

TWENTY 1

Insights From The Grassroots

INDIA
FELLOW



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Women & Empowerment

"Politics Is Not Good For Women"

Let me tell you about Rekha. She is a woman in her forties from a village called Rasooli in Rewari district of Haryana. You will be able to recognise her as a lone woman who doesn't cover her head or face with a veil. She stands out like that. Her skin is the shade of the soil she tills and her eyes reflect the yellow-gold of the mustard fields the region is known for. Her sharp jaw-line gives her a battle-ready look and her sharper tongue can rattle off the provisions of the 'Prevention of Domestic Violence Against Women Act' before you finish spelling patriarchy. That's because she camps regularly outside the District Magistrate's office and fights for women in her district who undergo injury and loss of property from domestic abuse. The District Protection Officer expects Rekha to turn up almost every third day and register a case and see it through. Rekha is dynamite in the traditional Haryanvi setting and she has stormed the offices of the high and mighty pleading and advocating women's rights. She has no special qualification and she has no legal background. Yet, she is the treasurer of 'Shakti Parishad', a council of women who fight against domestic violence—an initiative of the NGO, SCRIA¹ at Haryana.

She stands tall while addressing two thousand women at SCRIA's Aam Sabha. *"We don't get respect anywhere", she started, "like our rights, we have to demand respect. That is the state of our homes and society."* The crowd sat up perked. *"What can a woman do if she is not safe within the walls of her home? How can we expect our daughters and sisters to bear any kind of abuse?"* she demanded to know. With the same fire she added, *"If it is not happening in your homes don't sit back indifferent, watch out for the women in your village. Fight and fight continuously. Raise a voice against violence, and fight with the rights that the constitution provides us."* The crowd was grasping every word in complete silence looking awestruck at another woman, one like them, who was bellowing from the stage about freedom from violence. When Rekha thundered, *"There is nothing to stop us!"* the hands came together and applause poured like heavy rain on a tin roof.

India, and especially Haryana, is infamous for its gender-based violence. As of 2016, the National Crime Records Bureau recorded 3,38,954 cases of crimes against women. Out of this, 55.2% was of cognizable nature. On the other hand, as per the 2011 Census, female literacy rate in India is only 53.7% and stands behind male literacy rate by 21.6%. What Rekha champions is not just conflict resolution or retribution in the average Indian society; she carries within herself a flame for economic, social and political agency. The political agency, specifically, is majorly lacking amongst Indian women as they either yield their right to vote or right to represent to the men in their family or society. The case is stronger when the incidence of female literacy is particularly low and/or there is a proven history of gender-based violence in such regions. Rekha and her colleagues also take up conflict resolution at the local government body meetings or the Gram

¹ Social Centre for Rural Initiatives & Advancement, based out of Khorī (Rewari, Haryana)

Sabha. Thereby, asserting the presence of women and women's issues at the grassroots political institution.

Through the 73rd Amendment of the Indian Constitution, women were guaranteed the right to contest and represent one third of all seats in the local legislative bodies, i.e, Panchayati Raj Institutions. These quotas led to heightened police responsiveness to crimes against women, improvements in children's nutrition and educational outcomes, and increased women's entrepreneurship.² However, a large number of these Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) were seen as de facto signatories for their husbands, brothers, fathers, in-laws or a male elder in the family. Despite the empowering tool of the Panchayati Raj Institutions itself promoting women's participation in politics, it is still perceived as a place unsuitable for women.

Months later, when I travelled to the Kalahandi district of Odisha and met with a few tribal groups displaced by the hydroelectric project on the Indrawati River, I came across Rekha's counterpart. Gurubari Majhi, the head of a woman's group lamented, *"We do not even have drinking water facilities here. We cannot farm. We do not have electricity. We can only be coolie (labour). It is better that we migrate."* And she gave a picture of where all the men, women and youth have migrated to - Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and some cities in Odisha. Nearly seventy-five households in her village, Pukijal, did not have any land rights. Gurubari was leading the movement to win back their land from the forest department. She says she is ready to face the wrath of the government and win back her people their land and their livelihood. A group of women and men crouched behind Gurubari nod in solidarity. Gurubari is neither literate nor a representative in the Gram Panchayat. Yet she is the face the District Forest Officer recognises immediately.

Female-led Panchayats have had a history of better service delivery, either in terms of utilities like drinking water, sanitation or implementation of welfare scheme, but also in changing behavioural trends in the village for better - like improving investment and savings pattern of women or combating male alcoholism³. A Gram Sabha is more likely to see a larger women turnout if there were more EWRs at the meeting. The question now arises that if the positive impact of institutional reform to increase women's participation in PRIs is evident, why has it not been implemented at the national level as well? The Constitution (One Hundred and Eighth) Amendment Bill, 2008, seeks to reserve one third of all seats in the Lok Sabha and the state assemblies for women. This, in common discourse, has come to be known as the Women's Reservation Bill. The Bill in its current form, stalled for over a decade, also states that the reservation would cease to exist in 15 years from the time of its introduction. Does it imply that the affirmative action would make the society warm to and organically bridge the gender divide in Indian politics?

² J-Pal, Policy Insights, April 2018

³ Economic & Political Weekly, Can the Female Sarpanch Deliver, Vol. XLVIII, No.11, 2013

My journey as a fellow took me across Haryana and Odisha, Chattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Jammu & Kashmir, and the story of the women representative did not change much. They were both there and not there. Seemingly as mist on a glass. When they did register a presence, it was more like a blot on the landscape, carrying a history of violence or conflict. Did women leaders always have to be weighed by such a baggage?



Yashaswini (centre) during her fellowship journey

Politics had been a fascination for me since 2004, if truth be told. Gorging down the daily news and identifying the political stalwarts and learning their personal histories was embedded in my daily routine. From my home state of Tamil Nadu, an actress-turned-Chief Minister, J. Jayalalitha, was heralded for legendary decisions to set straight the law and order in the state. She too was harassed in the state assembly, her saree ripped and chased out by opposition parties. Her transformation into an unassailable political giant, bringing down the perpetrators with a vengeance, is seared in my memory. Her counterparts in other Indian states including Mayawati and Mamta Banerjee have faced immense ridicule and challenges for being a woman in the fray of politics. Each one has had a history of struggle and notably, none of these women were married. Nonetheless, the importance of these women in national politics cannot be ruled out. I sought to then, see, if their leadership also meant greater participation of women in the state assemblies and party cadre.

Jayalalithaa's own party, AIADMK⁴, had allocated only 31 out of 227 seats for women candidates. Of the 31, only 16 won. In the 2016 elections for the state assembly, only 323 female

⁴ All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, headquartered at Chennai, Tamil Nadu

candidates were fielded out of 3787, across all parties and seats. It left me with a larger question - what stops women from entering politics? The average percentage of women in state assemblies is 6.94% and ironically, Haryana is the leader of that table at 14.4%. On the national scene, the trends are slightly better, with 22 women MPs in the first Lok Sabha to 51 women MPs in the fourteenth Lok Sabha. States like Mizoram and Nagaland do not have a single woman MLA. The United Nations Development Program report on Gender Gap places India at 114 out of 128 countries.

Decades and centuries of patriarchal set up has left women with no economic, social or political agency. This reflects at every tier in national and state level politics. Even when it comes to discussion on women's safety in the Parliament, male MPs are left unchecked for sexist remarks during their debates⁴. Contesting and campaigning in elections at the local, state or national levels needs plenty of financial resources and serious connections with the top leadership to translate into a win. Women without the privilege of massive inheritance or backing of godfathers from industries are forever battling against the tide. The Women's Reservation Bill, is but a tool that can aid. Alternatively, political parties must consider reservation for women within their own ranks as to enable more candidature from women during the time of elections.

In the years that followed my time as a fellow, I have worked on the periphery of the government in multiple capacities. Currently working as consultant to the urban local body in Chennai, I observe the ratio of women in decision-making capacities at every single meeting that I attend. There have been several occasions over the past five years where I have been the lone woman in the room, often the youngest, and more often, mansplained about the very governance issues that I would have been working on. I still carry close to my heart an ambition of contesting at least at the local body, if not at the state or national level. Somewhere, the glimmer becomes a brighter spark every time a woman leader is elevated to a more prominent and significant position within the government. On those days, I jog my memory to an incident that happened fresh after my time as an India Fellow.

Unchecked by the cynicism of my time and age I had knocked on the doors of the Mayor of Greater Chennai Corporation multiple times. I wanted to be his campaign aide in the run-up to the 2014 general assembly election. On my sixth attempt, my stubborn attitude and earnest presence wore down the office staff—all men—to grant me an audience with the Mayor. The then Mayor, happily took me on-board without batting an eyelid. I turned up at his election rallies day in and day out for two months. Women cadre was enthused to believe that they would be helping to form the governments at the centre and the state. Women MLAs were made to reach out to minority groups and get their support for the incumbent Chief Minister and her policies. They were calling her the 'Goddess, who is all our mother'.

When my internship with the Mayor was done and I was bidding goodbye to the office staff, they again questioned my passion for politics. With a final handshake, his personal assistant left

me with words that would rattle the likes of Rekha and Gurubari and Jayalalitha and Mayawati. I go back to it, only to rekindle my purpose in this field. I know better. He said, *"Politics is not for good women"*.

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Yashaswini K S is an India Fellow (formerly called ICICI Fellows) from the 2012 cohort. She works now with the Chennai Smart City project, again on the periphery of the government. Yash continues to also support and nurture the fellowship commune. It is almost impossible that her sense of humour and wit will go unnoticed when you meet her. She is 30 now.

Understanding Capabilities Of Beedi Rolling Women



The picture was taken with consent on 07/06/19

The paper tries to trace narratives of paid beedi-rolling women of Dalsinghsarai in the light of the capability framework given by Ingrid Robeyns. The study is a contemporary ethnography that entails in-depth interviews conducted with the women followed by a focussed group discussion. Post transcription, these interviews and group discussions were coded with the help of Robeyns framework. In the South Asian region paid work has attained some prominence in the policy discourses on gender and development, where social norms, religious practices and legal entitlements restrict or deny women's access to, and their claims on familial, economic

resources (Agarwal 1994; Kabeer 2001). In fact, a qualitative study quotes that 77% of women engaged in beedi-rolling felt that they were treated better in the household since they earned an income, another 72% of women responded that their views in spending decisions had greater weight (Bhatty, 1970).

Though, narratives from Dalsinghsarai state otherwise, where women were seen to be trapped in the home-based beedi rolling work just to supplement some income to the household. The narratives signify that the women found the task 'disrespectful and a matter of forced choice' that was pushing them into the realms of 'un-freedom' in the garb of lifting them from poverty being paid home based work. In fact earning the little that they did provided no scope for empowerment or agency building to these women. Women were also facing health issues like ranging from a back pain to severe back problems.

Introduction

"What is now called 'the nature of women' is an artificial thing—the result of forced repression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others ... A hot-house and stove cultivation has always been provided for some of women's capabilities, for the benefit and pleasure of their masters." (Mill 1859)

The socially constructed basis of differences between men and women, as pointed out by Mill, have been established by cultural practices and their substantiation by various social, political and economic theories which have entrenched institutions that inhibit the functioning of a woman in any society. These existing institutions ignored the need for inclusion of women in public sphere for centuries which also impacted their contribution in the economic sphere. A broad understanding of the position of women in the public sphere is important to understand this engagement.

After liberalisation a rising competition in global and domestic market has been observed. This accompanied by failure of formal sector to absorb additional labour force or loss of formal sector job and the way women's work is conceptualised has created a situation where a substantial section of workers especially women are not working in a central worksite. Flexible work contract or sub-contracting and 'putting-out' system of production became a general practice. Businesses are finding it much easier and profitable to procure production from a network of workers/suppliers through intermediaries and middle man. The general mode of payment is piece rate. In a way production process is being decentralised. This decentralisation is of a different kind where production is not carried out by the business itself but is outsourced. This phenomenon has expanded in recent times and thus a set of workers have emerged known as 'home based workers (HBW)' or 'home workers' or 'outworkers' (Tripathi, 2013).

A clear distinction between home-work and home based has also been made in the Indian context framed by an expert group of MOSPI. According to the group, it is important to statistically and conceptually important to distinguish between the two categories: home-based workers are all those who carry out market work at home or in adjacent grounds or premises whether self-employed or as paid workers, whereas home-workers is a narrower concept that only encapsulates workers who carry out paid work for firms / businesses or their intermediaries, typically on a piece rate basis (MOSPI, 2008).

Rationale Of The Study

In India, home-work hinges upon responsibilities of social reproduction and more importantly upon all-pervasive social norms that continue to embed women in traditional constructs of domesticity (Raju, 2013). Even though, paid work has attained some prominence in the policy discourses on gender and development in the South Asian region, where social norms, religious practices and legal entitlements restrict or deny women's access to, and their claims on familial, economic resources (Agarwal 1994; Kabeer 2001). In fact, a qualitative study quotes that 77 percent of women engaged in beedi-rolling felt that they were treated better in the household since they earned an income, another 72 percent of women responded that their views in spending decisions had greater weight. In this globalised era, it can be argued that in a situation where the market has become extremely competitive and cost effective, the concept of flexible and cheap labour – the bandwagon of expanding capital – is best articulated through work that is carried out at homes for it can gel comfortably well, in sync with social codes, that assign women to the confines of home even if their status is that of workers (Raju, 2013).

Women are considered to not just have naturally nimble fingers but also to be naturally more docile and willing to accept tough work and discipline, and naturally more suited to tedious, repetitious and monotonous work (Elson and Pearson, 1981). Thus, the freedom to choose to do an economic activity can become economic 'un-freedom' in itself for women. In the case of beedi-rolling work that comes under home based work women experience this sense of economic un-freedom but fail to recognise it. The activities that they delve in are gendered around their place of work. The idea of rolling beedis at home itself is nothing but the same patriarchal institutions presented in a more attractive case. Hence, a woman's agency to exercise this freedom is controlled by patriarchal institutions and structures in which she has forever been moulded. So, her agency deliberation tends towards zilch.

This can be well reflected in the case of beedi-rolling work, where they are neither able to garner respect for their work nor are they able to match attain basic living standards. Some of these basic capabilities have been listed by Ingrid Robeyns in her essay on Sen's capability Approach. A list of such capabilities can be relevant in the context of beedi workers. Robeyns divided capabilities into three types, where first type includes the basic capabilities which are intrinsic in nature to any human and ones that can be interpreted as a resource for other

capabilities. This paper will hence try and visualise the agency of these women in the light of these types of basic capabilities. Narratives from the women will narrate their individual stories that will help define their agency.



A woman making beedi in Mokhtiyarpur Ward 8

Objective - To understand the idea of agency for a woman who rolls beedis for living, in the light of the framework given by Ingrid Robeyns on capability approach.

The study was conducted in the Mokhtiyarpur-Salkhanni Panchayat of Dalsinghsarai which is a sub-division of Samastipur district, Bihar. Since beedi-rolling is an occupation of the Muslim women in the region, they were the subjects of the study. The study included women of different age groups.

This is a contemporary ethnographic study⁵. This was conceptualised in the light of the feminist standpoint theory given by Sandra Harding that proposes the need to understand the knowledge and experiences of the marginalised in the social hierarchies as a better beginning to research. The conceptualisation was followed by in-depth semi-structured interviews with five women who roll beedis in the area (verbal consent to use the data was taken from each one of them). These narratives were then transcribed and coded. The resultant codes were then triangulated with the help of revisits on the codes and a focussed group discussion. The narratives that were gathered will be analysed with the help of Ingrid Robeyns framework on capability approach.

⁵ It differs from classic ethnographic research on the fact that researchers may have limited amount of time to conduct the research. This however does not detract from the quality of work produce.

First Degree Of Capabilities

Health Issues - *"Having done this for ages now, I have had a severe spine problem. I have even visited a doctor but all in vain, after all this is something I have to do there is not much that I can complain about, it fetches me 113 rupees a week",* said Mazda*, a 55 year old woman who has been rolling beedis ever since she was 20 years old. Robeyns' conceptualisation of well-being is relevant here as even a basic capability of physical health and well-being is not met. All women in the region have been facing back issues, ranging from a simple back ache to gap in the spinal cord. This can mainly be attributed to the hours of cramped sitting spaces and posture while making beedis. Even the idea of dignity and choice stood distant from these women. A question around what they wanted to become, either gathered narratives around lack of education. Though, a striking and reflective answer to the question on dream of becoming something in life was given by another middle aged woman named Madina*, she quoted

Respect And Choice - *"I was preparing to be a mattress to comfort my husband!"* The answer was clearly intriguing; the statement renders choice as myth. The fact that a woman thinks that her existence is only linked to satisfy her husband and bear babies to the family, is not new but does define the meaning of agency for the woman. This clearly shows that even the basic capability around dignity is not met. On the contrary this is creating inequalities for the woman when it comes to access of other resources, where a woman named Gulnaz* quoted, *"I was never sent to school, my brothers have studied till a certain age, but where did my parents have the money to send me to school?"*

Second Degree Of Capabilities

Education Endowment - The second set of capabilities includes education and knowledge, mobility, time autonomy, leisure activities all of which fall in the ambit of group-based inequalities. Since these capabilities vary on an individual level for they depend on preferences. The set of differences in the achieved functionings in an ideal case scenario should not exist, but due to these gendered preferences group-based inequalities under the aforementioned capabilities are visible. Shaheeda*, a 21 year old woman mentioned, *"I was promised education post marriage, otherwise why would I get married at 15. But it was only a trap after all!"* Women in home-based work are only able to navigate through the limited set of choices present in the informal economy thus, get adapted to the preference of working as home-based workers like beedi-rolling to contribute to the household income. In fact, a number of them claimed liked Mazda, *"Who sends a girl to study, especially older women like us, we were never even considered for education at our homes, after all, all that we have to do is cook and take care of the family, why will they invest in us?"*

Mobility And Time Autonomy - *"Whatever time that I am left with, I invest it in Beedi making. It takes time to roll 1000 beedis; I mostly achieve the target in in 1-2 days"* 55 year old Mazda, never thought of achieving much since she never had the time to. Women like Mazda, roll beedis for almost 7-8 hours a day. Since, they have to roll 1000 beedis to fetch a meagre amount of rupees 120, it was difficult for these women to even have autonomy over their time. This creates another issue of lack of mobility too. Mobility, as defined in this context refers to the constant work in cramped spaces that often results in women being more prone to back issues. Alongside this it even means that the woman does not even have a control over her movement. She is tied to the monotony of her work just to make sure it fetches her something at the end of two days.

Third Degree Of Capabilities

Dignity Of Work - On being asked questions around respect associated with the work, Gulnaz* a woman in her mid-thirty's responded, *"There is no respect for this work, in fact whenever I get to know that my parents are going to visit us, I immediately wrap everything up and hide it. My father will feel so guilty of getting me married in this household."* Since women have an inherent attribute to accept whatever they face as their lot, the achieved functioning as a result of this are not taken note of as an inequality. The inequality created by the first and second capabilities propels it's reproduction in the third type of capabilities that entail social relations, domestic and paid work. Such capabilities define the basis of homework since they cater to the choices that women make in professional and in personal space for themselves. These preferred choices are a result of the double burden of work in consonance with their 'adapted' gendered preferences. But as long as there is no consensus, we do not know what men and women would choose if they are liberated from their gendered roles thus making them genuinely free to choose (Robeyns, 2003).

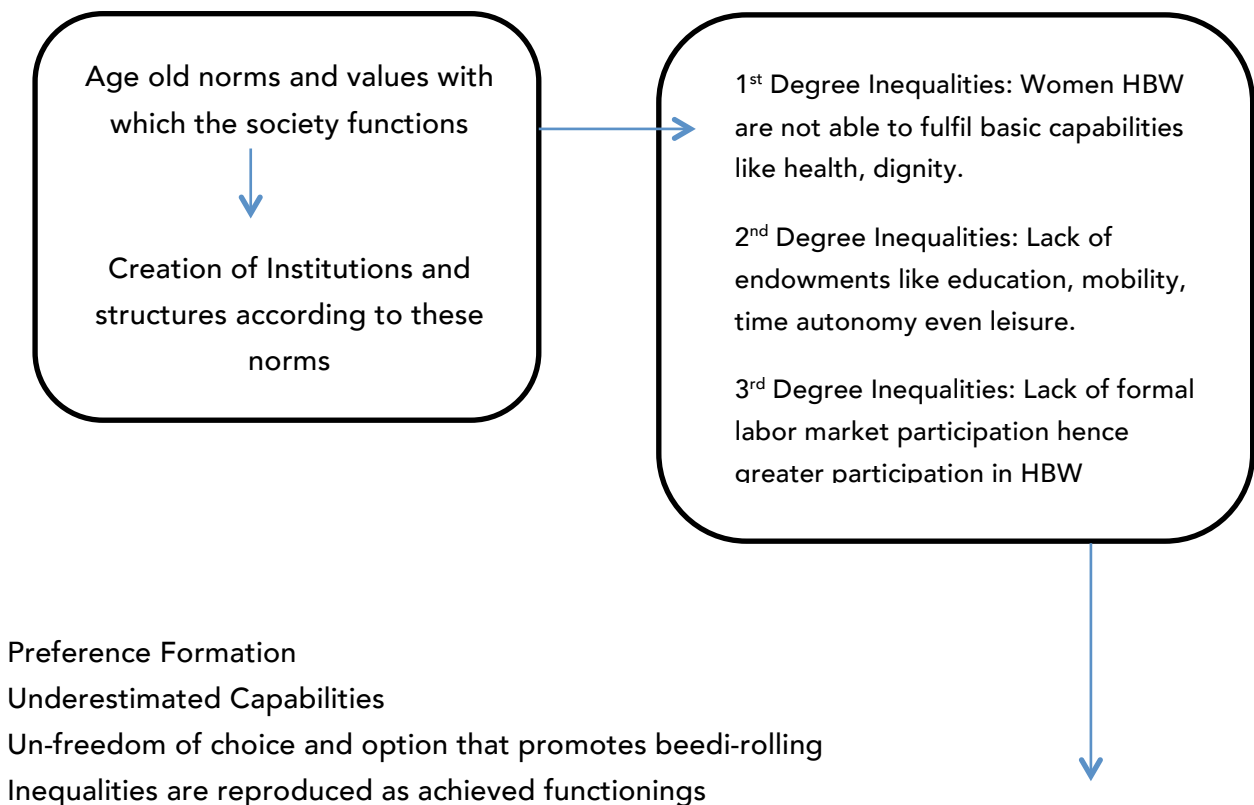
Divergence Of The Study: The First Earning

When women were cross-questioned on their previous narration of whether they find the work respectful, Sahana mentioned, *"The work is disrespectful, but I remember the first time I earned 113 rupees in return for 1000 beedis, felt like an accomplishment. In fact if you look at it this way, at least on retirement I will be given some money. I think the security drives me from within. It has only been five years of doing this but sometimes, I just feel like giving up so as to get the provident fund money. In fact a woman in our neighbourhood withdrew and used the money for paying of some of her pending loans."* In fact the literature also proves the same. The women beedi workers sometimes resigned from the registered companies in order to get the provident fund money and pension to meet the exigencies in their families (Rajashekhar, 2002). Respect and choice to do beedi work in this case are hence very intricately linked. Where women during the learning stages, find the work interesting but later they are only able to

remember the atrocities related to the work. On one hand, the work gives security about the future, and on the other curbs the aspirations of women in the present, as it makes them believe that this is the best they can achieve with whatever they have, educationally and otherwise.

Limitations Of The Study

1. It was difficult to get consent for using the conversations for the study. One woman out of six that were initially approached decided to opt out. The reason can be their hesitation to disclose data and the nature of work, since women hide it even from their own family members.
2. Since the study was conducted in a Muslim Ward, it became difficult to engage women during the month of Ramdan. In fact, no interviews were taken for a month, only some in formal engagements took, that also have been transcribed.



Highlighting the nature of beedi work

Conclusion

A good understanding of this can be highlighted with a framework that builds upon these capabilities and links it to the underlying nature of homework. The following construct throws some light on this aspect. Highlighting the idea of achieved functionings through the inherent

un-freedom will help us understand this nature of the work. From the starting point of societal norms impacting the input, there is a preference formation on the part of women that essentially forces them into producing and consequently reproducing certain set of underestimated capabilities (being a part of the informal economy of beedi-rolling in this case). These capabilities convert realistic capabilities of women into unrealistic choices and options. The consequence of this series of decision making forces them into reproducing their capabilities as inequalities, which indeed are their achieved functionings. Achieved functionings in this framework are a result of the unrealised capabilities of women.

In the context of Dalsinghsarai, girls are seen doing this work ever since they are 12-13 years old. The cycle that starts as child labour creates unequal preferences in these girls. Continuous engagement of these girls in beedi-rolling work with little or no scope of receiving formal education, results in reproduction of the same set of underestimated capabilities. With no realisation of capabilities due to lack of endowments such as education, these women are only trapped in a choice by default of working as beedi-rollers. Women mostly pick up the skill as children and continue with the same overtime in return for some money.



Uttara S (facing the camera) in her community in Dalsinghsarai, Samastipur in Bihar.

Thus, the achieved functionings in the case of beedi-work traps the women associated with it in a set of un-freedom. These un-freedoms are nothing but the same set of patriarchal notions that keep them tied to a certain space for work. The woman thinks that she can never do anything since she was never made capable to do a certain thing. Beedi-rolling in the community reproduces patriarchal norms again to make women believe that they are child producing

machines. Stuck in this vicious circle, the woman is never able to free herself from the burden of patriarchy that approves of beedi-rolling as a task to be done by the women since it gives her the flexibility to take care of the household which is her primary task as a woman.

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As a student of Arts, Uttara S was introduced to women rights in the course curriculum. Feminism immediately struck the right cords, helping her understand the intersectionality's and nuances in literature. Feminist writers like Simon de Beauvoir; Martha Nussbaum etc. enlightened and inspired her for the same. Being a firm believer of 'walking the talk', she takes cognisance of the varied disparities that she comes across on a daily basis and question them. She realises that unless we bring theory into practice, women's capabilities shall always be undermined. At India Fellow, she worked as a fellow in 2018-20 with Innovators In Health in Dalsinghsarai.

A Bird's Eye View Of Gender Inequality

"Pehle bolte the mahila ko vikas ki zarurat hai ... ab bolte hai vikas ke liye mahila ki zarurat hai" – said a Didi who is a Self Help Group member in a small village located in Amethi district of Uttar Pradesh, India.

Gender inequality is a mysterious phenomenon in our society, whose existence, cause and roots are very difficult to trace and explain. Gender inequality essentially means differential treatment of the genders in the society. It is something that existed from the beginning of time, or is it a complex social agenda created by our species during its journey towards world supremacy. In this piece, I am sticking to binary genders – men and women. In spite of continuous struggles and fights of women over centuries to be treated fairly, even today, a gender equitable society is a dream that we are waiting for to happen.

Gender Inequality As Social Inequality

While exploring gender inequality, it is inevitable that one also considers the origins of social inequality itself. There are several theories as to how it came into play. One of the stories say that, in ancient times when the Europeans were exploring the world, they came across cultures and customs stark different from their own followed by people from other lands. Witnessing something different from your own ways of life can make one question everything one does, even your own existence and origin. In order to establish their practices as the right ones, they declared themselves and their ways superior to others.

This is an instance where in a new social system was introduced to gain a higher status in the society. This is also claimed to be instance that marked the birth of racism. Max Weber, an early twentieth century sociologist, talks about resources, power and social status as dimensions of inequality that ensures stratification of the social structure. Inequality persists when there is something to be attained, most often equivalents of one or more of the three – resources (wealth), power or prestige (recognition). When the competition for the race of any of these increases, humans tend to leverage their differences to discriminate and weaken the opponent. Gender, race, class, caste, position, etc. are a few categories of differences where inequalities manifest.

GOOD · CHEER · NUMBER

GOOD HOUSEKEEPING

\$1.00 A YEAR



AUGUST '08

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New York

THE PHELPS PUBLISHING CO. Springfield, Mass.

Chicago

Poster of the August 1908 edition of the American magazine, the Good Housekeeping – depicting a woman in the lead role.

Is It Just Biology?

The most common or simple explanation that one would come to is that a man and a woman are biologically different. Apart from the obvious child rearing responsibilities, this argument gets to the point where claims are made that women are physically weak and hence prone to violence. Yet throughout the history, it is known that higher status groups usually exercise violence over the lower ones irrespective of their physical strength. Popular notion claims from the cavemen era that women need protection, men are the alpha humans that rule, men are the hunters or providers while women are the gatherers/nurturers.

Does this mean that evolving with different reproductive systems led to difference in societal roles? In his book *Sapiens*, Harrari mentions that when humans evolved into bipeds, women were disadvantaged as it led to narrowing of the birth channel making them dependent on others for care during childbirth. Thus, making the biological difference a liability. But does this necessarily mean that if the child rearing responsibility is taken out of equation, gender equality will prevail?

Degrees Of Inequality

A common practice by the gender rights organizations that promote self-help groups of women in rural India is to enact a role-play to make the women aware of the inequalities they face in their lives. The role play performed by two women entails one tying scarves around the other's forehead, eyes, ears, mouth, hands, womb and legs. She would go on to explain how a woman is covered in barriers and bonds and robbed of all her senses. She would untie the bonds one by one and each part has a story of how it affects her life. It effectively relays –how a rural married woman is not allowed to go outside her house, how she is not allowed to earn an income for herself, how she cannot choose whether to give birth or not, how she would have to sacrifice her meals/favorite foods for her husband and children, how her opinion doesn't matter in the family decisions, how she is not allowed to see anyone elder in the eye – her eyes must stay down, how she is not allowed to think for herself. The role-play works wonders in making rural women realize their own predicaments.

While a rural married woman is not allowed to travel outside her house alone, an urban educated woman might be restricted to travel outside a state or a country alone. The barriers faced by women in different geographies, different cultures, women of different caste, religion and class, women of different education levels are multifarious.

There are varying degrees of inequality that are practiced in these cases that majorly depend on different demographics. Right from the subjugation in the household to the neighborhood to the workplace to any societal space, inequality rears its head in different ways. When considered together with caste and class inequalities, women and other genders are the most vulnerable.

SC/ST women and girls in rural India struggles with access to education, employment opportunities, access to financial services, rights and entitlements more than the general category or the higher economic groups.

Patriarchy As The Natural Order

Contrary to popular belief, primitive hunter-gatherer societies across the world were majorly gender neutral. So, what was different in these societies from the current societies? What types of positions were developed in societies that had power and the rights to control the resources? In hunter-gatherer societies, was there equal division of labor? Were the resources equally distributed and how would it pass on? Was it each person for them? Many of these questions are difficult to answer, as there are no conclusive evidences. With the advent of agricultural revolution, use and control of resources such as land became an issue. Structuring the society into family units hindered women's liberty. Patriarchy got established as a social system to ensure men's power and control over resources.

Gender equality does not mean that all power which the male population enjoys being transferred to women. Even though, until the nineteenth century, patriarchy was the natural order in most parts of the world, there were exceptions – matrilineal societies such as in the states of Kerala and Meghalaya. Manu Pillai in his book, 'The Ivory Throne' tells that women were property owners and managers of the households, while men were just tools of war. Women had the right to choose their partner and polyandry was a common practice. Being divorced or widowed did not negatively impact the life of a woman and it was common for widows to remarry even in the royal families. *"What did happen by the nineteenth century was the impact of Christian missionaries with their prudish Victorian notions of decency and morality, aided by the colonial enterprise to 'civilise' India. Greater interaction with other parts of the subcontinent where patriarchy was the norm also added fat to the fire."*

Subsequently, when the male head of the household managed the properties, they were still inherited by the heirs in maternal bloodline. This custom was widely known as 'Marumakkathayam' (inheritance to sister's children) and practiced till 1975 when it was abolished with The Joint Family System (Abolition) Act, 1975 which was majorly led by discontented groups of Nair men who wanted to establish the notion of husband as the women's guardian.

Types Of Inequalities

Robert Max Jackson explains that there are two types of inequalities – status inequalities and positional inequalities and it is important to understand their relationship in respect to gender inequality. Positional inequalities refer to inequalities arising out of differences in 'positions', for example in an organization, the CEO holds and influences resources more when compared to a

clerk or an entry level manager. Status inequalities refer to inequalities that arise to gain higher social status (eg. Caste). This system of inequality uses characteristics that identify the person or a group of people rather than the positions they hold. Gender inequality essentially is an instance of status inequality. He also mentions that gender inequality though is an instance of status inequality cannot be exercised without positional inequalities.

For example, active women participation in a Gram Sabha is questionable even after introducing reservations because higher status groups (men) would ensure that the power to control or hold the resources is not shared or transferred. The existence of the positions/institutions such as Gram Sabha gives a platform to discriminate based on gender. Women are restricted from taking financial decisions in a household even when she could be a contributor to the income as this power rests with the head of the house that is supposed to be a man.



(Courtesy Time.com) Women's Strike for Peace-n-Equality, New York, Aug. 26, '70

Feminism Movement

Towards the late nineteenth century, a new movement began to challenge patriarchy and status quo. The term feminism can be used to describe a political, cultural or economic movement aimed at establishing equal rights and legal protection for women. The history of feminism can be divided into three waves. The first feminist wave was in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the second was in the 1960s and 1970s, and the third extends from the 1990s to the

present. Feminist theory emerged from these feminist movements. It is manifest in a variety of disciplines such as feminist geography, feminist history and feminist literary criticism.

Throughout the past two centuries, over three waves (term coined for different stages of the movement in history) of feminism- social, political and economic reforms were changed tremendously. Yet, the struggle still goes on at varied levels across the world. Post-modern feminists even maintain that difference is one of the most powerful tools that females possess in their struggle with patriarchal domination, and that to equate the feminist movement only with equality is to deny women a plethora of options because equality is still defined from the masculine or patriarchal perspective.

Discrimination For Fear Of Difference

Industrialization and advent of technology is paving ways for independence of women. Social support systems required for childbirth and care can be bought. Paternity tests were invented to guide inheritance lines. Introduction of free market economies shifted focus towards growth of profits and power has shifted from State to the private entities. It didn't make sense for this economy to exclude half of the population. The need to then maintain power with men started working in contradiction with need to create more profits. In the history so far, now is the time women's empowerment has been given more attention than ever.

The evidence that this message has reached even the women from villages of one of the poorest states in the world gives one hope. However, inequality is a systemic issue in our society. If gender inequality is stemmed, new kinds of manifestations of the system will take place, as the need to control the resources, power and gain recognition is not going to die. Along with the newly introduced systems of inequality new norms will be written and with our inherent need to conform to the norms, inequalities will continue to persist. We will continue to let our 'fear of differences' rule.

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Where Collective Strength Lies

Until the concept of Self-Help Groups found its way to rural women in Bihar, borrowing from local moneylenders at exorbitant interest rates was the norm. That's not all though. While some women could not afford to pay back an amount that would reduce interest cost, many did not understand monetary transactions well. They say it gave a false impression of holding credit for a longer period while making 'seemingly' meagre interest payments periodically.

Even when they made their way into self-help groups and could finally avail credit at significantly lower rates, it took them 2-3 years to break the habit of interest repayments. 'Mahajan Mukti' or freedom from moneylenders is still very real in remote pockets of Bihar, but women are willing to show faith and create opportunities for development of their communities. The SHG movement, started in India by NABARD, gained momentum in 1990's with the aim of linking poor households to institutional credit through organization. RBI data shows there are about 55,73,742 SHGs across the country, of which more than 10% are in the state of Bihar.



"Who'd ever want to pay interest of 1200 on a loan of merely 500 rupees?" A woman from the village of Tirpania in Kharagpur, Bihar did, and she did so willingly. Atleast for a while.

"In India, the SHGs constitute a widely accepted development strategy for poverty reduction as they are perceived as powerful vehicle for the promotion of micro-credit and micro-finance especially for women (Chen et al., 2007). SHG programme has emerged across India as one of the most popular strategy for empowering women (Chidambaram, 2004). The SHG model was introduced as a core strategy for empowerment of women in the Ninth Plan (1997-2002) in India (Planning Commission, 2002). The Ninth plan directed both states and the centre to adopt the 'women's component plan' through which not less than 30% of funds and benefits are earmarked to the women related sectors. This strategy was continued during Tenth Plan (2002-

2007) and even in the Eleventh plan (2007-12) with the government commitment to encourage SHGs to act as agents of social change, development and empowerment of women”.

Some of the very first self-help groups were started in Bihar in early 2000s by social organizations like Self Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) that had a recognised national presence. They employed a bottom-up approach under which women from the grassroots were organized as a SHG to begin saving money and obtain credit from within the group when needed, thus beginning their journey of financial and social inclusion. Starting off this journey, however, was not easy. When SEWA began organizing women into SHGs in Kataria village of Munger, it was met with apprehensive villagers who feared losing all their money to a fraudulent initiative.

Multiple visits explaining the concept of a collective that women could benefit from, along with the idea of helping them begin some form of work as a group encouraged a local woman, Sita Ben, to organize eight women and form the first SHG - Ganga Samooh. These women placed their trust in ideas never explored before and built livelihood opportunities for themselves, thereby further promoting the concept in the village. Sita Ben emerged as a community leader and led organizing of more women into SHGs across Kataria. As of June 2019, over 95% of women in Kataria were a part of some or the other SHG group.

Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) and individual interviews were held with thirty one women across seven villages in Munger district to understand their journey of financial inclusion since their association with self-help groups and other member based collectives. The below table represents village-wise details of meetings held with bifurcation between number of women who have been associated with SHGs for over ten years versus those with less than ten years.

Village	Individual Interview		FGD	
	<10 yrs	>10 yrs	<10 yrs	>10 yrs
Kataria	-	4 women	-	5 women
Manganiya Toli	-	-	6 women	2 women
Tirpania	-	-	2 women	1 woman
Tulsipur	-	1 woman	-	-
Kharagpur	-	-	-	1 woman
Munuktan	-	1 woman	-	3 women
Kulhariya Adivasi Tola	-	-	-	7 women

The data includes overlap of couple of women under individual interviews

Though the larger sentiment of being a part of something bigger runs common, women who have been associated with groups for longer are more confident and continue to place greater faith in collective structures despite setbacks or failures that (may) have adversely affected them. Let’s explore how successful SHG’s women centric approach has been in Bihar.

SHGs As A Cohesive Unit

NABARD (2005) explains that the Self Help Group is a group with *“an average size of about fifteen people from a homogenous class. They come together for addressing their common problems. They are encouraged to make voluntary thrift on a regular basis. They use this pooled resource to make small interest bearing loans to their members. The process helps them imbibe the essentials of financial intermediation including prioritisation of needs, setting terms and conditions and accounts keeping. This gradually builds financial discipline in all of them. They also learn to handle resources of a size that is much beyond the individual capacities of any of them. The SHG members begin to appreciate that resources are limited and have a cost.*

Once the groups show this mature financial behaviour, banks are encouraged to make loans to the SHG in certain multiples of the accumulated savings of the SHG. The bank loans are given without any collateral and at market interest rates. The groups continue to decide the terms of loans to their own members. Since the groups’ own accumulated savings are part and parcel of the aggregate loans made by the groups to their members, peer pressure ensures timely repayments.”

Each SHG defines their own rules that specify the periodicity of meetings, the amount to be saved per meeting, the length of repayment period, the interest rate to be charged on internal and external loans which can be higher than that at which the loans are received, as well as the amounts and mechanism by which loans are allocated. Women also get the opportunity to work together and earn an income through collective business. SHGs have, thus, given women a chance to step out of their homes and come together, especially in a state like Bihar where women’s mobility is heavily restricted. They promote the idea of an all-inclusive growth that helps in building ownership of the collective and its activities because SHG meetings serve as safe spaces for women to talk about a range of common issues beyond just the give and take of money.

Women have themselves spoken about the changes they’ve seen over the years – *“Pehle meeting me aate the, ghoonghat pehen ke baithte the, zyaada bolte nahi the. Ab har tarah ke nirnay me hissa lete hain.”* As a participatory approach to development SHGs ensured that women became actively involved in decisions that affected them, thus also ensuring sustainability of the model. There are multiple success stories of collectives that have led to the development of not just individual members but also the larger community.



Clicked during a field visit by the author in Munger district, Bihar

Growth Of Larger Collectives

As more and more women began to realize the benefits of these co-owned SHG groups that initiated their journey of holding money they could call their own, aspirations rose. Small SHG groups could only lend limited amounts of money which led to the need for a larger financial kitty that the women could draw from. This meant that the basic idea of a collective model had been understood and when few women highlighted this need within their union, SEWA, a brainstorming of ideas led to the creation of a women-owned and women-led savings and credit cooperative in 2014. This pushed borrowing limits and brought women under the formal

structures of finance, which in turn led to greater visibility of their financial needs and challenges.

This was much needed and many cooperatives with different working models have popped up in Munger since, however, not all has been achieved. A larger collective also means more responsibility and more work as a result of inclusion under legal reporting frameworks and, well, the job of running a profitable business. The question is, have we been able to build that kind of capacity to run robust collectives on ground? Do these women really own them? How long will the benefits remain once external support is terminated?

Insights From Women Linked To SHGs And Other Member Based Organizations

Manganiya Toli, a village in Munger, Bihar of mainly animal rearing women whose husbands work as migrant labourers far from home, faces acute water shortage and has a single crop bearing season which generates minimal income. Until a few years back, the women's only means of receiving remittances from their husbands was in the account of a single Rajput man from Milky village about 2kms away. *"Hazaar rupaye me sau rupaya kaat leta tha"*, says Rubi Devi. He used to deduct Rs.100 for every 1000 withdrawn, and sometimes denied any receipts.

When outsiders visited to form the first self-help group in their village, despite huge mistrust they took the time to understand the concept, took a leap of faith and eventually formed one. Trusting another individual with her money was the biggest challenge but it allowed them access to a bank account for savings, availing credit at lower interest while also earning interest on money lent to others at 2%. Today, ninety out of one hundred and fifty households of Manganiya Toli are also connected to a savings and credit cooperative through the women in their family who are regularly availing financial services to keep up with their needs.

Rubi Devi was the first to build her family a pucca house. She received about 1.4 lakhs under the Pradhan Mantri Indira Awaas Yojna after the required bribe payments but it fell short, so she took a loan from the cooperative to complete construction of the roof. Five years on, since the women could avail bigger loans from the cooperative, more than 90% houses in the village are more or less pucca. Onlookers confirm this development. She also took the lead to solve the problem of water scarcity on her side of the village. The single handpump that served over fifty households had run dry, forcing women and children to walk for an hour to the neighbouring village well to fetch water because caste-based conflicts didn't allow them to avail services of the Government installed water ATM in their village. Any complaint fell on deaf ears. Rubi Devi, thus, decided to take matters into her own hands. After timely repayment of her first loan, she availed another for INR 50,000 and used the money to get a 200 ft chapanal (handpump) installed.



The hand pump being discussed, that Rubi Devi helped revitalize from credit availed through her SHG, in the foreground

It is interesting to note the ways in which different women used their newly acquired understanding of finance to achieve some level of economic empowerment in this village. Parvati Devi's mother-in-law finds relief in the fact that their savings have moved from the 'gullak' to a bank account and instead of using up the saved money in times of need, they can now avail credit. Sakuntala Devi progressed from saving cash at the bottom of rice containers to using her matured savings to purchase a vessel for storing 10 mann rice (1 mann = 0.4 quintal). It allows her to purchase rice in bulk during the harvest season and save almost 2000 rupees in expenses. Mala Devi has struggled to pay back her loan due to extensive medical expenses, but she ensures payment of her annual LIC premium and wants to build a house after the policy matures in fifteen years. Almost every woman now has a PAN card and bank account in her name.

Their conversation has changed. They say that earlier they'd only talk about issues at home, but now they discuss solutions in the form of monetary gains through savings and which is the best credit option to avail. *"Pehle doosre ka loan chukaane ke liye paisa lete the, ab apna kaam badhaane ke liye lete hain."*



Parvati Devi is all smiles, standing next to the rice storing vessel that the family purchased from matured savings in the SHG

Entire villages have seen development through financial inclusion after one or more women decided to step out of their comfort zone and take the risk of saving money in ways new to them. In Tulsipur, Deepa Devi pawned seven katthas of land with Sheesham (Rosewood) trees to cover the loan she had taken from a local Mahajan. She joined an SHG and also began saving with a women's cooperative that allowed her to avail credit, pay back the Mahajan and release her land after twenty five long years. Her success led over hundred women in her village to follow into her footsteps and see benefits of formal savings. While some women choose to

follow the set system with few deviations, others with a greater risk-taking appetite choose to change it as per their preference. Mamta Devi from Munuktan village joined a SHG in 2006 but decided to quit after financial mismanagement by the then SHG leaders came to the fore. In 2009, she formed a new group with fifteen members, except that this new group operated without a bank account. An SHG bank account requires a tripartite leadership that Mamta Devi could no longer get herself to trust.

Ten years on, the group continues to operate without a bank account and has over seventy members who save hundred rupees every month and avail credit regularly. Strict rules have been laid down for collections and loans get booked in advance so that no money has to be kept at home for long periods. The members work as a strong collective ensuring default is kept to a minimum. Although Mamta Devi has a bank account in her name, she finds this better than any formal system of saving because interest earned on loan repayments stays within the group and is distributed among the members. Everyone in the village trusts her with money. Her only dependence, however, is settling the group's accounts every three years for which she has to find someone who knows how to do the job and that, is a bit of a problem.

Present State Of Collectives In Munger, Bihar

While outreach of SHG and cooperative movements has only been on the rise over the years, and the benefits women have derived from their participation in such movements cannot (and should not) be side-lined, weak capacity and lack of collective ownership has been a key reason for failure of many credit and saving programs. Multiple SHGs across these villages in Munger district have collapsed due to lack of guidance on how to conduct their affairs in the long run.

Conflicts and mistrust amongst members seem to be the prime reason. Members admit that intervention by a third party helps them understand better rather than from a fellow member, who is often dismissed. Unfortunately, the larger institutions that initially started these SHGs have more work and there aren't enough people with time on their hands to conduct SHG affairs anymore. Some groups are able to find people on payment, while others that are unwilling or cannot afford to pay face delay in finalizing accounts, which could potentially lead to mismanaged funds and in turn affect the livelihoods of women.

The Adivasi Tola from Kulhariya village is an example. Situated 7kms away from the National Highway with no mode of public transport going into the village, it has had very little exposure to the outside world and apart from the single institution that introduced this concept, none other have ever ventured into the area. Of fifty households, women from around two thirds of these became part of two SHGs that supported them with their seasonal businesses. However, the treasurer of one of the groups used the money in her own household activities instead of depositing it with the bank. This led to severe mistrust with only ten members continuing with one SHG.

The women here lead strenuous lives collecting firewood and other produce from the forest for a living. Cane ka patta or leaves used in Bidi production grow only once a year for about a month and are sold for 160 rupees for 5000 leaves' bundle. Kaili Devi* says, *"Pehle mela me jalebi, jhaal-muri, sab pattal me bikta tha, ab nahin."* Thermocol has replaced donas and pattals. Few women produce Masuha (local liquor) and sell to men within the village at meagre rates due to no market demand since the liquor ban in Bihar. Declining sources of livelihood together with limited sources of finance have put these women and families under the pressure of survival.



The Adivasi Tola from Kulhariya village

These instances speak volumes about the investment that's still needed in building successful women-owned solutions for rural communities. Women have shown the willingness and strength to lead and bring about lasting changes especially when organized. Aforementioned stories of women who had never heard of the concept of credit before they were introduced to SHGs, bear testimony to their collective contributions to the growth of their communities, albeit unknowingly.

"India's SHG movement has emerged as the world's largest and most successful network of Community Based Organisations (CBOs). However, quality is the major challenge that the SHG movement is confronted with at this point of time in the country." (Anuradha Samal & Prof. (Dr.)

A.K. Das Mohapatra in The Issues and Challenges of Self Help Groups: A Study In Odisha. www.irjmst.com/Article_details?id=5775)

Stressing on the right skills and practices and intra-group solidarity have been identified as imperative for successful collective action. Responsible interventions that ensure sustainability and survival are something that social institutions need to seriously deliberate upon so that women are not left halfway in the journey of empowerment. SHGs are still popular among poor women who find them as important spaces to begin their journeys of financial inclusion and self-reliance. Their failure seems to have been a huge hit to aspirations that found their way out through years of oppression, leading to resignation and acceptance of an unfair future. This is not where women's resilience should find home.

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Arunima Pande is a 2018 India Fellow. She worked with Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in rural Bihar and the piece is a consolidation of her insights and narratives heard / seen in field areas. A larger part of Arunima's work also revolved around handling the survival challenges that the women credit collectives faced. Some of the reasons have also found way in this piece. After her fellowship, Arunima continued to work with SEWA, for her home state of Uttarakhand.

The Nature Of Unpaid Care Work



Clicked by the author in her field area in Kantain, Sitapur in Uttar Pradesh

In India, certain groups are excluded from participating fully in many activities. Women in India are a marginalised community in society. Society has very limited opportunities for women. Women are capped with a few work. Society also holds control over the age of schooling, marriage, duties, responsibilities, attire, consulting a doctor, decision on birth spacing and so on. Women do not retain the freedom to pursue education, mobility out of free will, dress up as they like. There is a strict code of conduct prescribed for women that community tries to impose upon them; sometimes it's a father and sometimes it's a husband. They are left disadvantaged.

Here comes social inclusion. Social inclusion is the process of including every individual in mainstream society. It accounts for social, economic and political sphere of life where an individual or a group of individuals have traditionally been oppressed. Millions of women are struggling to get rid of the constraints put by the society. Hence quite a few voices are raised for an egalitarian society, where every individual deserves equal status irrespective of gender. Starting from equal access of education to taking part in governance; attempts are being made for bringing equilibrium in society. Still, women are facing discrimination in various walks of life, including in labour market.

Equal footing with men in the economy is a tool through which women can achieve social rights (Phogat, 2019). Earning women are more valued than pay-outs women. This gives a sense of autonomy as well as power in society. In other words, economic inclusion is a gate way to social inclusion. As Betty Friedan mentioned, *"Women with income take themselves more seriously and they are taken more seriously"*. This piece discusses about some factors that are pulling women participating in economic life in Kantain village of Sitapur district of Uttar Pradesh.

Kantain is a small village 40 kms west from Lucknow. This is the village of 'Thakur', who own acres of lands. Hence agriculture is the major source of income in this community. People grow wheat, paddy, maize, sugarcane, peppermint, various kinds of vegetables. Also there are acres of mango orchards. Since agriculture is the chief occupation people practice here which the community thinks does not require academic certification, education is less valued. As a result less people prefer to be educated. Many enrol in government school in hope of availing several free services like lunch, school stationaries, and uniform; but rarely go to school. So only a few are able to complete their high school education. The rest adopt ancestral occupation. Incompletion of education results in lack of awareness among the people of Kantain. One of these is lack of knowledge in improved technology or new skill of agriculture, which insists the people to adopt the ancient method.

Women, here, have to do second shift. They often expend significantly more time in farm to assist the male members as well as in household chores. This creates a burden for women. Therefore, women of Kantain spend more time in domestic work than national average, which is six hours per day. Irrespective of the time that is spent in domestic work, neither the work nor the women have been appreciated. Long hours of physical and emotional labour are regarded as the duty that a woman is supposed to perform. And it is so ingrained in the system that even woman herself never accepts this hard work. Even the economists ignore domestic care work as labour, because it does not help in the creation of any goods or services.

Domestic care work, also known as unpaid care work includes cleaning, making foods, taking care of children, washing clothes. These works are executed inside the home and remains invisible. So women involved in unpaid care work, are never compensated and hence taken without a job. The immense efforts women put in caring for the family, nurturing a paid labour remain unrecognised. Below are some of the reasons which intensify the condition of women in Kantain.

Migration

Lack of skill, not adequate education push several people from the rural areas go to cities in search of better opportunities. The problem here in Kantain is that most people wanting to migrate are not well educated or skilled. The competition level is extremely high in cities, in the case of job markets. The organised sector mostly takes in candidates who are well educated and

have technical skills. Instead of finding any permanent jobs, they end up working as daily wage labourers. They have no official policies for leaves. Their jobs are temporary in nature and the uncertainty around retaining it is high. For this, they either have to travel back and forth from their village every day or stay for longer periods away from their homes. In the latter case, they usually cannot afford to shift with the entire family because the cost of living in the cities is high. In the former case, they are away from home for most part of the day. This puts the burden of responsibility of children, old parents and household on women's shoulder.

That day Sushila rushed to call for an ambulance, when an unknown number popped up on the screen of her phone. Late 30's Sushila is an Anganwadi worker. Anganwari worker is a government worker, who basically works for maternal health, neonatal care specifically in immunization. Like other women Sushila also wanted to shoulder her husband in managing family expenses. Ramshankar, husband of Sushila was not capable to fill everyone's stomach with agriculture. He had no option left, but to migrate. This is referred to as single male migration. He went to Rajasthan in a hope that he could earn a handsome amount. Luckily, he found a job, driving a JCB. But he does not get leave easily. It has been three years Sushila is taking all the responsibilities of seven family members, including her in-laws. But when needs start increasing, sushila took a step to support the family. So her in-laws had to work in her absence, which was against the societal rules.

But Sushila did not know that day was the last working day. When Sushila hurried without cooking, her mother in-law reacted *"we brought you here to handle our household chore, not everyone else. And a mother-in-law is not supposed to work once a daughter-in-law comes."* Bearing in mind the responsibility of a mother, daughter-in-law she was supposed to carry, Suhila had to compromise her job. The job could have provided economic stability to Sushila, she could use the money for her children education, taking good care of herself, shouldering her husband in managing family expenses. But most importantly it would have provided the sense of empowerment, dignity in the society. The dream of Sushila, as an inspiration in the community ended up as a house-maker.

Patriarchal Structure

In Kantain, men are the head of the family also they own the right to take decision in every aspect. Also men are given the 'stronger' roles like farming, constructing building. These kinds of activities need physical labour, thus men doing stronger role. And the 'weaker' roles are predestined for women like cooking, washing clothes. Basically Kantain favours patriarchal structure. Here patriarchy is a structure where a male dominates a set up over the females. As it is mentioned above that male are the decision makers in house. He enjoys the right to impose his decision on the women in family. It may be education or health or marriage, women never get any ownership of their own life. For example, the wife has to take permission even for small things in her life from her husband. A typical man in Kantain would never let a woman take part

in a discussion on whether a toilet should be built for the household or not. This is the case, even if there are 5 women and one man in the house. This perception I found during conversation with a woman from Kantain, whose family consisted of six members from which four are women. The mother and grandmother of the family felt the need of toilet inside home, when two girls got puberty. But the decision of building a toilet inside home was never upon the women. As men did not want, so urge for toilet was never considered.

There is also division of spaces in society. Division in the realms of space is another way to embed the patriarchal structure. The public sphere is meant for men while the private sphere is relegated to the women. In case of a husband and wife, the wife is supposed to look after the children and do household chores while the husband is supposed to work outside and earn money for the family to sustain. The public-private sphere division is also maintained so as to show each gender their place in the society. Apart from roles, division of space, there are several habits that are ingrained in individuals derived from their gender.

The normalisation of gender roles start from a very young age when girls are not allowed to roam around in the village and boy are free to do so. For buying groceries from the market, usually the boy is sent while the girl is told to help her mother with household chores or take care of her younger siblings. This differentiated behaviour creates an image in the young minds about what kind of role they are supposed to assume when they grow up, and how to treat the other gender. So when the little girl becomes as mother, she also follows the same rule and calls her son when she need something from market.

The umbrella of normalisation covers not only gender roles, but also economic independence. Economic dependence on men causes them to bear with several restrictions. Many times, husbands do not want their wives to work. Women do not even think of a possibility that they can work to earn money. It attacks their male ego to let a women earn while they are already earning for the family. The fact that they have to stay at house and not earn money is regularised in the community to an extent that they do not wish to think of any opportunity that can help them earn.

Awdhesh is a living example who adheres to the age old structure in 21st century. Each month Awdhesh struggles to feed six stomachs in family. Two months ago, he took out his elder son from our school, who was a student of class 8 and engaged him in a brick factory. Later in the evening, when everyone was having tea, Kamini suggested her husband whether she could be an earning member. Suddenly, Awdhesh got up from charpai and went. Mother-in-law suggested Kamini to follow husband and apologize for the blunder she made, because women from the family did not go out for earning. Kamini followed, before she could say something *"Women are made to remain under veil. Am I dead or what? You have created two sons; the best work was ever done. Earning is men's business, you don't need think about it. Your duty is to serve food. Does that well."* That day for next two generations of Awdhesh's family learnt

men are the earning members of the family and women are child bearing bodies. Like Kamini, quite a few could not encounter the structure of patriarchy to participate in labour market, only a few could challenge. Hence several who could not dare to, for them paid work is unachievable.

Accessibility To Resources



The chikan embroidery that the women in Kantain are skilled at. It has a high value in nearby markets of Lucknow and Delhi.

To start a venture of your own, it is vital to have accessibility to the resources that help you build your enterprise. For women who do not have proper education for the job market but have the hard skills to start a venture of their own do not go ahead in thinking about it and putting it into action because they do not know how they can start their business. People who know how to stitch or make delicious pickles do not think of it as a marketable skill. If at all, they consider it marketable, they do not know how to convert their unpaid activity to a paid one. Most of the women in Kantain are skilled at stitching, chikankari (chikankari is a traditional art work in Lucknow done on cotton fabric with thread), making papad, potato chips, peda (a sweet biscuit made from milk) and what not, but never encouraged to market these products. Whereas, men get the opportunity either to go outside the village or state to earn their living or else can set up a small business within the village. Let's take the instance of Kanchan, who lives with her husband, in-laws, and three daughters in Kantain. The annual income of the family is about 37,000, which comes from a small snacks shop. Every month they struggle to fill their stomachs.

And with the little money, they could not afford education for their children. Whereas, Kanchan is an unbelievable cook, she prepares delicious peda, chips, papad. She also has expertise in chikankari. But neither she nor her husband made an effort to market the skills.

Kanchan says, *"To sell the products, I have to look for potential buyers. This demands to step outside of the community, which I am not entitled to."* If Kanchan were able to make good use of her expertise, her family would not have to struggle. Lack of knowledge about market economy, communications is barriers for the earning of Kanchan. The case of Kanchan shows one aspect of challenges women face for marketing their skills. There is another aspect which stands on the way that is financial support. For some women initial investment in business is a challenge. Having sound education and marketing skills also these women are not able to market the products because of financial support. Whereas, when a man wants to start his own business, land is used as mortgage. But women do not possess the privileges.

Access To Government Facilities

There are several facilities provided by the government to develop a region, make it more convenient for the people of the society and look into the welfare of people as well. It gives them their basic necessities and saves time and energy in a lot of ways. However, several households do not want to come out of the traditional and conservative ways and acknowledge a new style of living. This also hampers women from going out to work as they have so much to do inside the house and they are not even allowed or cannot easily avail of opportunities that help them save their time to do paid labour. For instance, Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) a welfare scheme that provides Liquefied Petroleum Gas to save the cooking time.

However, several are unaware of this scheme or are not fully aware of how the process takes place, where and how to apply and how to avail of the service. At times, due to certain procedural errors they are unable to avail of the service. This causes them to cook the traditional way, which takes more time and affects their health as well. Another illustration which can be taken into consideration is Swachh Bharat Mission - Gramin. This mission aims to build toilets in rural areas. In Kantain most of the households do not have toilet because they consider toilet space as impure, and not be built inside the premises of their house. Thus women have to wake up early in the morning and walk to the fields where no one can see them. This consumes a lot of time as well. The long-time women spent in cooking and defecating at open spaces that time could have could have spent in doing some productive works.

Healthcare Notions And Access

There is a wide culture seeking a boy child over a girl child as well as producing a lot of children because they're the 'gifts' of God and also they can be add to the family earnings. Not only this,

one of the villager Vijay believes, *"There are a lot of barren lands in our country. So we require more and more population to fill the unfilled places. Otherwise the British people can again attack and capture our country"*. These have resulted in creating more lives. So the more child birth, the more time spent on child care. This has tremendous impact on women's capacity to contribute in labour market.

Apart from this, there is no access to proper hospitals where they can be treated well. Also women are not taken to hospital in a prompt manner. During pregnancy, very few women approach to community health worker. Quite a few families do not allow women to step outside home during pregnancy because of superstitions. And demystifying superstitions for women is not feasible. Ante natal care, regular check-ups and nutritious feed intake are a far cry. This leads to deterioration of maternal health for several women as they are continuously reproducing year after year. This aggravates the situation by putting extra burden on women's health, which again decrease the possibility of participation of women in labour market.

Social Status

The social constructs have it that if a woman of a household works that means that the man of the house isn't enough for the entire family. This circumstance is seen among high class families. It turns out to be a question on the status of the family as well the aptness of men, if a woman from high class goes to work out. It exposes the 'weakness' of men. Therefore at a lot of times I see the lower castes and lower class women going out to work more than the higher class women. Mostly women get trapped in this entire dilemma of whether to protect their family honour or do something for themselves. Being married, they often choose the later which shows the sad state of the community. As Kantain is a village with majority of Thakur, women taking part in paid jobs is not even an option. Hundreds of women's aims, aspirations are shut down, just because they are born into high class family.



Rachna belongs to a high class family. She loves teaching kids. But her family 'status' does not allow her to take up a job in school.

Conclusion

Observing the situation in Kantain I got a better understanding of several concepts that I had only read in textbooks. Statuses of family, health, relative access to education, lack of opportunity are forcing women to get married to the one option left that is unpaid care work. The gravity of the situation is something that deeply affected me. Women with so many skills are sitting at home due to several reasons when they can market those skills and earn a living. A lot of their labour is unpaid, which they do it as acts of love and care. Never realised fact is that, those unpaid care works are more than necessary for every individual. While writing this piece, I realised that even my mother suffers from the same state. She has sacrificed her job for me and my brother. I can't imagine myself without her unconditional love and affection.

Like my mother, millions of mothers give up their own aims, aspirations for the sake of family members. Essentially, unpaid care work is impeding their employment opportunities. Nothing can lessen these situations, but recognition to the efforts women are putting and the striking out the line between 'gender roles'. In latter case, it is important to demystify the distribution of gender roles which lack convincing evidence. Because whenever women like Sushila steps out for work, millions of in-laws questions "Who will cook?" Redistribution of gender roles will help

women of Kantain to cherish their dream. Division of household chores between both genders will lessen the burden from women's shoulder, which will result in creating more employment opportunities for women. In former case, acknowledging and recognition of the efforts women are putting for maintaining labour force will provide a new identity. Apart from this, women doing unpaid care work will no longer be regarded as unemployed.

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India & Development



A Study On School Health Check-ups In Kalahandi

Despite easy availability of treatment for Malaria, there has been abnormally high number of Malaria cases in the area covering the study. The population group most vulnerable to the disease are children and pregnant women. Lack of understanding on the disease, malnutrition and favorable environmental conditions for the malarial parasite to reproduce puts the population at even higher risk. There is a need for awareness on malaria and malnutrition among the population to reduce the number of cases and avoid deaths due to malaria. Educating school children is one of the ways to spread awareness in the community. The government school system in the area has failed to engage the children from the community, inaccessibility, poor accountability, lack of qualified teachers are some of the reasons for the dysfunctional school system. Government of India recommends health education as part of every school curriculum.

Swasthya Swaraj is working with fifteen government schools in the area to promote health education among school aged children. School health checkup is an important component of the project and is conducted on yearly basis. There was a school health check-up conducted from February – March 2018 to mainly determine the total number of malaria and malnutrition cases. The paper suggests that awareness and education among the school aged children on malaria will not only help us reduce total number cases among the students but also among the community. This study will help field practitioners and social scientist to plan interventions on health awareness and education in school aged children.

Introduction

Schools are the most convenient setting for health education and health services for children. The concept of health promotion in school has been floating around for more than three decades now. Lot of countries in the west have successfully integrated health promotion as a part of their curriculum already. Focus on health promotion also stimulates the development of good learning climate and thus there is consistency between health promotion aims and school aims (Rowling and Jeffreys, 2000; Samdal, Viig and Wold, 2010; Tjomsland, Iverson & Wold, 2009; Viig and Wold, 2005). The first and official consideration of health promotion as part of the schools is considered to have taken place in 1986 with the publication of the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (WHO, 1986).

Health promotion within schools evolved in different manner in different countries as it was influenced by the national curriculum context. Australia and Scandinavian countries for example already mandated health promotion as part of the school curriculum, but in Netherlands health

professionals mainly dealt with related issues. Health promotion and health promoting schools is still very young field very much driven by the policy and practice development. So far, there is very less evidence on the effectiveness of health promoting school approach (Lister-Sharp, Chapman, Stewart-Brown and Snowden, 1999, Stewart-Brown 2006).

Since most of the implementation and innovation on health promoting schools has taken place in western countries there is negligent amount of material available for its effectiveness in the South-East Asia. There are some initiatives, which focus on the urban settings, especially in India. One of the biggest challenges with the implementation is vague operationalization. There are set guidelines given to schools but their operationalization and understanding has been mainly left to the schools and practitioners. Lack of specific implementation guidelines makes it difficult for the schools to identify concrete action steps to achieve health promotion in schools.

Classroom based health education essential part of health promoting schools. When we say whole school approach to health education it becomes essential to take into consideration all the stakeholders that are involved. Without involvement of the various stakeholders, the implementation strategies and approaches are bound to fail. In the past 30 years, there have been efforts to create a scientific base to school health promotion; in the process, people have been trying to achieve three major things.

First, linking health to education in various ways, secondly producing guidelines to outline the principles of health promoting schools and lastly looking for indicators to access if activity was meeting the guidelines or not. The most important thing to realize while implementing health promoting schools approach is that there are no universally acceptable concrete action steps, you can have guiding principles but every school has to in essence come up with their own ways of integrating health as part of the curriculum. In addition, this can only happen with effective involvement of all the stakeholders. There has to be a system of accountability to make sure that various stakeholders are fulfilling their duties efficiently.

The government schools in India have mandated school health checkups every six months, but in many cases, even these mandatory health checkups do not happen. Government of India launched a school health education project in 1989-1991 covering 10,000 primary schools, 20,000 teachers and 500 national social service volunteers in ten states that could be replicated across the country. Two NGOs that have made significant effort to promote health among students in India are HRIDAY & SHAN. They have covered 63 schools. Their program started off as school based health education and has expanded to mobilize students for community based health activism. Both of these NGOs are covering several metropolitan cities in India.

Project UDAAN in Jharkhand was an example of a successful school based health education in government schools in India. It was one of the largest health promotion project in India and over the years has scaled up. The biggest objective of the project is to provide sexual and

reproductive health education to adolescent girls in government schools. High political commitment from the state government for sexual and reproductive health education resulted in formation of public-private partnership between Jharkhand State AIDS control Society (JSACS) and Centre for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA). CEDPA was nominated as the nodal agency for providing technical assistance support for implementation of the project and it was supported by David & Lucile Packard Foundation. During the first phase of the project (2006-07) 48 master trainers from NGOs and private organizations and 757 nodal teachers were trained. The project was implemented in 444 schools covering 30,000 students. By the end of third and final phase of the project, a total of 87 master trainers from government sector and 2161 nodal teachers had received training and the reach of schools has increased from 444 to 1258.

The School Health Promotion and Empowerment (SHAPE) program is another example of school based health promotion intervention in Goa. The project was developed by Sangath and funded by John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. The project was named 'Manthan', it was implemented in 324 government schools and 80 counsellors and 12 supervisors were appointed for the same. The project targeted male and female students studying from 5th-12th grades (9-17 years old) and was aligned with WHO's health promoting school guidelines. The project lasted from 2009-2014; the main objective of the project was to promote health and reduce health related impairments and disabilities among school going youth.

Current Status Of Schools

On conducting community meetings in seven villages, we found that not a single school has been functioning in those villages. We questioned the village members in detail regarding the reasons behind the school not functioning; surprisingly from all the villages we got a common response. They said that the teacher never comes to the school. The village members complained that the teacher visited school only two times a year. In order to understand the situation we contacted the teachers and asked them about the situation; the teachers said that the students never come to school; parents never send them.

On visiting the school building, we felt that the school had been closed for a long time. This issue has existed here from the time when school buildings were constructed here. There are multiple reasons for schools not being functional here; absence of teacher alone cannot explain the issue. The teachers who teach in the schools here and they are all non-tribals, this is one of the reasons that explains the non-willingness of the children to go to the school. They are not able to connect to the teacher, if they have a teacher from their own community than it will be easier for them to connect to that person. In addition, the teacher's assigned teach in Odiya, which is different from the mother tongue of the tribal population. In the early years of school, it is difficult for the kids to learn in a language different from their mother tongue.



Outside one of the schools in the study area in Kerpai, Kalahandi, Odisha. Image clicked by Amrit Vatsa of 3 Minute Movies

In some villages here, construction of school building has stopped because of various reasons, the authorities claim complain about the lack of funds. Because of the lack of buildings, the schools are half constructed. In some villages, the teachers have been assigned but there are no funds sanctioned for school buildings. In such situations, the tribal population requires role models who can spread the awareness about their rights. The community needs the right kind of leaders who can take them in the right direction. The tribal population here requires leaders' who can give them hope of a better life, they need someone who can make them dream big. Another problem encountered was the school calendar, which is not catered to the local reality. The tribal population has their own festivals that are not aligned with the regular calendar. Creating the right kind of awareness is of immense importance in the context of educational development among the tribal communities.

School Health Check-ups

Swasthya Swaraj is working with fifteen government primary schools in the two most backward gram panchayats - Kerpai and Silet to improve health, education and nutrition (H E N) of the children in an integrated way. The National Health Policy of Govt. of India (2017) lays greater emphasis on investment and action in school health - by incorporating health education as part of the curriculum, promoting hygiene and safe health practices within the school environs and by acting as a site of primary health care.

In Health Promoting School program, we explore how health can be taught across the school curriculum. Based on our understanding of various projects that have been carried out in the past in India and elsewhere we try to make health education an integral part of these fifteen government schools. As per the recommendation of the government of India school going students need to undergo routine health check-up every six months. The interior villages of Kerpai and Silet cluster in Thuamul Rampur block are completely devoid of these due to logistical and operational challenges. For the past two years, Swasthya Swaraj has been conducting school health check-ups in the across fifteen government schools. The results of the health check-up conducted in February-March 2018 are presented below. Since there is high incidence of Malaria among the population and school aged children are particularly vulnerable to the disease, every kid was examined for Malaria. We conducted anthropometry of every kid as well in order to identify kids suffering from malnutrition.

Government of India has introduced the mid-day meal program in every government school to tackle malnutrition. We found that there is high irregularity in the implementation of mid-day meal programs in the schools we examined. This is mainly because no accountability system in place, headmaster of the school is the responsible for making sure that mid-day meal is served. There are several challenges associated with irregularity in delivery of mid-day meals. The inaccessibility of these villages makes it quite difficult get the required resources to the school. If somehow the resources are transported to the school then another challenge is to gather the students in the school. Despite the enrolment of students the attendance of students in the school is extremely low. There are various reasons for this as described previously.

Results Of School Health Check-ups

Under this HPS eleven school health camps were conducted covering a total of fourteen schools namely Danpadar, Silet, Sargipadar, Serkapai, Kachalekha, Melrofa, Podapai, Rupen, Taramundi, Kandulguda, Maltipadar, Bilamel, Kuturumali and Marguma. The number of school going children attended the camp were 450. In the camp, we found that 40.6% of children were having malaria who were then provided with required medicines and proper guidance as well. The findings of the health check are outlined as under. Out of the total student screened (n=450) majority were ST (87.1%) and 12.1% were SC and only 0.6% were from other castes.

TABLE 1 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE STUDENTS (N=450)

Sr. No	Name of Village	Female		Male				Grand Total
		OTHERS	SC	ST	OTHERS	SC	ST	
1	Danpadar	0	2	16	0	1	11	30
2	Silet	0	3	9	2	7	19	40
3	Sargipadar	0	5	17	0	2	10	34
4	Serkapai	0	0	12	0	1	17	30

5	Kachilekha	1	5	33	0	10	33	82
6	Melrapha	0	4	21	0	6	9	40
7	Podapoi	0	0	22	0	0	11	33
8	Reupen	0	0	9	0	0	12	21
9	Tadamundi	0	1	14	0	1	18	34
10	Kandelguda	0	0	2	0	0	10	12
11	Maltipadar	0	0	6	0	0	10	16
12	Bilamal	0	1	5	0	0	6	12
13	Kutrumali	0	0	3	0	0	15	18
14	Marguma	0	3	10	0	3	32	48

TABLE 2 VILLAGE SCHOOL & DATE WISE SCREENING OF STUDENTS

Sr. No	Name of Village	Date of Check-	Students Screened	
			Male	Female
1	Danpadar	12/02/2018	12	18
2	Silet	13/02/2018	28	12
3	Sargipadar	15/02/2018	12	22
4	Serkapai	20/02/2018	18	12
5	Kachilekha	21/02/2018	43	39
6	Melrapha	23/02/2018	15	25
7	Podapoi		11	22
8	Rupen	27/02/2018	12	9
9	Tadamundi	28/02/2018	19	15
10	Kandelguda	03/03/2018	11	6
11	Maltipadar		5	7
12	Bilamal		10	2
13	Kutrumali	13/03/2018	15	3
14	Marguma	15/03/2018	35	13
			246	205

TABLE 3 GENDER WISE DISTRIBUTION OF MALARIA CASES

Sr. No.	Name of Village	No of students screened		Malaria Positive (n=183, 40.6%)					
				PF +ve (n=166, 36.8%)		PV +ve (n=4, 0.9%)		PFPV +ve (n=13, 2.9%)	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1	Danpadar	12	18	2	8	0	0	0	0

2	Silet	28	12	12	7	0	0	0	0
3	Sargipadar	12	22	4	6	0	0	0	0
4	Serkapai	18	12	2	1	0	0	0	0
5	Kachilekha	43	39	7	11	0	0	0	0
6	Melrapha	15	25	4	13	0	1	1	2
7	Podapoi	11	22	6	8	0	1	4	1
8	Reupen	12	9	6	3	0	0	1	0
9	Tadamundi	19	15	7	7	1	1	0	1
10	Kandelguda	11	6	5	3	0	0	0	1
11	Maltipadar	5	7	4	3	0	0	1	0
12	Bilamal	10	2	2	8	0	0	0	0
13	Kutrumali	15	3	1	1	0	0	0	0
14	Marguma	35	13	17	8	0	0	1	0
Total (n=451)		246 (54.5)	205 (45.5)	79 (47.6%)	87 (52.4)	1 (25%)	3 (75%)	8 (61.5%)	5 (38.5%)

TABLE 4 CASTE WISE DISTRIBUTION OF MALARIA CASES

Caste	RDT				Total
	Negative	PF +ve	PFPV +ve	PV +ve	
Others	2	1	0	0	3
SC	45	8	1	1	55
ST	218	157	12	3	392
Total	265	166	13	4	450

TABLE 5 PRESENTATION OF SIGN AND SYMPTOMS OF MALARIA DURING HPS

Complaints	Negative	PF +ve	PFPV +ve	PV +ve
Asymptomatic	185	94	8	4
Symptomatic	80	72	6	1
Total (n=450)	265	166	14	5

TABLE 6 MORBIDITY STATUS AND MEDICAL CONDITIONS SCHOOL CHILDREN PRESENTING WITH SIGH AND SYMPTOMS IN HPS PROGRAM

Sr.No	Medical Condition	Type of Medical Condition (n=450)	Presenting Signs And Symptoms	
			Yes	NAD/NA
1	EYE PROBLEM	VISION PROBLEM	142	308
2		NIGHT BLINDNESS	1	449

3		BITOT SPOT	2	448
4	OTHER ENT & DENTAL PROBLEMS	DENTAL CARRIES	104	346
5		NOSE	2	448
6		EAR WAX	12	438
7		EAR DISCHARGE	18	432
8		NECK NODES	21	429
9	SKIN DISEASES	SCABIES	11	439
10		PYODERMA	7	443
11		FUNGAL INFECTION	4	446
12	RESPIRATORY PROBLEMS	ARI (LRTI WITH CHEST SIGN +VE)	8	442
13	CVS	MURMUR +VE	7	443
14	ABDOMEN	SPLEEN +VE	62	388
15	DISABILITY	ANY FORM	9	441
16	ANEMIA	SEVERE ANEMIA (<7 gm%)	13	437
17		ANEMIA (>7-10 gm%)	223	214

TABLE 7 CASTE WISE DISTRIBUTION OF ANEMIA AND MALARIA CASES

Caste	HB-ANEMIA				RDT				Total
	<7	>7 to 10	>10	NA	PF +ve	PV +ve	PFPV +ve	Negative	
Others	0	1	2	0	1	0	0	2	3
SC	2	24	28	1	8	1	1	45	55
ST	11	198	183	0	157	4	13	218	392
Total	13	223	213	1	166	5	14	265	450

TABLE 8 MEAN NUTRITIONAL STATUS OF THE SCHOOL CHILDREN UNDER HPS

Indicators	Valid (n)	Mean values (SD)			
		Total	SC	ST	Others
Mean Weight (In Kgs) (SD)	449	20.9 (5.9)	20.5 (5.7)	20.9 (5.9)	17.6 (6.4)
Mean Height (In Cms) (SD)	449	121.2 (12.0)	121.3 (12.6)	121.2 (11.6)	119.0 (13.5)
Mean BMI (SD)	449	13.9 (1.7)	13.7 (1.7)	14.0 (1.7)	12.3 (1.5)
Mean Hemoglobin (gm%/ dl) (SD)	450	10.8 (4.6)	12.4 (12.0)	10.6 (1.9)	11.0 (1.0)
Age (In Years)	450	8.5 (2.3)	8.7 (2.6)	8.4 (2.3)	7.7 (3.8)

**Table 9 WAZ (Underweight) & HAZ (Stunting) for school going children under HPS
from age group 5 years to 19 years**

Age groups	N	Weight-for-age** (%) (Under-weight)				Length/height-for-age (%) (Stunting)			
		%<-3SD	%<-2SD	Mean	SD	%<-3SD	%<-2SD	Mean	SD
Total (0-60)mnths	23	4.3	21.7	-1.4	0.9	4.3	17.4	-0.9	1.3
Total (5-19)yrs	424	18.2	45.3	-1.8	1.2	9.2	32.8	-1.4	1.3
Males (0-60)mnths	15	0	26.7	-1.6	0.6	6.7	20	-1.1	1.3
Males (5-19)yrs	230	23	48	-1.9	1.3	11.3	36.1	-1.5	1.3
Females (0-60)mnths	8	12.5	12.5	-1.2	1.3	0	12.5	-0.5	1.4
Females (5-19)yrs	194	13.1	42.3	-1.7	1.2	6.7	28.9	-1.3	1.3

**TABLE 10 BAZ (BMI-FOR-AGE) & WHZ (WASTING) FOR SCHOOL GOING CHILDREN UNDER
HPS FROM AGE GROUP 5 YEARS TO 19 YEARS**

Age groups	N	BMI-for-age (Wasting)				Weight-for-length/height (Wasting)			
		%<-3SD	%<-2SD	Mean	SD	%<-3SD	%<-2SD	Mean	SD
Total (0-60)mnths	23	13	21.7	-1.4	1.4	13	21.7	-1.5	1.4
Total (5-19)yrs	424	10.1	35.4	-1.6	1.1				
Males (0-60)mnths	15	13.3	20	-1.4	1.3	13.3	20	-1.5	1.2
Males (5-19)yrs	230	12.3	36.8	-1.7	1.1				
Females (0-60)mnths	8	12.5	25	-1.4	1.7	12.5	25	-1.4	1.8
Females (5-19)yrs	194	7.7	33.7	-1.5	1.1				

** Weight-for-age reference data are not available beyond age 10 because this indicator does not distinguish between height and body mass in an age period where many children are experiencing the pubertal growth spurt and may appear as having excess weight (by weight-for-age) when in fact they are just tall.*

Meeting With Parents



*Villagers of Kaniguma (Kalahandi), parents, accumulated at the monthly ration distribution spot.
Image clicked by Amrit Vatsa of 3 Minute Movies*

School health checkups conducted between 12th February 2018 and 14th March 2018 revealed some really interesting information for the HPS team. Apart from treating the kids, an integral part of the checkup was to conduct meetings with the parents in the village, talk to them and understand their perception. We believe that education of a kid has multiple stakeholders involved and all the stakeholders need to take the responsibility to make sure there is safe and efficient learning environment for the kids, which fosters their cognitive thinking ability at very young age. In order to achieve this school health meeting was carried out among four villages. Doing focus group discussions of parents in the villages carried out the health meeting. A standardized agenda was prepared in order to carry out the focus group discussions.

We found that in none of the villages the parents were aware of the school health committee, which had been formed during the school, health checkups the previous year. Every time we tried to talk about the importance of education for the kids the topic of conversation got diverted to poor health among the people. The only demand from the parents was that the patients being treated at the clinic should be bought back to the clinic in the car. This was really interesting to note, we have been stressing the importance of education but the basic need to enough food and proper health is still unmet. In a situation where you have to constantly think

about where your next meal is going to come from, the need for education of kids ceases to exist, instead your kids become part of bringing the food at home. It was also interesting to note that some parents were in fact very much interested in sending their kids to school, but there was complete absence of teacher to teach.

This is precisely the reason why we also invited the teachers to be part of the meeting, there were cases when the parents blamed the teacher and the teacher blamed the parents for the kids not getting educated, it was a blame game. We also interacted with the teachers personally to fully understand the challenges they face in running the school. In most of the schools the building was dilapidated and not even rain proof. There were two villages where the school building did not exist at all. And the teachers also complained about the lack support from the DEO and BEO to maintain the school. It clearly seemed that the mechanisms deployed by the government to drive the school system unaccountable is flawed and has lot of loopholes. Moreover the support system for the teachers is also non-existent, in such cases there is only so much a teacher can do.

To address this problem we decided to form sports club in every village that will be headed by one of the youth in the village who is relatively educated and motivated to teach the kids. The main role of this person would be to engage the kids every day at least for two hours so that the kids start developing an interest in education. The means of engagement would be playing different games and teaching mathematics for one hour. The kid's first need to gain a habit to come to the school only then you can make them sit inside the class. We also planned to get the members in the village decide a place to grow kitchen garden, the kid's will be responsible for maintaining the kitchen garden and they will eat the vegetables that are grown in it.

This is a long-term project but it is impossible to achieve without help and support from the teachers. Help and support from the teachers will only come once the government system starts functioning more efficiently and more importantly starts providing the right kind of support to the teachers. But we are making our efforts to do everything we can from our side so as to engage the children so that they can have a better future. Without educating them we can never expect them to have better health or even life expectancy for that matter. Average age of the people in the community wouldn't exceed 50 years here, because poverty and negligence for years has left them in a terrible state. Hopefully with our efforts things will start taking shape soon.

Learnings And Suggestions

The status of schools in Kalahandi was alarming especially in the block that I was working in. It was horrifying to see school aged children being deprived of proper health and education. In such a situation it is often very difficult to find someone to blame, and it is not at all the approach to be taken. By investigating whom to blame you never really find the solution, the best

case scenario is you find the culprit, and then what? It becomes essential to look for solution to the cobweb of problems surrounding school health and education, i.e. every stake holder has to be dealt with. Health and education always go hand in hand, you cannot work on them separately, you can have different interventions but the interventions have to be interlinked.

For school aged children we always focused on health, education and nutrition together, we used to call it the HEN project. Childhood is the most critical stage of mental and physical development for any person, considering the fact that immunity of kids is not as good as adults and they are vulnerable to variety of diseases, it is essential to include health education as part of their curriculum.



Mahir Bhatt (standing) in a training of Swasthya Swaraj animators for the survey. Image clicked by Amrit Vatsa of 3 Minute Movies

Developed countries have successfully included health education and introduced healthy environments in their schools. The concept of health promotion in schools had emerged in the mid-1980s, it was evolution of health promotion as a distinct public health strategy. Many developed countries have made health promotion as an integral part of their school education and many countries in the west still struggle with this. The concept of health promotion in schools has still not gained enough momentum in the developing and least developed countries. There are various reasons for this, to give a bird's eye view of the challenge, there are too many stakeholders that need to work in synergy to make it happen.

There is also political will required in order to do this. Government of India has recommended inclusion of health education as a part of the curriculum, many schools are yet to do this. It won't take lot of time for the schools in the metropolitan area to implement this but the schools, especially government schools in tribal areas are very far behind in this. There have been efforts to health education an inclusive part of school curriculum. The projects mentioned earlier give us a glimmer of hope but how can every school in the country adapt and implement health promotion as part of their curriculum is still a big question.

Reference: Fathi B, Allahverdipour H, Shaghaghi A, Kousha A, Jannati A. Challenges in Developing Health Promoting Schools' Project: Application of Global Traits in Local Realm. Health Promot Perspect 2014; 4(1): 9-17

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Mahir Bhatt completed his bachelor in engineering and went on to volunteer for a year with AIESEC in Nepal where he developed an interest in development project management. India Fellow gave him an opportunity to understand public health and the health school model in Kalahandi, Odisha through Swasthya Swaraj. As the only engineer in a team of doctors, Mahir got the appropriate forum to hone his management skills further. After this, Mahir has worked in women's health issues in rural Himachal Pradesh and then in sanitation and hygiene behavior change communication in urban slums of Delhi. He is gearing towards life long work in public health, currently pursuing his masters in the same.

Understanding Inter-sectionality In Rural Uttar Pradesh

I started over the fellowship, with a new pattern of thoughts, with a new set of emotions, with an entirely varied way of connecting to the community and immense faith in myself. What is my journey? How were my thirteen months? Trying to put it to words, I would define it as tackling the challenges that came in my way while creating a space for myself within the community. A space that recognises me as a familiar face and gives me the flexibility to make people accept my rationale and ideas.

A huge part of my journey is shaped on account of me being a female and also not belonging to the Hindi heartland. A woman working away from home is not quite the norm of the society, yet. Speaking a language not known to the locals makes me more of an outsider. Sometimes I feel that 'they' think I am from another part of the world as some students show me common trees and vegetables and ask if these grow in my home state or not. They mock the language that I speak and yet, plead me to teach them some words every time I take a phone call or talk to my co-fellow in Odia. Sometimes I wonder, feeling amused that does my co-fellow who is working as a fellow in my home state, Odisha, on account of being an outsider there in his own right. Coming back to Sitapur, on a regular basis I am questioned about my choices of working away from home. Questions about why in a village so far, what are the real benefits of me working there. These questions were very difficult to answer. My experience has unfolded before me several types of intersectionality; which I wish to explore here.

The term 'intersectionality' was coined in 1989 by Kimberle Crenshaw. She wrote and expanded on the oppression faced by black women, because of their race and gender and how these two factors lead to a very different experience of subordination. "The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discriminations or disadvantage; a theoretical approach based on such a premise," reads the Oxford English Dictionary. The essence lies around how different factors affect people and subordinate them, and then the experiences for a weaker section who are at the end of several subordinated contexts are very different. For example, a white upper class man would have an extremely different experience from a black lower class woman, or for that matter even a white middle class woman. Every parameter brings with it a constitution of power. These parameters work in binaries, that is, dominating and dominated. When several parameters cross each other or are identified in a character and the oppression level is measured, that is called analysing intersectionality. The first fold that comes to my mind is that of the intersection of gender and power, which I have reasons to believe as I elaborate further, is the root of the patriarchal system - from which arises a whole of problems like misogyny. With

each intersectionality, I have added anecdotes from my fellowship days which I have observed or been a part of.

Gender And Power

Every space in the village is political and each of it has certain power dynamics in play. Patriarchy in the broad sense sees the intersection of gender and power. When there are five female members and one male member, and he can veto a decision, you definitely know that something is wrong. The foundation of the system is wrong. Just like the five permanent members of the Security Council of United Nations, this is undue power given to the male person. And oh, why? Because they earn money just like the 'Permanent Five' initially contributing to the maximum funds of the United Nations.

Family as an institution has several layers of oppression within it. Defined gender roles and the segregation of the public and the private spaces are primary concerns. Women are supposed to do household chores and take care of children in the private space while men are supposed to go out in the public space and earn for the entire family. There are several cases in the village where families do not want their girls to go out and study because they feel there is no necessity to do so. They want her to get married to a boy who earns so that the girl stays at home and does what she is 'supposed' to do.

In the educational space, that is, in school teachers also imbibe this in the students. Certain tasks are always assigned to girls, for example, making creative charts for the school. The assumption underlying this is that, girls are supposed to be good at art and craft. In inter-house competitions, the house masters forward female students only for the competition. While if there is some work like, setting up benches for an event, the boys are supposed to do this. Home Science as a subject option for Class 9 and 10 is portrayed to be a choice for female students only. These activities are so normalised that, boys tend to neglect practicing art and then blame it on their gender.

At several instances, they take themselves to be superior to the girls. Lines like, *"Ye kya karenge"*, *"Ladkiyon se nahi hoga"* are very common. Parents focus on educating their boy child and prepare their girl child for being a good homemaker. At several homes, the boys are sent to the nearest private schools for better education and girls are sent to the government school. While casually interacting with a shopkeeper about his daughter's higher education, he remarked, *"What will she gain by studying? That too so far away, in Bangalore. My profits were huge last year, I can get her married off to a good family now. There's no need for her to go to Bangalore."*

According to Census 2011 details of Sitapur, the average literacy rate is 61.12%, while the female literacy rate stands at 50.67%. It is lower than the national literacy rate which is 74.04%.



Clicked by the author in her community in Sitapur, Uttar Pradesh

Students, including girls, would take a male teacher's voice over a female's any day. Salary quotation also follows a gender bias because well, a female earning is just some extra amount to help the family while a male needs to 'run' his family with his salary. Do I see a hope for the better future? Yes. I see hope, when a sister fights for her rights in her house; when she asks for her pocket money to be equal to her younger brother and even when she says that she needs some time for home work. A spark of rebellion for the better in adolescent girls is a pavement for a less unequal future. People need to understand that each child needs some space to grow and build themselves. Imposing gender roles on children and forcing them to follow what the misogynist society expects out of them, hampers their growth.

Caste And Gender

Anti-caste discriminatory provisions are incorporated in Article 17 by abolition of untouchability. Also right against exploitation (Article 23 and 24) is present to ensure prohibition of caste discrimination. As such right to equality is provided under Articles 14 to 18 of the Indian Constitution. Scheduled Caste / Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 prohibits atrocities and thus caste discrimination based on caste. Indian Civil Rights Act 1955 is meant to ensure equal civil rights to all the citizens of India. Uniform Civil Code (Article 44) in the Constitution of India is also directed to prevent discrimination based on caste. However, all these rights and provisions against caste discrimination are not observed in practice and caste

discrimination is rampant in Indian society, and I have very evidently observed this in Sitapur, Uttar Pradesh.



Image clicked by the author in the hamlet where the SC/ST communities of the village stay

The caste system in Hinduism has been established three thousand years ago. The hierarchy still exists, even after sixty eight years of it being outlawed. In the villages, people reside caste wise. The area of the lower castes is marked as untouchable for the children and people of the upper caste. It is normalised to such an extent that at times when I ask children about why they do not visit certain parts of the village, they say, *"Ma'am there is so much dirt around there. Our side is much cleaner and better. So we never feel the urge to go there. Our parents will not say much. We choose not to visit that place."* From their childhood, this concept has been so ingrained in their head that without even seeing that place they speak with much assurance that the other part of the community is 'dirty'.

On questioning about how could they judge if that place is dirty without paying a visit to this place, the students answer *"They rear goats, hen and pigs. The excreta causes the place to be filthy."* Further into the conversation I asked if the cows they reared did not make the place dirty. The answer to this was, cow is a holy animal and it can never make a place filthy. Digging a little deeper, let us take a look into an already oppressed Scheduled Caste family, where patriarchy comes in and suppresses a woman much more than a man.

The oppression for a female of a lower caste is at an aggravated level than that of 'Savarna' women. Apart from dealing with the men of the house, they are also subdued by the upper caste women and men. There are more restrictions for her, especially restriction on movement in public places. They are not allowed to enter temples built and owned by the upper castes, and in fact there are separate tube wells for the lower castes and untouchables. At institutional workplaces, several women ask for work according to their caste. When asked about what work they would do, some specify that they will only do dusting and not floor cleaning and washing utensils.

Some would cook and wash utensils but not clean the floor. In school, there is a careful consideration while choosing the person cooking the midday meals. In fact there are a few teachers and students from the higher castes who do not eat at school because the tea or food is not made by a woman of their caste. Sharing a lunchbox is also a rare seen, considering the castes of the children. This has an impact on the student friendships as well, on who they can be close with and who they can mock about.

Gender And Sexuality

Gender intersecting with several forms of sexuality is also something that can be observed here. Although it is very easy to assume that people from the rural sector would not embrace any sexuality other than the binaries that are widely recognised. In a small sample size, I have seen one instance of a family openly embracing their daughter's sexuality. This case is also accepted by the other people in the village. From early childhood, Anjali has urged for dressing up like the society would want a boy to dress. Her parents have always allowed her to dress like she has wanted. She keeps extremely short hair, and is always adamant on keeping it short. When she joined school, she was forced by the authorities to take the girls' uniform in the name of acceptance.

Her parents had a hard time convincing her to take the girls' uniform. However, they would have been at ease otherwise as well. Some students make fun of her, some look at her as a rebel, and some as an inspiration. The neighbours accept her only because her family is accepting in nature. Despite all the support she is still a victim of unwelcoming glances from her friends and outsiders. I have never talked to her about it explicitly, but from her attendance is school as compared to her siblings, it does seem that she could be in some emotional distress at times.

In another family, there is a complicated case of a slightly constructed sexuality. Most families in the village want a boy child because a boy brings in wealth while a daughter just drains the wealth. A certain family has three daughters with an age gap of one year each among the three sisters. The youngest one, however, has been brought up like a society would like a boy to be brought up as. Her father wanted a boy who would someday enter the police services. So when you ask her about her aim in life, she promptly says, "*Police Superintendent*".

While her elder sisters are not allowed to roam around in the village and play with other children in the village. She has been given the entire freedom not just to roam inside the village but also to go to the nearest market area to get groceries for the house. This is a big deal for the family as even their mother has to take prior permission if she has to step a hundred metres away from the house. She has learnt how to ride a bicycle, is comfortable in pants and steals mangoes from the dense orchards.

At first I would have thought it was just her natural self but I dealt closely with her, I could see how she admired her sisters dressing up and she would also do the same but if someone spoke about it, she would look ashamed. She would look as if she was guilty of committing a crime. Here, I am not trying to reinforce any gendered norms. The only reason I have cited this instance is because in an environment that runs by these norms, she was normalised into being someone she probably would not have been naturally. She enjoys this freedom to a great extent, but here the question arises, why would the other sisters be deprived of these little pleasures in their childhood?

Religion And Gender

Predominantly, people from two religions co-exist in the village of Amberpur, Hindus and Muslims namely. Being in the Hindi heartland, the Muslims are a minority even in this village. The Muslim rural population is about 10.64% from a total of 19.23% Muslim population of the state (Census 2011). There is always this unspoken tension between the two communities.

Both the communities are so against each other, and have their spatial rules as well. A conversation with students would reveal what the educated mass can think. There is a huge problem with the non-vegetarianism. Some people cannot even justify why they are not allowed to visit each other's house or share food with each other. They simply say that the norm is that they do not belong to our caste and religion, so we are supposed to follow certain rules when it comes to our behaviour towards them. They even get the India vs Pakistan debate into this. While the older generation blames the Muzaffarnagar riots for polarisation and justification for the tension, the younger generation catches on to the Hindu dominated India (which is quite well brought out by Hindu fundamentalist politicians that they look up to) and a Muslim dominated Pakistan.

Once when a student had an argument with her best friend who belonged to a Muslim family, she was really upset. She came up to me asked me, *"Why is it that I always have a fight with my best friend about India and Pakistan. Why does she support Pakistan when it is India that is feeding her?"* They have such strong feelings that one can already see the future generations adding to this polarisation. Muslims as a minority have mostly felt unsafe. For this reason, they have adopted several habits that would call them conservatives. Being a girl in a Muslim family

becomes all the more tough with extra restrictions added after the already conservative atmosphere. As I have conducted several events at school, I never see a Muslim girl participating in any dance activity. Even in class while I am conducting an energizer, they move aside and say that they do not want to or are not allowed to dance.

Another incident occurred when a girl was selected for a leadership residential training program, she was not allowed to go as she would have to stay with 'other' girls whom she did not know. From the fear of being dominated by the majority to extending that fear to obstruct a girls' career, a woman in a Muslim family feels trapped. The mother of the child who was not allowed to go for the training program was weeping, as she felt helpless. She said she has always wanted her daughter to do well and really wants her to go but this decision is not for her to take. It is for her father, her uncles and the eldest in the family - her grandmother. She would not even try speaking up to her husband. Her tears were just a result of the losing battle she watched her child fight.

Despite all this, the child would not even think of rebelling against her father just because family values come first. Here, the family values mean the religious norms that have been imposed along with the patriarchal power as well as a defence mechanism to appear strong despite being a minority community. At school once, when the girl raised her voice about why the prayers in the school's morning assembly were sung only for Hindu Gods. A female teacher replied, "*Why? Doesn't Goddess Saraswati help you with your studies?*" She stood there without saying anything, rebellion only limited to the glances through her eyes.

Thus, we see how several parameters brought together gather different experiences for different women. Many say it is a battle field where we need to battle this system but the truth is this might look like a battle for every single person is fighting their own battle mixed with several factors. To put them under a common umbrella of just gender or caste might be over simplification.

Similarly, recognising those factors is always a matter of privilege. One takeaway from this entire process of observation for me is that one can only learn to empathise when one recognises one's already existing privileges. The person needs to keep that aside, learn about the intersectionality that the subject is going through and only then can the process of empathising have a fair start. It is not an easy journey and it is very easy to be mistaken as sympathising, which reminds me of a quote from William Shakespeare's 'As You Like It' where the character Jacques says, "*All the world's a stage; and all the men and women merely players*". While empathising makes you a player but if you are mistaken of sympathising, then you are just the audience watching Shakespeare's work in theatre.

The oppression that these women go through cannot be measured. They stay quiet about it and the worst part is the integration of this subjugation is normalised for them. They say that this is

the way it happens, and that it how it works. The societal rules are nature's law for them. No matter how much pain they are in, they would not dare to speak up. Because how much can you? If there are several parameters pushing you down, how many will you tackle at a time? One might fight against one factor, say caste but again the power play in the family roles will throw her back exactly where she had started to rebel from. Situations are gradually changing, but the system is deeply entrenched with numerous power relations that it is difficult to get a dynamic change.

Personally, if I was to place myself in the above context, I would not find a definite place. On a daily basis, my experience takes into account, a gender-power dynamics, not belonging to the Hindi heartland – as oppressive factors and being an outsider - as a privilege. Students in school and even their parents, listen to what I have to say or advice but the same statement told by a male person belonging to their region will have a greater impact and it becomes more likely that people will listen to them. There is a strong and visible power dynamics visible on the staffroom table consisting of both female and male teachers. For several things that the students do not want to believe, they will just casually tell me that things work differently but I would not know as I am an outsider. Hence, at several instances where people would be averse to certain progressive views, they create space for my views and at least listen to them by the virtue of fact that I am an outsider and might have a different cultural background.



The author (centre) with the kids in her mobile library that she helped set up in villages of Sitapur, Uttar Pradesh as part of her fellowship with Swarachna school

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Female Voluntary Health Counsellors In Dalsinghsarai

Every year, far too many mothers and newborns die in India due to preventable causes. Within India, Bihar is amongst the worst affected with an infant mortality rate (IMR) of 38 per 1000 live births and a maternal mortality rate (MMR) of 165 per 1,00,000 births [NITI Aayog, 2014-16]. The national IMR and MMR rates are 34 and 130 respectively. To reduce the mortality rates, the government has tried several schemes, most of which include the presence of a community health worker (CHW) or village health guide (VHG) in the community as a health educator. Under the rural health scheme, traditional birth attendants or dai's have also been trained in obstetrical skills to improve their knowledge in elementary concepts of maternal and child health (MCH). All these programs have recognized the presence and need of local women from the community to address health issues in women, especially during pregnancy.

In 2005, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) launched the National Rural Health Mission to address the health needs of under-served rural areas. A number of initiatives aimed at reducing maternal and neonatal (neonate is an infant less than four weeks old) mortality were launched such as the Janani Suraksha Yojna (JSY) which has resulted in a surge of institutional deliveries since its launch. Another major initiative was the selection of a community health volunteer or Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) for every village in India. The ASHAs are meant to be the key communication channel between the public healthcare system and the rural population. These local women are trained to be health educators and promoters in their communities. Though their main responsibility is to promote best practices around maternal and child health, the ASHA's are also supposed to share knowledge on a number of other health issues.

The ASHA workers are often over-burdened with work and are unable to provide best possible healthcare services to the entire population, especially in over-populated states like Bihar. Usually the communities from the lowest rung of the society, for whom these services are critical, get left behind. Insufficient and irregular incentives also act as a de-motivating factor for these otherwise spirited women.

When Innovators In Health (IIH), a public health organization in Dalsinghsarai, Bihar (where I joined as an India Fellow in 2016) started working on a Maternal and Neonatal Health (MNH) program, it felt the need for an additional community member along with the ASHAs in order to address the healthcare needs on time. The local knowledge within community women is extraordinary and they provide support to one another in absence of a family member. IIH tried to capitalize on this community knowledge and kinship by identifying and training local women from the community with best practices on MNH. These women with shared socio-demographic

and life experiences with the target population, proved to be a social capital for the community and have contributed significantly in saving lives of women and children.

Need For Community Counselors

In 2015, Innovators In Health started its MNH program in the most vulnerable wards of Dalsinghsarai in Bihar. The neonatal mortality in these areas was high and institutional delivery rates were low. In this region, early marriage is followed by early and repeated pregnancies. This poses significant risk to the life of the mothers, who are invariably underweight and anemic. Various socio-cultural factors and certain myths and practices also affect health and health seeking behaviors of mothers. Even with the presence of ASHA, maternal health issues are not discussed in all areas and critical cases go unnoticed.



A meeting with community counselors and iih team members on knowledge sharing

IIH's intervention to address maternal and neonatal mortality had a two-pronged approach: on one hand it wanted to improve the service delivery through providing antenatal care services and ensuring institutional delivery and on the other hand it tried to generate demand for these services by interacting with the community. Although community engagement focusing on behavioral change is a slow and halting process but IIH preferred this approach since it brings sustainable change. During close interactions with pregnant women, IIH figured that in such rural settings advice from local women who are respected and perceived as knowledgeable highly influences their behavior. In every hamlet, there is a woman who is commonly referred to as 'chachi' or 'didi' who acts as a mother figure for other young women. In many situations, their advice or presence of mind help women in dealing with critical situations in absence of an authorized doctor.

To capitalize on this existing resource in the community, IIH decided to start an intervention with these women. The idea of the 'community counselor' program was to identify these women, bring them to a common forum to form peer groups for knowledge sharing and recognize their capacity as barefoot health counselors. This idea comes from the concept of positive deviance which says that a community already has the required knowledge and know-how and is best experts to solve their problems. Thus the aim of the positive deviance process is to draw out the collective intelligence from the community and apply it to those problems which require behavior or social change.

IIH organized monthly meetings with the counselors. The forum was used to discuss both technical and non-technical aspects of maternal care such as- identifying high risk in mother and child, care for anemic women, birth preparedness, kangaroo mother care and other techniques for low birth weight children, counseling, ensuring participation of women during Mahila Mandals, etc. The counselors were seen as a social capital and IIH tried to help them reach their full potential by supporting them from time to time.



Initial rapport building sessions with the counselors

Who Are These Community Counselors?

At the beginning of the counselor program, IIH realized that due to the nature of the program being voluntary work with no direct monetary incentive, the process to identify and select community counselors should be flexible. The community counselors had to be local women,

well aware of the social structures and practices in their immediate community and motivated enough to bring about a change in their community. These women themselves came from poor households. However, their motivation to help others in times of need never stopped them from contributing towards the betterment of their society.



A training session with the counsellors on anemia

Initially those women, who were already active in the community and were helping pregnant women, were considered as counselors. Over time, it was seen that young married women in the community also looked forward to join the program and in the process learn new skills. Eventually such young women were also being selected for training. IIH has counselors who are traditional dai's, ward members, housewives and daily wage laborers. All of them have been actively helping others in their neighborhood without even realizing its impact on the community. Bimal Devi, 44 years of age is a ward counselor from Nawada. Bimal's husband was severely ill for many years and he died last year. Their only surviving son is preparing for higher studies while giving tuitions to neighborhood children. Bimal's life is a struggle. Amidst all the chaos, she chose to contest elections to be a ward member because she wanted to serve her society. Bimal joined IIH as a community counselor in 2016, to gather knowledge on maternal health issues so that she can personally counsel pregnant women and encourage them to adopt best maternal health practices.

The first batch of counselors had twelve women. Over time, as IIH expanded its MNH program in more wards (village units with 1000 population), new community counselors were added to

the program. They were of different age groups, ranging from 22 to 60 years and their education level also differed. While two of the counselors are graduates, most of the others are illiterate and only know how to sign. Nearly 20% are well versed in reading and writing. Almost all of these women were married off at young ages, as early as 10 years and didn't get a chance to complete their education. Till date, eighty six community counselors have been identified and were included in the training process.

Over the years, counselors have dropped out due to their responsibilities at home, lack of support from family since there was no monetary incentive involved and other personal reasons. Currently, there are thirty community counselors who are actively supporting IIH's maternal health program. These women have faced extreme challenges due to the patriarchal set-up in rural Bihar. All of them were married at young ages and most of them never got a chance to study. They had aspirations and ambitions which were never fulfilled. After marriage, their family's wellbeing became their priority, and their own life took a backseat. By becoming a community counselor, there was a self-realized achievement within these women. Their confidence grew leaps and bounds when they saw that their contribution towards the society saved lives of others.

Meera Devi, 35, is a community counselor in Pagda. In 2007, when ASHA's were getting recruited in her village, she wanted to apply for the position. But unfortunately, she didn't have enough educational qualification. During her childhood, her family struggled to get two square meals per day, so education was not a priority for her and her five siblings. Although she couldn't become an ASHA, that didn't stop her from helping others with health related issues. Her proactive nature and interest in the Mahila Mandal meetings got her selected as a community counselor. As a counselor, she has ensured that women go to the hospital for deliveries; she also keeps notifying the ASHA and IIH staff about critical cases in her neighbourhood.

Another reason why the community counselors could empathize with other women is because they have faced similar losses as mothers. Nearly 14 counselors have had one or more children who did not survive due to preventable reasons. All of them said that due to lack of awareness and in some cases due to not having enough resources, they could not save their children. A common narrative amongst counselors was that they do not want other mothers and families to go through the same ordeal. That acted as a motivation and driving force in them to create awareness about maternal and neonatal healthcare practices. Ramdai Devi had six children, out of which only three could survive. Even as a child, deaths of newborns were a common sight in her neighborhood. When Ramdai was in her teens, she befriended a nurse in her village and was fascinated by her work. She followed her closely and learned some of the technicalities from her. After her own loss, Ramdai was determined to help other pregnant women in her community so that they do not face the same situation. She asks young women to take care of themselves so that they stay healthy and give birth to healthy newborns. She also ensures that women have

safe deliveries at hospital and are not ill-treated by the hospital staff. Ramdai specially focuses on newborns with low-birth weights and counsels mothers on how to take care of them.

In rural communities, women help others in good faith so that they get similar support when required. This was a common narrative shared by quite a few counselors. In Bihar, men migrate out of the state in search of jobs, leaving their families behind. In such a scenario, mutual support among women is a key to their survival. While women do all the household chores, they lack decision making power, especially newly married women. Delay in decision making is one of the main factors which result in home deliveries or serious complications during pregnancy. In absence of a male member or guardian, the community counselors have acted swiftly and helped in reducing the delays which in some cases have been critical in saving the mother's life.



Counselor Phulia Devi (right) with ASHA Neelam (centre) talking to a mother in her ward

Phulia Devi, a counselor from Pagda says, *"My husband used to work as a porter in Haryana's Karnal grain mandi. He used to visit us occasionally during festivals. In 1987, when I was about to shift to my in-laws place, this region faced devastating floods. I was a new bride, and my husband also left for Karnal as soon as the floods receded. I always had this constant fear that in absence of my husband, if something happens to my family, then how will I cope up. Soon I realized that there were other women in the neighborhood with similar situation. As and when needed, I used to help out other women when they needed me- to accompany them to the market, or take care of them if they were not well, especially during pregnancy. That way I was confident that my neighbors would support me whenever I needed any help from them. This has*

helped me become confident and fearless. Now I voluntarily help pregnant women and accompany them for deliveries."

Their Contribution

In the past two and a half years, the counselors have supported the program in different ways - some accompany pregnant women from their hamlet during delivery, some help in organizing monthly community meetings and there are others who regularly inform the team in case of emergencies. There are quite a few counselors whose prompt actions have saved the lives of pregnant women and their newborn child.

Another major contribution of the community counselor program is that it has led to an increase in their self confidence and agency. Enhanced agency - the ability to make decisions and act on them-is one of the reason why these women are able break the patriarchal norms in their society. In their personal lives, they have greater autonomy in making decisions and more power to act for their children's benefit. While most of the counselors are uneducated themselves, they wish to get their children educated, including their daughters.

Rinku Devi is a counselor of Nagargama panchayat Ward 7 in Dalsinghsarai. This hamlet is one of the most vulnerable hamlets with a majority of the population from the Musahri community. In January 2018, Shobha Devi, a resident of that Ward delivered her newborn at home. It was around midnight and she was alone at her house. The neonate was lying unwrapped on the floor as a semi-conscious Shobha suffered from post-delivery pain. The next day, IIH staff got to know about Shobha and her newborns condition. The newborn was quite serious and his body was extremely cold as it was winter.

He had to be admitted to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) immediately, located at the district hospital in Samastipur. As Shobha had no one in her family to support her, and her own cognitive development was poor, someone had to accompany and stay with her at the hospital. In this scenario, Rinku came forward to be with Shobha. The next nine days, Rinku stayed with Shobha and her newborn at the district hospital. She not only took care of the mother and child but also taught Shobha how to breastfeed the child. In times of adversity, Shobha found support from Rinku, someone whom she barely knew.

The community counselor initiative by IIH is not a critique of the existing community health worker cadre of the government. From its inception, the idea has been to support the ASHA workers to provide best possible care to pregnant women in the most vulnerable wards and ensure no critical case goes unnoticed. For the organization, the counselors have often been key informants who were able to identify high risk pregnant women on time and assisted them in seeking medical care. The program faced several challenges, the waxing and waning

enthusiasm of the counselors and inability to get women to join the program in certain wards. Due to the nature of the program, its exact impact is immeasurable. While some of the counselors have directly saved lives of women by accompanying them to hospitals during delivery, others have provided counseling to young mothers and prevented any complication in them. The focus was to strengthen the community and create more leadership amongst them. Having local woman who are knowledgeable and are able to voice their opinion is a huge asset in these villages where till date in most families the man is the decision maker.



Counsellor Rinku Devi (right) with Shobha Devi and her son

At present, IIH is focusing on continuous engagement with these women and get them recognized in local forums so that their contribution does not go unnoticed. I would like to thank the community counselors Rinku, Phulia, Meera, Bimal, Ramdai and the others for being community beacons and agreeing to share their stories. The counselor stories have been documented by me and my colleagues at Innovators In Health, Sarveena Sinha, Uttara Seshu, Bikram Basak, Abhijith NP and Dr. Manish Kumar.

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Dyuti Sen is an India Fellow from the 2016 cohort. She continues to work with her fellowship host organization, Innovators In Health, in Dalsinghsarai, Samastipur district of Bihar on public health. Specific focus is on maternal and neonatal health, along with impetus on behaviour change and developing community cadre for access and better counselling and referral services as well in disadvantaged communities.

The Health MIS Users' Take From South Rajasthan

"Digital India is more for the poor and underprivileged. It aims to bridge the gap between the digital haves and have-nots by using technology for the citizen."

-Ravi Shankar Prasad, Minister of Electronics and IT and Law and Justice, Govt.

The wave of Digital India has swept over the country in recent years. With the launch of the campaign to ensure government services are made available to the citizens electronically by improved online infrastructure and Internet connectivity, the government aims to digitally empower the country. While the rural India still struggles with some basic amenities like healthcare, education and infrastructure, to state a few. Digitization is the process of converting information into a digital format. In this format, information is organized into discrete units of data. Digitizing information makes it easier to archive, access, analyze and share. I have been working with (Basic Healthcare Services) BHS, an organization that provides health care services in the tribal areas of southern Rajasthan as an India Fellow. The organization runs clinics called AMRIT clinics in this remote, poverty stricken tribal area and provides primary healthcare services to the underserved. For the last one year, I have been closely working on implementing a new HMIS in AMRIT clinics.

What Is A Health Management Information System (HMIS)?

An HMIS is primarily used to maintain records for any program or organization. The collection of data enables the user to develop an understanding about the population it serves. The HMIS stores the following details of all the patients who visit the clinic namely:

- Socio-demographic details (e.g. age, sex, marital status, address)
- Vital parameters (e.g. weight, height, temperature, pulse rate, BP)
- Diagnosis (e.g. skin disease, confirmation of pregnancy, malnutrition)
- Medication details (e.g. drug name, quantity dispensed)
- Other details (e.g. fee details, follow up date, lab tests)

What is an HMIS expected to do? HMIS is basically a software tool, which gives a holistic report of processed information based on which management can take certain crucial decisions - on which strategy and tactics could be based. It provides information that is needed to manage organizations efficiently and effectively. It is a data collection system specifically designed to support planning, management, and decision-making in health facilities and organizations. It is

an organized approach for obtaining relevant and timely information on which managerial decisions are based upon.

Difference between BHS and any other HMIS in the urban area: The one thing that sets apart the efforts for setting up the HMIS in organization like BHS is the physical setting of the clinics. These are areas located in the far remote regions, where infrastructure is poor, internet services have reached in the last couple of years but are very erratic, there are frequent power cuts and a dearth of people who are skilled or previously worked on digital systems. But in this study, I am not trying to address the challenges in the system. Since, throughout the year I have been working with the HMIS with more of an implementation mode, I thought it was important to know what all the people who use this system in the organization think about it.

From a bird eye view, I understand the importance of the data generated from this system and its relevance in doing analysis and research - but for the data to come out clean and correct it is also very important that it must be entered in the system correctly. And this understanding for the importance of the end result will only come when every person working on this system understands this. So, almost after an year of using the HMIS, I decided to ask the key persons who use the HMIS about what are their perceptions about the system they use and if they really see the value in what they are doing and does it really serve the purpose it was introduced for in the first place.



The author, in extreme right, with the health workers (community nurses) from Basic Healthcare Services that run AMRIT clinics in south Rajasthan.

Objective: To understand the perceptions people have regarding the MIS. With the background of a rural setup, limited or no knowledge about the digital world, no technical

expertise/familiarity with the digital system, we try to understand the challenges, successes, understanding and feedback of the end users for the system.

To know the opinion of different people on a single system, it was necessary to interview all the stakeholders in the process. Below are the people I interviewed:

1. Manager - contains good knowledge about the HMIS and use the end result of the system like monthly progress reports and stock details.
2. Data Entry Operator - enters data in the HMIS and is trained in the HMIS and has a fair experience in data entry for clinical setups
3. Nurses - enter data in the HMIS and are trained in the HMIS, have a clinical background but have no/limited experience in the handling digital systems

With the help of a semi-structured interview schedule, I interacted with all of the above-mentioned users of the HMIS and tried to capture and classify all the different perceptions these users have about the system.

Understanding Importance Of Data Maintenance

Ready For Action

"We work in such an area where communicable diseases like TB and malaria are commonly seen and having a count of patients showing up with the disease is important to ensure preventive and curative options" says a nurse working at the AMRIT clinics. The timely and correct maintenance and review of data ensures that health service provider can channel their energy and efforts to prevent the outbreak of diseases and ensure all the preventive measures to fight against the diseases.

Planning For Future

"It is important information for any organization to decide their goals, study trends and plan and strategize for their future." says a managers who looks after the logistics and supply for the clinics. The records help her ensure a smooth flow of supplies like medicines and seasonal requirements like the ones during the rainy seasons to prevent outbreak of malaria. The proper maintenance and study of the data can also help to avoid last minute inventory overload causing expiry and wastage or critically low inventory leading to unavailability

Setting Clear Goals

"When I saw the last quarter records, it showed that 2 children had recovered from severely acute malnutrition (SAM). That made me really glad but at the same time, I knew that we still have 5 more children in the same village to get recovered from SAM and that gave me the motivation to work towards connecting the other children with the clinic and get them treated" shares a nurse who treats patients at the clinic and also visits different villages to create health

awareness, immunize children and counsel patients about the importance of seeking early and right care. The availability and reviewing of the data helps in measuring the progress of the efforts put in by far. It sets a clear goal to then further accelerate the efforts in the required direction. "Chalo iss mahine me itna toh hogaya, lekin aage aur bhi kaam karne k jarurat hai" says the nurse.

Sense Of Pride

"I feel proud when I see the number of children that have recovered from malnutrition and are healthy now." The answer was clearly out of most of the expected answers. The power of numbers here is such that it keeps the nurse motivated. The day-to-day din often makes them forget their daily achievements. This data serves as a digital note of appreciation and achievement for the nurses who are working day in and out to achieve healthcare solutions for these villages.

Reading Between The Lines

The data collected also includes the socio-demographic details about a patient. This enables the care provider (nurses) to know more as well as empathize with the patient. These details include the age, sex and checking if the family has any member who is a migrant or not (since a lot of people migrate to cities like Ahmedabad and Mumbai) and their address. These details help the nurses to know if there are any specific villages where patients show up with more diseases, if migrating to cities and the working conditions there are affecting the patients' health or if there is any specific issue that needs to be addressed with a certain specific area. *"There is this one village from where a lot of patients are suffering from Tuberculosis. When we came to know about this situation we conducted a survey for screening for TB and counseled the patients to get treated for the disease."*

Preferring Manual Methods For Data Maintenance

Fear, Ownership And Responsibility

"Mostly the field staff enters the data in their personal diary and they maintain it as per their understanding" says the manager who shares that individually the field staff has a knack of maintaining the data for their work with them. But it clearly becomes cumbersome when it comes to collecting the data from everyone. In spite of introduction of different registers and online excel sheet formats to make the entries, it still is a challenge to make a move from manual to digital. "I can always go back to the numbers I have entered and just in case there is some mistake, I can even correct it", tells a field staff. There is usually a fear of entering the incorrect data in the digital system. *"At first, I used to be scared to use the system because of the fear of entering incorrect data and that someone would scold me for doing that"* reaffirmed a nurse. The staff also feels responsible for the data that they have entered in their manual entries. *"I know where I have entered the numbers, it is always with me in my diary."*

Trust On The Digital System

When a fairly new system goes live and is brought to use, there are some technical errors that surface when it is used. These errors, even if not major ones, do affect the trust of the end users. The expectation of flawless systems, an ideal state, comes only with time and with resolution of all errors that are surfacing while the system is being used. But in this process, it is also a major blow to the experience of end user. *"In case of manual entry, I knew that it takes more hours but I was mentally ready for it. But when I worked on the online system, I expected that it will be done in lesser time and when it got delayed I was very frustrated"* An error/delay in the expected results pushes the user to look back and compare to the old system they used. The trouble shooting for the error at times can only be solved with technical assistance and hence further delays the process. *"All the time that I was using the manual system, I did all the calculations on my own, and there was confidence I had, but even after an year of using the online data I am not much confident about the automatically generated reports."*



Community awareness program in AMRIT clinic during Swasthya Diwas, facilitated by members of Basic Healthcare Services, in early January 2019.

Transition From Manual Methods To Digital Ones

Limited/No Exposure To The Digital World

"We had computer subject in our 12th class but getting a chance to try my hands on that computer was a rare opportunity. We used to barely get 10 minutes to work on it. I only learned to type my name", tells a nurse when asked about her first experience of using the computer. A lot of them do not even get that opportunity in their academic years. But with the state recognized RSCIT (Rajasthan State Certificate course in information technology) being made

compulsory for the government jobs, more people are taking up this certificate course. The certificate course costs somewhere between 2500-3000 INR. Few of the nurses had an experience of working on the computer because they were RSCIT certified. The ones who did not take up the course felt a little under confident in handling the computer. But a nurse who shared that without any prior experience she started working on the new HMIS, with time excelled it and after that gave the RSCIT exam without studying for it and cleared the exams.

Expectations

"You are supposed to know how to work on the computer", recalls the manager who first used the computer nine years back. *"There were clearly high expectations set from all the employees",* she adds. She further tells that the learning process was much longer than it should have been since there was no one to train them. All her colleagues were new to the system. But peer learning and on job experience is something that helped her sail through the transition process. But even if she learned it, at the end of the day, she felt like something more could have been done. The expert view and some quick tricks would have helped to do their work more efficiently.

Learning The New HMIS

Curiosity To Learn

"Sikhna toh apne upar depend karta hai", (learning depends on us!) says one of the nurses when asked how difficult it was for her to understand the new HMIS. Being a first time touch screen user, after using the HMIS on a tablet, she has come a long way. It took her one month to learn everything about the system and understand how to connect to the internet. As she had never worked on any digital system before, there was never a discomfort in trying her hands on touchscreen. She rather finds working on touch screen much better than a laptop. Learning from her peers, she always sat around observing and making a note of all the do's and don'ts and learning and adapting real quick.

It Is Here To Stay

With the spread of digitization in all the areas like banking, bookings and communication media, it is hard to avoid learning it. Everyone is either pushed to or is willing trying to learn it. Cheaper smartphones and mobile data plans have made it much easier for everyone to have access to the digital world. Whether the infrastructure to support this growing demand is in place or not is another debate. Everyone I interviewed clearly found a value in learning the new system. This has helped them not only understand the HMIS but learn other subtle things like checking the internet connectivity, handling devices, improved typing speed. *"Jab tak jinda hai tab tak computer kaam aayega."*



Motivation For Using The Digital System

Visibility And Retrieval Of The Data

"With the new MIS, we can view the data that we have entered and also run reports" shares a nurse while comparing the previous systems and the new one. The visibility of data at the users end helps build an assurance towards the system. The further retrieval and reviewing of the data helps the end user to verify that the data that they are entering is correctly being reflected in the system.

Alerts

"The software shows if there is any abnormal in the vitals", says a nurse. There are specific ranges for patient's vital parameters to be within. For e.g. a normal pulse rate is anywhere between 70-100 per minute and anything more or else than this is abnormal. Whenever a user enters the data in the HMIS and if there are any abnormal vital signs it instantly warns the user about it. These alerts ensure that there is no room for human error.

Limitations Of The System

While understanding the limitations of the system, some obvious things like dependency on internet and devices came up during the discussion. People also say that any errors in the system that requires any technical assistance affects working on the system. Along with that a person said that *"if we get frustrated or tired we will not enter the data in the system, isn't even that a limitation of the system"*. While definitely, setting up validation and quality assurance methods will ensure completeness and accuracy of the data, the desired state for any system will be to function without it. The comfort and ease of the end user is all what matters at the end of the day.

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After her engineering graduation and 3 years in IT job, in 2018, the fellowship took [Pranoti Monde](#) to Basic Healthcare Services in south Rajasthan. AMRIT clinics that provide last mile healthcare services to the poor required Pranoti to work on a health management information system, playing to her strengths. The insights she gained are presented here. She continues to work with the community and BHS to date.

MFI v/s SHG: Insights From Urban And Rural Madhya Pradesh

Muhammad Yunus, the winner of the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize and author of "Banker to the Poor: Micro-lending and the Battle Against World Poverty", said:

"When a destitute mother starts earning an income, her dreams of success invariably centre around her children. A woman's second priority is the household. She wants to buy utensils, build a stronger roof, or find a bed for herself and her family. A man has an entirely different set of priorities. When a destitute father earns extra income, he focuses more attention on himself. Thus money entering a household through a woman brings more benefits to the family as a whole."

Study says that seventy per cent of the world's poor are women. However traditionally speaking women have been disadvantaged in access to credit and all other financial services. It is nothing new when you hear that commercial banks gladly focus on men and formal businesses, conveniently neglecting the women who make up a large and increasingly growing segment of the informal economy. This is where microfinance steps in. It specifically focuses on women, in some cases exclusively too. The business case for focusing on female clients is substantial, as women clients register higher repayment rates. They also contribute larger portions of their income to household consumption than their male counterparts. This means that there is a very strong business and even public policy case for specifically targeting female borrowers.

Microfinance, Poverty And Women

Women in India represent a more traditional section of society and have been reflected throughout the ages. Therefore, their participation in any walk of life is viewed as a sign of progress, particularly in the case of economic field. Microfinance institution started in India in 1980s through the self-help groups (SHGs) model. It is the Grameen replication model of Bangladesh. Women empowerment through SHG based micro finance has been central to development agenda in India.

No doubt those women workers across the world contribute to economic growth and sustainable livelihoods of their families and communities. Microfinance is one of the ways that help a woman get empowered from poor household by making this contribution. Microfinance would mean the provision of financial services to the poor – in the form of credit, savings and other products like micro insurance and help the families come up with income-generating activities and better cope with risk. Women particularly benefit from microfinance as many

microfinance institutions (MFIs) target female clients. As discussed before, female clients means higher recovery rate.

Many of these loans are distributed to women in rural and urban areas providing them with tools to become self-sufficient and independent. Indian women are often considered as second class citizens in India and microfinance has the capability of empowering women by giving them the opportunity to be heard and the means to make informed decisions. Microfinance spread across India is one such avenue that targets women from poor communities help generate income. They have been able to help the poor by providing them with microcredit to start their own small businesses so that they can generate income and at the same time provide for their families. And it has been observed that microfinance clients include self-employed, household based entrepreneurs especially women entrepreneurs.



A women collective's meeting in Madhya Pradesh

What Are The Options Available For The Poor?

Microfinance has evolved in India considerably and is mainly delivered through two models - the SHG-bank Linkage model (SBL) which was kick-started by NABARD in the 90's and the Microfinance Institution model (MFI) resembling the Bangladesh Grameen Bank model. SHGs work on the principle of group lending where the liability of the loan lies within the group as a whole. MFIs structure these groups in such a way that social and peer pressure would easily ensure the compliance of individual clients in majority of the cases. Some of the MFIs also give

financial services to individuals but the major parts of their operations are restricted to giving to joint liability groups as the recovery becomes easier as compared to individual clients.

Having worked in Chaitanya WISE, a women empowerment organisation working on access to finance in Madhya Pradesh in the last one year, I got to meet and interact with a lot of women who were customers of various microfinance products. We are working in Indore, Ujjain, Umaria districts and recently have started work in Maheshwar block, Khargone district of Madhya Pradesh. This means exposure to urban, semi-urban and rural field locations! I was initially working majorly in Indore – an urban location by mobilising women into women collectives; self-help groups. As part of my field visits I have worked in Umaria - one of the tribal and rural districts in MP with major parts of it lying within the Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve. These are excerpts from my experiences in the field:-

If there is one thing that I have learnt from having worked in Indore, Ujjain, Maheshwar and Umaria is that there is no shortage of availability or rather access of finance anywhere in MP. All these microfinance institutions have mushroomed their way into the deepest, remotest and the most inaccessible locations one can think of. Making you wonder how an SHG model –which focuses on saving ultimately leading to empowerment will work in such a situation. Having said that here are the major challenges faced by us while we aim at promoting SHGs in both urban and rural areas of Madhya Pradesh.

‘Kitna Milega’ Dilemma: Plenty of Access to Finance - In Indore we work with urban poor women who are either slum dwellers or reside in small pakka houses. It is very interesting to note that NULM (National urban livelihood mission) groups are prevalent here and they are in a process of forming a women’s federation too. Having said that as a private institution when we set out to make our own self-help groups with women in Indore we knew that there was no sarkari benefits we could offer them like the Revolving Fund. A constant question we got asked was - ‘*kitna milega?*’ before they join.

Plenty Of Access To Finance - Attending a microfinance company’s meeting will make you realise that these women don’t have any problem getting access to finance. Every nook and corner of the city is taken over by the MFIs. With first loan amount ranging from 25,000 rupees it was no surprise that women when told about SHG bank linkage model didn’t seem very excited. Concept of saving, lower interest rates, benefits of being linked with a nationalised bank did not entice them as much as the capacity of MFIs to give them loans as big as 1,00,000! Weekly, fortnightly or monthly repayments did not bother them because a quick loan from MFIs meant quick solution to their immediate existing problems. (And their existing problems majorly meant repaying some existing loans!)

Battling The Trust Issues - One of the common things found amongst women in the urban set up has been the fact that there is very less trust amongst them. Be it SHG or MFI model

women hesitate before they join someone to their 'group'. The sad part of trying to establish amongst these women the idea of SHGs is the non-existence of Trust. Be it rural or the urban set up women have had such poor experiences before that they find it extremely hard to trust anyone who comes in to talk about things that will benefit them.

Once we recruited a lady from the community as a field staff who was to help us form groups, mobilise women and be a part of the whole process. The field staff ended up promising things to the women which we were unaware of and upon enquiring we got to know that the lady has collected all the money from these nine groups (close to INR 70,000) and had re-invested it somewhere else. After much interrogation and enquiry it was found that she had put that money to use somewhere else without the knowledge of the women. It took few months to recover the money from her. Post the incident due to the trust issues that came along with it, the women are still not convinced yet to be part of an SHG!

Once incident that really left me wondering was in Indore. As part of visiting new location for new group formation I happen to enter into Shanti Nagar near Musakhedi. After finding potential members at one location and being promised that they will be part of a SHG, every time visited them they seem to have a new story about how they are just not ready yet. It was on my 6th visit, the women finally decided to submit to my request of joining the group we promote. They had innumerable tales to tell where they were robbed off of money in the name of forming groups and much more. As I was sitting and finishing up the formalities of the new group formation process I could feel one of the women clicking my picture and I asked her instantly why she is doing that. To which she replied, *"Kal ko tum nai aaye, ya humara paisa leke bhag gaye, toh humare paas proof toh hona chahiye"*.

For a while I did not know what to say, I suddenly realised that the didi not click my picture because they were fascinated by me (happens usually when with kids) or because they liked me. It was their way of ensuring themselves that in case of fraud they have a photo that will help them track me down! I won't lie, but I was a little upset. But I couldn't show it, instead I told her to click a selfie with all of us in it from my phone as well. There seemed no better way to change the topic and the awkwardness that had built up in no time. On asking about clicking my picture, they began telling me the stories of how many times they have been cheated on by people who claim to be coming from NGOs, cooperatives and end up taking their money and never return. In this era of smart phones, women don't want to get cheated on hence clicking my picture was an insurance.

Uncooperative Bank Officials - As part of the SHG-Bank linkage program in Indore we were operationalizing a partnership with a leading nationalized bank. As part of this, WISE had to build capacities of SHGs of partner organisations (or own) post which this bank will provide them with basic banking facilities like- saving account and credit. Over the last one year, the

number of times we had to go back and forth with the managers, the nodal officers and even the regional office to make sure the work gets done on time is innumerable.

The casual attitude of the managers along with their disinterest in providing a mere credit of rupees 1,00,000 tests the patience of the group women and us. Their inability to process the documents and their rude behaviour towards the members makes it all the more cumbersome and annoying. This ultimately leads to the women getting agitated and letting us know that they no longer are interested to be a part of the program because MFIs can provide them with the same thing with zero hassles. Constant interrogation by the bank officials, cancelling bank visit dates at the last moment, their arrogance of wanting an updated Aadhaar card without which they simply refuse to even look at the documents all makes it a task that tests everyone's patience. Despite all of this convincing the members of the importance of being associated with a government bank and getting credit access at a lower interest rate all makes it a point to make sure we ensure women get benefitted.



Let's all be part of that quintessential selfie (Poornima at extreme right)

How Do SHG Differentiate Itself From MFI Model?

Low Interest Rates - A way to get out of the vicious debt trap. I happen to visit a village Kohka in Umaria for the purpose of reviving an old SHG that has been shut down. A shocking conversation with one of the dadajis of the village made me think. He shared how his family has taken a loan of 35,000 from one of the prominent MFI in the region with instalments being

drawn at the beginning of every month. He is supposed to pay back close to INR 46,000 at the end of two years! Such high interest rates are common everywhere be it rural or urban. When we told them about the benefits being associated with a self-help group will help them get loans from bank at an interest rate as less as 1.39% per month, the astonishment made them want to be associated with us.

Alarming situation as this may seem societal pressure makes sure that they pay back their loans in any manner possible. Villagers consider us to be one of the MFI officers when we approach them making it all the more difficult to convince them to be a part of the SHGs we promote. Once they see how different we are in terms of the services we provide, they slowly start joining us.



Umeria Federation meeting in progress

"Hume Koi Itna Nahi Samjhata" - One of the key differential features of an SHG meeting from an MFI meeting is the amount of time spent on meetings and the kind of discussions we promote in the group amongst women. In one of the meetings in Nirnajanpur, Indore I happen to spend almost 90 minutes in one meeting talking and discussing with on various topics-including various entrepreneurial opportunities that can be tapped in a city like Indore to the various changes they can bring about in their locality by being a collective. Listening to my stories they seemed enthusiastic to be part of the ventures and projects we have planned and designed ahead and promised the same. While I was about to leave one of the leaders told us, *"hume itni saari jaankari koi nahi deta kabhi. Hum alag alag samuhon se jude zarur hai par iss meeting mein jitni baatein pata chalti hai utni hume koi nai batata. Hum aapke saath hamesha jude rehna pasand karenge"*.

Being There For Each Other - It was Ujjain's Federation's first meeting post its inauguration in March 2019. We are working in urban, semi-urban and rural areas. MFI groups are prevalent like any other place. Hence it was not very common for women here to sit for long hours for any kind of meetings.



File image of India Fellow (clicked by Amrit Vatsa of 3 Minute Movies) from Dalsinghsarai, Bihar during a Mahila Mandal meetup

As we started the meeting and began telling them about the bigger purpose of being a part of a collective this big, we saw women smiling and nodding their head in acceptance. On realising that the collective or the federation is not just a means of getting access to finance and its here for them in case of any difficulty they face, we saw a member shedding tears. Being told that this is a platform for her to be herself and express, it bought out a feeling of oneness amongst them. At the end of the day, an MFI staff will never sit down and listen to your problems in the meeting nor will they ever ask them to be themselves.

Once when I had gone to one of the slum areas of Indore-Pachu Ki chaal, to conduct a monthly meeting, I was very disappointed with one of the leader's attendance records. Once she came to the meeting I started talking to her strictly about how important her role is in the group and made her realise her responsibilities and her capabilities. As a response she started shedding tears and explained how she faces domestic violence at home at the hands of her husband and mother-in-law, which forces her to not venture out of her home much. I had goose bumps listening to the various stories she had to share. Soon enough the meeting became a place where each member comforted her and started suggesting her ways to deal with it. They

extended support which calmed her down. One cannot imagine a similar scenario being created in an MFI meeting. Sure they provide you with all the credit that's possible but is that all we women ever need in our life?

Entrepreneurial Activities - One of the key ways how we have been trying to differentiate our model from that of an MFI is by providing the women with some opportunities that will support them in the long run. BY identifying their skills and training them. We organised Silayi training in Indore and Ujjain in collaboration with USHA Silayi. The responses received from women were positive and they always look forward to learning something new. They feel valued when their skills are identified and nurtured.



(Courtesy Wikimedia) Bamboo product making unit in Dumka, Jharkhand

If better microfinance products are made available only then will they ever be able to get out of the intense debt trap they are currently in. Daryl Collins in Portfolios of the Poor rightly says: *"Irregularity of their income compounds the problem by ratcheting up the need to hold reserves, or to borrow when the income fails to arrive. For these reasons, we would argue that poor people need financial services more than any other group."* The truth is just like the richer households; poor households also need to finance the big things in life.

For this, obviously, larger chunks of money is required and putting together that much is not surprisingly more difficult for the poor. Hence resorting to microfinance institutions wherein your savings don't matter makes it all the more convenient to them. Hence the growth of MFIs in MP has been observed to be ever increasing! That is why witnessing a collection of rupees 1,00,000 is very common in any MFI meeting you attend! For an SHG model this may seem far-fetched but that is exactly what needs to be fought.

Since the time I have started working in this sector-empowering women through access to finance, one of the key competitors have been the Microfinance Institutions (MFIs). All the more reason it has been difficult for us to be working in MP. Forming new groups - convincing them the importance of savings for their future - in their old age all seemed futile. Women look for quick credit opportunities that will solve their immediate problems. Despite these challenges we still have managed to set up an urban-semi-urban-rural federation in Ujjain and three rural federations in Umaria district and in the process of building one in Indore.

Women are still hopeful and eager to embrace opportunities that come their way. One of the major reason for this is the purpose with which SHG models work. I have witnessed MFI group meetings where in the whole agenda remains money collection. Women may shy away from trying something new, but with the right push and support, there is nothing more stronger than a women's collective model that can be used to empower them.

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Poornima Menon is an India Fellow from the 2018 cohort. She continues to work with Chaitanya WISE, her fellowship host organization in the space of women empowerment via access to finance and entrepreneurship development. Poornima wanted to understand gender and women issues when she joined the fellowship. What she learnt in the process was perhaps far removed from what she imagined. The complexities in this domain are many and she is immersed in absorbing them meaningfully, right now.



Education & Learning

Why Do We Learn?

This essay aims to understand the process of learning and the need for it. Instead of leaving it to chance, learning can be a lot more productive when it is intentional and an individual focuses efforts in the right direction. This subject is not limited to educators and students. As humans who are rapidly changing the way we live, it is necessary to learn and adapt. In case of working professionals building new skills and improving them, working in teams, maintaining relations within and outside the team, reflecting on work done is essential. They have to work in multiple domains. This is why developing an understanding of how we learn helps.

What Does Learning Mean?



Image courtesy Pixabay

Learning is information that is acquired by observation, experience or through formal education. This organized information or knowledge is gained from scratch sometimes or built upon prior understanding. The process of learning is not individualistic. A lot of it is context dependent. It is shaped by the individual's interaction in the society, the language used and incidents lived through. Learning can be defined as knowing if knowing is being able to find and use information instead of only remembering it. In this essay learning will be considered through three perspectives: neuroscience, psychology and education.

After 1960, educators have been gaining insights from psychological research to build robust modules and teaching techniques. The best outcome is psychological research practically applied to update and improve educational outcomes. Situated learning as the name suggests is situation specific. Learning swimming in a swimming pool is far more effective than watching instructional videos to learn how to swim.

Some people argue that what we learn in classrooms does not closely reflect in real world situations. When a child learns measuring length in a classroom setting, if understood well it can be applied while driving, measuring heights and estimating distances. However the reverse is not always true. Lave, a social anthropologist inquiring the existing system of education, tested a group of homemakers and children. The participants, who were adept with transactions to calculate the best prices, did not perform as well on an arithmetic classroom test. Thus learning should happen such that the content taught in classrooms has to be applied by the learner in different contexts later on. This may help build flexibility and a balance between generalized and situated learning. Anderson, a professor of psychology specialized in learning, discusses the popular claim that learning through abstraction is not as effective. Experiential learning is the latest trend. While working or interning in a professional setup most of the skills are acquired through practice and they are applied to achieve targets. This approach is found more effective than instructional methods used in schools.

A narrow definition of learning in organizations might mean problem solving. Chris Argyris, has worked elaborately on organizational learning and a renowned professor for his research in this domain, has coined the terms 'single loop' and 'double loop' learning. Single loop learning follows a set protocol to solve a problem for a set of conditions. In double loop learning, possible solutions are analyzed followed by a protocol before proceeding to the solution. Consider a cab booking service. An example of single loop learning would be where you want to travel and a cab is booked for you regardless of your location and destination. Double loop learning would be the service triangulating your location, destination and available cabs nearby to inform the user whether it's possible for the user to book a cab at the said time.

Learning In Early Stages Of Life

Humans have an inherent capacity to learn. Right from our childhood we learn in many ways both consciously and subconsciously. As children we learn by mimicking and observing. Even without using language an infant can communicate using expressions and behavioral cues. A reward system also reinforces patterns of behavior and helps a child differentiate between what is right and wrong. Most of the learning happens while growing up that is essential for the rest of our lives like learning how to walk, talk and developing synchronous motor skills.

Experiments conducted by psychologists Needham and Baillargeon validate that human babies

as young as 4.5 months understand that objects do not levitate in the air and they need support for stability. Perhaps a baby might not try to climb up a chair that is suspended in the air with a rope but rather trust a chair that is firmly rooted on the ground. In a series of experiments that were performed, the subjects tend to stare longer at unnatural sights where an object appears to be floating mid-air. When you see a baby gaping at a levitating car in a Harry Potter movie the next time, it is only because the infant is truly appreciating the magical wizarding world as such instances have not been registered by it in the real world before. Their experiments also suggest that by the age of 4-8 months babies develop a fair sense of existence of objects even when they are out of sight or concealed, comparing sizes and the permanence of dimensions in an inanimate object. No wonder peek-a-boo is a popular game with this age group. Such knowledge forms the foundation for advanced learning related to it in the future. These infants (who have never studied Newton's laws of motion) understand that an object will remain at rest unless another moving object pushes it.



It is common to perceive learning in a virtuous light. But over time we learn traits and habits that are looked down upon in societal context. Vasudevi Reddy, who has published her research and books on developmental psychology of infants, found that babies as young as six months know how to lie. They pick up several advantageous mannerisms that are effective. Crying for grabbing an adult's attention or fulfilling demands, giggling to be appreciated is among some others along with deception. I think that we carry some of these habits into adulthood as well. For instance, laughing to avoid an awkward silence in social gatherings and faking smiles. It perhaps shapes our world-view about what is socially acceptable.

Fish Is Fish

Leo Lionni's story *Fish is Fish* illustrates how learning is built on prior knowledge. It is a story of a tadpole and a fish. One day the tadpole grows up to become a frog and explores the world

outside their pond. It comes back brimming with excitement to narrate different creatures of the land. It described the flight of birds soaring high above in the sky, cows with big horns and pink udders grazing in green pastures and men, women and children of all ages. The fish has never been outside its pond. It has only seen fellow fish in the water. It imagines a fish with vibrant wings that can take flight as a bird, a fish with four legs and horns as a cow and fish that walk upright with clothes on as people.

Thus facts play an important role while learning. The frog may have conveyed the correct details to the fish but there was a wide gap between the information and the concepts. The fish was never told that life outside of water is different and several species apart from fish exist in the world. Since humans took years to explain the concepts of adaptation and evolution in nature, such collective knowledge over time is consolidated and taught in schools. If the frog were to include immaculate details of life outside of water right from the physical differences, other life forms and their surroundings it will be abstract for the fish that has never thought of a world like this. Could the fish be taken on tour in a fish bowl to gain knowledge by itself? Possibly. But if that is not feasible then abstraction is better than misunderstanding. It is believed that learning requires complex, social environments.

Learning In Complex Social Environment

As an India Fellow, I was placed in Himachal Pradesh, one of the most sought after exotic weekend getaway destinations of northern India. I come from an extreme heat zone of the country where people sweat bullets for most part of the year. Without any knowledge about surviving in the frigid mountains of Himachal, I learned how to layer six clothes atop each other and create warm pockets of air to beat the sub zero temperature. This information was not gathered overnight at all no matter how obviously simple it may seem. After receiving a bashing from elders for not wearing woolens, gathering strategies from locals and people who have experienced winters in Europe, experimenting which type of material feel and function the best did I become adept at blending in with the native folks.

A dramatic change in altitude and terrain brings with it a change in cuisine and eating habits. For someone who is accustomed to include at least three food groups in every meal, an overdose of carbs in heaps of rice plates was not appreciated. Also the food was generally low on the spiciness. Soon after I learnt the dominance of rice cultivation in the area and the kind of diet required to sustain in the local professions such as agriculture, cattle grazing and cutting grass. After spending a considerable time in the same circumstances did I realize that my dietary preferences had also changed according to need? My palate had adapted to the taste of local delicacies and I went around asking for recipes and learned how it is cooked. It was essential to survive through the year and any resistance would be futile. Sometimes the absolute need with no secret passageway to escape ignites learning.

Apart from geographical challenges, work had its own requirements. I had to facilitate math and science classes for middle school students. The medium of instruction was Hindi. Not only had I ever stepped into the role of facilitator but neither was I confident about speaking Hindi fluently. I brushed up on my Hindi vocabulary, conversed with colleagues and confidently conducted classes. Fortunately, a good support system and training to be a facilitator was in place. The confidence to contribute in a classroom grew over time only with practice. I learned a lot from my mistakes and through reflection.



Author in an interaction with kids during her fellowship in Aavishkaar, Palampur

Learning As Adults

Professor Barbara Oakley, in her book 'A Mind For Numbers', says that we have two modes of learning: focused and diffused. Imagine the focused mode as a target marked with a laser where our brain is concentrating intensely on one specific task. Diffused mode is similar to a wide beam torchlight, which illuminates a large area including the target of focused mode. Can you make exactly five crosses using ten matchsticks? A matchstick can be moved only to make a cross or undo it. A cross is formed only after jumping two matchsticks at a time. Can you solve this puzzle in one go? Focus intently and make a strategy. If you still feel stuck, try any mindless task. Stroll around in the park or engage in your hobby. It might be surprising that the answer would be easier to get after the puzzle is revisited.

While performing tasks unrelated to the problem the diffuse mode of the brain comes into play.

Learning in diffuse mode is linked to creativity too. The brain makes deep-rooted connections in diffuse mode that can be harnessed again anytime. Working memory is the ability of the brain to remember for a short duration. It is similar to RAM: easy to access during a task but volatile. It can create an illusion of mastering any knowledge with quick recall. One of the ways to avoid this is to let a short duration pass before recalling. Effective learning happens we train our minds to switch between focused and diffuse mode frequently as needed.

Barriers To Learning

An incorrect interpretation of what learning means, can be a huge barrier. Similarly, defensive reasoning can inhibit learning when it is required the most. People resort to reason defensively when they have to cover up for their mistakes. It can also be a case of avoiding to push oneself out of their comfort zone and face the reality. For example an individual is delegated a task. If they blame an external factor for poor results, it indicates their lack of accountability for their work. Instead of accepting their fault they might in turn resort to protect themselves through defenses. People with extraordinary academic records, who have never faced failure, while dealing with an adverse situation tend to respond defensively. Pointing out that an action or response is defensive leads to more defensive reasoning. The mechanism of defensive actions leading to more defensive behavior can prove to be a huge barrier to constructive outcomes.

In schools, children are often segregated according to their learning level. This segregation happens on the basis of grades. Some students are singled out because of repeatedly poor performance in exams. They start internalizing the belief that is constantly reinforced by harsh teachers and peers about their inability to do better. Provisions for special attention and care should be provided in such cases. Standardized tests should be designed to diagnose any learning disabilities in reading, transcription, attentiveness - to name a few.

While teaching in a rural school in Himachal Pradesh, I found myself helpless while teaching two children with impaired speech and learning in class sixth. Some of the teachers in the school were genuinely trying their best to bring them up to the sixth grade level but it meant repetitive learning for the other students in the class. The teachers were not trained to teach differently abled children and even their efforts to help these children did not seem enough. All students suffered in this case. In the interest of all students, instructors who are qualified to deliver them quality education should give children with special needs extra attention. Another consequence of grouping these together could be the children being bullied by others in the class. This may lead to lack of motivation and confidence.

Unintended Consequences Of Schooling

When Simran was studying in school, her perception of science was limited to remembering lots

of keywords and definitions. Her memories of science class include visiting the science lab where she would sit and stare at specimens along with her classmates. On rare occasions some resources would be given to the students to perform experiments. *"Observing onion and cheek cells is all the science I have done in school,"* she recalls. Her mother bought her a book of science experiments that she performed and modeled with her siblings. Even when her teachers in school skipped all the activities mentioned in the book, she used to perform them at home. She found science interesting when she understood what she was learning with hands on approach.

Her parents and siblings played a huge role in keeping her interested in science. They created a safe space for her to explore independently. Class ninth onwards she had trouble with science. All concepts would be represented diagrammatically. But drawing aided learning when it came to more concrete buildable examples like circuits. Pictorial representation had its merits too. She could not have possibly seen sub atomic particles in real life. The purpose of studying these theories was lost upon her. This reflected in her grades. *"I never made it beyond the 80 marks score. My scores were average. I opted out of science after tenth standard because it was exclusively for smart students. Nobody expected me to choose science anyway."*

She always enjoyed math. It was like a challenging game for her where she wanted to get from one puzzle to the next. The lectures in school were unhelpful because they always assumed some prior knowledge to grasp the content. She taught herself by reading her math textbook cover to cover. It was draining to learn only by using one mode of learning and she could learn only 60% of the content. Then it was only a matter of copying solutions for homework and preparing to do well on tests. In tenth standard, she decided to get a personal tutor. She thought instead of learning in a large group with differentiated learning levels, a tailor-made lesson plan might benefit more. But her tutor's teaching strategy was the same as the teachers at school. His role reduced to making her practice math. Practice does help when you have mastered some material but not so much when it is a struggle to understand.

At this stage practice can help will recalling and remembering the procedure. It is a common assumption that a math tutor's role is guiding through solutions to math problems without explaining why. This might help moderately to answer simple questions on the test but it does not let the learner become creative with the material and extend its application further in different contexts. She learnt well at the start of any lesson but the pressure to keep up with others' pace of learning did not help her master the topic. It gave rise to a cycle of skipping homework, punishment from the teacher and copying solutions from a friend to complete assignments and avoiding punishment.

Eventually this girl who enjoyed math as puzzles started to fear it. Since she was relying solely on the textbook, she started to fear topics that the textbook failed to explain. Simplifying the concept could help. For instance, instead of trying to learn multiples exploring skipping counting

sounds a lot less intimidating. On account of alienation caused by the numbers and symbols in math and science, she was inclined towards stories and text with a logical flow that she could comprehend. Any stories about science and science fiction kept her hooked but she was limited to only observing rather exploring on her own. But as soon as she succeeded in grasping a concept, she was motivated to learn it further. While learning science she relied a lot on memory because it involved scientific vocabulary.



Simran while facilitating a fractions class - one of the most challenging topics in middle school

Today Simran is a math and science teacher for middle school children. Not only has she mastered the content but also she thoroughly enjoys it. The major difference between her schooling and the present circumstances is that she is in a fostering environment where math and science are celebrated. A place where the subjects were not encrypted in numbers and symbols but discussed in simple language. To enhance learning every concept is made visual. She implemented strategies that have enabled her to learn effectively and she consciously incorporates it in her classrooms. She relies on teaching multiple methods so that the students have the choice to use any one that suits them. Overcoming the challenges in learning has heightened her sensitivity to the challenges faced by learners.

What Do We Learn In Schools?

A couple of decades ago, the prime focus of education was making people literate. But as our needs evolve with breakneck speed the skills acquired and need of education has changed drastically. Schools must first and foremost provide the ability for children to make their own living. Along with it, schools must also develop a sense of social responsibility and values. Alternative schooling is on the rise in the country because the need to keep up dynamic goals of education. Tamarind Tree is one of these alternative schools in Dahanu, Western Maharashtra.

"Teaching at Tamarind Tree is focused on pushing the students to be self-driven motivated learner and enhance them with digital skills such as graphic design and coding. We believe that the Information Age (Internet) has opened up possibilities of learning independently while collaborating with other learners' and knowledge creators in the world. The learning material is created only digitally and online so that the children can learn by themselves. And the role of facilitators is to provide students with equipment for their project and guide the students to research a topic online, finding reliable sources, presenting their content, and applying their digital skills. In one of my recent interactions with students, some of them discovered do-it-yourself videos on YouTube. Since then almost everyone got into this habit of making modeling and creating. Some of their exceptional work includes a robotic arm and a motor cooler," says Usma, one of the digital facilitators at Tamarind Tree.

Krishnamurti Foundation's Sahyadri School in Pune is an institution attempts to create a holistic education experience for its students on campus. Sneha Bhansali, a math education researcher at Iowa State University, is working with the middle school and high school math teachers. Her research is based on how teachers adapt their teaching and pedagogy in mathematics in a holistic school scenario. The objective in this school is to match Indian philosopher J. Krishnamurti's ideology. This is done with the intent of creating individuals with a sense of enquiry who can contribute to the modern world beyond its materialistic needs. Their tools to achieve their goal are the same subjects as any other school. However one of Sneha's observations was that the teachers and student revere each other and communicate fearlessly. It makes a huge difference in the learning environment. The teaching philosophy of teachers, the beautiful student friendly architecture that caters to all their academic needs and the vision of the school sets it apart. Apart from regular schooling, such alternate schools are also on the rise and a healthy dialogue around what should we learnt in schools is essential today more than ever.

Productive Classroom Culture Practices

I have assimilated the following ideas through my fellowship year.

1. **Students Speak** - Majority of the classrooms revere silence. *"I want pin-drop silence,"* is a phrase that teachers commonly use to maintain discipline. As mentioned earlier, learning cannot be an individual journey. It is a lot more effective in a social environment. When students speak they exchange ideas. It should not be a norm to maintain silence in a class. They should be encouraged to speak to the teacher and among themselves as well. A clear dialogue can be had with the students about how free flow of relevant ideas and thoughts builds collective knowledge as a group.

2. **Students Ask Questions** - When students speak, they should be given the chance to ask questions. There are three types of questions that aid learning: what, how and why. Answering

what questions gives information, facts and increases vocabulary. Questions that begin with how dig deeper than what. But the questions that ask why are the hardest to answer. They need thinking and verification. Such questions should be asked the most in the class.

3. **Freedom To Fail** - This is closely related to the first two. When students are encouraged to speak, they may either shy away from responding or wander away from the subject. They should be given the chance to struggle meaningfully where they find their own path to understanding. These failures should be celebrated because only then will any child fearlessly share their ideas without the concern of being ridiculed.

4. **Teamwork** - Shifting the dynamics of the classroom between think pair share, small group sharing and large group sharing helps all types of learners in a class. In a competitive environment that can be nerve wracking to outperform others all the time. It is necessary to develop a sense of a common goal and collaborating for it.

While this essay talk majorly about learning in the mainstream areas and in the education context, it is not limited to it. The science of learning can be extended in several contexts such as learning how to function better as a civilization collectively. At an individual level it is imperative to realize where the value of learning lies.

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Aishwarya Lohi is an India Fellow from the 2018 cohort. She has worked with Aavishkaar in Palampur, Himachal Pradesh and Nari Gunjan in Bihar as a part of her fellowship. She engaged with school students and teachers in fundamental math and science by using practical tools. Classrooms are her safe haven.

Education In Naxal Hit South Chattisgarh



Image from festivities in south Chattisgarh amongst the Gond tribes

The subcontinent of India, which was ruled by the British for nearly 200 years, consisted of areas directly administered by the United Kingdom and the areas ruled by the indigenous rulers under British paramountcy. Such an area which co-existed for many years, even before the British rule, were all granted independence in 1947. After independence, most of the land in rural areas are been controlled by Zamindaris and landlords.

In 1967, there was a movement started by a group of peoples in areas namely Naxalbari, Khoribari, and Phansidewa in West Bengal. The movement was started against the government and landlords to defend the basic rights of the poor, landless, Dalits and opportunities of people in tribal areas. The movement has been active from the last fifty years and spread across ten states in India such as Karnataka, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Telangana, and West Bengal. These ten states were described as 'Red Corridor' by the government of India. In 2006 the government declared this movement as the 'single biggest internal security challenge ever faced' by the nation. These rebel groups maintained a strong presence in southern Chhattisgarh since the 1980s. The armed wing of people are called the People's Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA) and is estimated to have between 6500-9500 cadres. These groups have frequently targeted police and government

workers in what they say is a fight for improved land rights and more jobs for agricultural labourers and for the poor.

Currently, these forces are mainly active in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Odisha. In the last few years, there have been many activities between the armed forces and government and the common people suffered a lot in those battles. Almost generations of peoples got affected and the children who were currently in their 20's got affected the most. Currently, a major base of operations is done from Dandakaranya forest which is located in Chhattisgarh.

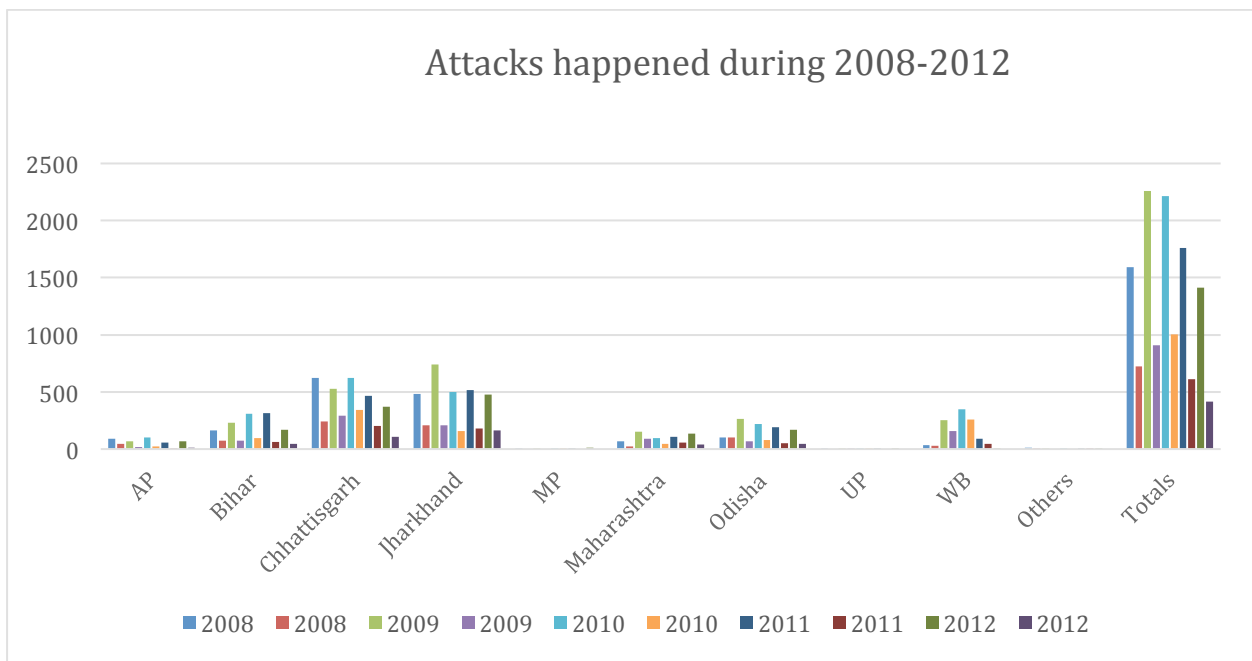
Salwa Judum

Salwa Judum meaning 'Peach March' or 'Purification Hunt' in Gondi Language was an anti-insurgency operation started in 2005 in Chhattisgarh aimed at countering Naxalite violence in the region. A lot of local tribal youth received support and training from the state government. In this movement, more than 644 villages were burned and evacuated making 300,000 people homeless. More than 100,000 people migrated to the neighboring states to protect their upcoming generations.

Jagadish a twelve year old student said, during the Judum, their village has been burnt down and they have been asked to move out of forest leaving all the ancestral property and culture they have with that place. Every night when they hear people with guns approaching they used to run from one village to another to survive. He was six years old when he first saw people were being tortured and beaten up. Almost on an average 70% of present generation childrens have witnessed killing during their childhoods.

Child Soldiers - Children are the most vulnerable group among populations living in regions affected by civil strife. In an environment of violence, children are vulnerable to fear, injuries, separation from family, abuse and other forms of exploitation. In India, at least nine states have been identified by the government as having a high incidence of violence. The condition of children, the status of their education and child protection issues in these civil strife-affected regions have been overshadowed by the discourse on conflict and conflict-resolution.

A primary survey says that twelve thousand minors were been part of the Salwa Judum movement from the southern districts of Chhattisgarh. During this time almost schools in the villages have been destroyed and made more than thirty thousand children drop out of the school for more than three years. A lot of children who were between ages six and twelve were enlisted in Balsangam's (village level associations) where they teach left-wing ideology. These children used to be trained in various aspects and been used as informers, a lot of children have been forced by both the forces to be part of this and many children have lost their lives.



In Chhattisgarh from 2008-2012 nearly 2608 incidents happened in which almost 1200 people have lost their lives according to official reports (courtesy Save The Children)

Due to the presence of the left wing forces in the forest, a lot of police forces used to settle base camps nearby villages and some camps in public infrastructure like schools, and other government buildings located nearby villages. Due to the presence of forces the schools became the primary target for the LWE. More than hundred schools have been blasted and parents have started treating schools as zone of threat.

For children who are caught in this crossfire, the distinction between the enemy and non- enemy often gets blurred. For them, both the Maoist and the security forces represent danger, as on one hand there is the risk of being lured or coerced by the Maoist groups to join them as child soldiers, and on the other hand, they cower before security forces. There have been incidents where adolescent boys have been caught and beaten up by the 'men in uniform' on the pretext of being informers. These children are not given the chance to be heard and are branded from the start. This extreme voiceless-ness coupled with the denial of 'agency' has been one of the main reasons of their alienation.

Rise Of Porta Cabins

To extend the education in the areas where schools have been destroyed and to bring down the dropout rate the government has created pre-fabricated bamboo structures called 'Porta Cabins'. These porta cabins are easy to build and whenever there is an emergency these structures can be easily removed and taken to another place. These porta cabins are located far from the villages and mostly near the highway, and near district headquarters.

Portacabins are residential setup and each porta cabin can accommodate nearly 500-600 children. The major purpose of the portacabins is to re-enrol all the dropout students and keep them under one roof. These porta cabins are able to accommodate around 22000 children, seeing the enrollment government has come up with a detailed plan under 'Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan' to provide funds. Though these residential setup's offer education, and living space to children, they lack to provide quality in every aspect. Parents send their children not because they get a good education just because they are living in secure place compared to the village and the schools provide three meals a day.



Porta cabins in Sukma district, Chattisgarh (image courtesy YourStory)

The school staff fails to support the children mentally who got affected by conflict. Apart from that the parents also never question the administration about how the lifestyle of the children inside the portacabin. Exploitation has become so common in every aspect in terms of money, food, education etc.

Education In Sukma

The conflict has severely impacted children's access to education. 40% of the children who were between the age group 6-16 have stopped going to schools. More than hundred and ten schools have been destroyed during the Salwa Judum movement. Schools which are to be identified as 'Zone Of Peace' ended up with police camps and gave fear to every parent in the villages. Children in these areas face huge challenges with the presence of armed police forces as well as the Maoists. They are suspected to be informers of either or both group. Many schools demolished by the Maoists a few years ago have not been reconstructed, while several schools still remain occupied by paramilitary forces hampering the normal functioning of schools. Languages are spoken by the teachers and students often differ, which adversely

impacts the teaching-learning process in the classroom. With vacant posts and high absenteeism of teachers, the teachers at work manage schools with meagre resources.



Image clicked by author at a weekly haat (local market) in Sukma district, Chhattisgarh

School education has become an important challenge in the life of a child in these areas. The government was able to build residential schools across Sukma, Dantewada, and Bijapur to bring back the drop out children from villages, but failed to deliver quality education. Teachers who were also part of the community failed to understand the emotional state of the child sitting in classroom who has gone through terrific experiences in small age. The focus has always been on the outcome rather than the delivering of the subject. Everyone has focused on how much a child is able to score rather than what kind of skills a child possesses. Another major challenge for a child who has been dropped out for 3-4 years and coming back to school all of sudden is that he/she has been straight away sent to the class according to his age/height rather than checking his/her basic knowledge. Almost all the children in the school speak their own language which has no relevance according to the books they have been provided.

Right to Education (RTE) states that mother tongue has to be given preference during the initial stages of schooling to make the child comfortable in the classroom environment which is not happening in the real world. On the other hand, the children who migrated to neighbouring states like Odisha and Andhra Pradesh faced major language problem in their education. Initially, these children studied in Hindi medium in Chhattisgarh and now they have to study in either Oriya or Telugu medium which made them drop out of the school and engage themselves in construction work and support their family financially.

Sukma is very much underdeveloped in the area of Education due to high dropout ratio and conflict factors. The district faces challenges of a low number of teachers primarily and lack of specialized teachers. Most of the primary schools consist of a maximum of two teachers who tend to teach 1st to 5th grades. Middle school consists of a maximum of three teachers with no specialization. Every teacher in the school can teach any subject (for e.g. a teacher who is appointed for teaching mathematics end up teaching Sanskrit or Science as per requirement). In this way, not even a single subject is delivered 100% as it should be taught. Not even a single teacher is able to understand the child mentality and the kind of situation the children came through at a very small age. They also failed to encourage the skills that children's possess within themselves. In a few schools, a student who is studying 7th class is unable to write and understand Hindi alphabets. The situation is the same across the district in almost every school, no one is responsible for their perspective for the failure of the kid but as a whole everyone is responsible including parents.

Almost all the parents never take a part of the child education as they were also not educated. They leave their children in residential schools called Ashram's/pota (meaning stomach in Marathi) cabins, mainly because the kid can stay in a safe place and also get food on a timely basis. Most of the children at the age six who need the care of the parents are been admitted in residential schools and visited once or twice in a year. Sometimes if an elder kid from village studies in Ashram the parents sends their kids along with him to admit in the same school. The community and School Management Committee (SMC) who should actively take part in the school failed to perform their role in delivering quality education.

Usage of concepts like Multilingual Education, Teacher learning materials (TLM's), local contextual methodologies, to deliver the concepts which help the children to relate and understand and perform a hand's on learning is not at all found in any of these schools. The government which organizes teacher training every quarter failed to evaluate how the implementation is happening. The northern part of Chhattisgarh which is developed by industries and steel manufacturing companies made a major difference within the state. Districts like Raipur, Bilai, and other districts have no threat by conflict and all the teachers usually opt these districts to work. Teachers who have posted in the Bastar region usually cannot relate to the mindset of the children and their learning patterns.

S.no	Blocks	Primary Schools	Upper Primary	High Schools	Higher Secondary	College	Ashram	Hostel
1	Sukma	207	80	7	5	1	32	9
2	Chindgarh	246	79	7	3	0	35	14
3	Konta	272	53	5	4	1	34	12
Total		725	212	19	12	02	101	25

Total schools in Sukma district, Chattisgarh

No-Detention Policy

No-Detention policy states that no student until class 8th should be failed and should be promoted to the next class as per the Right to Education Act. Though the act mandates to perform the process of Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) for each student at every periodic interval to assess and evaluate the student's learning. But no government school/teacher evaluate the students according to the objectives they teach in class. Due to the no-detention until 8th class, students made their mindset that any way they will be promoted to the next class. Once a child enters into high school they started facing the major problem and high chances of failure and dropouts in class 9th and 10th.

Harsh, a student of 4th class who enrolled himself in one of the portacabins came to school in the initial days. Once he received all the goodies he vanished and after figuring out we came to know he is staying in the village and working as a cleaner in a bus. Later next year when his parents brought him to school he was made to sit in 5th class. He has an attendance of 60% and passed the 4th class with an average of 55%. Once the child got to know this he never showed up in school and the administration hasn't removed his name from records.

Recommendations And Conclusion

1. Effective evaluation of teacher's performance and collection of accurate data
2. Regular interventions of community members and SMC to see what's happening in schools and how a teacher is delivering a concept in class
3. Maintaining subject teacher ratio and allocating specialized teachers for each subject
4. Evaluating students according to the process of Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) and maintain separate record for each student
5. Evaluating all the student on basic knowledge on the subject and integration of hands-on learning
6. Documenting local stories in the regional language and integrating them in curriculum
7. Creation on subject labs which helps students at different levels to learn in the same classroom
8. Finding a better solution for the children's who migrated and dropping out due to language as a barrier
9. Teachers to be given full time to teach and develop their skills rather than spending their work in office work



Author with his students from a government school as part of his fellowship with Shiksharth in Sukma district, Chhattisgarh

1. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2008/09/05/dangerous-duty/children-and-chhattisgarh-conflict>
2. Independent Citizen's Initiative, "War in the Heart of India," p. 14
3. Asian Centre for Human Rights, "The Adivasi's of Chhattisgarh, Victims of the Naxalite Movement and Salwa Judum Campaign," p. 15
4. People's Union for Civil Liberties, "Where the State Makes War on its Own People," p. 13.
5. <http://www.sukma.gov.in/en/education>

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Ravi Teja Dhavala is an India Fellow from the 2017 cohort. He was also instrumental in the fellowship being able to place youth in conflict areas such as Sukma (with inspiring partners like Shiksharth, who are doing crucial social change work), where it was needed to get these learning and voices out. The piece is based on his experiences and insights in the year spent there. Post this, Ravi has been working in Uttarakhand with another non-profit initiative to promote entrepreneurship in hill communities and arrest migration, before joining the Punjab Good Governance program.

Possibilities In A Wrecking System

It is a while back that I kept standing at the jeep stand and waiting for some motorbike to pass so that I could ask for lift to school. It is quite difficult to get a jeep around 7 O' clock in the morning. Even if you find one, it will make you wait till the jeep gets filled. A year ended with experiencing the same things almost every day. It appeared tiring some days. But it was also an opportunity to see myself reacting differently to the same situations at different point of time. Someone told me that if you want to be good at something, your training must be monotonous. And on the days of feeling numb I tried to motivate myself with this life motto. It was not easy.

The fellowship journey is a stepping stone to inculcate the values I need to find a better version of me - breaking my prejudices constantly. I have learnt that loving needs to be unconditional. The feeling I have had for the school (Jhed Govt. Senior Secondary School) gradually transform to love. And thus this final piece written as a fellow is about the possibilities of that system to metamorphosize into its true potential, irrespective of the wreck it finds itself in today.



Monalisa (center) with her kids from Jhed school, Kotra district in Udaipur

My day starts with greeting of the children I work with, and their parents, as soon as I enter the Jhed school. As an India Fellow, I have been placed in education sector project called Khilta Bachpan, for a year. My host organization, Kshmtalaya Foundation, has been running a leadership program, called iDiscover fellowship in Kotra and Gogunda block. In the fellowship 50% fellows are from local areas and 50% are from different states of India. Since past three years, Kshamtalaya is working in Government schools (with the primary section) in rural pockets of Kotra block in Udaipur district of Rajasthan to strengthen the existing system in school.

I remember the first day I travelled from Udaipur city to Kotra. We were in some overly crowded jeep, uncomfortably seated. I saw nothing but dusty mountain. The next day I got dust allergy. It took time to consider the beauty wiping the dust from the top of it. The beauty of these small hamlets in Kotra block is no less than Kashmir. But these hamlets of rural India have been apparently too far for the citizens so that the stories of these places mostly unheard. If it comes in media it is only because of its low literacy level or crime rate. It seldom features on the newspaper with its myriad inspiring stories. If we look with an open mind, there is ample of inspiring instances in these rural pockets of India.

Such as Sima's incident. It takes guts to stand against other's opinion. Even though her mother keeps telling her to stay at her fiancé's place, she has chosen to stay back home. She complains of overload of household chores she had to do at her fiancé's place (it is very normal to have engaged to someone after class 8 by own choice). After completing her 12th she aspires to be tailor. She is currently studying in class 10th. It was pretty difficult for her to continue her study in 9th. Most of the time, she used to feel really exhausted. She used to pass the school hour copying from books, used to struggle while she was asked to write something by her own.



Sima, amidst her household chores

But still she comes to the school with the expectation of being able to do something independently, after completion. There are several other Simas whose efforts get burried inside the four walls of classrooms. There are a nuber of Kevlas who after working in their farms come to school with the dream of being a better version of themselves.

Have you ever visited any Government schools in rural India or studied from one? Children will be found passing the whole day copying from Sanjiv passbooks or from the black-board. If someone asks them "how are you", without giving any response or without changing facial expression they can ignore you; like you are invisible. Or else they will give more importance staring at the cobwebs at that point. I had never seen a primary class like that. If being in school takes away the natural confidence of a child to express herself / himself in front of others, the role of the school as a value add to childhood is lost.

Rahul, a five year old boy (stays in the same village, Jhed, where my school is situated) who every time seeing me comes close to me and holds his hands up above his head till I hug him, or gently shake his hands. He seldom comes to school. It is never difficult for him to communicate with me as in his head, language is not a barrier. I have seen children studying in primary section are more intent to take responsibilities than the senior section. As time goes by, the children become quieter and more tend to keep staring at the cobwebs.



A student 'drawing' alphabets during an examination

The years of copying the alphabets from the text books without even relating to it, alleviate their natural ability to share about anything through the medium of words. So it becomes really difficult to find a person from the community who is ready to lead. After years of chasing to be someone else (someone who worship idols, put dhup and agarbatti in front of the idol, someone who is purely vegetarian ... none of which is the original nature of the tribal community these kids belong to; but a 'sanskritization' really) in the process the children lose themselves. They forget the purpose behind joining school. They grow more worked up to change themselves from outside.

After years of ignorance, a child who used to come to school to learn now comes to school to pass time. Many children come to school to avoid doing household chores. The school becomes just a place to meet people of their age group. And when they are absent for the whole day, you will find them at their farms working hard under the fiery summer sun. The class rooms get empty every year in July, September and March. In July, the community spend most of the time in corn farming. During September the community gets busy in farming Bt-Cotton. And in March, they are engaged in celebrating Holi. In a class room of three girls and twenty nine boys - everyone might have a different story to not coming to school. The story only they are aware of, not the generalised one we read in newspapers and articles regarding dropout rate in schools.

'In Rural Education in India: A Scenario' it has been mentioned that education in rural India is plagued by many problems like poor infrastructure, access difficulties, lack of financial support and poor quality of educators are a few of the most pressing of problems. One question the authors raise in the article is whether enrolment and attendance is the right parameter for evaluating the progress of rural India's education? We can't get the whole idea of a child and what they have absorbed in the school by stressing on their enrolment and attendance rate as proxy indicators. First, the attendance register is not a valid evidence of what a child knows. And just by getting enrolled or being in class does not determine one's academic outcome. And academic outcome doesn't always determine success and happiness in future.

Professor Abhijit Pathak says in his book 'Social Implications Of Schooling', that, *"Education has broader meaning, as it is a life-long process of learning that takes place everywhere. Hence, it is not uncommon to find people who, in spite of not having had proper school education, are full of knowledge and wisdom. Likewise, degree/diplomas may not necessarily provide one with what is generally expected of a 'cultured' / 'educated' being: the spirit of love and tolerance, honesty and courage."* (Pg: 13)

Majority of the children in Jhed worshipping textbooks, are not able to read properly. The Government schools do not provide practical implication of the learning. So the children who can easily do the calculation while buying tobacco from the shops are unable to add two

numbers without copying the answer from the board. India has the second largest education system in the world, after China. And to ensure quality of education for all in the country is challenging. And there is not a single factor that causes it or acts as a catalyst.

I was engaged in a study with an objective to get an idea of the factors of coming to school and to get to know the factors that stop the children from doing so. One factor that overpowered all the factors affecting absence of senior secondary children is working as labour in someone's farm, or in the hotels of Mount Abu. When the children have been asked further the reason they mentioned is *"paise ki kami"*. There are innumerable stalwarts who started their life as poor. So the question keeps striking me whether poverty alone affects students' academic outcomes.

As I asked the children, *"maan lo ki tumhe khet me kam karna nahi hota hai, tab kya tum school roz aoge?"* Most of them said yes. Some of them explained if all the periods would be taken only then they will come. Some complained that there is nothing happening in school. Two of the respondents said that they would prefer going to the Mandva market (It is 2km away from Jhed, the girl boy ratio is much higher in Mandva school. So the adolescent boys prefer to roam around the Mandva Govt. High School).

The total strength of Jhed school is 118. But in regular days it is quite difficult to find 40 of them at the same time. Teachers kept complaining that they get de-motivated to see these few children present in the school. It gets hard and annoying for them to teach a lesson when the children keep changing every day. The students and teachers after a point of time get normalised with this dis-functionality. Both the groups of people blame each other, justifying the procrastinating behaviour that each one seems to demonstrate. When the parents are asked to visit school, the parent who has immense role in the growth of the child, prefer to stay away from anything regarding to matters of the schooling. They are mostly scared of not being presentable in front of the teachers. The first generation school goers thus hardly experience any support from the two pillars in their life.

So a huge gap keep building between all the stakeholders. Have you heard of that parrot that the king once chosen to teach? Tagore has mentioned in his essay 'Tota-Kahini', there are luxurious arrangements for the parrot. Everything was going well, but no one truly knows about the well-being of the parrot. Likewise new programs and policies have been getting introduced to manage all the data required for the Government officials to monitor and measure the education system. The teachers keep busy filling all the documents from measuring the ground to filling marks in numerous excel templates.



Why do my kids in Jhed turn up everyday, despite of all this? Here are some reasons I found through the study ...

1. They find joy in it (as told by the students). Some children come because their joy is associated with meeting friends. So they come late in school just to give attendance and they go back home saying hello to their friends.
2. Two or three children come because they get joy by reading and being present in classes where teachers are also present.
3. When the school teacher does not reciprocate to this, the ones who find joy in studying start to search for it from other ways. Sitting idle and not having regular guidance from the teachers gradually becomes monotonous for the children.
4. The generation of school going children are at risk. Because they start perceiving themselves as unworthy. I remember students of class 9 saying *"Our parents do not understand anything. There is nothing to share with them."* *"They never gone to school, they know nothing."*
5. But there is hope as the children have one or two people (from the village) whom they want to be like. Sima says, *"I like to be like Nirma. She goes to school by scooty. She rides it all by herself."* Nirma is a teacher of a nearby primary school. The independence she has motivates Sima to go to school. Rajmal, another class 9 student says, *"I want to be like you. I want to be able to express my emotions and opinion like you."*

Let me tell you a story of a village called Adipipli. The local community was very happy and content. But after 4 O' clock the people from other villages are scared to pass the village. There were two renowned goons staying in that village. They terrified everyone, from the residents to the outsiders. One day a fellow came to the village. He joined the primary school situated there. He as an iDiscover Fellow did not get scared of challenges. Instead he was very much excited to know the current situation of the school.

On the first day, he found the school was locked. Not a single kid was present there. He contacted the teacher assigned as head mistress and from there he got to know it was a single teacher school. He allocated 45 minutes talking to the teacher every single day. From a listener he gradually started leading the conversations. They go to every household of the village till the children are not coming to school. They held meetings after meetings. Most of the times it got cancelled. The children were busy with handling their goats in the grazing land. So he talked to the local community and started school at night. There was darkness inside the classroom.

The one left behind, girls who had toddlers, started coming to school at night with their family members. It took time but slowly Adipipli changed. Even if there is no teacher, there is the Education Minister (a class 5 kid elected by all as representative) who take care that everyone is learning something. The Cleaning Minister with the help of other kids makes the space clean. And when they play, there is no one left behind. As they have set all the rules themselves - taking care of each other, helping each other are some values they practice every day.

Now you ask me why I have told you this story? Because Adipipli is 5km away from Jhed. And understanding what motivates the children of Jhed, Government Senior Secondary School come in regularly will help us understand where we need to put our efforts. Empathizing with the system and working along with the teachers hand in hand. In a multi grade class, conventional learning does not function. It needs external support so that children from different grades can relate to the lesson. The children do not consider that they are learning anything if they are not taught from the books. So the Government teachers who believe in traditional way of learning, play an important role in the life of children. Any flawed system needs that first role model who will trigger a chain reaction. When teachers start learning new things and talk about it, the students will also get inspired to try new things. Kids like Mohan who were unable to read from the book get the courage to read sentences from the wall painting and posters.

There are times when I look for change,
In the mindset of the teachers.
I look for change, in the way my adolescent students
Looked at me.
I pray for their parents to come
And visit school once.
I spent time with them
With the expectation of seeing change in their way
Of looking at education.
I asked for official work when the children did not show up,
So that I could understand the teachers
Who seldom go to the classroom.

All these times,

I forgot to see others in myself
And I did not try to find myself in others.
When I look back and reflect
And find a bunch of teachers
Coming to school regularly on time,
Working for years where they do not want to be
Where they feel threatened.
I find a community,
Who send their children to school,
Even though they badly need a hand in the farms.

I find 118 kids,
Full of hope and dream in their pockets,
Coming to school
With the hope of leading a better life.
I find myself full of efforts
To learn from where i am assigned to teach.
I find a flawed system intent to be fixed,
By collective efforts.

1. <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/bfbe/b89fe1e2382c3554a3371a7f4a32bc91f0d2.pdf>
2. <http://oaji.net/articles/2017/1174-1512041104.pdf>
3. <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/bfbe/b89fe1e2382c3554a3371a7f4a32bc91f0d2.pdf>
4. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/260599124_Role_of_Education_in_Rural_Development

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Monalisa Debnath is an India Fellow from the 2018 cohort. She continues to work with Kshamtalaya, her fellowship host organization in the space of education for all. The early months were not easy at all for Mona. She kept contrasting her own upbringing and education of relative privilege with her community kids. It took time to make peace and move from a drowning in empathy mode to what can be done mind-set. This piece reflects this inner dilemma and transition she underwent in her fellowship year to emerge stronger.

The Curious Case Of Two States

This essay mainly focuses on the work of the Telangana government and Nari Gunjan in Bihar - in the field of education, which are constantly working on the empowerment of Dalit community in India. Nari Gunjan is a non - profit organisation which is working in empowering and educating musahar community in Bihar. Musahar community has been seen as the most deprived and underprivileged community in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. From many centuries, the society has built a huge wall called untouchability between upper caste and lower caste people. This categorisation pushed the Dalits to an end, where no gates of opportunities come to vicinity. Similarly, Telangana government is also working for the empowerment of Lambadas, Koyas, Gond and other scheduled caste and scheduled tribe who live in Telangana, where they also face the same scenario as in Bihar.

To eliminate this descrimination and hirarchy among Dalits, a strong thought is that education could be the only source for bringing impact and change in the society and this thought was ignited 35 years ago. This started to bring remarkable changes in the field of education. This essay explains and elaborates the process and program of how they started their work and why is their work required.

The Telangana Social Welfare Residential Educational Institutions Society (TSWREIS) is an initiative by Shri. N.T. Rama Rao, the former chief minister of united Andhra Pradesh in 1984. He started few residential schools to provide education for tribal people who don't have any facility for transportation or schooling in their tribal area. This is mainly because the access to education was very difficult for these tribals who lived in far off rural areas, in the interiors of Andhra Pradesh. At the same time in 1986, Sudha Varghese, a Christian young lady dedicating her life to bring change in the lives of the Musahar community of Bihar, by relocating to the state from her native Kerela. She stayed with them in a small Tola in Jamsaut village for almost 21 years and started training centers in the nearby villages and guided the Musahar community to a path where they can face the world with confidence.

Fastforward to 34 years to present day. In Telangana's case, the residential schools have grown to 270 all over the state and each school comprises of at least 500 students. The schools have produced brilliant students over the last three decades. On the other hand, in 2006, Sudha Varghese has been awarded the Padma Shri for her tremendous work by establishing Prerna hostels and educating more than 150 girls of Musahar community in each school with best facilities of hostels and also setting up more than 50 training centers in nearby villages of Punpun and Bihta blocks.



Left, N T Rama Rao in a still from his movie Pataal Bhairavi. Right, Dr. Sudha Verghese in a file image. Courtesy Wikipedia

The Telengana Story

The Achieving Tribals

In the time of Princely Hyderabad state, in the 1900's, Nizams have conquered and ruled the whole Telangana. Nizams have always been ruthless leaders and used all the people's effort to work as labourers for building their forts and cleaning their courts. Around 40% of the land in Telangana was under the control of Jagirs who are the elites of Nizam's and the remaining land was with the government's land revenue system. The state was comprised of three linguistic people. The Telugu speaking people in Hyderabad city, Marathi speaking people in Marathwada area, and few Kannada speaking people at the borders of Karnataka and Telangana. There were also tribals who were in the forests and forests are their only source to live and believed that they have full rights on the forests.

But the Nizam's eyes fell on the beauty and income of the forests and gradually started shifting tribals if agreed to move. Otherwise they would kill them. Occupying forest area started rapidly, the last phase of Asif Jahi was the most ruthless in the Nizam's rule ever. Taxes were raised, atrocities against Hindus and tribal people were untold and increased, men were harassed for no reason, women were dishonoured. But as the saying goes, one small spark can burn the whole forest. One person stood up giving his whole life for the lives of the tribals. He was Komaram Bheem. Komaram Bheem was born in small Gond family where he was also facing all these difficult situations along with the other tribals, but one fine revolt lightened up many lives.

His slogan Jal, Jungle, Jameen got deeply rooted in every tribals heart. His deep passion for the liberation of the tribal people made him solely lead and fight till 1940. In 1940, a battalion of 90 police has been sent to find out Komaram and sentence him to death and unfortunately he had

been killed. But his revolution turned out successful by sending back all the Nizam's rulers. Gradually communism and communist leaders involved and supported the tribals movement. On November 2012, a statue of Komaram Bheem was installed at the Tank Bund in Hyderabad and that day is celebrated as world tribal day now.

It's Peasant's Time

When the Jaggirs found that the tribals were becoming strong, they thought of falling on the peasants. Slowly all the agriculture fields nearby the city and forest started getting captured by the Jaggirs, all the peasants working in agriculture were exploited by reduction in their wages. Many people couldn't manage their family and gave up their lives. Struggles and nepotism had suppressed all the peasants. But many were motivated by Komaram Bheem's brave achievement. One person, Chakali Iamma, belonging to Rajaka caste, had revolted against a Jaggirdar Ramchandra Reddy, who took his four acres of cultivating land. That revolt against a Jaggir had inspired many other peasants and everyone started revolting against the Jaggirs. Communists also stepped up in supporting the peasants. Their revolution had been very successful, where 10,000 acres from feudal lords was taken back across 3,000 villages and it was distributed among several landless peasants. At last this feudal system totally ended in 1951 after huge revolt all over Telangana.

Similarly there were many Telangana rebellion movements by the tribals and the peasants. And after people like B.R.Ambedkar and S.R.Sankaran had rigoursly worked for the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe, many people started getting opportunities and coming out to a new world which they have never dreamt of seeing. After constitution, S.R.Sankaran a bureaucrat, has really worked pedantically for the development of Dalit and Adivasi community. He was the one who started with the first few residential schools for all the Dalit community children for providing good education and facilities so that they can also make their stand with the other people in the society. He was also called the 'People's IAS Officer'.

Residential Schools For Dalit Communities

In 1984, When N. T. Rama Rao was the chief minister of united Andhra Pradesh, he thought of building upon the idea of S. R. Sankaran. The government had started constructing residential schools for the Dalits where different castes like Gonds, Koyas, Yerukalas, other scheduled caste and scheduled tribe could join this residential schools. The government had initially started with 20 residential schools and they increased their every year. And now they are 270 all over Telangana. All these people used to live on their ancestral occupation and make some income. Gonds mostly are peasants and herding cattle is their livelihood since many years. Koyas were artisans and used to make furniture out of bamboo and other wood material. They had their own language called Koya which belongs to the dravidian script. They also started depending on

migrant work as they were always shifted from one place to another due to some huge government projects near rivers Krishna and Godavari.

Slowly tribal tradition and culture was diminishing due to migration and also deaths, as gradually their work was having no value with the advancement of technology everywhere. Building Dams, power projects, etc. where the tribals have to leave their places and reside somewhere else, were disturbing their livelihood. So, education was the only path for them to get some light. The government started focusing on education and schooling of all the tribal children, providing them free residence, food and education. This gave their families exiguous confidence that their fates are going to change.

TSWREIS And TTWREIS



Inauguration ceremony of a TSWREI School in outskirts of Hyderabad, Telangana

The concept of residential schools was a successful project and children and parents started showing interest to join these schools even from far places. The government had named it as Andhra Pradesh Social Welfare Residential Educational Institutions Society (APSWREIS). On June 2014, when Andhra Pradesh had bifurcated and split into two states, then the residential school society became independent body of Telangana government. So they named it as Telangana Social/Tribal Welfare Residential Educational Institutions Society. They have also split this schools into two categories for ease of access to people. TSWREIS schools are located in surroundings of Hyderabad city and they take in admissions of economically backward children

and scheduled caste. TTWREIS schools are located in the remote areas of Telangana state where the tribal people can get access to schooling. Currently, K. S. Praveen Kumar IPS, is the secretary of these Telangana welfare schools.

The most interesting thing about these schools is that they are trying to bring a huge reform in the current education system. The thought of changing the classrooms from teacher centric to student centric is a huge shift from norm. He had initiated a concept of Freedom schools and Gurukulam schools in the institutions society. All the TSWREIS are named as Freedom schools and all TTWREIS are named as Gurukulam schools. These schools promote no bags, no homework, task oriented learning, theory less, practical more, instead of chapters they use modules, learning while playing, and other activities which are more student centered.

They also made 10 commandments for their school which when read the students feel confident and comfortable in the society.

I am not inferior to anyone.
I shall be the leader wherever I am.
I shall do what I love and be different.
I shall always think big and aim high.
I shall be honest, hardworking and punctual.
I shall never blame others for my failures.
I shall neither beg nor cheat.
I shall repay what I borrow.
I shall never fear the unknown.
I shall never give up.

The students who study in this social welfare schools they call themselves as SWAEROES, Social Welfare 'Aeroes' (Sky's the limit in Greek). All these people take oath everyday to follow the 10 commandments.

Challenges Faced

There are few aspects to be analyzed here that how successful and Impactful is this educational transformation. The idea of making teacher centric to student centric is a great move but the point to think is whether the teachers are getting the required amount of training and inputs to bring up this change. All the teachers who are teaching in the schools have deep rooted traditional methods of teaching, where teachers are the people who give knowledge and students are those who take knowledge. Suddenly when it's said both should have the same space while learning, it's a little tough for the traditional teachers to digest this concept. For this the government had decided to involve school academic consultants in every school where they give feedback to every teacher after the class, that what went well in the class and what not.

They'll also give inputs and suggestions to improve in their next class. Here, most of the academic consultants are hired from Teach For India (TFI), as they follow the pedagogy of student centric education. But how open are the regular teachers to take this feedback from a young person who had just entered the teaching field and came as a school academic consultant?



In a TSWREIS school during an exhibition organized by the students for the students. Promoting a student centric education is the prime focus of the administration here.

The age and experience gap always creates a problem in accepting things. For example, will this academic consultant ever be able to relate to the lives of the students? And the teachers'? Here, does language create a gap, how much autonomy does this consultant have, and many more questions can be raised.

The Bihar Story

Jamsaut Village

Jamsaut village is located in Danapur block of Patna district in Bihar. It is 6km away from district sub headquarters Danapur and 18km away from district headquarters in Patna. It has a Gram Panchayat. It's a beautiful village with lots of agricultural fields, small canals of river Ganges and celebration of festivals. Everything looked fine. Unless one scratches the surface. Untouchability and casteism. There are different levels of castes in the village, all upper caste people live in one

area of the village and other lower caste people live at the other corner. But there were also such people who are extremely economically backward and suffer widespread discrimination and are the untouchables or the Avernas in the village. They stay in small Tolas (Hamlet) which are far from the main village. They belong to the Musahar community.

The name Musahar itself meant "mus" (mouse) and "ahaar" (food). The local legend, it mentions that they have a sin from lord Brahma that they'll only have rats as their food. And the locals deeply believe in this. The community is mostly seen in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. They were always avoided in every activity in the village. People don't respect them, they were not allowed to go to school and study with other kids, they were not allowed in the temples, they lived as slaves, every light of their candles had been put off.

The First Step

One girl, who was just eight years old, heard about this situation of Musahar community in Bihar and she decided to dedicate her life for their growth and development. She was studying in a Christian Nunnery in Kerala and one day she got an opportunity to go to Bihar and study there and also teach poor students in Bihar. She thought that this is the time she should take a stand otherwise there will be no other opportunity. She grabbed it and finally reached Bihar. In Bihar she completed her secondary schooling along with teaching in some private boys' school. When she completed her senior secondary education she decided not to stay in the nunnery and go and work in the rural areas of Bihar. She reached the Musahari Tola of Jamsaut village. When she reached there she just stopped for few seconds and thought about whether to go forward or not because after seeing that place she was frightened – *"can I do this?"* That one step made her stature in this world for her exceptional work for Musahar community and she is PadmaShri Sudha Varghese.

After coming to Jamsaut, she dedicated twenty one years of her life to the village itself. She started training centers for boys and girls who did not go to school. She started training women about their rights. She also faced several hardships in her journey. Many tried to even kill her as she was making the Dalits grow and develop. If any girl of the Musahar community in the village got raped, they never complained about it to anyone because they thought that is how their lives are meant to be. But when Sudha Didi stood for them, the first rape case was filled in the Danapur police station - really a brave step by the community.

That gave a big shock for the accused who was not expecting this reaction. It had been tough times for them and also for Sudha Varghese to fight against upper class people, where it took a lot of effort and blood to successfully send the accused behind bars. After this case was cleared, within a few days the police station got nine more rapes cases from Jamsaut and it's nearby villages. The whole station was shocked and they had to take serious action against him. That was also the first stepping-stone for the Musahar community to speak out and confidently

express. Today, the Musahar community also does farming, labour work, and some are also pursuing higher studies in Patna.



The Padmashri awarded to Sudha Varghese, hangs in the Nari Gunjan office today.

In 2006, she started Prerna hostels for the Musahar community girls for providing quality education along with co-scholastic activities in Danapur and Gaya. It's been thirteen years and many girls have graduated from the hostel and pursuing their further education.



Sudha Varghese (standing) with girls from the Danapur Prerna school, Bihar

In both Telangana and Nari Gunjan, the schools established for the Dalit and tribal communities are residential. The thought of only residential schools but not regular schools is because the situations of the children in their home is very dynamic, where they may anytime quit school for earning money along with their parents by doing some labour work or they get migrated from the place where they are staying. So in the face of survival, the parents don't think of their children's education, they just have to survive at that moment. There were many incidents in Nari Gunjan where if one girl goes home for the holidays, we can't predict whether she'll come back or not. One main income for the Musahar community is local liquor sale. As Bihar has banned alcohol, it became a good business for them to earn money. They make the liquor in their house using ripe bananas, dates, or apricots. All these activities are done unofficially.

This also creates disturbances in the family, where the men come drunk and beat their wives and children. Sometimes police come and arrest few people for their illegal sale or take bribe. So when the children gets stuck or watch such situations, their inclination towards education gets diluted, if they go to a regular school especially the girls of that community, they'll come back home and they'll be severely beaten for no reason. Falling prey to the addiction themselves is also not unheard. In such case residential schools are the better option for the children to get good education and values, which they can understand in the school and try to implement or improve their family situations.

One more problem everywhere in an organisation is transferring the mission and vision to the people working in the organisation. The dedication and determination of the organisation gets

diluted slowly when the work is divided into many. In Nari Gunjan, the passion and work of Sudha Varghese is not being well understood by other people who work in the organisation. Similarly in Telangana residential schools, the thoughts of head of the project are very clear and mindful but is there the same clarity with managers, school staff, teachers and even the students? So passing off the clarity to people next to you is very important and crucial for any organisation to keep everyone under the same ideology.

In the Telangana social welfare schools, the ultimate big picture is to make students develop on their own and learn with the support of teachers, instead of depending on teachers, but some of the schools doesn't even now what's the purpose of this schools, why are they even called Freedom schools? There is no replacement to the hard work of ethos building within the organization. There might be different ideas and ways to complete a task, it's not that every individual has to stick to one way and follow that, they can debate and argue. But they should not forget the vision and values of the organisation.

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Sriram Valluri, is an electronics and communication engineering graduate. In 2018, he was placed in an organisation called Aavishkaar, located in Palampur, Himachal Pradesh. His main work has been in teaching and designing content for science and math in fun and playful way. He worked with children across three different states in India in his fellowship year – Himachal, Bihar, Telangana. He loves to travel and play outdoor games. Singing keeps him going in life.

Ushering Into An Era Of Open Learning

There has been a lot of discussion and drawbacks that was realized in the formal education environment where teachers have always been perceived as the holder of knowledge. In such an environment, the students are dependent on teachers to gain knowledge henceforth students perceive themselves to be only receiver of information, without really exploring the opportunity of knowledge creation. Open education is just the reverse of formal education system. It is a learner driven philosophy, which believes that knowledge should be accessible, collaborative, created and shared by everyone without any hierarchical, social, political or economic barriers. Open education is often conducted by using open educational resources, typically in online medium. The material of open education is shared through creative commons license, breaking the barrier of proprietary ownership and giving free access to its users.

The concept of open education started in the late 20th century with the invention of World Wide Web (WWW) in 1989 by Tim Berners Lee. The intention of the inventor was to use advance technology i.e., computer for sharing information between scientists in universities and institutions around the world¹. Today, we all use WWW through a web browser. The browser was released to the general public in August 1991. Post this; Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) initiated open education in 2002 through Open Course Ware (OCW). Latest example of open education approach is MOOC which is now incorporated in several universities and programs such as edX, Coursera, Udemy, Udacity, etc.

Resources In Open Education Approach

Open Education Resources (OER) are digital or online learning materials that can be used in institutes or for independent learner because the creators have given legal permissions called Creative Commons License, so they can freely access, reuse or modify them³. With the advance of information age, there has been rapid change in the world economy. Our everyday events and even thoughts are shaped by the way we interact with digital technology - from our mobile phones to the apps, websites, news, social media, communication etc. But should we allow the digital technology to shape our behavior or should we use the digital technology as a medium to create and share values in the global society?

As a digital learning community, we often take digital technology for granted without really questioning how these tools are shaping our everyday lives. We are often dis-empowered to create these digital tools or network in our own term because most of these digital content are designed to make us consumer and not producers. There are of course many free online learning tools but how much of it do we have the right to demand or modify that content in our terms. For instance, how many of us are aware that all YouTube learning videos are not free to use? You may have access to watch the videos freely, but are you allowed to re-use or remake?

You may want to learn video making, animation, illustration etc., but you don't have the resource or how to go about. OERs are the key to start anything you want to learn from any part of the world.

Now, let me give you an example of an open resource application. Telegram is an instant messaging app like WhatsApp. The difference is that the Telegram is created by volunteers who have released their source code under open source license in which the copyright holder grants users the right to study, change and distribute the software to anyone and for any purpose. Hence, both the users and the creator own Telegram or you can say it's a shared property. If you want to learn many other ways to share the world some valuable resources for free just like how I am sharing my story in 'WordPress', then I would recommend you to take around couple of minutes to check 'Creative Commons'. And I hope from next time, when you are surfing the net or using any software or app, you become more aware of which of the content makes you a free user, producer, collaborator or a thief. To empower the digital learning community, the open education communities around the world are collaboratively creating and sharing free knowledge wherein any learner can have the freedom to own and modify the content in their own terms.

Digital Technology In Classroom

Education in institute has always been supported by technology. With the information age, education technology have evolved from slate to calculator, from white board to digital board, printed textbooks to videos or audio, hands on drawing to graphic drawing, etc. Technologies such as computers, printers, video cameras, local area networks or internet connections are all highly complex technologies, which will certainly fail at times. A user must be able to accept this and understand the steps that need to be taken to correct the errors. In the process, it will enable them to construct realistic expectation or engage in the opportunity to find solutions that will arise while using them⁴.

Several actors have interpreted technology in education. Some see them as labor saving devices, some see them as resources for student driven research, some see them as vehicles for collaborative projects, and some see them as communication media. The meaning assigned to these technologies is determined by the attitudes the users have about the nature of knowledge and the purpose of education, and the constraints imposed by the institutional structures in which these actors learn and work. It is fundamental to question the advantage and disadvantage impact it may apply. Shifting from traditional to advance technology in education is not merely, replacement of tools. With the information age, it opens up possibility to vast knowledge system through collaboration, creativity, taking in charge of these technologies and digital media by understanding how and why are these tools created so that the users are aware of its advantage and limitation at the same time. Technology in education can open up possibilities for a significant role in the design, adaptation and use of technology.

"Most teachers and students perceived computers in an instrumental way, as tools to simplify their work, and as an important component of vocational training. Students believed that computer literacy would probably be integral to their future careers, so they felt it was advantageous for them to gain computer skills. Only a few students and teachers, those who were already oriented toward student-centered learning, saw the experimental and exploratory potential of computer technology. They appreciated the opportunities for independent learning that such technologies provide." (Saye, 1997)⁶

The empowerment of technology will only be realized when users understand that it is social, rather than purely technical forces which drive technological development. The educators may focus on selective decisions about integrating technology when it is useful and when it is not. We all need to realize that even as consumers, we can have an impact on the shapes that technologies take as feedback or collaboration with the developer to the design prices of educational technology.

Adoption Of OER In National Education Policy, India



First generation learners, when exposed to OERs, experience the kind of empowerment that one might wish.

Indian OER can be broadly categorized as audio-visual OER and textual OER. Few of the Indian OER initiatives are targeted at school students, whereas most others are targeted at students of technical and vocational education and training (TVET). In India, many e-learning products and services are available to senior school students (K-12) and to students appearing in competitive

admission tests for technical education. E-learning is delivered online as well as via offline platforms. Most of the e-learning products are affordable and targeted to students belonging to middle-class families.

National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL) is a programme in India that became an exemplary OER initiative with a status of 'Indian Version' of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Open Course Web (OCW) project. *"IITs are internationally known for high-quality engineering and technical education providers. Recorded in classroom lectures of IIT professors are made available through NPTEL web portals that create feelings of what IIT students learn from their teachers in direct teaching mode."* (Anup Das)

The latest initiation is National Repository of Open Educational Resources (NROER), by the Department of School Education and Literacy, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India and managed by the Central Institute of Educational Technology, National Council of Educational Research and Training, the Repository runs on the MetaStudio platform, an initiative of the Gnowledge Labs, Homi Bhabha Centre for Science Education. It is an online collaborative platform that brings together everyone interested in school and teacher education. The site includes audio, presentation, videos on subjects like science and maths. The content are licensed in Creative Commons, allowing any users to upload, download, view, edit or modify it.

Bridging Gap Of Quality Education

With the open education approach, Tamarind tree has been working on bridging quality education to the tribal community in rural Maharashtra. The organization is excessively using Open Educational Resources for teaching various subjects. Like the rest of the open digital learning community, the organization is advocating towards digital literacy. While literacy means the ability to read and write, the digital literacy encompasses on a broader range of skills from finding a digital content to gauging and consuming it, creating digital content, a responsive digital user and sharing the digital information. To empower the digital learning community, the open education communities around the world are collaboratively creating and sharing free knowledge wherein any learner can have the freedom to own and modify the content in their own terms.

Tamarind Tree is a part of this movement because of which it has been successfully able to instrument a full pledged affordable digital classroom for the first generation learner of the Warli tribe in Sogve village. The open education model in this village is a living example to democratization of knowledge, which can be incorporated, in any parts of rural India with a very low cost. To me, these kids are one of the few first generations in India to be digitally literate and I am hopeful that they would be responsive digital users and won't be carried away by fabricated information or be blind consumers of digital information.



The learning space at Tamarind Tree, Dahanu district in Maharashtra

As of 2018, there are 116 learners. The eldest group is between 14-15 years old and has been integrated with the education model since when they were at the kindergarten level. One of the unique facilitation at this school is the student-centric approach where the focus is on an individual's pace of learning without any age barrier. Students have learning levels instead of classes - lower primary, beginner and independent. The core aim is to push the kid to become a responsible independent learner where they wouldn't require supervision from the facilitator. Hopefully, the child would imbibe this practice in her/his life as well.

The team follows the guideline of NCERT while recreating, contextualizing and integrating it into their Learning Management System (LMS) called My Big Campus, which is an online learning forum designed to facilitate independent engagement for the learners. One of the core philosophies of the school is to learn and produce knowledge, rather than consuming it blindly. The team has recently set up their own studio to produce their course content. While creating any course content, the members make sure that it is contextualized for the students. This is called the Thinking Lab.

The Thinking Lab At Tamarind Tree

The team reports at 9 am. It is responsible for facilitating the upper primary learners (12 to 5 pm). The mornings are usually for debates, discussions on tools, generating new ideas or structuring the courses. There can be fixed roles or changes in responsibilities of team members based on the outcome of the discussion. One needs to be flexible and adapt quickly to changes.

On most days, the unfinished discussion/debate continues in the post-school session till 6 or 7 pm.

Most of the topics are decided spontaneously based on the learners' behavior. For instance, *"How do we know if the coding course would help the learner apply logical thinking in practical problems of everyday life?"* or *"How might we create interesting ways to comprehend the English language?"* If some of the kids are engrossed in games like Pub-G or Minecraft, how might we integrate significant learning from that? There is no concept of break or weekends in this team. When at home, they are either working to create an upcoming course or experimenting with new interactive content. The team is also heavily engaged in the process of strengthening its education model.

The Assembly Session

This session is usually held for half an hour before the other sessions start. The role of the facilitators here is to moderate the key concepts – sharing, reflecting and learning about things that would make sense in the life of learners. Some of the activities that take place are reading aloud the powerful stories, debates, Karaoke to improve English vocabulary, Pictionary, riddling or simply sharing experiences. To stimulate critical thinking among learners, there have been days where facilitators have moderated movie screening and debate on topics like *"Should men also take part in household chores?"* or *"Should there be uniforms in school?"*

Most of the students here are from Warli tribe, who has a long history of being subjugated by the people in power. A lot of them haven't had the opportunity to experience the world outside, not even Mumbai in spite of living so close to it. There is hardly any scope for aspirations other than those of farming, working in the balloon factories or getting married at a young age. The school intends to expand their worldview critically by opening the doors to at least have dreams of their own like other children in privileged positions.

Not Colleagues, But A Family

One can definitely expect intense arguments almost every day. Since all team members come from diverse backgrounds and ideologies, at times the discussions get extended to a point where the mind and body saturates but the enthusiasm stays alive. A newbie in the team would be specially hosted with Toddy (locally harvested palm wine) or locally available beverages and yummy food. For refreshment, the team takes out time for hiking and/or trekking the nearby hills, boat rides in the sea or simply hanging out by the riverside. The team is responsible for every mistake and learning in the education model. The experimentation continues while new discoveries get unfolded alongside.



Team members in an intense conversation in the Thinking Lab at Tamarind Tree, Dahanu

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Usma Dhammei is a 2018 fellow, who learnt from her kids during her role as a digital facilitator in Tamarind Tree, host organization that runs a school on principles of open source education in Sogve village in Dahanu, Maharashtra. When she contrasts this with her own traditional education, it leaves her with a lot of hope for her kids' futures.

Education During Covid 19 Times

Introduction

Since the Corona pandemic has hit the entire world, the status quo has been disturbed and nations are struggling to control the spread of the virus. Since March 2020, we are also facing several issues and our nation has also been in lockdown which led to the shutting down of all the functions other than the healthcare system. Schools have been shut and modes of education have been changed to online where the infrastructure supports. The case of rural India especially tribal areas; has had a severe impact if we look in terms of education. Since there is availability and accessibility issues, children in these tribal areas suffer the most because of the discontinuity in the education process.

This study is conducted in the district of Sukma, in southern Chhattisgarh. Sukma is the southern part of Bastar and it is newly formed on 16th January 2012. This is the left wing extremism affected district, which is far from development. Sukma is 400 km away from the state capital Raipur, well connected by NH-30. It shares border with Odisha, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh states and districts Bastar, Bijapur and Dantewada. Like in cities, where online class and webinars are possible for resuming the education albeit in heavily altered manner, given the current circumstances of Sukma where there is a lack of electricity, internet connectivity, and smartphones among the poor children - the continuity of education has become an additional struggle apart from the ones they are already facing.

This study will be focusing on how education has continued during the pandemic in the district of Sukma. What are the initiatives taken by the government, the involvement of civil society organizations especially Shiksharth - an NGO working in the education of the children here. This study will combine field data and statistics concerning children and how administration and Shiksharth have been addressing the issue of discontinued education in the area. The study will also cover the activities undertaken by Shiksharth with the help of administration in tackling the situation of discontinued education. Since the area has issues regarding the online mode of education, only traditional methods have had an impact since the lockdown. All around the country, there have been talks about the innovative online mode of education; but the hardships faced in rural tribal communities have been hardly covered. Hence the issue has to be addressed through a proper case study.

The Educational Context Of Sukma

There are around 1048 schools in Sukma and the combined strength of around 46 thousand children. Statistically speaking there are more than 770 schools in Sukma where there is an

absence of online education and more than 27,000 children are out of the learning process in the past 5 months. Even in the 272 schools which have the online mode of education, all the children are not able to utilize the medium due to several issues ranging from access to electricity, network coverage, inaccessible and remote villages, and difficult geography.

	Online	Offline	Total
School	272	776	1048
Children	18394	27678	46072

The below data shows the distribution of children from Class 1st to 8th in the three tehsils of Sukma.

	CLASS 1-3	CLASS 4-5	CLASS 6-8	TOTAL
Chandigarh	1110	523	659	2292
Sukma	4047	1959	1703	7709
Konta	5663	2406	1689	9758
Total	10820	4888	4051	19759

Shiksharth's Response In Time Of COVID-19

To tackle the situation, Shiksharth came up with different solutions namely

- offline self-learning workbooks
- online read aloud
- illustrated translations of storybooks in tribal dialect
- project-based learning with help of Education Above All
- science projects in collaboration with life lab

Offline Self Learning Kits: Workbooks are personalized self-learning kits which are contextualized combination of language and Math worksheet, puzzles, activities, and creative tasks to make sure the gap in schooling is filled and children are engaged in the learning process. The overall vision of these kits is to ensure children can practice key literacy skills in a personalized and engaging manner and minimize the widening learning gap because of school closure. The initiative doesn't intend to teach any new concept as it won't be possible without the help of a teacher/facilitator. Objective of this approach includes:

1. Making the teaching materials available and accessible in offline schools for learning purposes
2. Making sure that children are practicing the learning outcomes based educational workbook so that when the school reopens, they are not out of touch from the learning process
3. Supporting the remedial education process
4. Undertaking educational activities through community/parents participation in a contextually relevant approach

Content Overview

Offline learning kits will help take the education to the children's doorsteps. It will be a viable solution for the already distorted education in the district. Also, the process is done by following all the standard operating procedures under the given situation of COVID 19. The workbook can be practiced in-home, social distancing is ensured in the villages where children assemble. The learning kits are diversified into categories namely:

- Level 1: Grade 1-3
- Level 2: Grade 4-5
- Level 3: Grade 6-8

For each level there will be 5 to 6 workbooks with a workbook consisting of 50 pages minimum is being made and distributed to the children. The workbooks are designed by incorporating contextual elements into it. The workbook comprises contents from the local language, picture comprehension, learning mathematic and language with the help of stories, painting, Sudoku and word puzzles, activities with household materials, and doing the household activities with the help of parents, and doing science experiments. We have also collaborated with organizations like Education Above All and Life-Lab for using their content in project-based learning and low-cost science activities. All the worksheets are undertaken by the supervision of Shiksharth. The learning kits are made by Shiksharth team members by developing in house resources and customized open-source materials.

Distribution, Monitoring And Evaluation

The workbooks are printed and then distributed through Shiksharth team members and community volunteers from different villages and after three weeks the kits are collected back and new kits will be provided to the children. In many villages, children of higher grades like 10th standard and above help children from the lower class in understanding the content and helping them in solving the worksheets. Each child and their details are recorded, after evaluation and a mechanism to track their progress has also been devised. As of now, over thousand children have been reached in the district through team members, volunteers, children of higher grades,

Shikshadoots, and teachers who have been helping Shiksharth in the outreach process. The learning kits have been well received by the children and they are greatly involved in the process. Many students have completed the worksheets beautifully. It has been an engaging experience for them, given the situation that other means of learning are bleak. However, there are concerns regarding the younger children where there is much need for facilitation because it is hard for them to comprehend. However, children who have older siblings can do it because their siblings help them in the process.

Project-Based Learning

Shiksharth has also been involved in a pan India education project with an international non profit organization called Education Above All, based in Qatar. Around 18 organizations from 11 states of India working in education have come together in COVID situations and have initiated a project-based learning initiative. The idea of the rural collective is to ensure a form of project-based learning spread over three months which assess the learning level of students and try to improve the standard through rigorous ninety days of facilitation based learning by choosing different projects. There are around sixteen template projects which can be classified into all groups of children from 1st to 9th standard. The initial process involves doing the baseline survey to understand the learning level and then initiate the projects with children; namely making alphabet books, own restaurant making, conducting census, shadow puppet making, and so on. After the three month intervention period, an end line assessment is conducted to review the learning level alterations.

The Government Responses During COVID 19

The government has also come up with many initiatives of alternative education like:

Padhai Tuhar Dwar: The coronavirus pandemic situation has lead to the closing down of all the schools in Chhattisgarh by 20th March. Within no time, Chhattisgarh has thought about how to tackle the situation and then designed a website with least cost. On this website above 21 lakh school students and above 2 lakh teachers have registered already. The teachers from different classes can make and upload study materials for different chapters. The same facility is available for the education organizations too. Apart from the online classroom, the students can browse through the website for different audio, video, other study materials for a better understanding of the chapters.

Padhai Hamar Pharma: After the success of Padhai Tuhar Dwar, it became necessary to focus on children who do not have smartphones or internet facilities. For this, an initiative has been started in the Sankal Kachaud of Manendragarh block in Koriya district. This cluster in the district is known as the remote zone, Vananchal, and comprises of network-less villages. For this,

a meeting was first organized with the school management committee and a resolution was passed for this work. Based on the acceptance of the proposal from the school management committee, necessary materials such as blackboard and chalk dusters, etc. were arranged for teachers to learn.

Motor Cycle Guruji: Usually, children of primary as well as secondary schools travel almost 3 kms to reach schools. It is very difficult to get help from the community to teach these children. For the continuity of such children, there has been invocation of motorcycle guruji. This concept has been put into practice by the teacher from Narayanpur Mr. Devendra Devangan.

Loudspeaker School: Some enthusiastic teachers in different regions of the state are piloting loudspeaker schools. For this alternative arrangement, contacting the community first and informing them about this program and taking consent from them, the necessary process can be completed to take the loudspeaker or DJ available in the village.

Bultu Radio: In tribal areas, people come to the weekly market on a particular day and work throughout the day to sell and buy goods. Usually, everyone has simple cellular phones. These mobiles do not have an internet facility but all have bluetooth. Teachers of the cluster or block prepare some audio lessons based on their upcoming teaching lessons and upload them at **DIKSHA/school.in** . Then they will go to the weekly market in their respective areas and take the parents' mobiles and turn on their bluetooth and transfer the study material for the next week.

On-Field Review: Even though there have been initiatives put forward by the government, as mentioned above, the impact on the ground was low. The offline classes happening in the district were namesake. Showing online videos to the students can't be regarded as online classes. The status of online classes is not different. A school having 400 plus students but an online enrolment of just 78 students has been the reality in one of the Porta Cabins. All the students who are enrolled don't participate in the learning process and even the teachers are forced to login by taking different ID cards of students. There was a program initiated with the help of UNICEF called CG-Seekh which in the district was initiated during the pandemic but failed to address the issue of continuity in learning.

Conclusion

1. The current circumstances are such that the teachers are indirectly pressurized to take classes in the district and when there arises a situation of rising cases the classes are stopped for a while and then resumed again. Some of the parents who are aware of the situation have not been sending the children to schools but lack of awareness about the same is also an issue here. Initially, the classes were happening in the village, then it slowly started happening in nearby schools and now finally inside the schools. The practical difficulties for the implementation of programs have also been an issue.

2. The loss of human touch in the learning process has also been an issue. However, the offline learning kits have been a breather where the children could self learn during the pandemic. But looking at the reach, even the self-learning kits have only reached one in five children in the district. Hence the issue of loss in learning can only be analyzed after the formal education process has begun.
3. The syllabus-based education was stressed from the first week of September and in the second last week of October, the first formative assessment is happening with the children. The process of education has just been reduced to exams even though there is no learning that has been happening is a reflection of the structure and functioning of the system of education in our country. Children are out of focus in the system.
4. The traditional model of workbook based education has shown its impact in the district of Sukma. Hence the stubborn nature where online education should happen where there is no infrastructure for it to happen should be reviewed.
5. The bureaucratic hurdles should have been eased up for the civil society organizations, which works in different areas in the time of the pandemic. The pandemic has been an eye-opener in the education landscape of what works and what doesn't works at least in the context of Sukma. First, the infrastructure for the future mediums of education should be prioritized with a child-centric approach in the design and implementation. This in turn will be beneficial for the process of holistic development in education.



Author with his kids in the community in south Chattisgarh where he worked with Shiksharth in pre Covid times

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Rohit Rajan is a 2019 fellow, who worked with Shiksharth in contextual tribal learning in the left wing extremism affected southern Chattisgarh. Rohit has been fortunate to work at the intersection of civil society, teachers, parents, students, school administration and government – all key stakeholders in the education ecosystem. To be on ground during Covid pandemic and subsequent lockdown has been able to offer him a unique window to view our education system from a vantage point like no one else.



Livelihoods & Markets

Goat Paravet Programme In Mhaswad



Goat Paravets at the chavani (cattle camp) set up by Mann Deshi in Mhaswad, Satara district in Maharashtra

The agriculture sector in India has been beset by a host of issues in the past few decades. Recent years have seen a staggering number of farmer suicides, protests, and crop failures, along with the resultant national media and government attention. The year 2018 saw several farmer protests, including two major ones in Mumbai and Delhi, where farmers marched from all over Maharashtra and the country respectively, to bring their demands to the government⁶. However, despite several policy interventions and the implementation of schemes such as the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, soil health cards, National Agriculture Market (eNAM) and Minimum Support Prices (MSP), the agricultural sector in India continues to flounder⁷.

The consensus seems to be that the major issues that plague the sector today include an over dependency on rainfall, fragmented land holdings and decreased productivity, crushing agrarian debt and hence decreased capital investment, both overregulation and under regulation, lack of storage spaces for produce as well as natural disasters such as drought, floods or hailstorms⁸. In

⁶ 'Why Are Our Farmers Angry?', October 4, 2018, in *EPW Engage*.
<https://www.epw.in/engage/article/farmer-protests-delhi>

⁷ 'Indian Agriculture - what ails and fails the farmer?', by Ram Mudholkar, March 13, 2018, in *Business Today*. <https://www.businesstoday.in/opinion/columns/indian-agriculture-what-ails-and-fails-the-farmer-and-a-look-at-policy-imperatives-for-sustainability-in-agriculture/story/260922.html>

⁸ 'Opinion | Indian agriculture's problem of scale', October 4, 2018, in *Livemint*.
<https://www.livemint.com/Opinion/AWOJfzdPGOL1kPNifewYcl/Opinion--Indian-agricultures-problem-of-scale.html>

such a scenario, some of the solutions that experts have proposed include reducing rainfall dependency by diversifying sources of irrigation, increasing the land ceiling, improving soil quality through watershed management, increasing MSPs and strengthening the linkages between primary producers (farmers) and end consumers. The list is endless and some of these measures have already been put in place by the government or NGOs.

However, one aspect of the rural agricultural ecology that often gets overlooked is the role of livestock in alleviating farmer distress. The role of animals in the agrarian economy and their potential to improve food security and provide a safety net for farmers has largely been ignored, both in the Indian and global context⁹. Livestock help in diversifying the income sources of farmers within the agrarian economy, by providing invaluable sources of labour, meat, milk, and products such as wool and leather. According to the National Livestock Census of 2012, the livestock sector contributed up to 4.11% of the GDP according to the prices in the year 2012-13¹⁰. In the event of drought and crop failure, livestock assume greater significance for small and marginal landholder farmers, for whom they become an asset.

In the area of rural Maharashtra where I have been working for a year now, drought and agrarian distress are disturbingly common phenomena. The town of Mhaswad falls in the Maandesh region, which is a perpetually hot and dry rain shadow area in western Maharashtra. The Maan region includes the talukas of Man and Khatav in Satara district, Jat, Atpadi and Kavethemahankal in Sangli district, Sangole and Malshiras in Solapur district¹¹. The region is supposed to have got its name from the Manganga river, which flows through the area but is mostly dry throughout the year. The semi-arid landscape and scarce rains make this region one of dwindling crop returns, if any. The most commonly grown crops include jowar, bajra, maize, groundnuts, and a few vegetables such as brinjal, onion and drumsticks.

However, if the monsoon rains don't arrive, which they often don't, the kharif crop is completely lost while the rabi sowing does not even take place. In such situations, livestock become both an asset and a liability. They are an asset in that they are often the last financial security for the small farmer; even if their prices fall far below their normal price and farmers are forced to sell them. However, this is not a desirable outcome, as farmers greatly value their cattle and are loath to sell them even under extreme situations. Hence, they are also a liability for the farmer, as ensuring for fodder and water for them during a drought proves next to impossible. It is this

⁹ 'India: Issues and Priorities for Agriculture', May 17, 2012, in *The World Bank*.

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2012/05/17/india-agriculture-issues-priorities>

⁹ 'The role of livestock in sustainable agriculture; delivering for people, animals and planet', in *Committee on World Food Security*.

<http://www.fao.org/cfs/home/plenary/cfs43/side-events/7/en/>

¹⁰ 19th Livestock Census – 2012, *All India Report*, Ministry of Agriculture, 17 June, 2014, p. 1.

<http://www.dahd.nic.in/documents/statistics/livestock-census>

¹¹ 'Families separated by the search for fodder', Medha Kale, February 18, 2019, in *People's Archive of Rural India*.

<https://ruralindiaonline.org/articles/families-separated-by-the-search-for-fodder>

need to provide for farmers' cattle that has spurred the Maharashtra government to provide cattle camps or chara chavanis during drought conditions, especially in the dry belts of Marathwada, Vidarbha and some areas of Western Maharashtra.

In 2012-13, one of the most severe droughts in recent memory, Mann Deshi Foundation, the organization where I work, started its first cattle camp in Mhaswad. The camp ran for over 18 months and people from even distant villages and talukas came to live at the camp with their cattle. This year, 2019, has come on the heels of two consecutive years (2018 and 2017) which were without rainfall. Hence, the chavani was started early in January, way before the government chavanis were started in March.

Here, it is important to make a distinction between cattle such as cows and buffaloes, and smaller livestock such as goats and sheep. The cattle camps are set up mainly for cattle, and until recently, did not allow goats or sheep to be brought in. The reason seems to be that goats and sheep are smaller, hardier, more adaptable and have far less requirements than cattle. This makes them invaluable during times of drought, as they not only require less water and fodder, but can also be sold for meat or breeding. In fact, it is this very characteristic that makes them more likely to be owned by small and marginal farmers, nomadic pastoralists and other economically or socially marginalized communities¹². Additionally, they require very little capital investment as compared to larger ruminants and there is a market for their products throughout the year.

In Maharashtra, traditionally sheep and goat farmers are from the Dhanger or Lonari communities. These communities usually migrate along with their goat/sheep flocks during the dry summers to the more fodder rich areas of coastal and Western Maharashtra, returning only after the arrival of rains in their region. In fact, goats form 25.96% of the livestock population in Maharashtra, just after cattle at 47.66%.¹³ In Satara district, there are 434 goats for every 1000 households, both rural and urban combined. Some districts of Western Maharashtra such as Solapur, Sangli and Satara, also have some of the highest goat populations in the state¹⁴.

Apart from these communities, farming households in these arid regions also usually own on an average at least three to four goats (the average is for Satara district). These animals are usually reared for milk production and breeding. More importantly, they are mostly looked after by the women, as they are more likely to be at home to attend to their needs. Thus, goat rearing is looked at as a domestic responsibility in which the goats are only kept to meet the sustenance needs of the family for milk and meat.

¹² 'Status of Sheep and Goat Sector in Maharashtra', January 11, 2010, in *Department of Animal Husbandry, Government of Maharashtra*.
https://ahd.maharashtra.gov.in/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=200&Itemid=138

¹³ *Volume II, Statewise Livestock Census 2012*, Ministry of Agriculture, p. 357.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 402, 365

However, goat rearing has much potential as a livelihood opportunity for farming households and for overall rural development. Considering this and the role of women in goat rearing, Mann Deshi decided to start the Goat Farming and Insemination (GFI) project in 2014. While the foundation was already giving agri-business and goat farming training to rural women through its Business School Program, the GFI project aimed to explicitly focus on goat rearing. While women were involved in rearing goats at home, they had little to no knowledge about procedures such as vaccination or medically treating goats for specific diseases. Thus, no matter how well they took care of their goats, the animals were ultimately at the mercy of private and government veterinarians, who were rarely ever in time to treat sick and diseased animals. The program thus aimed to train women as Sheli Sakhis (Goat Paravets), who could conduct procedures such as vaccination and artificial insemination, which strengthened existing animals and produced healthier offspring, respectively.

About The Goat Farming And Insemination Project

The goat farming and insemination project was started as a standalone program in 2014. The demand for the project came from the women beneficiaries of the business school program, who wanted to learn about agro-allied activities that could be undertaken in case of drought or crop failure. On receiving such requests, Mann Deshi did a survey in Maan and Khatav talukas on the number of goats and goat farming households in the region, and found the numbers to be high. However, as expected, the surveys revealed there were very few large goat farms. Most families owned around 2-3 goats and goat rearing was more of a domestic undertaking, typically being the responsibility of women.

There was immense potential here for a livelihood opportunity for marginalized women goat farmers. The vision was to empower women goat farmers from the community to administer vaccinations and artificial insemination (AI) procedures, thus empowering them and other women from their communities to breed more and healthier goats. Mann Deshi partnered with Nimbkar Agricultural Research Institute (NARI), one of the foremost agricultural research institutes in the country, to provide training for the women in artificial insemination and vaccination. While AI is an accepted procedure for bovine cattle, many goat farmers were hesitant about its effects on goats. Thus, a pilot AI drive for the program was conducted in two villages, Jambhulni and Pulkoti, where 25 healthy goats were inseminated. After 5 months, when the goats bore healthy and heavier kids, which fetched more than the average price in the animal market, farmers became convinced of the validity of AI and began to approach the goat paravets to inseminate their goats.

While the project initially had AI and vaccination procedures, farmers challenged the goat paravets with situations in which their goats were ill and government appointed veterinarians were too distantly located to be of much use. Thus, primary treatment was included in the

repertoire of skills imparted to the goat paravets. The project has also been evolving according to the needs of the farmers, including fodder seeds for planting (earlier food crop residues would be used as fodder), nutritional supplements for goats, goat laboratories, electronic weighing machines and more.

Objective And Methodology

This essay seeks to understand the long term impact that the GFI project has had on the goat paravets. The impact will be assessed for the goat paravets through qualitative data acquired through in-depth semi-structured interviews and a focus group discussion. Another related objective of the paper is to assess the relevance of the program as a sustainable livelihoods development intervention. Although I do not have the expertise to assess the ecological impact of the program, discussions with the goat paravets have shed some light on the perceived viability of goat farming and the GFI project itself as a livelihood opportunity. It is this aspect that I would like to explore.

Impact Of The GFI Project

The GFI program was conceptualized with a two-fold benefit in mind. By training women from the community itself, the aim was to empower them as well as the communities they served. The objective was not to create a specialized elite group of women goat paravets but to make sure these women became agents of change in their communities and equip local farmers with the information and resources they required for profitable goat rearing. That being said, these women are also the direct beneficiaries of the program, and some of them have been associated with it for four or five years. Thus, it is also crucial to measure the long-term impact it has had on their lives. Since there was no baseline survey taken at the time the goat paravets joined the program, the impact information is mostly qualitative and dependent on the goat paravets' own perception of their improvement over the duration of their association with the program.

If patriarchy is the system that ensures men have access to and control over the productive resources of human society, then women's empowerment would mean a dismantling of this system. Productive resources need not be limited to the Marxian land, labour and capital, but include more intangible resources such as knowledge, cultural capital, technology and power. This makes women's empowerment a complex concept and not necessarily a straightforward task. However, there are several empowerment indices that aim to break down empowerment into more accessible dimensions or domains. These dimensions usually include economic participation and opportunity, political participation, education, health and reproductive rights. There are several women's empowerment measures that make use of these domains, such as the Gender Empowerment Measure (WEM) of the UNDP, the Gender-related Development Index (which adopts the HDI for gender-based inequalities) and the Gender Gap Index of the

World Economic Forum¹⁵. However, for this essay, I relied on the impact indicators developed by Mann Deshi for the GFI project. These indicators not only measure progress on the dimensions mentioned above but also employ indicators more relevant to the context of the project and the area. These include economic impact indicators such as banking information, assets, home improvements, etc. as well as social indicators such as agency, mobility, decision making and community leadership/public participation.



The Goat Paravets in action. Clockwise from left: Varsha Sathe, Radhika Shinde, Rupali Dombé and Sangita Tupe

The semi-structured interviews were held with 5 goat doctors in Mhaswad: Radhika Shinde, Sangita Tupe, Varsha Sathe, Rupali Dombé and Sunita Kamble. All the women are from lower caste OBC and Dalit communities. Talking to them revealed areas in which they were truly empowered, while some aspects had hardly changed. In terms of the economic indicators, such as having and operating a bank account, maintaining savings and RDs, and taking out loans, all of the women had made progress on at least two of these indicators. The longer their association with the project, the more economic progress they seem to have made.

For instance, Rupali Dombé, who joined the program in 2018, has purchased a two-wheeler on installments since joining the program. Varsha Sathe, who joined the program in 2017, bought a two-wheeler and built a toilet in her house after joining the program. She also saves in an SHG every month. Her in-laws, who were agricultural labourers before, no longer have to work on other's fields. Sangita Tupe, who joined the programme in 2015, has bought a two-wheeler and

¹⁵ 'Gender Equality Indicators: What, Why And How?'
<https://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/44952761.pdf>

built two additional rooms to her two-room house. Sunita Kamble, one of the first few women to be trained as a goat paravet also has made much economic progress since joining the program in 2014. While earlier, she did not have any livestock, she now rears six goats and one cow (recently she sold one of her cows for Rs. 30,000). She also recalls that she purchased a fan, television and cooker for her household after joining the program. She recently also built a house for her family in November 2018. She also saves two hundred rupees every month in a recurring deposit in a Patsanstha (co-operative credit society).

While these impacts are impressive, what one must keep in mind is that for most of these women, they are the only members of their families to have a salaried job. This is not necessarily related to their role as goat paravets. The financial security afforded by a regular job facilitates financial planning and saving. This would also explain the fact that the longer they have been associated with the program, the greater the economic benefits: their salary is subject to increments and the senior most goat paravets also have the highest salaries. In terms of their progress in banking and financial planning, any employee of the foundation is compulsorily required to open a bank account in the Mann Deshi Mahila Bank. Thus, these women also were introduced to banking and operating accounts due to their job, as they withdraw their salary every month from their accounts. The financial literacy trainings that the Foundation provides to its employees and account holders of the bank have no doubt also contributed in building an understanding of the importance of savings.

Apart from the myriad economic benefits that the women have experienced, there have been several improvements in domains like autonomy, decision making and community participation. Initially, when the goat paravets of this project first stepped on to the field, they faced much criticism and ridicule from goat farmers, both male and female, even from within their own villages and communities. This was because although goat rearing at home is usually undertaken by women, providing veterinary services such as vaccination and primary treatment are a male dominated endeavor. Government appointed and private veterinarians are invariably male. Thus, these women were often mocked for being uneducated (most of them have only studied up to class 10 or even 8) and for trying to do what was perceived as men's work. The goat doctors also received more censure when they began setting up their stalls at the weekly goat markets. These markets are crowded, completely male dominated spaces and it was hard to create a foothold for themselves.

However, the stalls have been very successful, with most calls coming in from farmers who heard about the program at the market. In fact, today, the situation has changed to such an extent that farmers prefer calling the goat paravets to male veterinarians. The goat paravets are now perceived as more efficient, better-equipped and quick responders to goat farmer's requests. This involves them having to attend calls for AI or primary treatment mostly, as late as 8 or 9 pm at night. When I asked them how they felt about having to attend to calls at any time or traverse long distances at night, their response was surprisingly nonchalant. They took it as a part of their

job, which they couldn't avoid. Sangita Tupe said this was the reason why she was drawing her salary – to do her job. Some of the goat paravets like Sangita and Varsha Sathe are ferried by their husbands to the location of the goat farmer. When I asked them how their husbands felt about having to attend calls at any time, they said they were used to it now and hardly complained. Radhika Shinde said her family would mostly be worried for her safety and would advise her to take well-lit and busy roads.

This brings me to my second point, which is how their relationship with their husbands, family and community have evolved since their association with the program. A few of them, such as Sangita Tupe and Varsha Sathe have had supportive families and husbands. However, for goat doctors such as Rupali Dombé and Sunita Kamble, the respect of their husbands and other family members was not so easily earned. Rupali Dombé describes how her husband didn't earn and yet tried to prevent her from taking up the goat paravet job, as it would involve travelling to different villages. Sunita Kamble had been married into a very conservative household where it was unthinkable for women to go out and work. However, now she reports that she has much more say in decisions made at home, right from what vegetable would be cooked to her children's education and home improvements. She says her husband's support has been very helpful in overcoming resistance from her in-laws.

Radhika Shinde described how her relationship with the community has evolved. When she began working as a goat paravet, other women in the village would gossip about her long working hours and her character. However, now she has earned respect in her village and everyone recognizes her as the 'goat doctor madam'. Similarly, Sunita Kamble, who has received the Niti Aayog's Women Transforming India (WTI) award, says she only got the respect of her family, community and the gram sarpanch after she won the award and her story was broadcast on the local news channel. Rupali Dombé also says that the respect ('maan-samman') she receives from society is worth more to her than the salary she earns.

From these findings, it is clear that the program has had a significant impact on the lives of the goat paravets associated with it. What is not so clear is how far this impact has been a direct result of the program. Holding a salaried job may be the factor that facilitated the intense socioeconomic improvements of the doctors. However, it does not explain the niche carved out for them as the 'goat doctor madams', which is intrinsically linked to the nature of their work. The 'goat doctor madams' busy registering goat farmers after the chavani recently allowed the entry of goats and sheep.



Goat Paravet Radhika Shinde conducting goat vaccination

The Program As A Sustainable Livelihood Intervention

The GFI project was envisioned as a livelihoods and women empowerment intervention that would empower women goat farmers to be self-sufficient in rearing their livestock. The method adopted to achieve this goal was to train women from the community itself who would further disseminate this information along with administering the procedures they would be trained in. In line with this vision, the goat paravets not only attend calls from goat farmers but also organize workshops and information sessions on vaccination, primary treatment and even AI. They train the farmers to conduct the procedures and also take them on exposure visits to agricultural institutes like Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) or NARI.

The initiative for training members from within the community in a specific skill has long been taken up by the government in the form of local governance initiatives such as that of Anganwadi workers, ASHA volunteers, Gram Sevaks and Sevikas, etc. These initiatives encourage self-sufficiency within villages and also help in democratizing access to necessary information and resources. Thus, the GFI project aimed to do the same for goat farming in the region. The government of Maharashtra recognizes that goat and sheep rearing have much

potential, which remains unrealized¹⁶. As mentioned before, goats are usually bred as a domestic activity and are not perceived as a business opportunity. However, the goat paravets attempt to remedy that by teaching the farmers techniques such as vaccination and primary treatment so that they can be self-sufficient in taking care of their goats. They also give farmers advice and ideas on how to start their own goat businesses. In this drought prone area, goats can greatly supplement the meagre income from farming.

One of the most important points that came out from the focus group discussion was that goat rearing is not thought of an exclusive source of income. Even those beneficiaries who have begun their goat rearing businesses do not only rely on goat rearing for their income. In fact, most farming households do not sell the milk they receive from their goats and use it for household activities. Thus, the only direct income they can receive from their goats is through selling them in the animal market. Usually, goats bred through AI fetch a greater price at the market.

The goat paravets say that even those farmers who did not own goats before often buy them after exposure to the program. Many beneficiaries also begin their businesses by inseminating their existing goats. Considering that goat rearing requires far less capital investment than large cattle, it is within the reach of even those who do not own farming land. Thus, although goat rearing cannot be a standalone business for most farmers, it is a valuable supplementary source of income for farmers. As the incomes from farming remain meagre and irregular, livestock such as these are invaluable in diversifying sources of income of the farmer. In fact, in recent years, the number of goats being farmed has reduced considerably. The 2012 National Livestock Census shows a decrease of 18.82% in the number of goats bred since the last census in 2007¹⁷. Reports indicate that farmers are increasingly moving towards supplementing their farm income through non-farm sources of income¹⁸. Thus, in such a scenario, encouraging livestock rearing helps in improving the financial and food security of the farmer.

However, if goat rearing cannot be a standalone business at this point, then the program would benefit from including rearing of other smaller livestock such as sheep and pigs. This would include more number of marginalized communities in the program's ambit, who already rear sheep and pigs but are unaware of how to profit from them. Smaller ruminants like goats and sheep have a much smaller environmental footprint than larger milch animals like cows and buffaloes. Hence, it makes both ecological and economic sense to cultivate and encourage their

¹⁶ 'Status of Sheep and Goat Sector in Maharashtra', January 11, 2010, in *Department of Animal Husbandry, Government of Maharashtra*.
https://ahd.maharashtra.gov.in/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=200&Itemid=138

¹⁷ *Volume II, Statewise Livestock Census 2012*, Ministry of Agriculture, p. 358.

¹⁸ 'Why Are Our Farmers Angry?', October 4, 2018, in *EPW Engage*.
<https://www.epw.in/engage/article/farmer-protests-delhi>

rearing among poor and marginal farmers. The program is already moving towards diversifying by introducing hatchery machines to the beneficiaries.

The vision that the program carried for a community self-sufficient in rearing its own goats is still a long way off. The goat paravets, however, say that a lot of progress has been made. The goat owners are no longer suspicious of them and procedures like AI. Sangita Tupe says that even when they go to a new area for survey, the general level of awareness of the farmers has really improved and she no longer receives hostile behaviour. Although farmers are now more aware and more likely to call the goat paravets for AI or primary treatment, they are still dependent on the goat paravets. There is a conflict of interest here; if the farmers were to become truly self-sufficient, the goat paravets might find themselves limited to AI only, which is difficult to undertake without institutional support in the form of equipment. Thus, the project needs to work out how such a scenario can be facilitated without adversely affecting the salaries and job security of the goat paravets. Also, since the program is currently run with the help of external funds from donors, there is a need to make it sustainable at some point.



Goat Paravets (from left) Rupali Dombe, Sangita Tupe and Radhika Shinde share a laugh while preparing the masala bolus goat nutrition supplements

The accuracy and relevance of the results of this study are affected by certain limitations. For one, no direct information has been taken from the goat farmers who benefit from the program; secondary data and the perspective of the field agents (i.e. goat paravets) have been used to make inferences. Secondly, the goat paravets interviewed are all from within Mhaswad branch, while the project is operational in five other branches of Dahiwadi, Vaduj, Lonand, Nashik and Sinnar. Moreover, the long-term impact studied is greatly dependent on the recall and perception of the goat paravets themselves, as no baseline survey of the paravets was conducted at the time of their joining the program. Thus, more information needs to be collected to triangulate the results of this study.

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[Adrija Chaudhuri](#) did her graduation in History, where she was also exposed to sociology and anthropology. This sparked an interest in learning not just about the pasts of communities and cultures, but also how the fractures of the post-colonial world have affected them in the present. At India Fellow, she was placed with Mann Deshi Foundation in Mhaswad, Maharashtra, in 2018, where she worked on documentation and data management, and learnt much from the people of this drought-prone, semi-arid part of Western Maharashtra. She enjoys trekking and exploring little known places.

Order In Chaos In Tribal Way Of Life



A farmer in Kashipur, Odisha during paddy cultivation in rainfed agriculture

In mathematics, while defining complex and non-linear systems, a great deal of care and analysis is given to initial parameters to the minutest level as any changes in these can ultimately redirect the answer towards a wrong direction. This is one of the basic characteristic of Chaos Theory, which tries to bring order into a system that may seem random in nature. While it is almost impossible to label the present state of a society as either chaotic or in transition phase or in equilibrium, we nevertheless tries different theories such as these to bring clarity and meaning into the nature of this structure we live in.

In an evolutionary perspective, it was required of us humans to carry out this procedure and the quality of our survival very much depended upon the depth of rationality that we were able to derive from it. The phenomenon known as change was always propelled by such procedures, which taught us that there is a connection between the amount of rainfall and the crop production, or animals can detect natural disaster much early. With the increase in complexity, that our society evolved itself into, one may find that the factors that could significantly contribute towards any underlying pattern has increased a great deal in numbers. Through the advancement in technology like data mining, we are now able to control flow of large chunk of information into a direction that removes the veil of mayhem.

However, when it comes to human society there are some basic factors, which can create a big impact on its own regardless of presence of other agents. For example, many political scientists attribute the wide spread of Islamic State with the severe drought that countries like Syria and Iraq faced, which resulted in a depleted economy thus fuelling massive resentment among youth population in that region and it so happens that IS provided them a way of salvation from that mess. To live in a specific area all through your life can sometimes make you a stranger, untold

of some aspects of your own home. This may be due to that fact that these elements are born and evolved with oneself, growth rate too evident and small to catch our attention.

It is almost ironic that we need to experience contradictions to identify and pluck out a pattern from those aspects which otherwise may give an impression of pure chaos. The beauty and problem with such an approach lies in the fact that such a form of analysis can only give a broad outline of incidents happening but then the nature of implying conclusions are entirely left to the perspective formed by the reader. Coming from Kerala, a state that nurtured itself in a different culture and living conditions while compared to Odisha (where I worked as an India Fellow), the social dynamics that I witnessed here have a special charm that is now emerging as a pattern.

Tribal population who primarily live on a day-to-day basis occupies the southern part of Odisha and the area of concern for this piece of writing, Rayagada district, constitutes 56% of Schedule Tribes within its total population. Agriculture and cattle grazing was the main source of livelihood for centuries in village hamlets, which has placed itself in some of the highly remote area in this region that majorly constitutes of hills and dense forest. Tribal way of life has always displayed a special structure while comparing to the main population and one of the major indicators of this difference can be the high level of gender equality that we may witness here.

This could be due to the not so evolved sense of ownership to land and other possessions which in turn has been highlighted as the reason of dominance of patriarchy in the first place. Women enjoy an equal, or sometimes more, amount of freedom in every aspect of day-to-day living from the way they should dress to choosing one's life partner. Even though practices like barter system still exists, we may consider this section of population to be comparatively less complex than rest of the country. Though a considerable change in dialect is visible within different regions in the same district, an invisible web of social structure erected upon community village life, worship of deities and farming practices runs all through the area. With the turn of the century, most of this untouched region witnessed a powerful introduction of a new societal thought that, in the first place, evolved without this people, in other parts of our world. A new market led economy, powered by globalization made this entrance with a grace especially after this region was found to hold one of the largest bauxite deposit in the country. The ripples of this new entity is now the birth place of countless elements that may paint a picture of transition when one tries to get familiarized with this region.

Launching a full-fledged analysis of these so-called changes requires considerable amount of time and is a slippery task due to the very nature of metamorphosis that this zone exhibits. Therefore, any attempt to be on the cautious side, while trying to flood this piece with jargons, may give a half-finished structure but it will remain true to its nature. First look into such a scenario will display farming as an obvious character to begin the sketching as it a base factor that runs its roots all through the region. Due to the presence of mountains and hills, land suitable to agriculture was highly limited and the grandeur of water supply throughout the year

was again in short supply within this selected region. A significant amount of control over these suitable fields was enjoyed by a small group of upper class population and practices such as bonded labour flourished here in abundance.

Thus for centuries, the livelihood of tribal's livelihood was dictated by goods procured from the forest where items like honey, wood, medicines etc. finds their way to external market thus providing them with a marginal income to substitute food requirements along with tubers, fruits and other edibles collected from the forest. The system sustained this basic essence for quite a good time until it was interrupted by elements such as various forests acts that prevented tribals from using forest as a livelihood option (Indian Forest Act 1927, Wildlife Act 1972), growth in tribal population, and change in social aspiration level etc. The next obvious candidate to fill this gap of employment options that may fulfil such aspirations was commercial farming and migration with farming being major player.

The growing demand for cultivable land under this scenario along with not so eco-friendly farming practices like slash and burn agriculture took a heavy toll on this sensitive environment. With the turn of the century, the population bloom demanded a new path for the society to walk upon to sustain themselves. This is where migration came into picture and it is a characteristic that is becoming increasingly visible in this area. Due to considerable poverty and lack of employment opportunities, population here is known to migrate towards other states such as Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh etc. but the economic and social impact was minimal. This flow of population took a different direction with the onset of 2010 when high wage rate attracted considerable population from this region into Kerala.

Majority of the people who have never travelled outside their home district, now almost has a member from their family who now work in a different environment such as Kerala. Many villages whose average annual income were not more than 10k rupees now receives an average monthly income of 10k from their relatives who have migrated to Kerala. The psychological impact of this phenomenon coupled with the declining employment opportunities and low income from farming in this part, is an area yet to be studied. When one interacts with the villagers, a pattern that is seemingly invisible, props up here and there which narrates a melancholic tale sung by the elders about their children who had to abandon their home to make a living. This resentment combined with the timing of this new migration cycle has created a new standpoint in the hamlets that now demands introduction of industries to prevent this outflow.

The main pillar that reinforces this belief lies in the newly found labour opportunities generated on the behalf of an Aluminium mining company here in Rayagada and the presence of factories in those migratory spots. An evaluation of such a possibility reveals two facts; one the only natural resource present in abundance in this area is Bauxite and two, this region faces a

substantial shortage in skilled population who could grab a position, in any industry that may come here, which could ensure a decent income.

In addition, the emergence of a new culture and opportunities that was introduced in this region in the form of contractors (from the tribal community) who undertake works on behalf of industries present in this region. Within a hamlet it now became a common sight to witness families with highly different income levels which was not a characteristic of such a region. The presence of uneven distribution of opportunities and the very ability of such opportunities to reach out to the very needy may not contribute much to the required equilibrium. So, it is only common if one gets sceptical about this model of development while measuring the impact of such industries on environment with the welfare that the affected population may benefit from.

The southern part of Odisha, in the last five years, witnessed an increase in number of residential schools as a solution to the difficulty faced by many students in regularly attending school that is far away. First signs of an incoming chaos achieve its maximum visibility from this area if we combine it with cultural and mining history of this region. Education without any attachment to local culture seems to initiate a process that may result in cultural and social cleavage to the scenes here. A population, disenchanted from its roots may soon find themselves to be a foreign entity in their own home thus making it relatively easier for mining companies, who regards the minerals to be more valuable than the original populace, to procure these lands effortlessly. The dilemma present here is that the citation of such scenarios is no reason to deny a population standard education. The same education might become the key for some while they try to make a living for themselves whether it is through migration or through contract and other entrepreneurial work. Ethics here shifts into the grey area while one tries to analyse preferred mode of education, to be provided to this community, which in turn is going to significantly impact some of the factors previously mentioned such as migration, cultural integrity etc.

In the middle of such a mutation that this society was subjected to, a new element was quietly painting its fingerprint all over. Smartphone now become an affordable commodity and its proliferation in recent times has resulted in telecom companies establishing network connectivity in areas where it is still a difficult task to reach by road and where electric supply is irregular. The community found themselves suddenly shifted from absence of mobile network to high-speed 4G connectivity and items like online shopping, social media activism, and entertainment came with it. The normal status of such changes transformed itself into a different nature when this region was affected by a panic of child kidnaper, which spread widely through social media.

Participation of the uninformed and the authentic in the flow information between these hamlets apparently created a chaos that resulted in an undesirable outcome. This was one of the first instance where the whole of society turned to violent means that resulted in the death of two

innocent person and the role of this network connectivity is quite interesting, as much of the required momentum to commit such an act was originated from false messages spread through social media. The instigation of new and mixed political views, whose propagation was mainly propelled by party propagandas through internet, into a single social fabric that every hamlet contained created a new mould of party based activities. The singular ideological structure adorned by tribal communities is now on the path of transformation and this combined with the upsurge of information, facts mingled with fabrications, has resulted in a brand new disorder.

The interaction between various variables like new source of income, religion, education that offers a better life, access to the immense possibilities of internet etc. seems to initiate the beginning of a transition from the traditional way of living of this tribal community. A community, which was at relative equilibrium for centuries and far from interactions of the outside world. The introduction of complexity into such a social system via different components mentioned here has brought considerable change in the level of social aspirations, economic activities and politics.

Maintenance of such a complex system in turn requires a detailed governance structure as well as considerable resources. The evolution of such a society in the absence of a planned structural reformation may create a complex pattern of mutation where the relationship between various elements acting on it will dictate the outcome. The task of understanding this pattern holds an irony in the fact that mapping of such a system is required to gain a better understanding to achieve favourable direction but it is the required direction that in turn dictates the structure. This dilemma has its basis created upon the doctrine, which is a source of perpetual debate that places development of the nation and quality of local livelihood of indigenous population on opposite ends. One can only wonder whether it is possible to manipulate the factors acting upon such a system that could both preserve the integrity of this society or one may discard any intervention to let time decide the outcome.

A close up view of these different factors may show a chaotic nature while one tries to write a unified story the entire region. Though there will be a deficiency of facts and figures, this is where a top view analysis will make sense, by giving an overall picture of how various elements such as education and mining are interacting with each other. And thus this picture written here can only be considered as an introduction to a system that may appear organised but will slowly show its chaotic nature while we try to dwell deeper.

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[Anandhakrishnan](#) was walking the road often taken of engineering graduation followed by information-technology job. But a building dissatisfaction and curiosity to understand himself brought him to India Fellow in 2018. This in turn led him to Agramee in Kashipur, Odisha where he understood the intricacies of the tribal way of life. We hope that he is continuing to unearth order in chaos in the urban space he finds himself back in.

Exploring Youth's Interest In Agriculture In Kanpur

As a part of my fellowship, I was placed with a grassroots organization called Shramik Bharti in Kanpur. The organization works on diverse projects and thematic areas to solve issues of water, livelihood, agriculture and healthcare with the vision of providing sustainable solutions with equal opportunities for all. This essay explores what does the rural youth aspire to be, what are their dreams, what role does their education play in their career choices. Is there any meaningful opportunity that rural youth can pursue in their village itself? In rural Kanpur, it is not uncommon to find parents who struggled to see their young educated children not doing anything that could be called meaningful, according to them. I often witnessed that there is a reluctance to see farming as a full-time career option. This study is an attempt to explore the following questions:

- Are rural youth interested to get involved in agriculture at all?
- If not, what factors contribute to their aversion towards agriculture?
- What are the other livelihood opportunities in the villages that youth is willing to pursue?

I specifically worked in Shivrajpur block of Kanpur Nagar. The main source of livelihood for the families in the villages around here is agriculture and animal husbandry. Shramik Bharti started working in villages of Shivarajpur block in 1998 with the support of Uttar Pradesh Bhumi Sudhar Nigam in sodic land reclamation project. The small and marginal farmer families were further organized in women self-help groups. Presently, 89 SHGs having 1,158 women members are operational here. I met farmers who are opting for economically and ecologically sustainable farming. Shramik Bharti started promoting a particular kind of sustainable farming called 'Natural Farming' since 2015. It is a way of practicing agriculture by supporting nature by utilizing local resources and traditional seeds. The agriculture produce by this practice is safe for human consumption and the expense in cultivation is nominal. Therefore the net margins of farmer increase and at the same time the health of family members improve.

During the yearlong project, I got a good exposure to the host of issues on development in the villages that are intertwined to a large extent. For instance, I realized that apart from making agriculture nonviable for the farmers and producing food that is unsafe for human consumption, chemical-intensive agriculture is also contaminating the groundwater and exhausting water resources gravely. Many farmers asserted that if they produce organically their water usage reduces up-to 50%. Though no major studies prove this, the need for promoting sustainable agriculture seemed inevitable to me. Also because it's important that we start producing and consuming safe food. The primary stakeholder of Shramik Bharti for promoting natural farming is the women farmers. The organization trains the women farmers through the network of SHGs, provide them with on-farm support, collectivized the farmers into farmer producer organization

through which they sell their produce after processing it. Over two years, around 1200 small and marginal farmers have been trained by the organization. While Shramik Bharti has strong reasons to keep women farmers in the center of its intervention, I wondered why this can't be a youth-led initiative? Because many of the women I met expressed concerns about the future of their children.

Present State Of Agriculture And Farmers

As a developing nation in terms of economy, infrastructure, and human resources - the country has witnessed a promising growth. This, however, seems lopsided because the manufacturing and service sectors are growing exceptionally, the one sector on which our entire production depends, the agrarian sector is dwindling. Presently, the sector employs 58% of the total workforce in India as opposed to 75 percent during the time of independence. There has been a consistent decline in the share of the workforce in the sector and it is further estimated to decline by 25.7% by 2025. Agriculture sector contributes to 17 to 18% of the country's GDP at present, there has been a sustained decline in the same, from 61% during the time of independence (Sunder, 2018).



Image courtesy Creative Commons

A recent study conducted by The Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) revealed that 76% of the farmers want to leave agriculture to find a job in some other sector. Among the main reasons are the poor income, bleak future, and stress. The study concluded that many farmers among the respondents complained about repeated losses because of drought, flood or

pest attack. It is important to understand why these crises persist in the first place. According to Prem Singh, a sustainable agriculture expert in Banda, Uttar Pradesh, the agrarian community finds farming to be a burden because of the following three reasons

1. Crop failure due to consecutive droughts,
2. Loans and debt due to failure to repay bank credit, and
3. Government policies that advocate farmers to abort traditional and sustainable farming methods over the use of urea, chemical fertilizers.

Agriculture As A Source Of Income

“The main motivation of any livelihood that one pursues is to earn money. We are leaving agriculture because we do not earn enough to even sustain ourselves” - Hari Prasad (farmer).

An activity done in a village in Sambhal district as a part of Shramik Bharti's assignment gave me a deeper understanding of the farmer's yearly income. The activity which was done with the small farmers who take two crops (wheat and sugarcane) in a year per acre revealed that his yearly income is Rs. 34,000 per acre. One of the reasons for non-viability of agriculture is the chemical-intensive farming which has manicured an agricultural way of life which is driven by cash rather living in coexistence with nature and one another. The farmers are driven by the market and are dependent on it exceedingly, from his seed requirement to selling, so much so that today the market drives the farmers. 50% of what he earns is spent on buying the agriculture input.

Accessibility of credit has risen in the last few years as the government and other lending sources have subsidized the credit rates. However, we must realize that instead of subsidizing the credits, we need to change the farming practices altogether. To make farming viable for the farmers it is important that their input cost reduces and they get better prices in the market. The small and marginal farmers spend around 5 to 10 thousand rupees in inputs. In the absence of cash, they take loan. If the crop fails or the productivity is not good, he struggles to repay even the principal amount leading to a never-ending cycle of debt. Researchers have revealed that the farmers get only 20% of the price that the consumers pay. The middlemen and traders cap farmer's share of profit.

Migration

Sharma and Badhuri (2004) remark a coming crisis as the rural youth aspires to seek a job in the service sector which already has a limited job opportunity and the manufacturing sector has been experiencing jobless growth, these youth will only struggle to fend for themselves in the cities with shrinking opportunities and poor living conditions. Nevertheless, it is inevitable that these sectors will attract the youth more than the agricultural sector does. The current farm

crisis with increasing farmer suicide, debt-trap and trader's monopoly over the market are some grave crises in the sector that is pushing the youth out the agrarian sector.

Feminization Of Agriculture

Feminization of agriculture is happening as more and more men fallout of the profession and there is an imbalance in the men and women laboring in the farm and the way they are treated in multiple aspects. With globalization, communication and transportation advancement there are seemingly increased opportunities in the cities that lure men and the youth (mainly boys) to get a more stable source of income and when agriculture doesn't give them hope for a good future. Other causes of feminization of agriculture are mechanisation of the agriculture because of which the roles men have been taken up by the machines and women are confined to the traditional roles such as sowing seeds, livestock rearing, weeding, etc.



Women shoulder most domestic responsibilities in rural India, including child care. Feminization of agriculture is on the rise due to fall out of men from farming as a profession and mechanisation of the agriculture. Image clicked by Amrit Vatsa of 3 Minute Movies

As a result of changing circumstances, there is a growing burden on women to take care of the household as well as the farmland to supplement the family income. As a result parents of the youth, especially men dream that their son must get a job in the city rather than wasting time in the village doing farming, even if it means that they will have to live in difficult circumstances in the city. Feminization of agriculture makes me wonder if agriculture, like cooking and household chores will become 'women's work' altogether? So far agriculture is still considered to be a less preferred career opportunity, such scenarios will further reduce it from being called a profession at all and will become part of women's housework.

Methodology

Focused group discussions were conducted with the youth in four agricultural villages, one from Kanpur and three from Sambhal district of Uttar Pradesh. Each group discussion involved ten participants. The participants vary between the age group of 15 to 25 who were mostly boys. As soon as the young girls in the village realized that the discussion was about agriculture, their interest in participating in the declined, however, these girls do take part in farm labor. The group was a mix of educated and uneducated youth. A few personal interviews were also conducted. All the villages that were selected for the study are predominantly agrarian villages and participants belong to families with small landholding. The discussion was conducted to broadly understand the career aspirations, challenges to pursue their aspirations and possibilities of the future in farming. A vision building exercise was done to understand the kind of vocations youths are engaged in the village for income generation. And what are the possibilities of other income generation activities? If the youth have migrated to cities discussion that was held was around their experience, living standard, food, etc, this was to understand if the living standards are better in villages or the town according to them.

Case Studies

"We prefer to stay in the village and do agriculture. But the state of agriculture should improve, right now its not profitable" - Youth of Beekampur Jagheer.

Beekampur Jagheer is a village at a distance of 3 km from the Ganga River, in Sambhal district of Uttar Pradesh. The primary occupation of people living in the village is agriculture, a few people have migrated for work in the cities. The farming land in the village is quite fertile the main crop that the farmers do is sugarcane, done by almost 98% of the population. Very few youths in the village are educated. Many of them are also illiterate. Livelihood opportunities that are available in the village include daily wage labor, tailoring, working at a brick kiln, etc. Most of the young people in the village do farming in their field and some also labor in other's land for three hundred rs/day. Babloo, a 23-year-old man who is doing agriculture after studying till 12th standard shared that nobody in the village is happy with the way farming happens, the income that they get from agriculture is very low. *"Kheti me bhot lagat lag rahi hai Itna vapas nahi mil pata"* (too much money is spent on buying agricultural inputs which is a reason for their trouble). Additionally, the crop is destroyed by animals. Many of the young men shared that they have sought loan for agriculture that hasn't been paid yet.

However, when asked if they would want to stay in the village or go out to the city to earn money, most of them said they would prefer to stay in the village. *"Seher jana tho majboori hai, gaon me kheti achhi ho tho hum toh kehti hi karna chahte hain, gaon me rehne me sukon hai, bahar jaane se dhoke bhi ho jate hain"*(We go to the city out of helplessness, if agriculture gives

good income we would stay in the village itself, living in the village is peaceful, when we migrate we also get cheated). Most of those who have migrated are working as labor for 6 to 7 thousand rupees per month and their entire income is spent on the monthly expenditure. The youth in Beekampur aspires for more livelihood opportunities in the village apart from agriculture. There should be a factory or company near the village itself where a part-time job can be sought.

"Agriculture is a part-time occupation for me, I want some additional source of income to sustain myself" - Vikas, Meerampur village.

Meerampur is another village in the bank of Ganga river, the village has a sizeable number of small, marginal and landless farmers. The agriculture land in the village is fertile. Farmers are cultivating sugarcane and wheat. Most of the villagers cultivate in their field and do labor in others field. Many people especially the youth have migrated to the cities to find labor work which gives a more stable income. Some of the means of livelihood in the village are agriculture labour, tailoring, painting, carpentry. 70% of the youth have permanently migrated to the city. The seasonal migration happens during the festive season when young boys get labor work as a painter and carpenter. The ones who have migrated are mostly those who did not have land. The few boys who have stayed in the village prefer to be engaged in agriculture on a part-time basis there should be other means of livelihood in the village itself. *"Kheti se kabhi bhi guzara nahi hoga, kheti me paisa nahi hai"* (we will not be able to sustain ourselves by just doing agriculture, farming doesn't have money) - said 20-year-old Amit. The youngsters in the village think the income in the cities is much better but the standard of living is much worse as compared to rural areas. Most of the youths participating in the group discussion preferred staying in the village if they get a good source of income apart from agriculture.

"Agriculture doesn't have a good income but we want to stay in the village" – Youth of Maheehusainpur village.

Maheehusainpur is a village in Sambhal district of Uttar Pradesh. The primary occupation of the village is agriculture, the majority of the village consists of small and marginal farmers. The farming land is fertile but there are cases of frequent floods because the farm-lands are on the banks of the Ganga river. The farmers cultivate wheat, sugarcane, and menthol predominantly. There are no means of livelihood in the village except agriculture. The condition of literacy is quite poor. Many of the youngsters involved in the group discussion said that they have never gone to school. A severe flood that occurred 20 years back has adversely affected the socio-economic condition of the people in the village. There are no means of earning in the village except agriculture.

In Maheehusainpur, only a few youngsters have migrated to the cities. Seasonal migration also happens rarely. *"Humare gaon me padhe-likon ki sankhya bhot kam hai, aise me bahar jaake dhoka ho jata hai"*. It is because most of the youth in the village are not educated they prefer

staying in the village, there are cases of many getting cheated in the city and returning home hopelessly. Those who migrate to cities they do it out of compulsion because the ability to earn through farming is very uncertain. The crops are destroyed by frequent floods and wild animals. If these issues are resolved then we prefer to stay in the village and pursue agriculture rather than becoming somebody's labor. The problem, however, is that in agriculture we put more input cost than what we get in return. We do not see hope in agriculture as a result of which we feel compelled to look for opportunities in the city in the future.

"My son and daughter should get a job in the city, there is no future in farming"
– Sita, farmer from Kanpur.

"Why don't you make her work with you", said Pooja's mother as I walked out of the house after having a brief discussion with her about farming. I met Sita, a marginal farmer from a village in Kanpur, an expert in organic farming she has won several awards for her exceptional efforts towards promoting organic farming. Sita belongs to an agriculture village in Kanpur called Padahara. The village consists of predominantly small family-cultivators. The agricultural land is fertile and the farmers grow wheat and rice every year. The state of education in the village is good. Most children and youngsters have gone to school and college. Shramik Bharti has been working in the village to empower the farmers since 2010 by promoting nature farming. There are no other means of livelihood in the village except agriculture. The farmlands are predominantly managed by the elders of the house with youngsters contributing their time during the peak season. Many of the youngsters have migrated to the city for daily-wage labor. Many of those who have studied prefer to get a full-time job in the city, preferably a government job which will give a stable income. Some of them also expressed an interest in pursuing agriculture, but they were a handful.

Conclusion

The rural youth wants to stay in the village and are keen to pursue agriculture as a profession. But because of several challenges, they face they are unable to see a sustained future in farming. Low farm income, heavy input costs, inability to fetch good prices and animal menace are some of the challenges they listed. My experience in Kanpur where most of the youth I met were educated was quite different from the one in Sambhal where most of the youngsters are not educated. Reason for migration for the educated youth was to find a better job, for the uneducated youth migration because of the lack of ability to see a future in farming. Farming, the way it is conventionally done has become a lost cause for the small and marginal farmers. The dwindling confidence and inability to see an alternative, make them continue with the way they do agriculture. It is important that we start natural resource-based farming because not only does it help to contain the exploitation of our resources but it can give a better price to farmers.

With the learning and inspiration that I got in my year-long tenure, I want to start a residential program where the rural youth will learn sustainable farming. In the program, the youth not will learn farming they will be also trained in food processing and marketing. The idea of the fellowship emerged when I met a few farmers who unlike others were proud to be farmers and are earning well. One such person that I met personally was Prem Singh, a middle-aged man from Banda district of Bundelkhand who has been practicing natural farming for twenty five years now. After studying MA Philosophy and Management in Rural Development he went back to his ancestral profession, he does organic farming. He thinks that farming even for small and marginal farmers can become profitable if it's done the right way. While I was always concerned about organic farming not giving as much production as chemical-intensive agriculture meeting such people instilled confidence.

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Born and brought up in Delhi, Aarti Narayan had a fascination to get an exposure to the grassroots of India and be a part of rural realities. To pursue that, she joined the social leadership program called India Fellow, in 2018. Post fellowship, she continues working with Shramik Bharti on nature farming. Rural Uttar Pradesh and it's complexities has captivated her in the community she worked with as a fellow and Aarti continues to work in the same sphere.

An Inquiry Into Markets Of South Rajasthan

Late Dr C.K Prahlad gave a revolutionary proposition of 'wealth lies at the bottom of the pyramid (BoP) - if we stop thinking poor as a victim or as burden and start recognising them as resilient and creative entrepreneur and value conscious consumer a whole new world of opportunity will open up."



In a rural area in north Goa where a carnival is going on to capture the imagination of rural consumers and tourists; alike. Image clicked by Amrit Vatsa of 3 Minute Movies

India is a residence of 1/7th of world population. There are about 650,000 villages which are inhabited by more than 850 million consumers which makes up about 70% of India's population and drives 50% of gross domestic product. Rural GDP has been continuously growing at the Compounded Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 6.2%, alleviating large chunk of population out of poverty line as per the benchmark assigned by the Govt. of India. Through public investments govt. has managed to provide jobs in rural areas and built infrastructure for private players to invest in the market. Rural market accounts for 40% of the total Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) market. It is forecasted that it may cross US \$100 billion by 2025.

Similarly, the automobile segment got a major part of the revenues from rural market. There was a time when only the affluent household in rural area could afford to have gas guzzlers vehicles,

but with constant innovation, fuel efficient motorbikes backed with easy financing options helped the low-income households to own two wheelers. While mainstream financial products are yet to make a presence in rural market, there are micro credit institutions, self help groups, and govt. backed credit-options are serving of the financial needs of underserved households. Govt. initiatives like Aadhaar Enabled Payment System (AEPS), Jan Dhan Yojna, and insurances have attempted to include majority of rural population into financial market.

Presence of spurious products and fraudulent schemes in rural market is wide as compared to urban. The inability of multi-nationals to serve the BoP market at an affordable price and being profitable for retailers in remote areas gives space to the companies just capable of providing cheap quality products and lookalikes of branded items. There have been several instances of expired products, which can't be sold in urban markets, have been dumped in rural retail stores. As cosmetics are one of the many FMCG segments where the profitability is skyrocketing for the retailers, I've witnessed many spurious and harmful chemical products available in all shapes and sizes in the tribal market of Salumbar block of Udaipur district in south Rajasthan. In service sector people are getting duped on account of false promises and social engineering, similarly.

It has been assumed, with rapid growth of rural market, where the awareness about rights and lack of information to base a rational decision on product or services persists, the rural consumers are being exploited in numerous ways. The rural consumer has been made endured to sub-standard products and services, adulterated foods, short weights and measures, spurious and hazardous drugs, exorbitant prices, endemic shortages leading to black marketing and profiteering, unfulfilled manufacturing guarantees and host of other ills. Moreover, the rural consumers who generally depend upon local retail shop to supply of essential things are often cheated merely due to lack of freedom of choice.

The rural consumers are generally ignorant and unorganized. Thus, they are exploited by the manufacturers, traders and the service providers in different way. The rural consumers are not only scattered but also diverse and heterogeneous. The manufacturers and traders take advantage of this condition. It has been observed that the conditions of rural consumers are deplorable on account of lack of competition among the sellers.

An Enquiry Into Buying Behaviour Of Rural Consumers

Gone are the days when rural consumer purchased things uncomplainingly. The better connectivity, technological advances, access to finance is assisting rural consumer in making purchase decision. With access to multiple source of information there has been a significant change in taste and preferences of rural consumer. Rural economy is developing at a faster rate than urban which has increased the disposable income of the rural households. The fact gets substantiated by the record high consumption of packaged goods and consumer durables.

Product assortment in rural outlets consists of wide range of packaged goods of small quantity to accommodate the need and affordability of people living on daily wages.

Migration of people from hamlets to cities has also increased the level of awareness amongst rural consumers. Young migrants have experienced different lifestyle as compared to those who decided against migration and stayed back in the village. Their exposure to technology, attitude towards consumption is way ahead of their peers. They are part of the early adopters and influencers in their peer group.



A woman in Ghanchopad village, Udaipur district - in her retail shop. Villages with about a hundred households will typical have 2-3 such utility stores. Image clicked by Amrit Vatsa of 3 Minute Movies

A small study has been conducted to understand the buying behaviour of rural consumers. The details of which are shared hereunder:

Objective: To understand the buying behaviour of the rural migration-dependent households, degree of awareness and factors that influences their buying behaviour

Limitations: The study was conducted within Salumber block of Udaipur district of Rajasthan. The findings may not be applicable in other rural market. The collected data is based on the expressed opinion of the thirty respondents; hence the likelihood of biasness persists

Sample size: Thirty respondents

Sampling method: Random sampling

Collection of information: Structured interviews with 19 men and 11 women were conducted from three different panchayats of Salumber block. Closed ended questions were

asked to arrive at quantifiable responses. The questionnaire was designed to enquire about socio-economic status, buying pattern, factors influencing buying behaviour and level of awareness.

Profile Of Respondents

Level Of Education	No Of Respondents
Illiterate	8
Just Literate	20
12th	1
Graduate	1

Per Day Household Income	No Of Household
<200	0
200-300	3
300-400	10
400-500	10
500-600	3
>600	4

Age	No Of Respondents
<20	2
20-25	5
25-30	8
30-35	5
35-40	6
40-45	2
45-50	2

Availability Of Shops In Village

Availability has a major impact on the purchasing decision. From the responses it was inferred that there is a general store and mobile recharge counter in almost all the village. For villages which are in proximity to town have the shops that cater other needs as well. Villages that had shop of electric appliance was not a big one. It only consisted of basic household items like switches, bulbs, wire and few set of fan. The shop that offered cloth was actually into tailoring business. The tailor offered limited choices to the customers. Reason why people preferred to purchase from him was that, he provided services on credit. Families dependent on migration have to rely more on credit as the cash inflow is not regular. Cash inflow takes place when the earning member returns from the destination or the crops are ready for cultivation.

Availability		
Type	Yes	No
General store	30	0
Cloth	13	17
Chemist	11	19
Mobile recharge	30	0
Jewellery	12	18
Electric appliance	11	19

Principal Decision Maker



A man and wife outside their home in a village in Udaipur district, south Rajasthan. Image clicked by Amrit Vatsa. Clearly, women play a pivotal role in decision making when it comes to consumer items

In purchase decision making the principal decision maker in tribal community does not have the mark of patriarchy. Women head of the house has a lot of say in as what is to be purchased and what not. In migrant dependent families, household responsibilities are mainly on the female head of the family. Decision to buy products for daily needs are taken care by the women.

Situation where something is to be purchased requires high involvement, earning member who is usually husband takes the charge or a collective decision making takes place.

Principal Decision Maker	No Of Households
Husband	6
Wife	20
Kids	0
Collective	4

Place Of Purchase

Place Of Purchase	Frequency				
	As and when required	Once in a week	Once in 15 days	Once in a month	Never
Within Village	29	0	0	0	1
Nearby Town	0	4	3	23	0
City	0	0	0	6	24

Place Of Purchase	Reason				
	Near Home	Credit From Shopkeeper	Fair Price	Quality	Choices
Within Village	2	27	0	0	0
Nearby Town	1	1	27	0	1
City	0	0	0	5	1

The respondents preferred to buy their daily need items from the shop in their village only. The relationship between them and the shopkeeper is of different nature as they are known to each other for a long time and live in same locality. It is more about loyalty and trust that they have on each other. Even though the choices are limited and products that are being offered are of substandard quality the consumer buys it because the shopkeeper agrees to credit options.

Other reason is of proximity. Customers do not want to incur unnecessary cost of travel for things that are available nearby even though there is price differential on the same product which is available in the town or city. Rural consumers usually buy low involvement products from nearby town or city when they have to make visit the town for other purpose. Shopping is the secondary objective. As the customer moves from village shop to a town shop he loses the flexibility of credit purchase but at the same time he is exposed to multiple choices and goods sold on MRP and cash discounts. City is usually not the preferred place of purchase as it is time consuming and shops in town are good enough to fulfil the needs of rural consumer.

Influencer

	Some Extent	Large Extent	Not At All
Friend	19	11	0
Relative	17	13	0
Neighbour	28	1	1
Advertisement	24	0	6
Shopkeeper	26	0	4

For spendthrifts purchase decision can be impulsive but for people who have limited source of income, spending money requires lot of cognitive process and in this process there are lots of external stakeholders who influences the purchase decision. Friends and relatives are the most trustworthy when it comes to take their advice or get influenced. Advertisement only makes people aware about the product but does not activate the rural consumer to buy that as the main reason is availability and prices. Products which are advertised are slightly expensive as compared to non-branded product. Consumers also feel that they derive similar or even higher utility than the advertised product at a lower price. For example In general stores of hamlets of Salumber block or even in Salumber, Lays no longer exist. Locally produced wafers from nearby places like Indore and Mehsana are dominant in these marketplaces.

Awareness

	Always	Sometime	Never
Terms & Condition	0	0	30
Competing Options	9	16	5
Quantity	21	9	0
Price	27	3	0
Warranty	2	19	9
Expiry Date	0	2	28

When enquired about how much they are aware about what they are purchasing, prime concern for them is the price and quantity. None of the respondents were aware about the terms and conditions of the product or service that they are paying for. One of the prime example is the premium that they pay for LIC. None of the LIC policy holders I have met in rural pockets of Udaipur are aware of the terms of their policy. They just pay the premium of whatever amount their agent asks for. When asked for expiry date they said they are hearing this word for the first time. Most of the edible products that they use are either produced at home or procured in loose quantity from local shop. Packaged goods are mostly purchased for personal care and detergent segment. Consumer protection laws become ineffective in such cases where consumers are not aware of what they are purchasing. Buying in loose quantity increases the chances of adulteration.

Channel

A marketing channel is set of interdependent organisation which makes the product or service available to the end user for consumption or use. In urban markets where the transport facility is good and there is uniformity in the customer profile, inventory cost gets reduced as the orders are fulfilled on demand but the same is not true in rural areas. The rural population is widely dispersed, transport infrastructure is poor and income levels are also low. In such a situation the inventory cost for a retailer in remote hamlets is high which ultimately gets reflected in the price of products.

It is one of the biggest challenges for companies as to which distribution model they should choose in rural market to reach the end customer at the same time minimize the operational cost. Companies which have huge cash reserve opt for traditional channel sales. Companies which are low on cash needs to sell the product immediately and can't afford to have multiple levels of partners in distribution network.

In rural market finding a reliable logistic partner is next to impossible. Cost of hiring a transport facility, size and frequency of orders received from rural outlet prohibits the distributor to take orders from rural retailers. Cost incurred in making the product available to rural customers reduces the ROI for a distributor. For example the margin for a HUL distributor is 5% out of which 3.5% is fixed and the rest depends on multiple sales parameters. After reducing the cost of operations he manages to 20% profitability. If he would try to penetrate in the rural outlets the additional cost of deploying manpower and engaging his vehicles would reduce the profitability hence focus is only on the whole sellers of rural areas as the order size is big and cost incurred is low.

Types Of Distribution Model In Rural Market

Hub And Spoke Model: For products which are in high demand require faster response time and immediate availability. In order to reach widely dispersed population organisations have adopted hub and spoke strategy. For example Shram Sarathi provides financial services to migrant communities in south Rajasthan. It is one of the most difficult terrains to operate in but with hub and spoke model it has successfully reached vast number of people. It works in three blocks of Udaipur. Each block has a office which is controlled from head office in Udaipur. Operational area under each block is divided into zones and zones are further divided by collection centres. Clients are mapped under collection centres.

Aggregate Demand In Population Centres: Unlike FMCG good which are easily available in rural outlets and are of low involvement, consumer durables like TV, Motor-pumps, two-wheelers, etc. are of high involvement for rural consumers. Desires and preference for such product for a rural consumer is pretty much same as that of urban consumer. For such products

people in remote villages do not mind travelling to nearby towns as it gives them option to select from multiple sources.

Door To Door Sales: Door to door selling is form of direct selling where the seller of product or service approaches the buyer at his place rather than customer approaching the seller. In Salumber where rural households are not concentrated and dispersed due to hilly terrain, sellers are now offering their products at their doorstep. There are vans which move from one hamlet to another, selling vegetables, FMCGs, supplying stocks to small shops. Service providers are also knocking the doors of rural households to sell their services like insurance and micro credits.

Piggybacking Partnership: Piggybacking is a non-equity arrangement wherein one producer markets the products of another producer. The first producer – the carrier in this case – performs as a distributor in marketing the products of the second producer – the rider. The fact that the rider's products are being distributed by another producer may bring important benefits to the rider as compared with using a regular distributor. The "interest" can be either profit-motivated (for a company) or social welfare-motivated (for a NGO or local trade organization). Rider chooses to piggyback to take advantage of the carrier's distribution network and local knowledge, while the carrier joins in the relationship to add the rider's product or service to its portfolio.

For example Shram Sarathi is in partnership with two companies. One is PaNearBy and other is Mahindra Rural Housing Finance limited. Shram sarathi acts as distributor of PayNearBy for Udaipur and appoints agents in its working area. Here the rider company PayNearBy gets the advantage of Shram Sarathi's rural presence and network while Shram Sarathi social objective to help the rural population to make financial transaction cost effective. Similarly with Mahindra Rural Housing finance Limited, Shram Sarathi acts as carrier to identify clients in its working area who have bigger financing needs for housing.

Analysis Of A General Store In Rural Market

In rural market, especially in remote locations there are general stores which are home based business for women and serves neighbour households. These stores do not require large investments and majorly constitute of loose edible products. Below is an example of such store. The owner of this store has been given financial and technical assistance under EDP program of Aajeevika Bureau and Shram Sarathi organizations.

Routine items	Unit	Current	Cost Price	Selling Price	Profit (%)
दाल	kg	1	85	100	15%
Sugar	kg	50	36	40	10%
Rice	kg	25	28	30	7%
Tea	kg	5	180	200	10%

Salt	Pkt	25	150	200	25%
Soap	Pkt	10	8	10	20%
Detergent Soap	Pkt	1	450	500	10%
Surf - Detergent	Pkt	10	22	25	12%
Shampoo Vatika	Pkt	10	18	20	10%
Coconut	Kg	1	15	20	25%
Mustard Oil	Ltr	10	47	50	6%
मेहंदी	Pkt	1	35	60	42%
नमकीन	kg	5	70	100	30%
Biscuit Parle - G	Pkt	2	54	60	10%
मुंग दाल	Pkt	1	90	100	10%
बच्चो की टॉफी	Pkt	4	30	50	40%
Chips	Pkt	5	50	60	17%
आलू	kg	25	15	20	25%
प्याज	kg	25	15	20	25%
बल्ब	Krtn	1	8	10	20%
अगरबत्ती	Pkt	5	50	60	17%
Vimal Pan Masala	Pkt	5	130	150	13%
Tobacco	Pkt	5	120	150	20%
Bidi	Pkt	2	370	500	26%
Masale	Pkt	5	70	100	30%

Assortment

Total sales from core business	16,010
Cost of goods sold	12,951
% margins	19.11%
Gross profit	3,059
Electricity costs	300
Travel costs	100
Other business costs	0
Total other expenses	400
Net profit from core operations	2,659

Profit and loss statement of a rural general store

Fake Brands And Spurious Products

One of the major problems being faced by the rural consumers is that of fake brands and spurious products. The brand image of the successful FMCG majors has been imitated by some of the small regional companies. These fake brands have been sold mostly in rural areas. Fake products are of two types – counterfeit products and pass - off products. Counterfeit products are fake products that bear identical name of a product/packaging/graphics/colour scheme and even same name and address as the genuine manufacturer. Someone produces these to look

exactly like real products other than the legal owner of the real product, trademarks and product packaging. Sometimes it becomes difficult to tell which the real product is. A rural consumer is brand loyal and understands symbols better and this also becomes a problem as it is easy to misguide the rural consumer.

Pass-off products uses (similar sounding) or is similar in spelling. They use similar type of packaging or colour or design. These are look-alike products that resemble the original products, mainly through misspelling of the trademark. For example, Taja salt instead of Tata Salt, Orio instead of Orreo, Collegiate for Colgate, Layz for Lays, Gold Flak for Gold Flake. They come out with the motive to mislead and cheating ordinary consumers who are uneducated or in a hurry while purchasing products. Rural retail outlets are full of such kind of products primarily of the following reasons:-

1. Availability
2. Margin for retailers
3. Lower consumer awareness
4. Easily accessible
5. Locally produced
6. Difficulty in differentiating if it is genuine or not

Tax Evasion: There are super-stockist and suppliers in “rurban” areas who are doing business worth of crores but are still not under the purview of tax authorities. They charge the retailers and service providers GST on the purchase but do not have the GSTN. During a conversation with whole seller of motor-pumps of Salumber block, he told me that his annual turnover is more than three crores out of which twenty five lakh is only accounted for. Under any circumstances he manages to get 30% margin on all his products sold to end customer. After reducing all the expenses he still manages to retain at least 20% profit. The reason he did not applied for GSTN is also interesting. There have been cases where traders who got registered under GST have been harassed by the tax officials and are now paying monthly bribes to them.

Financial Frauds: Financial inclusion has had many advantages from opening of bank accounts, banking correspondents’ makes it easier for people to withdraw money through AEPS. Though it has many advantages but if the intention is wrong then technology can be a source of exploitation. For instance people who live in remote location and access to bank or ATM is not possible, Aadhaar enabled payment system is only feasible option. Banks have deployed their banking correspondents and Rajasthan govt has given licences to numerous people to operate e-Mitra (kiosk for availing govt online services). These agents who were supposed to make life of masses simpler have found this opportunity for making money either through charging exorbitant rates for their services or duping customers of their bank accounts.

Another category of financial fraud that is on the rise is of fake MFI in rural market. Agents roam around the hamlets promoting fake loans at cheaper interest rate and bigger ticket size. They

follow similar process like any other MFI which makes it difficult for people to distinguish between real and fake.

Ponzi/Pyramid Schemes: There are companies which operate in rural areas which target slightly educated young locals to introduce Ponzi schemes in rural areas. They tell them lucrative investment plans and commissions that they will receive on adding more members in the scheme. One of the victim of such a scheme told that he was approached by one of the agents of XYZ company while he was at filling application form at e-Mitra. He explained about the investment plan and asked him to attend a meeting in Udaipur. In a one day meeting they heard motivational speeches from senior members of the team. They were shown live examples of people who became rich and today own luxury car and expensive lifestyle. He got so much influenced that he became the member of that scheme. He invested some amount and linked lot of people from his community into this scheme. He even received a cheque of nominal amount and was promised that the remaining commission will be released soon. He is still waiting for his commission.

Healthcare Frauds: There are medical practitioners in rural areas who neither have the knowledge nor the expertise to provide treatment to the people but are still operating fearlessly. They give high dose of medicine, steroids and other stuff which make people feel better instantly. People in rural areas who are mostly daily wage earners prefer to visit such practitioners because they can't afford to have long duration treatment. Instant relief from pain and illness enables them go on work continuously. Recently I met a veterinary compounder who was carrying prescriptive medicines in his bag and according to him these drugs can easily be procured from market. Even if someone goes critical from his treatment people are not going to report it to police rather they will come back for further treatment or go to the temple.

Players in the market have not only underserved the biggest consumer segment in aggregation but also been unjust to satisfy the overall needs. Limited knowledge and lack of consumer rights protection have exposed rural consumers to the sharks minting money on their financial and social well being. Products and services offered go unnoticed to bearers of law until some grave incidents take place. Consumer protection laws seem to exist only for the urban educated consumers. Image and symbol play a major role in brand recall and consumer trust in the product. Unregulated and underground firms thrive on these brand imagery for fooling the illiterate consumers. Perceived price benefits overpower the product quality.

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Kumar Gautam did his management studies and went on to work with state government implementation program, after a corporate job. The quest for meaning from work brought him to the fellowship in 2018 and he worked with Shram Sarathi in south Rajasthan on products and services for the poor and 'non-bankable' traditionally. Most of them are migrants at destinations like Surat, Ahmedabad and Mumbai and with their families at source.

Being Landless In Mangaon

Ensuring that people have access to livelihood opportunities has been a central concern for the development sector and a lot has been written and spoken about it in the past. Livelihood plays an integral role in everybody's life. Let's begin by understanding the meaning of livelihood. Livelihood is defined as *'the capabilities, assets and activities that people require for a means of living.'* In simple terms the meaning of livelihood is to secure the necessities of life. Words like means of support, sustenance, daily bread are all synonyms to the word livelihood. All across India people are involved in a variety of livelihood practices, in the following passages we would be reading about the Katkari tribals of Raigad region, located in Maharashtra.



The Katkari tribe (Courtesy Centre For Social Action website)

The Katkaris are one of the most marginalized communities of India, being designated as 'Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)' within the Scheduled Tribes. Spread in pockets in Gujarat and Maharashtra, a substantial population (approx. 1,10,000) is spread across all of Raigad district in places like Pen, Khopoli, Rees, Mangaon, Mahad, Alibag etc. Katkaris dwelled in the forests and lived off it and didn't own land unlike other communities. They would move from forest to forest and became protectors of it. They worshiped the forest, the sun and the moon as their Gods. The folk songs that they sing or the tunes they dance to was all in reverence of the mighty forest. It was their provider and they were its protectors. As time

passed by, the tribals were denied their right to the land as a result of the colonial forest laws in India.

After the Forest Rights Act 2006, the Scheduled Tribes and other 'Traditional Forest Dwellers' were provided the restitution of deprived forest rights across India including both individual rights to cultivated land in forestland and community rights over common property resources. Even after passing this law almost a decade back, its execution has taken several years. The current situation in most of the villages in the district of Raigad is that the process of granting land in the name of the farmers is still on going. In the villages that have received the forest land, referred to as 'Dali Land', the distribution of land still remains undone. As a result no one individual can claim authority on the land. This state of affairs makes the Katkari tribals of Raigad to be landless. All across India several communities are still landless and among them the worst affected are the tribals.



Poster of the 1953 movie that won the best film and best director (Bimal Roy) Filmfare awards. The plot of the movie was based on a Zamindar threatening to seize two acres of land owned by a humble family if they fail to repay their debts. The father of the family then works as a rickshaw puller in Kolkata to earn money.

In 2015, the then finance minister of India Mr. Arun Jaitley had said 300 million people do not own land. The draft national land reforms policy released in July 2013 said 31% of all households are landless. That number is derived from a 2003-04 survey of the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), but the definition of landless is unclear. According to NSSO, landlessness is defined as possessing land below 0.002 hectares, or 215 sq. ft. A 2008 paper by Vikas Rawal of the Centre for Economic Studies and Planning, Jawaharlal Nehru University, claimed that 41.63% of rural

households were landless. That works out to 61.5 million households and 307 million people in rural India alone.

Ownership of land is critical as it affects income, social security, health, education etc. However, for decades, there has hardly been any attempt to bring in land reforms in India. When you search for Landlessness on google and read articles on it, majority of them have mentioned the movie *Do Bigha Zamin*, an old classic. The movie dates back to the year 1953 where the protagonist of the film loses his land to a Zamindar who is going to construct a mill on that same land. Though the movie is dated back to 1953, landlessness is still an unfortunate reality in India. The Socio-Economic and Caste Census of 2011, which acknowledged and counted landlessness as a major indicator of poverty, put the 'households with no land' at 56.41 percent of total rural households or 101 million households. The landless poor are India's growing problem. The bulk of poverty in India is found among those with no land or insufficient land with which to feed themselves. This is the hidden yet harsh reality and unfortunately to an extent it is invisible.

The repercussions of being a part of the landless poor in India are several. Since land assures an individual of identity and dignity and creates condition and opportunities for realizing social equality, assured possession and equitable distribution of land is a lasting source for peace and prosperity and paves the way for economic and social justice in India. In a casual conversation, I spoke to Suvarna Tai who resides in Paned Wadi (village) in Pen block. The house where she lives in has been constructed by her family under the government scheme of Indira Awas Yojana. It is a small hut made with haystacks, mud and bricks. Her village has been allotted the land under the Forest Rights Act 2006 but they are still awaiting the visit of the Talathi to come, measure the land and give each household their designated space. Surprisingly, she says it doesn't bother her family much as they have never felt what owning land means. She happily took me to the area where she would be getting a part of the land. On being asked how she would utilise the land, her wish was to grow vegetables, turmeric etc. to sell in the local market. Currently she works on the land of the Marathas in the neighbouring village as a daily wage labourer.

The vicious cycle of being a daily wage labourer has become a norm amongst the Katkaris. Majority of them work on brick kiln sites where they are often exploited and made to work as bonded labourers. The second most common form of livelihood is to lease agricultural land or work on the land of the Maratha community. During the pre monsoon period, men and women depend on the forest produce which they sell in the local market. A few areas that share proximity to a water body engage in fishing.

Some tribals have expressed their desire to take loans and are willing to invest in small businesses and ventures like purchasing machinery for cashew processing, goat rearing, fish breeding, or fabrication work. Those who have learnt a few technical or vocational trades have

taken up jobs outside the village, but very seldom have they been able to persevere in their jobs as they express that they miss their family, village and cultural traditions and celebrations. They don't feel comfortable to work together as a group and would rather take up any livelihood initiative individually. They look for instant ways of earning money hence they take loans from brick kiln owners and then land up working on their brick kilns in order to repay them (a subtle kind of bonded labour). They are only seasonally engaged in agricultural labour, and in other months they work as domestic workers or as helpers in small industries (10-12%). Some tribals rear goats and sell them during the festive seasons. The crux of the matter is that there is no fixed source of income that they can depend on. Due to these irregularities and lack of availability of livelihood options majority of them migrate for about 6-7 months in a year i.e from October to March.

Land is the most valuable possession from which people can receive permanent means of livelihood. Absence of which may lead to another societal problem like migration as mentioned above. Migration has reduced over the years, however those who are still caught in the bonded labour trap still migrate for a few months. 35% of the families in a village migrate after the agricultural season and most of them mainly as per the availability of jobs during the brick kiln season and also because many of them have taken loans which they have to repay, hence most work as bonded labourers. Another aspect in which migration negatively affects their society is the rise in the number of children dropping out of school. When a family decides to migrate, it's not just the man and woman who migrate but also take their children with them as additional hands to earn income.

The root cause of migration was unavailability of enough livelihood options for them. Centre For Social Action, a non profit working in the region where I am placed as an India Fellow, acted upon this and created a setup to tackle the problem. We started with training five Self Help Groups on various products like Nachi Laddoo, Nachni Papad, Methi Laddu, Bombay Duck Chutney etc. As Nachni is grown in abundance the SHG's decided to make products out of that. For the making of the products the SHGs come to the centre i.e our local partner NGO's place. Once the products are made they are sold in Mumbai. The aim of this initiative is to give them at least two weeks of employment and once this stream of income is regular we hope they wouldn't migrate in November. Here our focus was not only generating livelihood but also to inculcate the idea of ownership and most importantly entrepreneurship.

After a couple of months of this initiative on livelihoods, we planned an exposure visit to Ahwa in Gujarat. The women from the SHG were invited to experience the work of tribal women from Gujarat. The women there ran a bakery producing Nachni biscuits, they had established a hotel, some of them owned rice, papad machines and mill. It was a three day exposure visit with a lot of conversations and observations. The tribal women of Gujarat were independently running all the businesses. After the day's visit we would all sit down and share what we felt that day. All the fifteen of us had a striking observation to make. They said that all of them owned the land

they were working on, whether it was the bakery, the mill, the land for the poultry farm etc. Since they owned the land they had built spaces which they used for running their own. They set up the place themselves, they decided the timings they wanted to work for etc. One of the SHG members named Alka Tai wished to open a bakery of her own in Mahad. Her only dilemma was the fact that she didn't own a piece of land where she could start her business from. I asked if she could rent a place instead, to which she replied that no one trusts us Katkaris, I will never be able to run my own business.

After all these discussions I realised how important it is to own a land. It does not just give you confidence but also builds the identity of an individual. This made me think of how it can also bring about a sense of ownership in the people. When the SHG's are trained in making various products, the first motive is to bring about a sense of ownership in them and also hope that they realise that it is their own business. Several videos and sessions are presented to try and inculcate this approach. However after the exposure visit to Gujarat I realised how the real sense of ownership will only come once the place belongs to them.

Currently the members of the SHG across Raigad have to come to the partner NGO's workplace for production. Since the place doesn't belong to them, they are bound to be under the partner's supervision. I believe until and unless they establish a place of their own where they make rules of their own, decided their timings etc the need for showcasing ownership will always arise. Being landless not only hampers with their sense of identity but makes practising other livelihood options also difficult. We wanted to introduce Beekeeping as a form of livelihood activity. While speaking to one of the organisations who provide trainings in beekeeping, they mentioned that they don't work with landless people. They elaborated that results from beekeeping is the most effective when the surroundings have adequate flora or an agricultural land. The bees will then enhance the quality of the yield as well as an increase in the output of honey. Given these circumstances this option of livelihood did not seem feasible for the tribals as they still await the distribution of individual land.

Another such instance took place last year where we tried to practice growing exotic vegetables owing to its great demand. An exposure visit to Pune was organised to learn the techniques, skill, use of equipment etc. One person out of the six who went showed interest in trying this in his village near Khopoli. Since he doesn't own the land he knew of a barren piece of land near his village and went along with the social worker to speak to the woman who owned the land. Unfortunately the woman told the social worker that she doesn't trust a tribal and refused to lease the land to him. Several such stories of disappointment have time and again surfaced. Whenever an individual was willing to take a risk, the unavailability of land always set him back and he had no other choice left but to go back to being a daily wage labourer. The fact that a very high number of deprived households are also landless doing casual manual labour is significant. Land being the most important asset in rural India, its absence with other deprivations means a household has no asset and it is that much more vulnerable.

Owning land is not the only factor, which influences the options of one's livelihood. There are various factors that are responsible for the livelihood of a person including education, skills, networking, infrastructure, financial capital etc. All these factors are interlinked with each other and make the basis of a sustainable livelihood. However in the case of the Katkari tribals of Raigad, landlessness has been a major concern for years. In fact In 2009, the rural development ministry's Committee on State Agrarian Relations and Unfinished Task of Land Reforms pointed out that landlessness had witnessed a phenomenal rise from about 40 percent in 1991 to about 52 percent in 2004-5.

It explained why: *"While all the enhanced landlessness cannot be attributed to the liberalisation process alone the non-agricultural demands placed on land on account of industrialisation, infrastructural development, urbanisation have certainly contributed to the process."*

As of today the focus of our partner NGOs is to get the Dali land for each village in the Raigad district. This would be the first step towards their economic development. In the coming years my hope is that they receive the land which is rightfully theirs and are able to built their life from it. Till then the focus is on finding alternate sources of livelihood which require no possession of land like tailoring classes, producing food products etc. The goal is that Suvarna Tai and Alka Tai's of Raigad who are willing to start their own business and have an entrepreneurial mindset. Once this cycle starts, and hopefully majority of them will be engaged in livelihood practices that give them a steady source of income and most importantly dignified work, the next generation will not fall in the trap of bonded labour.

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India Fellow is an experiential social leadership program for young Indians that include working full time for a year and a half with a host organization on a specific project or issue together with training, peer learning and mentoring. These experiences empower India Fellows to find their own leadership potential, shape their futures and make a difference. As part of their fellowship journey, fellows constantly reflect on their learning through writing. A monograph, is a piece that the fellows write at the completion of their 18 months. This is our first compilation of 21 such essays as well as a sequel to our first publication – SEVENTEEN (2017).