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Group rights and gender justice: exploring tensions within the Gond community in India

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Abstract

This paper seeks to address some of the tensions identified in the political literature between group rights, which allows historically marginalized communities some measure of self-governance in determining its own rules and norms, and the rights of marginalized sub-groups, such as women, within these communities. As the literature notes, community norms frequently uphold patriarchal structures which define women as inferior to men, assign them a subordinate status within the community and cut them off from the individual rights enjoyed by women in other sections of society.

There is a tendency within this literature to assume that if women within these communities fail to exercise 'voice' by protesting gender injustice within their community or choose 'exit' by giving up their membership of the community, they can be deemed to have consented to their subordinate status within the community. Yet, as feminists have pointed out, the capacity for neither voice nor exit can be taken for granted. Indeed, community norms may be organized in ways that explicitly deny women any voice in its decision-making forums as well as the resources they would need to survive outside the community.

This paper draws on quantitative and qualitative research among the Gond, an Adivasi or indigenous community in the Chattisgarh state in India to explore this debate in greater detail. The Gond community, like other Adivasi groups in India, have long been among the poorest and most socially marginalized sections of the Indian population. In recognition of their historical disadvantage, the Indian constitution allows these communities a degree of self-governance within the territories in which they are concentrated. As our research shows, this has allowed these communities to uphold norms that systematically discriminate against women, exercising greater controls over their marital, sexual and reproductive behaviour than men, denying them equal access to community resources and excluding them from community decision making forums.

Given the strength of the forces within the community militating against their capacity for either voice or exit, the question motivating the research was whether external organizations could make a difference to one or other or both. Our research set out to answer this question by exploring the impacts of two external development organizations, BIHAN and PRADAN, that sought to work with women within these communities, organizing them into self-help groups in order to promote access to new financial resources and livelihood skills as well as their political capabilities within the community and government decision-making domains. We ask whether these organizations were effective in their objectives, whether they had any impact on women's voice and exit options and whether the kind of organization they were made a difference to the impacts that we found.

GLOSSARY

Term	Definition
Aam Sabha	Common Assembly
Adhikari	Officers, usually representing the government
Adivasis	The collective name used by many diverse ethnic groups that identify themselves as the aboriginal population of India
Assistant Development Extension Officer	government functionary who is responsible for implementing government projects and schemes at the grassroots
Baba Jat	Term in colloquial Hindi commonly used to refer to men folk
Bangladeshi	Native or inhabitant of Bangladesh or Bangladeshi descent
Bastariya	A term used to refer to anyone who resides in and belongs by birth to the Bastar region.
Bastariya Gond	A term referring to Gonds who are born and live in the Bastar area of Chhattisgarh in India.
Basti	Hindi term for habitation/village
Bengali	Belonging to or relating to Bangladesh and West Bengal or their people.
BIHAN	Name of the SRLM (State Rural Livelihood Mission) in Chattisgarh.
Block	Block is an administrative sub-division of a district in India, consisting of a number of villages
Block CEO	Chief Executive officer is the official in charge of the block. His office is responsible for implementing key development projects as regulatory administration for the Government of India
Bunding	Raised structures built usually from soil or stones along contour lines to slow down water runoff in the fields.
Chunda	Hindi term for a lock of hair. Refers to rituals performed during the last rites of the deceased person, where the closest male family member shaves their head as a sign of mourning.
Dalit	Term used for a caste that was formerly known as untouchable.
District Collector	An Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer in charge of revenue collection and administration of a district in India.
Ekta	Hindi term for Unity
Garh Mandala	A prominent Gond kingdom powerful before the 15th century (roughly located in and around the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh)
Gayata	The village priest

Gond	A member of an indigenous people living in the hill forests of central India.
Gotra	A Sanskrit term, in Hindu society commonly considered to be equivalent to clan. It broadly refers to people who are descendants in an unbroken male line from a common male ancestor or patriline.
Gram Panchayat	Statutory council of elected members representing one or more villages
Gram Sabha	Gram Sabha usually refers to a council comprising all adult members of a panchayat.
Hariyali	It is a traditional festival of agriculture-based communities of Chhattisgarh that marks the beginning of Shravan month.
IAY or Indira Awaas Yojana	A social welfare flagship programme, created by the Indian Government, to provide housing for the rural poor in India. Now renamed as Pradhan Mantri Gramin Awaas Yojana (PMGAY),
JAGORI	A feminist organization in India
Kotwal	Village watchman appointed by the State government. S/he is also given the post of an Elder in the village council
Kshetra	Refers to a region in Hindi. It also refers to an administrative unit within the Gond samaj comprising of 10-12 villages
Mahila mandal	A formal association of women belonging to village or duster of villages.
Malguzari	A system of land revenue collection started by the Mughals.
MGNREGS	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme
Mughals	Muslim dynasty of Mongol origin founded by the successors of Tamerlane, which ruled much of India from the 16th to the 19th century.
Musar	Instrument used to pound rice
NRLM	National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) is a poverty alleviation project implemented by Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India.
Panchayat/gram panchayat	A village council in India
Patel	Patel is traditionally a position (that is retained with one family through inheritance) held by a village Elder, wherein the position holder is responsible for maintaining the records for landholdings ever since the village was settled.

	It is only after seeking his permission that a family receives recognition as a resident of the village..
Patwari (Land records officer)	Term used for a land record officer at sub-division or Tehsil level. As the lowest state functionary in the Revenue Collection system, his job encompasses visiting agricultural lands and maintaining a record of ownership and tilling.
PDS	Public distribution system is a government-sponsored chain of shops entrusted with the work of distributing basic food and non-food commodities to the poorer sections of the society at very low prices.
PESA	The Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act or PESA was introduced in 1996 to extend provisions of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment to the Schedule 5 and 6 areas
PRADAN	Professional Assistance for Development Action, a voluntary organisation in India.
Sachiv	Hindi term for secretary
Sahib	Hindi term used to refer to a person in a position of authority, commonly used to refer to the British officials in pre-independence India.
Samaj	Hindi term for a society, assembly or congregation
Samajik	Belonging to a society or community
Sanskritization	Denotes the process by which caste or tribes placed lower in the caste hierarchy seek upward mobility by emulating the rituals and practices of the upper or dominant castes, in Hindu society.
Sarkar	Hindi term for Government /administration
Sarpanch	Elected head of the local self-governance council in a village in India
Sarvajanik	Hindi term for public
Saskiya	Something that is official, is approved by the government or by someone else in authority.
Scheduled tribe	Scheduled Tribes (STs) are officially designated groups of historically disadvantaged people in India. The term is recognised in the Constitution of India.
SERP	Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP) is an autonomous society of the Department of Rural Development, Government of Andhra Pradesh.
SHG	A self-help group (SHG) is a financial intermediary committee usually composed of 10–20 local women or men.

Siyan	Term used to refer to village elders
SRLM	State Rural Livelihood Mission (SRLM) and it is an autonomous body under the Rural Development Department of the State
Sudhar	Hindi term for Improvement
Untouchability	In Hinduism, the quality or condition of being an untouchable, ascribed in the Vedic tradition to persons of low caste or to persons excluded from the caste system.
VO	VO is a primary level institution where all SHGs members are its members at village level.

1. Introduction

1.1 Objectives of the paper

This paper explores the tensions between group rights and gender justice as they play out among the Gonds, an *adivasi* [1] community, in the state of Chattisgarh in India. *Adivasis*, or indigenous peoples, are amongst the poorest and most socially marginalized groups in the Indian context. The tensions in question reflect the way that the Indian state has sought to address the problems of poverty and marginalization among its citizens. The Indian constitution of 1950 declared its commitment to freedom from discrimination and equality before the law for all citizens, regardless of gender, caste, religion, indigeneity and so on. At the same time, the constitution also extended a range of group-differentiated rights to address the historically entrenched disadvantage of certain social groups: the *adivasi*s, officially designated as Scheduled Tribes (STs) within the constitution, and *dalit*s (previously 'untouchable' castes), officially designated as Scheduled Castes (SCs). These rights took the form of special reservations or quotas within elected bodies, public sector employment (extended to private sector institutions in 2006) and state educational systems. The groups were also prioritized within a number of government poverty programs, such as subsidized housing schemes and the MGNREGS[2].

These rights applied to individual members of marginalized groups. Additional group-based protections were extended to *adivasi*s to reflect the significance of land and forests to their identity and livelihoods. This extended a limited right to self-governance in the administration of areas where scheduled tribes are concentrated, guaranteeing a specially protected community space[3]. These rights were further strengthened by the PESA (Extension of Panchayat Raj to Scheduled Areas) Act in 1996.

This juxtaposition of individual and group rights presents a conundrum. On the one hand, socially marginalised groups and communities view group rights as necessary protections to prevent their identity and way of life being assimilated into a mainstream culture that often looks down on them. On the other, group rights can have the effect of suspending the individual rights of members who occupy a marginal status within the groups in question, 'the

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[1] See Glossary for translation of terms

[2] In addition, in view of the high percentage of *adivasi*s in its population, Chhattisgarh state has specific scholarship schemes for Gond students and, since 2011, considerably higher quotas for adivasis in public sector jobs compared to the central government). *Sources*: http://persmin.gov.in/DOPT_Brochure_Reservation_SCSTBackward_Index.asp and https://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/hc-lifts-stay-on-chhattisgarh-s-new-reservation-policy-112071000207_1.html

[3] The 73rd Amendment of the Constitution of India reserved seats for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in all Panchayat councils. It also reserved Sarpanch and Pradhan positions in the form of mandated representation proportional to each minority population's share in each district. One third of all seats in both were reserved for women. The Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act or PESA was introduced in 1996 to extend provisions of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment to the Schedule 5 and 6 areas. Key features that distinguish PESA are the stress on the village as a community which manages its affairs in accordance with its traditions and customs. Rather than the gram panchayat or its elected representatives, the gram sabha under PESA is a council comprising all members of a village. The gram sabha is empowered to approve all programmes and projects related to social and economic development in the area.PESA mandates that the gram sabha must be involved all decision-making relating to acquisition and utilization of land and other natural resources in its territory, approval of plans, supervision of social schemes and local institutions such as schools, hospitals and so on.

minority within minorities' (Eisenberg & Spinner-Halev, 2005). As the feminist literature has pointed out, it is frequently the rights of women that are overridden by the recognition of the rights of minority groups.

These debates are of particular relevance to PRADAN, a development NGO with which the authors of this paper are associated in different ways[4]. PRADAN has been working since 1987 with women from the poorest households in the poorest states of India. Many of these households, the majority in certain states, are drawn from *adivasi* communities. Central to PRADAN's strategy is the formation of 'self-help groups' of 15-20 women who are encouraged to meet regularly, save whatever amount they can afford and pool their funds to use as a source of credit for the membership. While self-help groups remain at the heart of PRADAN's strategy, the role of these groups has evolved over time from the early preoccupation with microfinance services to greater emphasis on livelihood support to an increasing concern with women's empowerment and gender justice. It was in order to gain a better understanding of how gender injustice is manifested within poor and socially marginalized communities, how it is experienced by women at the intersection of inequalities defined by the socio-economic position, ethnicity and gender and what organizations like PRADAN can do about it – that we carried out the research on which this paper is based.

The paper uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to address two main objectives: *first* to explore possible tensions between group rights and gender justice as they play out within the Gond community and *second,* to assess whether the work of two development organizations, PRADAN and BIHAN[5] both working in Kanker district in Chattisgarh[6], both using the SHG approach in their programmes, has had any impact on how men and women experience these tensions. The rest of this section summarizes some of the theoretical debates about group rights and gender justice, and describes the methodology we used to address its implications for our research questions. Section 2 discusses *adivasi* communities in India more generally before discussing the Gond community who feature in our study in greater detail, including their experiences of poverty, inequality and injustice. Section 3 examines the activities of BIHAN and PRADAN, what forms of change they were able to achieve and what these implied for women's empowerment and gender justice within the community. Section 4 draws out what our findings contribute to the wider debates about this issue and its practical implications for organizations working with women from socially marginalized groups. Section 5, in conclusion, revisits some of the theoretical debates discussed in the introductory section of the paper and considers the implications of our findings for the efforts of organizations that are seeking to empower women.

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[4] Nivedita Narain has been in the leadership of PRADAN since its early years, Vinitika Lal has been a consultant with the PRADAN research team for 10 years, Varnica Arora has been working in PRADAN field teams, including in Kanker district, for 7 years while Naila Kabeer carried out previous research with PRADAN in 2004.

[5] Both BIHAN and PRADAN co-operate in the implementation of the government's National Rural Livelihoods Mission in the state of Chatisgarh. BIHAN is the name of the State Rural Livelihood Mission (SRLM) that is responsible for the overall implementation of the NRLM in the state. It has partnered with PRADAN which provides a) formal technical support on livelihoods to both BIHAN at the state level and for the NRLM nationwide and b) direct community mobilization in certain blocks within the state. Our focus is on the activities of the two organizations in specific blocks of Kanker district.

[6] What is now Kanker district was part of the older Bastar district till 1999.

1.2 Group rights and gender justice: theoretical considerations

External protections and internal restrictions

At the heart of the conundrum we are dealing with in this paper are competing views about justice: views associated with liberal theory, with its focus on universal notions of justice, and views associated with communitarian philosophy which conceptualizes justice in cultural-relativist terms. Universalist notions of justice are premised on the assumption that all individuals have equal moral worth by virtue of their common humanity and hence must be accorded equal rights in the eyes of the law. The role of the liberal state is to uphold a notion of citizenship which reflects this assumption and provides the institutional framework within which individuals are able to exercise autonomy about the kinds of lives they wish to lead.

But many liberals who are committed to the idea of universal rights acknowledge the need to deviate from principles of universalism in order to take account of historic forms of disadvantage. They argue that if members of these historically disadvantaged groups are to enjoy substantive rather than merely formal equality before the law, it may be necessary to adopt affirmative measures in order to reverse the effects of past discrimination.

In addition, some liberals also accept the need for group-based rights. Kymlicka (1989), for instance, argues that individuals do not make their life choices in a vacuum but according to the meanings and values that they have grown up with and which help them to make sense of their lives. Where they belong to cultural minorities, and particularly where these minorities occupy a marginalized status within the larger society, the state must extend special protections to these groups so that their members are able to pursue their chosen way of life rather than being subsumed into the culture of the majority.

A somewhat different view of universalism is put forward by Kukathas (1998). He envisages a more minimalist role for the state, confining it to the maintenance of a peaceful social order within which people can be left free, separately or in concert with others, to pursue their lives as they wish. If they choose to live as groups, even groups that eschew majority values of equality and autonomy, the state has no role either in extending protection to these groups or intervening in their internal affairs. Efforts at protection are all too likely to descend into the politics of interest group conflict as different cultural groups strive to gain advantages at the expense of others. And in the absence of a benevolent state, efforts at intervention may serve to merely impose the culture of the majority on minority groups.

The communitarian position is defined by the support for group rights but on relativist rather than universalist grounds. Different cultures and traditions do not merely constitute the context of people's lives, they help to constitute their sense of identity and personhood. They must therefore constitute the starting point for defining the claims and responsibilities associated with the membership of particular groups, their ideas about justice. The principles of universalism embodied in the liberal tradition which prioritize the rights of individuals over groups reflect the dominance of market values in Western societies. Other cultures may not place the same value on autonomy and equality; efforts by the state to promote individual freedoms within these groups is an unwarranted imposition of majority values which will undermine or destroy such groups.

Advocates of group rights vary in their approaches to the question of inequalities *within* cultural groups. Those closer to the relativist position have tended to focus primarily on inter-group inequalities. They either fail to acknowledge intra-group inequality, seeing only difference and complementarity or else acknowledge inequality but see it as the price to be paid for community coherence (Levy,1997; Gutmann,1994; Macedo, 1995a; Shapiro,2001; Parekh,2001).

Universalists have paid greater attention to internal inequalities. Kymlicka (1995), in particular, has argued strongly that while group rights provide legitimate 'external protections' to cultural minorities, they must be made conditional on the elimination of unacceptable 'internal restrictions' which allow discrimination within groups against their own members or against members of other groups. The discussion around these ideas has thrown up two themes which are of particular relevance to the concerns of this paper.

The first theme relates to the conditions considered necessary to justify the extension of 'external protections' to minorities. Those arguing in this vein have tended to single out the right to exit from cultural groups as the most important of these conditions. For Kymlicka (1995), the right to exit not only provides a means for protecting individuals within oppressive groups but can act as an incentive for these groups to transform oppressive practices. Raz (1994) argues that the elimination of oppressive practices within groups is likely to be a slow process but the groups still merit external protections as long as the right to exit is recognized and provides an interim form of protection to the oppressed within them.

The second theme relates to the 'internal restrictions' considered significant enough to warrant the denial of external protections and even justify external intervention. Here there has been a tendency to regard certain kinds of inequalities as less acceptable than other and hence carrying greater weight in determining whether external protections should be extended or denied. For Kymlicka (1995), 'gross and systematic violations of human rights', such as slavery, genocide, mass torture and expulsions constitute unacceptable internal inequalities. Other less egregious forms of injustice, he argues, do not warrant intervention by the state as long as there is consensus within the community that they are legitimate. Raz (1994) singles out slavery, racism and homophobia as examples of the unacceptable. He sees the 'gender differentiation' of social relations as a lesser problem: as long as it does not carry the 'implication of an inferior status' both men and women are likely to believe it to be socially acceptable.

Kukathas (1998), on the other hand, is indifferent to internal inequalities within groups believing that they should be allowed to exist, without either external interference or protection, as long as they accept the right of exit for their members. If some members of these groups find aspects of their traditions and practices unacceptable, they should be allowed to leave. Members who choose to remain, however reluctantly, can be said to have accepted these practices, presumably because group membership continues to have some legitimacy, meaning or value for them.

Group rights and gender justice: exit, voice and loyalty

Within these arguments, therefore, questions of consent and consensus within the community play an important role in legitimizing certain kinds of internal inequalities, including everyday forms of gender inequality. Such interpretations of consent and consensus have been questioned by feminists on a number of grounds. A useful framework for discussing their arguments is provided by Hirschman's concepts of exit, voice and loyalty which help to frame the options available to women as subordinate members of subordinate groups. In the context of the present discussion, loyalty is attributed to those who neither voice their objection to their treatment under existing social arrangements nor choose to exit their community. It is taken as evidence of consent to both lesser (by Kymlicka,1995) and more blatant (Kuthaka, 1998) forms of discrimination.

As Shachar (2000), among others, points out, this doctrine of 'implied consent' assumes that those who do not exercise the exit option have implicitly agreed to their own subordination (p. 80). Such an assumption overlooks the extent to which the very discriminations to which women and girls are assumed to have consented may deny them the capabilities they need to exercise either exit or voice, leaving loyalty as the only option (Okin 2005). It may deny them the education, skills and resources that would allow them to make their way in the world outside their community. Equally, it may exclude them from forums within their own community where they would be able to protest their conditions.

This suggests a clear relationship between the options for voice and exit. Without the substantive capacity for exit, subordinate groups are unlikely to voice their discontent. But equally without voice, it is difficult to see how they can acquire the resources they need to survive outside their communities, the resources that would make exit, or the threat of exit, a credible option.

However, there seems to be greater support in the feminist literature for the idea of building women's capacity for voice and influence within the community rather than for their capacity for exit. There are a number of reasons why this is the case. Quite aside from the practical difficulties associated with exit, there are likely to be psycho-social costs which tend to be overlooked by many of those who advocate this right, a depth of cultural attachments which can render the exit option deeply undesirable (Reitman,2005). In addition, it has been pointed out that the right to exit is an individual response to discrimination but does little to address its causes, leaving discriminatory practices intact (Okin,2005). And finally, there is the question about exit to what? There is no guarantee that women from communities that occupy a marginalized status in the wider society will be accorded respect and dignity in the world that they are being asked to exit into (Mahajan,2005).

Consequently, the focus of much of the feminist writing on these issues has been about strengthening women's voice and influence within their community as part of a broader approach to transform its power relations (O'Neill, 2005; Phillips, 2002; Fraser,1990). As Phillips points out, the norms of their 'given' community – into which they did not choose to be born and which they find hard to leave - are rarely formulated under conditions of gender equality. They tend to embody notions of justice that reflect the standpoint and interests of those who hold power within the community and dominate its decision-making forums. Basic justice requires 'parity of participation' (Fraser,1990): the norms and principles of a community, and the institutional arrangements they give rise to, should be worked out with

the fullest involvement of all those who are affected by them and must include the ability to refuse or renegotiate aspects of these arrangements (O'Neill, 2005; Phillips,1990).

At the same time, feminists have also recognised that the capacity for voice, for dissent and resistance, is not evenly distributed in an unjust society. The discriminations that women experience may be deep-rooted and hidden, the product of long-term socialization processes, they may be backed up by violence, or the threat of violence. Either way, those most oppressed are least likely to be able to recognize, let alone protest, the injustice of their situation or imagine the possibility of change. Parity of participation requires building the critical consciousness and capacity for 'voice' of those who have been hitherto disenfranchised but this is unlikely to occur through internal forces within communities that have long practiced and justified discrimination against women.

Here it is possible that external actors can play a positive role as long as they are fully aware of the dangers of substituting their own agency and views of justice for those that emerge when women from marginalized groups develop their own capacity for critical consciousness and their own views of justice (Phillips,2002). The significance of external actors relates to the new associational spaces they can open up. If, as cultural relativists have argued that it is through the 'given' relationships of kinship and community that people gain their sense of identity and ideas about justice, then it is possible that participation in new 'chosen' forms of association can give women the reflexive vantage point they need in order to evaluate community norms and relationships and renegotiate those aspects they find unjust (Kabeer, 2012).

1.3. Methodology

It was this potential for external interventions to transform the consciousness and capabilities of women from socially marginalized groups that motivated our research. We were interested in exploring the role that the SHGS in our study played in the lives of the women from the Gond communities they worked with. While these SHGS were clearly products of external interventions, were they merely vehicles through which external actors, whether government or NGOs, were able to impose their own norms and values and promote their own predefined goals? Or did they serve to open up new spaces for these women to gain resources and to develop critical consciousness and the capacity for voice and influence within their community and beyond?

Our research was conducted in Gond-dominated villages, twenty-eight from the administrative block of Bhanupratappur, which was PRADAN's area of work, and sixteen from the administrative block of Narharpur where BIHAN worked. We decided to include both men and women in our study in order to explore possible gender differences in how they viewed the norms and values of their community and their experiences of injustice (See Appendix 1). The research was carried out in a number of phases.

The first phase consisted of detailed, semi-structured interviews with 10 SHG members and with 10 men who were spouses of SHG members but only one member from any household was selected. They were contacted in advance, their permission for the interview sought and a convenient time fixed for the interview. These semi-structured interviews encouraged the interviewees to talk about themselves, about growing up within the Gond community, their

lives as adults, their views about discrimination and injustice and their experience of SHGs, whether as members or as husbands of members.

The second phase consisted of focus group discussions (FGDs) carried out separately with 45 women and 28 men in groups of around 8-10. The FGDs were intended to solicit collective discussions about various aspects of being a Gond, ideas about justice within the community and experiences in the outside world. While the life histories proved useful in describing the individual experiences and views of men and women, the FGDs allowed free-floating debates and discussions about issues of poverty, inequality and injustice. Additional interviews were carried out by the research team with various key informants who were involved in some way with the two organizations or who held positions of power within the Gond community.

A survey was carried out in the third phase of the research to establish the frequency and distribution of the various findings that emerged from the qualitative interviews and to explore issues that were of interest to PRADAN and BIHAN, specifically issues related to their livelihood interventions[7]. A list of all SHG members and of men married to SHG members in the selected villages was drawn up using certain criteria: they had to be over the age of 20; to have been members/spouses of members who had belonged to the SHGs for at least 3 years and to belong to SHGS with 50% or more members drawn from the Gond community. In addition, no more than 2 respondents and 2 spouses could be selected from the same SHG and no more than one respondent could be selected from any household. The final sample was randomly selected from this list.

We developed a provisional questionnaire on the basis of our findings from the qualitative survey. This was translated from English into Gondi, field tested and the questions further refined[8]. The survey was carried out with 223 men and 228 women across the two study locations by a team of 4 men and 4 women who were recruited locally but from non-survey villages, and trained by the team (See Table 5b). Drawing local researchers was essential in terms of language and idiom.

Once analysis of the data was close to completion, the PRADAN research team shared a summary of the findings with 30 women leaders from study locations in Bhanupratappur. We touch on their responses in Box 1 and 2. Findings were also discussed with staff from PRADAN and BIHAN[9].

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[7] The survey team was led by Amit Kumar of PRADAN's data and research unit.

[8] The transcription and translation of the qualitative interviews and survey questionnaires - from Gondi and Hindi into English and from English into Gondi - presented some challenges. Certain English terminologies acquire a different meaning in local languages; conversely there are no concrete terms in these languages to articulate certain experiences in English. For example it was very difficult to find a locally relevant term for discrimination. In Hindi it translated to *'bhed bhav'* but when we talked to people about '*bhedbhav'* it was either not understood or interpreted as ostracization which meant something completely different, especially in the Gond community. To work around this, we conducted informal interviews, discussing with women about the experience of discrimination that they face in their daily life and the words they used to 'label' the experience were noted. In this way, we were able to loosely translate discrimination as the experience of being treated 'differently' because you are an Adivasi/woman.

[9] A series of meetings and discussion events were conducted with BIHAN at block, district and state levels, and with PRADAN in Chatisgarh and nationally.

2. The Gond community in India: history, culture and governance

2.1 A brief history of adivasis in India

There were over 104 million *adivasi*s in India, according to the 2011 Census, making up 8.6% of the total population. The bulk of them live in the largely contiguous hill and forest belt that extends across east and central Indian states, including Chhattisgarh. Despite a tendency in the larger literature to view tribal societies as internally homogenous and egalitarian, many are highly stratified. Those in Central India were divided into kingdoms in the medieval period but lost their power with the coming of the Maratha kings followed by the Mughals and were gradually pushed into hilly forest areas where they survived on shifting cultivation, hunting and gathering forest produce (Pallav, 2015; Koreti, 2016).

The British did not establish direct control over the area but collected taxes under the *Maalguzari* system. Influential members of the community, as well as some of the local Brahmins, were 'gifted' large tracts of land and charged with collecting rent from their tenants, usually through forced labour, part of which was handed over to the state as tax (Sundar, 1997).The system was abolished after independence but many of the *maalguzar* families continued as large landlords in these areas, owning the largest landholdings and occupying privileged positions within community hierarchies.

'Outsider' views of *adivasi*s have tended to elide their different histories and internal structures. British administrators, for instance, subsumed culturally and linguistically heterogeneous groups within the generic category of 'Gond' in their efforts to codify the Indian population[10] . The writings of colonial administrators such as Glasfurd (1862) subscribed to the theory of the 'noble savage', depicting *adivasi*s as innocent and primitive tribes living in harmonious village communities in a symbiotic relationship with nature. The need to protect this unique way of life from the onslaught of the mainstream Hindu society led to a policy of 'gradual assimilation' on the part of colonial powers (Pereira, Dutta & Kakati, 2018).

Indian nationalists, on the other hand, contested the distinction between tribal and mainstream Hindu society and advocated a straightforward policy of assimilation. Ghurye (1966; 1969), for instance, elaborated on the similarities between Adivasi features and those of lower caste Hindus in order to claim that they belonged on the lowest rung of the tribe–caste–class hierarchy. Scholars in this tradition argued that the incorporation of Sanskrit traditions into Adivasi society offered the best hope of helping *adivasi*s to move from tradition to modernity, from a backward and degraded way of life to a morally superior one (Hebbar,2009). These attitudes still persist today among many state officials who regard *adivasi*s as 'lazy', 'backward', 'alcoholic' and 'promiscuous' (Sundar, 1997; Baviskar, 2005; Shah 2018b).

Contemporary historians and ethnographers have focused on the processes of marginalization that adivasi communities have faced in the post-Independence era, the result of large-scale development projects and conservation efforts to promote national parks and sanctuaries (Sundar, 1997; Guha, 2007; Shah, 2018b). Fernandes (2006) for instance has estimated that *adivasi*s are five times more likely to be displaced by these interventions than

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[10] The Gonds themselves use different terms to identify distinguish their different identities. Most of those in our area of study, for instance, describe themselves as Koitur Gonds (*koi* meaning a human) but there were others who identified as Dhurva and Chhattisgarhiya Gonds.

non-tribals. As a result, the natural resource base of land and forests which made up their way of life has been steadily eroded.

As various studies have made clear, adivasis as a group are far worse off than other social groups, including Dalits: they are poorer, have lower literacy rates, higher rates of dropouts from school, higher rates of maternal and child mortality (Maharatna, 2000; Das et. al, 2011, Shah 2018b). The national decline in poverty rates in recent decades has been slower for these groups so that they are increasingly concentrated at the bottom of the wealth distribution: in 2005, for instance, *adivasi*s made up around 8% of the overall population but 25% of the population in the lowest wealth decile (Das & Hall, 2012).

There is less documentation of gender relations within *adivasi* groups but a report on women's situation in Chattisgarh sketches out some of the contradictions of *adivasi* patriarchy that we will discuss in greater detail in this paper (Sen, 2004). On the one hand, the report notes that their sex ratios, 'universally acknowledged as an indicator of women's wellbeing, survival and status', suggest a highly egalitarian society. While extreme forms of gender discrimination in the wider society means that there are far fewer women than men in the overall population of India – just 933 women to every 1000 men in 2011 –the ratio was 990 women in the state of Chattisgarh and as high as 1006 in Kanker district[11].

The report notes women's visibility in the economy. Women are not required to wear purdah, as is the norm in the majority Hindu community, and they play an active role in all aspects of household livelihoods. They are major agricultural workers, working in every stage of crop production, preservation and storage, and primarily responsible for the collection and processing of uncultivated crops and forest produce. According to 2001 statistics for Chattisgarh state, 45% of men were active by 'main worker' status and 9% by 'marginal worker' status while 25% of women are active by main worker status and 21% by marginal worker status. However, as the report points out, the seasonal nature of one of women's primary economic activities, the collection of non-timber forest produce, means that they were likely to have been excluded from the recall period of the survey and hence classified as marginal workers. In reality, the gender gap in labour force participation is much smaller than suggested by 'main worker' status.

This finding mirrors the national picture which shows that *adivasi* men and women have higher rates of labour force participation than all other groups, including Dalits and a smaller gender gap in participation rates than all other groups (Srivastava and Srivastava, 2010; see also Das, 2006; Xaxa, 2014; see also Shah, 2018a). According to Das, controlling for other factors, *adivasi* women are three times as likely as non-SC/ST women to participate in the labour market compared to Dalit women who are one and a half times as likely.

At the same time, *adivasi* women are subject to a variety of patriarchal controls which restrict their life choices: they include men's rights over children, their privileged access to property and their dominant position in the family. In addition, women are excluded from the decision-making structures of the community. For all its assumed egalitarianism, therefore, patriarchal discrimination exists among the *adivasi*s, but takes a different form from that of the wider society.

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[11] Data from recent years suggests a deterioration in sex ratios in the younger age groups, suggesting a rise in this form of discrimination. *Source:* National Family Health survey (NFHS) data (2015-2016) in Kanker district.

2.2 Gond culture and identity

The Gonds, the second largest *adivasi* group in India[12] are concentrated in Central India where geologists first discovered the remains of the Gondwana tectonic plates, a finding that is closely bound up with how these groups define themselves (Forsyth, 1871). Gond men and women express a strong sense of pride in their identity and way of life which is based on their understanding of their own history and religious beliefs. They consider themselves the first people to have inhabited the planet: first among all communities and the first among indigenous communities: *The goddess of creation lives here. This is the epicentre of the entire earth system. This is the beginning and the end… After the earth was formed, a gourd grew here, slowly, ripened and then burst. The gourd contained seeds of the human race and as it burst and spread, the first brothers and sisters were born. Their lineages make the 750 gotras (clans) that are the Gonds today* (Male FGD,Narharpur).

The Gonds are followers of *Koya Punem*, an animist religion which sees the divine in all natural things and is believed to have been founded many thousands of years ago. The mother goddess is held in high regard and each village has its own temple and sacred grove dedicated to her. At the same time, the Koya Punem attaches great importance to male ancestors. The Gond keep their ashes in urns inside their house in the *'mai' ghar*, a sacred space in the house. Each significant event in the life cycle of the community, from sowing to harvesting, and of its members, from to death, is marked by ceremonies and festivals during which offerings are made to their ancestors. These are celebrated with music, dance and theatre and constitute important occasions for bringing members of the community together.

2.3 Layers of governance: state, community and daily life

Our discussion with local Gond leaders suggested three layers of governance, each relating to different domains of membership. At the broadest level, the Gonds are part of the larger national polity. The domain of *saskiya*, the official domain, relates to their membership of the nation-state and is governed by the laws of the land. The domain of the *samajik* relates to the region-wide Gond community while the *sarvajanik* domain refers to the village community, the domain of everyday life.

Governance and the state: the domain of saskiya

The *saskiya* represents the official structures of governance. Its key representatives in the lives of the Gonds are the elected representatives and officials of the state at the local level. Most of the poorer men and women in the Gond community did not distinguish between different state actors. Their contact with them tends to be limited to the registration of births and deaths and to their efforts to gain access to the special provisions and protections extended by the state. It was only those in leadership positions within the community who are aware of the difference between the roles of judicial, administrative and political systems, could distinguish between the efforts of the state and civil society, including development NGOs and engaged with them on community wide matters.

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[12] According to the 2001 census, the Gonds numbered around 10,850, 000 out of a total of 104 million adivasis (Tribal Committee report, 2014:pp 47).

Governance at community level: the samajik domain

The Gonds are a place-based community in that the boundaries of the community are defined in territorial terms: '*self-determination is a key element in Adivasi ideology and control over territory is considered essential to its realization*' (Poyam, 2016). This territorial identity defines the *samajik* domain as encompassing all members of the Gond community within the larger Bastar region[13]. The *samajik* domain is governed by a pyramidal structure of governance: village level forums are at the bottom of the pyramid; the *kshetra* forums comprise representatives from clusters of 10-12 villages; the block level forums are made up of representatives from each *kshetra* within the block. Above them are the district level forums while the state level forum is at the top.

The forums of the *samajik* domain adjudicate disputes within the community. If matters cannot be resolved at a lower tier, they can be taken to the next tier of governance. These forums play an important role in enforcing community norms, defining the collective identity of the community, overseeing its festivals and important rituals that mark the life course. They also act as safety nets for their members, most of whom have extremely precarious livelihoods and few support systems outside the community.

Governance in everyday life: the sarvajanik realm

While the boundaries of the Gond community are coterminous with the wider Bastar region, and its affairs governed by the rules of *samajik* domain, the daily life of its members takes place at the village level in interaction with the other communities who also live there. This is the *sarvajanik* domain. Since our study took place in mainly Gond villages, the *sarvajanik* domain in our study reflected the Gond identification with 'place' and was defined to include only those communities who belong to the Bastar region. These communities are considered to be familiar with each other's conventions and respectful of each other's deities and way of life. The *sarvajanik* domain is governed by clear rules about inter-dining and inter-marriage among these communities and define their degree of social distance from each other.

2.4 Protecting and preserving the Gond way of life: the role of the Elders

The cultural traditions of the Gond communities in Bastar have been orally transmitted over generations and provide the rules and norms by which these communities have lived. The final responsibility and authority for interpreting these rules and norms rest with the Elders or *siyan* of the community, but only with *male* Elders. Historically women have been excluded from the institutions of community governance[14].

The most powerful of the male Elders are drawn from families who had settled the village, who later became the Patel (headman) of their village, and who continue to own the largest landholdings within their villages. Some of these families also served as malguzars at one point, collecting tax on behalf of the rulers. These Elders are collectively responsible for interpreting the rules and norms of the community, adjudicating disputes and enforcing discipline, particularly in the *sarvajanik* and *samajik* realms. They are also often able to exercise influence in the *saskiya* realm through their links with locally elected representatives.

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[13] What used to be the Baster district was divided in 1919 into six separate districts, including Kanker.
[14] One exception is when women are acting on behalf of a young son.

As our discussions with some of these Elders revealed, they see themselves as guardians of the community, responsible for preserving and defending its way of life. There is an elaborate system of sanctions and penalties for violation of community rules. Serious violation of rules can be punished by excommunication which is the most severe form of punishment conceivable within the community. As Balaram (male, 54 years, Bhanupratappur) one of the Elders, asked rhetorically: *How can a person live without a samaj? How can he live without connection with others? It is not possible to survive.* Social ostracism may extend beyond the individual to their family members, creating strong pressures on all members to conform to community norms.

Many of the men who participated in our focus group and life history interviews appeared to accept the necessity of these sanctions for keeping the community together. As Dharam Singh (Male, 40 years, Narharpur) said: *Our ancestors have made the samaj, it has been going on for a long time so that we can live in peace. Imposing fines is a way of controlling those who have gone wayward. If there are no rules then everything will become chaotic, there will be no balance.* This sentiment was echoed by Sunder (Male, 60 years, Narharpur): *If you don't want to listen to the Elders of the village and of Bastar region ...then go and live outside the samaj…if you want to live in a community, you need rules.*

Along with upholding the traditions of the community, Gond Elders also seek to defend it from outside influence. The steady encroachment of the external world in the shape of government policy, migrant settlers from outside, the spread of market relations and the cultural forces of sanskritization and religious conversion are all perceived as threats to the community's way of life. Our interviews with Gond leaders at higher levels suggested that they gave special significance to PESA because, unlike affirmative measures for individuals belonging to marginalized communities, PESA affirmed the rights of indigenous communities to self-governance and the superior authority of their *gram sabha* on matters relating to land and development[15]. To facilitate the effectiveness of their advocacy efforts, Gond leaders at the regional level formally registered themselves in 1991 as a Society, the Gond Community Coordination Committee, under the Societies Registration Act in India[16]. But, they had not been able to prevent the continued transfer of community land by state officials and politicians to major corporations or the initiation of large-scale development projects without consultation with community members.

Codifying norms

It was in response to these various external sources of threat to their way of life that Gond Elders came together at the Kanker district level forum in 2010 to agree to a written constitution which would codify the norms and rules of their community for the first time in its history, giving official status to rules and norms that had previously existed in unwritten and more fluid forms.

The new constitution begins by declaring the Gonds as the First People, the original inhabitants of the Gondwana terrain, who have their own distinctive culture, traditions and language which give them a unique identity, their own way of life, their own world view and

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[15] The 1996 Act declared that 'Traditional tribal conventions and laws should continue to hold validity... While shaping the new Panchayati Raj structure in tribal areas, it was desirable to blend the traditional with the modern by treating the traditional institutions as the foundation on which the modern supra-structure should be built.'

[16] From the time of the British several regional factions of the Gonds have formed similar organizations to press for their demands.

their own social systems. While the constitution affirms the faith of the community in the Indian constitution (spelt out in bold letters in the text), it declares the legitimacy of the community's own norms as acknowledged by Indian constitution's extension of the limited right to self-governance to *adivasi* groups under PESA. On some matters, the constitution upholds the provisions laid out in the national constitution: for example, it accepts that the legal age of marriage as 18 for women and 21 for men. On other matters, it declares that community rules take precedence and must be adjudicated within the community.

The codification of traditions spelt out by the constitution suggests that the Gond belong to what Shachar (2000) has described as *nomoi* groups: communities who have their own unique history and cultural memory and a normative universe in which law and cultural narratives are inseparably related. While many *nomoi* groups define themselves in terms of culture, religion and place, the Gond are among those who place additional emphasis on biological descent, making them more exclusionary than others in their definition of community.

The main substance of the new constitution is to effectively define a family code for the community revolving around specific moments in the life course of members: as Bansi (Male, 43 years, Bhanupratappur) one of the Gond Elders, explained: *All humans share the same values, but different religions have different rules, rituals and traditions. Their differences may be distinguished in the three most important of these traditions – those relating to birth, marriage and death.* This emphasis on birth, death and marriage reflects the fact that these are specific junctures in family life which define membership of the community along with access to valued resources associated with such membership: land, community support and the affirmative provisions of the state. And because women play a central role in the biological reproduction of community boundaries, it becomes essential to control their marital, sexual and reproductive behaviour, how, when and with whom they can have children, so as to ensure that biological claims to membership are clearly established. The norms governing group membership in such communities are thus simultaneously the means through which women are subjected to patriarchal controls (Shachar,2000). Furthermore, the decision to codify what had previously been unwritten norms, subject to fluid interpretations, has meant that some of the more liberal practices that had characterized the community in earlier times have been reinterpreted in more restrictive terms (Sen, 2014)[17]. Shah (2006) notes a similar trend among *adivasi*s in Jharkhand to reimagine the notion of the *adivasi* community in purer form through the greater regulation of the social and sexual tribal body.

Birth

The Gond community is patrilineal which means that both descent and inheritance is passed through the male line. The birth of a child is accompanied by various rituals to establish biological paternity because this has important implications for their membership and entitlements. A naming ceremony can only be held once paternity has been established to the satisfaction of the village forum and the child becomes a part of the father's *gotra* (clan), taking on his clan name. The child is registered with the village council and the Gond *samaj* and their religion and language entered as Gond. The naming rituals thus establish the rights of the father over his children. Mothers' rights are contingent on remaining within the marriage. Given the emphasis on biological paternity, adoption is not accepted. This creates problems for women seeking to remarry as children will always belong to the father. In such

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[17] Alpa Shah notes the same tendencies in the indigenous community that she studied in Jharkhand (Shah, 2018[b])

instances they must either give up their rights over their children or opt to live outside the community

Marriage

The Gond constitution affirms the centrality of marriage to their community. Women are expected to live and die in their husbands' home. According to the women's FGD in Narharpur, a woman who leaves her husband faces the disapproval of her community: *If you separate from your husband, if one house becomes two, then you will face abuse. If you can't get along with your husband, if you can't make it work, then fingers are pointed at you. Once you get married you have left your parents' home and joined your husband's.* Men, on the other hand, are allowed to take on more than one wife. At the same time, community rules require men to support even 'unfaithful' wives. If a woman leaves her husband but then chooses to return, he will be pressured by the community to accept her, even after a separation of many years and even if she had eloped with another man. If a woman chooses to leave her husband or is left by him, she is allowed to remarry a man of her choice, again as long as it is in accordance with Gond *gotra* rules and has been approved the circle of Elders.

The Gond constitution defined the rules of marriage in endogamous terms, distinguishing between those communities, including different Gond *gotras*, between whom both inter-dining and inter-marriage is permitted, non-Gond communities with whom both inter-dining and inter-marriage is permitted, non-Gond communities with whom only inter-dining is permitted, and those non-Gond communities with whom neither is permitted.

Marriage outside these accepted boundaries is believed to weaken the social fabric of the community. There are strict penalties when this occurs but their severity is differentiated by gender. For instance, the *samaj* ostracizes both bride and groom and their families and will not allow them back until the matter has been adjudicated by the community and necessary fines and rituals completed. However, once the adjudication process has been completed, the wife of a man who has married outside accepted boundaries can be brought into the community. She will be accepted as a Gond as will her children. The right to perform key Gond rituals will be restored to her husband, but she will only be allowed to participate in community rituals during certain important events.

By contrast, a woman from the Gond community who marries outside permissible boundaries must leave her own community to become part of her husband's. If he belongs to a community with whom inter-dining is permitted, she will be allowed to maintain ties with her natal family, after payment of fines but she will no longer be considered a member of her Gond *samaj*. If she marries into a community outside the permissible circle, her family must completely sever their ties with her: *We leave her and she leaves the Gonds. No member of our community is allowed to even drink water served by her.* She is barred from attending important ceremonies including those when her parent dies. In some instances, symbolic death rituals may be performed to indicate that she is '*jeete ji mar jana*" (dead while still alive).

The children of women who choose to remarry outside their community do not enjoy full rights within either community. They cannot be adopted by her new husband, they cannot claim a share in his property nor can they show his lineage on their caste verification certificate, an important certificate in that it verifies their ability to access affirmative measures. Their claims have to be exercised through their biological father and are therefore conditional on his acknowledgement of paternity.

Death

Death rituals are performed collectively by the community but only a male family member is allowed to perform the ritual of the *chunda* which has to be observed at the death of a male. He must shave his hair as a sign of mourning and offer it to ancestors. This ritual has particular significance at the death of an adult male member since it serves to name the primary custodian of the land belonging to the deceased. The only exception to this rule is when a woman may be named as primary custodian of the land on behalf of a minor son. If there is no immediate male family member to perform the ritual, the family must turn to men in the extended family group who can, in exchange for performing the ritual, make a claim on some or all of the land. Women without adult males in the immediate family to perform these rituals at the death of the senior male are thus vulnerable to loss of land rights.

3. Poverty, inequality and injustice in the study villages

3.1 The survey population: assets, livelihoods and consumption

We turn now to an analysis of poverty and inequality within the Gond community in our study, beginning with a summary description of the survey population and their current situation. Table 1 summarizes selected household level characteristics and highlights some of the differences between households in PRADAN and BIHAN locations. Most households (over 80%) had electricity but the greater proximity of villages in the BIHAN area to the district headquarters explains why they reported higher levels of electricity as well as greater access to piped water, hand pumps and bore wells. The higher percentage of households in the PRADAN villages who reported houses built under the government's Indira Awas Yojana scheme suggests that they were more likely to be classified as poor.

Households in the PRADAN villages were more likely to own land, although we do not know of what quality, and to own larger landholdings. The widespread ownership of ploughs in the two villages suggests that most households practised traditional agriculture; only a small percentage owned tractors and power tillers. Purchasing power in the two locations was generally low: less than half the households owning any of the consumer assets listed (with the exception of basic cell phones), but the fact that some households at least did report ownership of bicycles, motorcycles, smart phones and televisions indicates they were connected with the rest of the world[18].

Table 2 reports on individual land and housing. As might be expected in a patrilineal system, men were more likely than women to own land as well as housing. Some women owned land because they were the only daughters, some were holding land in custody for young sons, some women had been given land by the state on grounds of poverty but as the tables show, 84% of men and 75% of women reported male ownership of land while 83% of men and 75% of women reported male ownership of housing.

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[18] The qualitative interviews suggest that the cell phones were generally owned and used by men. Women only carried them when they travelled some distance from their homes.

Table 3 reports on individual characteristics of our survey respondents. We find that men were older, more likely to be currently married than women (over 90% compared to 75%) and more likely to have married more than once. Women were more likely to be widowed, single or separated. Education levels were lower for women than men: over 40% were illiterate compared to just 22% of men.

As with *adivasi* communities more generally, households in both locations reported cultivation as one of their main sources of livelihood, with women more likely to report it than men (87% and 82%). This was followed by wage labour (between 70 and 87%) and forest collection (between 60 and 78%). Other sources of livelihood included livestock rearing, non-farm enterprise, formal employment and contract work for government (no more than 10-12% of households reported these). Households in the PRADAN villages (a more rural and forested area) were more likely to report cultivation as their main source of livelihood along with collection of non-timber forest produce while those in BIHAN villages (closer to district headquarters) were more likely to report wage employment. Around 10% of households reported outmigration.

While we have noted the high rates of economic activity among Gond women, Table 4 suggests that they continue to take disproportionate responsibility for unpaid reproductive activities. It distinguishes between work done on an episodic or irregular basis and work that had to be done every day. Both men and women agreed that men were more likely to take primary responsibility for the more episodic activities. So, for instance, if we focus on the overall figures reported in the final two columns, we find that in the case of house repair, a very irregular activity, 88% of the male respondents reported they took primary responsibility compared to just 9% of female respondents while 63% of male respondents said they were primarily responsible for collecting PDS rations, a monthly responsibility, compared 40% of female.

Both men and women also agreed that women were more likely than men to take primary responsibility for more routine, everyday activities. The difference was less marked for activities that necessitated moving some distance from the home so between 50-70% of women reported primary responsibility for collecting wild foods, gathering fuel from the forests and purchasing food from shops compared to 34-46% of men. The differences were extremely marked for routine daily activities that had to be carried out within the home. Both men and women agreed that women were almost exclusively responsible fetching water from the well, washing clothes and cooking: over 70% of women reported primary responsibility for these tasks compared to 2% of men.

According to Table 5, hunger was not widely reported among our survey households - only 2-3% reported going hungry in the previous year. But only 60% could meet their staple food needs through their own cultivation effort for more than half the year. Over 80% of those who fell short made up the shortfall through the Public Distribution System. Only 10% used the open market. As far as diversity of diet went, over 90% of households reported consumption of vegetables and pulses in the previous week while over 40% had consumed animal protein, eggs and fruit.

3.2 Growing up in the Gond community

The ability to meet their needs for food, potable water and housing through their own efforts and government support, to diversify their diets and to purchase producer and consumer assets which is documented in these tables provides a marked contrast to the stories that the men and women in our study told us about their experiences of growing up within the Gond community. These stories were pervaded by the themes of poverty, hunger and hardship, of 'deeply sorrowful childhoods' and 'broken people'. As Parmeshwari (female, 30 years, Bhanupratappur) put it: *In a life of poverty, many things get broken inside you…You can't get what you need at the right time.*

Theirs was a subsistence-based, cash-strapped economy. Even those who had land either did not have the resources to cultivate it or were not able to produce enough to feed themselves. Many had not gone to school at all or had dropped out early in order to support their families, living and working in the homes of wealthier families within the village. In times of shortage, they survived on rice gruel, wild tubers from the forest, weeds from the field, gleaning broken rice after threshing or simply skipping meals. When crisis became acute, they borrowed money from their employers at exorbitant interest rates to buy paddy or offered their land as collateral paying off their debt by providing labour.

Earlier people would sow paddy by hariyali (broadcasting seeds)… what they ate depended on whether and how much yield there was…they would eat whatever they got from their cultivation. They would also take containers and axes to the forest, dig up edible tubers and cook them in the ashes…. That was how life was at that time. We never got to see any money (Male FGD, Bhanupratappur)**.**

There wasn't enough to eat then. At that time those with lot of land used to grow paddy and crush it in the 'musar'. Our people would carefully collect the small broken pieces that got stuck in the "supa" and were thrown way and cook them with salt- that way we did not die of starvation. In times of drought we had very little to eat and would just keep sitting by the fire. I have never known hunger like that. One year there absolutely no rain, we were forced to cook and eat weeds (Sangita, female, 29 years, Bhanupratappur)

Even 20 years ago, we went through times when there was no food to eat in the house. We had fields but no grain. We had no inputs to do our own agriculture, we provided labour in another's fields. We used to collect dung in their fields and spread it and then go to school. Sometimes we got food to eat and sometimes we skipped meals, that was our life. We made rice gruel sometimes, we often did not get vegetables to eat. Other times we ate kulthi (cheap pulse) (Anita, female, 24 years, Bhanupratappur)

In our parents' time, we all lived in someone else's house…In this village there are big high level families, those who are wealthy, we lived in their homes as servants and farm labour, to plough their fields and do work in their houses. My father and mother stayed in their own house but we brothers were sent to work for large and wealthy families. We worked very hard. Our parents had land, but they had no draught animals, no bullocks, so how could the land be ploughed and cultivated? In such a situation all five of us brothers lived in another's house. (Hari, male, 42 years, Bhanupratappur).

Our condition was really bad. Our father used to go for wage labour only sometimes, but mostly he used to work on our fields. We had 7-8 acres of land then, and we depended on agriculture. There was no other business or livelihood. Whatever we were able to

produce, we used to consume that and once it was finished we used to come to village for work. The monsoon period was always tough for us, because our paddy used to be exhausted at that time and we had nothing to eat at home. So we had to ask for money to buy paddy and would it back with interest only after harvest. That is the kind of hardship we had. We sometimes went hungry until the paddy was harvested. (Rakesh, male, 28 years, Narharpur).

These stories of the hunger and deprivation that had characterised the process of growing up were widespread among both men and women and had continued into their adult years - till '20 years ago' . We used our interviews to explore in greater detail whether they viewed the hardships they had experienced, and were continuing to experience, as individual misfortune, as part of an inevitable social order or whether they regarded any of these experiences as evidence of injustice. The discussion suggested that both men and women viewed certain aspects of their lives as manifestations of injustice. While there was some overlap in their accounts of injustice, there was also considerable divergence.

3.3 Male narratives about injustice

Discrimination and stigma in the 'outside' world

The men in our study had far more interaction with the outside world than the women. As a result, they were more likely to come face to face with the behaviour and attitudes of outsiders to their community. These interactions took place most often when Gond men were trying to access special government provisions for their community and were characterised by complex bureaucratic hurdles, paperwork that got lost and the multiple visits to government offices: *When they ask us to submit our applications for assistance to get our fields levelled, or other work, we submit the paperwork to them, but then we have no idea what happens after that. Some 2 or 3 years will have passed and that work has still not been sanctioned.*

They told us that their applications for land titles under the Forest Rights Act often lay pending with the administration, despite the bribes they had paid: *We have taken a lot of efforts to demand the land, we also paid bribes for it but still the officials have not given the titles yet, despite reassurances from the officers* (male FGD, Narharpur). It also appeared that despite the constitutional reservations of jobs in the public sector, the payment of bribes had now become common, particularly as rising levels of education within SC/ST communities meant that many more were now competing for these jobs.

Along with the practical obstacles that Gond men faced in their efforts to claim their entitlements, obstacles that were likely to be encountered by other poor people, their contact with the official domain also brought them face to face with their despised status in the eyes of the outside world For all their pride in their Gond identity, these encounters made them acutely aware of the contempt with which they were regarded by 'outsiders':

In the rest of Chhattisgarh, they call us 'jungaliya' (wild forest people). They say that Gond people are always drunk, they only like to catch fish and feast and stay merry. All communities do this, but it is only the Gonds who get a bad name (Male FGD, Narharpur).

All our beliefs are being negated by government and they are terming it as superstition, they don't accept our gods and call us backward…We are adivasis … Wherever and whenever we speak, we always say the wrong thing… When outsiders come and ask for water, we give it and they then enter and loot our homes. The Bastariya Gonds are the lowest on the ladder.

Hari (male, 42 years, Bhanupratappur) described himself as only half a man (*aadha aadmi*), a *jungaliya* , in comparison to the government officials and educated people that he encountered:

When people come to our village…sahebs from the government, how do we behave with them? We are full jungaliyas in their presence. I myself don't fight or argue or use abusive language like many others do. There is no difference between illiterate people like me and the more educated in terms of behaving well and speaking respectfully and politely. But there is always this thought in my mind that I am illiterate and I am ignorant of things.

Wealth inequalities within the community

The men we interviewed were initially reluctant to acknowledge any inequalities within the community, responding to questions on this with neutral responses such as 'all Gonds are equal' or 'there is no discrimination amongst us'. It was only when we asked them to use the idea of a ladder as a metaphor for the distribution of wealth within the community and to describe their own position within it that the discussion became more impassioned. They believed that they had failed to prosper because of inequalities within the community referring in particular to the exploitative wages paid to them by those at the top of the wealth ladder and to the fear and hunger that kept them trapped in relations of dependence on wealthy patrons:

The people at top of the ladder have a lot of wealth, they make progress. Those at the bottom are daily labourers, entire families work as daily labourers. People like us at the bottom of the ladder remain where we are, we are unable to climb to the next rung of the ladder. For example, suppose there are five members in our family and, between us, we earn 500 rupees wages in a day. We will go to the market, buy rice, vegetables, spices and that will be the end of our 500 rupees. How are we to progress if we have nothing left after buying food? Hari (male, 42 years, Bhanupratappur)

We had no wealth so we had to labour. It was only after they had used up our labour and ground down our bodies that we were given food to eat. Those who have a lot of land and wealth, they will progress, won't they? Wealth begets wealth. We lived and worked as labour in their houses for the entire year. They would not pay enough so we were trapped, we were completely dependent on these big malguzars for our daily subsistence. As long as we gave them our labour, they would help us when we faced a food shortage. But if we did not work for them, they would turn us away when we were hungry, they would say, go to the people you work for and ask them for rice and dal. So with hunger came fear: we were afraid of hunger and so we did not dare speak out or ask for higher wages. (Bansi)

Participants in the male FGD in Bhanuprattappur pointed out how the influence of wealthier families extended beyond the boundaries of the community into the domain of the official:

Our elders used to tell us that only those with a lot of land would go for meetings with government officials because they were the ones who knew the benefits of the knowledge and information provided in these forums. As a result they got titles in their names. Those who were preoccupied with earning a living, who were engaged with shifting cultivation, who had to move here and there in search of work, had very little land in their names because they could not attend these meetings… whenever profitable opportunities come this way, those who are able to attend the meetings will cancel the names of others from the list.

Male attitudes to gender inequality

Gender did not feature in men's discussions about injustice. While they acknowledged that there were differences in the treatment of men and women within the community, they tended to justify them in terms that neutralized their discriminatory implications. For instance, many men attributed the lower levels of education among women to their lack of ability and aspirations. Pritam (male, 42 years, Narharpur) gave the following simple explanation for why he was educated and not his sisters: *My sisters failed at school examinations so their education was stopped. I kept passing my exams so my education continued.*

Balaram denied there was any unequal treatment between boys and girls in the community, speaking only of a 'little' difference in their responsibilities:

We bring up our daughters and sons in the same manner. We send both to school from childhood, pay attention to the education of both. We don't differentiate in the eating and drinking of the two. The only little difference is that girls cook the food and wash the clothes. Boys sit to eat the food and just throw off their clothes once they are dirty. If parents have to go somewhere, then the sister is supposed to wash the brother's clothes. Within the house the boys feed the cattle hay, take the cattle to the field and plough the field. They come home and again go back to the field in the evening to cut wood. The wood is carried back by the women.

Similarly, men tended to justify the exclusion of women from community forums in terms of their temperament and inadequacies. According to Narayan Singh (male, 40 years, Narharpur): *There is a difference in how men and women think.... Women don't have a sense of what to talk about, when and where..... Women gossip and spread rumours. Men keep matters to themselves they don't share it with others ...* Dharam Singh (male, 40 years, Narharpur) pointed to their mobility constraints as the reason for their limited participation: *Women will not be able to travel alone to different villages, therefore they are not encouraged too much.*

Very few men expressed concern about domestic violence within the community. They believed that it was kept within acceptable limits by clearly specified community norms which governed men's right to beat their wives and equally clear norms which forbade women, under any circumstances, to raise their hands against their husbands.

It is alright for a man to give a woman one or two slaps with the hand. If he hits her with his shoes, a penalty is levied on him. But men cannot be touched. A woman cannot hit

a man, raise her hand on him. Even if a man slaps her a couple of times, she cannot retaliate or hit him. If this happens then the community levies a penalty on her . Naresh (male, 45 years, Bhanupratappur).

Among us Gonds, the husband is considered akin to an important deity. If a woman by any chance happens to hit her husband, then we give her a huge social punishment: a goat has to be sacrificed, rituals have to be completed. If you hit your God, you must go through these punishments. And if she does not agree, we expel her from the samaj. Ratiram (male, 52 years, Bhanupratatppur).

Men's lack of concern about domestic violence also surfaced in their discussions about alcohol consumption. Alcohol is integral to Gond rituals and lifestyle and had traditionally been drunk only during festivals. This was no longer the case and alcoholism had become a major problem within the community[19]. The men we interviewed acknowledged this but framed its negative impact in terms of the health of individuals, its adverse influence on boys' education and its contribution to poverty and unemployment: *What we see is that with education, there has been improvement and reform, there has been improvement in farming techniques but there has been no change in alcohol consumption. You see, it is like this: father drinks so son also follows that path and drinks.* (Balaram). They rarely made the link between alcoholism and domestic violence and its implications for women's bodily integrity and mental wellbeing.

Finally, men were adamant in their rejection of any question of gender equality in relation to land rights. They did not believe that national legislation regarding women's equal rights to ancestral property could override the norms of the community. They condemned the idea of women turning to the law to claim their rights. Any woman who took her claims to court could expect to be rejected by her family and community in accordance with Gond rules, whether or not the court upheld her claim.

One reason for their resistance was that if women were allowed to inherit land along with men, it would lead to the excessive sub-division of land into unviable sized holdings.

Suppose you have five daughters and all ask for their share, what can you do? How many can you give to? That is why we only follow government rules up to a point, we believe that girls should be kept away from property. Today one person will ask, tomorrow another person, how much can you give, how much can you take?

They were also concerned that if Gond women were given land rights, outsiders would seek to marry them in order to gain access to their land. Gond norms governing women's marriage to outsiders were particularly strict because of this fear, but some of the men in the FGDs wanted further legal guarantees: *There should be a law that just as outsiders cannot buy land belonging to Schedule 5 communities, they cannot marry women from scheduled tribes* (male FGD, Narharpur). A strong anti-immigrant theme ran through these discussions.

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[19]   The high incidence of alcoholism among India's most marginalized groups has been documented by Prabhu et al (2010).

3.3 Female narratives about injustice

Shared injustices

Some of the experiences that women deemed unjust overlapped with those of men. Like men, they were aware of inequalities in wealth and privilege within the community and its implications for those at the bottom. Saraswati (female, 45 years, Bhanupratappur) used the idea of the wealth ladder to illustrate her point:

> *At the bottom of the ladder is the ground. Life for people who are at this level is bad. I will explain why with the example of lentils. If lentils are on the ground and just left there, they will go bad won't it? Until and unless, you take those lentils up the ladder and dry them in the sun on the roof, they will just rot away on the ground. They will get spoilt and then you will have to throw them away. That is how poor people get thrown away. Poor people have to understand and learn properly, only then will we be able to climb. Otherwise, like now, you are the kind of person that gets thrown away.*

In common with men, women had experienced discrimination and harassment at the hands of outsiders, particularly those responsible for administering their entitlements. A women's FGD in Narharpur spoke of the problems they encountered when they went to collect their MGNREGS wages from the nearest bank:

> *I think the ones who sit on the chair create problems for us – the bank officials…Women have to travel from so far to get to the bank, but they don't consider this…. within a few hours, they stop disbursing money. Are there transport facilities available for us? How far have we had to come? It takes us an hour to reach the bus stand from here, sometimes we wait for over an hour to get a bus and pay a fare of 10 rupees to reach the bank. And yet, there is no guarantee that we will get the money when we arrive. It is not about the bus fare, but about the time that is wasted. We are all daily wage workers. Sometimes we are late in reaching the bank.*

A number of women spoke of the corruption of those responsible for administering MNREGS payments:

> *Last month I withdrew 3,000 rupees from the bank. When I got my cash transactions entered into the bank passbook, I realised Rs. 4,000 had been withdrawn from my account. I went with my nephew to the bank and demanded to check the withdrawal slip, and we were able to uncover the dishonesty of the bank officer. I am uneducated but I was confident that I had withdrawn 3,000 rupees* (Women's FGD, Narharpur)

Some of the discrimination that women experienced at the hands of officials had gendered undertones. This was particularly the case when it came to seeking caste certificates for their children. Because they were required to name the father of the child in order to apply, women who were separated from their husbands needed them to acknowledge paternity. If this was withheld, not only were women unable to obtain the certificate but it also opened them to accusations of immorality by officials, 'a different kind of humiliation':

> *If a woman approaches the police and says that her child doesn't have a father, then what will be the police's response? They will accuse the woman of having loose moral character. In the police station and the courts, we feel humiliated. It is a different kind of humiliation to when people ask for bribes.* (Women's FGD, Narharpur)

And like men, the women were aware of the derogatory opinions held about their community by outsiders: "*The roads improve, the dams are built, but the Gond won't improve. Why? How would we know? Because they drink mahua". That is what they say about us. They say it as a joke, but jokes also have a thought behind them….We have gods, but they do not support us in finding success. Because of that we remain at the bottom and we look upwards at the top… In today's world, everyone changes….but the Gond people remain at the bottom and all the other castes are at the top.*

Gender asymmetries in workloads

Along with these shared experiences of injustices within and outside the community, there were also aspects of injustice which reflected women's subordinate status within the community. While men explained women's lower levels of education in terms of their limited ability and aspirations and of the 'little' difference in the gender division of labour, women pointed to other explanations. One related to the role ascribed to them and the limits it placed on their aspirations.   Kamita (female, 54 years, Bhanupratappur) told us her view of why none of the girls in her family had gone to school: *We were told that you need to learn this work at home so that when you go to another house after marriage you will be prepared for your responsibilities. So we wanted to learn the work, we did not go to school, but stayed home, we did not even go out in the village.*

Another related to their work burdens. Many spoke of having to shoulder primary responsibility for unpaid reproductive activities from an early age, at the same time as contributing to household earnings along with men. Samotin (*female, age 36, Bhanupratappur*) had worked from childhood as a domestic in other people's homes. She recalled the daily exhaustion of her work burden that had left her without the energy or motivation to engage with additional school work:

> *I used to work all day in people's homes. I would get some lentils, grains or whatever food and then bring it home to cook and eat - that's how we survived. Only by working hard all day could we manage an evening meal. And if you went to school you required books, stationery, clothes…So if you work all day, you manage to eat in the evening, if you keep going to school, how can you manage what you need? This is why I left school (*Samotin).

As women were bitterly aware, these asymmetries in responsibilities and workloads continued to curtail their aspirations and opportunities in later life:

Men seldom work for the full eight hours of their wage work. They may work for 6-7 hours and then return home and fall asleep. Whereas even if a woman has worked from morning eight to five pm in daily wage work, she will come home and do all the household chores-washing utensils, cooking food …(Women's FGD Narharpur).

Women do not have many resources to live on … they get by with day labour, cleaning dishes, sweeping homes and whitewashing houses in order earn a daily wage. Women think to themselves: Oh God, did you give me birth only to clean dishes in another person's house? If you had given me a good mind so I did not have to clean dishes or sweep other homes in order to feed myself, I could have lived well (Saraswati).

Institutionalized male power and women's life choices

Women spoke of their resentment of the power of dominant men within the family, backed by the authority of the community, to make strategic life choices on their behalf. They spoke in particular of decisions relating to marriage. While the survey suggested that sizeable percentages of both men and women had not married out of choice (Table 2), it was almost exclusively women who spoke of this as a form of oppression, perhaps because it was easier for men to leave their wives and remarry or take other wives. By contrast, as we noted earlier, women were under intense community pressure to remain with their husbands regardless of their behaviour.

Saraswati recalled how young and frightened she had been at the age of 12 when her marriage was being arranged: there had been no space for to voice her objections. She continued to view the community as a source of fear and oppression in her life today.

> *I was married at 12 the first time… I was scared, I had to respect the Elders. What had to happen had to happen, that was the way it was- there was no space to speak or express your wishes. There was no way one could say, I don't want to do this or I don't want to go there. Parents would admonish us not to talk like that. They would get the Siyans to talk to the young person and there was no way anyone could oppose their decision. What I am still most scared today is our samaj… there is a lot of pressure and oppression even now.*

Samotin had expressed her objections to the man chosen for her because he was much older than her and had been married before, but had to defer to her grandfather's wishes. Her only other option would have been to leave the community and she had nowhere to go:

> *My grandfather chose this person and said just this to me: 'Given that you are an orphan, you know that wherever you look for a husband, it will only be to married men. What is important for you to know and understand is that you will eat as long as you work and bring some money in. If your character is good and you work hard and earn a living, then the fact that he was married once already doesn't matter. His age is his business and your age is your business His age may be more than yours but that is not affecting your age, is it?'*

The greater ease with which men could remarry, their right to co-wives, was regarded by a number of women as a further source of injustice because it gave men a licence for irresponsible behaviour:

> *Sometimes people in this village have seen that men bring home another woman... they throw this one out or bring the other one in when the first wife is still around. Some men sometimes bring two or three, even while the first wife is still living there. When they bring more wives, then you are frightened. Your parents tell you to stay with him, whether he abuses you or fights with you, nobody cares. Your parents say if you don't keep quiet your husband will throw you out. Where is there for women to be heard if the man brings home a second wife? If my husband brings in another woman and we don't get along and I leave him, then the community will point a finger at me. They will say: she left her husband and went to live in her maternal home.* (Women's FGD, Narharpur)

The institutionalized nature of male power over women's life choices was illustrated by the case of Poonam, a 35 year old woman, who had left her husband when he brought home a second wife and returned to her village home with her young daughter. He complained to the Gond circle of Elders in her village that she had no right to abandon her duties as a wife and that she had no right to take their daughter who belonged to him. The Elders rejected his first claim and formalized their separation but accepted his second claim since according to Gond rules, the father has sole guardianship and custody over children. Despite Poonam's attempt to appeal against their decision, the Elders stood firm: *we don't allow women to put their names on the caste certificate'.* They also ruled that if she did not return her daughter, both she and her parents would be excommunicated.

Poonam left their village and moved to a nearby town where she filed a legal case for the custody of her daughter. Her parents had to perform rituals to express their remorse, 'officially' severed their ties with their daughter and were assimilated back into the community. Poonam however was excommunicated and can no longer visit her parents in the village or participate in any community rituals.

Institutionalized male power and violence against women

We noted that the men we spoke to appeared to consider violence against women to be acceptable as long as it was within the limits prescribed by community norms. And while they recognized the growing problem of alcoholism – many had grown up with alcoholic fathers - they appeared to discount its link to domestic violence. Many women, on the other hand, were continuing to experience the link first hand within their marriages. Satyawati (female, 42 years, Narharpur) had been married off by her parents at a very young age to an alcoholic and abusive husband:

My husband drinks a lot, he drinks every day…Many people who drink go to sleep once they are done, but he is not like that. He starts shouting and abusing.. he beats me bitterly. I have been so afraid that I have run away and slept in another house out of fear .. Who knows that whether in a drunken state, he might not actually kill me…he often threatens me, he says I will kill you, I will cut you to pieces.. I don't know if he had a drinking problem from before I married him.. But they wouldn't have told me..…

She found out after her marriage that he was rumoured to have driven his first wife to drown herself and her children in a well. The entire community had known about his abusive behaviour but no one had spoken out. She feared for her own life but there was no one she could turn to. Nor could she leave him: *Where will I go? My parents are no longer alive ….who is there for me? I sometimes think about it, but it has been more than twenty years that he has been beating me, abusing me, thrashing me and I have still not gone anywhere.*

Saraswati, who spoke earlier about being married off at the age of 12, was the only woman in our qualitative sample who had taken the decision to flee her alcoholic and abusive husband while she was pregnant. She described in detail what had driven her to this action:

Food was not an issue, but the tension, the drinking and violence all the time, who deserves to live like this? What man takes a daughter away from her mother saying that he will take care of her and then tries to beat her to death, tells her she is not allowed to speak with anyone or see anyone except him? How can I not talk to anyone else but him?

Don't I live in the family? Am I not part of the community? God gave me two eyes and two ears – was it so that I could only look at and listen to one person? ……. I had to leave because of the pain and misery of the marriage. If I had not left the day I did, I would not have left that place alive. I got the courage to leave from my mind, from my anger….. When the body gets hurt and beaten like that, the mind suddenly wakes up, the body tells you that you have a mind and your anger rises.. and in that anger I left the house at 4 am in the morning- I told myself I will not take so much violence. That our mind resides in our body is something one only realises after getting that badly beaten. So I got that beating and it made me apply my mind - about how I would return to my village.

While the fact that community norms endorsed male violence left women with no recourse to its forums to seek justice, the threat posed to community honour made it difficult for them to take their grievances to external authorities. As Malti Kola (female, 24, Bhanupratappur) told us, the injustices suffered by women took second place to the reputation of men and the honour of the community. She was particularly incensed by the case of a little girl who had been sexually assaulted by a man in their community and the refusal of the Elders to go to the law:

I never thought such a tragedy could happen to someone so young. She did not even understand what was happening. … I was very angry. I thought we should have reported it to police, but the village forum did not support this since his mother accused us of doing witchcraft to her son. He had not stepped out of the house for three days- he had not slept or eaten anything. But my mother went to the village elders and they found him guilty and fined him. People in the community told us, 'Please do not take this matter further as his future will be spoilt'. We protested that when that the girl grows up, how is she going to feel when she finds out that we did not take the matter any further and punish him? However, there was no consensus among the village elders.

One point to make is that the frequency with which violence featured in women's accounts of their life histories as well as in the focus group discussions was not reflected in our survey where only 22% of women said that they had experienced violence some time in their lives along with 18% of men. These figures went down to 13% and 16% respectively when the question was about violence in the past 3 years. We discussed this mismatch between the high frequency with which violence was discussed in our qualitative interviews and the low frequency with which it was reported in the survey when we had our feedback focus group discussion[20]. Their responses are summarized in Box 1.

Box 1: Feedback on our findings: the issue of violence

The women in our feedback group believed that the incidence of domestic violence had been seriously under-reported in the survey because of the shame and humiliation associated with it. Asked how many women they thought had experienced violence in their lives, their initial response was 10 out of 10 women rather than the reported 2 out of 10 but after some discussion, they decided that the estimates were likely to be 5 out of 10 women,

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[20] It should be noted that various studies have reported that women tend to under-report their experience of violence in surveys, sometimes because they take it as a routine aspect of their lives and not worth reporting and sometimes because they feel ashamed. This appeared to be the case in our survey as well.

mainly at the hands of male members of the family, and 1.5 men for every 10 men, most often at the hands of non-family men. The main reasons why women were beaten were that they had not prepared meals properly, that men had been drinking and become violent, that women had gone to SHG meetings, that husbands were jealous and suspicious, that women were having relationships outside marriage. The main reasons why men experienced violence was getting into fights after drinking, or attempting to intervene in such fights, drinking during weddings and celebrations, arguments over land, encountering abusive language or attempted theft.

Exclusion from land rights

The final issue which featured in women's discussions of gender injustice related to their land rights. In this, as in the other issues, women had very different views from men. While men upheld the patrilineal norms of the community as just and logical, women complained about the precarious nature of their rights. They pointed out that while national legislation recognized the equal rights of children to ancestral property, sisters were put under considerable pressure by the community to waive their rights to their brothers. In many cases, they said that they preferred not to claim their rights in order to maintain a harmonious relationship with their brothers: *we are treated with dignity in our brothers' home and the road connecting us does not fracture.* But even where there were no male siblings, women could be deprived of their claims if they had to rely on a male member of the family network to perform the death rituals for a deceased parent as it was his right to, for some – or even all - of the land in exchange. And others only held land in temporary custody for sons who were too young to claim it.

There were certain categories of women for whom insecurity of property rights was a particularly acute problem, such as daughters responsible for looking after elderly parents or women whose marriages were unstable or had broken down. Samotin who had left her violent husband and returned to her village spoke of the difficulties she faced in building a house of her own. Although she was entitled to benefit from the government's subsidized housing scheme, she was not able to take advantage of it because her brother refused to give her a share of their ancestral land:

> *I have to live with a lot of tension - not because of my marriage breakdown but because of life.. I used to worry about life before but not now. Now land is the big source of tension in my life. I must have my 5 decimals of land from our parents. Whether it is through the administration or the State, I must be able to build my house. This is what I am trying to tell everyone. Everyone has land in their name- much more than they need- how is the government going to stop them? I am also the daughter of this land- I was born here too- I too have a right. That is my right as a part of this village.*

As a mother too, she was worried that without her ex-husband acknowledging paternity, her son could never lay claim to his father's ancestral land or be able to access his entitlements as an adivasi.

The discriminatory aspects of community norms led some of women in the community to look towards the state for justice. For instance, a widow told us that she had already prepared a title deed in the name of her only daughter because she was afraid that her husband's male relatives might try to defraud or intimidate her daughter after her mother had died. She hoped that the legal system would protect her daughter's rights and ensure that the land was transferred according to the laws of the land.

Others were not sure that it was worth going to the law. They were well aware of attitudes within the community to such a course of action. They worried that if a woman decided to take her case to court, there was no guarantee that she would win it and in the meanwhile, her life within her community would become very difficult: *In some instances, even if the patwari intervenes in these matters, the people of the village continue to make trouble for you. She would be seen as 'ulta kanoon' (upturning the law). She will not get support of the villagers and she will be very scared. She may also face ostracization* (Women's FGD Bhanupratappur.).

Women's views on community norms and gender inequality

Patriarchal oppression took a toll on the lives of women and children, both in terms of the physical harm it inflicted as well as its costs for their emotional wellbeing. The fact that much of it played out within the intimate relations of family life and that it was condoned by the community, leaving them nowhere to go for justice explains the strong sense of isolation and hopelessness expressed by some of the women in our study. Satya whose description of her husband's abusive behaviour was cited earlier spoke of the daily fear and humiliation that she suffered in silence:

God knows when my fate will improve….My life has been full of struggle from the beginning and I do not see it changing. All the village people know of this. I have lived in a suffocated way until now. My life is just suffocation. Even if I want a better life, there is no way it can happen. Seeing him drink every day, my mind is always in turmoil. He abuses me in filthy language all the time. My mind is numbed from the abuse he hurls at me… Who can I tell my troubles to when he abuses and beats me? I keep it all in my mind, in my inner mind. I don't express it, I don't let it out. I don't feel happy in anything. It is what it is and that is all. I don't think about clothes and how I look/ I just want to manage to stay alive, that is all.

Saraswati spoke more generally of the hopelessness of women's lives, circumscribed by the community to home and work, unable to share their sorrows with anyone:

Women have lived with a lot of sorrow because they had to live within the home and work, they had not seen anything of the world, had not learnt how to speak… the identity of Gond has been etched on this forehead of mine so I am doomed to live a life of misery. You live like this and then die. Who knows? Nobody knows.

But as the discussion also makes clear, many of the women who narrated their personal experiences of gender inequality did not perceive them as their individual misfortune or their collective fate but as manifestations of injustices that were woven into the fabric of community

norms and traditions. We suggest that this reflected the influence of their membership of self-help groups and will discuss the process by which change happened later in the paper.

Recognition of the systemic nature of gender justice was evident in generalized language in which it was described by many women, their references to the community norms and practices which underpinned it and their bitterness about the *baba jat* (the male caste) who benefited from and perpetuated it. This was how a women's FGD (Bhanupratappur) articulated their sense of injustice:

Men and women work equally but there is greater recognition of men's work. Men plough and women plough, both work equally but still there is more importance given to men. When we go for government employment guarantee work (MNREGS) both men and women have to cut earth, but when we return home, women still have to do all the household chores, the work at home. The men do not do it. If a man gets tired, he will ask his wife for 20 rupees so he can purchase alcohol. Men have more rights even though women do more work because they have the right to hit women. Women do not have that right. If women abuse men, men will hit them. But if women retaliate by hitting back, society will penalize them. Why this is the case is not clear, it has been happening since the days of our ancestors. These rules are made by men, by male Elders…The state says that daughters must have equal rights with the sons but nobody says that women should have the same rights as men or that wives should have the same rights as the husbands. This we have never heard. When they talk of rights they never talk of equal rights for a wife.

Sangita (female, 29 years, Bhanupratappur) spoke of her frustrations with a culture which burdened women with responsibilities but denied them rights, including the right to speak:

Women should just earn and keep quiet is the way that people think here. I do not like this way of thinking. Women folk should have same rights as men folk...women folk are not behind the men folk, they are equal. Women run the house, do farming, look after the children, look after their education - for everything it is the woman. Men folk actually don't do very much, just a little bit of work in the fields…We are, after all, mahila jat (the female caste). My heart and mind feel that wherever my home may be, I would like to be an equal there. Both of us should be equal. What is the point of discriminating against people?

Saraswati who had spoken about the prosperity of those at the top of the wealth ladder was emphatic that it was men who dominated these positions, who had been treated at the 'precious ones' from childhood so that it was inevitable that they would rise to the top:

Who is at the top? Men of course. They know all the rules. Everywhere in society, men are on the higher levels, everyone knows that. When right from the beginning, we make the son 'the precious one', then there is no other way for him but to go higher up the ladder. And the daughter, begins and lives in weakness, she cleans dishes so how will she ever go up the ladder. We give more respect to the son and so they climb faster. If we had done the opposite, given more respect to the girl instead of boys, the situation would have been very different.

She also offered a succinct summary of men's arbitrary use of interpretive authority conferred on them by the community to impose their accounts of reality while dismissing those offered by women: W*hen men say wrong things, they prove them right. When they say right things, they are right anyway. So they are always right. On the other hand, when women say right*

things, the men prove them wrong, and when the women say wrong things, of course they are wrong. So women are always wrong.

3.4 Gendered narratives about 'us' and 'them'

Threaded through these various reflections by men and women on their experiences as members of the Gond community were observations that suggested they viewed the community in somewhat different terms. Men were more likely to define their identity as Gonds in opposition to non-Gonds, to construct 'the outside' as a threat. As we noted, some wanted a law to prevent outsiders from marrying Gond women because it weakened the community's rights to land. Others expressed concern that the outlawing of discrimination based on 'untouchability' by the Indian constitution had encouraged inter-dining and inter-marriage among members of different communities and was blurring boundaries between them:

> *Ever since Indira Gandhi, untouchability has been abolished. If this practice had been continued, this confusion would not have happened…Earlier the people of our community would not dine with other communities like Gadha, Chamra and Lohar (dalit) communities ....We are in danger of loss because of all this... Our samaj is getting destroyed* . (Men's FGD, Bhanupratatppur).

They worried that these interactions with the outside world were weakening their own system of justice and its effectiveness in defending the community's way of life. They believed that many members were becoming less willing to acknowledge the verdict of their elders or to respect boycotts and sanctions imposed on erring individuals and families. They contrasted this unfavourably with earlier times when '*even families in neighbouring villages would not give (erring) families water from their wells or fire from their hearths.*

Women had led more circumscribed lives than men both within their communities, where they were confined to home and field, as well as outside it. Not only were their interactions with 'outsiders' far more limited than those of men, but they were also less well-versed with the official taxonomies of their clans and with the complex rules and rituals that governed different aspects of their lives: *Basically, we just know we are all Gonds, we don't know all that much about the gods and rituals.*

They were less likely than men to define themselves as Gonds in opposition to non-Gonds and more likely to define themselves through comparisons with the other communities with whom they lived. As a result, their sense of identity revolved around the small observed differences between similar groups of people, including other Gond clans, rather than around an unbridgeable gulf between Gonds and the rest of the world.

This may explain why women appear to be less invested than men in maintaining distinct boundaries between different groups. A women's FGD in Bhanupratappur for instance expressed a fairly flexible view about inter-community dining, blaming the Elders for unnecessary restrictions: *These restrictions on inter-dining are largely enforced within the village, once you are outside, people don't follow them... These restrictions are imposed on us by the Elders…We all eat in the houses of other communities, but we remain discreet about it. In our mother's time it was very different, things were very strict.*

 They too alluded to the diminishing influence of the traditional systems of justice in the face of outside influence, but they did not appear as troubled by this prospect as men were. In

fact, in the face of the injustices they faced within their own community, the outside world appeared to hold out the promise of fairer treatment. So for instance they contrasted the egalitarian treatment that characterised their work on the MGNREGS, where they did the same work as men, and were (in principle) paid the same wages, with the full responsibility for domestic work that community norms expected them to take on once they came home. It was also to the official legal system that some of these women looked for the justice they did not expect to find in their own community forums whether it was in relation to land, violence against women or greater equality of rights.

4. Building 'invited' and 'autonomous' spaces for women's collective action

4.1 PRADAN and BIHAN: differences in their strategies

The question we turn to next is whether the efforts of PRADAN and BIHAN to organize women from the Gond community has made any difference to their experience of poverty and injustice within the community. Both organizations receive funding from the Indian government's National Rural Livelihoods Mission which began in 2011 with the goal of reducing poverty through the promotion of diversified opportunities for gainful employment (NRLM Mission Document, 2015).

The National Mission works through State Rural Livelihood Missions (SRLMs) to set up self-help groups of women as grassroots institutions through which state resources can be distributed. BIHAN is the name of the SRLM set up in the state of Chattisgarh. In Kanker district, where our study is located, BIHAN is directly responsible for implementation in the administrative block of Narharpur. It works in partnership with PRADAN in the administrative block of Bhanupratappur. PRADAN, as we noted, is a long-standing national NGO and a pioneer of the SHG approach while BIHAN came into being with the setting up of the SRLM in the state.

Both PRADAN and BIHAN began work in Kanker district in 2013. By 2017, PRADAN had established 590 SHGs in Bhanupratappur while BIHAN had established 1,689 SHGs in Narharpur (Table 5a). As the table shows, most of their members were adivasis. Our qualitative discussions revealed that there had been previous attempts, dating back to 2003, to form SHGs by local government officials[21] but these, according to a number of the women's FGDs, had not functioned very well: *The unity among members was not very strong.. we did not learn or know much. We just saved*. By contrast, it was widely agreed that both PRADAN and BIHAN SHGs were functioning far better: our survey reported that 98% of their members participated regularly in SHG meetings.

The two organizations can be seen as concrete manifestations of the 'outside world' of government and civil society in the lives of the Gond community. Both set out to change certain aspects of women's lives and both placed SHGs at the heart of their strategy.   But there were a number of differences in their visions and strategies which are important to

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[21] Around 25 women (out of the 109) in our Narharpur survey and 16 (out of 113) in our Bhanupratappur survey had been involved in these.

highlight because they explain some of the differences in the findings we report with regard to their achievements.

First of all, the fact that BIHAN is run by the government while PRADAN is an NGO had implications for how they were received within the community. BIHAN SHGs were seen, and with justification, as a conduit for accessing various government schemes. As a result, women in Narharpur were actively encouraged by their families to join. By contrast, women in Bhanupratappur faced strong resistance from their families who considered that PRADAN was merely taking women away from their normal responsibilities without offering compensatory access to new resources.

Secondly, BIHAN's SHGs were formed by a cadre of field staff who had been recruited from the government-run Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty[22], a programme in the state of Andhra Pradesh where the SHG strategy was considered to have been particularly successful. These women were given intensive training in the local languages of Hindi and Chhattisgarhi in order that they could carry out field-level responsibility for the promotion of SHGs while BIHAN staff provided overall management. PRADAN's field workers, like the rest of PRADAN staff, were recruited with a baccalaureate in the professions (e.g. agriculture, engineering, veterinary sciences) or a Master's degree in any discipline, and a good academic record. Each field worker subsequently underwent a twelve-month long Development Apprenticeship programme preparing them for grassroots development work. Full-time PRADAN staff were thus directly responsible for forming and working with the SHGs.

Thirdly, both PRADAN and BIHAN saw SHGs as the organizational means through which they could provide their members with access to savings, credit and government anti-poverty programs in order to move them out of poverty. Both federated their SHGs into Village Organisations (VOs) which played a financial intermediation role between SHGs and government funds. But other elements of their livelihood programmes differed. In particular, PRADAN placed greater emphasis than BIHAN on the provision of skills training and technical expertise to supplement its financial services. It also conducted regular meetings at community level with both men and women in order to involve them in joint planning, implementing and reviewing their livelihood strategies.

Fourth, the two organizations differed in their attention to women's political capabilities. Both encouraged women to participate in official forums at the local level. An additional initiative taken by BIHAN was the organization of quarterly *aam sabha*s, cluster level meetings, for women in the Narharpur block. These provided a new forum for women to discuss issues of interest to them, along with the village-wide discussions that took place in the *gram sabha*. In addition, as a result of the government's increasing focus on women as front-line agents in anti-poverty programmes, it put pressure on Gond Elders at the district level to include set up *mahila mandal*s (women's committees) at different levels so as to encourage their participation in *samajik* forums.

PRADAN took a different route to promoting women's voice and presence in the public domain. It set up specialized subcommittees in their Village Organizations to take

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[22] Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP) is an autonomous society set up in Andhra Pradesh in 2000 to mobilize SHGs for livelihood enhancement and employment generation for the poor. The success of this initiative led to the formation of other such societies (including BIHAN) across different states in India.

responsibility for addressing gender inequality in four specific areas: women's rights and entitlements in relation to the state; gender injustices such as violence against women; livelihoods promotion; and strengthening SHG capacity, particularly their capacity for self-governance.

Finally, the future envisaged for SHGS differed between the organizations in ways that had implications for their current strategies. BIHAN envisaged continued support for SHGs into the foreseeable future because the government perceived them as a grassroots administrative structure for the implementation for various anti-poverty programs. It can thus be seen as creating 'invited spaces' for women's participation, spaces created 'from above' by powerful institutions to achieve goals that were externally determined (Brock et al. 2001). The goal of PRADAN, on the other hand, was to promote SHGs as self-governing organizations to develop their own goals and to build strategic partnerships with relevant local actors in order to achieve them. It was thus seeking to construct 'autonomous spaces' through independent forms of social action by women. While these effort to open up these new spaces were initially led by PRADAN rather than self-generated, PRADAN's strategy was to gradually disengage as groups matured and were able to take on the task of forming new groups themselves.

In the rest of this section, we explore the practical and strategic changes that appear to have been brought about in the lives of men and women through the efforts of the two organizations. First however, a brief note to clarify our methodology for doing so. The cross-sectional nature of our survey rules out the possibility of making any statements about changes in poverty, inequality or political participation over time, let alone being able to attribute these changes to the organizations we are studying. Instead, we focus on different elements of the strategies used by the two programmes which are specifically intended as the mechanisms through which they hoped to achieve their goals. We explore what the survey tells us about how these mechanisms were viewed in the community and the extent to which they can plausibly be linked to some of the outcomes it documents. We complement this analysis with what the qualitative interviews tell us about how men and women viewed the two programmes, what changes they attributed to them and how they believed that these changes had occurred.

4.2 Changing livelihoods

While our life history interviews served to establish that the men and women in our study had experienced considerable hunger and poverty when they were growing up and into adulthood, our survey suggested that considerable progress had been made since then (Tables 1, 2 and 3). The households in the survey no longer reported periods of hunger, they were able to meet their food needs through own cultivation for much of the year, they reported considerable diversity of diet and had been able to purchase various producer and consumer assets. We can therefore be confident that their situation has improved over time. To what extent could the livelihood support provided by the two organizations have contributed to these changes?

Savings and Credit

At the core of the programme activities of both BIHAN and PRADAN is the promotion of savings and lending, with funds for loans initially self-generated from the pooled savings of the SHGs but subsequently accessed through government programs. This priority reflects the fact that both organizations were working in highly cash-strapped economies in which shortfalls in basic survival needs, emergency funds and investible surpluses were part of the everyday realities of their membership.

According to Table 6, of various reasons listed in the survey questionnaire for valuing SHG membership, the ability to save with SHGs, access to emergency funds and credit for working capital were the three that were ranked highest in both locations. In fact, the ability to save was ranked highest by men and women in both locations, although women were more likely to do so than men (59% compared to 44% respectively at the overall level). Table 7a tells us that not only were SHGs highly valued as a mechanism for saving, they were also the *preferred* mechanism for saving by an overwhelming majority of men and women in both villages: over 96% They were preferred to the other mechanisms listed in the survey questionnaire: bank saving, cash at home, jewellery and small animals (often sold in times of need) and informal rotating savings and credit associations.

While this highlights the importance of savings for those whose lives and livelihoods are extremely precarious, the gender difference in ranking speaks to a finding noted in the wider literature: that poor women particularly value forms of saving that can be protected from appropriation by dominant family members, from the demands of their children and from their own temptation to spend to meet immediate needs. In addition, for Satyawati, the big advantage of the SHG as a mechanism for saving was that it allowed even extremely poor women to participate: *Even the poorest can save. And those who cannot bring money to the SHG fund bring a fistful of rice or a rupee coin. Then the SHG can lend them money to run their family and house.*

According to Table 7b, SHGs were also the preferred source of credit - for 91% of the women in the survey and 85% of the men. They were preferred to agricultural co-operative societies, banks, friends and families, moneylenders, traders and employers/patrons. As a source of loans, SHGs offered certain advantages over traditional sources of credit. They could be accessed by those normally excluded from these sources by their poverty, they carried lower interest rates and they offered more flexible repayment periods. As Bansi told us: *There was no one to turn to earlier and the families in the village would have to ask for money here and there. And it was difficult to get money even on those terms. This situation has changed. The SHGs have ensured that the families have access to cash when they need it to meet a variety of everyday needs.*

The perceived financial benefits of SHGs appeared to superseded all the other tangible and intangible benefits listed in the survey as possible reasons for valuing SHGS: feelings of unity and positive group dynamics; improved access to skills; improved knowledge about government programs; ease in receiving benefits of government schemes; group business; involvement with village institutions; demanding rights and entitlements; and decreased domestic violence. While this may mean that material security was given overriding priority over other possible benefits, our interviews remind us that access to financial resources can act as a pathway to valued intangible benefits as well.

According to Table 8, loans were used, in order of frequency, to purchase farm inputs, to pay for medical expenses, to improve housing, for children's education, to meet food needs, to set up a new business, to purchase livestock and to hire labour. These are some of the material benefits. An important intangible benefit that emerges from our data relates to reduced dependence on more exploitative traditional sources of credit. First of all, as our life history interviews told us, many of the men and women in our study had been forced in the past to turn to money lenders or wealthy landlords in times of distress to borrow money on terms that were not only exploitative but also humiliating. Table 7b suggests that these sources of credit – moneylenders, traders, patrons and employers – continue to be ranked very low in their preferences. However, access to SHG loans meant that they no longer had to rely on these sources. As Table 9 tells us, only 6% of men and none of the women turned to these sources in times of financial difficulty. Instead, SHGs were now the main port of call in such times for both women (68%) and men (45%), with relatives and neighbours next in importance.

Our respondents interpreted the shift from landlords and moneylenders to SHGs as a source of credit as a release from the need to 'beg'. As Gopal (male, 45 years, Narharpur) put it: *Earlier when you wanted to buy seed, fertilizer, or hire labour for weeding or purchasing medicine, you had to borrow money from a few wealthy persons who would charge interest of 5%, 10% or even more per month. These days …you don't have to beg for money in front of anyone.*

Asha Mandavi (female, 37 years, Bhanupratappur) provided an illuminating account of the material, social and human gains her household had made through their access to SHG mechanisms for savings and credit. These included food security and diversity, the education of children, the health of the family, meeting their daily expenses, social expenditures, house repair and productive investments. In addition, she valued the fact that they were able to achieve these gains through their own efforts rather than having to hold their hands (*hath failan ki nhi*) in supplication to others:

Before I joined the group I was always short of cash, I had no savings. We could not buy vegetables or anything else. SHGs savings have helped us to manage our family, meet our expenses. We go for labour, we earn some money, we grow paddy to feed ourselves, we buy vegetables and clothes. We also educate our children, we have money to treat coughs, colds and fevers. We can buy inputs for the field, we can pay for wedding expenses and for building or repairing the house. These are big changes. We need cash for all these things but now we don't need to hold out our hand to others for money, we have our own money and we can withdraw from our account when we want. It is important to save money, it is the biggest change that has happened since joining the group.

Improved skills and practices

Both PRADAN and BIHAN also sought to strengthen and diversify livelihood strategies of their membership through interventions to improve skills, introduce new agricultural practices and expand livelihood options. Given the importance of cultivation to the livelihoods of Gond households, and to women's economic activities in particular, both organizations prioritized interventions to promote agricultural productivity, focusing on paddy, pulse and vegetable production. Table 10 presents the adoption rates of a number of these interventions. Two general points emerge. First, as owners and managers of land, men were more likely to report adoption of these practices than women. And secondly, adoption rates tend to be higher in the PRADAN villages than the BIHAN ones. This may reflect the fact that PRADAN makes it a matter of policy to directly involve men as well as women in its livelihood interventions.

The qualitative interviews provided information on how men and women evaluated these efforts. As might be expected, men were particularly positive in their evaluations of the new agricultural practices they had learnt. Balaram (male, 54 years, Bhanupratappur) explained: *During the time of our elders, the only cultivation method we knew was broadcasting seeding (hariyali). By the time of Hariyali festival, our elders would be the last ones to complete their sowing, which was very late and made the crop vulnerable to disease attacks. So the yields were very poor. PRADAN came and gave us some more knowledge. Now, observing each other, we have improved these practices.*" According to one of the participants in a male FGD (Bhanupratappur): *In three to five years there has been a marked change in agriculture and therefore a change in the people as well.*

Table 10 also reports on efforts to diversify livelihoods, specifically into fisheries, lac activities, small business and trading. Greater male mobility probably explains why men report higher rates of diversification than women in both locations. Among women, those in the PRADAN villages were more likely than those in BIHAN villages to report livelihood diversification, mainly into small business and trade. In fact SHG members in BIHAN villages expressed enthusiasm for diversification into off-farm activities having observed the example of SHG women from other areas but complained that they had not received any support from BIHAN. Satyawati bai (Female, 42, Narharpur) told us: *Our group meets weekly on Sundays. We do not do any livelihood related work or anything. We only save and lend money. We have written our names to apply for training in leaf plate stitching training and business, silk cocoon yarn making training and business. No-one from above comes so how can we learn and do this? For five years in the beginning we did fish cultivation in the pond here. Apart from that we have had no livelihood support for our group.*

By contrast, greater responsiveness among women in PRADAN villages is likely to reflect the higher levels of *in-situ* technical expertise among PRADAN staff and the direct hands-on support they provided. One of the organization's important interventions was the introduction of a natural resource management program designed to help SHG members to take advantage of the provisions of the MGNREGS, both in terms of access to the wage employment it offered during the lean season as well as of the provision that allowed some of this wage labour to be directed to the improvement of community infrastructure as well as the assets of marginalized groups. These wage opportunities had made an important difference to poorer families in PRADAN villages: *When you didn't get work in the summer months in the village we really had to struggle. Now we have a separate MGNREGS cards in our name which allows us to get work in the summer months as well.* (Parmeshwari).

To sum up, men benefited to a greater extent than women from the new forms of financial access and livelihood interventions associated with women's SHG membership, by virtue of their greater mobility and access to resources but, we should also add, by the fact that neither organization was seeking to promote women's independent access to livelihoods. Rather, both saw women as conduits to improve household livelihoods. Both men and women valued the increases in household livelihood security, the opening up of new opportunities and, more intangibly, the reduction in dependency relations with money lenders and landlords.   Our findings also suggest that programme efforts probably contributed, at least in part, to the ability of households to meet their own food needs, diversify their diets and purchase productive assets that was reported in Tables 1 and 3.

An additional important point to make is that these material gains appear to have been instrumental in muting the opposition of men in PRADAN villages to the idea of women joining NGO-organized SHGs. We noted earlier that while BIHAN was generally welcomed by men within the community because of the promise of access to government benefits, PRADAN's efforts to form SHGs were initially met with considerable resistance. Their SHGs were seen as making considerable demands on women's time, requiring them to attend SHG meetings on a regular basis and sometimes travel outside the village for residential training programs without guaranteeing any of the immediate material benefits associated with government-organized SHGs. A women's FGD in the PRADAN area reported on the threats and violence that they faced when they had initially tried to join its SHGs:

The men initially asked what the reason was for us to join the group – to save? to meet? There was no financial benefit that we could show in the beginning. We would go to meetings and trainings and the men would say, that's enough, you must stop this, they would threaten us. If we quietly attended the meetings anyway, men would find out and beat us hard, how dare we leave the house? What is the purpose they would say, there is no financial benefit (Kamita).

This hostility declined considerably as financial benefits began to flow into the household, with men very often major beneficiaries. PRADAN's livelihood support therefore not only helped to mitigate economic hardship within the household but also served to overcome resistance from men within the family. To that extent, it provided the pre-conditions for other less tangible and more political gains for SHG members. These are discussed next.

4.3 Voice and participation in local governance

Along with promoting the livelihoods of SHG members, the organizational strategies pursued by BIHAN and PRADAN included efforts to promote women's participation, voice and interactions in the public domain. We report on the various indicators we used in the survey to capture these forms of participation before considering organizational approaches in greater detail and how they might have contributed to change. Table 11 starts with indicators relating to the official domain. It suggests over half the women in the two locations participated in panchayat and gram sabha meetings, with higher percentages participating in the low-level gram sabhas. These are elected local government bodies. Participation was somewhat lower in village-level committees set up by the government to deal with health, education and other policy issues. Although differences were small (around 5-7 percentage points) BIHAN SHG members were more likely to attend panchayat meetings while PRADAN members were more likely to attend gram sabha and village committees.

Beyond attending meetings, the table also reports on more active forms of engagement with representatives of the official domain. A higher percentage of PRADAN members reported interactions with these representatives but the likelihood of these interactions diminished with the increasing seniority of officials and their increasing distance from villages – as did differences between the two organizations. For instance, while 56% of PRADAN SHG members reported interactions with the village sarpanch compared to just 48% of BIHAN members, this had declined to 11% and 13% respectively with respect to the District Collectors. In addition, 44% of women in PRADAN villages and 31% in BIHAN villages said they were able to express their views in front of government officials without fear (Table 11).

The community domain is where women have historically faced the greatest discrimination because of the exclusionary nature of its norms. We noted earlier that under government influence, Gond leaders had agreed to allow women to participate in the region-wide *samajik* forums. This seems to have had greater effect for BIHAN members: 34% had participated in these forums compared to just 26% in PRADAN. This is likely to reflect the direct presence of the government in BIHAN and hence its greater influence in BIHAN SHGs. There was very little difference in participation by women from the two organizations at the village level *sarvajanik* forums: in both cases it was around 30% (Table 11).

In terms of more active engagement, the survey suggests higher levels of engagement among PRADAN members. They were more likely to interact with the Elders of their community than BIHAN members; more likely to say that they could put their opinions forward without fear in front of village elders and more likely to believe that they were listened to during village meetings. However, significantly, very few of either group said that they had questioned community practices during these meetings.

One final set of indicators relating to women's active participation in the public domain related to collective forms of action taken by SHG members. Women were asked about some of the most common issues around which collective action had been taken in the district. These are reported in Table 12. They suggest that SHG members associated with both PRADAN and BIHAN were very active in campaigning against excessive alcohol consumption (with higher participation reported by BIHAN members), less so against open defecation and delayed payment of MNREGS wages (similar percentages), violence against women and children's irregular school attendance (with higher participation by PRADAN members). Interestingly, despite frequent complaints, very few reported collective action against official corruption. The survey also allowed respondents to report on 'other' forms of collective action which we discuss later.

Our survey data thus suggests that SHG members played an active role in both public and community forums in the two locations but that this varied by forum: it was generally higher in official forums compared to community forums. The survey also suggests that PRADAN members were more active in most of these forums than BIHAN members. In terms of collective action, the difference between the two groups varied by issue.

Based on what we know about their organizational strategies, we would suggest that an important reason for the higher rates of political participation reported by women from PRADAN compared to BIHAN relates to differences in their length of experience and in their organizational strategies. PRADAN is a non-governmental organization that has been

working with SHGs of poor women for over 3 decades. It began out with the goal of promoting the livelihoods of the poor and has gradually evolved on the basis of lessons learnt in the field into an organization that is also interested in promoting women's political capabilities. As we noted, it seeks to build SHGs as 'autonomous spaces' for its members and has developed a conscious strategy for doing so by promoting women's capacity to claim their rights and stand up to injustice.

BIHAN, on the other hand, was set up very recently. It is a government agency with direct responsibility for setting up SHGs to act as a grassroots structure to implement government anti-poverty programmes. SHGs are therefore seen by the community as a conduits through which women and their families can access government benefits. Their members are not required to come forward actively to claims these benefits because, simply by participating as BIHAN members in the invited spaces of the gram sabha and other official forums, they can expect to gain access. The distinction between the SHGs organized by PRADAN and those associated with BIHAN was implicit in the statement made by Ramesh (male, 37, Naharpur): *We have to often clarify to the women SHG members that this is not a collective but a government yojana (scheme) from which we can all derive benefits.*

The difference between the invited spaces represented by BIHAN's SHGs and the autonomous spaces being built through PRADAN SHGs is partly captured by indicators of decision-making processes within their SHGs (Table 13a). Both organizations trained their members in collective decision-making processes. But while 100% of PRADAN SHGs reported that decisions within the SHGs were most often taken by group members, 30% of BIHAN SHGs reported that decisions were often taken by BIHAN's community resource persons or by group office bearers. It also captured by the fact that 40% of PRADAN SHG members went to PRADAN for advice when they faced difficulties in claiming their rights and entitlement compared to just 7% of BIHAN members (Table 13b). While similar percentages in both locations went to friends/neighbours, it is significant very few of either group went to village elders.

Processes of change: the personal and the political

The qualitative interviews with women offered illuminating insights into the processes through which they gained the political capabilities reported in Table 10. They highlighted the importance of changes at the personal level for enabling changes in the public domain but they also highlighted the extent to which differences in organizational strategy defined the scope for such change. One feature that was common to both groups of SHG women was the opportunity provided by their regular meetings to share their life stories with each other. What was striking about their accounts of these meetings was the value they placed on sharing their personal experience and forging new relationships. But there was a difference in how these discussions evolved in the two organizations and the changes they led to.

When women from BIHAN SHGs spoke of the opportunity to share these experiences, it was evident that it had happened as a natural outcome of their regular meetings. They spoke of the social aspects of their relationships within SHGs and what it had meant in their personal lives:

> *What I liked best about the SHG is that after I got married and moved to my in-laws house, I would feel shy and hesitate to socialize with people. I would feel scared of people, my mother-in-law and father-in-law. After I joined the SHG, I got the opportunity to sit amidst*

people and interact with them. I enjoyed meeting and listening to them. I felt happy sharing my own thoughts too. (FGD, Narharpur).

I found out that there is not much difference in how women think. We listen to each other's stories carefully and we understand each other (Kanti, female, 23 years, Narharpur)

For those with difficult family lives, these meetings helped to lighten, if only temporarily, the burden of oppression they lived with:

Sangwari (friendship) makes me feel good and so I play and laugh with them. It's only when I come back to the house, I start to feel the tension again and think to myself, now how will you manage, Saraswathi? (Sarawathi, Age etc).

Who can I tell about my troubles? It remains confined within me. We do talk to each other as women here, but who can solve the problem? (Satyawati).

Women from PRADAN SHGs also spoke of the value they placed on their meetings with one another and of the opportunity to share their personal stories. As one of the women's FGD in the PRADAN area told us, the ability to save regularly was the incentive that brought women out of their homes on a weekly basis to meet with each other while the weekly meetings provided them with the valued opportunity for regular discussion: *We deposit savings in the group and sit in the meeting and then take the amount to deposit in the bank. If we deposited the money directly in the bank then how would we have the benefit of meeting and discussion with each other?*

However, what was evident from their accounts was that the sharing of personal experiences that made up some of this discussion did not occur spontaneously as a result of regular meetings but was part of guided experiential learning processes that PRADAN staff facilitated in its group meetings[23]. The regularity of these meetings and the opportunities for discussion they provided became critical elements in these processes of change, beginning at the subjective level, 'the power within'

PRADAN facilitators started out the early group meetings by encouraging women to talk about themselves and their experiences of life. We have already noted the oppressive nature of the lives that many women described, lives which had been circumscribed by community norms to the home and the field, depriving them of any support systems of their own. The opportunity to open up to each other about these experiences, and find out they were not alone in experiencing them, played an important role in helping to overcome their feelings of isolation and offering possibilities for forging new relationships that were 'chosen' rather than 'given' by their place within the community.

Two themes that surfaced repeatedly in women's accounts of their personal histories were fear and silence. They spoke of their fear of men, of the Elders and of the community. They described the subjective changes that they experienced through their participation in SHG meetings as the dawning of courage: in the first instance, the courage to speak about their

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[23] This is a methodology used by from feminist organizations across India. It became part of PRADAN's SHG strategy when it moved from a focus on livelihoods to building the capacity for self-governance among its members. PRADAN partnered with Jagori, a feminist organization in India, in order to develop its own approach.

personal lives and then to speak out publicly in the presence of those they had previously feared.

For Samotin, the process of change began almost literally with finding her voice:

I never thought that I would learn all these new things. Earlier we worked in our own homes and fields and rarely exchanged ideas or information. In the first meeting held by PRADAN, they asked us to share experiences right from our childhood up until now, to speak of all the painful things that had happened to us. It was very frightening, we were all very quiet. I was very scared and kept my mouth closed. All of us did. My heart was beating so fast and I was feeling so strange. I had never been asked to speak like this. We continued to be quiet and then slowly, one by one, we started to speak. I was the last one. I remember saying a few things about my childhood- it was a scariest experience. It has become a lot easier now- compared to earlier when I was constantly wondering if I am right or wrong, should I open my mouth or not?

Saraswati who had left her violently abusive husband to return to her village had been so immersed in the daily repetitive struggle to survive, to feed herself and her child that she had neither the time nor the courage to reflect on the gender injustices built into her community's norms:

Men live lives free of tension - what do they have to worry about? They have strength, they have money, they have arrogance, they can give us two slaps if they want and we cannot protest. What courage do women have? …. it was all about earning and eating, earning and eating. That's all. Go to the fields, come home and eat , the next morning do the same things again...that's all our life was supposed to be...we did not think about anything else in terms of women's lives, the violence, the abuse ..eat and work was all we did.

She too described in detail the process through which she found the courage to speak, first in 'whispers' and then more confidently. She also spoke of how what she had already known took on a new significance when it was discussed in a group situation:

You know, there is a lot of difference between hearing with your own ears and seeing with your own eyes. So I may have heard and known many things before but when I went to the meetings, and saw what I saw with my own eyes and heard what they were saying for myself, it was different. That is how I built an understanding of things- I was still not shouting at the top my lungs but I was slowly and softly speaking to one or two people as well as speaking in the group, just whispering my thoughts. Slowly my fear started to fade away. I used to be so scared of men - I had to leave the room if a man came in - I could not bear to be near them for a very long time. I ran away from my husband because I was afraid and weak, how could I now start to speak? But I have got a mind that now says to me: It is time to speak, you have to speak. I haven't spoken much but slowly I am starting to. At home also I keep asking myself and practising how to say things – and then I finally go to the meeting and speak. If it is incorrect, then I improve.

I didn't get strength from the village community, I got it from PRADAN, both strength and also care. I couldn't speak before.. If PRADAN had not made the group, how would we have got together and found strength? We did not understand much but little by little we

did. We would leave our housework so that we could go and sit at meetings- if we had not done that, we would not have had the understanding we have today, could not have spoken up. Until I was part of the SHG, I did not have either the words, the voice or the courage to speak about my views, about what I wanted. I may be a woman but I am intelligent. It is only after the SHG, in the last 4 year that I have started thinking and raising my voice…. It is only after the SHG that I am able to say that I want my share in my husband's property. If someone were to support me, hold my hand, I am ready to fight for it.

A similar process was described by Surajbatti (Female, 32 years, Bhanupratappur):

Earlier I did not want to go anywhere. My thinking has changed now from before. Now I feel like talking and engaging in meetings. I am interested. Even if I make only one point, at least I make it…I can now sit with the siyan, with anyone…Earlier I could not do all these things, I did not have all this learning before ...When there are Elders around, people tell you, do not talk too much. But if something is wrong, I will speak up. When you believe that what the person in front is saying is incorrect, it is important to protest. I used to be scared of talking to big people - now it is not so scary. Big people meaning like the Siyan, Patel, sarpanch, Sahib, Adhikari other elders in the village- I just could not talk to people and I would not go anywhere at all. I have learned a lot... There is a change in the Surajbatti from before and now.

4.4 Processes of change: from individual to collective

The accounts related help to trace the gradual diminution of fear and the growth in courage that lay behind the different forms of voice and participation in official and community forums by women noted in Section 4.2. Being part of SHGs expanded women's experiences of the world beyond their community:

From the day we joined the SHG- we sat together for meetings, interacted with each other. We get an opportunity to go for meetings and visit new places that we otherwise would not have had the opportunity for otherwise. Earlier we wouldn't go anywhere, didn't get meet anyone. These days we go for all kinds of meetings- in the village, outside the village, panchayat. We get to listen to many new things about which we were previously unaware. (FGD, Bhanu).

After BIHAN scheme was started, we started sitting together weekly, that way I was able to overcome my shyness. These days when there are certain events and we are called, I enjoy it. I like being part of a larger collective of SHGs and we also get access to a lot of information and learn new things. You get an opportunity to travel outside the village.

It is significant that over 90% of SHG members in both locations said that they had made friends with people outside their immediate circle of family and kin since joining the SHGs . With their sustained interactions over time, and encouraged by their organisations, SHG members began to experience for themselves power of acting together. This included actions in their immediate lives:

If we are united, then if somebody is sick we can even help them go to the hospital, take them there. If there is no unity even if he dies you would never get to know. Once they joined we also got to know each other's well-being in depth. (PRADAN female FGD)

I feel this this SHG is a tree and we are the branches. Earlier if you called women to help with labour in your field, often nobody would come. Now if a decision is made in the SHG, everyone has to come. It's much easier to get work done. BIHAN female FGD)

But collective action began to encompass matters of wider interest. As we saw from Table 12, women from both SHGs reported being active but levels of activity varied by group for the different issues. Once again, it is important to bear in mind the distinction between the 'invited' forms of collection action to which women were summoned by government and 'autonomous' forms which SHG members initiated themselves.

Successive governments have frequently launched public campaigns to mobilize communities around issues they considered important. The campaign against open defecation, for instance, is a major priority for the present Modi government. Similar percentages of women from both groups of SHGs (37-39%) had been involved in rallies to build awareness about health risks associated with the practice, to encourage voluntary cleaning of public spaces and to exert community pressure to construct toilets to meet national targets.

Similar percentages of women from both programmes (37-38%) were also involved in collective action around non-payment/delayed payments of their MNREGS wages. This was not part of a government campaign but reflected the grievances of SHG members themselves. The protest took different forms between the two groups. BIHAN members took their grievances to BIHAN staff who were government officials and who then raised it on their behalf in the gram sabha. PRADAN SHGS were mobilized by their Village Organization subcommittees who organized rallies against relevant officials within the elected bodies such as panchayat and Zillah parishad who are responsible for disbursing payments. This seemed to be having an effect:

Today if women go collectively, you can get anything done. If only one or two of us go we won't be able to get work done, no one will listen to us. However if we all go together to the collectors office or anywhere, then our work will get done immediately. If two or three of us go to get some work done, they will keep sending us back- come back tomorrow. If all of us go together even for a single day that task gets done. (Women's FGD, Bhanupratappur).

Another issue on which SHG members appear to have taken the initiative in both locations was in relation to children's school attendance, particularly the problems of drop-outs and irregular attendance. 26% of PRADAN members reported such action compared to 18% of BIHAN members. This was an issue of concern across both communities. BIHAN women spoke of discussing the issue in the 'aam sabha' where they decided to take out rallies to encourage parents to send their children to school.

Focus group discussions in PRADAN locations suggested that collective action around education went beyond SHG and that SHG members had been able to provide community level leadership. Discussions during the male FGD in Pandripara, Bhanupratappur linked women's involvement in school affairs to the formation of the SHG: *Another key difference*

about the coming of the SHGs is in terms of education. They have got more involved in the school and they discuss it during SHG meetings but it is a slow process and will take its own time.

In one of the PRADAN study villages, 10-15 women from the SHGs had formed a special group *to work for the benefit of the village* on this issue. A number of men had also formed their own SHG to work with these women . According to the women's FGD in the village in question, it was men in the village who had approached the women's SHG to ask them to take a lead on the matter:

Earlier small children were not going to school but were drinking alcohol and doing bad things. The men of this village are trying to improve this. You see the men go to each of the groups and ask what are you thinking about change and development in the village, what are your thoughts about the school, and about the children's future? We have called the teachers at the end of the month. Every last Saturday of the month, we have a meeting in school to discuss why our children are not attending regularly, why they are weak at studies, why they are being naughty, why they are going off in the tractor to work and leaving their studies. Even if children of those who are not group members are missing school, we follow up with them and their parents and ask what the problem is. The meeting in school is to discuss why our children are not paying attention to their studies.

One important reason why men mobilized around the issue of education was their belief that it would enable their children to know how to 'behave' in their encounters with higher status officials and visitors. We quoted Hari earlier and his belief that members of the Gond community were regarded as only 'half human' by those outside their community. His own life had taught him that their lack of education was an important part of the problem:

I will sign with my thumbprint so that at least my children will be better, they will be educated. They may not get jobs but that is not the reason I am keen on their education. I will tell you how I decided to get them all to study. I was not sent to school and am not literate. I do earth work and labour and manage somehow. I don't want my children to be in the same situation. I worked hard, went for wage labour, worked in my field and ensured all of them put their minds to their studies. I don't expect them to get salaried jobs, but at least they will have their minds and brains in the right direction.

Another example of collective action initiated by PRADAN SHGs and supported by the wider community was raised in the qualitative interviews. It occurred when SHGs from one of the study villages came together to protest the illegal felling of trees by large contractors to sell on as firewood to brick kilns. The women mobilized the *sarvajanik* forum in their village to agree to impose a ban on brick-making for commercial purposes and to limit the manufacture of bricks for domestic purposes to a maximum of 50,000. *Our SHG s were concerned that the trees in our forests were being destroyed. Brick kiln owners and contractors were chopping trees and clearing the entire forest. This would endanger our future and that of the next generation. We were worried that wood and other forest produce are already in short supply and by the time our children grow up there will be nothing left.*

The women went from kiln to kiln to try to enforce the ban but were aware of the scale of the problem: *Even if we stop them, the number of outsiders making bricks here are growing and*

this is destroying our forest. There are so many contractors now. They are not group members. These contractors are mostly from Bihar and the labour are among us from our villages. The contractors also bring labour from outside, like from Mandla district."

A final example of collective action by SHGs in both areas was around the inter-related issues of alcoholism and male violence. These had been singled out by women in our interviews as one of the most oppressive and widespread manifestations of patriarchy in their lives. The government had mounted a public campaign against the production and consumption of alcohol. This was also an issue on which development NGOs, including PRADAN, had been active for some time because of its links to violence against women. This was thus an area in which SHG efforts to bring about change intersected with government campaigns. The campaign was embraced enthusiastically by SHG members from both programmes, with BIHAN members more likely to report involvement in the anti-alcohol campaign than PRADAN (74% and 60% respectively). However, members of PRADAN SHGs were more likely to report collective action against male violence than members of BIHAN (30% and 17% respectively) suggesting that this was an issue on which PRADAN SHGs took action independently of the state campaign.

Women in the FGDs in both areas believed that government support for the issue had been important in raising awareness of local officials and community leaders. In some areas, the government has been encouraging patrolling by women commanders to curb consumption of alcohol. The practice of patrolling was enthusiastically adopted by some of the SHG members along with various actions on their own initiative, such as organizing rallies and fining the home brewing of liquor. These actions were described in some detail by women FGDs in Bhanupratappur:

In this area we have women commanders from Durg, and they wear caps and have a stick and whistle, and we go from street to street. The women have a cap and a whistle and they leave home at 9pm and patrol each street, if someone drinks alcohol they catch them. The district government has made them women commanders. The women all gather then and the drunk men are taken to the police station…In the night after a meeting, if a group member is returning home and her husband or others are drunk and they start troubling or beating her and fighting, then the women all go and we go to them as a group and tell them they have to change.

*Men were drinking more than necessary and that was a problem. We women therefore broke all the pots and stopped the production of mahua, We used to seek out the places where it was produced and drunk and put a stop to it. Now the trade of mahua has also declined. This year is the first after many that we have collected mahua flowers again. There was a bandh on production of liquor and so there was a bandh on the collection of flowers, bigger people also stopped us from this. This is not only for the Gond samaj but for the whole village. And not only for this village but for all the villages in our kshetra. (*Anita, female, 24yrs)

Both PRADAN and BIHAN members believed that there had been some decline in male violence but explained it differently. BIHAN members pointed to more indirect routes: they spoke of the greater legitimacy accorded to their concerns as a result of their membership of government-organized SHGs, of the importance of government pronouncements on gender equality, of women's greater representation in community forums as a result of government

pressure, of being able to use the threat of police in cases of violence. A number of them believed that the fact that the government was now issues ration cards in women's names had given them greater bargaining power within their household. In addition, they valued the establishment of the *aam sabha* in BIHAN villages as a forum for women to deliberate on issues of common concern to them.

> *Government is propagating the thought that men and women are not different. They also say this about our social rules…. During social meetings, the woman's working day is also considered. During samajik meetings we have the space to ask the woman involved with the case being adjudicated what mistake was committed, and by whom. Women can also give in a written application if her husband drinks alcohol, beats her, abuses her, takes away money from her. Elders punish the man in that case.* (Women's FGD, Narharpur).

> *People are less abusive now. Earlier even if there was a small festival in the community, the men would drink and then fight with their wives and beat them. Domestic violence was common. In the aam sabha we tell our members that if there is a husband who is beating his wife or abusing her then they should come and let us know. All of us SHG members will then together try and dissuade him. If he does not heed us, then we will take the matter further. And if he doesn't listen to the village forum then we will report the matter to the police.*

Government support did not feature as directly in the explanations of women from PRADAN SHGs. Instead, as we noted, PRADAN had set up a designated subcommittee in its Village Organizations to deal with gender-related injustices within the community, included domestic violence and alcoholism. They helped to mobilize women. As a result, PRADAN members were more likely to attribute the decline in violence to the role of SHGs. A women's FGD in Bhanu explained: *Earlier men would not hesitate to beat up a wife.. there was much more violence. The intensity has gone down. There is a lot of change because of the SHGs. The men need to behave with us with more caution. Earlier they would beat us. Those who could bear it would bear it. Others would run away, but even if they ran away, they would have to come back in the end.* Some believed that the SHGs helped women to learn about the rights extended to them by the state, including resort to the police in cases of violence: *So when the women go to the SHG meetings and hear about these rules, they go back and inform their families about these. If they harass a woman about dowry and hit her, she can go straight to the police station and complain.*

One puzzle from our findings was that while during the qualitative interviews, many women singled out the SHGs as an importance factor in bringing down violence and as an important source of support in their lives, the survey data suggested that very few went to their SHGs when they were beaten or when they faced personal difficulties. This apparent contradiction between the qualitative and quantitative findings was raised in the feed-back discussions. The explanation offered is summarized in Box 2 and provides an insight into the way the SHG activities had served to change relationships among women within the wider community.

Box 2: Why women do not go their SHGs when they are beaten or in times of personal difficulty

The main reason given by the women in the feedback discussion group for why they were more likely to go to their family and neighbours when they were beaten or facing a personal difficulty, rather than their SHGs, was because the SHG as a group could not always be reached when the need arose. But they believed that, as a result of SHG influence, their families and neighbours were now more likely to give them support. Many of the households in their communities had one or more women who belonged to an SHG and who had, over time, influenced attitudes within the family: "So a mother-in-law who attended her SHG meeting understood how to treat her daughter in law better. When the daughter in law participates, she understands and learns about how to deal with her husband and family. The daughter learns how to interact with her parents. Together they had brought about changes within their families. Today if the mother in law hits the woman, she can leave the house and collect one or two Elders and have a meeting in the village where she complains publicly. This was not the case a few years ago. Back then she would earn and work hard and yet suffer abuse…" They also believed that women's regular participation of SHG meetings had served to curtail some of the violence as abusive husbands were now afraid that their wives would complain to their group members and behaviour that had previously been confined to the private domain now became public knowledge. At the same time, not all women in the groups had gained this courage. Many continued to be silent, too frightened to speak out in meetings. Until they spoke out, there was little their groups or neighbours could do for them.

These various forms of collective action appear to have played a role in bringing about changes in gender relations within the community but at an uneven pace. Table 14 reports on what men and women in our survey perceived to have been the most important changes in the wider community brought about by SHG activities. Both men and women, but particularly women, identified women's greater participation in the public domain as the most important change followed by easier access to financial services within the village - with more men likely to state this than women. Less significance was attached to the increased voices of the poor and to decline in domestic violence. The least change was perceived in relation to alcohol consumption, women's public influence and greater security of land rights.

Given that these organizations have only been active in this area for five years, the uneven nature of progress is not surprising. But it is significant that, apart from male violence and alcohol consumption, the collective actions undertaken by the SHGs did not address patriarchal relations within the domestic domain. They were directed towards school authorities, government officials, commercial loggers, health providers and others. Aside from alcoholism/male violence, therefore, women's mobilizations did not bring them into direct confrontation with men within the family – or indeed the wider community. The question then is to what extent, if any, men within domestic domain had been affected by the kinds of changes that women were undergoing at the personal and political level and whether men's attitudes towards these changes offered support or resistance.

4.5 The familial domain and male resistance

We had already noted from our discussion of male views of injustice that men within the community were reluctant to acknowledge gendered forms of injustice. This was, of course, to be expected, given that they enjoyed greater privileges within the patriarchal structures family and community and less of a stake in changing it. Our survey data suggests that change had not filtered into the personal familial domain either.

Table 15 reports on how men and women described their role in household decision-making on a number of key issues. Despite some discrepancy in their descriptions, both sets of responses agreed that male authority has remained largely intact on most issues. Between 59-75% of men reported that men had final authority in decisions relating to children's education, livelihood investments, the purchase and sale of assets, taking loans and visits by spouse to her natal family, with between 9-18% saying that the decisions were jointly taken. It was only in the case of decisions regarding SHG loan use and family size that men did not appear to have final say (46% and 53% respectively) with 10% and 36% saying it was a joint decision.   This pattern of male authority was mirrored in women's accounts, with the percentages saying that they made the final decision varying from a low of 18% in relation to livelihood investments to a high of 42% in relation to use of SHG loans.

We have already noted earlier that women combined a disproportionate share of unpaid reproductive responsibilities within the home with their routine contribution to household production and that they perceived the resulting heavy workloads as a major source of gender injustice.   The qualitative interviews suggested that little had changed on this front. Not only had women's participation in SHGs failed to encourage a redistribution of domestic workloads between men and women within the households, but the demands on their time had gone up as women were increasingly allocating time to SHG meetings and to participation in public forums and government campaigns. While men had benefited economically from women's participation in SHGs, the added demands on women's time had not triggered a reallocation in the distribution of unpaid family labour.

Instead women were having to find their own ways of coping. As one of the male FGDs in Bhanupratappur commented, women '*devised strategies to deal with the situation by 'carefully' scheduling meetings on a fixed time at night after they finish all their household work - so that it does not interfere with her other work' (Sonsingh*(Male, 26 years, Bhanupratappur*)).* Sunder,(Male,60 years, Narharpur) echoed this observation: *After returning from their agriculture fields they (SHG members) mostly meet for half an hour or an hour in the evenings. In our house, 3 people- all my daughters in law- are SHG members. They have SHG meetings on different days, so there are no problems: things get managed.* Clearly none of the men in his family volunteered to share the 'management of things'.

Some of the men commented on the growing 'laziness' of women 'these days' because they were taking rest for some time after giving birth instead of following their husband into the fields:

These days women as getting very lazy, they don't want to work. Earlier (at the time of our elders) within one week of pregnancy they would go back and work in the field. In those days the husband would go to the field and the woman would pack some lunch and take it for him. Then she would make a little cradle under the shadow of a tree, keep her baby there and get

engaged with the labour in the field. When the man would rest the wife would also do some work. Now we do not see this happen. (Male FGD, Bhanu).

Ramesh (Male, 37, Narharpur) said he was prepared to countenance some degree of equality within the home but believed that women should continue to carry out the responsibilities ascribed to them by community norms and customs:

Within the house a woman may sit on the same level as the man but not in the samaj outside. Of course there is a difference between the two but that does not mean they are not equal. Like in the samaj the meaning of being 'ek samaan' is that men sit at one side and women sit together at another side, but they sit as equals. According to traditions and customs, there are certain things that are women's work in the samaj and they have to carry them out. The place for each is carved out by customs and traditions.

At the same time, the qualitative interviews also offered various scattered examples of exceptions to this overall picture of resistance to change. Some men were taking on a greater share of responsibilities at home even if they resented the extra burden. Subeh Singh (male, 35 years, Bhanupratappur) spoke of the tensions that arose because his wife, who had taken on a leadership role in community, was frequently out of the house for meetings, leaving him to manage the household work and the fields:

My father is now an elder, so my wife and I do all the agriculture work. But now my wife goes to many meetings: panchayat meetings, group meetings …If she does 1-2 days of house work then that is a lot! She goes to the gram sabha meetings once a week as she is the ward panch. She is in a meeting even now. I sometimes think I am sitting at home and she is in meetings! I am now alone, looking after the fields and the housework. Will I look after the house or the fields?! We discuss this. I am alone and there is a lot of work, and I even curse her and the meetings! But what can we do? If she is not ready to stay back then I have to do the work! There is tension, as I am left alone sometimes. I manage the tension and have to maintain my patience. We do fight sometimes about her having to go out so often. But I do not beat her.

One of the participants in the women's FGD (Bhanupratappur) described the mixture of resentment and accommodation that characterised her husband's response to her SHG activities: *He doesn't totally prevent me from coming to meetings, otherwise we wouldn't be able to participate. However, he does keep commenting – what is all these meetings one today, again tomorrow. Even then he also adjusts that is perhaps why I am still able to sit here for so long.*

Then there were examples of men who expressed more egalitarian attitudes and a greater openness to the idea of change.

*I do not consider wife as separate in our relationship. She has her own troubles but I consider them mine. In the same way she considers my troubles to be hers. We consider ourselves as equals. When she is pregnant she works until the ninth month. After that she doesn't have enough energy to work. After delivery, she is unable to go anywhere to work. Where will she carry a young infant? At that time, I have to take responsibility and do things all by myself (*Bhaskar male, 42 years, Bhanupratappur).

Focus group discussions with men in Bhanupratappur suggested that some were beginning to understand what women had to face within the home – and the role that SHGs played in helping them: *These days they sit for meetings every week. Some woman may be troubled by her husband, someone may be troubled because of their children. So when they go to an SHG meeting at least for those two hours their mind is distracted. They can talk about it to others and they also learn new things.*

Many of the men agreed that the SHGs had made a difference to women's political participation:

Women have started coming forward, that's a change. Otherwise, what used to happen was that men were left to themselves to do as they please and women woke up and cooked and cleaned and went to work in the fields. Earlier, the men wouldn't even call the women to any meetings or events. The men would go to meetings, gatherings or whatever they want to do - . So this was the division earlier. Now, gradually, women are coming in.

Bansi Sonsingh (Male, 26 years, Bhanupratappur) spoke with pride about the changes he saw in his wife: *My wife's SHG membership has a lot of meaning. They save, they discuss, there is a change in how they think. There is a change in behaviour as well- how to talk in the midst of ten people- there is a transformation in that .She is socializing much more- earlier she would barely step out of the house to talk to our neighbours. She even goes out of the village sometimes. She is experiencing the world outside the village.*

Men in a Narharpur FGD were willing to question the injustice of denying women caste certificates for their children without a named father: *In the present time a caste certificate is necessary to access government benefits and giving a father's name is mandatory to obtain it. It cannot be made in a mother's name. Yes, the government is now giving ration cards in women's names but till now no law has been to allow caste certificates to be made in the mothers' name.*

Balaram believed that the spread of education had helped to change men's attitudes and bringing about a greater willingness on their part to acknowledge women's feelings. He went as far as suggesting that the Gond constitution needed to change its rules on violence against women:

Violence within the household is also lower now that men are more educated. They have become wiser. Now we think that the woman is also a human being. Just as we know our feelings as men, we need to know their feelings as women. We were misinformed earlier, swept away in superstition, and didn't know better. Owing to lack of education, men beating women was more widespread. Now only the more foolish men do this. Even in these cases, neighbours try to stop him and explain to him why should stop beating women in his family. The Gond constitution allows men to beat women. That has not changed. I do not believe that beating is a good thing. It should not be allowed. As times change the rule book needs to change.

5. Conclusion

The analysis in this paper provides us a particular vantage point from which to revisit some of the theoretical debates discussed in the introductory section of the paper and to consider the implications of our empirical findings for the efforts of organizations that are seeking to empower women as the 'minority within minorities'. The analysis has focused on the Gonds, one of India's poorest and most socially marginalized adivasi groups located in the forested areas of Central India. They have been recipient of various special provisions extended to individual members of ethnic and caste minorities in recognition of their long-standing disadvantage. In addition, along with other adivasi groups, they enjoy group rights in the form of a limited self-governance, an acknowledgement of their distinct way of life and the territorial basis of their identity.

Despite these 'special protections', a*divasi*s continue to lag behind other social groups in national poverty statistics; they report worse human indicators than other groups; and they are more likely to face displacement from their land. To take away even the minimum protections extended to them by the state would be an enormous injustice: the most likely outcome would be to undermine their sense of identity, to eradicate their way of life and destroy any security of livelihood they may still enjoy, leaving them to swell the ranks of the rootless and floating poor. At the same time, while self-governance within the Gond community is understandingly centred on defending its boundaries, the rules by which it does so have particularly oppressive implications for women, drawing attention to a key internal equality within the community.

We noted that the Gond community can be classified as *nomoi* communities in that their laws embody their cultural norms. Given that they define membership of their community along lines of biological descent, a significant focus of their norms is to control women's sexual and reproductive behaviour. These norms have now been codified in the new Gond constitution and we see them at play in the lives of the men and women in our study. Women pointed to some key examples of gender injustice embedded in, and upheld by, these community norms. They included its legitimation of male violence within the family, the long hours of work entailed in women's dual responsibilities within the home and in the economy, their exclusion from land rights and rights over children, their low levels of decision-making within the family and, a factor which served to perpetuate these injustices, their exclusion from the forums in which community norms were discussed and deliberated. Women were thus denied voice in defining community norms.

While the community could not in principle override the right to exit of its members, it is not clear what such a right means if the worst penalty that the community could impose on transgressive members was excommunication or forcible exit; when world beyond the community denigrated and disrespected its members; and when, in any case, women did not have the material resources and marketable skills to make their way in the outside world deprived of community support. Exit was not a realistic option for most women.

Returning to the theoretical question that motivated this research, it would appear from the women's testimonies that there were real tensions between the group rights of the Gond community to govern itself in the light of its own community norms and the rights of women within the community. Community norms defined women as bearers of inferior rights but denied them the voice to challenge this position or the possibility of exit from the community except at a very high price. The silence that the women in our sample had maintained in the

face of past oppression would be difficult to interpret as consent to their condition or loyalty to their community. It was instead the silence of those who had no power to change the circumstances of their lives.

Our research explored the extent to which two external organizations committed to working with women within these communities had any impact on their capacity for voice and exit. Both organizations used the self-help group approach to reconstitute social relations among women in the form of 'chosen' rather than ascribed associations and to use these new associations to promote access to livelihoods and political participation. We found, however, that their livelihoods efforts were directed to addressing household poverty rather than women's independent access to resources, an important precondition if the right to exit was to become a realistic option for women within the community. In fact, men benefited disproportionately from their efforts. These livelihood-related interventions proved important, both for the material wellbeing of women and their families but also for gaining the support of men within the community.

It is possible that building women's capacity to exit either did not occur to these organizations or that it was considered too challenging for some of the reasons outlined in the feminist literature. We did find evidence of progress in terms of women's political capabilities but we noted these changes were more discernible in the case of PRADAN SHGs than BIHAN's. We suggested that this may have been because PRADAN sought to construct SHGS as 'autonomous spaces' within which women could take greater control over their own lives while BIHAN SHGs remained 'invited spaces' in which SHG members were encouraged to act as grassroots vehicles for government policy. While there was no systematic difference between PRADAN and BIHAN SHG members as far as political participation in official and community forums were concerned, PRADAN members were more likely than BIHAN to report active voice and interaction in these forums. They were also able to provide eloquent and nuanced accounts of the processes by which the organization had sought to build their ability to reflect on their own lives, to make them more aware of the rights and entitlements they enjoy as citizens of India and to alert them to the potential of the state to act as an alternative source of justice in their lives. This 'process' element was missing from the accounts of BIHAN members.

The other point to note is that the two organizations together appeared to have made greater progress on some issues than others. They had succeeded in improving access to financial services for women and men within the community. There was evidence of greater participation by women within community forums. Women were also more likely to take collective action on key issues within the community. But it was also evident that on a number of aspects of gender injustice within the community – male alcoholism, land rights, effective public voice, challenging community norms and accessing their entitlement as Gonds – progress had been slow.

Since these efforts have only been going on for five years, this is not a surprising finding. But our interviews with men within the community suggests that a further factor behind the uneven pace of progress was their indifference to, and even denial of, the injustices faced by women. We found evidence of this in the focus group discussions as well as in our interviews with individual men. Yet given the difficulties of exit, it is clear that without greater support from men from their families, there are likely to be limits to women's ability to challenge the patriarchal norms of the community. The lack of male support is perhaps not surprising given

that while the organizations accepted, even encouraged male participation in their livelihood programmes, both confined their efforts promote greater awareness about gender injustices to women in their SHGs.

This essentially meant that neither PRADAN nor BIHAN challenged male dominance within the constitutionally protected 'community' spaces. It has been traditional patriarchal elders rather than the state that have the authority to define its laws. They have used this authority to define laws which have reproduced, and even intensified, the patriarchal norms of the community. Given that men stood to gain far more from these traditional authoritarian structure than women, regardless of their place within the community hierarchy, they had little stake in the kinds of change that women might seek to bring about.

Our analysis of the different forms of collective action reported by SHG members suggests a possible way out of this conundrum. We noted that that SHG women, particularly those associated with PRADAN, had taken leadership on a number of issues that were of concern to the wider community: children's school attendance, illegal logging, protesting delays and corruption in MNREGS wage payments. One of the reasons why women could take this leadership role was precisely because they had their own independent organizations. The SHGs had been able to carve out a space in which they could develop the consciousness and capabilities necessary to be able to take the lead on a number of key issues. Men, by contrast, were co-opted to a greater extent into the community governance structures although it was only those who were higher up the hierarchy who had any authority.

The way forward may lie in an intersectional strategy of collective action that acknowledged both community level injustices which stemmed from marginalization of adivasi communities, as well as gender injustices, those reflecting women's marginalized status within a marginalized community. One strand of this strategy would be for SHG members to continue to initiate collective action on issues that were of importance to the wider community, particularly to men at the bottom of the community hierarchy, and hence likely to mobilize wider support. For instance, one of the issues that concerned both women and men in the lower ranks of the community related to the difficulties they encountered in accessing their constitutional provisions, the delays and obstacles put in their way by government officials. Providing SHGs with legal support and advice through, for instance, setting up legal cells within different locations, would help to build a community wide leadership of women willing to use their collective capabilities in the interests of the community.

The second strand of this strategy would be to use women's efforts on behalf of the community to leverage wider support to address their gender-specific interests. While changes in men's consciousness appeared to have lagged behind those of women, many men have started to recognize some of the injustices that women had to face: the failure to allow women to obtain caste certificates in their own name so blocking independent access to constitutional provisions for their children; community norms which endorsed men's right to beat their wives; the excessive workloads that women have to bear. These may be isolated examples but their existence suggests that there is potential for change among men within the community - some of it in response to the presence of these external organizations. The SHGs would need to build actively on this potential in order to widen men's support for their struggles for gender justice.

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Appendix 1: Description of sample and methods

Scale of SHGs by location (November 2017)

Site	No of SHG *	No of Villages/ Gram Panchayats	SC members	ST members	Others	Total
Bhanupratappur	590	79/41	390	5104	1495	6989
Narharpur	1689	118/65	429	11036	4802	16267

Details of Sample (no of respondents)

	Bhanupratappur		Narharpur		Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Life history Interviews	10	10	10	10	20	20
Focus Group Discussions	8	27	20	18	28	45
Survey	118	110	105	118	223	228

Appendix 2: Tables

Table 1: Access to infrastructure and assets by location

	Bhanuprattappur %	Narharpur %
Main sources of drinking water (multiple responses)		
Has electricity	86	95
House built under IAY program	38	17
Roof material		
Tarpaulin, plastic sheet, twigs	1	0
Thatch	-	-
Tiles (hand-made)	75	88
Asbestos sheets	19	3
Concrete	4	9
Piped water (public supply)	4	8
Bore well	11	17
Hand pump	77	79
Open well	12	4
Covered well	2	2
Land ownership		
Landless	1	4
0.1 to 5 acre	70	78
5.1 to 10 acre	18	11
10 above	11	7
Assets owned		
Television	43	49
Fan	35	61
Cooler	19	22
Basic Cell phone	75	74
Smartphone Cell phone	25	19
Radio/tape cassette	5	5
sewing machine	14	14
Refrigerator	6	5
Plough	82	74
Power tiller	2	3
Borewell	10	24
Sprayer	14	44
Bicycle	86	90
motor cycle	34	31
Tractor	5	2
Computer	3	1

Table 2: Land and household by gender and location.

Category	Response	Bhanupratappur %		Narharpur %		Total %	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
In whose name is the land you own?	Self	55	12	42	8	49	10
	Wife/husband	5	38	2	21	4	29
	No papers	2	1	2	1	2	1
	Female family member*	9	16	10	14	9	15
	Male family member**	29	34	43	56	35	45
In whose name is the house in which you presently reside?	Self	65	19	61	9	63	14
	Wife/husband	4	30	2	30	4	30
	Female family member*	9	13	9	20	9	17
	Male family member**	18	31	22	36	20	34
	Others /Dont know	4	7	6	5	4	5

Table 3. Individual and household characteristics of survey respondents

	Bhanupratappur %		Narharpur %		Total %	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Age (mean years)	41	36	41	36	41	36
Religion						
Gond	93	92	100	100	96	96
Hindu	7	8	0	0	4	4
Marital status						
Single	5	14	0	1	3	7
Married	90	66	98	85	93	75
Co-wives	5	1	1	0	3	1
Separated *	0	6	0	0	0	3
Widowed	0	13	1	13	1	13
Married by choice	59	53	53	30	56	51
Married more than once	19	9	10	2	15	5
Education						
Illiterate	22	46	23	43	22	44
Grade 1 – 5	39	22	26	26	33	24
Grade 6 -8	19	12	21	21	20	17
Grade 9 -10	10	10	10	7	10	9
Grade 11-12	8	8	17	3	12	6
College	2	2	3	0	3	1
Most important livelihood activity**						
Agriculture	88	92	75	82	82	87
Livestock rearing	14	9	10	2	12	5
Forest collection	88	80	67	42	78	60
Non-farm enterprise	4	2	14	8	9	5
Wage labour	81	54	94	85	87	70
Formal employment	3	10	4	8	3	9
Contractual Employment	4	9	3	6	4	7
Other	11	33	2	36	7	35

Family member or members migrated in the past	13	12	8	6	10	9

* Divorced or abandoned

**Most important source of income or household sustenance. Multiple responses possible

Table 4: Primary responsibility for unpaid reproductive work by gender and location:

Nature of activity	Who took primary responsibility?	Bhanupratappur		Narharpur		Total	
		Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
House repair	Self	86	13	90	6	88	9
	Spouse	2	58	0	70	1	64
Bringing water	Self	3	71	2	78	2	75
	Spouse	69	4	89	4	78	4
Cooking	Self	3	71	2	86	2	79
	Spouse	70	0	89	3	79	2
Collecting food	Self	30	75	38	72	34	73
	Spouse	53	8	50	5	51	7
Buying food (bazaar)	Self	45	46	48	58	46	52
	Spouse	38	37	38	19	38	28
Collect PDS rations	Self	60	35	66	45	63	40
	Spouse	15	41	21	28	18	35
Cleaning clothes	Self	3	76	2	88	2	83
	Spouse	74	1	90	3	82	2
Collecting Fuel	Self	31	59	46	70	38	65
	Spouse	49	23	44	17	47	20

Table 5: Food security and diet

		Bhanupratappur %		Narharpur %		Total %	
	Response	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Food from own cultivation	0-6 months	31	43	57	37	43	40
	6 +	69	57	43	63	57	60
Food for rest of the year	PDS	82	93	95	83	89	87
	Purchased from market	17	7	5	17	10	13
	Others	1	0	0	0	1	0
Hunger experienced in past year	No	96	98	98	98	97	98
	Yes	4	2	2	2	3	2
Types of food eaten in past week?	Vegetables	100	98	100	100	100	99
	Animal protein	40	40	44	40	42	40
	Milk	15	11	13	6	14	8
	Eggs	46	53	40	37	43	44
	Fruit	42	41	60	65	51	54
	Pulses	93	96	99	92	96	93

Table 6 Reasons they valued SHGs

	Bhanupratappur %		Narharpur %		Total %	
Reason cited	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Savings facility	46	63	42	54	44	59
Emergency loans	30	21	36	13	33	17
Working capital loans	24	15	21	32	23	24

Table 7a Preferred methods for saving

	Bhanupratappur %		Narharpur %		Total %	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
SHG	96	98	100	100	98	99
Bank	81	53	70	38	76	45
Cash at home	65	29	93	35	78	32
Jewellery	20	22	26	4	23	13
Small animals	14	1	10	2	12	1
Post Office	7	9	13	8	10	8
Moneylender	3	1	4	2	3	1
Committees	4	3	2	2	3	2
Insurance	15	5	22	7	18	6

Table 7b Preferred sources of credit

	Bhanupratappur %		Narharpur %		Total %	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
SHG	79	87	91	95	85	91
Co-operative	40	17	31	18	36	18
SHG Bank	13	5	13	15	13	10
Bank	10	2	10	3	10	3
Friends / family	8	2	8	16	8	9
Money lender	1	0	2	2	1	1
Traders	1	1	5	3	3	2
Patron/ employer	1	3	1	1	1	2

Table 8 Use of loans taken from the SHG

Name of Item	Bhanupratappur %		Narharpur %		Total %	
	Last Loan (N=75)	First Loan (N=80)	Last Loan (N=82)	First Loan (N=96)	Last Loan (N=157)	First Loan (N=176)
Food	3	5	10	4	7	5
Medical	15	25	13	10	14	17
Education	15	6	6	6	10	6
Farm inputs	25	23	26	25	25	24
Livestock	0	3	1	3	1	3
Business	5	3	2	1	3	2
Hiring labour	1	1	0	1	1	1
Building, repair, improvement	12	8	12	14	12	11
Others	24	28	29	35	27	32

Table 9: Who do you go to in times of financial difficulty?

	Bhanupratappur %		Narharpur %		Total %	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
SHG	49	64	40	71	45	68
Moneylender	4	1	8	0	6	0
Bank	5	1	4	0	5	0
Neighbour	21	18	21	16	21	17
Relative	17	2	18	9	18	5
Others	4	15	10	4	6	9

Table 10 Adoption of Improved skills and practices in income generating projects

Name of Intervention	Sub- Interventions	Bhanupratappur %		Narharpur %		Total %	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Paddy production	System of Rice intensification	27	18	8	3	18	11
	Line sowing	46	21	33	7	40	14
	Use of organic fertilizer and pesticide	37	28	15	4	27	16
Vegetable	Use of trellis	23	21	4	1	14	11
	Line sowing of vegetables	27	26	7	7	18	16
	Use of organic fertilizer and pesticide	17	16	2	1	10	8
Pulse Production	Seed Treatment	15	9	2	3	9	6
	Line sowing	13	9	11	1	12	5
	Use of organic fertilizer and pesticide	13	6	3	1	8	4
Livelihood diversification into:							
Fisheries		7	4	1	4	4	4
Lac		24	2	11	0	18	1
Trading		40	19	29	2	25	10
Small business		14	9	11	3	12	6

Table 11 Attendance, interactions and voice in official and community forums by women SHG members.

	Bhanupratappur %	Narharpur %	Total %
Participation in official forums			
Panchayat meetings	52	57	55
Gram Sabha	69	61	65
Village committees	32	28	30
Interaction and voice in official forums			
Interaction with *Sarpanch*	56	48	52
Interaction with Panchayat secretary	51	39	45
Interaction with ADEO	37	25	31
Interaction with *Patwari*	19	4	12
Interaction with Block CEO	22	22	22
Interaction with District Collector	11	12	12
Ability to have a say in front of government	44	31	37
Participation in community forums			
Samajik Forum	26	34	32
Sarvajanik Forum	32	32	32
Interaction and voice in community forums			
Interaction with the Elders*	62	17	31
Ability to put forward opinions in front of village elders without fear	49	36	42
Being listened to during village meetings	61	53	57

Questioning practices in the community forums	10	7	8

* Patel, Kotwal, Gayta

Table 12 Issues around which collective action undertaken

Issues	Bhanupratappur %	Naharpur %	Total %
Open defecation	39	37	38
Alcohol consumption	60	74	67
Children not attending school	26	1	22
Claim delay payments in MGNREGA wages	38	37	38
Action against violence	30	17	23
Bribery and corruption	5	5	5

Table 13 a Who makes decisions in the SHG?

	Bhanupratappur %	Narharpur %	Total %
Group members	100	70	84
Staff	0	30	15
Non-members	0	0	0

Table 13b Who do you go to when you have difficulty in claiming rights and entitlements?

	Bhanuptarappur %		Narharpur %		Total %	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
SHG	6	40	0	8	3	23
Spouse	1	3	0	9	0	6
elders	26	24	13	27	20	25
Friend/Neighbour	4	5	3	7	4	6
Relative	6	2	6	7	6	5
Others	57	26	78	44	67	35

**Predominant responses are gram sabha, officers, sarpanch/sachiv (those belonging to the *sarvajanik* realm)

Table 14: What are the changes in the wider community around you?

Changes in Wider Community	Bhanupratappur %		Narharpur %		Total %	
	Male (N=64)	Female (N=59)	Male (N=65)	Female (N=65)	Male (N=129)	Female (N=124)
Greater female's participation in meetings	25	48	22	44	23	45
Easy access to credit in the village	19	10	43	29	30	20
Increased Voice of Poor	14	25	9	6	12	14
Decreased Domestic Violence	11	14	8	4	9	9
Field improvement and agriculture	11	0	5	0	7	0

Reduced alcohol consumption and production	8	3	2	3	5	3
Female's opinions valued in public forums	6	0	6	1	6.1	2
Female getting more land rights	3	0	2	3	2	2

Table 15 Decision-making patterns within the household: how was the final decision taken

	Bhanupratappur %			Narharpur %		
	Self	Spouse	Joint	Self	Spouse	Joint
Children's Education						
Men	75	4	9	75	3	12
Women	28	25	27	31	10	37
Livelihood investments						
Men	72	4	10	79	2	10
Women	18	41	21	28	15	36
Asset purchase or sale						
Men	64	5	17	70	3	17
Women	19	30	18	33	8	21
Taking a Loan						
Men	63	9	18	71	6	11
Women	44	18	27	34	13	39
Use of SHG loans						
Men	46	33	10	46	34	13
Women	42	14	15	38	10	23
Woman visit to natal family						
Men	59	27	7	56	23	17
Women	33	23	25	38	14	21
Family Size						
Men	53	3	36	50	2	46
Women	27	20	31	34	9	28