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Looking at Our Natural Resources

For integrated natural resource management to work, it is essential to take a holistic view of land, water and people resources

Dinabandhu Karmakar

These days my role is to visit different teams and interact with colleagues to understand and help others understand how to approach land and water based livelihood interventions. I continue to carry a sense of discomfort that despite having several senior colleagues in Pradan who understand the science and art of land and water based interventions, the reach of that knowledge and experience at the cutting edge is visibly limited.

I visualise a scenario where all Pradan professionals working with land and water based activities are capable of interpreting land and water resources and working out opportunities for value addition. The challenge is to find ways to facilitate faster learning. I am not talking about individual learning but about a process that gears up the entire organisation to organically pick up skills of interacting with land and water resources.

I think if we agree it is possible to initiate such a process in Pradan, we can work on multiple fronts. Experienced colleagues could spend more time systematically with colleagues in the field, cross-project visits when different levels of experience have opportunities to learn from each other, organising workshops, attending seminars and so on. However, my experience is that such visits rarely reach the depth of interaction where we can get into the thought processes of each other. For that, I think writing is best.

Apart from the NREGA (National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) manual that we attempted in the recent past, we have

not made any serious effort to document our experiences. The manual has not been developed keeping Pradan professionals in mind. It is too basic and might provoke a 'cut-and-paste' attitude instead of challenging professionals to delve deeper into the subject.

Beyond Mere Understanding

We require processes that would help professionals to interact with the science and art of the work and not merely understand techniques for replication. This deeper understanding is very important because no level of perfection in 'cut-and-paste' will be adequate to come up with critical adaptation (with appropriate innovations) of the techniques for the best potential use of the resources.

The challenge is big enough. How do we update our knowledge and experience across the organisation in the least possible time and ensure a process that continues to do so? This concern has been articulated in several consultative forum meetings.

While we (I along several other experienced colleagues) have taken on the responsibility to reach all professionals in field, it simultaneously needs everybody's sincere participation in the process. The basic purpose of writing this article is to seek that participation.

Looking at Land

When I look at a piece of land, the first question springs to mind is: Who owns this land? For whom I am giving my time? I have some hypothetical responses in my

mind. These responses might not be appropriate to the local situation, but they help me to process the data in a framework to address equity.

Ownership of Land

I hold the view that scarce resources (including my time and energy) should be spent for the needy. If the piece of land belongs to a poor family, it intensifies my urge to generate the best possible option that might help the family to improve their economic condition. If the land belongs to a better-off family, it reduces my tension to generate options for best potential use.

Even if the land belongs to a better-off family, it does not completely relieve me of my responsibility of generating options for the treatment of that piece of land. I try to understand two things. First, whether a poor family's land is going to be affected if this piece of land left untreated. Second, whether a poor family's land will benefit if that piece of land is treated properly. Thus, I try to map out the ownership of all contiguous pieces of land in an area.

For example, if a big piece of wasteland is situated upstream of the lands owned by poor families, I feel the urge to look at that land more carefully. I try to figure out the minimum possible investment that might yield maximum sustainable benefit to the poor peoples' land downstream. The option should be significant to the owners of the lands. Otherwise, they will not agree to adopt the option.

A big farmer often agrees to options that require low involvement of recurring family labour (but not as rule since the definition of big farmers vary from location to location). When resources are not a con-

straining factor, I think of options requiring higher investment, which would also generate significant job opportunities for local landless wage earners.

Land and water ownership mapping is a very important exercise in implementing an integrated natural resource management (INRM) programme. It provides possibilities to identify the poor, and prioritise lands and treatment options. It helps to exclude or include areas to fit available funds and ensure better allocation of resources.

It is also interesting to record whether there has been any change in the ownership over a significant period of time and to understand the impact of ownership change on the quality of land. Did the land become better with the change in ownership? It is not uncommon to find an inverse relationship, when lands become richer when a smallholder buys land from a big holder. The opposite is anyway common.

Quality of Land

After understanding the issues related to ownership, I look at the quality of the land. First I look at the surface appearance. It includes the kinds of vegetation, grasses and weeds that are growing on the land. If they are rich and healthy, it reflects the productivity of the land. I also calibrate it with the seasonal variations that might happen. Appearance in summer or winter would certainly be different from that in the rainy season.

The slope of the land is another important aspect. I look around to see the relative position of the land. How much (contiguous) land is situated above (upstream) and what happens at the land downstream? I

try to estimate the amount of rainwater (including runoff) the plot might receive at every spell of good rain (say 5 cm). I also try to understand where the runoff water goes. Would it make sense to harvest that water? How? How much? For what purposes?

If it is possible to dig out some parts of land (there could already be dugout spots), it provides an excellent opportunity to look at the other properties of the soil. I look at the physical characteristics of the soil particles available on the top layer of the land as well as just below it. What are the basic physical properties of soil I look at? They include coarseness (presence of gravel and sand) and fineness of the soil because that has a lot to do with the water retention capacity of the land.

I think a poor farmer needs deep topsoil with a lot of silt and clay (loam is best) where he could cultivate short-term crops to meet food grain requirements, and vegetables for consumption and cash income. The soil should have good water holding capacity with desirable drainage.

If I find a piece of smallholder's land with degraded topsoil full with gravel, my options include adding tank silt, growing sun hemp for green manure, adding compost, growing pulses, etc.

I may also think of digging deeper pits to replace bad soil with good soil in order to plant more remunerative fruit trees. In that case I immediately find out whether there are any hard rocks that may affect the root growth of a mature plant? If I do not examine that, the option may end up as a big loss in the future. The entire investment would be useless.

If the same piece of land is owned by a better-off farmer, I may think of just leaving it, apart from some treatment for on-site moisture conservation and planting timber trees or grass (in case of limited budgets). Thus, the task of generating technical options and reflecting over the economic profile of ownership runs in tandem.

Looking Under the Surface

I am very curious about the qualities of surface soil as well as subsoil because both are very important to me. I remember Chapri village of Hazaribagh in Jharkhand, where my colleague Soumen negotiated a food for work project with CRS (Catholic Relief Services). The project was to rehabilitate 40 acres of extremely degraded land belonging to poor scheduled caste families. It was a chunk of wasteland with severe gully erosion.

In those days replicating the 5% model was a preoccupation. But in this case, we improvised. We treated the land with a modified 5% model, not to treat the land to grow paddy but to dig out good silt available in the lower layers to cover the degraded topsoil. The idea was to engage family labour of the concerned smallholders profitably with low gestation crops.

I am very cautious about the presence of impermeable rocks below the soil for two reasons. One is that the rock at moderate depth (say 10-15 ft) check deep percolation of rainwater and increases the possibility of tapping seepage. This happens when the soil above is permeable. Villagers might have the data from the experience of digging wells or tanks in the area.

If nothing is visible, I look for a local

stream where the watercourse might expose the substratum. I try to speculate looking at the position of exposed rocks within villages that people often use to dry their grains, or the appearance of local hillocks, or the pits formed where people take soil to mend their walls. All these help me to generate an idea about the nature of the substrata.

Other questions that I try to answer include the depth of the aquifers and the degree of fluctuation in the water table in different seasons.

Distance of Land from Home

I also try to map how far the land is from the house of the owner or from the hamlet. What is the status of protection? A plot of land with a fence says a lot about the family's attitude towards the land. Is the family enterprising enough to protect their land with a good fence? What do neighbouring families do with their lands? What is the existing land use pattern?

I also consider the steps we might have to take to tackle the envy of fellow farmers if a particular piece of land is developed. I need to consider that in generating options. I have to also ask whether the family has adequate manpower to take care of the land with proposed change in practices.

Value for the Owner

I have to assess the comparative value of a piece of land through eyes of the owner. I try to assess the owner's existing return against labour deployed in different livelihood sources. Suppose the owner's family is already earning Rs 50 per person day from selling firewood collected from the local forest while the land remains idle.

The challenge would then be to generate an option for this piece of land that would consume an equivalent amount of labour but would ensure higher returns with a higher degree of sustainability than that of selling firewood. I often find this a very difficult challenge to address. It is far easier to increase returns against labour for a family already engaged in farming on a particular piece of land.

Possible Crop Economics

I however try to work out possible crop economics from a piece of land in different conditions and in different seasons. If we can provide irrigation, we can plan for 300% cropping intensity with one crop each of a grain, a pulse and a vegetable. The pulse and grain could be used for home consumption.

I would therefore try to understand the food habits of the family. Do they value grains and pulses? Or would they like to only cultivate vegetables, as the potential for returns is higher? Vegetables are all right if the soil and water are suitable, and linkages with local and external markets are not limiting factors.

In the areas where we work, it is possible to access information on existing yields of grains and pulses. However, it is difficult to arrive at estimates of the yields of vegetables. I try to generate some figures through the people's guess on yield on a per plant basis. For example, I enquire about the amount of eggplant or chilli that can be harvested from one plant. This helps to project return on a per acre basis by estimating plant population per acre.

I try to guess the canopy size of the selected plant at maturity and assume a

particular spacing to calculate the area required for each plant and then divide the total area by each plant area to arrive at the number of plants in an acre. I then try to work out the cost of cultivation on a per plant basis. Knowing per gram of seed count is very useful in this regard.

There are also other issues to address. How do we decide when to harvest water rather than tap groundwater, or the other way round, for a piece of land? How do we work on the basis of a farming system and not on the production of specific crops?

Resource-Resource Relationship

These decisions, however, require explorations of a much higher order. In order to do so, it is important to look at the resource-resource relationships.

In integrated natural resource management (INRM), an understanding of resource-resource relationships plays an important role. Resources are always going through a conversion chain. Multiple factors are simultaneously active on any given resource, determining its present and future state.

It can be said that if we understand the carbon, nitrogen and water cycles, geological formations, meteorology, botany, zoology and such other elementary sciences, we can interpret all relationships that we like to call resource-resource relationships.

What follows, however, is an endeavour to capture some of the observable manifestations of these relationships around rainfall, terrain features, geological formation, substrata, land use, etc., which mutually determine how each resource would behave or function.

Influence of human beings and livestock are also important in defining the behaviour of resources. At the same time, their own efficiency is determined by the efficiency of other resources.

It is difficult to provide an exhaustive narration of detailed resource-resource relationships. Following are some simple examples, which may help us to develop an understanding about such relationships. It is expected that once we develop an understanding through systematic analysis of some of these relationships, we can identify many more such relationships while interacting with various resources.

Rainfall and Land

Let us look at a large area receiving the same amount of rainfall. We would find that each piece of land in the area would not have similar moisture regimes although they might have received the same amount of rainfall. The extent of moisture content varies from place to place and even plot to plot, depending on several factors. Some of these factors are:

Texture: Lands with fine textured soils (clay and silt) would retain more moisture, thereby providing a longer time to use it for biomass production. Lands with coarser textured soils (sand, laterite, etc.) would retain moisture for a shorter duration, thereby limiting the possibilities of growing biomass.

Similarly, the permeable depth of subsoil and its texture determine the potential of retaining water in the deeper soil layer once it receives rain and after the topsoil is saturated. Many a time we observe that the topsoil (ranging from a couple of inches to a couple of feet) is degraded and full

of coarse soil particles but the soil immediately below it consists of finer textures, which can retain significant amounts of moisture and can help in raising deep-rooted plants.

It is possible to enhance the moisture retention by manipulating the soil surface or soil texture, which means that the resource-resource relationship could be artificially strengthened.

Relative position of land in the slope: In an undulating terrain, the quality and value of land vary depending upon its position. The land on ridges is generally more degraded with coarse soils. Thus, their water retention is low. At the same time, as the ridge lands have shallow soil depths, they let most of the water to run off to downstream lands.

This means (assuming same rainfall across the region) a piece of land downstream of the ridge would receive an additional amount of water as either runoff or seepage from the ridge. As one goes further down the slope, there is every possibility that lower the location of land on the slope, greater the possibility of receiving additional water as surface runoff and seepage.

Relative position of upland and lowland: Lands are classified as upland or lowland depending upon their relative locations on the continuum of a particular slope. It is possible that valley lands of a particular drainage line could actually be situated on a higher contour than a piece of uplands in the adjacent area. Thus, it is possible that one can divert excess water from a valley to an upland following a contour.

Land use: Proper land use is a very sound

approach in strengthening resources-resource relationships. Plantations on degraded uplands not only create new demand for water for their growth but also checks further degradation by reducing runoff and increasing percolation. Addition of biomass and humus (as leaf litters) further enriches the topsoil, strengthening its relationship with rain.

Intercultural operations in cropped lands: Regular hoeing and application of organic manure improves the relationship between rainwater and land.

Land and Subsoil

As mentioned earlier, many a time we observe that topsoil of a piece of land may look very degraded with coarse soil particles but the subsoil immediately below may consist of finely textured soil of significant depth. This subsoil could be used as a valuable resource to create a layer of fine topsoil.

This reminds me of Chapri and Mayapur villages in Hazaribagh district. We used the concept of the 5% model to dig pits and excavate good subsoil to cover the degraded topsoil. In this way we were able to convert a significant amount of degraded land to cultivable land.

Land and Groundwater

Location of an aquifer and the quality of water under the ground plays an important role in determining the potential of the land. However, the potential depends a lot on the peoples' ability to establish this relationship by sinking wells to draw the water for irrigation.

In Dausa district of Rajasthan, we have seen farmers dig wells by investing about

a lakh by borrowing from local moneylenders to tap very poor quality water, whereas in eastern region states such as Jharkhand, Orissa and Chhattisgarh, there is much more potential to tap groundwater but farmers are not culturally oriented to tap such resources.

Land and Flowing Water

Lifting or diverting water from rivers or drainage lines is a time-tested way to provide for irrigation.

Land and Labour

When land is left entirely to nature, it can manage the resources on its own. That relationship may or may not serve the immediate needs of the people. To make it useful, a planned investment of labour is necessary.

Labour invested in an opportune time (when other factors of productions such as sun, rain, water, temperature, length of day, etc. are favourable) can only produce desirable results. Last year, day-neutral varieties of paddy transplanted in September in the eastern plateau region could not flower because the temperature dropped below 15°C.

Land and Draught Animals

It is common to find many families who own land but do not have adequate draught power to plough it. It shows that the relationship between land and draught power is critical in determining the relationship between the land and its owner. Bad performance of biomass production from land also affects the relationship between humans and livestock. Distress sale of cattle in Western India (Rajasthan and Gujarat) during drought is therefore very common.

Land and Sunshine

Agricultural productivity depends a lot on appropriate sunshine. A piece of land would be productive only when it receives sufficient sunshine. Selection of crops or trees on a particular piece of land must take into consideration of its illumination.

It is well established that in the rainy season in eastern India, the yield of paddy is lower than the yield of summer paddy. This is primarily due to the brighter sunshine in summer, leading to higher photosynthesis. Besides this, bright sunshine is also effective in making the soil free from pathogen inoculums.

Today, when sunshine is freely available, we consider water as a limiting factor in enhancing production. We seldom think how best we can trap solar energy to meet our energy needs in different forms. So much of land remains idle for most part of the year and the solar radiation is lost. We may think of producing more biomass to meet our energy deficit by using the moisture in deeper soil.

Land and Air

Some gases in the atmosphere supply primary plant nutrients (carbon, nitrogen and oxygen). Plants trap all the three elements, while some nitrogen is also received in the soil through other inorganic processes where human beings have little role to play.

But trapping more nitrogen through cultivation of leguminous plants is very much within our reach. Nitrogen does not come alone; it proportionately increases the synthesis of carbohydrates. These, increased biomass gets back to the soil, enriching it further.

In this context it is worthwhile to mention people-resource relationships. Generally, people-resource relationship is used to qualify people's access and control over resources. Who owns the land, who does not, who has access to water sources and who does not, etc.

However, the relationship is mature and meaningful only when the people understand the intricate linkages of their resources with other resources. Otherwise, the understanding is incomplete and so is the relationship. Thus, understanding resource-resource relationships is necessary to understand people-resource relationships.

Deeper Understanding Required

For those among us in Pradan who are involved in INRM activities, resource-resource relationships and resource-people relationships are frequently used terms. Understanding these relationships have become more significant as we think of adopting INRM as our main approach to promote livelihoods.

Many of us are more comfortable in helping people to grow vegetables or paddy, or constructing ponds, wells, etc. In a few cases, INRM means fitting a set of activities to an area. While funding is a constraint to follow the ideal INRM approach, it need not mean we have to move with an incomplete understanding about the subject.

It is for these reasons that I have attempted to explain the concept of INRM activities. I will really appreciate responses from colleagues in the field so that we can arrive at a better understanding of the issues.

Present a New Idea for Peer Review

Pradan has always been in the forefront in innovating on new ideas that could be implemented at the grassroots. **Concept Papers** in NewsReach are a way to share and air new untested ideas to solicit peer feedback. If you have a new idea you would like to test before implementing, send us a 2,000 word **Concept Paper**. If you have experience or views on any **Concept Paper** that would help the author, email us at newsreach@pradan.net.

Reeling Yarn as an Enterprise

Innovative training on entrepreneurship development could fulfil a felt need to orient poor women to engage in reeling tasar yarn more profitably

Madhabananda Ray

Pradan has been promoting tasar yarn production based livelihood among its women self-help group (SHG) members. This is different from the traditional tasar yarn-making sector because the activity is separated from traditional weaving activity and individual producers are trained as business entrepreneurs. We have promoted about 2,000 women tasar yarn producers. They are now organised into a producers' company.

Pradan has developed a comprehensive training module for the yarn producers after assessing their level of understanding of the business of tasar yarn production and by identifying specific training needs.

The training module was first tried out at a tasar yarn reeling centre in Bihar. The group was floundering, the members were leaving the business, the work shed and cocoons were not optimally utilised, and production of yarn per member, and thus earnings, were abysmally low.

We found that the impact of the training on the performance and outlook of the producers was significant. There was immediate enthusiasm in and around the village. Gradually, the group became one of the best performing groups. There is now a huge demand for the activity in and around that village.

The training has since been conducted in other tasar yarn production groups. In each case the impact has been perceptible. In particular, it increased the confidence level of the producers.

To achieve our objective of large-scale expansion of tasar yarn production by poor women and making producer groups self-sustaining, the producers need to improve skills in technical aspects, managerial ability and leadership quality. We therefore need to identify potential producers and enable them with these skills and techniques.

Difficult Task

We have realised that in addition to the month-long technical training in the village by trainers of Central Silk Board (CSB), the producers also need to acquire and develop their managerial ability, leadership quality and entrepreneurial skill. The task is difficult because most of the women are illiterate with limited exposure.

In this context, it is important that individual producers develop a sense of ownership towards the activity. This would infuse growth in their organisations. It is possible if a sense of entrepreneurship is developed in the producers. For this, the training needs to emphasise on the following areas.

Development of business sense: Although the tasar yarn producers are mature members of SHGs, they are entering into a business of their own for the first time. They need to know what a business is all about; how a business operates, and its various ups and downs. They need to be aware of the issues related to quality and quantity.

Target setting: It is important that each woman sets her own target regarding the

number of cocoons she intends to process everyday. Setting targets is directly linked to profits. Therefore, training on setting targets is important.

Negotiating in the market: The women need to develop their bargaining skills to purchase raw materials (cocoons), sell produce (yarn) and govern the organisations.

Business management: The women need to not only manage their time, they need to manage production, their resources and their family responsibilities.

Working together: Although the producers are individual businesswomen, they require to act as a collective entity on specific issues.

Indicators

Based on our experience of working with these groups and based on certain expected outcomes, a few factors have emerged as useful indicators of the entrepreneurial orientation of the producers. They are:

- Why have they joined the producer group?
- Do they understand the entire business process?
- Are they aware of the linkages?
- How do they fix daily targets?
- Do they talk about quality, profitability, time, capability, etc?
- What can they do to increase their incomes?

In order to verify these observations, we selected two tasar reeled yarn producers' groups at Saraiyhat block of Dumka district in Jharkhand that have been operational for different periods of time. We took up these issues with them and elicited their response.

Target setting: Producers in the older group set their day-to-day targets (number of cocoons processed) on their own based on their availability of time. About 15% of the producers could not achieve their targets as they were setting unrealistic goals. Producers in the younger group also set daily targets but their main consideration was the profit they could earn per day. They were achieving targets well ahead of time (although less than the potential).

Quality orientation: Both the groups were aware of the quality standards. However, the concern for quality was not always translated into action. They were aware of certain external blocks, which were hindering quality yarn production.

Awareness of business process: We found that both the groups were not entirely conversant with the business process of tasar sub-sector. Some of the members in both groups had not even seen the final products (fabric, made-ups, etc.).

Exposure to markets: Although the groups were aware of the selling price of their produces in all the grades, they were not aware of the entire tasar yarn market and did not have sufficient market related information.

Costing and pricing: Both the groups, especially the older one, were not aware of the process of costing as well as the pricing of the cocoons and the yarn.

Credit assessment and management: Although the older group had procured a loan of Rs 4.5 lakh from ICICI Bank to purchase cocoons, they were not sensitive to the implications of the loan vis-à-vis timelines in task completion.

Increased responsibility for growth: About 10-15% of the women expressed eagerness to take on additional responsibilities for marketing, and building and managing linkages. This requires a proper selection strategy to identify a few women who could be trained to manage the affairs and take charge of the governance of the producers' company.

Training Objectives

Based on the deliberations, the broad objectives of the training were set as:

- To help SHG members to build a tasar yarn production based enterprise group.
- To orient the producers towards tasar yarn production enterprise.
- To develop their attitudes towards becoming tasar yarn production based entrepreneurs.
- To train them in setting goals and in taking calculated risks.
- To strengthen the competence for enterprise management.
- To help the women manage the increased workload.

Application

The phase-I of the training module was applied in a tasar reeled yarn producing group with the objective to measure the desired impact of the training on producers, and make necessary changes if required.

We selected one group in Bihar (Viswakarma Sut Katai Samity) in Bhusiatari village of Katoria block. Although the SHGs were old, the reeling group was promoted only in January 2004. We conducted the training during September 21-23 of that year.

The poor women in this area are engaged in household work coupled with seasonal wage earning (mostly paddy transplanta-

tion). Most of them also had to go to the forest to gather firewood for sale in local weekly markets.

Initially, the technical training started with 19 selected SHG members from four adjacent villages (Bhusiatari, Letwa, Titlakho and Kadhar). Four of them dropped out for different reasons. Finally, 15 members participated in the training. Most were wage earners before they started producing tasar yarn.

Nine participants were waiting for us when we reached Bhusiatari on the scheduled date. Within the next 15 minutes, another 6 members joined. The day started with a focus on the business of reeling and the need to know more about the activity. The norms of time and regularity were emphasised.

Ice Breaking

The ice-breaking session began by pairing the participants. They were given 10 minutes to share their names, the village they belonged to, the number of cocoons they processed the previous day, the profits they earned on their last sale, and the scope for improvement. After the sharing, participants assembled together and each participant was asked to introduce her partner in the assembly on the above aspects.

We then discussed wage earning vis-à-vis entrepreneurship and engaged in role-playing. The participants were divided into two subgroups. One subgroup demonstrated the life of wage labourers in a paddy field while the other demonstrated the life of women in a reeling centre.

The involvement of the participants during their role-play was so intense that the reel-

ing subgroup were trying hard to convince the wage-earning subgroup to join the reeling activity. The wage-earning subgroup was also convinced about reeling. This conclusion was reached without any facilitation from us.

In this session, the group playing the reeling role realised it was their own work. There was no fixed timing. They could easily work at the reeling centre and comfortably finish all household chores. Most importantly, they would be able to earn more than what they could earn as a wage labour. No scorching heat, wind or rain disturbs them while reeling. Food and tea can be served in the centre according to their interest without depending on anyone.

Enhanced Regard

The perceived regard from their families, especially from their husbands, was immense. Some husbands even carried lunch to the centre. The women were able to spend their earnings on hair oil, soap, children's education, etc. Some of the participants thought of tuition for their children. Work round the year in the centre without any disruption was a major aspect of the employment that they liked. Some expressed their enjoyment in working together under a common shed.

In wage earning, on the other hand, the women worked only due to compulsion. They never wished to be wage earners. It was reflected in the role-play that no tea was served even at the time of extreme cold despite repeated requests to the landlord. Wage labour was time specific so that even women with small children reaching the field late had to return without getting to work. The quantity of work was not limited on a day. It was entirely up to the landlord.

Even after a day's hard toil, payment was often delayed. On top of it, they ended up in getting paddy without standard measurements instead of cash. The meagre income from wage labour was not sufficient to save for their expenses at times of crisis.

During the debriefing, the learning for undertaking one's 'own activity' was summarised as follows:

- Control over working time.
- Higher status in family and society.
- Work round the year (not seasonal).
- Hard work determines level of income.
- More control over income and expenditure.
- Work according to capacity.
- Opportunity to take initiatives.

The third session of the first day involved locating the reeling activity in the business chain. The session started with eliciting responses from participants about what happens after reeling. Most did not know what happened with their produce. We then discussed the mapping of tasar activity.

Mapping the Activity

We started by asking participants how the reeling activity began. Asking the participants focused questions generated animated discussion. Based on their responses, the facilitator pasted pictures, drawings and photographs on a chart paper fixed on a board. Real cocoons and yarn were also used. After graphics of all tasar activities were pasted on the chart, the facilitator helped the group to understand how cocoons were prepared and what happened to their yarn. The final products (scarves, dress material) of tasar yarn were also displayed for the participants to look and feel.

The process was participative. The women

knew about the backward linkages like raising nurseries and plantations, rearing silkworms, cocoon production, grainage operation, group formation and bank linkages. They were however not well aware of the forward linkages (grading of yarn, selling and marketing of yarn and fabric, weaving and its difficulties, exhibiting tasar textile through fashion shows, payment cycles, etc.).

They were therefore keenly interested in the forward linkages and were very inquisitive. The display of the final products to the participants evoked curiosity and excitement. They were not only gathering information. Everybody wanted to touch the product to have a feel of it.

In this session the participants learnt that:

- Each stage of the activity in the entire process of tasar requires hard work and sincerity.
- The process of rearing itself interested many participants who do not practice it.
- There are different ways to procure cocoons.
- How to identify reelable cocoons.
- The importance of bank linkage.
- The necessity of grading yarn.
- The need to develop contacts with other stakeholders in the tasar network.

The group was able to understand the entire process of tasar silk production. The group showed interest in some activities beyond reeling like procurement of cocoons, boiling of cocoons, contacts with other reeling groups, going to the markets, etc. They realised that their earnings depended on the market, which follows its own terms and conditions. They were able to identify their position and its significance in the overall tasar production cycle.

Day Two

We began the second day by recapitulating the learning of day one. The participants clearly articulated the differences between wage earning and entrepreneurship. They were now aware of the entire chain of tasar enterprise. They had also realised that quality of yarn they produce determined the quality of fabric, which in turn affected their earnings and regular cash flow.

In the first session of the second day, we mapped forward and backward linkages in tasar reeling. We started by referring to the position of reeling in tasar activities in the chart prepared on the first day. One of the participants expressed her desire to know the ways she could get help and gain knowledge to enhance and sustain her earnings. This helped us to introduce a skit involving some volunteers from the participants as well as trainers.

The objective of the skit on linkages was to make the participants understand the importance of the different agencies and of leveraging resources and services at different stages for promoting a reeling group.

The skit showed the step-by-step involvement of various agencies (SHGs, bank, CSB, Pradan, cocoon producer group, machine manufacturer, yarn grader, secondary organisation for marketing) in establishing a reeling centre from the beginning. It also showed how collectives of yarns producers of 4-5 reeling centres could efficiently supply market demand.

After the skit, we asked participants to speak about the various agencies they have seen in the skit. We drew symbols for each of the agencies. We then showed the linkages between agencies by drawing arrows.

We summed up the linkage chart by explaining the role of different agencies and experts and their relation to a reeling group. We then discussed their future role beyond yarn production. We also discussed how to increase their skills and capabilities so that they could take on additional roles.

The women's participation was lively and their level of confidence to adopt new roles like building linkages with manufacturers and marketing agencies was beyond our expectations. The most striking part was the collective enthusiasm they showed to attain a scale of production to adequately meet the market demand.

The skit displayed that the reelers themselves were comfortable in managing some activities involved like arranging land for the reeling centre, dealing with the bank and procuring cocoons. However, for some activities like arranging reeling and spinning machines and trainers, they required initial help from Pradan.

The participants felt that they could immediately pick up skills on various activities that included purchasing cocoons, boiling cocoons, grading yarn, supplying yarn to the market, and dealing with the bank to mobilise working capital.

In this session they were able to derive a fair amount of clarity on the linkages with different agencies. They understood the marketing channel of yarn. They also understood the extent to which they could play roles other than yarn production immediately.

Tossing Rings

The second session of the second day involved helping the women set realistic goals, take risks and understand the rea-

sons behind success and failure. The session started with an energizer. We started by playing the game of tossing rings.

Three rounds were conducted. The first round was confidential, second was in front of the group and the third was a money round. In first round, while the participants were going one by one to play the game, the rest were engaged in singing songs. At the same time, one of the trainers collected performance data of the last month of individual reelers. In the third round, we placed cocoon as incentive for success, with which the reelers could easily relate.

In first round seven of 14 participants succeeded but in the second round 11 participants succeeded. In second round they utilised the first round's learning of success and failure and set a realistic target. As a result the success rate was higher. In the third round, the incentive influenced target setting.

Learning from Loss

At the end of third round, three participants who incurred losses were disturbed and disappointed. We then compared success and failure in the game. The loss making members started expressing opinions like reducing the target a little bit, properly re-reeling, being more quality conscious and then gradually increasing the processing of more cocoons.

The game helped the participants to learn that the factors for success and failure are within their control. Subsequently, they were able to relate success with profit and failure with loss in connection with their business.

It also helped them to become aware of the importance for maintaining high quality.

They identified the factors to be considered during setting realistic targets (number of cocoons to process). Their reaction was to adjust targets in term of cocoons to be able to produce more A-grade yarn.

Learning from each other's experiences was a major focus for them. They showed their willingness to visit other groups as well. Many members also expressed the risk associated with goal setting and how to minimise and manage that risk.

Day Three

The third day also started with recapitulating the previous day. The facilitators stressed upon the strategy they need to have in order to take the risk in taking up the reeling activity. It was also emphasised that it was time to look into other dimensions to identify the internal resources and to know and utilise external resources contributing to the activity.

The first session started with a tower building exercise. The group was divided into 5 subgroups, with the option of selecting their own partners of 3 members. The norms were established for the building of the tower. We informed them that normally one could build a tower of eight blocks within the stipulated time of five minutes. The tower needed to stand erect. An erect tower represents the success of the subgroup.

The exercise was conducted in three rounds. The first round was for the subgroups. The second round was for the whole group. Realising the potential of the whole group, a third round was also conducted.

All of the subgroups were found to be well prepared for the exercise. The number of blocks they wanted to use and the member

to be blindfolded were already decided before entering into action. Despite the failure in the first attempt, some of the subgroups tried to rebuild it for success with more precaution. One of the members was so cautious that despite a request from her own group members to add one more block, she did not, knowing that it would fall again. Seeking help from the builder and providing help to the tower builder was lacking in some of the subgroups.

In the second round the entire group was given a chance to prove their potential. It reinforced the cohesiveness and the integrity of the group. They selected the best tower builder from their earlier experience.

This round was taken as the success of the whole reeling group. As a result, all the members got involved in their own ways. They succeeded in building a tower of nine blocks (excellent result) and the participants thought that it was a great achievement.

Excellent Showing

In the last round, without having any experience as a tower builder, one of the members came forward on her own for the exercise. She built a tower of 11 blocks, demonstrating her self-confidence. Her excellent showing encouraged other group members for progressive success in subsequent attempts.

At the end of the session the group felt the need of using the potential of internal resources (knowledge, skills, etc.) and drawing on external resources at times of need. We also observed that the participants had realised the importance of both the resources to set a realistic goal for success. That internal resources can contribute to develop the confidence level of the women was clearly

expressed by the participants.

The third session of the third day involved identifying internal and external resources. To reinforce the learning of the tower building exercise, we proceeded with two skits. One was about a reeling group that used both the resources, while the other did not use their own resources nor did they use external resources. The skits were played by all the trainers and took 40 minutes to perform.

The learning of the group was very positive. They learnt about the commitment of producing A-grade yarn, sharing of targets among members to avoid cocoons to be carried forward to the next day, initiative to boil the cocoons, and owning up to shortcomings. At the end of the session, the participants realised that collective effort of the entire group was necessary to achieve the target. They also became aware of the resources they have.

Action Plans

After the three days of training, the participants prepared their action plans separately. The striking aspect of the action plans was that everybody was concerned about the quality of yarn, to the extent of compromising on the number of cocoons to process. We found that all participants committed to reel only A-grade yarn. Some of their remarks were as follows:

- Will work for eight hours with concentration, will process only 60 cocoons but convert them all into A-grade yarn - *Falguni Devi*
- Will do re-reeling on my own and will not leave it to the children - *Punawati Devi*
- Will apply mind to eradicate B-grade yarn - *Kaito Devi*

- Have to take 60 instead of 80 cocoons to reel A-grade yarns to earn more profit - *Kushmi Devi*

- Have to concentrate during reeling, otherwise will fail as seen in tower building - *Rajmuni*

- Will increase the number of cocoons gradually but will reel all A-grade yarns - *Basanti Devi*

- Will learn how to boil cocoons and will accompany others to introduce to the bank - *Paria Devi and Punawati*

- Will go and purchase cocoons on my own - *Paria Devi*

We found that after the training there was a shift in outlook. On the first day participants were suggesting that processing more cocoons would increase their profit. At the end of the training, they were emphasising more on the quality of yarn reeled rather than the number of cocoons.

We also found that backbenchers became active. Some of the participants, who were initially shy and appeared to be less confident and little bit reserved, became more confident. It was reflected in their performance and appearance. The participants also prepared a song based on the linkages, which was complete in its content. This reflected clear understanding.

This is abstracted from a paper presented at the National Meet of Accredited Trainers in Entrepreneurship Development organised by National Institute for Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development (NIESBUD)

Diary of a Visit to the Netherlands

An EYE Exchange visit to the Netherlands in June was memorable for several reasons, not the least for the warm hospitality

Mala Roy

Three of us from Pradan, Arnab Chakraborty from Purulia in West Bengal, Ashok Kumar from Vidisha in Madhya Pradesh and I from Jamshedpur in Jharkhand reached Amsterdam at 6 am on June 24, 2006 on an EYE (Exchange Young Executives) visit. Since this was my first trip outside India, I was a little tense before reaching Amsterdam, although I knew that Nelleke would come to receive us.

The weather at Amsterdam was chilly. Nelleke van der Vleuten, Programme Manager for EYE Exchange, gave us a warm welcome. She took us to Utrecht, which is about 40 minutes by road from Amsterdam. The Netherlands looked so planned that it looked like a picture postcard. We stayed at an ICCO (Dutch funding organisation) guesthouse. It was cosy and had all facilities including a kitchen. Nelleke stayed with us till the afternoon, discussing the aim and focus of different programme activities in the week ahead.

We then went to a supermarket to buy groceries and vegetables. It was like an Indian supermarket, but with a big difference. All vegetables, chicken and eggs came with a serial number. One could track farm origins and other details. I understand that all Dutch people are highly quality conscious. For me, it was very difficult to buy anything as I was calculating everything in rupees and everything seemed to be very expensive. We bought some stuff after a lot of mental struggle!

In the evening we strolled in the market area of Utrecht. I saw people of all ages sitting in hotels sipping beer or other drinks. It was a Saturday and most restaurants had laid out tables and chairs on the pavements where everyone was enjoying their weekend.

We had dinner with Pauline Jansen and Mayra Ortega Maldonado, who had visited with us in India in November 2004. It was nice to meet them again after two years. Pauline was in a new job and Mayra had a baby now. It was interesting to know the new initiative at low cost undertaken by Philips, where Mayra works. We met with a new friend, Mr Kaus from ABN-AMRO. He will be supporting Pradan in making a business plan of all poultry co-operatives. He will be visiting Kesla in Madhya Pradesh and various locations in Jharkhand in September 2006. For me the most interesting part was that it was daylight even at 9.30 pm!

Second Day

The next day was a Sunday. For the Dutch the weather was horrible as it was raining, windy and cold. I however enjoyed the weather as in India one needs to go to a hill station for such weather.

At the start of the day we went to Nelleke's home in Nijmegen. It was a lovely house with wooden flooring. There were many Indian handicrafts, which made me feel proud of the rich culture of my country. All the houses in the locality were of the same

size and structure. Each and every piece of land was planned and identical. This gave me an idea of government regulation.

Then we went to an open-air museum where we caught glimpses of traditional Dutch culture and how industrialisation and mechanisation started in the Netherlands. We also attended a concert and a theatre. We enjoyed till the evening and then went to the countryside.

We travelled to a place called Schalkwijk to meet Mr John, who owns a mini dairy (he is also Nelleke's cousin). The countryside looked like a town. It was an interesting to know that he was a member of 4 co-operatives for different services. He had 20 cows in his shed. Milking of cows was automatic. The milk went directly to the chilling plant. He also mentioned that one could not run a family with only 20 cows. He does some side business to manage household expenses.

He mentioned that dairy farmers operate at a very low margin and would not be viable if they do not operate on scale. All the activities of the dairy farm are automatic, so a single person can manage an entire dairy farm.

On the way I saw a number of dykes. As is well known, half of the country is below the mean sea level. The Netherlands has managed to convert submerged land into arable land by constructing the dykes. As a result, not a single piece of land is wasted. Nelleke accompanied us throughout the day, making it very memorable.

Third Day

On Monday we met with Annette Smith of ICCO. It was nice to meet Annette after a

long time. Annette and Elske accompanied me to a research and information centre at Lelystad, which is a part of Wageningen University. On the way I was told that 30 years ago the whole of Lelystad was submerged. But the Netherlands government has converted it into cultivable land by scientific water management. Maize and potato were cultivated here.

Mr J J Hoekman, experiment co-ordinator at the centre, welcomed us. This research farm conducts research on cattle, goats and poultry. Since I was interested in poultry, he showed the various experiments conducted by the centre. The entire experimental farm was fully automatic. There are conducting experiments with various feeds, layers, free grazing, etc. I found that the efficiency of production of a kilogram of meat was very high compared to India.

In fact, it is very difficult to compare the efficiency of both the countries, as the major factors that influence efficiency such as climate, breed used, etc. is different. One of the major achievements of this country, apart from its efficiency, is the extension services regarding latest outcomes, which the producers get from research institutions.

I talked with Mr Hoekman about linkages. It was difficult for him to commit anything as they were also facing a fund crunch. He was however eager to share knowledge with other partners. But they have their website in Dutch. But he assured us that he would try his best to support us.

We then met with Ms Kitty Hovenkamp, Manager of NAJK (Dutch Young Farmers Organisation). She informed us about the connection between the board and

members. She also told us how this organisation supports young farmers. It also helps in negotiations with the government regarding policy issues.

In the evening we had a meeting scheduled at Rabo Bank Foundation. Arnab made a presentation on behalf of Pradan. Mr Charles, Manager of Rabo Bank Foundation made a presentation on behalf of the bank. Mr Cosmas accompanied us on behalf of Share People (an organisation that supports organisations in developing countries with expertise from the Dutch corporate world). His participation helped us to have a more meaningful discussion with the bank. Ms Tetra Taams also participated in the meeting.

Rabo Bank is interested in financing experimentation and capacity building for activities that Pradan is promoting. Mr Charles suggested that Pradan could submit proposals for various activities. At the same time, they wanted to postpone such a proposal for some time as they are financing our Lohardaga dairy initiative. They wanted to see how it worked out, which might help in strategising further collaboration.

Fourth Day

The next day, June 27, was bright and sunny. We met with Ms Imke Musterd of WERELD WERKDAG (which tries to bring different organisations under the same umbrella) and Ms Caroline Rombouts of SAA, along with Annick S of ICCO. We showed them 'Reaching Out', the movie on Pradan. Ms Caroline was impressed with the initiatives of Pradan in promoting rural livelihoods. She assured us of talking to the board members of SAA for funds for Pradan promoted activities.

The next meeting was scheduled with Ms

Leonie Haakshorst of ICCO. She is working with marketing of tropical fruits. Sumitra from India also participated in the meeting. Together we tried to explore the market for soybeans and mangoes from India. We also tried to explore how to add more value to the present produce. As an outcome of the meeting, we intend to write a proposal regarding further possibilities of marketing mango.

In the afternoon, Mr Cosmos and Mr Kaus of ABN-AMRO and I visited Cobroed, a co-operative at Groenlo. The company is at the border with Germany. We had a meeting with Mr Hans (director) and Paul Ueffing. Mr Ueffing shared his experiences, as he was associated with Cobroed from its initial days. He also discussed how the co-operative came into being.

We discussed about the relationship between board members and the managing directors, how one can become a member, how does it function, etc. Mr Hans made a presentation regarding their operations. He emphasised on the operation of Cobroed.

I came to know of a number of interesting concepts on the movement of co-operation. All of us also visited a breeder's farm. It was interesting to see a member and managing director relationship and at the same time know the business of a breeder, a chain in the poultry industry.

Mr Hans promised me to support in the business plan of all Pradan promoted poultry co-operatives. Pradan will have to share their plans and work out further collaborations.

In the evening we had dinner with Anne Marie, a trainer at De Baak VNONCW. She

will work with ICCO in the EYE Exchange programme. Nelleke joined us at dinner.

Fifth Day

The morning of the fifth day of our visit started with the visit to a supermarket that sells only organic products. I found that the prices of all produce were double the cost. We saw some Indian pickles, mango chips and dried raw mangoes, which made us think that if we could promote such products in the villages we work in. These types of products would fetch premium prices. It would however require strategic planning and a robust business plan.

In the evening we went with Nelleke and Joost Moonen to Agriterra, a co-operative that works with 50,000 farmers. Mr Clevering of Agriterra discussed how the co-operative model became successfully in the Netherlands. Mr Kees Blokland joined us later. We tried exploring options for linkages. They suggested that we contact the federation in India, which was registered two years ago.

We then went to Annette's home. She had invited us and prepared some Indian dishes for us. I felt like home and was touched by her hospitality. We met with Myrtle, who joined us for the dinner. We talked about export markets and possibilities.

Sixth Day

The next day Mr Kaus of ABN-AMRO and I went to Cobroed to see the chain of poultry production. Mr Hans and Mr Paul accompanied us throughout the day. First we went to a farmer who has a shed capacity of 1.60 lakh birds in the Netherlands. He also owns a poultry farm of similar capacity in Canada. He mentioned that he was a medium-scale producer. He sells his produce on an annual

contract price to a processing unit.

I found that everything was automatic. He managed the farm alone. He only hires two labourers to clean the shed after the produce is sold. He mentioned that it would not be economical if he keeps any more helping hands. This gave me an idea of the competition in the market and also the scale of viable operation.

We then went to a processing unit that has a capacity of processing 9,000 kg of chicken per hour into premium pieces like breast, leg, etc. This was my first exposure to a processing unit of such magnitude. There were few workers working in the factory. Everything was automatic. The director of the company mentioned that most of the producers have an annual contract with him. He also mentioned even after having an annual contract, he has the liberty of making changes in the rate, if prices drop extraordinarily.

We then visited a small feed plant producing cattle feed. It was started by his parents. The feed was initially grinded by a windmill. Now the plant has modern instruments. He mentioned that it has become very tough to survive and he had to be constantly vigilant about the quality.

Seventh Day

The seventh day started with a meeting with Mr Willem Middelendrop, who chairs the organisation called Platform Aarde Boer Consument. It is platform where small farmers can fight for the rights and entitlements with the government and the corporate sector.

We then rushed to Wageningen University where we had a meeting scheduled with Mr Peter van der Meer and Mr Rob Kselik.

Annette accompanied us. We showed them the film 'Reaching Out'. We also explored possibilities of linkages between the University and Pradan. They suggested that we send them a proposal mentioning possible areas of collaboration.

We had dinner with Mr Gerhard (Impulsis) and Mr Michael of Indian Roses, an NGO. They support a few organisations in India for that promote self-help groups (SHGs). We made a presentation regarding our computer munshi programme (computerisation of SHG accounts). Both of them were impressed by the concept. Mr Michael suggested that we send a proposal if Pradan is interested in funds for SHGs.

We had dinner in an Indian restaurant. The most interesting part was when the soup was served. It was basically dal mixed with coriander leaves. It was a blow to us when we paid for it in Euros. The names of the dishes were Indian blended with Dutch. It was a memorable dinner.

Eighth Day

The next day Annette, Miranda, Mr Peter of ICCO and 3 of us went on a long drive to Mr Joris Baeke's farmhouse. He is a board member of NAJK. He owns a 90 ha farmhouse with all modern equipment and two large warehouses. He mentioned that he was a medium-scale farmer. He took special interest in showing his farm. We came to know how the Dutch government controls use of fertilisers within limits. The government sets crop rotation schedules, levels of fertiliser use, etc. It can take any legal action if these norms are violated. It shows the government's keenness on quantity and quality.

In the afternoon we went to see the North

Sea. Since it was a sunny day, there was a huge crowd. We could see how the dykes are constantly holding back the sea. We also saw many windmills. We drove back via Rotterdam, an industrial township. This city was completely destroyed during World War II. The city now has magnificent modern structures.

The Visit Ends

Our last day in the Netherlands was a Sunday. Pauline and Elise took us to the market. I bought lots of chocolates and some souvenirs. We then went to a park. In the evening we went to Pauline's place. She hosted us dinner. She made Indian dishes especially for us. She also had a plan of making rotis. I was touched by her sensitivity.

That night I could not sleep, as we would fly back to India the next day. All events were flashing in my mind and I was eager to share them with people back home.

In conclusion I would like to mention that it was a memorable trip. We need to follow up on the linkages that we have discussed with various people. I am hoping that with Mr Kaus plans of coming to India, the poultry business plan would take some definite shape. Our visit was very well designed. I must thank Nelteke for that. I also appreciate the fact that Nelteke and Annette tried so hard to make us feel at home in an unknown country. Elise was always by our side to make us comfortable.

Faces of Grief

Vignettes of gender tribulation from rural Chhattisgarh

Mousumi Sarkar

I have spent the past five years promoting women's self-help groups (SHGs). This period can be divided in two distinct phases. The first phase was in the Purulia district of West Bengal, where I joined as a Development Associate. It was here that I picked up basic skills required to promote SHGs.

The second phase was in the Raigarh district of Chhattisgarh, where I have been fortunate to initiate SHG activity. Being a woman, I have always been quickly accepted among the women in the villages and have freely mingled with group members, sometimes even discussing personal matters. These interactions have often given me an opportunity to learn about their emotional problems, which mostly seem to be suppressed or neglected.

I describe three instances here. I am yet to figure out a role for myself on these issues. What could I do to prevent this from happening again, and again, and again? I do not have the answers yet.

Financing a Second Marriage

Rathkuer Rathia is an tribal woman with four children. The family depends on agriculture, the forest and wage earnings for a livelihood. Rathkuer is one of the group members of the Saraswati Mahila Mandal promoted by Pradan in Danout village.

She once took a loan of Rs 3,000 for the purpose of 'marriage'. I was present in the meeting and asked her whose marriage it was. She turned to hide the tears rolling

down her face. The first thing that struck me was that maybe I was wrong in asking this question. The meeting ended and I did not pursue the matter. It was afterwards that I learned that she was borrowing money for her own husband's second marriage!

Rathkuer's husband brought home another married woman of the same village, with whom he had a long-standing relationship. This woman's husband took the matter to the Rathia Samaj, a village decision-making body consisting of men.

His allegation was that Rathkuer's husband had forcibly taken his wife. He demanded Rs 1,000 as compensation or threatened to take the matter to court. The Rathia Samaj settled the dispute. What did they do? They imposed a fine of Rs 1,000 and a community feast on Rathkuer's husband.

I was so uncomfortable. Firstly, how could a woman accept her husband marrying another? Secondly, why did she herself take a loan to meet that expenditure? How could the villagers come to terms with the kind of decision the wise men of the village took?

Life as Beating

The second incident happened in the Amaghat village. Philisitabai was a member of a SHG. She is probably the only woman in the village to work all 30 days in a month as agricultural labour. Her contribution to the family's well being far exceeds that of her drunkard husband.

One day her husband beat her up very badly. It all happened in front of the villagers who, along with Philisitabai's brother, rescued her. The three SHGs in Amaghat convened a meeting and asked Philisitabai to leave her husband for a few days. They also called her husband to apologise to her in front of all the members.

Philisitabai did not accept this decision. Not only that, after a few days I came to know that Philisitabai had filed a case against her own brother for interfering in a family quarrel and beating up her husband. When I last went there, I heard that Philisitabai also wanted to leave the SHG.

I have talked to both these women to understand the reasons for such behaviour. In both cases the answer was the same. They say that they have to think of their children. How could a woman manage to live without her husband? It is too difficult, they say.

The Scarlet Woman

Anusua Soni is a vocal member of Om Shanti Mahila Jagriti Samiti in Regra. She did not get on with her husband and was forced to leave him. Anusua returned to her parent's home and got married to another person.

The second marriage did not last long either. She now has three daughters, works in an *anganwadi* (creche) and earns Rs 200 per month. She also works as an agricultural labour.

In one of the group meetings, a conflict arose between Anusua and Sarifabai, also a member of the same SHG. The conflict was settled by the timely intervention of other

group members.

That evening Sarifabai's husband, Iqbal came searching for Anusua. Anusua saw Iqbal and ran, taking shelter in a nearby house. However, Iqbal did not spare Anusua. He beat her and dragged her to Sarifabai's feet.

All this happened in front of some villagers but nobody intervened or rescued Anusua. The group members and some villagers suggested that Anusua take the case to the police. But Anusua did not agree, fearing that Iqbal might kill her brother.

The SHG then convened a meeting and called Sarifabai and Iqbal. But no one actually dared to call Iqbal. The group members decided to take this matter to the cluster meeting. In between, I kept hearing murmurs from nearby villages that Anusua was of bad character and that she was the cause for everything that happened.

If there was a relationship and it was the cause for the quarrel, why did the villagers not blame Iqbal (a father of six children) as he was equally responsible?

This issue was raised in the meeting, too, but no one, including the mahila sarpanch (woman head) dared to summon Iqbal to the forum. Anusua also lost interest in this case and apologised for bringing the issue to the group. Several days later, I heard some group members talking again in low voices about Anusua's bad character.

Mysterious Behaviour

I would like to understand more clearly why these women behaved the way they

did. Tribal women in Chhattisgarh have traditionally enjoyed more freedom, something that has perhaps been denied to women in most parts of our country. According to available data and the gender development index, the districts of Chhattisgarh are placed higher than districts of Madhya Pradesh.

How can I then accept that there was nothing wrong in the cases of Rathkuer, Philisitabai or Anusua? Are these stray cases that do not reflect or represent the population? Does this happen because of the roles that women play – as daughters, sisters, wives and mothers?

How come I did not come across such strange happenings in Purulia? What happens when we leave such issues to be settled in traditional ways, where men are the arbitrators? Don't we suppress women's feelings and dignity? Don't we deprive them of the voice they should have in running their own lives?

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