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REPORT

JRF: Building Community
Leadership through Craftmanship

CASE STUDY

Nari Adalat: A Beacon for
Women in Distress

JOURNEY

JMMS Chakai: Fight
against Corruption



Farm Technology

—
Opening up
unimagined
possibilities
for women

Transplanting paddy from a mat
nursery in Bausuli Village,
Mayurbhanj district, Odisha (p. 8)



02 LEAD

Farm Technology: Opening up Unimagined Possibilities for Women

'A woman worker uses her fingertips on an average 522 times, her fingernails 144 times and her palms 55 times for every single kilogramme of grain that she produces, according to a survey by India's Ministry of Agriculture.'

ANJAN SWAR AND SAGARIKA SATAPATHY

13 JOURNEY

JMMS Chakai: Fight against Corruption

Coming face to face with rampant corruption in the implementation of the provisions of MGNREGA, the women of Jivan Marshal Mahila Sangh refuse to buckle down to the local oppressors and an apathetic bureaucracy

SHUVAJIT CHAKRABORTY

19 CASE STUDY

Nari Adalat: A Beacon for Women in Distress

Fulfilling the need for justice-imparting systems in a strongly patriarchal society, Nari Adalats, despite facing challenges during the evolutionary phase of this Alternative Dispute Resolution system, are helping to reduce the distress of village women

NAMITA RAJE

29 REPORT

JRF: Building Community Leadership through Craftsmanship

Choosing young women weavers, who show promise and who have a thirst for knowledge, as Bunker Sakhis, is an attempt to recognize the potential of women to flourish in business

YOGESH CHAUDHARY

37 CASE STUDY

The Road Less Travelled

Showing remarkable steadfastness of purpose and undeterred by the hurdles and rejections they faced, the women SHG members of Kalachandpur doggedly pursue the block officials to sanction the building of a road to their village and relieve them of untold misery

TAPAS PAUL

42 JOURNEY

My Experiences with the Kulhaiya Community

Initiating a women's group in this Muslim-dominated area of Bihar and introducing cucumber cultivation as an alternative farm-based livelihood was challenging and sometimes frustrating for the new team. Their success is their reward

SANTOSH KUMAR MANDAL

ANJAN SWAR AND SAGARIKA SATAPATHY

FARM TECHNOLOGY: Opening up Unimagined Possibilities for Women

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'A woman worker uses her fingertips on an average 522 times, her fingernails 144 times and her palms 55 times for every single kilogramme of grain that she produces, according to a survey by India's Ministry of Agriculture.'

Source: <http://www.scidev.net/global/r-d/feature/can-technology-rescue-women-farm-workers-from-drudgery--1.html>

WOMEN DO MANY OF the most difficult farm tasks such as seeding, transplanting, weeding, fertilizer application, manuring, plant protection, thinning, harvesting, processing, selling, winnowing, storing, looking after animals and kitchen gardening. All of these tasks are time-consuming and full of drudgery. Manual planting, sowing, weeding and harvesting activities are very hard work.

Although they do more than 70 per cent of the work in the fields and spend their days in farm-based activities, women are not given recognition as farmers. Similarly,

although they do all the work in the house, women are not the owners of a single item in the house. They do not even have ownership of themselves. They have no freedom.

Women agricultural labourers are an 'invisible' workforce who see farm work as an extension of their roles in the family; others regard them as unpaid assistants to their husbands. Agriculture is the main source of livelihood for most families in PRADAN's operational area; most are small and marginal farmers with very little landholdings. Agriculture is part of the unorganized sector mainly because there is lack of access to improved agricultural technologies in the area and farming is drudgery.

The term drudgery describes the physical and mental strain, agony and hardship experienced by human beings.

The term drudgery describes the physical and mental strain, agony and hardship experienced by human beings. It is even more alarming for rural women who, constrained by illiteracy, malnutrition and unemployment, have taken on the heavy burden of agricultural tasks and suffer immensely. There is a strong gender division in agricultural tasks, with women having to spend long hours in painful bent-over postures, leading to miscarriages and high infant mortality.

The strain on women is even more visible during the *kharif* season when they carry out the transplantation work, remaining bent over or squatting for much of

the day. Prolonged squatting sparks off strain and stress that often lead to premature births.

Farmers of Patna block, Keonjhar district, and Kolnara block, Raigada district, in Odisha, spoke of the contribution of women in agriculture during a discussion. We found there are various forms of discrimination in agriculture labour. In Patna block, there is gender discrimination in the labour rate, with the men being paid Rs 350 for ploughing and the women getting Rs 150–200 as farm labourers.

Women, by and large, contribute to two-thirds of the entire labour work. In a small farmer family,

where there is minimal nutritional food security, women spend hours and hours of painful labour in their fields and earn an additional Rs 50,000 as cash income. The scenario in Kolnara block is similar. The status of women is rarely considered with respect to their level of income or employment. Their education and health are neglected and their roles within the family, the community and society are considered inferior to that of men.

PRADAN's long-term vision is to bring about socio-economic transformation in women's lives. An inherent difficulty in conducting a meeting with women in the *kharif* season, however, is that a woman



Figure 1: Scenes Showing the Division of Work among Men and Women in Agriculture

**Table 1: Labour Budget of a Sample Farmer Family (of Five Members)
with an Average Landholding of 2 Acres**

Expected Yield and Outcomes	Paddy 22 Q, Pulses 40 kg and Cash Rs 50,000 (Food Sufficiency + Rs 50,000 Cash)										
Major Intervention	Engage Men/ Women	Paddy (1 Acre)		Pulses Blackgram (0.5 Acre)		Creepers with trellis (0.25 Acre)		Solanaceous Crop (0.25 Acre)		Total	
		Person day	Cost	Person day	Cost	Person day	Cost	Person day	Cost	Person day	Cost
Ploughing	Men	11	3,300	5	1,500	2.5	750	3	900	21.5	6,450
Nursery preparation/ Seed sowing	Women	3	600	0.25	50	1.25	250	0.75	175	5.25	1,075
Land and water management, Pit preparation, Trellis	Both (1:1)	2	400	0	0	19.5	4550	10	2000	31.5	6,950
Transplanting	Women	28	4200	0	0	0	0	3	600	31	4,800
Weeding and interculture	Women	30	4500	7.25	1450	10	2000	11	2200	58.25	10,150
Fertilizer and medicine application	Both (1:1)	2	400	0	0	1.5	300	1.25	250	4.75	950
Harvesting	Women	20	3000	4	600	7.5	1500	12	2400	43.5	7,500
Threshing and storing	Both (1:1)	25	5000	5	1000	0	0	0	0	30	6,000
Marketing	Mostly Men (2:1)	0	0	0	0	12.25	2450	20	4000	32.25	6,450
Total		123	21400	22	4600	54.5	11800	61.5	12600	261	50,400
Note: All costs have been calculated as per locally available labour rate in Patna block						Women's Contribution (%)				71%	66%

The drudgery of women's work in agriculture impacts their education, food security, health and productivity. Women are the backbone of the agricultural work force; however, nationwide, their hard work has been unpaid and unrecognized just like their other productive and reproductive contributions to the family.

of a small farmer family spends her entire day in the field and is busy throughout the *kharif* season to produce food that will take care of her family.

While promoting improved practices in agriculture, we observed that many times farmers were unable to complete their weeding and other activities on time. Because the weeding process is an intense, painful and time-consuming activity and is invariably performed by women in almost all crops in the *kharif* season, they spend many extra hours at work. The tools that they use for weeding are outdated and very old. The division of work between the men and women is visibly unequal and the strain shows on the women. More than 80 per cent of all Indian women workers are cultivators or farm labourers and most of them do not own a single piece of land. Women are barred from ploughing but they almost exclusively perform all other operations such as transplanting, weeding, harvesting and threshing, and most of the post-harvest work.

Culturally, all machinery work is regarded as the domain of male workers. Men do the ploughing and the marketing and, thereby, control the land and the produce. It is a profound case of socio-capitalism, whereby the women

from small-holder farming families are available for work as unpaid farm labour. The drudgery of women's work in agriculture impacts their education, food security, health and productivity. Women are the backbone of the agricultural work force; however, nationwide, their hard work has been unpaid and unrecognized just like their other productive and reproductive contributions to the family. The present agriculture situation throws up various gender issues, including unequal rights to land and other assets, unequal work load, unequal access to food and health care, unequal wages for work, and unequal control over income.

In Kolnara block, PRADAN has begun realizing the important aspect of gender relations in agriculture. Women are largely occupied with agricultural work from July to November (five months). The crops grown are primarily rain-fed. In the up-lands, paddy is the main crop. Un-irrigated millet and vegetables are grown in a few pockets where perennial streams flow or where large ponds exist. The first peak period of work in agriculture is June-August when the women engage in breaking up sods of earth, sowing and weeding from morning until night. Women bend for whole days to transplant the

paddy seedlings in this season, and the process continues for 15 to 25 days.

Sometimes, they transplant paddy while it is raining relentlessly. At such times, they are unable to take care of their up-land crop properly, leading to hampered production. Working in the rain affects their health adversely too. There is no respite for them even after they return to their homes from the fields because they continue with all the house-hold work that awaits them. They do not get adequate rest.

The percentage of single women in Kolnara is around one-third. These women face difficulties every *kharif* season. They are unable to plough their land because there is a social taboo on women ploughing the land and, either because they have no male members in the family, or because the men-folk have migrated, they have to hire help, usually by paying about Rs 300 for a full day.

Hiring a tractor, to plough half an acre of land, at Rs 900 per hour is also very expensive. Furthermore, the availability of a tractor in the peak season is also uncertain. The women farmers of the Agriculture Production Cluster (APC) have, therefore, taken a decision to purchase a power-tiller, a power-

Farm women are a vital part of the Indian economy, constituting more than one-third of the national labour force and a major contributor to the survival of poor families, which depend greatly on the women's income.

transplanter and a power-weeder for themselves to reduce their drudgery and to save time.

Farm women are a vital part of the Indian economy, constituting more than one-third of the national labour force and a major contributor to the survival of the poor families, which depend greatly on the women's income. As per the Census of 2011, 263 million people are engaged in agriculture and over half of them are now agricultural labourers, a trend observed for the first time in the past 40 years (Source-www.downtoearth.org.in/news/farmers-have-decreased-farm-labourers-increased-census-report--40940).

A comparison of the data from Census 2001 and 2011 shows that the number of farmers has decreased by 7.1 per cent and farm labourers have increased by 3.5 per cent, mainly due to the declining size of landholdings, the loss of interest in farming and low profits, where by small and marginal farmers are mostly in the vulnerable stage. Therefore, migration has increased in many farming families.

More than 90 per cent of the rural women in India are unskilled. This restricts them to low-paid occupations. They have no control over the land and other production

assets, and therefore, they are largely excluded from access to credit, rights and entitlement as farmers. It is very important to empower women through friendly mechanization technology to reduce their drudgery, and lead them to better efficiency, enhanced production and dignified lives. Of course, focussing on mechanization may not create a holistic change; it is an opportunity, however, to create better socio-economic conditions for women farmers.

Mechanization can increase the productivity of crops, reduce the amount of labour required and also provide safety and comfort. It can help reduce the drudgery for women, and give them the scope to engage in other activities such as getting better access, control, ability and assurance in farming. The focus needs to be on gender-friendly farm tools and equipment to sustain the interest of women and ensure their continued involvement in agriculture as farmers. This will entail identifying, demonstrating and making available hardship-reducing technologies in agriculture, animal husbandry and homestead activities, thereby giving women farmers a better quality of life. Some mechanized tools and technologies may motivate men to engage in the work; this will then

transfer some of the workload from women to men. Women then will get more leisure time, will access rights and entitlements, will get more economic and social freedom and will have choices available to them.

USING MANUAL IMPLEMENTS

Women farmers find manual equipment most effective because these are easier to operate, access and control. Currently, women farmers use a variety of manual implements such as wheel hoe, ridger, paddy cono/mandua weeder, sprayer, liner or marker, and dry land weeder. Gradually, as they begin to use these implements, we observe that they are able to complete many crop practices in time and are increasing the cash crop area in the *kharif* season. Discussions with the women farmers of the area reveal the importance of different implements (Figure 2).

MECHANIZATION IN PADDY PRODUCTION

Paddy is the most widely grown and consumed crop in India and across the world. Almost all the small and marginal farmers in these areas of Odisha cultivate paddy. The *kharif* season is a time for intense



Figure 2: Women-friendly Tools Used in the Area

Table 2: Cost and Efficiency of Manual Implements Used by Women Farmers

Manual Implements	Paddy Mandua/ Cono Weeder	Wheel Hoe	Sprayer	Dry Land Liner	Weeder	Ridger
Cost (Tentative)	Rs 1,500 (Rs 400 with subsidy)	Rs 1,800 (Rs 450 with subsidy)	Rs 1,700	Rs 1,700	Rs 2,300	Rs 2,100
Crops	Paddy	DSR and vegetables	All	Potato, DSR, pulses, groundnut, etc.	Potato, paddy and other vegetables	Potato, maize
Labour Time Efficiency (Mechanized: Manual)	1:5	2:3	-	-	1:10	1:3
Capacity	5 labour days/acre	20 labour days/acre	2.5 labour days/acre	1 labour day/acre	3 labour days/acre	1 labour day/acre

After mechanizing paddy cultivation, there was a reduction in the cost and time spent on agriculture.

labour for women because they work in the fields, with little time to engage in any other work as farmers. Women mostly engage in cultivating paddy in their fields during the *kharif* season. Sometimes, they face difficulties and are not able to manage their crops simultaneously in all the fields with same thoroughness. They are not able to complete

their agricultural practices in time, and that leads to low production and low income. Often, women are unable to focus on the cash crop, neglecting some important interventions such as nursery raising, weeding, ridging and harvesting, due to their intense engagement in the paddy crop.

We tried to understand whether

the introduction of some power-operated implements in paddy cultivation would lead to enhanced productivity, profitability and whether that would be beneficial for the small farmers. The Agriculture Production Cluster (APC) provided power-operated machines at a subsidized rate and a major part of the work was done using these machines.

Table 3: Investment and Efficiency of Power-operated Machines for Paddy Production

No.	Name	Rate (Rs)	Govt. Subsidy	Amount (Rs)	Labour Cost Efficiency	Labour Time Efficiency
1	Power tiller	1,55,500	40,000	1,15,500	1:1	1:6
2	4 Row rice transplanter	2,30,000	1,72,500	57,500	1:2	1:55
3	Paddy power weeder	37,000	18,500	18,500	1:5	1:40
4	Power sprayer	19,625	9,345	10,280	1:1	1:8
5	Power reaper	1,08,000	54,000	54,000	1:3	1:60
Total cost for APC		5,50,125	2,94,345	2,55,780	-	-

Table 4: Economic Comparison of Manual and Mechanized Operations in Growing Paddy

Cost for 1 Acre Paddy	Mechanized Cost	Manual Cost	Benefits
Main field preparation	1,200	1,200	Effective ploughing, less time and less dependency
Nursery preparation	800	300	Good quality nursery, including polythene cost
Transplanting	1,500	3,300	Cost-effective, less time and less dependency
Weeding (2 times)	1,000	5,250	
Medicine spray (2 times)	500	400	Battery spray with organic medicine
Harvesting	1,000	3,000	Cost-effective, less time and less dependency
Total	6,000	13,450	Labour cost: Less than half
Expected Yield	25 quintal	18 quintal	Yield: Enhanced by more than 35%

The APC provided services as per the plan of the women farmers. The paddy transplanter was in the

greatest demand because this task is critical, owing to the fluctuating and unpredictable rainfall. After

mechanizing paddy cultivation, there was a reduction in the cost and time spent on agriculture.

TURKI DIDI, NIRVAYA FEDERATION

Turki Ataka is a farmer and a single woman in Palipinda village. She stays with her parents and does all the work on her own. Her life is simple just as it is for the other women of a tribal society. She starts her day early in the morning and continues till the evening without any rest. She is a member of a Self Help Group, which is a part of the APC. She represents her village and the Group in many forums such as the APC, the *panchayat*-level Cluster and the Nirvaya Federation (a block-level Federation of women's SHGs). When she started to go outside her village for meetings, she said that she became aware about so many things taking place in the world outside.

She told us, "I didn't see any platform where people talk about women's drudgery which we face in our everyday work and we also just accept it as our responsibility. This year, we tried something different with our paddy crop. Earlier, my villagers had many doubts and said that the mechanical transplanter machines would not give more production and that the women would not know how to use them. It was quite difficult for me to convince them; when the transplanter was brought to our village for demonstration, they tried to accept it. We (SHG members) were very happy with this intervention because ours was the first village in our block to use the paddy transplanter. In my field, I drove this transplanter on my own.

"Earlier, I used to hire five labourers for transplantation in 50 decimals of land. It would take around one-and-a-half days to complete the work. The labourers took Rs 150 per day and in total I would spend around Rs 1,100 for transplantation in this half acre of land. This year I spent Rs 800 for transplanting in the same piece of land in 1.5 hours. Earlier, I got three quintals of paddy from this land; this year, I got four quintals, despite the drought situation that affected around 20 per cent of the crop."

Table 5: Sample Data on Yield Analysis of Patna Block

Mechanized Paddy in Same Plots				Year 2015 (Kharif)			Year 2016 (Kharif)	
No.	Name of the Farmer	Village	Area (Acre)	Earlier Practice	Variety	Yield (Kg)	Variety	Yield (Kg)
1	Lilabati Naik	Godipokhari	0.6	Traditional	Lalat	400	DRR42	1,200
2	Durgabati Mahanta	Bhuluda	0.3	Traditional	Lalat	200	Mandakini	800
3	Guramani Mahanta	Bhuluda	0.1	Traditional	Lalat	80	Pratiksha	300
4	Malati Naik	Godipokhari	0.3	Traditional	Pratiksha	400	DRR 42	1,000
5	Manjulata Mahanta	Dalanga	0.12	DSR	Lalat	300	DRR 42	440
6	Guramani Mahanta	Bhuluda	0.1	DSR	Annapurna	100	DRR42	200

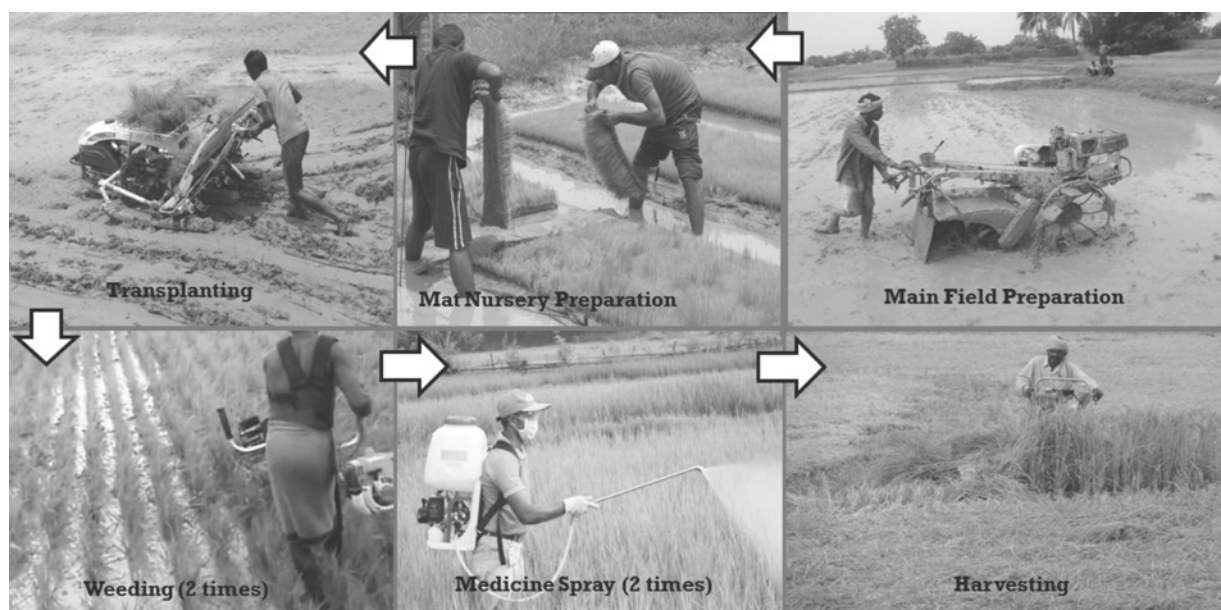


Figure 3: Fully Mechanized Paddy Cultivation

SERVICE UNIT AT APC

Farm mechanization is a new initiative for the team, and the experience of providing services of power-operated agriculture machine through community institutions is in its experimentation stage. However, with our limited experience, we have visualized that that the APC will be at the *panchayat* or block-level so that farmers can easily access it. Mechanization being an important part of agriculture intervention of the APC, the PRADAN team has made a business plan for optimal utilization of machines to reach the maximum number of potential farmers and make it affordable. In some areas, the group or local entrepreneurship approach helps us reach the farmers. However, because many of the implements are very new for this area, motivating farmers to use these on a large scale is a challenge for the initial period of one or two years. Therefore, procuring and managing farm implements, are critical factors for APC.

Model 1

We have promoted some SHGs or local entrepreneurs in some APCs, who will deposit at least 15–20 per cent of the amount as advance and gradually the concerned group will refund the full amount to the APC on an installment basis within four to five years. After full repayment, the ownership of the farm implement will be transferred to the entrepreneur and the APC will use this amount as a revolving fund to promote more entrepreneurs in the area. Nevertheless, creating a business plan and assessing the capacity of the entrepreneur on farm technology are necessary components of the promotion.

Model 2

All the farm implements will be under the control of and monitored by APC. APC will hire some local people as drivers to operate the machines. Again, creating a business plan at the APC level, and the implementation and money collection mechanisms and building capacity of the operators are vital components of the promotion.

Business Model of a Paddy Transplanter

Broad Assumption		Expenditure Per Hour	
Depreciation per year (20% of m/c cost)	Rs 46,000	Depreciation cost	153
Maximum utilization opportunity in rain-fed paddy area (50 days per year x 6 hr per day)	300 hr	Fuel and oil cost	78
Fuel required (@ Rs 65)	1 ltr/hr	Operator cost	100
Engine oil (1 pack/20 hr)	Rs 260	Maintenance cost (Rs 3,000/- per year)	10
Operator (2 persons @ Rs 300 per day)	Rs 600		
Farmer's service charge (per hr)-	Rs 500	Total expenditure (per hr)	341
Break-even (total hours)	152	Break-even (total area) acre	76

In both the models, APC finalizes a rate chart for the farmers, based on the service charges. Additionally, APC worked to create demand from women farmers, as per the designed plan and perspective.

EXPERIENCES OF SOME FARMERS AND ENTREPRENEURS

“We’ve learnt new technologies and methods in vegetable cultivation. Now it is easier to cultivate cotton and different vegetables.” Penta Puala, Ambaguda village

“Twenty-five days after the transplanting and before applying fertilizers, the field needs to be weeded. This work is the responsibility of a woman. It is quite difficult to weed the entire land (average 1 acre) within the

desired period of time. Continuous engagement is needed to complete the weeding, leading to back pain and body ache; still we continue to work because there is no other option.” Tulasi Himirika, Sarupali village

“These machines are very women-friendly and we now get time for rest. Nowadays, people’s perception of women is changing from considering them merely as labour to that of empowered farmers. We feel very confident when we learn different techniques regarding agriculture (which is our

main livelihood), we will and use these machines ourselves.” Sanai Kambrika, Bandhaguda village

Some Critical Learning and Challenges

1. Better technologies have been developed; yet these have not reached the villages and particularly not women farmers. There is very little change in the input of women’s manual labour, either because the policies and the investments of mechanization technologies have not catered to the particular

There is very little change in the input of women's manual labour, either because the policies and the investments of mechanization technologies have not catered to the particular needs of women, or because they are inaccessible or unaffordable.

needs of women, or because they are inaccessible or unaffordable. The mechanization process may vary, depending on the need-based perspective and drudgery-reducing technologies.

2. The eight-row power-operated transplanter is not suitable for undulating areas, where most small farmers have small and scattered plots.

3. APC has purchased power-operated machines through various subsidized schemes

of the government and other projects. These implements require regular maintenance and services. Getting regular and quality services from suppliers is a real challenge on the ground in many areas. The selection of suppliers and companies needs to be on the basis of these parameters.

4. The maintenance of power-operated machines at the APC level is a new learning for women members. Machines have to be stored in a designated place,

need regular maintenance, and protection from damage and misuse.

5. The operating process of any machine is a critical factor. The operator of a power-operated machine should have knowledge of the parts, the operating technique and its fuel and oil requirements.

Anjan Swar in Jashipur, Odisha, and Sagarika Satapathy is based in Jaykaypur, Odisha



Indra Huika from village Ambaguda, district Rayagada, Odisha uses power weeder in her brinjal field.

JMMS CHAKAI: FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION

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Coming face to face with rampant corruption in the implementation of the provisions of MGNREGA, the women of Jivan Marshal Mahila Sangh refuse to buckle down to the local oppressors and an apathetic bureaucracy

“*AAPE TINADHABI HASA LA RIYA MASIN thanate bai idiyada, unadhabi aale log to note se khoy bai ruodah* (We won't leave the police station until you forfeit the JCB machine),” Lalita Hansda declared in Santhali to the police officer, and talking about the JCB machine, which was being used to dig soil at the MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) construction site on the boundary of her village.

BACKGROUND

Jivan Marshal Mahila Sangh (JMMS), Chakai, is a block-level women's collective with representatives

from the Santhal and the non-tribal region. Formed by PRADAN in 2013, its aim is to inculcate the concept of solidarity among the women in the block. Beginning with 1,500 women, there are now approximately 8,000 women in the Federation, spread over 11 *panchayats* of the Chakai block with more than 700 Self Help Groups (SHGs). JMMS acted not only at the social level but also worked on creating awareness about citizenship and empowering women through that knowledge.

PRADAN started working in Chakai block, Jamui district in Bihar in 2010. The work mainly focussed on savings and credit, water and in-situ management, and livelihood activities (agriculture, tasar). It also worked in the NABARD-TDF-WADI

The villagers were also informed that MGNREGA was an Act and not a Scheme so they could unite and arrange their irrigation infrastructure as well as employment simultaneously.

project for the creation of irrigation facilities in tribal villages. Owing to the availability of irrigation, the agriculture produce of the farmers had increased substantially. However, the scale was very small because only 1,500 households benefitted from the scheme whereas the number of households in Chakai is 23,000.

In a perspective building meeting in JMMS, Federation members shared that there was a huge demand for irrigation infrastructure in the villages. The members asked if there could be more projects like the NABARD-TDF-WADI project. Members were informed that no project could provide such irrigation infrastructure. There was also a discussion on how the villagers could make their own plan for the village and demand work under MGNREGA. The plans could be based on the Integrated Management of Natural Resources (INRM) through which many water harvesting structures could be developed.

The villagers were also informed that MGNREGA was an Act and not a Scheme so they could unite and arrange their irrigation infrastructure as well as employment simultaneously.

The Federation was convinced about the idea and wanted to work through MGNREGA in their block. They, then, planned to survey the area to understand the current benefits that they were receiving from this Act in their area and how they could make improvements.

JMMS representatives surveyed the SHGs and found that the members had no knowledge about the benefits of MGNREGA or about Panchayati Raj. The representatives also visited the MGNREGA office in the block and found that the average mandays in Dulampur and Nouadih *panchayats* were 2.17 and 2.34, respectively. As many as 145 SHG members from Badgunda village had no job-cards, and 18 job-card holders from Dulampur said that their job-cards were with the local contractor.

In Nouadih *panchayat*, people shared that the *mukhiya* only received the application of in-situ work, that no *gram sabha* had taken place and that nobody had got work. People were not aware of government policies such as MGNREGA or other social security schemes. They also did not attend the *gram sabhas* regularly. This was detrimental to the survival of the existing

institution and to its relationship with the people. After becoming aware of the ground realities, the Federation and the PRADAN team in Chakai realized that if the people's awareness was not awakened and enhanced, development would not happen.

PRADAN and the Federation organized movie shows (*Swaraj and Well Done Abba*) in Badgunda, Dulampur Kolhariya, Naibadih and Kumbadih villages, and discussed the issues depicted in the movies. The Federation seeded the concept of people working together as a unified entity, demanding their rights. Thus far, the system was working as a supply-driven system whereas it needed to be, instead, demand-driven.

After these activities, the SHGs of Badgunda village gathered together and made their Village Development Plan, based on their common needs and presented the issue to Dulampur Gram Panchayat Federation. The Federation approached the *panchayat*, which began an initiative to address the common needs of the people by organizing a campaign at the *panchayat* level. The SHG members, who had already claimed their job-cards, visited the block MGNREGA

The Federation worked at the village level to bridge the gap between the villagers and the local government system. Following this, the SHG members were quite motivated; they realized that if they united and worked for their common needs, they would be successful.

office and had their cards reissued. In the process, 108 villagers got their job-cards.

The Federation worked at the village level to bridge the gap between the villagers and the local government system. Following this, the SHG members were quite motivated; they realized that if they united and worked for their common needs, they would be successful. The Dulampur *gram panchayat*-level Federation started a movement that created a chain reaction. It motivated neighbouring collectives to take action. This collective action will definitely create large-scale changes in the area.

Some of the Federation members of the area participated in the Kaam Mango Abhiyaan, Katihar (Bihar). It gave them an

exposure to MGNREGA and how to demand their rights under the Act. Further, they planned to build a team of such people, who had had some training in MGNREGA and had collaborated with GPLFs, so that it could create awareness among the people of the *panchayats*.

The Dulampur GPLF organized the first Rojgar Mela on 22 August 2014, and people from all the villages participated and enquired about how to get a job-card and demand work. The villagers submitted 316 job-card applications and 51 work demand forms; they received acknowledgements for the same. However, even after 15 days, the villagers received no job-cards. Seeing the rule violation, the Dulampur GPLF decided to visit the Programme Officer (PO) of MGNREGA in Chakai block, to

talk about the system and not specifically about the job-cards.

The women's initiative of visiting the MGNREGA office was supported by their husbands and other villagers. On 10 September 2014, around 60 women went to the block office and placed their agenda peacefully before the PO, Mr Sushil Kumar. The PO promised to issue all the job-cards within the next 10 days. The incident was also reported in the Hindi newspaper '*Hindustan*'. Ten days passed; the villagers did not get their job-cards. The SHG members complained to the Block Development Officer (BDO), Chakai, and the District Magistrate (DM), Jamui, but no action was taken. The *mukhiya's* explanation about lack of labour was easily accepted by the administration. The villagers did not get what they had demanded.

MGNREGA SAYS:

- Rural families have a right to 100 days of employment in a year.
- For getting employment, the family needs to apply for a job-card.
- The job-card will be provided within 15 days of application.
- Once a family gets a job-card, they are entitled to demand work any time in a year.
- When the demand for work is made by a worker, it is the responsibility of the *panchayat* or MGNREGA functionaries to provide work within 15 days of the demand.
- If work is not provided within 15 days, the worker is entitled for an unemployment allowance.
- On completion of the work, the worker has to be paid within 15 days. Otherwise, the worker is entitled to a compensation for delayed payment.

One day, while members were being trained on how to surf the MGNREGA website, they found that job-card holders' accounts in their names had been opened in the Bank of India, Dumri, Sono block, located almost 90 km away from Dulampur and Nauadih *panchayats*

The block officials continued to dilly-dally. The SHG members were frustrated and did not know how to claim their rights.

One day, while members were being trained on how to surf the MGNREGA website, they found that job-card holders' accounts in their names had been opened in the Bank of India, Dumri, Sono block, located almost 90 km away from Dulampur and Nauadih *panchayats*, whereas, there was a Grameen Bank (Kiyajori) and

Post Office (Dulampur), located within 5 km, and many banks located in their own block, only 20 km away. The trainers and the GP Federation members further searched the MGNREGA website and got to know that these accounts had money received as remuneration for work done. They then found that the money from all these accounts was withdrawn after a few days and the accounts were empty. None of the account holders was aware that they had bank accounts and

none of them had done any work under MGNREGA either.

They were puzzled. If the *mukhiya* had said that there was no work happening in the area, how were the structures being made and how was money being added and withdrawn from their accounts? Who had opened those accounts? Nobody had a clue. Both the GPLFs (Dulampur and Nauadih) informed all the account holders about the corruption taking place. The Federation members,



Members of JMMS with the confiscated JCB Machine

No threat could shake the faith that these women had developed in themselves. The name Jivan Marshal Mahila Sangh became the identity of all the women protesting outside the police station.

along with the account holders visited the Bank of India, Dumri, Sono block, and asked the Bank Manager about their accounts.

Surajmuni Murmu (GPLF representative) asked the Bank Manager, “*Ki dada ji, tab hum logon ke paiswa kaun nikalko?* (Sir, who has withdrawn our money)?” The Manager clarified that those accounts were opened by the Customer Service Point (CSP) of the Chakai area and he had no information about them. He told them that the accounts were mostly operated by the CSP, Panchayat Rojgar Sewak of Chakai and other staff of the Panchayati Raj Institution.

After this discussion with the Bank Manager, all the women went to the MGNREGA office in Chakai and lodged a complaint. Nothing happened. No initiative was taken by the government officials of the block. The women even met the DM, Jamui, but nothing happened.

The people were disappointed and disturbed for the next two years. And on the night of 15 February 2017, when they heard the mechanical sound of the JCB machine roaring in the field of Badgunda, their disappointment exploded into anger. A pond was being constructed in Dhab

Tola. The construction was sanctioned by MGNREGA (ढाब में मोरजोर आहार का निर्माण – 0550002020/WC/20177347 – 2015-2016), to be constructed by manual workers. Instead of giving employment to MGNREGA card holders, the *mukhiya* of Dulampur was using a JCB machine and tractors to construct the pond in the middle of the night.

This action by the local authorities became a trigger for the anger and frustration of the people in the area. When the villagers came forward to stop the work, the *mukhiya* called the police and tried to threaten the villagers. The villagers immediately called the JMMS representative and sought their help.

The next morning, the women from JMMS and other women gathered at the construction site to oppose the construction. One of the Federation representatives, Fatima Biwi stood on a bucket of the JCB and said, “*Gari chalana hain to pehle mere upar chalo.* (If you want to continue the work, first you have to run the JCB over me).” The leaders of JMMS took control of the JCB machine and demanded that the police act immediately. The women also called the DM of Jamui and even informed him through

WhatsApp. The *mukhiya* then apologized to the villagers and asked for a compromise, which the villagers refused.

The *mukhiya* said, “*Is baar ke liye didi maaf kar do, haat jorte hain, aur naa karbo.*” (I beg you to forgive me this time, I will never do this again). When no one from the administration gave any satisfactory response till the evening of 16 February, the women and other villagers decided to take the JCB machine to the police station in Chakai on their own. The *mukhiya*, with the help of his goons, tried to stop the JCB machine, multiple times. The goons of local *mukhiya* came and threatened the villagers, including the children, of dire consequences.

The women informed the police station and the DM of Jamui of the threats. They also informed the nearby Gajhi *panchayat*’s Federation members. Within one hour, all the Federation members of Gajhi *panchayat* came to their support and went with them to the nearby Binjha village, where almost 200 women were waiting to express solidarity with them.

After repeated phone calls to the police station and the DM of Jamui, and waiting for more than two hours, a police van came

"It is not power that corrupts, but fear. Fear of losing power corrupts those who wield it and fear of the scourge of power corrupts those who are subject to it,"

and accompanied the women with the JCB machine till Chakai police station. The SHO at Chakai agreed to give them a receipt of their complaint but without the stamp of the police station. And he absolutely refused to give any receipt for the JCB machine they had brought to the police station.

The 150 women and villagers, who went to the police station, were so scared of the threats that they decided to spend the night in Chakai. Surajmuni Murmu, Chhutki Hembhram and Sushita Soren continuously reassured the women that all women of Jivan Marshal are together and no one can do any harm to them. Anisha Devi firmly said, "*Uh 10-12 log kitna dabangai dikhayega, humlog hazargo didi bhi saath hain.*" (These 15-20 goons cannot withstand the strength of thousands of women who are together)."

No threat could shake the faith that these women had developed in themselves. The name Jivan Marshal Mahila Sangh became the identity of all the women protesting outside the police station. It was like the Swaraj Abhiyan of this era, diffusing all the opposition that came from the corrupt. They didn't know

about the fight for independence and had no idea about freedom fighters but they were behaving like freedom fighters, fighting corruption and for their rights. They returned to their village and were not subjected to any violence.

The *mukhiya* and the block officers used the political mileage they had to get away in this case. After one month, the JCB machine was released without the Federation being informed. Due to lack of funds, the Federation could not afford any legal action; this event, however, gave them confidence and strength. Radhiya Devi (Federation representative) smiled and said, "*Barbar nehi chhorto, humni abhi sab samajhto.*" (Now we have the knowledge, so won't let go again)."

The sight of a JCB in Chakai is now rare. If and when a JCB is spotted, the alert villagers question its presence. What was earlier going on uninhibited in the area is now challenged; the corrupt *mukhiya* and his associates live under a cloud of fear and doubt. The JCB in this story is the symbol of corruption and oppression. JMMS, by acting courageously, has managed to roll

the powerful machine back and has instilled fear in the corrupt intentions of the local officials.

"It is not power that corrupts, but fear. Fear of losing power corrupts those who wield it and fear of the scourge of power corrupts those who are subject to it," says Aung San Suu Kyi, the Burmese pro-democracy leader, in her book *Freedom from Fear*.

The women of the Federation have proved this through their actions. The fight has begun and these women will uphold the flag against corruption in Chakai. Following this incident, the work by the JCB machine was stopped in every *panchayat*. The BDO, Chakai, now directly handles JMMS issues concerning MGNREGA. Panchayati Raj Representatives have begun to treat Federation members with respect. There is a change in the hegemonic thought that women are not capable of handling such socio-political issues. In the words of the Chancellor of Germany, Angela Merkel, "Neither the chains of dictatorship nor the fetters of oppression can keep down the forces of freedom for long."

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NARI ADALAT: A Beacon for Women in Distress

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Fulfilling the need for justice-imparting systems in a strongly patriarchal society, Nari Adalats, despite facing challenges during the evolutionary phase of this Alternative Dispute Resolution system, are helping to reduce the distress of village women

Thanks to cultural and social sanctions, there prevails, in our society, a fallacious notion of male privilege that considers women as subordinates and inferior to men. As such, many women accept the atrocities inflicted upon them as fate and barely think of questioning them because that would invite criticism and humiliation. The traditional, often male-dominated, mechanisms of dispensing justice, at the village level, seldom take into account the sufferings of women and end up with verdicts that asphyxiate the very essence of Justice.

The evolution of Nari Adalats, at the block level, in the form of an Alternative Dispute Resolution System, led to the addressing of problems through counselling, conciliation and facilitation and the public condemning of such acts, imposition of fines, etc. These Adalats, exclusively dedicated to women, attempt to balance the scales of

The traditional forms of justice-dispensing mechanisms had patriarchal biases. If women ever dared to raise their voice against the atrocities inflicted on them, they would face criticism and humiliation, both at home and in society. They were often reviled if they questioned the prejudiced view about the women in society.

justice, by-passing social evils and stigmas. Only cases that fail to get resolved at the village organization (VO) and the Gram Panchayat-level Federation (GPLF) reach the Nari Adalats.

Being associated with PRADAN in Koderma, as part of my internship programme, I got the opportunity of interacting with members of the Nari Adalat there (under the wing of the Damodar Mahila Mandal Sangh, formed through PRADAN's initiative), who were being exposed to rigorous paralegal training sessions that made them aware of the prevailing male dominance and the ways to tackle it.

This article analyses the need for the evolution of such mechanisms, the challenges faced during the evolutionary phase as well as currently, and their functioning and impact in reducing the distress of women. When reading this article, you may decide for yourselves whether such an institution translates into concrete women's empowerment or not.

BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH

My work with the members of the Nari Adalat in Koderma gave

me insights into the mechanisms of a form of Alternative Dispute Resolution System; Nari Adalat literally translates to Women's Court.

The traditional forms of justice-dispensing mechanisms had patriarchal biases. If women ever dared to raise their voice against the atrocities inflicted on them, they would face criticism and humiliation, both at home and in society. They were often reviled if they questioned the prejudiced view about the women in society.

Nari Adalats stood up for women's rights and ensured that the social fabric of the community is preserved, which might otherwise wither away if the formal judiciary system were to be approached.

Personal accounts of the victims, who sought justice through this Adalat and the experiences of the members of this Adalat, whether it be at the phase of initiation or currently, reveal success stories of women's unions, which dared to walk past deeply embedded patriarchy and regressive mind-sets, and established a platform for women to voice their problems and fight for their rights.

INTRODUCTION

"A society that is unable to respect, protect and nurture its women and children, loses its moral moorings and runs adrift" ('Are women not part of our being?' by Siddharth Chatterjee, *The Hindu*)

At the time of the advent of civilization, there was no distinction between man and woman. However, in the Vedic period, the lawgiver Manu, in his work on social conduct, Manusmriti, stated, "Where women are honoured, there the Gods are pleased; where they are dishonoured, the sacred rites yield no fruits."

However, the institution of marriage confined women and limited their role to within the four walls of the home. The condition of women deteriorated with the passage of time. On the one hand, they were being projected as goddesses and, on the other, they were expected to be submissive and dependant wives and daughters. Gradually, women learned to conform to the social norms of conduct set by the men.

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For centuries, women have been discriminated against, oppressed and humiliated by men and their plight has not yet been addressed.

Before approaching the focal topic of the research, I want to offer some data related to crimes against women in India and throw light on the types of crimes being committed.

- According to the National Crime Records Bureau (Ncrb.gov.in. National Crime Records Bureau. 2013), reported incidents of crime against women have increased by 6.4 per cent in India during 2012.
- As many as 60 per cent of Indian men believe that women should tolerate some violence

in order to keep the family together and they deserve to be beaten. (International Men and Gender Equality Survey, ICRW.org)

- A crime is committed against a woman every two minutes. (National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), 2014)
- Approximately 24 per cent of Indian men have committed sexual violence in their lifetime. (International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES). ICRW.org.)
- Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh account for half of the crimes committed against women. (NCRB Report, 2014)

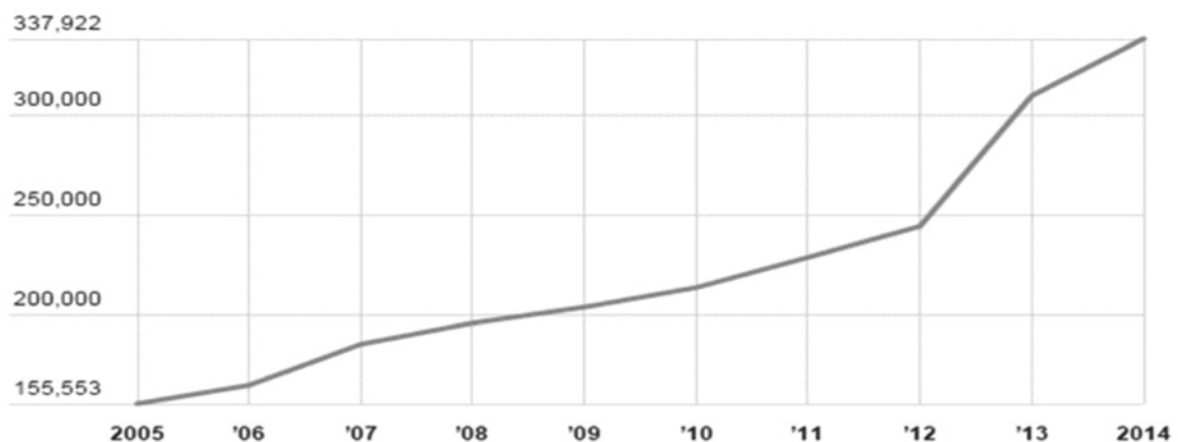
The semantic meaning of crimes against women is direct or indirect physical or mental cruelty against women.

The most common atrocities against women are dowry deaths, honour killings, female foeticide and infanticide, witchcraft-related murders, rapes, forced prostitution and human trafficking, acid attacks, forced child marriage, domestic violence—whether it is physical, sexual, psychological or economic, eve—teasing, abduction, etc.

Among all the crimes committed against women, cruelty by husbands and relatives accounts for the majority. Assault on women with an intention to

Crimes Against Women, 2005-2014

*Figures represent cases reported.



Source: National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)

outrage their modesty is the second-most prominent type of crime committed against women in India.

The data point to the need for the evolution of an Alternative

Dispute Resolution system called Nari Adalat.

Given below is the record of FIRs instituted in the Mahila Thana, Koderma. It is worth mentioning

that the list of instituted FIRs does not reveal the true data of crimes against women because only for those offences that are too grave to be solved through mediation are FIRs filed.

Government of India
National Commission for Women
Nature-Wise Report of the Complaints Received by NCW in the
Financial Year 2015-16

No.	Nature	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
1	Bigamy/Polygamy	35	18	40	25	19	21	18	14	14	19	17	26
2	Cyber crime against women	24	17	32	21	20	28	22	8	11	32	16	21
3	Dowry harassment/ Dowry death	245	159	313	195	155	195	136	105	182	196	166	239
4	Gender discrimination including equal right to education & work	3	6	2	7	0	7	4	2	4	4	3	1
5	Indecent representation of women	14	3	13	11	2	9	9	13	7	8	10	10
6	Miscellaneous	73	42	30	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
7	Outraging modesty of women	254	163	473	348	153	195	156	121	213	236	201	240
8	Police apathy against women	598	374	1006	893	405	591	594	410	536	481	425	455
9	Privacy of women and rights thereof	21	23	27	9	47	16	5	6	6	11	12	3
10	Reproductive health right of women	7	8	13	5	4	4	2	6	9	4	5	2

No.	Nature	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
11	Right to exercise choice in marriage	51	72	111	62	33	47	37	30	50	53	35	53
12	Right to live with dignity	540	473	1153	838	593	645	603	449	482	531	473	534
13	Sex selective abortion/ Female foeticide/ Aminiocentesis	8	4	4	2	0	4	1	2	1	2	4	2
14	Sexual harassment including at workplace	71	41	68	50	38	58	34	22	23	49	36	52
15	Stalking/Voyeurism	2	3	6	4	7	4	4	2	2	5	13	6
16	Traditional practices derogatory to women rights, i.e., Sati pratha, witch hunting, etc.	3	0	2	1	2	0	1	2	0	2	4	0
17	Trafficking/ Prostitution of women	9	7	13	7	0	3	5	6	3	8	6	9
18	Violence against women	274	186	444	272	191	294	214	130	203	193	154	183
19	Women's right of custody of children in the event of divorce	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
20	Total	2234	1600	3750	2750	1629	2121	1845	1328	1746	1834	1581	1838

Total complaints = 24,379

Nari Adalat is a gender-sensitive, informal Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) platform, an innovation of the Mahila Samakhya of the Ministry of HRD, in response to the rise in the number of cases of violence against women

The population of Koderma, as per the 2011 Census, stands at 24,633. The types of crimes and their frequency in 2015 in Koderma are listed below:

Type of Crime	Frequency
Domestic violence and cruelty	11
Dowry death	13
Riot	1
Sexual assault	3
Witchcraft-related murders	3
Total	31

WHAT IS NARI ADALAT?

—

Nari Adalat is a gender-sensitive, informal Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) platform, an innovation of the Mahila Samakhya of the Ministry of HRD, in response to the rise in the number of cases of violence against women. It issues verdicts in cases of crimes against women and also tries to propagate legal literacy at the grass-roots in India. It uses methods such as mediation, negotiation, conciliation and fines.

In case of acute need, the Adalats help women approach the formal judicial system, helping them seek justice through legally entitled

authorities, as and when the situation demands.

Operative on certain fixed days in a month, a Nari Adalat is typically formed at the block level and builds on the village-level Mahila Mandals (Damodar Mahila Mandal Sangha in Chandwara). A legal committee is formed within the Sangha; members receive paralegal training to solve disputes arising in the villages. Nari Adalat members are chosen from among the women of the area.

Nari Adalats form a network with Non-government Organizations (NGOs), community leaders, *gram panchayats* and government institutions such as the police, Courts, and Mahila Aayogs.

WHY NARI ADALAT?

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A mere glance at the data provided points to the need for an efficient system of trials and a competent mediating authority. With India being so deeply shackled in patriarchy, there is need for a platform that would be exclusively dedicated to, and largely managed by, women.

Whereas most urban women are aware of the basic legal redressal systems available to them to fight

against the atrocities inflicted upon them, rural women are largely ignorant on this front. Most women, especially in less-developed states, are not aware of the basic legal aid available to them. 'Courts' have a strange meaning in their dictionary; courts are viewed as institutions of harassment and intimidation; for this reason, they do not seek the available remedies and continue to suffer.

Even when women are aware of their rights, they are often reviled for raising their voices. Their cries and complaints are suppressed for the sake of the family's prestige, which may become tarnished if such issues were to be publicized.

One peculiar situation is that sometimes women too believe that, by nature, they are meant to remain subordinates to men and, therefore, accept cruelty as their fate, instead of fighting back. Although strange, often women in the family inculcate such ideas in the minds of growing girls. Young girls are taught that they are supposed to remain submissive to men. Often, women are viewed as a commodity, dependent upon and sheltered by men. "*Pati ne hi toh maara hai, is mein kaunsi bari baat hai*," (It is just your husband who beat you, what's the big deal)," Neera

The Adalats work towards resolving disputes through mediation and counselling, and also by making the women aware of their rights

Devi (name changed) consoled her twenty year-old daughter who repeatedly complained of being beaten by her drunk husband. Later on, she sought some relief when she approached the Chandwara Nari Adalat. The girl is now leading a happy married life with a two-year old baby girl.

In many cases, if a woman were to dare to question such abuse, and were to approach the village-level *panchayats*, she would either be shooed away or be made to suffer punishment she did not deserve. As such, the scales of justice are lopsided and gender equity chokes to death.

In such a scenario, justice-imparting mechanisms such as Nari Adalats ensure a speedy redressal of grievances and, that too, at affordable fees unlike the local-level *panchayats* that charge a hefty amount.

The Adalats work towards resolving disputes through mediation and counselling, and also by making women aware of their rights. This method of working preserves the social fabric of the community that would not be possible if the formal judicial system were to be approached.

“Facilitating the approach to the formal judicial system is also made easier for the ignorant population through this institution of Nari Adalat” says Adv. Suman Jaiswal, who has been associated with the Nari Adalat in Chandwara, and offers her services to the members and victims, as and when the need arises.

IMPACT AT THE GRASS-ROOTS

Since my research work pertains to Koderma, I have tried to capture glimpses of the Nari

Nari Adalat is a concept that evolved through the initiative of the Mahila Samakhya Programme of the Ministry of Human Resources Development and has been in existence in India since 1995. The Nari Adalat, Koderma (in operation since 16 April 2008), has been initiated by PRADAN and falls under the umbrella of the Damodar Mahila Mandal Sangh, Koderma, being operated in the Chandwara block of the district.

The cases involving atrocities against women, which fail to get resolved at the Village Organization (VO) and Gram Panchayat Level Federations (GPLFs), get instituted at the Nari Adalats that are operational at the Federation Level. Those people, who are not members of the Nari Adalat, may directly approach these Adalats instead of following the hierarchy. The *didis* (this is the way the members of Nari Adalat address one another) of these Adalats make inquiries by visiting the parties and through other means so as to make a better judgement. Each Adalat has six to eight judges, assisted by 20 advisors. The judges are chosen by the members from among themselves. These groups also attempt to make people aware of their rights, thus promoting legal literacy.

The concept is still not very popular in Koderma, with only a single Nari Adalat operating for the entire district. The Adalat operates in two of the villages of Chandwara block, namely, Tham and Madanmundi on 16th and 28th of every month, respectively.

They relate to their Federation and feel proud of it. They tell us that when they say the name of their Federation, people in the villages give them respect and behave politely.

Adalat influence in Koderma, so as to get an idea of how far these Nari Adalats have come.

a teen-aged girl named Rukhsana Khatoon here (See box).

suffering injustice have sought solace through the Nari Adalat.

I would like to share the story of

Rukhsana's case is just one among several others, where women

Dhannu Saw from Chattarbar, Koderma, is another example.

THE PLIGHT OF RUKHSANA

Rukhsana, a bubbly, dainty girl aged seventeen years, greeted me at the entrance of her house. After a brief introduction, she invited me in. I explained to her the purpose of my visit, and she initially hesitated to talk about her traumatic past. She said, "*Didi, ab hum zindagi mein kaafi aage barh chuke hain. Unn puraani baaton ko bhul kar, phir se hum unn baton ko kabhi yaad nahi karna chahte.* (I have now moved on in my life, forgetting my past, I don't want to look back and remember those moments.)"

It took some effort to convince her to share her story. She finally agreed to talk at length about her life before and after her broken marriage and how she managed to smile amidst her scars. How with the Nari Adalat Chandwara, holding her hand, she had walked away from the traumatic life that she had believed was her destiny.

Youngest among her siblings, and everybody's darling, a happy-go-lucky girl belonging to a conservative Muslim family, Rukhsana had to enter into the institution of marriage at the tender age of 13, while studying in the seventh standard. She is a resident of Chaurahi village, in Chandwara block of Doderma district. She was married to Saddam Ansaari, a resident of Bekobar village of Jainagar block in the same district.

At an age when her peers hopped around, chasing frogs and butterflies, an age at which she should have been holding a pen to study and nurture her dreams for the future, she instead bore the handcuffs of bangles. Still, she left her parents' home with a heavy heart, looking forward to a new journey of her life. Little did she know that she was going to be bruised for life!

It didn't take even a week for her to realize that her in-laws house was not the house of dreams. It was a nightmare instead. Her husband and her mother-in-law, both, were abusive towards her. Far from giving her the dignity of a daughter-in-law, they often beat her. They also locked her in a room without food and water. Her husband forced her to have sexual intercourse and threatened to kill her if she resisted. They took away all the money she had with her. Losing her patience, the aggrieved girl informed her parents about the atrocities she was being subjected to. Her parents called her back. After some panchayat meetings at the village level, her in-laws agreed to keep her with them and she returned. But they failed to change their attitude toward her, and the torture continued.

The verdicts passed by the Nari Adalat have an acceptance owing to the social sanction. The effects of the prevailing patriarchy are diminishing wherever such institutions are operative.

After bearing all this for about one year, Rukshana heard about the Nari Adalat from Sudha Devi, a service provider of Nari Adalat, Chandwara. After some efforts at mediation by the members of the Adalat, the Nari Adalat members helped Rukhsana approach a court of Law. She got relief, and her in-laws were asked to pay a compensation of Rs 2,00,000.

Two years have passed. Meanwhile, living with her parents, she has completed her matriculation and is looking forward to getting enrolled for the intermediate examinations. She is also getting married again this October and she is looking forward to a happy married life, where all her cherished hopes and desires get fulfilled.

As I was about to take leave of her, she insisted that I take some sweets and she invited me to attend her wedding ceremony. Thereafter, I bid her adieu hoping that she be blessed with a happy conjugal life where her past doesn't haunt her anymore.

After delivering a baby girl, she was tortured and abused by her in-laws. She was asked to bear all the expenses incurred on her daughter. It became difficult for her to live there. When she approached Nari Adalat, the matter was resolved through mediation and she now enjoys a happy family life.

Nari Adalat clearly has a far-reaching influence on the lives of women, particularly those belonging to the marginalized community. The organization helps them walk with their heads held high.

The verdicts passed by the Nari Adalat have an acceptance owing to the social sanction. The effects of the prevailing patriarchy are diminishing wherever such institutions are operative. No

doubt, Nari Adalat has brought about a drastic change in society. Whereas earlier, women were hesitant to sit beside the male members of the family, they are now out in the field, fighting for a good cause and spreading legal awareness.

IMPEDIMENTS AND LOOPHOLES

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The enthusiasm of women, coupled with active participation, with the aim of liberating themselves is no doubt, commendable. Such enthusiasm is fuelled every time justice is imparted. But their spirit often gets dampened by the many impediments posed by society and authority. Such hindrances are not new for those who have been associated with Nari Adalats since the journey began.

Initially PRADAN, Koderma, took the responsibility of propagating the concept of this institution among village women, who were ignorant about their rights. It was a tedious task to convince them to unite on a common platform and address the problems of law and order exclusive to women. Convincing them was difficult, first, because they were women, accustomed to living within the four walls of their homes. Second, because most of them were illiterate and uneducated, it took great effort to make them realize the need for such an institution.

Societal biases also performed their role of discouraging women at every level. People were disparaging of the women who had recently begun to realize their worth and dignity

Thereafter, there began a phase when a few women, who realized the importance of the Nari Adalats joined hands and began propagating the concept of this institution. They were exposed to several rigorous paralegal training sessions at the initiative of PRADAN

and were trying to figure out if they ‘actually’ deserved equal treatment. Often, they were accused of being negligent of their household chores while being active outside their homes, the supposedly male domain. They were often chided for competing with men. This traditional mentality of society often created awkward situations for women, making each step difficult for them.

Thereafter, there began a phase when a few women, who realized the importance of the Nari Adalats joined hands and began propagating the concept of this institution. They were exposed to several rigorous paralegal training sessions at the initiative of PRADAN. They often faced constraints imposed upon them by the very authorities meant to assist them. When they required the assistance of police officials, they were often asked to pay bribes in lieu of the services that were due as a right to every citizen of the country. Not only this, many a times force was used upon these women when they tried to seek assistance.

It is not that this Adalat faces glitches only on account of external factors. It also had some lacunae in its own conduct that

need to be addressed urgently. The lack of efficiency causes delays in trial procedures. Verdicts of this court are often challenged on the grounds of the inadequacy of the jury members. Several times, influential people visit the sessions of these Adalats and try to manipulate ignorant members. Certain cases of betrayal by the Adalat members have also emerged, shaking the faith in the sanctity of the institution. The mode of operation of such Adalats is time-consuming, causing a large number of cases to not even come up for hearing. The frequency of operation of such Adalats also needs to be increased from the current once a month, so as to be able to take up a maximum number of cases.

SUGGESTIONS

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A thorough analysis of the working of this institution throws up certain suggestions for its improvement and to increase the span of its influence, thereby, enhancing the efficacy of Nari Adalats:

- *Promoting the institution:* This institution needs to be promoted on a larger scale. Various means may be adopted

such as newspapers, television and radio, which are more popular in rural areas. Even pamphlets may be circulated in this regard.

- *Rigorous training of paralegals:* There is a lack of efficiency among the members trained for the purpose. Regular paralegal training sessions should be organized in order to have these institutions working better.
- *Regular meetings:* Meetings should be organized among the members themselves in order to discuss the problems faced by them in running the Adalats and the ways to sort them out.
- *Proper monitoring:* The sessions of these Adalats should be monitored, at least for the first few years of their establishment. This may be done by professionals especially recruited for the purpose.
- *Co-ordination between the government and the NGOs:* Properly co-ordinated efforts of the government and the NGOs could bear fruit. The government may assign these tasks to specific NGOs.

Namita Raje is a student of National University of Study and Research in Law, Ranchi and did her internship with PRADAN

JRF: Building Community Leadership through Craftsmanship

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Choosing young women weavers, who show promise and who have a thirst for knowledge, as Bunker Sakhis, is an attempt to recognize the potential of women to flourish in business

TUCKED AWAY IN SOME OF THE MOST REMOTE corners of the country, there lives a community of artisans, who produce some of India's finest carpets through the age-old craft of hand-weaving, a practice that is, however, on the verge of extinction. Jaipur Rugs Foundation (JRF) was started in 2004 with the desire to conserve this craftsmanship. JRF is an attempt to give these artisans, the creators of handmade rugs, the opportunity to reach their full potential, have a voice in decisions that affect them, and a chance to live and work with dignity.

WHO WE ARE

Begun by NK Chaudhary, in 2004, as a non-profit organization, JRF

Interventions are guided by first engaging with these communities, followed by developing and nurturing their creative capacities, and then sustaining these as part of a larger ecosystem

believes in catalyzing sustainable livelihoods for all artisans engaged in the entire carpet value chain and connecting them to the global market. JRF reaches out to people in remote rural areas and establishes strong linkages with marginalized communities, focusing predominantly on women, with the aim of making the practice of rug-weaving go beyond a mere income-generating mechanism to a sustainable livelihood, striving to help them not only to weave rugs but also their own lives. Interventions are guided by first engaging with these communities, followed by developing and nurturing their creative capacities, and then sustaining these as part of a larger ecosystem.

PURPOSE

The purpose of JRF is closely connected to the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations, whereby the significance of creating sustainable market-based solutions for the disempowered has been comprehended. There are myriad factors that force a subaltern population to remain confined to the vicious cycle of poverty. In a country that is predominantly dependent on agriculture and the

sector's limitation in providing round-the-year income, people are looking for alternative sources of livelihood such as construction work and large-scale migration.

Rug-weaving: The practice of rug-weaving in itself does not demand massive infrastructure-building and allows the individual to acquire this traditional skill at his/her doorstep. It is flexible enough to enable artisans to earn a sustainable livelihood working from home, without investing more time, effort or resources to complete a task. Instead, they get paid regularly for their participation and the work done. Furthermore, this activity also addresses the issue of widespread migration in villages, which occurs seasonally but year after year as a consequence of unsustainable livelihood options such as labour of different forms.

SOCIO-DEVELOPMENT MODEL OF JRF

Geographic presence: (MAP) JRF is currently working in five different states, namely, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand. The work is supported by a core team of development professionals based at Jaipur and many field

functionaries spread across different locations (mostly rural and partially urban). Several interns and volunteers from various academic institutions are constantly involved in spearheading the many activities undertaken by the foundation.

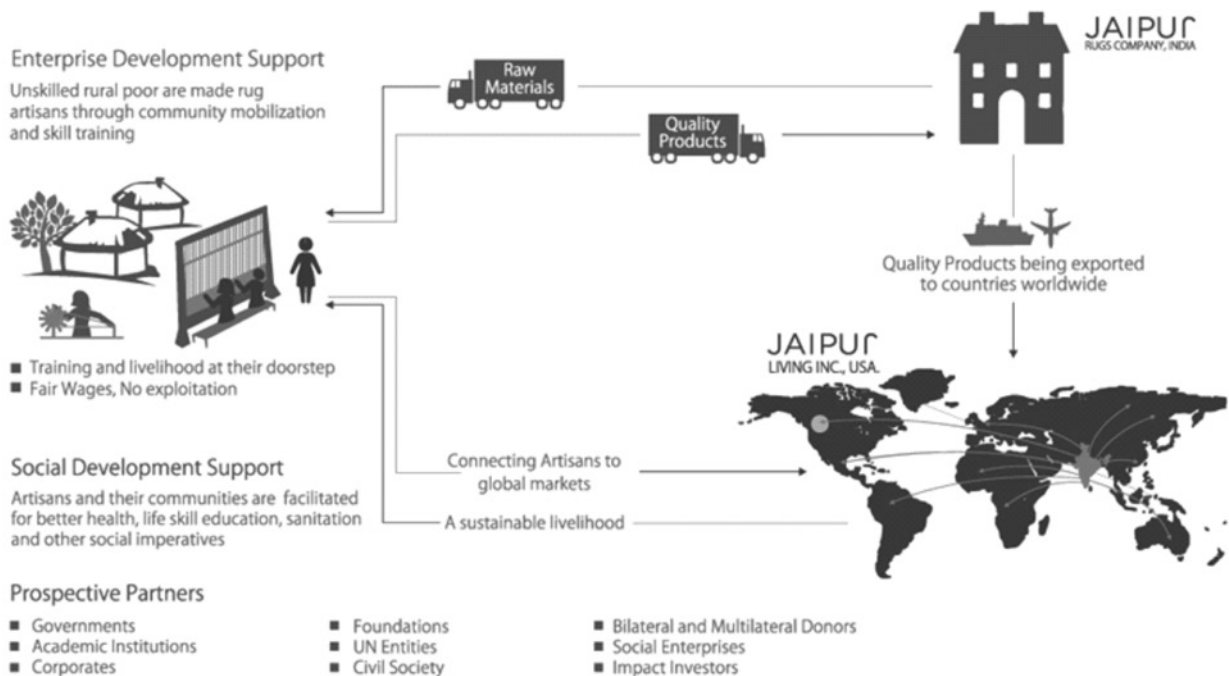
INITIATIVE BY JRF IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE BRITISH COUNCIL

Young Women Social Entrepreneurship Programme

JRF and British Council, in partnership with Diageo, launched this programme with the aim of providing entrepreneurship education to rural artisans. The training targets women artisans between 20 and 35 years, and are trained to be 'Master Trainers'. Through these Master Trainers' the training aims at reaching a growing body of communities interested in social entrepreneurship.

JRF started this initiative in 2014 by mobilizing over 100 women weavers from Rajasthan and organizing workshops needed to help them understand the rugs value-chain better. The training received a footfall of 104 artisans, between 18 and 35 years; 26 of

Gradually, the expectation is that these women emerge as grass-roots entrepreneurs, managing a specific component of the rug supply chain



these were chosen as spinners and 78 as weavers and given further training. The intent was to broaden their perspective about rug weaving (rather than being concerned only with weaving the way they do), to be able to look at the bigger picture, explore the global journey starting from the artisans' doorstep to the customers, and to take up higher responsibilities with respect to quality supervision, waste

minimization, error reduction, etc. Gradually, the expectation is that these women emerge as grass-roots entrepreneurs, managing a specific component of the rug supply chain.

Quintessentially, JRF concentrates on involving unemployed and unskilled women, living in rural villages and provide them training in the craft of rug-weaving. Once the

women transform into working artisans, they get an opportunity to integrate with Jaipur Rugs' 'inclusive development model'. The subsequent phase is to deliver technical training and augment their skills and knowledge through up-gradation. This completes the skill-building facet of transforming women artisans, who by then have earned economic independence, working from home.

The Bunkar Sakhi Programme aims at developing leadership skills of women so that they can become good decision-makers, not only in business but also at home and in the village. Women who have never spoken up before are now being taken seriously by their family members and society



BUNKAR SAKHI LEADERSHIP TRAINING PROGRAMME OF JRF

The Bunkar Sakhi Leadership Training Programme was started as an experiment in August 2014, wherein women artisans were to be identified as local community quality supervisors.

A celebrated art form across the world, Indian handicrafts powers much of the country's export business. These crafts are passed on generation after generation with individual villages emerging as having special skills that are traditionally transferred from master to student.

The sad truth, however, is that these craftspeople have, for centuries, remained underpaid and under-celebrated and been confined within the same trade circles. The result of such gross negligence has been a steady reluctance of future generations

to take up these art forms. Often, families that have practiced these art forms for generations refuse to allow their children to continue the craft because of the perceived lack of dignity in such work.

In an attempt to recognize master craftsmen and the potential of women in business, JRF started the Bunkar Sakhi Programme in partnership with British Council. Through this programme, young women weavers, with a thirst for more knowledge, are chosen for managerial positions and further trained to develop their skills.

In order to identify master craftsmen/master weavers, who have the potential to grow, JRF engages weavers through a Weaver Engagement Programme in which they are given the opportunity to visit the Head Office, where they can see, first-hand, the finished carpets that have been woven by their own hands. This experience helps to instill in them pride in their work.

During these two-day programmes, we identify potential women weavers. We, then, encourage them and their families, to work with JRF as Bunkar Sakhis, whose job is to ensure that carpets are of good quality, are well-designed and delivered on time.

OBJECTIVE

The Bunkar Sakhi Programme aims at developing leadership skills of women so that they can become good decision-makers, not only in business but also at home and in the village. Women who have never spoken up before are now being taken seriously by their family members and society.

This initiative gives new hope for the younger generations of women, who do not want to weave at home. A new door of possibilities has opened up for them. Women who work as Bunkar Sakhis can preserve the dying art of carpet weaving in India, by becoming professional trainers who travel across India to teach the art of carpet weaving. Thus, they become change-agents in alleviating poverty in our society.

This training by the Bunkar Sakhis helps weavers to increase their capacity so that they become financially stronger than just the typical weavers.

THE ROLE OF A BUNKAR SAKHI

A Bunker Sakhi is a quality supervisor, who visits every loom in her village, places orders and

JRF's vision through the Bunkar Sakhi Programme is to start preserving the lost dignity of and pride in hand weaving so that a new generation of women can work in this sector and make this industry sustainable.

ensures the timely delivery of raw material. She checks the quality of the product being woven and also checks the consistency of weaving. For the very first time, a weaver, as Bunkar Sakhi, has the liberty to visit different houses in a village, and is socially accepted. This has slowly changed the way these women perceive themselves.

THE BUNKAR SAKHI PROGRAMME IS UNIQUE

The art of carpet weaving has been gradually dying across the world in many countries such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bhutan, China and Nepal due to an increasing reliance on machines for weaving. Hand-knotted carpets represent the ancient hand art of spinning wool and weaving the carpet. These communities of spinners and weavers are disappearing slowly due to many social and economic conditions in various countries.

JRF's vision through the Bunkar Sakhi Programme is to start preserving the lost dignity of and pride in hand weaving so that a new generation of women can work in this sector and make this industry sustainable. These women are the catalysts for preserving this precious art of

hand-weaving in India and for the world.

IMPACT

So far, eight Bunkar Sakhis work in Rajasthan and three in Uttar Pradesh, encouraging 2,000 weavers.

The impact of the intervention has been remarkable. It has led to a boost in the self-confidence of Bunkar Sakhis, who now have a newfound say in various decisions. Moreover, it has led to an increase in the attention to detail, with regard to weaving. Not only is there improvement in the quality of the products but also a strong relationship has been built between the Branch Office and the artisans. An increasing number of weavers now aspire to become Bunkar Sakhis.

One significant milestone achieved this year is the inclusion of Bunkar Sakhis in the Grass-roots Leadership Programme, organized in association with Pravah, which earlier used to limit itself to the Office staff only. The impact is reflected in the much-strengthened link between the Head Office and the grass-roots, and more importantly, the Bunkar Sakhis understanding the

significance of their role in JRF's value chain system.

FUTURE

A Bunkar Sakhi is an active weaver who wants to grow with the company. She can be given training so that she eventually becomes a Quality Supervisor, a Branch Manager and a Trainer for the company.

KATWARI SAKHI LEADERSHIP TRAINING PROGRAMME

A Katwari Sakhi is an active spinner, who wants to work with the company. The success of the Bunkar Sakhi Leadership Training paved the path for extending a similar training programme for spinner (Katwari) communities working in Bikaner, Rajasthan. This programme also started on a purely experimental basis to address the growing quality concerns with regard to the spinning of yarn. There was a need for a local individual, who would go to every house and check the quality of the yarn being spun, the quality of yarn being bought, the count of the yarn, etc.

The rationale behind this was to increase the level of awareness

Under this programme, women spinners, with leadership potential, were identified and provided with additional training to take up the responsibilities of Katwari Sakhis (Spinner Companions). Like the Bunkar Sakhis, Katwari Sakhis are expected to play an important role in strengthening the carpet-making value chain while evolving into grass-roots leaders

Impact of the Bunkar Sakhi Programme

Commercial	Social
The result of this project has been a 114 per cent increase in production, both in Rajasthan and UP combined, from September 2014 to February 2015, and March to August 2015. More importantly, there has been an immeasurable increase in the dignity of these artisans and this has encouraged their growth.	At present (2017), there are 11 Bunkar Sakhis—eight from Rajasthan and three from Uttar Pradesh. The women in Rajasthan belong to very traditional Marwari families and have never been allowed to move freely in their villages or talk to the men. Women weavers are now able to share their problems related to work and their lives with the Bunkar Sakhis, resulting in a positive environment in various villages in Rajasthan. The weavers in UP belong to very traditional Muslim families and also face similar social restrictions as the women in Rajasthan. Thanks to this programme, Bunkar Sakhis are able to move freely within their villages and confidently to nearby villages; they have the support of their families in this. Enhancing the confidence of the women and giving them constant support so that they can work and grow to their full potential is a direct outcome of this programme.

among spinners, with respect to hand-carding and spinning techniques and other processes, in a way that they develop a sense of ownership—an ‘owner mentality’ and mindset—in order to cultivate a sense of pride and dignity in their work, as they play a significant role in the entire value chain process of carpet-making.

Under this programme, women spinners, with leadership potential, were identified and provided with additional training to take up the responsibilities of Katwari Sakhis (Spinner Companions). Like the Bunkar Sakhis, Katwari Sakhis are expected to play an important role in strengthening the carpet-

making value chain while evolving into grass-roots leaders. This initiative has so far trained six Katwari Sakhis and they are in the process of understanding their new responsibilities.

The training includes a step-by-step coverage of the various processes involved with yarn (wool) production. This has had a remarkable impact on the lives of the newly turned Katwari Sakhis, who belong to the remotest corners of Rajasthan. It was a turning point in their lives, their first step towards liberty and independence, an opportunity to be heard and an opportunity to earn. This, further, had a great impact on the organization, with respect to better quality yarn,

better spun yarn and a richer, deeper outreach in the villages of Bikaner.

The ‘Women’s Entrepreneurship Development Programme’ and the ‘Leadership Training Programme’ are adding a cadre of highly self-motivated women with an entrepreneurial mindset to Jaipur Rugs and JRF.

CASE STUDY: ARCHANA DEVI, BUNKAR SAKHI, MAHASINGH KAS, RAJASTHAN

Archana Devi was one of the participants of the ‘Young Women’s Social Entrepreneurship Development Programme (YWSEDP) Phase 1’ in 2014.

In order to tap all the available opportunities, it is important to be aware of the many needs of the community, to be in sync with the bigger movements, to understand the role of the people in the change process and to build ownership in the changing scenario

Following this, she went through a leadership programme—the ‘Bunkar Sakhi Programme’—aimed at empowering women weavers. She now says, “I can do anything in the world.”

Her progress in the last three years is evident in the confidence with which she expresses herself in front of people; This has grown exponentially. She speaks fearlessly to the Branch Manager she reports to and the founder of the organization. Today, she manages the quality of 35 looms in Mahasingh Ka Bas village near Jaipur. The organization realizes that, inspired by Archana, many women have become Bunkar Sakhis, bringing the total to seven Bunkar Sakhis and adding a new cadre of women leaders at the grass-roots.

Her family comprises eight members, including herself, her husband, three daughters and two sons. Before becoming a Bunkar Sakhi in 2014, she had been weaving carpets for 15 years. When asked why she started weaving in childhood, she said, “I did not like to go to school although my family members used to force me to go. I was afraid of the strict teachers. I decided to weave because I love weaving.”

Before YWSEDP in 2014, she was working with a contractor from 2000 to 2007, earning Rs 50 per day. In 2008, she started working with Jaipur Rugs and the company paid her Rs 60–70 per day. After that, gradually, the rate increased as per the design and, in 2014, each weaver started earning Rs 200 per day for a specific design and quality. She worked 20 days in a month and earned Rs 4000 on an average each month. If there was an urgent order, she would work for 25 days and would earn Rs 5000. After she attended YWSEDP, she was selected as a Bunkar Sakhi; she got trained in August 2014 and was appointed for full time work in October 2014; her initial salary was Rs 5400. Thus, there was a significant increase of Rs 1400 per month in her income. When she joined the organization as a Bunkar Sakhi, her husband did not have a job. On Archana’s request, her husband also got a job in the store in the Branch. Today, Archana’s monthly income is Rs 6000 and her husband’s income is Rs 6500.

CASE STUDY 2: SHANTI, BUNKAR SAKHI, MANPURA

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As a young child, Shanti had always been a bright student with

a keen interest in studying. Her parents broke stones for a living; however, she continued in school for as long as she could. When it became difficult for her parents to make ends meet, she had to give up school (she was in the fifth grade) to lend them a hand. Besides breaking stones, she took up weaving as a practice under some local contractors; this would help her earn more. She was 17 years old when she got married. After settling down, she tried her hand at farming, joined a nearby beauty parlour and even tried making jewellery for a while—anything that would help her earn a few extra rupees. However, nothing satisfied her. She was not content with the kind of work she was getting involved with. There came a point when she became lazy and did not feel like working. This was a cause of concern for her husband, who worked day and night to support his little family in Manpura.

During this time, her brother-in-law, Harfool ji, who happened to be the Branch Manager of Manpura, asked her to become a Bunkar Sakhi. Her life took a different path after this—a path toward responsibility, empathy, honesty and sincerity. Nobody knew what a Bunkar Sakhi was supposed to do, in her

Once she underwent the leadership training, her perspective about life transformed. She began to accept bigger responsibilities and started focusing on work and quality maintenance

community. Most important, whatever it may be, the people had the least confidence that Shanti would be able to do a good job, considering how lazy she had become!

Once she underwent the leadership training, her perspective about life transformed. She began to accept bigger responsibilities and started focusing on work and quality maintenance. She also started helping JRF in most of its development interventions that took place in her community, to a point where she became an indispensable part of the grass-roots ecosystem. A grass-roots leader today, Shanti, the Bunkar Sakhi, is responsible for quality maintenance of

numerous artisans working in her community.

“The three-day training (Social Enterprise Leadership Program in August 2016) was a combination of fun and learning. My favourite part was the ‘tiger-hunter’ game wherein we learned teamwork and how not to work on assumptions. The story narrated by Ms Swati helped me understand how not to take things for granted and the repercussions of the same. We were able to relate those stories with our lives and, hence, it was a great learning opportunity. It also meant that apart from our individual work, we must make an effort to understand the others’ work as well, so as to get a systems perspective of working

for a higher purpose and for better results.

Furthermore, this particular training has been different from the others because, for the first time, the vendors or the loom-owners were involved. Through this, they now know their roles and responsibilities. Many vendors take the initiative to ask me more about how to improve the quality of the carpets being woven on their looms. This also shows us how well they have understood their work and how serious they are about improving their work. All this has definitely been showcased beautifully.”

Yogesh Chaudhary is the Director of Jaipur Rugs.

The Road Less Travelled

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Showing remarkable steadfastness of purpose and undeterred by the hurdles and rejections they faced, the women SHG members of Kalachandpur doggedly pursue the block officials to sanction the building of a road to their village and relieve them of untold misery

“*HAAMRA HAAMADER GOLPO BOLA SHURU KORLE eto joldi shirabek naai, saara din laagbeke* (If we start sharing our stories, it will take the whole day),” said Sadmoni Soren excitedly, her eyes shining with pride and confidence. She is a Santhali and a member of the SHG, the Malamiru Swanirbhor Gosthi, and also a Board Member of the Sabuj Sathi Nari Shakti Sangh. Not only Sadmoni but all the other members of that SHG also were glowing with pride. They have maintained a notebook in which they have written their achievements from the beginning till date.

“Tui pore ne ihate ki ki likha aachhe, haamra suru le aaj porjonto ki ki korechhi (Read what we have written in this notebook. We have recorded all our achievements till date over here),” said one of the members of the SHG when I asked them about their achievements.

The most interesting story of all is the story of the construction of a concrete road in the village.

Kalachandpur and Tilaboni are two adjacent villages in Bansbera *gram panchayat* of Barabazar block. The villages are so close physically that the villagers call

The *kuccha* road became an awful sight in the rainy season and caused severe problems for the residents. Negotiating the *kuccha* road on a regular basis during the rains was a major nuisance because the road became muddy and slippery

Kalachandpur the *upor para* and the two hamlets of Tilaboni the *maajh para* and *neech para*. Both the villages had concerns about the road. The *kuccha* road became an awful sight in the rainy season and caused severe problems for the residents. Negotiating the *kuccha* road on a regular basis during the rains was a major nuisance because the road became muddy and slippery. Ambulances and other vehicles did not want to enter the villages or, rather, could not enter the villages. In case anyone was unwell, the villagers had to carry the patient to the main road on a cot. It was very tough to carry material to these houses because vehicles couldn't reach them. The primary school teacher used the state of the *kuccha* and muddy road as reason not to come to teach in the school.

The Sribari cluster decided to take the issue to the concerned department. The Sribari cluster includes members of SHGs from four villages: Tilaboni, Kalachandpur, Sargo and Hullung. The cluster has 10 SHGs and its representatives meet at a fixed place in Tilaboni village once every month. The application for the construction of concrete roads for both the villages, Kalachandpur and Tilaboni,

was submitted to the Block Development Officer (BDO). The application was approved in principle; however, due to the shortage of funds, the road for Kalachandpur was not approved of whereas the road for Tilaboni was sanctioned. The people, however, were not informed about this nor were they aware of it.

A problem arose, owing to this, during the inspection and survey of the road. The officials from the block surveyed the site at Kalachandpur, which had not been approved, and even started the excavation work in the village instead of in Tilaboni, which had been approved. The excavation was just about to be completed, when the block officials realized their mistake. They stopped the work at Kalachandpur and shifted to the actual site sanctioned at Tilaboni village, leaving the work in Kalachandpur unfinished. The process of shifting of the work actually bemused the people. They thought that the work had been stopped due to political reasons. When the excavation work was going on at Kalachandpur, Chepu Murmu, the elected representative from the Sansad, or Ward, of the Bansbera *gram panchayat*, had come to the site with his followers

and had ordered the people to stop the work. Chepu Murmu did not tell villagers that the road had actually been sanctioned for Tilaboni village, and that the work at Kalachandpur that had been started was a mistake.

The construction work for the road started in Tilaboni the following month, that is, in June 2014. The shifting of the work from Kalachandpur to Tilaboni, leaving the road dug up, created a great deal of trouble not only physically but also socially between the villagers, who assumed that the decision to change the construction of the road was political.

When Chepu Murmu asked that the work in Kalachandpur be stopped, the other political party got into action. They tried to take the Malamiru Gaonta SHG and the other villagers of Kalachandpur into confidence. They aggravated the situation by saying that Ramdon Majhi of Tilaboni village had influenced the Bansbera *gram panchayat* and the Barabazar block officers through his political allegiance to shift the road work to his village. The allegations impacted the women as well. Ramdon Majhi's wife Khunki Majhi was an influential leader in the cluster.

The SHG women, however, did not give up hope. The members followed up with the BDO every week and insisted on the construction of the road. They tried to negotiate with the government staff in all possible ways. Sometimes, they even had heated discussions and arguments with the BDO and the Joint BDO

She took the allegations against her husband personally. Because of this, the SHGs in both the villages became polarized.

In the next cluster meeting, Malamiru Gaonta Mahila Samiti raised the question regarding the violation of their interest and said that the people of Tilaboni could have let the work be finished at Kalachandpur, and they could, instead, have appealed to the Block Administration for the construction of a road at Tilaboni as well. And that could have been done through the Cluster. But the SHG of Tilaboni did not take this feedback well and showed no interest in listening to the women from Kalachandpur. This eventually led to a fight between the SHGs of the two villages. SHG members of the two villages stopped talking with each other. Not only this, the women from both the villages stopped going to each other's villages and even the men-folk stopped interacting with each other. Cluster meetings were not held for two months because of the road.

The members of Malamiru Gaonta Mahila Samiti decided in the SHG meeting that they would get the road in their village constructed and decided to meet the BDO to have it sanctioned. Led by Sadmoni Soren, they

went to the BDO of Barabazar block. He did not respond to them favourably. Instead, he asked them to leave the block premises. A couple of weeks later, they again went to the BDO and appealed to him regarding the problem in the village, and once again they returned without an answer.

The SHG, meanwhile, had conducted a meeting with the villagers to search for solutions to their problems but did not get any support. The SHG women, however, did not give up hope. The members followed up with the BDO every week and insisted on the construction of the road. They tried to negotiate with the government staff in all possible ways. Sometimes, they even had heated discussions and arguments with the BDO and the Joint BDO.

They continued to make their request and asked the officials to visit the site to see how the villagers were suffering because of the unfinished work. They kept on visiting, applying, forcing, debating and requesting for over a year. Finally, the BDO gave them a date for meeting the SHG members. The women of the Malamiru SHG met the BDO and the Joint BDO and spoke of the hardships they were facing. The

site for the road at Kalachandpur had been dug up and it was had become like a canal in front of their houses. During the rains, the entrance to the village was slushy and difficult to use.

The people had no other means to reach their village. The BDO showed them the sanction papers, which clearly stated that the sanction was only for a road to Tilaboni village and the excavation in Kalachandpur had been carried out by mistake. The women understood that a mistake had been made by the block officials and that the decision had not been influenced by either of the villages. Sadmoni Soren told the BDO angrily, "*Torai toh haamader jhogra ta laagayen dilis. Haamader gaayer lokeder modhye je kotha bola bondho hoilo seta kikore thik hobek?* (You caused a dispute between us. How are you going to repair the damage already done to the relationship of the villagers)?"

The SHG members then met the Joint BDO because they had had a positive experience with him earlier. He had helped them in implementing MGNREGS work in the village. He suggested, informally, that they block the entrance of the road to the villages (the entrance of the Tilaboni and Kalachandpur are common) as a sign of protest, so

Blocking of the road affected the construction in Tilaboni village because vehicles could not enter with the required construction material

that no one could use the road and no vehicle could enter either of the villages.

All the SHG members did not agree to this action. They were apprehensive that it may escalate to some bigger issue, which they may not be able to control. The SHG members wanted to hold a joint meeting of the two villages in Tilaboni, in which men and women would be invited. The purpose of the meeting was to share with all of them the information that they had got from the BDO regarding the road. However, the men of both the villages did not turn up for the meeting and the joint meeting could not take place. This fuelled the members of Malamiru Gaonta SHG to take extreme steps, and they decided to act on the suggestion of the Joint BDO. “*Sojhe katukte gotom bang rakaba, undo katuk bankaayte laaga aa* (When the straight finger cannot extract butter from a pot, the curved finger needs to be used),” said the SHG members and went ahead with the decision to block the road.

Blocking of the road affected the construction in Tilaboni village because vehicles could not enter with the required construction material. The SHG members also disallowed anyone

from taking any diversion to approach the village. This action fuelled the imbroglio between the two villages. The extreme step of protesting transformed the situation into a huge issue throughout the area. Tilaboni and Kalachandpur, being very close, have a common *sholoyana* (forum of men of the village, in which they discuss and take decisions on matters affecting the village). Women are not allowed in the forum although the forum takes decisions on issues regarding women. In such cases, only the accused woman/women are asked to attend. The headmen of that forum called a meeting to discuss this matter. As the members of Malamiru Gaonta MS were all involved in creating the chaos, the *sholoyana* called them to the meeting.

The main concern of the forum was not to generate a discussion on the issue that the people of Kalachandpur were facing, but to demean the women of the SHG for their action. When addressing the forum, one of the headmen said, “*Aatu rin aayo horko nuna sahos tako hor eset lagit* (How dare the women close the village road)?”

The *sholoyana* meeting was held in the area between Kalachandpur and Tilaboni villages. Since the

women of the SHG were called, a few women from the other SHGs of Tilaboni village also attended the meeting. However, they were not there to support the women of Malamiru SHG but solely to see what happens in a *sholoyana* meeting because women had never been to such a meeting.

The members of Malamiru Gaonta Mahila Samiti were asked why they took such action. In response, Sadmoni Soren along with Lugu Hembrom, Suradhoni Hansda and Chumki Hembrom, shared their experiences that they had had while dealing with the block officials. The work at Kalachandpur village should not have been started; but because it had been, it should have been completed. As it is, they have been facing too many problems because of the unfinished road. And there was no way that the villagers could fix the situation.

The headman, however, was not ready to listen to the women and insulted the SHG members. The tension did not end there. It had become an inter-village issue, and because the women-folk had been called to a public meeting and insulted, the men of Kalachandpur village were angry and boycotted the *sholoyana* meeting. As a result, the *sholoyana* also became divided. However,

At the meeting, the BDO accepted the mistake of his office that created the turmoil in the two villages. He admitted that their personnel had not been able to differentiate between the two villages and had ordered for the excavation work at Kalachandpur, instead of Tilaboni

because the women of Tilaboni were also there in the *sholoyana* meeting, they understood the plight of the SHG members of Malamiru Gaonta Mahila Samiti. They revived their Cluster meeting after the incident. The members of Malamiru Gaonta Mahila Samiti got the opportunity to take their fellow SHG members into confidence, and receive their support.

However, the men of Tilaboni village didn't leave the matter there. A few of the men went to the Bansbera *gram panchayat* office and the Barabazar Panchayat Samiti office, to lodge a complaint against the women of Malamiru Gaonta Mahila Samiti. This group of men included Ramdon Majhi, the former Sansad Member of Bansbera *gram panchayat* and a member of a political party. A couple of weeks later, a meeting was held at Tilaboni village, in which representatives from the Panchayat Samiti, the Gram Pradhan of Bansbera GP, the BDO and the Joint BDO of Barabazar block were present.

At the meeting, the BDO accepted the mistake of his office that created the turmoil in the two villages. He admitted that their personnel had not been able to differentiate between the two villages and had ordered for the excavation work at Kalachandpur, instead of Tilaboni.

In reply, Sadmoni said to the BDO, "*Haamra bhul korle toh tora ekhaner le pulice pathayen dis, aar liye chole aase. Tui je bhul ta korlis itar ki hobe ekhon* (When we make a mistake, you send your police force to bring us to you. Now you have made a mistake, what will happen)?"

The BDO said in response, "*Aami kotha dichchhi tin maser vitore tomader raasta ta toiri kore debo. Aar ekmas pore ese tomra khoj niye jaabe* (I promise that your road will be constructed within three months. You come to my office next month to get updates)."

All the efforts by the SHG members had borne fruit. The funds for a road in Kalachandpur were sanctioned as per the

timeline given by the BDO. Here also, the Malamiru Gaonta Mahila Samiti played a vital role. They called a meeting of the villagers before the construction work started. All the villagers, men and women, participated and they decided that they would all work sincerely so that road could be completed as fast as possible. The SHG monitored the quality of the material used for the construction of road. It is on record the fastest constructed concrete road in the entire area and the quality of the road is also commendable.

With this, I closed the notebook, thinking how the women of this SHG had overcome all the odds to connect their village with a road. I feel happy to be associated with women like these. I am also aware that there have been some other serious issues in the villages that have come up in the intervening years that might not have been resolved had this SHG not been active.

—
Tapas Paul is based in Baghmundih, West Bengal.

My Experiences with the Kulhaiya Community

...

Initiating a women's group in this Muslim-dominated area of Bihar and introducing cucumber cultivation as an alternative farm-based livelihood was challenging and sometimes frustrating for the new team. Their success is their reward

IT WAS AN EXCITING DAY. My team members—Trisha, Anup, Tarannum—and I were going to visit the successfully initiated cucumber field. An intervention of this sort was taking place for the first time in the operational area of PRADAN's Araria team in Bihar. On arriving in the village, we were glad to see the people in the cucumber field. A pick-up van was parked beside the road; women, men and children were plucking the cucumbers in the field, while the traders at the collection point were busy packaging the produce in gunny bags.

Fatima, the owner of field, expressed her sheer joy, "*Bhaia ji sapna pura ho gelei, aisan kheera kabhi*

ne dekhlo chili (Brother, this is a dream come true. I have never seen such cucumbers in my life)." Fatima's words provided us with respite from the concerns that we had had during the exposure visit of this village to Jalalgarh, a cucumber production area in the Purnia district. In fact, these words were immensely satisfying; it was like our dream was finally taking shape.

Dream! What was the dream? Where did the word 'dream' come from? To respond fully, let's travel two years back in time when a new team was started in Araria and I became a part of it. The socio-economic condition that we encountered, the various struggles, challenges and excitement we faced, and

I heard many stories about their struggle to mobilize women. I was aware about such challenges with this community, having heard stories about it from my colleagues at Kishanganj

how we overcame these, and moved forward as a team—all need to be chronicled.

I have had much experience in working with the SC and ST communities of Bihar and Jharkhand but I had not had any experience of working with Muslims, especially in north-east Bihar where the conditions were very different. Therefore, it would be appropriate to talk briefly about Araria and describe my journey with Muslims. I would also like to talk about the team's intervention in cucumber cultivation: how and why it started in the area, and the impact of this initiative.

Team Araria was initiated in December 2014. This area was chosen because it is one of the most backward and flood-affected districts of Bihar and stands at the bottom of the 90 minority concentrated districts of India. It is backward, both in terms of its socio-economic standing and its infrastructure indicators. There is a substantial proportion of Muslims in the district. Against the state average of 16.2 per cent, the Muslims constitute 44.4 per cent of the total rural population in Araria. In the three blocks that PRADAN is operating, the proportion of the Muslim population stands at 77.5 per

cent in Jokihat, 62.70 per cent in Araria and 46.8 per cent in Palasi blocks.

Although 60 per cent of the families are involved in agriculture, only 30 per cent of them have their own land. The other 70 per cent are landless families whose livelihoods are dependent on wage earning in the landlords' field. About 30 per cent of the landless households also engage in agriculture through leasing land. Agriculture is not the mainstay of the household income, which is reflected in the subsistence level of cropping practices. Migration is a prominent source of income for the majority of the households. You will find people saying, "If we don't migrate, we won't be able to feed our families."

The majority of the community is Kulhaiya Muslims. Kulhaiyas are one of the four sub-groups of the Shaikh community in the area. The overall condition of the community is poor, in terms of educational, financial, social and political status. And it is one of the fastest growing castes of Muslims. The prime source of income of this community is agriculture. However, owing to population growth and the growing number of nuclear families, the land has been

divided over time, leading to many families becoming landless. The Kulhaiya women observe the *purdah* (veil) system, are mostly engaged in household chores and do not participate in agriculture. The health condition and the literacy rate (20 per cent) of the women are very poor in the area.

I became a part of this new team in April 2015. My colleagues, Abhishek, Jyoti and Drasti, who joined earlier, had started the initial discussions with the villagers. At that time, mobilizing the women into an SHG was a big challenge and only two SHGs had been formed in Araria till March, 2015. I heard many stories about their struggle to mobilize women. I was aware about such challenges with this community, having heard stories about it from my colleagues at Kishanganj (Abhishek, Sachin, Sudarshan). At the same time, I was also excited because for the first time I was going to be a part of a newly formed team.

I started to understand the area through my development perspective. However, there was some fear in my mind. How do I work with Muslim women? How will the villagers react? What type of approach should we use in a new place? Such questions passed through my mind, considering

I started a discussion with the villagers and tried to mobilize the women to form an SHG but for the first 25 days I was not able to form a single SHG. During my field visit, the women were not even ready to talk to me

that we had a lot of experience working with the ST, SC and OBC families but only a very limited experience in working with Muslims.

I started a discussion with the villagers and tried to mobilize the women to form an SHG but for the first 25 days I was not able to form a single SHG. During my field visit, the women were not even ready to talk to me. I got various kinds of responses from the community, “*Jo baat karna hai hamara malik se kijiye* (Whatever you want to discuss, do so with my husband).” “*Humlog bahut paisa jama kiye lekin sab bhag gaya* (We deposited a lot of money earlier, but the organizations fled away).” “*Ye sab sirf thagne ka tarika hai* (These are different ways of deceiving us).” “*Yahan ye sab nahi chal sakta hai* (Here, these things don’t work),” and so on and so forth. I became frustrated and anxious because I was unable to find a way to mobilize Muslim women, who were not even ready to talk to me because I was a man.

During my field visits, I understood that without convincing the men and the so-called important persons of the village such as the Maulvi and the Hafij, it would be difficult to proceed with our work. I began

conversing with them. I started visiting the villages at around 6 a.m. in the morning and after 6 p.m. in the evening because it was difficult to meet these people in the day time. Many a times, I stood near the mosque and tried to initiate a discussion but the responses were always disheartening like, “*Hamari aurte noor hoti hai paraye murd ke samne nakhun dikhana bhi napak hota hai* (Our women are divine, and for them to even show their nails to other men is immoral).” “*Jo kaam karne aaye hai hum mardo se boliye aurto ka kya kaam* (Whatever you have come for, talk to us, what is the need of women)?” “*Jaldi se yahan se bhagiye warna masjid se elan kar denge ki kafir aaya hai ek bhi haddi wapas nahi jayega* (Go away quickly from here, else we will announce through the Mosques that a disbeliever has come, you will not be able to go back).”

Such comments were utterly frustrating; yet I never lost hope. I strongly believed that one day the people would understand. I, therefore, continued to approach the men from different hamlets. Whenever I sensed some openness, I showed them various videos on my laptop. Finally, the day arrived when my relentless efforts showed the first signs of

bearing fruit. On 28 April, 2015, I received a very heartening response from Kudus, a former *mukhiya* of Bagdehra *panchayat*, giving some much-needed hope.

He said about me, “*Ye neik banda hai aur neik irade se aaya hai, ye hamare gaon ko sudharne aaya hai* (He is a good person. He has come up with good ideas. He has come to develop our village).” He told me to visit him again after two days and assured me of lending his help in organizing the people in the village. I was excited to hear this response and immediately went back to the location and discussed the development with my colleagues.

After two days, on 30 April, Abhishek and I went to the Gamharia village, where Kudus gathered around 15 women and briefed them about our objective. Afterwards, some more women and men joined the discussion. Sensing the opportunity, we showed them a video of PRADAN’s outreach programmes. We then facilitated a discussion, which generated so many questions among the community such as: What is the profit in forming an SHG? How many days will we have to continue to save? What benefit will we get from the government? What will you give

During my journey, I learned some hard lessons on the importance of understanding the social milieu and acting accordingly

us? After a prolonged discussion, a few people exclaimed, “*Ye achha cheez hai. Is se gaon ka achha hoga. Is me koi nuksan nahi hai* (This is good. It will help the villagers. There’s no loss in doing this).” As a result of this intense discussion, 10 women formed a group named Gulab Mahila Samiti, and started saving Rs 20 each. We felt jubilant that we had crossed the first hurdle.

The very next week, two new members joined the group and, in no time, one member took a loan of Rs 500 for the treatment of her son. The impact of the internal loan in the crisis helped people realize the importance of the SHG; other village women also came forward to form new SHGs. Subsequently, Gulab Mahila Samiti and I facilitated the formation of eight more groups in the same hamlet over a period of next two months. The experience was no less than a miracle!

During my journey, I learned some hard lessons on the importance of understanding the social milieu and acting accordingly. In one meeting, I asked the women to read the *kalma* (Muslim prayer) before starting the meeting; when it was over, the women clapped their hands in appreciation. However, hearing them, the men came and

started shouting at their wives, “*Bhago yahan se. Yahan paisa jama karne bheje hai ki kawali gaane* (Go away from here. Have we sent you to deposit money or to sing)?”

Following this incident, these women withdrew their money and left the group. In another meeting that I facilitated, the discussion was on how to ensure norms in the group; the meeting continued for about three hours. When the meeting was about to finish, a man entered and threw the SHG savings’ box and shouted, “*Ye kya tamasha ho raha hai. Teen ghanta se aurat ke beech mein baithkar ras lila chal raha hai. Bhago yahan se, koi group nahi chalega yahan* (What’s going on? A man sitting among women for so long! We will not allow any group here).” To my surprise, not a single SHG member opposed him and this group also got dissolved subsequently. These incidents taught me to be cautious in our approach.

I also experienced many good things in the area. After three to four months of savings and credit, the women understood that the SHG was very beneficial for them, leading many of the SHGs to increase their savings rate to Rs 50 per week. Meanwhile, people started trusting me and this helped me

to mobilize around 300 women in 35 SHGs at the end of the first year. I also demonstrated some good agricultural practices in the villages such as Direct Seeded Rice (DSR), vegetable cultivation and System of Wheat Intensification (SWI), which helped to establish us further in the area.

Meanwhile, I happened to visit Jalalgarh village of Purnia district when I was returning from Katihar on 25 March, 2016. Some farmers were busy loading cucumber in a carrier-van beside the road. I became eager to know what they were doing and after some time I heard about a patch where almost 500 farmers grow cucumbers instead of wheat in the summer season. I planned to visit Chatar village in Jalalgarh block of Purnia district, which is only 35 km from our location.

I discussed this with my teammates and together we planned to make a visit there. The next day, Arshad and I went to Chatar village. We were surprised to see three trucks from Patna and Darbhanga standing on the road. Farmers were busy loading the cucumbers in the truck. It seemed that no other crops grew in this area; we could only see cucumbers in the field. After talking to the farmers, I understood that they have been

Can cucumber be a good option in our area? Will the farmers adopt it? If so, why have they not started yet? These questions came to my mind because the farmers in our area were also growing only wheat and had told us about the losses they faced in wheat cultivation

growing cucumber for the last 20 years and earning around Rs 1.25 lakhs from their one acre of land. Growing wheat would give them a return of merely Rs 15,000 from one acre.

I started dreaming...Can cucumber be a good option in our area? Will the farmers adopt it? If so, why have they not started yet? These questions came to my mind because the farmers in our area were also growing only wheat and had told us about the losses they faced in wheat cultivation. I thought about the impact it would have if the people in our area successfully initiated cucumber cultivation. The season was about to end, and we would have to wait for one year before we took on cucumber cultivation. I wanted to discuss this with all the SHGs in our area.

I went to the Parkan village the next day for a SHG meeting. I called some men to the SHG meeting as well. After their savings and credit transactions, I shared my experiences of Chatar with them and asked whether they were aware of it. I was shocked to know that most of them were not aware about the area just 50 km away from their village. However, they showed their eagerness to visit the area. We planned an 'exposure' visit

the very next day. I was excited and the women were excited too. Asmati, said, "*Hum pehli bar ghar se bahar ghumne ke liye sath milkar jaenge* (This will be the first time that women are going together out of the village)." Some of the members were fearful and said about me, "*Pata nahin kahan le jaega* (Don't know where he will take us)." About 16 women and six men were ready to visit Chatar. They took responsibility for arranging for a vehicle that would take us there.

The next morning, a woman named Salma from the village called me and said that no women would go as they had not been given permission by their husbands. I was surprised and rather sad. I immediately reached the village and sat with the SHG. After some discussion, I understood that they wanted to go but were afraid to do so. I again tried to motivate them and after some time 12 women and six men got ready for the exposure visit and we reached Chatar after two hours.

The experience in Chatar was exciting. All of us enjoyed seeing the huge cucumber fields. "*Baap re baap kaisan kheera faral chhai* (What a production of cucumber)!" was the instant remark by one of the members.

After visiting the field, we called some farmers from Chatar and requested them to share their experiences in cucumber cultivation. The farmers said that about 12 years back, they also used to grow only wheat in the rabi season. After they learned about cucumber cultivation, all the farmers of the area abandoned wheat cultivation. Earlier, they were earning only Rs 5,000 from one *bigha* of land, whereas now they were earning Rs 30,000 to 40,000 on an average from their one *bigha*.

Listening to the experiences of the farmers at Chatar, the SHG members were delighted and said, "*Hum log isi liye garib hai, hum log kheti karna nahi jante hai, isi liye kamane ke liye bahar jana parta hai, ab aankh khul gaya* (That's why we are poor, we don't know how to do agriculture; and we always migrate to earn money)." Most of them said that they would change to growing cucumber and would share these experiences with the other women of the village.

The next day, I arranged a meeting in the village and invited those who went for the exposure visit to share their experiences. After the meeting, 12 members made a commitment to grow cucumber next year.

Although, we were ready to grow cucumber, no one had any concrete experience of cucumber cultivation. So, we called a resource person from Chatar village for four months to provide continuous technical support to the farmers

I continued the process of exposure visits and conducted two more. About 40 more SHG members and their spouses visited Chatar. From that time on, I always tried to keep alive the discussion around cucumber cultivation. The coming year, during the *rabi* season, as we got involved in wheat cultivation, we asked those farmers who had committed to experiment with the change the previous year following the exposure visits to leave some land for cucumber. More than fifty persons retracted. Yet, about 100 farmers were ready to experience cucumber cultivation for the first time.

Although, we were ready to grow cucumber, no one had any concrete experience of cucumber cultivation. So, we called a resource person from Chatar village for four months to provide continuous technical support to the farmers. We formed a Kisan Sabha in each hamlet, where farmers met every week to discuss the issues, progress, challenges, inputs requirement, etc. The trainers also provided technical knowledge in these meetings. Often, seed sellers also reached the meetings, with the required inputs.

After much struggle, we were able to initiate cucumber cultivation

in 40 bighas of land with 98 farmers. It was really a great moment for the area. Other farmers also visited the field and shared, “*Is baar dekhte hai agla bar lagaenge* (Let’s see the result this time, will do it the next season).” After seeing the cucumbers in the field, the farmers and the other villagers were so excited; it was as if they had won the World Cup. Their happiness was somewhat dampened, however, when the cucumbers reached the market. The rate of the cucumber in the *mandi* was at an average of Rs 2.5–3 per kg, which reduced the net income of the farmers drastically. We were expecting an average realization of Rs 5–6 per kg.

Despite this, many farmers earned Rs 5,000–20,000 for the first time, which was more than ten times what they earned from their traditional wheat crop. The farmers and the villagers were very happy and they were eager to grow cucumbers in the coming year. The other farmers also showed interest in cucumber cultivation for the next year. They were reassured that cucumber could be grown in their land and they could earn as much as Rs 30,000 in just four months from their one bigha of land. We were also confident and saw the

potential in cucumber cultivation in changing the farm-based livelihood of the area.

Although farmers did not get as much money as they hoped to, due to the differences in the rate, it made a great impact in the area. The confidence of the farmer and that of the team grew. Many farmers said that they would not migrate in the season; instead, they would stay home and earn money from vegetable cultivation. We are also planning to scale-up cucumber cultivation along with some other vegetable crops next year.

We tried to link the farmers with the local market but were unable to do so due to limited production. We will have to ensure mass production in the coming years so that a link is established with the outside markets and the area could be developed as a hub of vegetable cultivation. The staff of the Bihar Rural Livelihood Promotion Society (BRLPS) also visited the cucumber fields and discussed the cultivation with the farmers. They were excited with the initiative and planned to demonstrate it in their area.

Usually, the women of this area were not involved in agriculture; however, they were engaged from

The success of the cucumber cultivation has also provided a way to develop farm-based livelihoods. This can now be scaled-up, which will change the culture of farming in the area.

the start to the marketing in cucumber cultivation. This set a precedent in the area and could lead to more participation of women in agriculture, especially in vegetable cultivation.

In my two-year sojourn in Araria, I found that my motivation fluctuated greatly. Often, I was frustrated by people's comments; nevertheless, I did not lose hope. I am inspired by the words of Og Mandino, "Failure will never overtake me if my determination

to succeed is strong enough." I believed that the people would understand me at some point.

Now the situation has changed. People from the area respect me. When I enter the village, I hear, "*Salam wale kum, bhai*, (Greetings brother)," and many *didis* say, "*Bhai khana khakar jaiga, aapka manpasand saag banaye hai*. (Brother have the food, we have made your favourite food)." It provides me great satisfaction to see the changes in the village.

Now the women talk to me without any hesitation as if I were their own. I can enter any house without any hesitation.

The challenges are many. We are now confident of overcoming them. The success of the cucumber cultivation has also provided a way to develop farm-based livelihoods. This can now be scaled-up, which will change the culture of farming in the area.

Santosh Kumar Mandal is based in Araria, Bihar



PRADAN is a non-governmental organization registered in Delhi under the Societies Registration Act. Working with small teams of professionals in several poverty clusters in seven states across central and eastern India, PRADAN builds and strengthens collectives of rural women, in order to stimulate their sense of agency and help them occupy space as equals in society. PRADAN professionals work through these collectives, to enhance the livelihoods and overall well-being of women, thereby striving for a just and equitable society.

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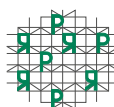
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Santosh Mandal interacts
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