The Story Retold:

Singleness and the Sanghathan

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Stories of not just pain and suffering but of collective strength and learning, joy and companionship, as the single women in Rayagada work to transform the future
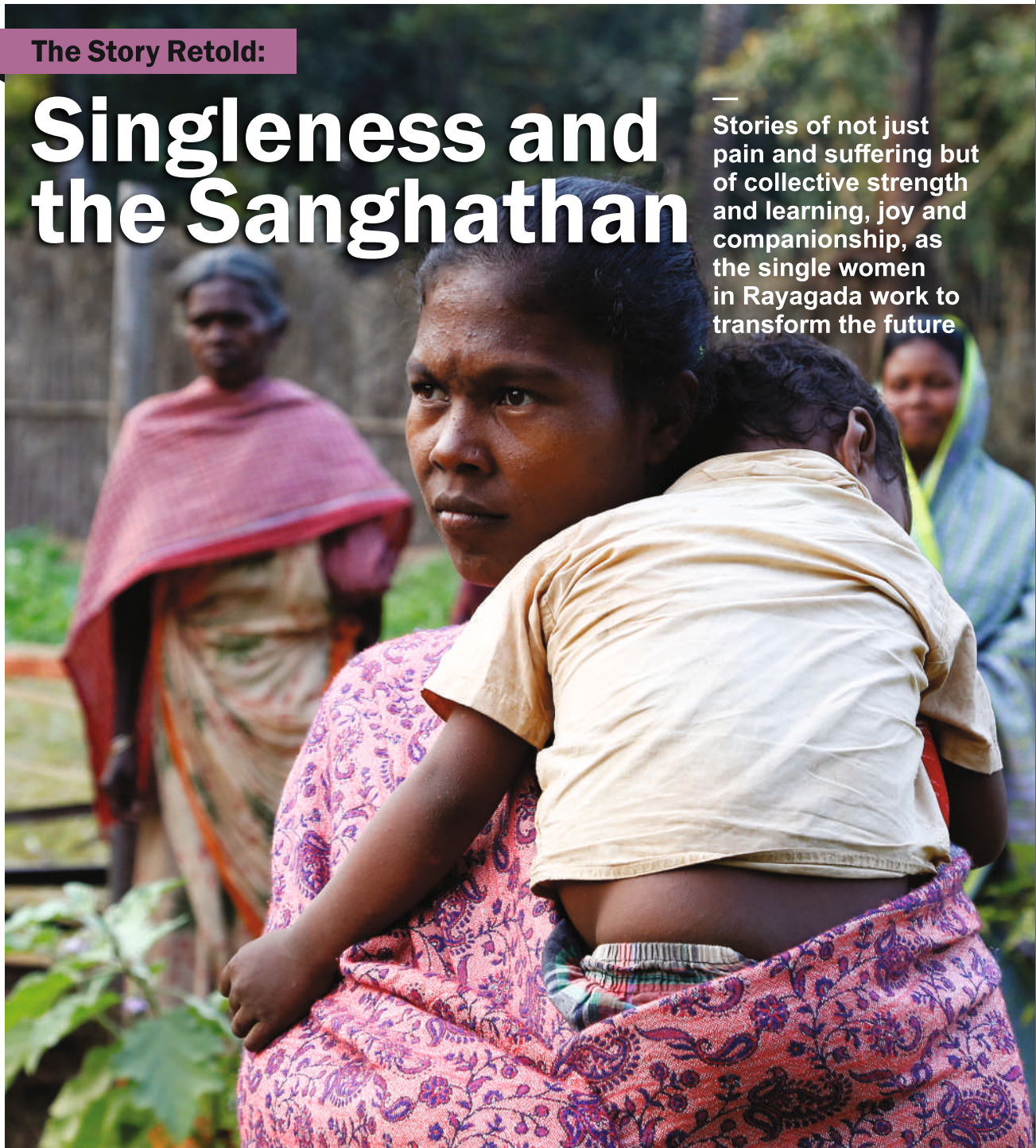
Fulbati Murmu (right) counting the savings in her SHG (p. 17)

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THE STORY RETOLD:
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Narrating stories, not just of pain and suffering but also of collective struggle and learning, joy and companionship—stories that have been 'created' and are still in the making—as the single women in Rayagada work to transform the future…looking back at a five-year journey of (gendered) relationships, collective actioning and co-learning.

AFTER A LONG DAY OF HARD toil, on a hot summer evening in 2013, a group of Kondha *adivasi* women gathered in a dark and isolated corner of a village named Emaliguda. A disturbing silence prevailed in the gathering. It was a 'silence' that hinted at a loss of words/language. This silence was the result of what an old woman, Tulsi Pulaka, had just shared; an instance from her

life that she believed she could never forget and, yet, did not want to recall. It had occurred a few years earlier when she was accused of theft in a neighbour's house, where she had been invited to perform a religious ceremony. She had been harassed and humiliated in front of the whole village. While narrating the incident, she suddenly got up, threw open the end of her saree, revealing her bare fallen breasts as she cried in pain,

> Deep into the night, as the women shared the stories of their lives with each other, I was told, "The night will end, our stories will not"

"I stood before them like this and said, look for your money. Where is it? Find it. Later, I went inside that house and forcefully took a handful of rice as my remuneration for performing the pooja. I know I should not have taken rice from the household where I had been insulted. I should have refused any offerings from that house. I would have slept on an empty stomach that night, however. I was forced that night to place my helplessness above my humiliation."

Her frail, thin and 'pained' body was trembling with anger in front of the women listening to her. And there was silence all around. The women of Emaliguda village had gathered that evening to share with each other their experience of living (in) singleness, holding each other in silence. This was the first time they had gathered for such a meeting.

Deep into the night, as the women shared stories of their lives with each other, I was told, "The night will end, our stories will not." Many nights have passed since then (from the beginning of 2013 to the end of 2017) and many stories continue to unfold—stories of loss, pain, suffering, abandonment, rejection, violence, as also stories

of defiance, struggle and everyday resistance—stories of singleness that were buried deep inside.

This paper recounts the stories, not just of pain and suffering but also stories of collective struggle, collective learning, creative joy and companionship—stories that have been 'created' and are still in the making as 'we' (the single women in Rayagada and I) work together, towards transforming our future. In other words, this paper is a kind of reflective/reflexive 'looking back' at a five-year journey of working through (gendered) relationships (including relationships among women), collective actioning and co-learning.

Beginning (in) Singleness
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This work began with the collective articulation and analysis of the condition of singleness among the Kondha *adivasi* women in Emaliguda village of Kolnara block in Rayagada district of Odisha. An initial survey in 2013 revealed that 35–40 per cent of the women in the village had either never married, were widowed, or were separated from their husbands. The group discussions, over time, helped us (the single women and myself) arrive at a two-fold

understanding of singleness: (a) singleness as a condition depicting loneliness and alone-ness, including economic, political and cultural othering and exclusion, perpetual states of financial and emotional insecurity, life largely devoid of relationships and care, a huge work burden resting entirely on the woman's shoulders, and the everyday life of a woman subjected to varied forms of socio-political discrimination and violence, and (b) as also a condition that has enabled women to lead, at least, a negotiated gendered existence in comparison to women under the direct and strict control of the hetero-patriarchal institution of marriage and the patriarch figure, the husband. In other words, singleness for us is as much about negotiating and coping with, as also resisting patriarchal structures, as it is about everyday pain and suffering.

Mami Pedenti, a never-married single woman, asserts, "Our happiness is ours and our sadness is also only ours. We do not have to worry about keeping a husband satisfied and happy. We can earn our own money and, at times, even spend it upon ourselves, which is very difficult for a married woman (in our context) to do." Most of the never-married

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women in Emaliguda think they are comparatively more liberated than married women and can plan their own lives, even if there are structural restrictions and a control of a different nature.

What also emerged in our group discussions was that even the separated single women, given an option, would not want to remarry. They did not want to suffer again and experience the same kind of violence, isolation, alienation, negligence, stress, and crises they had had to face when they were living with their husbands. Some said, "Husbands increase a woman's burden of work, create unnecessary troubles and disturbances at home; husbands also dominate." Demystifying the common and popular assumption that marriage leads to happiness, Jaga Pedenti asks, "… it is not as if I am very happy at the moment, but what is the guarantee that I would have been happy, had I been married?"

This understanding also takes us beyond the rather simple formulations of victimhood and the equally simple notions of agency that come to haunt us in present times. In this regard, Tulsi's experience is an experience of singleness. What was revealed and relived in her sharing was

not just a story of poverty and hunger (which are quickly taken up as developmental issues to be resolved), but also of helplessness and humiliation (lived psychological experiences that do not find much space in the usual work of development that is heavily focused on economic interests).

Here, one does not intend to belittle the importance of working on the economic questions related to poverty, hunger, deprivation, etc. Rather, the point is to highlight what gets obscured (questions related to experience of gender, well-being, desire, dignity, life beyond material interests, etc.) in the excessive focusing on 'developmental issues'. Analyzed further, Tulsi's experience was not limited to an experience of helplessness and humiliation (which interprets Tulsi's subject position only as a victim), but also of Tulsi's protest when she decides to take her rightful share of rice. This complex layering of varied 'subject positions', of loneliness and self-dependence, of suffering and resisting at the same time speak of singleness for us.

Arnalu Miniaka (Aiya) is a 45-year old woman, who lives alone in a small, self-constructed house. She

was 10 years old when she began working outside her home. Due to the need to share responsibility of work, both at home and outside, her parents never allowed her to go to school. She was 15 years old when she was forcibly married to a much older man. Her husband was an alcoholic and used to abuse her verbally, physically and sexually. Every time her husband forced himself upon her, she would be in pain for a long time. Even before she could recover from the physical pain, she would again be sexually abused by her husband. At times when she tried to stop him, she would be beaten badly. Even after about 30 years of separation from her husband, the psychological scars of the violent marriage continue to haunt her.

One year into her marriage, she had become pregnant with her first child. The child died soon after its birth and within six months she had become pregnant again. "One night, when I was sleeping, my husband came home all drunk. I was scared. I did not get up. My husband got a big knife from the kitchen and tried to slice my neck. The next day, I left my husband's home. I came back to my parents' house." Her second son was a few months old at that time. But her husband did not let her keep the child. He

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took the child away and, after a couple of months, he re-married. Her parents did not take the separation very well. She was forced time and again to go back, make peace with her husband and live with him. However, Aiya was determined not to go back ('not to go back' is an important political position in a largely patriarchal tribal culture), and began working as a wage labourer in a factory.

Seven years later, she fell in love with a man at her workplace and decided to re-marry. The second marriage lasted only nine months. With time, her new husband also became violent and began to ask her to leave the house. One night, he locked Aiya outside the house. She wept all night waiting for the door to be opened, but no one heard her cry and no one opened the door for her. In the morning, she decided to go back to her parents' house. This time when she came back to Emaliguda, her brother who lived with his parents, refused to support her; after her father's death, he abandoned not just her, but their mother and their unmarried elder sister.

Aiya began a 'new life' with her mother and sister. Her mother and her sister worked as wage labourers on other people's farms

and she worked in a factory. Even after her mother died, Aiya and her sister were not supported by her brother. A few years later, Aiya's elder sister also passed away. Since then, Aiya has been living alone in Emaliguda. Some time later, Aiya left the factory job and began cultivating a small piece of 'encroached' government land. These never-ending struggles have not crushed her; instead, paradoxically, these circumstances have made Aiya quite independent. Yet, this does not take away the loneliness and insecurity she experiences about the future.

The two-fold understanding of singleness is also tied to a shift we made from singlehood (as a state of being single or a particular social positionality due to the absence of a male sexual partner—singlehood more as a marker of a woman's identity; such as the identity of a widowed, separated, abandoned, deserted, divorced, never-married woman) to singleness (as a condition, a way of be-ing single; as an experience of living and feeling singleness in the absence or even in the presence of a male sexual partner—more as a 'contingent emergent subject position').

Interestingly, shifting the focus from singlehood to singleness

helped us understand the condition of Kondha *adivasi* women in a broader way. It led to the surfacing of the conditions of singleness that are lived within marriages and necessary coupledom. This involved women, who were married and had husbands, and yet faced conditions that were similar to those faced by the women, who did not have or lived without a male sexual partner. Women (the older ones) whose husbands are (physically or mentally) unwell, women with alcoholic husbands, women with husbands who do not contribute to the household in any way whatsoever, women whose husbands are abusive and violent, women whose husbands have migrated and have not returned, to women living with men who do not care and are often indifferent to the presence of these women in their lives. We had, thus, moved from woman as an individual biological entity/identity to singleness as a lived experience and a socio-political condition— an experience or condition not limited to the widow or the poor or the *adivasi*—but which could be shared across age, marital status, ethnicity, class and caste positions.

Aunla Kadraka's husband works in the railways, has a salaried

job and earns a monthly income, but he brings nothing home. He spends all the money on alcohol. Aunla is old and lives alone in a small dilapidated hut in the corner of the village, in spite of having a husband, four sons, two daughters-in-law and grandchildren. When telling us about her husband, she said, "He does not come home for months. When his money is spent, he comes back to me. I have to, then, take care of him and feed him. I am old and have to work all day in other people's fields to be able to manage even one meal a day. But my husband does not understand any of this. He keeps complaining that I don't give him proper food to eat. From where am I supposed to get money for expensive food? He spends everything he earns and when he is left with nothing, he comes back to trouble me....When I was pregnant with my first child, he left home and returned after four years. I raised my son with so much difficulty. Now all my sons refuse to look after me. Two of them are married. They live in the same village with their wives and children, but they refuse to keep me with them. My daughters-in-law and my husband accuse me of having sexual relations with my sons."

A man, who works, brings money home and does not beat his wife is understood to be a 'good' husband. "Is that enough?" is something Basanti (who is not more than 20–22 years of age) asks us. Basanti lives with her husband, who is a mason, and brings home substantial money. She tells me with a sad smile on her face, "He is a good husband. He does not beat me like other men beat their wives. But there is no happiness between us. He goes for work in the morning and comes back late at night. There is no problem as such, but we never spend time together. He does not even talk to me." Basanti helps us understand that the experience of singleness is indeterminate of the presence or absence of a male sexual partner. Despite the physical 'presence' of a 'good' husband, there can be an experience of singleness.

The articulation and analysis of oppression and the resistance within singleness connected us women into a kind of collective, which we named the Eka Nari Sanghathan, ENA (Single Women's Collective). The Sanghathan developed into a space of friendship, belongingness and togetherness for the women who had been,

either abandoned by their families or were treated as a burden and a liability. The Sanghathan became a space that hosted companionship and a sense of care and security for the women, who experienced 'singleness' as a result of social/familial othering.

Ruayi Pedenti, who is a member of the Sanghathan, once said, "No one believed my story and no one ever understood my pain. I had no choice but to keep my sadness to myself. I could not explain it, so I never shared it with anyone... But now I share my feelings with my *Sanghas* (friends) in the Sanghathan because they believe what I say and they understand my pain..."

The coming together of women in the Sanghathan is not a means to attain some common/shared goals (such as increasing the numbers in order to attain rights and entitlements), but as an end in itself (where women come together to share their life with each other). This space is co-created every moment with the members of the collective, in the wake of a need for a collective for single women. However, it functions not only as a support group but also as

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a transformative space that can move beyond the standard model of addressing (single) women as victims to making sense of singleness as a living process—as also a response and challenge to hetero-patriarchy. Women in this collective journey engage and (re)think questions related to development, well-being, solidarity, rights, feminist consciousness and politics, and these processes have played a significant part in building and strengthening more and more voices of resistance. Thus, the Sanghathan is, for us, both a politics of friendship and a form of a collective struggle and action (*sanghathit sangharsha*).

Because the Sanghathan belongs to the *adivasi* single women, the questions concerning women, gender, and hetero-patriarchy as well as the other collective endeavours that the Sanghathan undertakes are all placed well within the particularity of the *adivasi* context. Moreover, building heavily upon the cultural ethos and value system that tie them together, single women in the Sanghathan have been re-creating new relationalities (ethico-political companionships) and redrawing old ones (those engrained in hetero-patriarchal systems). 'Care for the other'

is held in the highest regard and continuous efforts are undertaken to maintain trust among each other. This work does not intend to romanticize the *adivasi* culture, ethos and values as one remains aware of the inherent antagonisms, conflicts, discriminations and marginalization that are a part of the Kondha *adivasi* life world. It builds upon the disaggregated nature of *adivasi* society that has a lot to offer us in terms of rethinking and co-creating ethic-political values and transformative praxis.

Moreover, the collective repeatedly undertakes several processes in order to analyse and reflect upon group behaviour, group functioning, communication patterns, power dynamics, external/internal influences, etc. Importantly, this work revisits the familiar idiom of 'representation' and 'leadership' and resists the formation of 'woman leaders' because it sees the very idea of 'leadership' (privileging and placing power in the hands of a few) as patriarchal. The Sanghathan has no elected/selected 'leaders'. Whoever wants to join in is welcome and whoever wants to share speaks! All the members of the collective form the core of decision-

making and facilitation among themselves. Different roles and responsibilities are fulfilled by taking turns, which is decided through consensus. The members labour together and work towards mitigating power relations within the Sanghathan in order to arrive at a common and a non-hierarchical space.

There has been a significant change in the overall personality of the women in the Sanghathan. In the initial meetings, the women were not very comfortable speaking to each other, especially in front of many people and in the presence of men. Most women would share their hesitation to speak and voice their opinion. Arnalu Miniaka (whose lived experience has been mentioned earlier) often said that because she is not educated, she thinks she does not know much about the world and, hence, prefers silence. She believed that she lacked the 'sophistication' required to interact with people. However, slowly, her involvement and engagement in the Sanghathan deepened and she has gained more and more confidence. She slowly overcame her hesitation. She is no more the hesitant, shy, petite woman sitting in the corner, arms wrapped around herself, only

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listening to all that was being said; rather, now even with the officials (mostly men), she is a strong, fearless and an articulate woman, who knows well what she argues for. She takes initiatives, has direct conversations, encourages participation in and even facilitates the group many times.

Arnalu's mobilization and strategizing skills have played an important role in bringing the Sanghathan members together to form the collective and to help raise the consciousness of the members. She ensures that each and every member of the collective is involved and makes an effort to keep the collective in place. She deals with individuals in the collective with immense empathy and patience, and works efficiently towards resolving conflicts of interests, whenever necessary. She has been making efforts to mobilize women and raise consciousness around the need for coming together and pursuing an ethical engagement.

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under her supervision. Unlike most women activists, she does not have a fiery voice. She is very soft and polite. However, she always brings direction to the discussions and ensures that every member's opinion and voice is accounted for. It is also interesting to see how she often builds on what she learns from the space of the collective and what she gives back to the space. There are many other women like Arnalu Miniaka, who have experienced a change in themselves over time and have become exemplars for the others in the collective.

For the last two years, women from the Sanghathan have been working as my co-action researchers. We have been visiting six villages in the Sikarpai *panchayat* in Kalyansinghpur block in order to explore and understand the experiences of women in different villages, the condition of singleness, their everyday lived reality and the nature of gender(ed) relationships. Many women from other villages have come together to be a part of the Sanghathan (about 130 women); despite the contextual differences, the women have been engaging with each other on several issues and instances.

The next section explores this journey of expanding the Sanghathan.

From the Women on the Scooty
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The 'main road' turned upside down with narrow and temporary 'side-lanes' offering way to ever-speeding trucks, overloaded TATA magics (something really magical about these mini-vans fitting no less than 20 people in, above and outside them), and rashly driven bikes (honking masculinity) takes us (the Sanghathan members from Emaliguda and myself) to the villages in Sikarpai *panchayat* (about 30 km away from J.K. Pur where I reside and 15 km from Emaliguda village). Leaving the main 'developmental' road, we take the difficult, temporary, risky and less travelled road of/ to transformation (more on the difference between development practice and transformative praxis later).

We make our way through the uncertain maze of side lanes and muddy paths on my unsteady scooty—the speedometer needle oscillating between 30 and 40— my shoulders held tightly by the woman sitting behind me and the woman behind her clutching the back of the scooty cautiously. Our

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journey together is characterized by caution, this inter-dependence and holding on to each other, which helps us move ahead (slowly, yet steadily) on the side lanes of transformation.

As we began visiting the villages in Sikarpai, we received a variety of responses ranging from curiosity, hospitality and acceptance to suspicion, disinterestedness and rejection. In the initial days, we would go from house to house requesting the women to sit with us. There were days when a few women would gather and some discussions would take place about the 'problems' in the village and the lack of resources. There were also days when we would return disheartened after waiting for hours and finding not more than a couple of women interested in talking to us. We were often told that, "There is no sense of oneness in the village and the women do not value sitting together for meetings." At other times, we were asked politely to not waste our time visiting these villages because people either had no time or they were simply not interested. Bringing women together to engage in a dialogue was very challenging.

We observed that, in some villages, the women would often sit together in one place and talk to each other till late in the evening after finishing their day's work. We decided to join them and slowly become a part of their everyday discussions. Our repeated purposeless evening visits to these villages gave us an opening and helped us build some friendships and familiarity. The women slowly began opening up to us and there was immense curiosity among them around why we, three women on a scooty, roam around the area, from village to village. They would ask us who we were, where we were from and what was the purpose of our visits.

As we answered their questions and addressed their curiosity, there was a shift in their perception about us. From being viewed as an educated middle-class professional/expert, bringing *adivasi* women to help her work in the villages, we were now regarded as '*ma-mane*' (women) from Bepliguda (original name for Emaliguda), who had forged a Sanghathan in their own village and were working on women's issues with a '*didi* from Dilli'. This process helped us communicate to them that

this work was not mine alone, and that it had been initiated and was being taken forward by the women in Emaliguda. The initial discussions on why and how the Sanghathan had been formed, what our experiences were, the philosophy behind our praxis, and what kind of work we had done so far, provided us with an opportunity to generate interest among women of the Sikarpai area.

However, time and again, we were still faced with the most popular question 'rural' spaces have learned to ask as victims and beneficiaries of development: "What can we get from you?" and "How will we benefit from coming and sitting for these meetings?" To be heard amidst the loudness of these questions and repeated assertions of, "Rural *adivasi* spaces are poor and lacking," was a struggle.

Moreover, the issue at hand was also the manner in which these concerns were being communicated and the ways in which we were being approached; these mostly came in the form of a 'cry' of a victim, poor, third-world woman, lacking resources, knowledge, cognizance and capability to change her

condition, making constant demands for all that she was supposed to demand for, and all that we were supposed to provide. It is not that the concerns around poverty and problems regarding access to resources are not important or are of any less value; our efforts, however, through the workings of the Sanghathan have been to move beyond mainstream developmental imagination and practice that perceives the 'village' and its inhabitants only through the framework of poverty and 'lack'.

This work, since its inception, has been arguing for critical engagement with the existing (somewhat under-theorized) practices that are hegemonic in mainstream development—and is continuously trying to arrive at a re-formed understanding of the transformative praxis. It maintains that mainstream development, that claims to speak of transformation, mostly falls short of distinguishing transformation from (somewhat instrumental and self-interested practices of) state-sponsored or funded developmental deliverables.

The action research work with the Sanghathan—which could also be called 'collaborative gender work with adivasi women'—fails

to find much purchase in the current developmental practices hegemonized by the women's Self-Help Group models that are centered around ideas of material benefit and self-interest. This kind of theoretically informed gender work aims at exploring and addressing concerns that continue to remain hidden (in the obsessive focusing of developmental issues) and those that resonate with *adivasi* history, knowledge and way of life, thereby relying on *adivasi* women as 'capable' subjects creating possibilities for a collective (transformed) future rather than remaining mere beneficiaries of state-led development.

It took us long to explain the difference between the workings of the Sanghathan and that of the developmental organizations. A graphic representation and explanation of what we call 'The Circle-Triangle Distinction: From Resources to Relationships' helped us communicate it better. The circle stands for the resource-related issues in the women's lives, for example, shortage of drinking water, inaccessible roads, lack of electrification, absence or malfunctioning of governmental institutions, provisions and policies, etc. The triangle, on the other hand, stands for (inter-personal) relations-related

issues in women's lives, thereby, representing issues such as singleness, violence, gender discrimination, a woman's relation to her own body-being, health, sexuality, etc.

This separation between the circle and the triangle highlights that the issues tied to the circle, at one level, require a negotiation with the state and government officials, largely as 'rightful' beneficiaries of developmental policies and programmes, whereas, the issues tied to the triangle require a rethinking of gender(ed) relationships, ethico-communitarian ways of being and transforming ourselves and our socio-economic-cultural context and conditions. Women are burdened by issues tied to both the circle and the triangle. But how to address these issues and what we become in the process is an important question that opens up through marking this distinction between the circle and the triangle. This also takes us to other questions such as:

a) Do we remain beneficiaries relying solely upon the developmental state and other organizations (something the 'circle' insists we do) or do we take charge of transforming our present and future through

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transforming ourselves, our social relations and context (something the 'triangle' becomes symbolic of)?

b) Where do we begin: from the circle or the triangle? Can working through the triangle strengthen our position to negotiate better with (non) governmental organizations? Can rethinking social (gender) relations and strengthening 'local' collective bonds take us towards transforming the self, the social, the economic and the political, thereby lessening our reliance on outside agencies such as the state?

This exercise, through marking a sharp distinction between the work of development and that of the Sanghathan and, therefore, opening up these questions, has helped us destabilize the dominance of practice and the discourse of mainstream development in the villages in which we were working. It has allowed us to prepare fresh ground of our own.

The Sanghathan at Work

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The ENS, in the last four years, has managed to lobby with the state to procure some of its rights and entitlements. All the widows,

separated, and old single women, now have access to pension. They have also been slowly receiving financial assistance for building houses under the Indira Awas Yojana. However, in these engagements with the state, there has been an ongoing reflection on the state-citizen relationship and the hierarchy therein. There also has been a marking of the difference between procuring of rights and entitlements, simply as beneficiaries, to working hand-in-hand with state functionaries.

The women have come together to secure themselves financially by opening bank accounts in their own name, in which they deposit a part of their pension and the money they receive from their respective families as part of their remuneration for farm and house work; this was one among the many other significant decisions the Sanghathan took—the decision of negotiating with their respective families and ensuring a remuneration for the work they performed for their families. This has led to a small yet significant change in the way single women are perceived in the family and the larger social.

Moreover, the women in several villages have come together and have opened up issues beyond singlehood. The instances of

singleness among married women have been discussed and debated and the voices of more and more women are being included in the Sanghathan. Issues related to alcoholism, abuse, marital/sexual violence, masculinity, body, sexuality, gender discrimination, division of labour, preventive health-care mechanisms and access to government schemes and provisions have been taken up and the women have been sensitized to think and reflect around these concerns. Besides, our regular visits to the villages in Sikarpai, the women from all the villages that we are working in come together once in six months to meet each other, discuss and reflect upon the issues of concern and plan the future course of action.

Additionally, the collective has also been involved in creating models of self-sustenance, in creating processes of working together and generating surplus in order to take care of the financial needs of single women. For instance, for the last two years, the women in the Sanghathan have been collectively preparing *ambo-soda* (a traditional mango pickle) from the mangoes gathered from the forest. Some of this pickle is kept for self-consumption by the women and the rest is sold to generate

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surplus, which is appropriated collectively. The idea of making pickle is not to make a business venture but to come together as labouring-creating subjects. It is also to generate support for the members of the Sanghathan, who are now too old and are not in a condition to sustain themselves.

This year, 35 women from the Sanghathan have come together to collectively cultivate paddy by leasing three acres of land for the next three years. With the help of my colleague Ashutosh (who has joined us this year) and in collaboration with Dr. Debal Deb and Dulalda (from Basudha: cintdis.org/basudha/), we cultivated indigenous seed varieties using ecologically sensitive and traditional methods and techniques. This year's two-fold initiative of (a) bringing women together to do collective farming, and (b) moving beyond chemical farming to alternative ways of farming has proved worthwhile. Today. when the farmers are being encouraged to produce and appropriate on an individual basis, keeping self-interest in mind and are being lured into relying heavily on capitalist, market-based inorganic and chemical farming that emphasizes the use of fertilizers, pesticides and hybrid/high yielding seeds, this experiment

of alternative farming with indigenous seed variety and ecologically sensitive methods was a big challenge in itself.

We faced many other challenges from the unpredictable and often delayed monsoon (that led to lack of irrigation in the initial days and, therefore, delayed sowing), to washing off of the bridge (in the flash flood) that connects Emaliguda to Pujarida village where the land is, and performing all the farm work, including tasks that usually/traditionally men in the families do (such as preparing and cutting the boundaries of the field, spraying medicines, thrashing of the paddy, etc.), to staying up till late in the night in the fields, in order to regulate the amount of water on the land. However, the collective spirit of the Sanghathan kept us going and we managed to work through all kinds of constraints, ranging from the financial to the physical, psychological and environmental.

The women walk a long distance (a couple of hours) to reach the land, lift heavy weights, perform back-breaking work all day, stand without shade, whether it rains or in the scorching sun. Yet, they sing in harmony as they work, laugh their heart out during the small *pika* (traditional beedi/cigarette) breaks, eat together

under the mangrove and walk back home in joy after completing the work, day after day. Their bond strengthens as they travel, work, sing, smoke and eat together. Their happiness is beyond measure on the days that all 35 of them come and finish the work in a couple of hours. They would, at times, say, "When we work together, the work feels so easy. It becomes much more difficult when we have no one to share it with."

The work was mostly distributed according to age...with the younger women taking up the more laborious tasks. However, everyone, irrespective of their age, participated and contributed to the labouring process, except Daima Pedenti, who unfortunately met with an accident a few days before the sowing and could not be part of any work. Not only the performance of labour, even the appropriation and distribution of the produce was a collective endeavour and everyone including Daima (who could not participate this year) was given an equal share of the produce. The Sanghathan teaches as it learns—this collective journey of producing, appropriating and distributing paddy equally has left us all (the women, Ashutosh and I) with new learnings, reflections,

The work is largely to understand, rework and (re) build gendered relationships, processes and ethics of care that draw heavily from the *adivasi* culture and context that these women are a part of, rather than build upon foreign understandings of feminism that have continued to guide us so far

and, most important, it has strengthened relationships.

Every year, we plan to engage extensively with five to six villages in different *panchayats* so that we have an expanded reach in the area and the Sanghathan can be built across different contexts. Five to six villages a year may seem very little; but the engagement of our work is more qualitative than quantitative. We believe that by simply expanding to a large number of villages, we may not be able to build strong bonds among the women; moreover, the learnings and reflections from our work might get hampered.

The work focusses on in-depth engagement with women, with the aim of building transformed futures. Along with my co-researchers (we will go on adding co-researchers as we move to more villages in different *panchayats* over the years), the plan is to understand and explore the nature of hetero-patriarchy and socio-cultural controls and taboos in the Kondha *adivasi* culture that oppress and exploit women. The work also focusses on spaces and structures that are gender-just and operate differently from the mainstream understandings of feminism; the focus is also on exploring

traditional ethics and values that hold and assist the functioning of the 'communities'.

These explorations and reflections coming from the *adivasi* life-world would help us in building on our work while rethinking and redrawing gendered experiences, practices and relationships and in transforming lives through collective living and caring. Thus, the work is largely to understand, rework and (re)build gendered relationships, processes and ethics of care that draw heavily from the *adivasi* culture and context that these women are a part of, rather than build upon foreign understandings of feminism that have continued to guide us so far.

Although the plan is to work largely on building *adivasi* gendered collectives, specifically we also plan to engage deeper with related issues of sexuality, violence, gendered division of labour, preventive health-care, eco-sensitive and collective agricultural practices, models of self/social sustenance, learning spaces that will focus heavily on *adivasi* knowledge systems and practices (rethinking learning beyond formal western education systems), and building collective processes that are democratic and non-hierarchical in nature.

The question before us is how to move forward with this vision in non-violent yet affirmative ways. The work shall remain deep-rooted in the context and yet may offer insights and knowledge that may be helpful for rethinking transformative work in general. We, at Eka Nari Sanghathan, will keep working towards this aim of newer learnings, common becomings, and deeper bondings.

Co-learning
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My role in this journey (both assigned to me and taken up by myself) from the beginning has not remained a fixed one; it has kept shifting from that of being a friend, facilitator, co-ordinator, mobilizer, trainer, learner and researcher. At times, I am a guiding source and at others the one who was guided, a source of information, a link between the Sanghathan and other institutions and organizations, an insider who was entrusted with the property of the Sanghathan (personal sharings, plans, discussions, etc.) and an outsider with the potential of taking this initiative and struggle beyond its limits of remaining 'local'.

In this way, this work cracks the binary of the researcher as the 'expert' because the aim of this

> Travelling along with the Sanghathan members has been a significant experience, shaping my be-ing and bringing about a transformation within me.

work is to generate knowledge that gets co-created (Sanghathan members and I). This work has taught me how outside 'expertise' cannot be deployed or accepted uncritically; rather, this work builds towards generating a collective 'expertise', thereby, bridging the knowledge gap between what comes from the 'outside' and that which already exists. This, for me, was an experience of a process of mutual exchange, learning and co-production of knowledge.

The forging of the Eka Nari Sanghathan has been a very challenging process, yet it has taught me so many things about women's experience, gender work and women's friendships. It has encouraged me to think of the alternatives to development. It is from these women of the Sanghathan that I have learned 'gender'; I have learned how to 'live' relationships (even when in singleness); I have learned what it is to collectivize/mobilize and work towards common/shared

futures. In another sense, this work has not only taught me 'gender', but how to live life; live life ethically. Like the Sanghathan members, my confidence and courage has also been building slowly with time. With every successive initiative, I learn something new (an unknown language, about relationships, collectives, gender, agriculture, health, etc.), face challenges, overcome problems, and find a way out.

These processes seem to have a life in themselves; they are the driving force. This is not just any other job for me. This is like living life in its everydayness. Looking back, I realize that my involvement and keen interest in this work has not only been to be able to do something with/for the single women in Rayagada, it has also been a journey into my own self, towards making sense of my own condition of singleness and fighting my own feminist battle of 'making space' for a woman who chooses to reject the

hetero-patriarchal institution of marriage and wishes to lead a life of singleness without being questioned, without being challenged, without being mocked at, and without being harassed (both mentally and sexually).

Travelling along with the Sanghathan members has been a significant experience, shaping my be-ing and bringing about a transformation within me. I am a friend, a researcher, a facilitator and much more; all these relationships that I shared with the women teach me something or the other. Be it learning to live in the rural, learning to share, from learning their language, to learning the significant lessons of life, death and politics, these women to me are great mentors.

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CHANDANI BHANDARI

Small Changes on the Road to Development

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A story of small changes leading to the visualization of bigger changes at the grass roots; a story of a tribal woman, eager for a life of dignity, of a life other than that of an agricultural labourer, a life of equality and agency, wanting the betterment of herself and her community, making the best use of the opportunities that come her way

THE MEANING OF GRASS-ROOTS development was, at one time, very simple in my mind. When I was studying Agricultural Engineering, I used to think that rural India only had agriculture-based livelihoods. We, therefore, just needed to increase agricultural production through advanced technology to bring prosperity at the primary level. It was a revelation to me that development was more complex than that. Does increasing agricultural production really not change the life of rural under-privileged people? If not, what are the actual factors that can change their lives on the path to development? With this curiosity I joined PRADAN, to explore the development process and its impact on the people at the grass roots.

I did not know that soon after joining PRADAN, all my old notions would take a backseat. Amartya Sen, in his capabilities approach, says: "Poverty is a denial of choices and opportunities for living a tolerable life. Poverty, seen from this approach, will be in terms of a shortfall of 'basic capabilities' or 'basic capability failure'. Such failure involves the inability to achieve certain minimally adequate levels of crucially important functioning: such as being educated, being free from caste or gender discrimination, having access to resources, being nourished and being sheltered."

I found myself questioning how a landless tribal woman, who belonged to the lowest rung of the ladder in the social structure of caste, class and gender, could become a part of development

As I engaged with the community, my own development theory shifted its focus from economic prosperity to caste and gender issues. In PRADAN, I learned that many communities are landless because even in the ownership of land, caste has played an important role for many centuries; the result is that most of the people belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes have become landless. As a practice in India, the ownership of land belongs to the man of the family and is inherited from father to son within the family. Farming was not a direct livelihood for the landless and, therefore, an increase in production could not bring any change for those landless, marginalized people.

I found myself questioning how a landless tribal woman, who belonged to the lowest rung of the ladder in the social structure of caste, class and gender, could become a part of development. My fundamentals were shaken. I needed a new conceptual paradigm for development. I was eager to find a model that would bring change in the lives of landless tribal women, perhaps the most vulnerable in our society.

I joined the Development Apprenticeship Programme of PRADAN (2016–17), in the team based in Bahadurganj, Bihar. I searched for ways to bring about development changes at the grass roots. For my Village Study, I was based in Dogirja village, Satkauwa *panchayat*, Dighalbank block in Kishanganj district, Bihar. As per Census 2011, the *panchayat* comprises five revenue villages, namely, Satkauwa, Haribhitta, Kast Karmali, Haruwadanga and Dogirja. The total population of the *panchayat* is 15,774, of which only six per cent belong to the Scheduled Castes and nine per cent to the Scheduled Tribes. The *panchayat* includes many communities—Thakur, Mandal and Ganesh, which belong to Hindu Other Backward Castes (OBCs), Sheikh Muslims (General), Shershahwadi Muslims (OBCs), Rishidev aka Mushars (SCs) and the Santhal tribe, who were either Hindus or Christians (STs). The OBCs of both the religions owned most of the land of the *panchayat*. The other communities (SCs and STs) were merely potential agricultural labourers in the OBC community's fields and had been there for generations.

From the Census, I found that the tribal people lived in only two villages of the *panchayat* viz. Satkauwa and Haribhitta. And they used to work as agricultural labourers for all the nearby villages in the agricultural season and as construction labourers in the off-season.

My first introduction to the Santhali women was as agricultural labourers when they came to work in the fields in Dogirja village. There were no SHGs in their hamlet of 60 families. Their language, culture and traditions were very different from those of the nearby communities and were very new to me. Because these women worked for the local people, they had learned the local dialect, that is, Surjapuri. They had been given land by the government for building houses at Shakti Nagar in Satkauwa village; this was land that had been occupied by the government during the land reforms in 1960 under the Zamindari Abolition Act. The land had belonged to Zamindar Shakti Singh then and, therefore, the hamlet was called Shakti Nagar.

I wanted to know more about the life of the Santhalis, especially the women. I made frequent visits there, and in January and February 2017, two SHGs were formed by the Santhali community in Shakti Nagar. The life of the Santhali women was tough. The men of the families migrate to cities in Punjab,

The women wake up early, prepare food for the family, look after the old members and children of the house, pack their own lunch and leave for work by 8 a.m. to return home by 5 p.m.

Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Delhi, etc., and this generation of women have become even more burdened by this. The women wake up early, prepare food for the family, look after the old members and children of the house, pack their own lunch and leave for work by 8 a.m. to return home by 5 p.m.

All the 30 Santhali women of the two SHGs were excited to start the savings and credit activity, especially because between agricultural seasons, they do not get much work. They took loans during the lean months and repaid it in the agricultural season. The agricultural season comprises two peak work periods, that is, sowing/transplantation and harvesting. During those peak periods, the SHGs hold their meetings late at night; no other activity can be planned with them. Other than those peak work-periods, the women were open for training programmes, vision building, health workshops or discussions about their hamlet and the community's current situation and development.

Life went on in this familiar pattern and eight more SHGs (1 SC, 1 ST, 4 OBCs, and 2 General) started in that area, under a project of the Bihar Rural Livelihood Promotion Society

(BRLPS). Because there were 10 SHGs in the Satkauwa *panchayat*, a woman Community Mobilizer (CM) was required to maintain the accounts of these SHGs and to form a VO (Village Organization) of those SHGs. The CM had to be an 8th class pass woman from the area, preferably an SHG member.

This was offered to all the members of the SHGs as an opportunity to work with women for development and also as a way to enhance their own capabilities of being community leaders. The women of the OBC SHGs, both Hindu and Muslim, rejected this opportunity because the monthly honorarium was only Rs 1500. Fulbati Murmu from the Santhal community who had left school after Class 8 came forward for this work. She said, "*Didi main hun to aathvi paas par pata nahi yeh kaam kar paungi ki nahi* (Didi, I am an eighth class pass but I don't know whether I am capable of doing this work or not)."

She sat for the test for the post of the CM and the result was satisfactory. It showed that, with support from professionals, she could learn the work and would be able to handle the accounts. One day, after an SHG meeting, she asked me, "*Didi baki jaat ke log to mujhse bhi jyada padhe likhe hai, to woh log yeh test dene kyu*

nahi aaye (Why did the other SHG women, who had more qualified academically, not come for the test)?"

I told her, "*Didi, aapko pata hai na isme Rs 1500 hi milega mahine ka, baki log isiliye nahi kiye ki kam paisa hai* (As you know the honorarium is only Rs 1500. That's why the other women prefer not to do it)."

I asked her for her reasons for taking on the work. She responded, "*Paise ki baat nahi hai didi, main to ek din ka Rs 300 jan kaam mai hi kama leti hu, yeh kaam to izzat ki baat hain. Aisa padha likha kaam karne ka mauka mujhe zindagi mai pehli baar mila hai, jo ki main kabhi sochi bhi nhi thi ki main karungi* (It's not about money, I earn Rs 300 daily as agricultural labour. It is about the dignity of work as an educated person. I am getting such an opportunity for the first time in my life; I never dreamt of getting such work.)."

Looking back at my time with Fulbati *didi*, I recall my first interaction with her. Her parents were landless agricultural labourers. She had studied till class eight and had taken admission in class nine; but at the age of 16 she got married to Bupesh Tudu of the same hamlet, who had never been to school.

She had all the capabilities and potential of a good leader but lacked the opportunity to explore and display her abilities. The CM work gave her that opportunity to excel with her capabilities and mark the change story on the development road

She gave up her studies after marriage, to handle household chores and earn money as an agricultural labourer. She is now 22 years old and has two children. Her husband has migrated to Himachal Pradesh and visits the family only once a year. She works as a daily wage labour in nearby agricultural fields. In 2017, it was seven years since she left school.

Puja Kumari (A Hindu OBC girl), who is book-keeper in BRLPS in Satkauwa *panchayat* was her classmate up to 8th class. Puja had, however, continued her studies and now is doing her B.A third year. I felt Fulbati's pain of not having had the same opportunity as Puja. She told me, "*Puja ki abhi tak uske gharwale shadi nahi karaye hain, wo aapke jaisa bada wala phone chalati hain aur 12 pass karne ke baad apni job kar rahi hai* (Puja's parents have not gotten her married yet. She has a Smartphone like you and is doing a job after clearing her 12th standard)."

She compared her life with Puja's saying, "*Aur yahan mai sirf ek anpadh jan jaisi ban gayi hu jo ki do bacchon ki maa bhi hai* (And here I have become like an illiterate agricultural labourer who also is a mother of two young children)." She added that "*Hamari jaat mai ladkiyo ka yahi hota hai, didi, padhi-likhi ho ya anpadh, khatna hi hai unki kismet mai to* (In our community the situation of girls is like this, whether illiterate or educated, we have to struggle throughout our life)."

Fulbati always showed great interest in the SHG and other activities such as health workshops, SHG vision building, and in supporting and grooming other SHGs in the hamlet. She was punctual for the SHG meetings and attended them regularly. She used to urge others to help with the proper functioning of SHG meetings. She had all the capabilities and potential of a good leader but lacked the opportunity to explore and display her abilities. The CM work gave her that opportunity to excel with her capabilities and mark the change story on the development road.

Amartya Sen's capabilities approach delves on the opportunities available to people and the opportunities that they value: "It emphasizes the importance of freedom of choice, individual diversities and the multidimensional nature of human well-being. The emphasis is not only on how people actually function but also on their having the capabilities, which are practical choices, to achieve outcomes that they value and have reason to value."

On becoming a CM, Fulbati was very excited about doing something different from her daily grind. In her first CM training, however, she was withdrawn and shy. She compared herself, and quite naturally, with the others on the basis of education, clothes and presentations. She was self-conscious and shared with me that the other participants were good and confident and she was nervous. She promised to herself that she would learn and perform better from the next training onwards.

In the SHG meetings, she struggled with the big calculations when doing the accounts. Initially, she would get tense when SHG issues were raised by the women and with the responsibilities of the Cluster-level Federation (CLF). She was worried about making mistakes and about her pace to learn things. To be uncomfortable about the new territory that she was venturing into was, perhaps, natural; what was a little unjust was that she put so much performance pressure on herself.

> She put in extra effort, challenged herself at every SHG meeting and pushed the barrier, learned everything required and never said no to learning. She attended each meeting of all the 10 SHGs and asked questions over and over again until she got things right

I had a talk with her, but she was unrelenting in her determination.

She said, "*Meri zindagi mai mila yeh aage badne ka mauka mai khona nahi chahti* (I don't want to lose this opportunity that I have got in my life)." She put in extra effort, challenged herself at every SHG meeting and pushed the barrier, learned everything required and never said no to learning. She attended each meeting of all the 10 SHGs and asked questions over and over again until she got things right. She overcame her initial shyness and never hesitated to ask for help, if required. She had a strong urge to learn new things and overcome hurdles. The learning process and the execution of the learning amazed me. It was as if she wanted to make full use of this opportunity to explore and expand her capabilities.

After her selection as a CM, I asked her to give me her bank account number so as to transfer her payment. She shared that neither she nor any other woman in her family had a bank account. They used to work in the agricultural field or on constructions sites only and never had to go to the bank. As the CM payment was payable to a bank account only, her father

accompanied her to the bank and she opened her bank account.

She was so happy that day. She called me in the evening to tell me that the Bank Mitra (Bank Mitra works as a representative or agent of Bank and is appointed to provide banking service to citizens) had shown her respect amidst all the people when she had told him that she was the CM of the Satkauwa *panchayat*. She also shared that the Bank Mitra had asked about her SHGs and their bank account opening process. She proudly told me that although she had been apprehensive that she would not be able to talk to the bank officers, she found the bank manager of Central Bank very supportive.

She told me the whole story with pride. She shared, "*Jab manager ne poochha kya tum kahin kaam karti ho, to maine khush hokar bola ki mai Jeevika mai CM hun. Mujhe kafi achha laga batane mai ki main bhi kuch padha likha wala kaam karti hun* (When the manager asked me if I work somewhere, I happily told him that I work as CM. It gave me immense pleasure to share that I am also educated and do such work)." She further added, "*Jab se maine yeh kaam sambhala hain na, mujhe kafi log

janne lagein hai, mujhe ab kahin bhi jane mai aur logo se baatein karne mai dar nahin, balki achha lagta hai* (Since I have started working as a CM many people have started recognizing me. Now I don't fear talking to people or going to other places. In fact, I like doing that)."

A day after one of the SHG meetings got over, I asked her whether her father liked her new job or not. She shared that her father was happy and had told her, "*Tum karo apna group ka kaam ab kheto mai khatne ki jarurat nahi hai* (You do your SHG work. There is no need to work as a labourer in the fields)." She feels proud to hear those statements from her father. Curious, I asked if she would stop working as an agricultural labourer. She said, "*Nahi, didi, season mai to main bhi jan ka kaam kar lungi, wo to hamara kamai ka season hota hai. CM ka kaam to izzat ke liye karti hun jo ki sirf mere padhe likhe hone se mila hain* (I will work as an agricultural labourer during the agricultural season as that is our earning season. The CM work gives me dignity, which I got due to my education)."

Her husband came home after more than one year. He had been updated about this new opportunity of his wife's on the

> She never hesitated at any point to seek any kind of support. I have seen her grow in confidence as she has widened her support structure beyond me to other PRADAN professionals and BRLPS staff

phone and was happy to see the changes. He supported her in this decision and during his holidays, he looked after the children when she had to attend her SHG meetings. Also, he dropped her and picked her up on his cycle if she needed to go to SHGs that were located far away. The CM work gave her a sense of agency.

Her father and her husband also accepted it positively because they both never had such 'padha likha' work. Her father said, "*Agar hum log aise kaam karne lage to logon ka nazariya badalta hai* (If we people will get such opportunity, the perception of the people about us will also change)." The community also started to give her respect for her work beyond the caste and class bias. Not only her Santhali community but the communities of the other SHG members, namely, the Hindu OBCs (Gangai), Hindu (SCs), Muslim OBCs (Shershahwadi), and Muslim General (Sheikh) also treated her with respect. She began entering their courtyards for SHG meetings. They also offered her tea with respect.

Earlier, the community used to offer her a cup of tea only in my presence although she was never upset about it. She shared, "*Arrey Didi, aap bura mat maniye, ek baar mai achhe se kaam karne lagungi*

na, to yeh log aap jaisi izzat mujhe dene lagenge (You don't feel bad. As I become more efficient at my work, they will start to give me as much respect as they give you)."

When she attended the CLF meeting, she observed that the other CMs are very confident. She noticed that they carry bags like professionals for documents, reports, etc. Now, her aspirations in life began to change. In the next CLF meeting, she also carried a bag to keep her documents and reports. She started to converse confidently with the Cluster Coordinator, Book-keeper and PRADAN professionals. She even contacted Puja, her childhood friend, and asked her for help in filling several forms and documents for the SHGs. She never hesitated at any point to seek any kind of support. I have seen her grow in confidence as she has widened her support structure beyond me to other PRADAN professionals and BRLPS staff.

One day, we were going to attend an SHG meeting near the government middle school in Satkauwa. The Headmaster of the school saw Fulbati *didi* and remarked that it was good to see her doing this work even after marriage and after having kids. He looked at me and said, "*Yeh*

ladki mehnati hai, aapki sanstha ka bahut dhanyawad ki isko yeh mauka diya, maine jan majdur ke aage iska jeevan kabhi socha nahi tha (This girl is hardworking and I am thankful that your organization selected her for BRLPs work. I never imagined her life beyond agricultural labour)."

When we left, Fulbati *didi* asked how she could pursue her studies further. She said, "*Mujhe nahi pata school mein padha kitna yaad hai, par mujhe lagta hai main kar sakti hoon. Mein barvi to pass karna chahti hoon* (I don't know how much I remember from the school now, but I believe that I can study further. I want to pass my class 12)." I was pleased to see her determination to study further.

In the two months after her selection as CM, she attended each SHG meeting and two CLF meetings. Her understanding of the basics of the functioning of SHGs and BRLPS exceeded my expectations. when she started voicing her concerns about the functioning of the group. I gradually reduced my engagement and let her attend SHG meetings by herself.

In each SHG meeting, she motivated women to work for the better functioning of the group. She understood the long-term

What if the BRLPS project had not offered the CM's post to her? Fulbati *didi* would have spent her life as an agricultural labourer. And what about the many other women with potential, whose skills are never recognized merely because of their identity (in caste, religion or gender)?

benefits of SHGs and shared all her understanding with other SHGs members. She asked them to prepare documents for the SHG bank account opening even before the notice came for the same because she had heard about it at the CLF meeting. She also told me about how the CMs of the other areas had shared with her about all the benefits they got from the SHG, the VO and the CLF. Her focus was on maintaining the timings of the SHG meetings, the presence of each member, savings and the repaying of loans.

After having skipped two SHG meetings, I attended some meetings, and found a few mistakes in accounts. When I asked her to correct them, she confessed, "*Didi bahut samay ho gaya hai na padhai chhode mujhe, isiliye galti ho jati hai, par didi aata hai mujhe, aap ek baar aur bata do, main samajh jaungi* (Didi, it has been a long time since I left my studies, that's why I make errors, but if you tell me again I will understand)." It was inspiring for me to see how she always accepted her mistakes and how eager she was to correct them, to learn and to understand things. I did not see her being hopeless about mistakes or accounts.

Her confidence boosted my morale about her capabilities. When my colleague Akhilesh came on a visit, she told him, "*Group ki har didi ko iske fayde ke baare mai samajh honi chahiye, agar unke man mai koi bhi dar hoga to woh group mai aana hi band kar degi, isi liye SHG meeting mai main hamesha aage bhavisya ke baare mai aur dusre gaaon mai jo didi logo ko fayda mila hai uske baarein mai baatein karti hu* (Each SHG member should have an understanding about the benefits of the SHG for better functioning of the SHGs. If they have fears, they will lose interest in the SHG. That's why I always have a conversation in the SHGs about the long-term vision and success stories of other villages)." Seeing her in conversation with Akhilesh, I smiled to myself and was confident about her capability as a CM and, moreover, as a vibrant SHG woman leader.

The life of Fulbati *didi* has changed in the last three months. Simultaneously, I observed the impact of this change in the life of other women, especially those from the Santhal tribe. Sukhmaya Marandi and Mungli Hembram also shared that they were ready for any such work. They said that their families, especially their

husbands, have no objection to their working. In the Village Organization's Board of Members election, two Santhali women got elected out of five members. The SHG women also planned to rent land for collective maize cultivation, to earn profit from cultivation for themselves. The Santhali women now believe and visualize a life and work beyond agricultural labour. Many of the women were eager to do other things, along with their agricultural labour work.

Thinking about Fulbati *didi's* journey from an agricultural labourer to a CM, I wondered: What if the BRLPS project had not offered the CM's post to her? Fulbati *didi* would have spent her life as an agricultural labourer. And what about the many other women with potential, whose skills are never recognized merely because of their identity (in caste, religion or gender)?

Amartya Sen's capabilities approach talks about development for people. That it is an expansion of their capabilities. As a girl from a tribal community, Fulbati didi could not complete her education, which limited her development and the chance to explore her full potential. As the

capability approach explains, for development, the significant fact is that people must have options and not whether people make use of the options they have or not.

Imagine Fulbati didi's life had she continued studying. She would have had options for education and marriage like Puja. However, because she belonged to the bottom-most rung of the ladder of caste and gender, she had no option but to discontinue her studies, get married and work as an agricultural labourer like other women of her community. The lack of freedom of choice would result in the potential of being a motivated and inspiring woman leader remaining unused all through her life.

There are thousands of women like Fulbati *didi*, whose potential is untapped, and who are waiting for such an opportunity to come their way to change their destiny and become something other than agricultural labourers.

This is a story of small changes. It became a ray of hope for me as a Development Practitioner. It helped me visualize the bigger change that is possible at the grass roots, a change beyond the concept of agricultural prosperity. Fulbati's story strengthened my resolve to find ways of development for the lowest section of caste, class and gender, just as this landless tribal woman found her wings to fly high in the sky, making the most of the opportunities made available to her.

The other question that pops up is: What would have happened if Fulbati *didi* had been an illiterate woman. Here again, I am, as an executive in the Abu Road team of PRADAN in Rajasthan, searching for ways and opportunities that allows an illiterate, landless tribal woman change her life.

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ARPIT GAIND

Becoming a 'Ho':
Remembering and Working Through

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Entering the Ho community, making sense of this fast-disappearing world, working with the villagers, exploring his own is a young, educated, Delhi-bred man, whose experiences foster a multiplicity of engagements and enduring relationships in the community

A Sense of Beginning: Experience with the Self

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ON MY MORNING WALK EVERY DAY, I STROLL through a number of tracks formed by the villagers who walk through the fields and the forest. Soon, walking on these tracks became a fascinating exercise. I wondered what the spaces meant. It was clear that the tracks in the fields were a result of constant traversing over the paths and thus their meaning and significance derived from the culture or custom of walking for a purpose. A concrete road, on the other hand, takes its meaning from the need to be travelled upon. Its purpose is defined, even before it comes into existence.

This story will unravel my journey around two years back as part of the Action Research Project[i] conducted with the Ho tribe (Turibasa village in the Kolhan region of West Singhum district) of South Jharkhand, India. The project, and my engagement with the Turibasa community and the village, evolved in three phases, comprising three village-immersion exercises (of two months, two months and five months, respectively), where I stayed in the village, leading to a multiplicity of engagements and relationships.

The writing largely covers the journey taken by both, the people of Turibasa and myself, over a period of time. It is the story of a Delhi-bred, young, educated man entering the Ho community, trying to make sense of their world, working with them and building relationships. I was surprised when I was considered part of the community and referred to as 'Ho', more so in context of the suffix attached to it—*adivasi*.

I wonder whether I really belonged to the community, whether I needed to do something in particular to be a part of them and, most significantly, what did it really mean to be a Ho *adivasi* (and this was the beginning of

everything that happened in the next two years and shaped me into becoming all that I am today). Their everyday lives, their *adivasi*-ness, and the mundane world they lived in and the cultural practices the community followed—all became part of the documentation, and eventually led to the making of a film by the community. This article is an attempt to take the reader along with me in the process that unraveled, in the journey that was taken and the world that was created.

This paper is created on the basis of the learning that evolved during the immersion and the project that was undertaken, helping us understand and question the ways in which the *adivasi* way of life is becoming lost, is remembered and, most important, how it is being lived currently. The last section will reflect upon what the future holds and what we, as practitioners, can do to work with the community, to learn and unlearn, and to understand where the community is coming from and going to.

During my entire stay, I lived in the house of a 17-year-old boy (the head of the family), Gunaram Deogham, and his mother, his wife and his four-month-old daughter). He lived in a small self-

constructed house in the village; he offered me a space, not only in his house but eventually, also in his life. Slowly and steadily, as we began to get to know each other, there developed a deep bond between us and it didn't take us much time to become friends. I do not even remember when I began calling him *bhai* (brother).

My inspiration and motivation to work in the village began and persisted because, perhaps for the first time, I found so much love, unconditional and free of any demands or expectations. I am not certain whether it was our loneliness and some kind of void in both our lives, that connected us both; it certainly gave me an opportunity to experience a beautiful relationship that I share with a beautiful person. He was 15 years old when he was forcibly married because his father had died.

He told me, on the second day of our interaction, while he was taking me to the fields, "*Jab se akele hue hain, dar bohot lagta hai, kaafi dar, pata nahin kab kya ho jaaye. Acchha hai aap aa gaye* (Ever since I have been alone, I am scared. I don't know when, what will happen. I am happy that you came)." I found many of my own insecurities reflected in his words as I heard Gunaram speak.

In the village, participating in the everyday acts of living, eating together, going to the fields and being with the people for most of the day, one starts becoming part of the social ('solar') system of the family

I recalled my own sense of being in that space at that age and how it had affected me at the time. The empathetic connection shifted and flitted between my position as a detached rational researcher and as an elder brother who wanted to be there with him and help him through his confusion and his fears.

In the village, participating in the everyday acts of living, eating together, going to the fields and being with the people for most of the day, one starts becoming part of the social ('solar') system of the family. Like any other system, it has its orbits and it has its core. My struggle was about how to become a part of this orbit. Acceptance, in this way, would signal a sense of the 'other'—one who is part (yet apart) from the common; there is closeness in this relationship and, however, at the same time a difference and separation. When Basmati *didi* tells me, "*Ab toh aap yahan ke hi ho gaye ho…*(Now you belong here…)," I struggle with the dichotomies of my own self and how I accept it and whether I belong.

Amma (mother) tells a bunch of kids merrily chatting with me and pointing at my mobile phone, in her local language, "*Bas itni hi baat karo* (Stop,

talk this much only)." This angered me and at times like these, I was almost tempted to confront her and maybe even have a small argument, just to vent my frustration with what was so obviously happening around me—being snubbed and told to not interact with exhaustingly annoying. Yet it was not important enough for me to communicate about this to amma in private. However, even though language itself is a private affair, eye movements, body language, not so much and they say more than one intends to. From where I sit, I can only hear low, distant voices. I am part of their personal everyday lives and yet not part of the orbit. Only in retrospect do I find meaning in this. This made me probe the question of what it means to be part of a community and to understand what it is that we mean when we use the word *adivasi*.

The next section is about understanding this cultural setting and what makes the Ho community a community.

Leanings from the Mundane Everydayness of Culture

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My second immersion started with a rather strong dilemma—an ethical and a research one. On the

one side, I was confused about whether I would like to stick to the story of Gunaram and use just that one 'individual' narrative that I had carried from my first immersion or whether I should move beyond the convenient space and explore other layers to the story that needs to be brought out in similarly nuanced ways. After all, the problematic was still the same—the question of what is the *adivasi*. But the nature of the problematic, that is, why it was a 'problem' for me and, 'how' it needs to be made sense of was for me the critical purpose of this immersion. Even before starting the immersion, I had made a decision to discuss with Gunaram what he thought was the purpose of my being there and what, in his view, I was thinking about with regard to the project. Not just that, I had to attempt these conversations with others as well, rather than only with Gunaram, so that it could lead to perspectives and narratives beyond just one lens.

In an everyday practice, when the identity of being a Ho is superseded by the identity of being an *adivasi*, when festivals become *adivasi* festivals, when language becomes *adivasi* language, when culture becomes *adivasi* culture, where do the memory and the understanding

Our stories help us have an identity. Because we do not just tell stories, we live them too. We rely on philosophy to find meaning in our everyday practices, which in turn shape our perspectives

of being a Ho lie? A clear demarcation between the two is impossible and the boundaries remain fuzzy. As Sardar Degogham remarked, "*Ab hum (adi) vasi nahin rahe, hum toh (nava) vasi ho gaye hain* (We are not Adivasi anymore, we have become 'new' dwellers now)."

The purpose of their festivals has changed. How can a *parab* (a quarterly festival in the Ho community), which celebrates rain and good harvest, held in the monsoon, be celebrated now when for years there has been no rain and the monsoon season has undergone a transformation?

What is this 'culture' of impossibility? Sardar Bhai remarks that meanings have changed and purposes have changed too; yet these festivals hold importance. It is the same when *Amma* comes back home quietly after the rituals and doesn't dance and celebrate like everyone else and Gunaram says, "*Amma* hasn't danced after my father's death. It's a loss that *Amma* lives with every day." I perceive through these conversations a certain sense of nostalgia, a longing for who they were and an attempt to retain

who they are, in order not to forget their identity.

Our stories help us have an identity. Because we do not just tell stories, we live them too. We rely on philosophy to find meaning in our everyday practices, which in turn shape our perspectives. To be mindful of what we think, say and do; to be reflexive of the potential, consequences and the learning of behavioural practices renders the world not problematic in itself, but situated in its being, in its knowledge and in its spirit.

So far, my practice of ethics has been within role demarcations: student, employee, researcher; action research as a method was, in the recent past, the means with which I was trying to make sense of self-ethics and knowledge production. Perhaps the road to ethics is the road of the ethic; because that is what we will need to understand...a world of living, growing, sustaining and coming together of community and what it means to be a practitioner working in a village with a group of people.

The next part of the article, consequently, talks about where

I place myself in this shift from a researcher to an action researcher.

Understanding the *Adivasi*: Learning and Unlearning

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Gunaram asks me to be part of the dinner at the Bodamonji festival, "Everyone is going to be there." I see it as an opportunity to meet everyone. However, the people who actually had dinner that night were from his family/title, and the collective 'everyone' took on a different meaning altogether. Is it only from my own vantage point that I was looking at everyone or is there ever an everyone? I wonder what I mean by social and does how I view a certain sociality become as important as the social setting itself. The world of Gunaram does not operate on my code of understanding, but from his own.

Sitting in a *gram sabha* meeting (I randomly just happened upon the meeting 15 minutes after it had started, not having known that there was a meeting in the first place), which I could only try to make sense of because of the language, there came a point where Sardar Bhai (an old active member of the *tola*—hamlet—

> In my combined stay of ten months (spread across three immersions) interspersed with spending time away from the Turibasa, I have come to understand that many of these stories—be it Gunaram's, Sardar Bhai's, Sukhmati Amma's, Lalita didi's or mine—are about 'loss'

and also a Ward Member) asked a bunch of people (men and women and an especially large group of kids), "*Kya swastika lagaana ya gaay ki pooja karna hi Hindu dharma hota hai*? (Does using a swastika sign or offering prayers to a cow alone make you a follower of the Hindu religion?)" and "*Agar ka, kha, ga, gha... hi padayenge toh Ho bhasha kab padayenge, Ho bhasha toh khatam ho jaayegi* (If we only learn the Hindi alphabet, when are we ever going to learn the Ho language? The Ho language will become extinct soon)."

In my combined stay of ten months (spread across three immersions) interspersed with spending time away from the Turibasa, I have come to understand that many of these stories—be it Gunaram's, Sardar Bhai's, Sukhmati *Amma's*, Lalita *didi's* or mine—are about 'loss'.

For Sardar Bhai, it is this impossibility of giving meaning to his life-world (maybe), a life-world that defines who he is, a 'Ho', a part of a community. In this Kolhan region of Jharkhand, the community has had certain practices and systems in place for a very long time; these are now becoming lost. It has been his life work to protect these traditions from 'outside' (missionaries as

per Sardar) influences. For Sardar, the life-world of a community hinges on its meaning and its practices, with language being one of the most critical.

He looks at the new trends, such as learning Hindi or the lack of monsoon or the kids going out of the villages to work and study, as a cultural loss because now "no one plays the flute or the *nagara* (a big drum-like local instrument)." This, perhaps, makes him a Ho who makes sense of the world by what the world used to be, and longs for his life in the future to be what he is used to.

This raises an important question. Is it only when one acknowledges that there is no longer a genuine way of proceeding like we used to might there arise new genuine ways of living like we used to? This is a personal question. A very personal problem! Where does the 'common' lie and what is the dialogue that happens between individual stories and common histories? How do we come together in our stories?

The project was 'On being or becoming an *Adivasi*', a project about nostalgia, about longing, about well-being, about recreating the old, the forgotten and the not-so-forgotten, there,

and yet not there. And through this project, I acknowledge that I am looking for my own being in the common and how much of an 'individual' I am. This is the question I deal with as I write this and this is a question I am sure all of us ask of ourselves every once in a while. I hope the answer lies in our practices, in future possibilities and in some hope—hope on which I want to end this article, because I believe, among other things, that hope is the best thing to have because it creates a possibility, a possibility that I would like to conclude this on.

Opening up Possibilities: How Do We Take This Forward?

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The film that we made then becomes a medium to understand the relationship of the community with creativity, wherein, Ho, in the very process of making the film (in the mere act of deciding what will be shown in the film, what will be shot, which practice is important, what will be edited, the music to capture, the sounds to include) becomes 'Ho'—which then argues for Development as Creativity. It's not going to be easy; however, maybe the time has come to 'complicate' our understanding of *(Adi)vasis* (MPhil research

> Through the whole process of five months, we talked about the story we wanted to tell, the videos and the images we wanted to shoot, how we wanted to edit the film and how we wanted to show it to everyone in the village

collaborations with PRADAN, being one of them). It is, in this context, important for practising researchers of the development world to be able to collaborate and work with institutions and organizations (both state and non-state) such as PRADAN. It is important to be able to open up possibilities for such community engagements, to ask questions, to create collaborations so that the future of adivasis can be imagined and worked towards.

Like the communities we engage with, this project of collective creative imagination cannot be realized alone (certainly not individually). Because I like to believe that in order to cultivate an intensive collective community inside would need a collective 'imagined' community outside, one where all of us practitioners, in all our multiplicities come together to create something new and, in the process, all of us 'become' something new too. It is going to be difficult, but it is definitely possible.

So, when Gunaram or Santoshi *didi* asks, "*Kuch galat laga toh hata sakte hain na...*(If something is

wrong in the film, we can edit it and delete it, right)?", it says something of the very modality of the memory we are working on, one that is visual and oral and yet differential enough to erase or construct. When, in Turibasa, people decide to record the funeral of a child in the hamlet because a funeral is a 'celebration' for them, the remembering takes a new turn. During the ceremony, Lakha *bhai* goes to mourn in different shacks, where families from various villages have arrived. Meanwhile, we follow him making a film of villagers cooking, eating, drinking and dancing. When the visitors from other villages ask Lakha what is happening, she responds, "*Turibasa ka film bana rahe hain, tumhe bhi dikhaayenge...*(We are making a film on Turibasa, we will show it to you)." This does something. This makes all of us (Lakha, Gunaram, Santoshi, Basmati and myself) try harder at making a new story, a new history, a new memory.

Through the whole process of five months, we talked about the story we wanted to tell, the videos and the images we wanted

to shoot, how we wanted to edit the film and how we wanted to show it to everyone in the village. We created a narrative (and a process) about making a present, one that is decided by the people themselves in their stories, in their loss and in their happiness. I wonder what the process of making of this film might have to suggest to the ways of doing practice, ways of doing research, ways of building the language of film. The making of the film involves the methods of meeting the aesthetic creative spaces, represents the spaces of transformation, and explores the spaces of self, for critical political education in innovative ways in the context of the community.

As Bergson rightly remarked, "The idea of the future, pregnant with infinity of possibilities, is thus more fruitful than the future itself, and this is why we find more charm in hope than in possession, in dreams than in reality." (Bergson, 1896).

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DEEPAK KUMAR

Sustainable Farming:
A Collective Learning Approach

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Bringing to life the dying land, ravaged by years of chemical use, farmers in Bhandaro village choose to risk going back to organic methods of crop cultivation, controlling diseases and pests through indigenous ways. The results were theirs to experience... better yield, richer soil, and rejuvenated natural resources

"DADA HUM LOGON KO HAR SAAL KHET MEIN ZYADA kar ke khaad dalna padta hai aur humara khet ka pani bhi jaldi sukh jata hai (Dada, every year we have to use more and more fertilizers in our fields. Our fields also dry up very quickly)," grumbled Sushila Hembrom, as she showed me her dry paddy fields in despair.

Another SHG member said, "Humlog apna khet mein chemical wala khad dalna Bengal jane ke baad sikhe the. Lagbhag 20–25 saalo se humlog urea khad khet mein dalte aa rahe hai (We learned to use chemical-based fertilizers after our exposure to Bengal farmers. We have been applying urea for almost 20–25 years now)."

The story of these SHG women from Bhandaro village is no different from that of many other farmers of Kathikund block in Jharkhand

The story of these SHG women from Bhandaro village is no different from that of many other farmers of Kathikund block in Jharkhand. The effects of using chemical-based fertilizers have begun to show up in the land and were taking a toll on the farmers.

SHG members shared with me that earlier when they were not using chemicals, they did not have enough produce to feed their family. Many people from the village migrated then in search of wages to Bengal, where they worked as agricultural labourers. They learned about new techniques, about hybrid seeds and fertilizers, which helped increase the yield considerably.

When the migrant labourers came back to their village, they adopted the same techniques in their fields. They started using chemical fertilizers such as DAP, urea and potash. Initially, the results were significant and the production increased considerably. However, over the years, there was stagnation in production. When the SHG members shared their stories with me, I heard hopelessness and fear in their voices. Year by

year, their fields were asking for more and more chemicals. The farmers had no option but to invest more in their fields or to give up agriculture and migrate again.

Most of the land in the village was undulated, of poor soil quality and had no irrigation facilities. The village had huge scope for chemical-free agriculture farming because of the abundance of cattle population. All the households in the village had livestock such as cattle, goat and backyard poultry, that was used by them to mitigate their immediate money needs. Also, because many of the SHG members were involved in broiler poultry farming, there was bird-excreta available in abundance. Convinced that this huge untapped resource could solve the issue that the SHG members were facing, I asked if we could have a meeting of the entire village to discuss this issue.

Exploring Non-chemical-based Practices

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In the village-level meeting, the villagers reiterated that their current farming practices

necessitated high input costs in terms of hybrid seeds, chemical fertilizers and pesticides. There was low retention of moisture in the land, and the quality of the land was getting degraded every year due to excessive application of chemical fertilizers. Soil erosion was high too owing to the undulating topography of the area.

When I shared with the community the possibility of non-chemical-based practices, there were mixed responses. Many said that it was impossible to have a good yield without the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. People also assumed that organic farming would be very costly and cumbersome. Some, on the other hand, supported the idea. One dada said "Dada, agar humlog jaivik tarika nahi apnayenge toh aane wala samay mein humara khet banjar ho jayega aur hamara bal bacha uspe kheti nahi kar payega.(Dada, if we do not adopt organic methods of farming, our lands will become barren in time and our coming generations will not be able to do any cultivation.)" Even though the villagers were not very sure, they were interested in knowing more about the non-chemical-

A video show called 'Toxic Foods—Poison on Our Plate,' from the popular television show 'Satyamev Jayate,' was shown in the workshop. The villagers were dumfounded after seeing the show and almost everyone in the village wanted to switch to organic practices

based agriculture. A three-day workshop was organized for them, in which the people from Bhandaro village and the nearby Jitpur village participated.

The workshop focused on existing farming practices vis-a-vis traditional farming practices. The purpose was to build a common understanding among farmers so that they could make a choice as to which approach they wanted to follow. A discussion was held about the challenges and the drawbacks of both the practices. Some of the questions that surfaced were: What were the crops that their ancestors used to grow on their land? Had they witnessed any kind of diseases in their village in the past 10 to 15 years? How would they protect their plants in case of pest and disease attacks? How many farmers were still using the traditional variety of seeds and why?

The farmers said that they used to cultivate different varieties of crops on their agriculture land. They had never used chemicals in their crops. One such crop, which the people, nowadays have stopped cultivating, was millet. It was now limited to only a few families in the village.

There were some farmers in the village, who were still cultivating the traditional variety of paddy called the Baihad Dhaan. But it was on a limited patch of land and only for their own household consumption. They could use this paddy for a long time because they did not use any fertilizers and pesticides for it; moreover, it was tastier than the hybrid paddy variety, that is, Swarna.

The farmers also said that, earlier, people never had health problems. Now, however, people were beginning to suffer from illnesses such as blood pressure, diabetes and gastric problems. People's attitudes too have changed. They do not want to do the hard work that is needed for traditional farming. The young generation tires very soon. One SHG didi said, "Dada aaj kal kodo jo ugata hai gaon mein use garib parivaar samjha jata hai (Dada, nowadays, those who cultivate millet are considered poor farmers)."

A video show called 'Toxic Foods—Poison on Our Plate,' from the popular television show 'Satyamev Jayate,' was shown in the workshop. The villagers were dumfounded after seeing the show and almost everyone

in the village wanted to switch to organic practices. Some were also disturbed to see the effect of chemicals on their health and on their land.

Anita Murmu said, "Pehle ke admi zyada mehnat ka kaam kar lete the aur zyada din zinda rehte the. Abhi bhi gaon mein 4 se 5 log hai jinka umar 80 se zyada hai (Earlier, people would work very hard and lived much longer. Even today, there are 4 or 5 people in the villages who are more than 80 years old)."

The villagers showed enthusiasm about trying out non-pesticide management (NPM) farming although they did fear that production would decrease if they did not use inorganic fertilizers such as DAP and urea. Also, they were not sure about the cost-effectiveness of organic farming and believed that it would require a lot of physical labour. They, however, were willing to try it on some portion of their land.

Piloting in Bhandaro and Jitpur villages

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To begin with, two experienced change animators, Pushpa

Clearly, going full steam into organic farming would be counter effective; instead, a gradual transition from one practice to the other would be a better alternative

Devi and Bimla Devi, from an organization called PRAN (Preservation and Proliferation of Rural Natural Resources and Nature), with extensive experience in organic interventions, were engaged to support the villagers in Bhandaro and Jitpur. Their role was to hand-hold the farmers in adopting organic practices and identify and train some Resource Persons within the village on NPM farming. These Resource Persons would then perform the role of change agents for the rest of the block. For Bhandaro and Jitpur, however, these two change animators were the Resource Persons; they created a base for modern farming practices such as the System of Root Intensification (SRI), provided on-field technical support in preparing organic products and demonstrated its use to farmers. The animators supported the community for almost a year, helping bring about a shift in the practices and enhancing the skills and the knowledge of the farmers about NPM farming. In this process, six SHG didis emerged as Resource Persons for the rest of the village and for the block.

Platform to Experiment and Share
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During this period of engagement with the villages, many of the problems they faced when adopting the practices came to light. Some said that it was difficult to collect cow's urine whereas others who had prepared the organic formulation said it smelt very foul. Some farmers observed that practising organic cultivation required a large amount of animal waste and that the process was very time-consuming. They were not willing to devote so much time and hard work. They wanted quick results and expressed a wish to use the readymade products such as urea and DAP, easily available in the market.

Clearly, going full steam into organic farming would be counter effective; instead, a gradual transition from one practice to the other would be a better alternative. Earlier, we were focused on adhering to a model Package of Practices (PoP). Therefore, for SRI paddy, we shifted the focus to improved practices, rather than insisting the farmers adopt all the SRI principles. Training was provided

to farmers through audio-visual aids. IEC (Information, Education and Communication) material was provided to farmers in the form of booklets and leaflets so that they had the option of choosing or dropping the organic practices, based on the availability of resources and on their convenience.

A farm-field school, an informal set-up, was created for farmers to support each other, to enable a group-based learning process, enhance their skills and knowledge and help them make informed decisions. For example, the farmers collected different types of insects and disease-affected plants from the field and brought them to a common place for further discussion. They discussed the types of insects (both sucking and chewing). They learned whether an insect was harmful or beneficial for their plants. They were shown how the presence of harmful pests could be minimized naturally and how the presence of beneficial pests could be increased.

Sushila Hembrom from Bhandaro village said, "Pehle to

The farmers took measures to protect the health of their crops and the ecology from the ill-effects of chemical pesticides

hum to sabhi keedo ko kharab samajh kar uspe dawa daal dete the (Earlier, we thought that all the insects were harmful and we would apply pesticides on all the insects)."

Sarita Murmu added. "Hum ne jab jaivik khad daalne ke baad dekha ki mitti mein keede ho rahe hai to hum ko laga ki kharab ho gayi lekin training mein pata chala ki wo keede mitti ke liye phaydemand hai (When we applied organic manure, we found that there were insects in the soil; we thought it was bad

for the soil. In the trainings, we understood however that those insects were beneficial for the soil)."

The farmers learned to identify different pests and learned curative measures. For sucking pests, they used Neemastra, an organic pesticide; and for chewing pests, they used Agniastra. Farmers from both the villages used these pesticides and the results were very effective. The best time for farmers to review their fields was early mornings when they could

clearly see the pests in their plots.

To retain soil moisture, farmers were encouraged to use Jeevamrit. In case of less vegetative growth, they used organic fertilizers such as Pranamrit and Bakramrit. In case of viral diseases, farmers isolated the affected plant from the others, identified the vectors responsible for the diseases, and checked their growth by using a coloured sticky plate over their crop fields. This process was repeated fortnightly or monthly,

Table 1: Organic Products Used by Farmers

Product	Use	Material
Jeevamrit	Fertilizer (increased bio-agent in soil)	Cow dung, cow urine, jaggery, gram flour, fertile soil, water
Ghan-jeevamrit	Fertilizer (increased bio-agent in soil)	Cow dung, cow urine, jaggery, gram flour, fertile soil
Pranamrit	Organic fertilizer	Poultry waste, oil cake, ash, water
Bakramrit	Organic fertilizer	Goat excreta, oil cake, ash, water
Beejamrit	Seed treatment	Water, cow dung, cow urine, lime, handful of soil
Beeja Raksha	Seed treatment	Soil from under a big tree, ash, asafoetida, turmeric powder, cow urine.
Mahuastra	Fungal disease	Mahua, jaggery, cow urine
Agniastra	Chewing pests	Cow urine, dry tobacco leaf, chilli, garlic, neem leaf
Lohastra	Pest control	Rusted iron scraps, cow urine
Mathastra	Fungal disease	Fermented curd and water
Amrit	Tonic/Hormone	Moong dal seed, chick pea, wheat, cow pea, arhar dal, til seed, etc.

Farmers found visible changes in their fields after using organic practices. Soil health improved as was evident from the change in the colour of the soil from reddish to black. The farmers also said that diseases and pest attacks were fewer because of better soil health

by all the farmers, who had similar kinds of crops in close proximity.

The farmers took measures to protect the health of their crops and the ecology from the ill-effects of chemical pesticides. Some of these measures were: building bird perches, laying pheromone traps, using yellow sticky plates, using border crops such as red gram, marigold and coriander, to reduce pest attacks and applying Neemastra and Agniastra, in case the crop was attacked by pests. The farmers also shifted to improved agricultural practices, using SRI, making a collective nursery, sorting the seeds, treating the plants with Beejamrit and managing water correctly.

The farmers monitored the texture of the soil, the growth of plants and any attacks by pests in their fields and countered these with the application of organic preparations. They also used these preparations in the patches where they had used chemical-based methods. Subsequently, they did an impact analysis in the organic and the inorganic patches, and discussed the results in their SHG meetings for further course

of action. They took decisions, collectively, on some crops and monitored them commonly. Accordingly, they also prepared a crop-wise pest and disease calendar. The whole idea was that the community gets engaged in the learning process, doing active experimentation and taking informed decisions.

Some remarkable changes that the farmers of Bhandaro and Jitpur villages adopted, while doing non-chemical based interventions last year were: the adoption of SRI practices, resulting in increased yield of paddy and vegetables during the kharif and the rabi seasons; improved water and animal waste management; preparation of organic pesticides and fertilizers; inculcating NPM interventions in farming practices; creation of awareness about the side-effects of chemical pesticides on human health as well as the ecology; identifying pests and learning how to eliminate them; taking a community approach in learning and making decisions; creating a knowledge nucleus around NPM by building expert resources; demonstrating clear differences between current practices and NPM-based

agriculture interventions with the community; and to be able to bring the community on the same platform.

Bitiya Marandi of Bhandaro village said, "Jo didi jaivik khad aur dawa khet mein nahi dali hai uska paudha accha nahi hua hai (Those who did not use organic methods in their fields did not have good plants)."

Evident Changes
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In both the villages, farmers found visible changes in their fields after using organic practices. Soil health improved as was evident from the change in the colour of the soil from reddish to black. The farmers also said that diseases and pest attacks were fewer because of better soil health, seed treatment and preventive measures taken such as sticky traps and plantation of marigold.

Bitiya Marandi, who did organic and inorganic paddy in two patches of her land, had a yield difference of seven quintals per acre with a mix of organic practices and improved practice of cultivation than through chemical-based farming.

I would often question, why we were working here? Why am I here? What change will I bring here, where things are already in a certain stage of development? Is there a real need for us to work here?

Sonamati Tudu cultivated tomatoes through organic practices as well as the chemical-based method in two patches of 10 decimals each. She had a produce of 20 quintals in the organic field, where she used Pranamrit as fertilizer and sticky trap and Neemastra to control pest attacks. The yield from the field in which she used DAP was 14 quintals. The water-holding capacity of the farmlands treated with organic fertilizers such as Jeevamrit, Bakramrit and Pranamrit has also increased, with some farmers claiming that it had occasionally saved them from having to irrigate their lands one or two times.

Bitiya Marandi irrigated her potato crop in 10 decimals of land twice; she also applied Pranamrit, Jeevamrit, Ghan-jeevamrit and got a yield of 4.2 quintals. On the other hand, she irrigated the other patch of land of 10 decimals three times, used DAP and got a yield of three quintals.

The SHG members also said that the cost of cultivation had decreased, contrary to the thinking of the people that organic practices would be costlier and more time-consuming. Table 2 shows the difference in the cost of cultivation between organic practice and inorganic practice in Anita Murmu's field. She had cultivated paddy both organically and inorganically in two separate fields of one bigha (33 decimals) each. The cost incurred through organic methods was low when

Table 2: Cost Analysis of Chemical-based and Organic Paddy Cultivation in 1 *Bigha* Land

Chemical-based Farming		Organic Farming	
Material and labour days used	Cost (in Rupees)	Material and labour days used	Cost (in Rupees)
Seeds: 3 kg	330	Seeds: 3 kg	330
Total man-days for the preparation of the nursery field: 2 days	340	Total man-days for the preparation of the nursery field: 2 days	340
Total man-days for the preparation of the main field: 9 days	1530	Total man-days for the preparation of the main field: 9 days	1530
DAP: 30 kg	900	*Pranamrit*: (1 time)	220
Urea: 20 kg	200	*Jeevamrit/Ghan-Jeevamrit*: (4 times)	250
Total man-days for weeding: 6 days	1,020	Total man-days for weeding: 6 days	1,020
Total man-days for harvesting: 16 days	2,720	Total man-days for harvesting: 16 days	2,720
Total cost	7,040	Total cost	6,410
Yield	6 quintals/ *bigha*		6.5 quintals/ *bigha*

At present, more than 1,000 farmers are venturing into non-chemical-based farming. Some have shifted entirely while the others have made a partial shift

compared to the chemical-based methods, using the same number of labour days. Significantly, the yield through organic methods was also more.

The yield will improve over the years, with the use of organic practices, because of improvement in soil quality. The most visible change observed was in the quality and the taste of the produce. SHG members said that the vegetables produced were much tastier. This also helped them fetch better prices in the market. Their produce was in high demand in the haat (local market). SHG members now, regularly, discuss their experience in the SHG and Village Organization (VO) meetings, and extend their support to other farmers. As part of the farmer field school, they regularly visit the organic and inorganic patches separately, and work on preparing an action plan to scale up healthy and efficient practices.

Making the Idea Viral

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Bhandaro and Jitpur villages, in two years, have become the nucleus for the rest of the block for non-chemical-based agriculture. Exposure visits were conducted for the farmers of other villages during the kharif and rabi seasons. SHG members of Bhandaro and Jitpur created awareness around non-chemical-based agriculture in their Cluster and in the panchayat. They sang songs and performed plays to create awareness and had focused group interactions with SHG members of other villages in the block.

Six women from Bhandaro and Jitpur were trained as master trainers, to develop new cadres in other villages in Kathikund block, who in turn would support farmers. At present, more than 1,000 farmers are venturing into non-chemical-based farming. Some have shifted entirely while the others have made a partial shift.

Although very gradual, the transition process is natural and is without external coercion. The community has taken its own time to explore, understand and improvise on practices. Convinced, they are now taking it upon themselves to reach out to the other farmers and are inviting them to explore, creating a learning environment that helps them make informed choices.

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SAYANTI SUR

THE STATE-SOCIETY INTERACTION: A DEVELOPMENTAL DEBATE

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Do the changes being slowly inculcated in tribal life, represented by the adivasis of Kewlajhiri, add up to development? Do traditional practices, customs, beliefs need to be shed in order to bring about transformation in people's lives? Does the government take into account the wealth of traditional wisdom when it determines how to develop a village?

Introduction: Kewlajhiri and Numbers

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THIS ARTICLE IS BASED IN A small village in Betul tehsil, which lies in the southern-most part of the state of Madhya Pradesh (MP) in India. Kewlajhiri is a small forest village situated at a distance of 4 km from NH 69, with poor road connectivity. It is a Gond-dominated village with four Yadav families, who belong to the Other Backward Class (OBC), and one Vishwakarma family belonging to the Scheduled Caste; thus 92.7% belong to the ST population. The total population of this village in 2011 was 641; with 327 men and 314 women and thus a sex ratio of 960 women per 1000 men. The literacy rate in Kewlajhiri is 58.4%.

Communicating through numbers has its own limitations because the diversity of human life is not reflected in them. Different boundaries[1]—physical, mental, spatial, territorial, etc—get created when one talks about management of and thereby the administration of any population. We usually have Census, National Family and Health Surveys, Socio-

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[1]Refer to Joel S. Migdal's concept of boundaries in his book 'Boundaries and Belongings' in 2004.

> The complexities of human life vis-à-vis its fundamental processes are neither accommodated nor entertained in any record books of the modern state

Economic Caste Census and many related policies emerging from such simplifications which mostly regulate the direction in which a poor's life would be turned towards. Such details of the boundaries from the country to the state to the village are simplifications of the variations and the diversities that exist within each of these levels. Such simplifications made by the state—with the intent to govern us—"are always far more static and schematic than the actual social phenomena they presume to typify... It can no more reflect the actual complexity of a farmer's experience..." (Scott 1998, 46-47)

Doubtless, there are far more complex nuances in society than these numbers may reflect. The complexities of human life vis-à-vis its fundamental processes are neither accommodated nor entertained in any record books of the modern state. This divorce from the nuances has neither proved to be beneficial to the common man, that is, the governed, nor has it helped the system make any significant impact on the lives of the people it is meant to serve.

After all, "These typifications are indispensable to statecraft. State simplifications such as maps, census, cadastral lists, and standard units of measurement represent techniques for grasping a large and complex reality; in order for officials to be able to comprehend aspects of the ensemble, that complex reality must be reduced to schematic categories." (Ibid, 77). However, even under such a circumstance of typified representation, it is worth studying how state and society interact with each other, how the governmental apparatus penetrates society to regulate and appropriate the minutest details of the everyday life of people. Hence, the ways the state keeps data for each and every aspect of its citizens such as regulating ethnicity (as SC/ST/OBC/Gen), food versus nutrition, literacy versus education, sex ratio, health and well-being versus reproductive health, local infrastructure, environment, entitlements and so on, reveals the state-society divide. Here, we will look at the way governmental representation controls and shapes people in their everyday life.

Kewlajhiri: How the Name Emerged
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From the beginning, the name of the village—Kewlajhiri—fascinated me. "How did the village get its name?" was the question that came to my mind on my first visit. I came across two explanations: a religious one and a relatively 'modern' one.

The fifth-generation Gond priest, the *bhagat*, of the village narrates the story of three successive settlements of the Gonds in the region. Once, their wandering ancestors selected a place to settle down, they established their dev with the rituals performed by 'Mata-Maai'[2] who, after fasting for 21 days, performed a puja, offered sacrifices to the forest-goddess and enunciated the name Kewlajhiri, reportedly, as per the wishes of the forest-goddess. Starting with five families, the community expanded to 43 households in Jamun Dhana of Kewlajhiri and 81 households in Kuadhor (or Bada Dhana). This story is similar to the administrative version, though not exactly the same.

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[2] *The woman supposedly gets 'possessed' by the 'Dev' (God) and performs puja and rituals for the Dev.*

> The rural poor, "can at best derive very low wages by working as forest labourers or by selling firewood, and since they do not share in the profits made from from the forest produce these wages always remain low, at the subsistence level"

The younger generation believes in another version of how the village got its name. They recount that the colonial forest department felled big trees, to expand the railway tracks network; the wood was used as fuel (coal) for construction work. The middle-aged generation, the sixth of the village, believe that *koyla* (coal) became *kewla*, and because it was situated amidst many streams (*jhora*) that criss-crossed the village, it led to the name Kewlajhiri. Anticipating that forest department officials must also have some information about the history of the village and its name, I spoke to them and when the then Beat Officer (a member of Gond tribe himself), knew very little; he ardently believes that, "The government has done the poor people a favour by giving them land and allowing them to settle; in return, the people must support the forest department in protecting the forest."

I find all these versions interesting because on one hand there is an inherent religious belief dear to the elderly Gond members about their existence in that place; however, on the other hand, there is an increasing tendency in the younger generation to climb up the logical ladder of government. What is interesting is that the outlook towards forest has still not changed even after British government is no more. Their idea of governing forests is still upheld by our Indian government with the original spirit. Guha mentioned, "The unquestioning acceptance of colonial norms, especially with regard to the usurpation of state monopoly right, has characterised post-colonial policy to this day" (Guha 1983, 1888). Although during the post-Independence period the *adivasis* are covered or protected under the Constituition of India where they were given the right to represent themselves politically by the reservation of seats in a joint electorate based on adult franchise, but still, the rural poor, "can at best derive very low wages by working as forest labourers or by selling firewood, and since they do not share in the profits made from from the forest produce these wages always remain low, at the subsistence level. While the rural poor gain little by protecting the tree crop, so far they have always succeeded in establishing their ownership over a patch of land by cutting down the trees and putting it to the plough" (Gadgil and Guha 1992, 196).

Thus the fusion of the two different reasonings for naming the place Kewlajhiri became two sides of a same coin to me. The fear has been, nowadays, transformed into something else! The people now fear the flagbearers of the colonizers! Their confidence has been totally swallowed up by this fear of the consequences if they do not abide by the government, then government might not support them in their living. The fear has transformed itself from a gross visualization of tyranny into a very mixed and subtle feeling of being governed. Sumit Guha, in his study, shows[3] how the forest department developed its own version of history, in order to justify the way it functioned. He researched and came to the conclusion that the very existence of the forest village and the villagers is neither merely a coincidence nor do they live there because of any favour, but rather a result of the functions and the integration of the practices of the government over the years, in constructing and perpetuating a particular history.

[3]*Refer to Sumit Guha's book 'Environment and Ethnicity in India, 1200-1991' published in 1999.*

> People's mobility and their exposure to the outer world have led to a difference in their perceptions about Kewlajhiri. When they went outside the village, they saw and learned new things; adopted some of those and modified a few existing ones, according to the changing times.

One middle-aged man smilingly told me a very interesting fact, "Outsiders call that hamlet Kewlajhiri, and this one Jamun Dhana ..." Surprised I asked, "But this is also Kewlajhiri isn't it?" The other villagers standing around him laughed and the man continued, "Yes, this is also Kewlajhiri, but only because it has more *jamun* (blackberry) trees, it got this name; this is what has been continuing for years."

People's mobility and their exposure to the outer world have led to a difference in their perceptions about Kewlajhiri. When they went outside the village, they saw and learned new things; adopted some of those and modified a few existing ones, according to the changing times. Very simply, they said, "*Samay badal raha hai, duniya aage badh raha hai* (Times are changing, the world is moving forward)." And with changing times, the younger generation's outlook on life and their aspirations have changed and do not match that of the older generation.

Changes in Kewlajhiri: The people of Kewlajhiri were locked in a tug-of-war situation between the elders' strong affinity for their own *adivasi* culture (reflecting a fear of their identity getting lost), and the younger generation's

preference for the modern and fashionable world.

Two Dhanas or Two Villages!
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The people of Jamun Dhana say that the Bada Dhana's fortune is shining because, "That hamlet is very close to Khadara Road; and that Dhana also hosts the Beat Guard office. The *up-sarpanch* also resides there. There, you will not find the things that you find here..."

Jamun Dhana is different. "There are more hillocks here than there. The people over there find it easy to call someone or go to some place. This hamlet is difficult to live in." Other responses were, "Whenever people from the outside such as the Ranger or the *sarpanch* visit, they stay in Bada Dhana hamlet. Who is going to cross so many hillocks to come here? With road construction work beginning, there are more vehicles coming inside; Earlier, except the Self-Help Group people (PRADAN), nobody used to come to our hamlet and even they faced many difficulties." Another person said, "The people of that hamlet are familiar with the people of the higher status, more people from that hamlet are employed at the forest nursery as compared to this hamlet. They are

more fortunate." Another young man added, "Electricity reached that hamlet first, in 1988, and in this hamlet, it reached just five or six years ago."

The people of Bada Dhana say that they don't like Jamun Dhana because it is within the forest and is difficult to reach. They say, "We don't need to go to that hamlet. We stay in our home, go to the fields, and work. We don't feel good in that hamlet. This hamlet of ours is much more beautiful. Here, you will find people to talk. There, there's not a single person to speak to." The phrase "we don't need to..." caught my attention and I began to think of what could the need be for the people of Jamun Dhana to come to Bada Dhana? I probed further and got the following response, "They come to us for selling curd, buttermilk and ghee, and the people over here purchase from them. So why do we need to go there? The one whose need it is will come or go..."

They used the word *jarurat* which I translated as 'need'. I pondered over the word '*jarurat*', nowadays an established foundation for fostering a relationship based on monetary need and overlooking the *jarurat* of mixing with fellow villagers and being familiar with each other's well-being. The bond

> I sensed a strong desire for families to be at par with the *bade log* (outside their community and of higher status), in terms of establishing a *barabari ka dosti* (an equal relationship) and also the pressure of *naam rakha jayega* (keeping up with the others) are the drivers for a shift in their lifestyle

had already loosened somewhere and it now manifests itself through such mental barriers. Also, the biases of government officials, based on the proximity and remoteness of villages (Chambers 1983), have set in skewed practices whereby the people of Bada Dhana benefit from government programmes, even getting recognized as the official Kewlajhiri, despite it being a relocated hamlet.

Houses: On the Way to In-between-ness

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The traditional houses are wide, with big rooms, without windows, made of mud (walls and floors), wood (pillars), bamboos and tiles (roof), on a raised platform. Interestingly, in Jamun Dhana, I found four houses with windows, including one house that had recently being constructed. These families, and especially the family building a new house asked, "Having windows in the house looks good, doesn't it?"

They have seen the houses of the Mahajans (non-tribal, mostly, upper-caste Hindus). Following these, in some households, mud-walls are being replaced by brick-walls because the people wish to have houses similar to those of

the Mahajans. I talked to those three families with the semi-*pucca* houses and all of them gave similar answers. One of them said, "These days such houses are in fashion, mud-houses serve our purpose better, but are old-fashioned." Another family said, "We have visitors these days from society, and our house has to be presentable." Another family believes that having a brick house with an asbestos roof would create a way for them to go and mix with people of other communities and make way for them to move to the higher strata of society.

I sensed a strong desire for families to be at par with the *bade log* (outside their community and of higher status), in terms of establishing a *barabari ka dosti* (an equal relationship) and also the pressure of *naam rakha jayega* (keeping up with the others) are the drivers for a shift in their lifestyle and it is taking them a long time to complete their wish. One of the *pucca*-house owners said, "We save small amounts of money every year and are slowly getting it made. Till now Rs 60,000 to 70,000 have already been spent… or may be even more." He ran his hands on the wide, black and designed wooden pillars of shagon (teak) and smiled.

The lifestyle these families want to have is influenced by some 'higher' ways of living, and, thus, the roots of the markets are percolating into the layers of society. Similarly, *khatiyas* (cots) are being replaced by 'modern' box-beds made of wood. They say, "These kinds of beds are available in the malls. We just make them here with the wood available from the jungle. It is easier and cheaper."

What has not changed is the pattern of arranging the rooms inside the houses. They make three parallel rooms in their houses. In the Gond culture, the middle room is their main room where their deity resides and one room is the kitchen; these two rooms need to be made with mud, otherwise their 'Dev' will get angry. One person said, "Outsiders will come and sit in the outermost room, have tea and leave. They will not enter inside. It is us who have to live in this house and this is right for us…also we have our deities. We believe that some misdeeds of ours will make him leave us. This is believed as a bad omen in our society." The man stopped, thought for a while, nodded and then said, "A few things are never going to change in our *adivasi* society."

> The idea of religion has also not escaped the purview of rationality. Just as we had two different inter-generational views regarding the name of the village, I found similar inter-generational views about religion

Blurred Boundaries of Religious Labels

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The idea of religion has also not escaped the purview of rationality. Just as we had two different inter-generational views regarding the name of the village, I found similar inter-generational views about religion. The older generation said, "We belong to the Gond Samaj (community/clan) and our rules and regulations are quite different from yours." The younger generation, on the other hand, who have been through formal schooling, said, "Ours is Hindu religion." Surprised, I asked, "I heard that you belong to the Gond Samaj?" They replied, "No. Gond is our community/clan, but our religion is Hindu. We belong to that religion only. These people are not educated enough…" And then they thought for a while very seriously, and reiterated, "No, ours is Hindu religion."

They were pretty sure that they belonged to the Hindu religion. Interestingly, the respondents belonged to the three well-off families in Jamun Dhana. So, the impact of class or economic status also works on the people,

who agree on the predominant depoliticized view of Gonds as 'Backward Hindus' as propagated by the government or the positioning (Hall 1990, 226) of the Gond religion preserved over the years.

Later, going through the Hindi textbooks, I noticed that there was no mention of any Gondi heroic figures. The books talked mostly of Hindu deities and national leaders. In this way, "governmental interventions simplify the realities to be governed as they succeeded simultaneously in homogenizing the population and differentiating it, setting off those in the margins from the core population in the center." (Migdal 2004, 21).

The Gond tribe is divided into 12-and-a-half Devs. The 'Devs' are synonymous with the Hindu *gotra*. The population of Kewlajhiri belongs to two Devs and has the clans of the '6th Dev' and the '7th Dev'. They believe that there is no hierarchy between the Devs and all the 'Devs' are equal. However, above these 12-and-a-half Devs, is the most powerful Dev…the Bara Dev, who is believed to be Mahadev (Shiva) only. Some of the elders believe

that Bara Dev and Mahadev are different entities and that Bara Dev is even more powerful than Shiva.

According to legend, Mahadev had taken a girl from (that is, married) the Gond community whose name was Maya Gondin and, thus, became the son-in-law of the Gonds. There is a period of 10–15 days when they observe Shivaratri. On the day of Shivaratri, they perform Ujhaal to wash off their sins and impurities, which they have acquired after mingling with the non-tribals, as "*zamana aage badh raha hai.*" By performing Ujhaal, they beg forgiveness for their social transactions[4] with the non-tribes and also ask for leniency so that their Bada Dev does not leave them for their misdeeds. Ujhaal is an act of instilling hope, creating a balance between their usual living and the adoption of newer ways of living. This is a must-do for all families, and they say that they will not change themselves in this aspect of their life.

Guha and Gadgil say that during the early non-tribal empires and the British period, the governance introduced different forms of territorial controls over

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[4]*By social interactions, I mean to say that they go outside for migration, work in the house and fields of the non-tribals, attend various trainings and meetings outside their village, or even provide accommodation to some non-tribals in their houses, etc.*

> Thus, when the villagers of Kewlajhiri say that they will not change a few aspects of their lives, it arises from the membrane of that diasporic experience, it is an unuttered need for respect of their heterogeneity and diversity.

the resources that have reshaped the intrinsic belief system of the *adivasis*. They say, "The new system drew on beliefs in the sanctity of individual plants and animals, as well as of elements of landscape, which thousands of endogamous groups had inherited from their food-gathering days… These distinctive belief systems were now woven together into a composite fabric by identifying many of the spirits with a few key Gods in the Hindu pantheon… However, an important element added was devotion, or *bhakti*,… This belief system had a clear role in regulating and moderating the use of natural resources." (Gadgil and Guha 1992, 90)

I have experienced this analysis of Guha and Gadgil throughout my stay and action research phases. Thus, starting from the popular tales behind the names to the current religious practices in Kewlajhiri, I can see an overlapped interplay of the government, a mosaic of cultural practices and an impact of the present market on the everyday lives of the common people. In this context, Hall analyzed this fragmented identity as a product of governmental rationality, which strategically positioned

their (here, the Gonds') socio-religious and cultural practices to experience themselves as the 'other.' (Hall 1990, 225)

Thus, when the villagers of Kewlajhiri say that they will not change a few aspects of their lives, it arises from the membrane of that diasporic experience, it is an unuttered need for respect of their heterogeneity and diversity. The tight-fisted demand (for a better living) and pulling forces, arising from their interaction with the market and its agents (both sellers and other consumers) are catching their attention and causing them to make many changes, mostly in the unconscious realm. There are other domains (of their lives) too, where such changes are happening under the intersectionality of governance, modernity (rationality) and their belief systems.

Food—from Strength to Deliciousness

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Earlier, *makka* (maize), *kodo*, *kutki* and *samariya* were the only staple foods. They learned to grow rice in the *kharif* season some 20–25 years back from the Bengali

community, which had migrated to and settled as permanent community at Chopna.[5] The two communities met during migration. The villagers explain, "A few people from our village went to their villages in search of work. There, they observed how those people used to cultivate their fields and grow paddy." Another viewpoint was, "But here, we have no fine lands as theirs for growing paddy. This area is full of hillocks." The taste in food has also changed; and the younger generation finds rice and wheat tastier than *kodo*, *kutki* and *samariya*.

Almost 22–24 families, which have motor pumps, cultivate wheat in winter. Vegetables such as cherry tomato, *saemi* (flat beans), brinjal and gourd are grown in all courtyards, depending on rain water. The children have chosen wheat over maize because it tastes better, but the elders prefer maize to wheat because maize fills their stomach for a longer time than wheat and rice. Rice and wheat are also being promoted by the government under the Public Distribution System through Fair Price Shops.

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[5]*Chopna comes under Shahpur block, which has relatively more plain land than Ghoradongri block.*

> The Gond community considers marriage as one of the biggest rituals of their life processes. There are widely accepted diverse marriage practices in this community. The villagers say that, in earlier times, the beauty of a girl was considered secondary to the fact that the girl could work and take the load of the family.

The government also promotes hybrid seeds of cereals, pulses, oilseeds, etc., for increasing crop production and productivity. In Madhya Pradesh, the average seed replacement rate for paddy and wheat (in 2009–10) was 13.10 per cent and 275.21 per cent, respectively, and quite below the average seed replacement rate for maize (807.88 per cent). This means Madhya Pradesh is lagging behind in the production of rice and wheat than maize, and within the purview of the governmental rationality, the citizens should be provided with nutritional security, food security for rice and wheat, and thus, must be protected from the food price inflation for these two crops.

Hence, the state government provides the primary rural households[6] with 5 kg of wheat and rice per family member @ Re 1/kg and Rs 2/kg, respectively, (GoMP, 2016). So, in Kewlajhiri, people sell the maize grown from certified seeds and consume the indigenous variety of maize, cultivated on a small portion of the field. Thus, it is not at all difficult to understand the implications of governmental rationality on the food regime and the loss of diversity of food, and to explain why these days *kodo*, *kutki* and *samariya* are vanishing from the farmers' plates and are available in big malls and shops, at a much higher price (ranging between Rs 90–120/kg)!

Marriage: From Bonding to Burdening, from Necessity to Desires…

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The Gond community considers marriage as one of the biggest rituals of their life processes. There are widely accepted diverse marriage practices in this community. The villagers say that, in earlier times, the beauty of a girl was considered secondary to the fact that the girl could work and take the load of the family. Marriage was practised through abduction also, with quite a few instances in the village (and sometimes marriage didn't happen at all)! Sometimes, the *bhagat*[7] and the families themselves fixed and arranged the marriage. The concept of dowry did not exist or the people do not recall its practice.

There were gender-just marriage practices, wherein the bride and the groom were presented with gifts and either started living in a new house of their own, or stayed with his family. At that time, the only luxurious food was *dal-chawal*[8]; the neighbours contributed grains and everything was managed peacefully through sharing by the community. The boy's family would carry their own food stuff (rice, *dal*, utensils and wood) in a cart to the marriage. They cooked their own food, thereby not creating any pressure on the girl's family or on the village. We can't even think of such arrangements in modern society. Such practices increased the cooperation between two affinal families (and villages) also.

Nowadays, the needs and desires to bring brides from different villages is increasing, as a result of the interaction of youth in their work or public places, and is gradually heading towards the question of status. By marrying within the village, they will not get the desired *khatirdari* (how they will be looked after during the wedding), a term used by the local and upper-caste Hindu

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[6]*Do not include families under Antyodaya scheme.*
[7]*The Gondi man who performs rituals, religious and spiritual practices in the Gonds.*
[8]*Chawal, or rice, procurement was a luxury even 30 years ago.*

> When people from this village went to work in the houses of the higher castes and class of people and saw their marriages and rituals, they started taking up some of these practices in the Gond marriage rituals

people. However, the work or public space interaction of the youth is also creating a scope for them to choose their desired partners. Dowry is now becoming a silent characteristic as the norm to gift has increased manifold. Gold is gradually taking its place in their market.

Interestingly, nowadays the groom's family does not carry their own 'rations' and the bride's family has to arrange the food for the marriage party, placing a huge pressure on them. Neighbours still help; some with grains, and some with money and this saves a lot of money for the bride's family and also maintains the relationship between the families in the community.

Things are really turning around. Lalji *dada* (one of the elderly persons in the village) recalls that this desire has come from "*Mahajano ko dekh kar. Humare log jaate the Mahajano ke paas kaam karne aur unke shaadiyan dekh kar aate the…aur yahan aakar bolte the ki hum bhi kar sakte hai aisi shaadiyan. Phir dheere kuch log Mahajano ke saath ghumne lage, dosti badhane lage, aur unke dekha-dekhi unka kharcha bhi badhta gaya…nahi to pehle hum*

itne gareeb nahi the, humare paas kaafi cheezen hua karta tha, par logon ki budhhi me samajh hi nahi aya, ki aaj nahi rakhenge to kal kaise chalega…Gareebee aa gayi humare samaj me…(when people from this village went to work in the houses of the higher castes and class of people and saw their marriages and rituals, they started taking up some of these practices in the Gond marriage rituals. Gradually, as they mixed with the upper-class Hindus, they started mimicking their lifestyles and a sense of competition grew that, 'even we can have these kind of marriages. We need money for this and for that we will also do what these people do'. Lalji *dada* emphasized that this desire of the Gonds to give in to peer pressure and spend more was leading to discarding the earlier frugal lifestyle and the adopting of a new expensive lifestyle. This was leading to debt and poverty.)"

There are many governmental initiatives for marriages such as mass weddings under the Mukhya Mantri Kanyadaan Yojna[9]. The market and peer pressure made people, although subtly, emulate the hierarchical differences (as Mahajans are higher than the *adivasis*—backward Hindus) of

the caste systems. However, these days, many people are migrating to the cities for work and are engaged in construction works, where they earn higher wages than they get from agricultural labour. This is also contributing to higher aspirations and, therefore, leading to emulating the practices of the higher castes. They have started believing that this is how life should be. This is like a complex web of closely knitted traps of consumerism.

Entertainment
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This desire has also extended to (and has changed) their modes of entertainment, which has now shifted to playing movies and songs on CD-DVD players, speakers and mobiles and radios. People switch on their radios, play songs from very early in the morning and do all their domestic works to the accompaniment of film music. Shanti *didi* says, "I longed for years that the radio should be played in our house too." Another young boy said, "The radio has FM channels, so sometimes songs and sometimes some other programmes are broadcast…"

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[9]For details, refer to http://www.newincept.com/madhyapradesh/mukhya-mantri-kanyadan-yojana-madhya-pradesh.html

> The earlier folk-lores, songs and dances that used to come up from the lived experiences of the people have, nowadays, been replaced by TV, radio and various artistes.

However, for most of the time, the flow of the medium of entertainment (such as the radio, television, etc.) is used to carry political news to the village in a very subtle and dynamic manner. So, listening to music at one moment and another programme next becomes actually very free-flowing.

Thus, in the context of the village, the radio has had widespread infiltration into society due to technological advancements, that is, radio as a feature in mobile phones. Kamla Bai says, "We just put it on and leave it and the songs come. We listen and do the chores…" So, it is also about the choices of the user. The earlier folk-lores, songs and dances that used to come up from the lived experiences of the people have, nowadays, been replaced by TV, radio and various artistes.

My encounter with one of the folk-songs emerging from the lives of the women was, "*Paintees ka pauwa do ka chana, pi ke maare roje dina…*(Having a quarter of liquor worth Rs 35 and snacks worth Rs 2, my husband beats me every single day)." This is not a very old song. We see that the song speaks about the consequences of rising alcoholism in the community; the wife sings this song among her peers[10]. It tells us that the husbands beat up their wives daily after drinking. It portrays the daily lived sufferings of the women. What is interesting is that they have composed songs about their sufferings so that they can smile through their pain.

Health

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People of Kewlajhiri prefer to use the locally available medicinal herbs over medicines for treating common ailments. Although the people's inclination, nowadays, is increasingly turning to private health practices, their profound belief in the *bhagat* and *bhumka*[11] is still in place. My stay in the village gave me a chance to witness some such practices wherein the *bhagat* cured people's ailments. The people have immense faith in their treatment systems. However, it is very unfortunate that the limelight is shifting to modern medicine (allopathy) that is overshadowing these practices that are now being ignored as superstitions.

A discussion with the *bhagat* revealed that these are special skills that require special training, along with huge concentration, dedication and practice. This can neither be inherited, nor can just about anybody become a *bhagat*. With the advent of modern medicine, the young are not willing to learn this knowledge because they believe, "These days (modern) medicines can cure almost all the diseases." The *bhagat* was disappointed with the lack of dedication and faith regarding this among the youth, "Today's youth lack the dedication to learn all these things!"

The government uses a few variables such as the Infant Mortality Rate (IMR), the Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR), the Under-5 Mortality Rate

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[10]But the most interesting thing I found was the context in which and how this song was used by Munni didi *against Rangolal* bhaiya *(her spouse). We were sitting, one morning, the day after Shivaratri and Rangolal* bhaiya *offered me a quarter of desi liquor. I chose to take it and we were having the liquor in the courtyard where Munni* didi *and the children were cooking the meal.* Bhaiya *spoke about how he would celebrate Holi (with liquor only). Munni didi took this chance to poke him and sang the song (dancingly) in my presence. She knew very well that* bhaiya *would not say anything to her when I was there and she could easily remind him how his alcoholism makes her suffer, and also, I would get to know. I was really amused by this and couldn't resist appreciating her wit.*

[11]Bhagat *and* bhumkas *are persons who cure and heal many diseases and help exorcize possession by any (bad)-spirit.*

> The tribals have adapted themselves according to the Gond community they are living with, in an attempt to remain at par with the Gonds

(U5MR), the Malnutrition Status and the Maternal Health Status to understand the status of the basic healthcare practices of a place. The Public Health Centre (PHC) for Kewlajhiri is located at a distance of almost 6–7 km from the village at Neempani and that too with not many healthcare facilities. Rather, a majority of the people prefers to visit the private medical clinics located as far as 10–15 km away because they get quick relief, polite behaviour and have a shorter waiting period. This makes healthcare problematic, especially for the vulnerable and the poor sections of the villagers. Good facilities for institutional deliveries are available at the PHC in Ghoradongri town, almost 35 km away from the village.

The Interplay of Castes

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In this region, a typical village can be divided into four main caste categories: Brahmins (Pandits), Other Backward Castes (OBC), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Scheduled Castes (SCs). In general, Kewlajhiri is a forest village where, administratively, the STs form most of the

population, with a few OBC and SC families. No Brahmin family resides in the village; yet they influence the people from outside.

Adivasis believe that they are above the SC community in every respect. There is much discrimination against the *adivasis*, with respect to food and water and touch from the other castes, especially the OBC and the Pandits in Kewlajhiri. However, *adivasis* call the Yadavs *Gwalihun*—cattle herders, who make their livelihood from cattle; They do not consider the Yadavs as superior to themselves.

The ST families, on the other hand, say that STs do not match upto the social conduct rules of OBCs. OBCs label the *adivasis* as backwards, "*Yadav humare naam rakhte hai.* (Yadavs bad-mouth us behind our backs)." As per the OBC, the STs belong to the lowest strata of the caste hierarchy and consider the SC better than the ST. The SC women are not allowed to cook food for any other household in the village, not even in the *anganwadi*. However, it was interesting to note how the SC, ST and OBC women often meet in SHGs to save money. All these

categories believe that the caste system should exist.

Despite all these colours, there is still some blurriness. Kamla Bai is from the Yadav community. She wears *kadhi* (in the legs) and a 16-gauge saree (*lugda*); she has also inscribed the traditional Gond tattoo on her arms. Initially, I thought that she was a tribal. Later, I observed that all the Yadav women have adopted the tribal language (Gondi/Parsi[12]), jewellery and the way of wearing a saree. They even go to the *bhagat* to get rid of evil spirits. However, very few like Kamla Bai have marked their body with tattoos (*gudwana*).

The tribals have adapted themselves according to the Gond community they are living with, in an attempt to remain at par with the Gonds, especially because they are residing illegally on tribal land. I also observed that the OBC girls never mix with the Gondi girls, and hardly come out of their house and homesteads. However, the boys from the Yadav community do mix with other boys in the village frequently while maintaining their identity as Yadavs. In

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[12] *The Gonds named their language as Parsi, it is not literally Parsi.*

Money brings a change in their thinking. They don't like to go to other people's houses to watch TV. They want their own, something which, in some ways, affects the cohesion of the community.

Kewlajhiri, my encounter with the interplay of castes was no different than the mainstream norms prevalent in society; however, yes, now people have learned to wear masks in front of each other for their own interests.

The Economy

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People earn their living in many different ways. Kewlajhiri Jamun Dhana has not received many agricultural benefits, except access to forest for fuel wood, *kisan* credit cards, and cooperative societies. Their livelihood options are selling fuel wood, collecting non-timber forest produce (NTFP) such as *mahua* flowers, *mahua* seeds, *tendu* leaves, *achar*, *aonla*, dried *bel*, or *mahka*, and *chakota* seeds, working as labour in the forest nursery, rearing mulberry worms, crop remuneration after crop loss, grazing cattle, cultivating vegetables, selling grain and animals, selling milk and milk products, earning wages from road construction and other works, selling fruit (guava, lemon, tamarind, papaya, etc.) and doing subsistence farming or migrating for work to the cities.

No one goes to bed hungry because almost all of them have land; moreover, the forest is always there to feed them. What is difficult, however, is to work hard constantly in a forest village; and they always find some way or other to arrange their food for subsistence by growing seasonal vegetables in their homestead. Weekly market purchases include edible oil, salt, potato, onion, garlic, spices, some leafy vegetables and toiletries.

Only 30 per cent of the 43 households in Jamun Dhana grow cash crops (raising mulberry silk worms and selling cocoons in the mulberry collective). For a very few families like Geeta Bai's, it has proved to be economical, "For the coming year, the kids are asking for a television set. They say that it is a must in the house, and they don't like watching TV in other people's homes. So, this time we will listen to them."

Some of the activities that a few people like Geeta Bai are adopting give them monetary returns; with this, their desires too are changing. Money brings a change in their thinking. They don't like to go to other people's houses

to watch TV. They want their own, something which, in some ways, affects the cohesion of the community.

The circulation of money and the market exchange are making the situation even worse for the community at large. Those who are well-off (not even 10 per cent[13] of the total families of Jamun Dhana) are the least affected by any small changes in the market because they have many sources of income. The poor families, however, with limited sources of income, are the most affected ones, even with the slightest changes in any aspect of their lives.

The economic aspect of their lives is greatly impacted by governmental practices. Some well-off families in Jamun Dhana accessed policies such as orchard plantations, old-age pension scheme, and widow pension scheme and became well-off. However, being able to access these schemes entails several visits to the *panchayat* and the banks. It costs almost twice as much to get the amount they get as pensions. These policies actually get implemented at the

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[13]*I calculated during the survey conducted in the first stay.*

cost of the probable, local, coping strategies of the people.

The Polity

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Madhya Pradesh has been ruled by a stable government, with the leading political parties being the Indian National Congress, the Bharatiya Janata Party, the Madhya Pradesh Kisan Mazdoor Adivasi Kranti Dal, the Madhya Pradesh Vikas Congress, and the Pragatisheel Bahujan Samaj Party. The current Madhya Pradesh government has faced criticism for being under the guardianship of its fountainhead organization, the RSS. However, except during the elections, I hardly see the people of Jamun Dhana taking active part in the current trend of politics. They have their own way of interaction in this current political scenario.

Several times the villagers interacted with government officials when they wanted to access government policies or make citizenship claims. As residents of a forest village, they have frequent interactions with the forest Beat Officer. At one point of time, the relations between the villagers and the Beat Officer became so bitter over the distribution

of the payment for *tendu patta* collection that the women of the SHG (with the support of the PRADAN Executive) went to the Collector, praying for direct payment into their accounts. That was, apparently, a scary and humiliating experience for the women as well as the Executive. However, despite all the obstacles they faced, the payment finally began coming into their accounts.

A year later, due to the 'village action-plans' facilitated by PRADAN, the villagers again had to knock at the doors of the *panchayat* office. This time they went with an application for the construction of a road (measuring almost 2 km) from Khadara Road to their village. Their application was not accepted by the *panchayat* nor were they told the reason for the rejection. They were sent to the Beat Office repeatedly. The people came to know that the Forest Department had already issued a 'No Objection Certificate' to the *panchayat* many years earlier and, thus, it had no say in the road-construction within the forest village. The villagers felt really cheated.

After some rounds of to and fro, they finally knocked at the doors of the Collector's Office again (the earlier Collector had

been transferred meanwhile), remembering the success they had met with the last time. They made three or four trips and were not allowed to meet the Collector. Finally, one day they waited for the Collector and sat on a strike for almost half a working day. Ultimately, seeing the large gathering on strike, the Collector was compelled to come outside his office and meet them.

Just as the earlier Collector had done, the new Collector spoke very roughly to the people. After many questions and counter-questions, the officials checked the old documents and it was discovered that the road had not been built due to the reluctance of the officials and various departments.

The villagers 'repaid' the reluctance and inefficiency of the old *sarpanch* by defeating him in the *panchayat* elections in 2014. They elected a new candidate, who had earlier lost the elections three consecutive times, and said, "We will see what he does. We have elected him this time. He says he will work. If he does not, we will see that he also loses after five years."

It was pretty interesting to see the Gond headmen bringing the

matters of the Gond *panchayat* to the administrative *panchayat*. When the elders of the Gond tribe were asked about their Gond *panchayats*, they themselves sounded disappointed with their representative. One of them said, "Nowadays, it is immaterial whether we have our *jaati-panchayat* or not. That only exists in name. Whatever work happens, is getting done by the *sarkari panchayat*."

Another elder from the family of the Gond Mukaddam[14] said, "The present Mukaddam also abides by the *sarkari panchayat* nowadays. A separate *jaati panchayat* is redundant these days, and gradually, it will cease to exist, we think." The first elder said, "The *jaati panchayat* does not function beyond the clan or *jaati*, and these are the times of the *sarkar*. The stronger the *sarkari panchayat* is becoming, the more the *jaati panchayat* is fading away. We don't know what will happen in the coming days!" Clearly, the elders have no hope in or expectations of their own *jaati panchayat*. They believe that all the work is being done by the *sarkari panchayat*. The young in the village say, "There is a *jaati panchayat* in the village covering two hamlets; we have never experienced it," that is,

they have not seen it working on any issues yet. For them, the *panchayat* is the *sarkari panchayat*, an institution they can approach for work.

Sumit Guha, tracing the history of British governance, noted, "The *maai-baap sarkar* (Wikipedia describes it as "a style of government that is a benevolent dictatorship or nanny-state") needed a more grateful set of children and, by the 1930s, the 'child-like' aborigines were the best available candidates for the role." (Guha 1999, 185). And the moniker of '*maai-baap*' government is true in many situations because, in a sense, its role is to protect their children's vulnerability and dependencies. The response, "*Ab to sarkar ka jamana hai*" (It is now government's time) touches this issue of dependency of their beneficiaries.

Thus, to summarize, the transformations are a function of complex and mutually reinforcing networks of ecological, economic, political and cultural processes and at the intersection of all of these are the everyday lives of the people. At this junction the question that comes to my mind is what significant role does the

government play in this entire process? Does it actually intend to bring in well-being in people's everyday lives, thus enabling people to lead their lives or has it actually acted in a detrimental way against the promised well-being thus incurring the atrocities upon the entire society? This is a question which we need to ponder upon in the course of time.

The ecological changes (felling of trees and charcoal making), started during the British rule, have changed the way the people see their livelihood practices. These were, indeed, policy level changes and the process is still unfolding. Not only the people but the forest also is paying the price of the forest laws. The trees, and the land on which the trees grow, both are now mostly under the control of the Forest Department and the recognition of the life-support role that the forests play in the lives of the people is limited to a handful of *adivasis*, who know the importance of medicinal plants and some activists.

The people, their caste dynamics, and the increasing desire to emulate the so-called elite way of living amidst a malfunctioning

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[14]*Mukaddam is the word used to denote the head of Gond jaati panchayat.*

> Those fascinated by the trappings of modernity and modernization started believing that they were different and that they were not good enough and they wanted to be better.

panchayat with selective policies—all evoke a sense of frustration for the situation and are an indication of compromised governance practices. The houses, modern apparel and accessories, food, TV and radio, motorcycles, dowry and high expenditure in weddings are all reflective of the transformation caused by governmental interventions and its consumerist market mechanism.

People are still negotiating each and every aspect of their lives and coming to terms with changing notions. For a while, Kewlajhiri's isolation acted as a natural protection against the changing tide but it is now experiencing a state of transition from wilderness to 'so-called' development and civilization with new governmental interventions, becoming socially overloaded, and running after money to get economically stable.

Conclusion

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Transformation has occurred in every aspect of tribal life in Kewlajhiri. The labels of modernity have their own politics embedded in it. However, it is also very impotant for us to think about what we consider modern,

developed and development. Do we ever see eating or defecation or taking a bath and maintaining personal hygiene as a global or universal thing? I think many readers will smile at this question. But in this progressive world we are witnessing a change in the food (either items, habits, fads or the nourishment) that is being consumed, table manners, sanitary products being used, apparel and codes and conduct of dressing, conversation and many such things as modern and developed. All these aspects of life and the related values and notions are seeing a transformation with the people aspiring to become 'modern'.

The initiation of such patterns of dependency began during the colonial rule or may be before that, and with more than six decades of independence and citizens' rights being guaranteed by the Constitution, it has multiplied across the arena of everyday life, even in a forest village. In Jamun Dhana, the external differences (as they appear to an outsider's eye), are now fading away as modernity arrives with electricity, mobile phones, banks, hospitals, transportation and ideas, but the fear and frustration of not

achieving the aspired modern standards still remain ingrained, deep within the hearts of the people, even for me at times.

In what ways can fear be transformed into confidence? What possible praxis may help us to stand up and raise our voice? These questions left me standing at the junction of hope and despair, action and frustrations at times. Throughout my village stay and study, one thing that was evident was the belief of the villagers that 'we are different' and this difference is always going to be there. However, I realized that their lives are not very different; the only difference that I saw was in the availability of facilities and the exposure to external environments. Those fascinated by the trappings of modernity and modernization started believing that they were different and that they were not good enough and they wanted to be better.

Kewlajhiri and its inhabitants have led me to think of what actually is needed to live life in peace and happiness. To what extent will this *jamana* move ahead? How modern are we really and how modern do we desire to become? Are we as modern as we claim to be? For the people

The governmental categorization of people as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, forest villages and revenue villages makes it easier to govern people; and the governmental interventions, as welfare measures for these categories, exist as an image of the state.

of Kewlajhiri, even I am a part of that modern *jamana* because I too own some of the things that they desire.

I find this interplay of boundaries true for the people of Kewlajhiri. I find that the question existing between the two worlds of 'who they are to others' and 'where they stand in one group or another' is politicized by some religious as well as political groups, who literally drag them to their sides—are they Hindus or are they Christians? Probably they are neither of these two, and nor are they pure Adivasis now. Santulal *bhaiya* said, "We are not completely *adivasi*. We have become half *adivasi*. Neither do we have full knowledge of ourselves, nor do we want to know about ourselves. It is just carrying on like that…and in schools, everything is being

taught in Hindi and that is why the children are forgetting Gondi. Moreover, people bring brides from outside the village, who have studied Hindi in their schools. Look at my wife, she does not speak Gondi, but she understands Gondi…and the government works are done in Hindi only… and you people speak English, isn't it?"

As Santulal *bhaiya* says, they have become half-*adivasi*— the horizonless, colourless, stateless, rootless, (Hall 1990, 226) diaspora with a positioned cultural identity at the cutting edges of the development—being continuously de-shaped and re-shaped by the developmental and governmental rationalities. The governmental categorization of people as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, forest villages and revenue villages makes it

easier to govern people; and the governmental interventions, as welfare measures for these categories, exist as an image of the state.

However, whether these interventions are actually supporting them or not remains a point of developmental debate. Generation after generation, we are becoming more exposed to global premises, in terms of values or life-styles or daily life-practices. Many new acts and laws facilitate the changing of our practices and we slip into measuring development in terms of these new attributes of a globalized assemblage of governmental practices.

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Women farmers of Bhandaro village collectively prepare the organic mixture (p. 32)

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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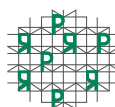
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Deepak Kumar demonstrate the use of pheromone traps to the women farmers in Bhadaro village, Kathikund, Jharkhand

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