Changing Places, Creating Spaces:
Santali Women in Local Level Politics in Rural India.

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Contents

Abstract

This thesis analyses the impact that a 33% women's quota in local level politics has had on a tribal population in India. It is based on ethnographic research in a majority Santali village in northern Odisha, India. Using Marxist and Foucauldian categories, I assess the manner in which state imposed systems of governance interact with tribal governance structures and analyse how women outside of the political process have benefited from women's political presence in local governance structures. In using Batliwala's (2007) definition of 'empowerment' I analyse the extent to which the 33% women's quota in local governance has challenged ideologies, changed patterns of access and control over resources and transformed institutions.

Through assessing the numerous power relations within a Santali community, I show the degree to which women's entry into politics through a quota system has changed the manner in which society functions. My ethnographic research shows the obstacles that elected women continue to face, and the formal and informal strategies they employ to overcome these obstacles and fulfil their roles and responsibilities as elected representatives. I illustrate the complex web of power which ultimately prevents women outside of the political realm from benefitting from an increased women's presence in local level politics. However, I also show how these power dynamics are shifting as women deepen their participation in formal decision making structures. As India increases its 33% women's quota in local governance to 50%, the power women continue to gain from this process will depend on the extent to which key lessons learnt from implementing the 33% reservation are incorporated into the new directive, and the extent to which macro level external influences impact on social change in the area.

List of Acronyms

AICC	All India Congress Committee
APL	Above Poverty Line
APRA	Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana
ASECA	Adivasi Social Education and Cultural Association
BJD	Biju Janata Dal
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BPL	Below Poverty Line
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
CPI	Communist Party of India
CPI (M)	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
CPI (Maoist)	Communist Party of India (Maoist)
CPI (ML)	Communist Party of India (Marxist – Leninist)
CYSD	Centre for Youth and Social Development
DPC	District Planning Committee
FIR	First Information Report
GONGO	Government Organised Non-Governmental Organisation
GP	Gram Panchayat
IAY	Indira Awas Yojana
JSY	Janani Suraksha Yojana
KAMS	Krantikari Adivasi Mahila Sangathan
MCC	Maoist Communist Centre
MLA	Member of the Legislative Assembly
MPLADS	Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme
NAWO	National Alliance of Women
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NREGA	National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
OBC	Other Backward Caste
OREGS	Odisha Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme

PDS	Public Distribution System
PESA	Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas
PRI	Panchayati Raj Institution
SC	Scheduled Caste
SEZs	Special Economic Zones
SHG	Self Help Group
SLFP	Sri Lanka Freedom Party
ST	Scheduled Tribe
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VEC	Village Education Committee
VHP	Vishwa Hindu Parishad

Glossary

Adivasi: Indigenous population of India. The term means "original inhabitants."

Above Poverty Line (APL): APL is a government categorisation for families who are above a certain income threshold and therefore are not entitled to social welfare benefits.

Anganwadi: The anganwadi centre is a state sponsored child care and mother care centre. The anganwadi system is mainly managed by the anganwadi worker. She is a health worker chosen from the community and given four months training in health, nutrition and child care. Anganwadi workers provide outreach services to poor families in need of immunisation, healthy food, clean water, clean toilets and learning environment for infants, toddlers and pre-schoolers.

ASECA: ASECA is the Adivasi Social Education and Cultural Association, a Santali run association which promotes Santali culture.

Below Poverty Line: This is a Government of India administrative term. Families who are below a certain income threshold are entitled to social welfare benefits if they have a BPL card. However, as of 2013, the Government of Odisha was still using a Below Poverty Line list that was devised in 1997. A subsequent poverty line census was carried out in 2002, but at the time of writing this list has not yet been finalised. The criteria for measuring poverty during the 1997 census was based on consumption rather than income, based on a calorie intake of 2400 calories in rural areas and 2100 calories in urban areas. A number of households were automatically excluded from the census: families who earned more than Rs20,000 (€333) a year, who had more than two hectares of land, or who had a television and a refrigerator. According to the Department of Health and Family welfare, 47.15% of the population in Odisha live below the poverty line.

Block: A Block is a district sub-division within the Indian Administrative system.

Bongas: Santali word for "spirits".

Bojini: Bojini is a festival that is usually celebrated by Santals during the month of March. During the festival, the Santals worship a spirit called Jogini in order to protect them from disease.

Dalit: A Dalit is the term used for a section of Indian society traditionally considered 'Untouchable'. The Constitution of India recognises them as 'Scheduled Caste'.

Dain: A dain is a Santali word for witch. In Santali culture, only women can be accused of being witches.

Disham Pargana: Top tier of Santali governance structure within the Santal Majhi system

Diwali: is a five day Hindu festival, also known as the "festival of lights".

Durga Puja: is a Hindu festival during which time the Hindu goddess Durga is worshipped.

Godet: is the village messenger within the Santal Majhi system.

Gram Panchayat: Village level tier of the Panchayati Raj Institution. It usually covers a population of up to 5,000 citizens.

Gram Sabhas: Village level meetings as part of the Panchayati Raj Institution. The Gram Sabha serves as the principle mechanism for transparency and accountability and is required to meet at least twice a year at the village level.

Handia: Santali word for rice wine.

Indira Awas Yojana: Social welfare programme to provide housing for the rural poor in India.

Jaher Ayo: Santal goddess.

Jaher Gar: The Jaher Garh is a sacred Sal tree area where Santals worship. It is usually located at the edge of Santal villages.

Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY): JSY is a Government of India scheme to encourage hospital births in order to reduce infant and maternal mortality.

Kali Puja: A Hindu festival dedicated to the Hindu goddess Kali.

Lok Sabha: Lower House of Indian Parliament

Majhi: Santali Village Leader.

Majhi system: In Santal communities, law and order is maintained through a three tier structure of customary courts beginning with the village court, which consists of a gathering of all male heads of households, and is presided over by the Majhi. Beyond this level is the Pir, which is a meeting of Majhis of up to sixty villages in the area, presided over by the Pir Pargana. The final level is the Disham, involving all the Pir Parganas from the area, presided over by the Disham Pargana. The posts of Majhi and Parganas were hereditary, but they are now slightly more democratic and are elected by the male members of the community on the basis of their knowledge of customs, maturity and fairness in dealing with disputes.

Marang Buru: Santal god.

Moneka Turuik: Santal god.

Naib Sarpanch: Elected representative who is the assistant to the Sarpanch.

Naike: Santali Priest.

Nirmal Gram Puraskar Award: an award given to individuals, organisations and gram panchayats who have been the driving force for effecting full sanitation coverage for a geographical area.

National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA): A job guarantee scheme which stipulates that the state is responsible for providing 100 days employment per year per rural household paid at the minimum wage. NREGA is now called the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), but at the time of research in Odisha, it was referred to as NREGA.

Odiya: Official Indian language, mainly spoken in the state of Odisha.

Ojhas: Santal village healers.

Olchiki: Santali script.

Other Backward Caste (OBC): OBCs are described in the Indian constitution as "socially and educationally backward classes". OBCs are citizens who are not the most marginalised in Indian society, but have been recognised as citizens who have been exploited or marginalised in the past, which has resulted in their comparatively low economic condition.

Palli Sabha: Hamlet level meeting for all villagers in the hamlet to attend within the Panchayat Raj Institution.

Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI): System of local governance in India comprising of four tiers of government (Hamlet, Village, Block, District). Through these structures local people can influence official governance processes, including decisions on the utilisation of government development funds.

Panchayat Samiti: Middle tier of Panchayat system of local governance. This is the elected body covering between 10-20 gram panchayats.

Puja: Religious ceremony.

Pir Pargana: Middle tier of Santali governance structure within the Santal Majhi system.

Rajya Sabha: Upper House of Indian Parliament

Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST): Population groupings specifically recognised by the Indian Constitution. They represent the most marginalised and vulnerable populations in Indian society, largely due to their history of exclusion. SCs are also known as Dalits, and STs are also known as Adivasis. SCs and STs are entitled to a number of benefits through various government schemes. For example, there is a reservation system for SCs and STs in government jobs and for elected positions through the 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution.

Salwa Judum: A group of tribal youth who received training and support from the Chhattisgarh state government to counter the Maoist movement.

Scheduled Area: A Scheduled Area is an area that has a majority population of Scheduled Tribes

Sohrae festival: Santal festival which is celebrated after harvesting the main rice paddy crop

Ward Member: The hamlet level is the first tier of local level participation in the panchayat system, comprised of a "ward". A ward member is the elected chairperson of the ward, which usually includes up to 250 voters in an area.

Zilla Parishad: District level tier of the panchayat system. This usually covers between 4 - 10 Blocks and is the link with the state government.

Introduction

"Woman is the companion of man gifted with equal mental capacities.
She has the right to participate in the minutest details of the activities of man,
and she has the same rights of freedom and liberty as he…By sheer force of a
vicious custom, even the most ignorant and worthless men have been enjoying
a superiority over women which they do not deserve and ought not to have"
(Mahatma Gandhi, Young India, 26th February 1918 quoted in *Towards Equality*,
Committee on the Status of Women in India, 1974: 284).

Gender inequality is persistent in every domain examined (son preference,
education, age at marriage, spousal age differentials, employment, female
household headship, women's access to resources, gender relations in the
household, women's participation in decision making and spousal violence).
"Women are disempowered both absolutely and relative to men" (Ministry of
Health and Family Welfare, 2009: 126).

While Gandhi propounded the ideals of gender equality in 1918, socio-political differentials
between men and women in India continue to persist, as can be seen from the 2009 quote by the
Ministry of Health and Family Welfare above. Gandhi's ideals of democracy and secularism
have materialised to some extent in India - it is the only country in the world where the Prime
Minister is from a minority religion (Sikhism), the head of the leading political party is a
Christian woman, the presiding officer of the Lower House of Parliament (the Speaker) is a
Dalit[1] woman, the Vice President is Muslim and between 2007 and July 2012 the President was a
Hindu woman. However, even though minority and marginalised communities are now
represented in positions of authority, these communities continue to be disempowered in many
ways.

India has attempted to create a system of democracy where people are at the centre of decision
making. This is seen through Article 40 of the Indian Constitution, which states, "The state shall

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[1] A Dalit is the term used for a section of Indian society traditionally considered 'Untouchable'. The Constitution of
India recognises them as 'Scheduled Caste'.

take steps to organise village *panchayats*[2] and endow on them such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government" (Government of India, 2007: 50). The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act in 1993 brought in a deeper level of multi-level federalism and widened the democratic base of Indian politics[3]. The aim of the Act is to strengthen people's participation through the *panchayats*, providing a key opportunity for improving government activities by empowering people to demand better services in education, health, watershed and forestry programmes. Communities can now take responsibility for ensuring that services are delivered efficiently and effectively and development and poverty eradication programmes are now vested in the *Panchayati Raj Institutions*[4] (PRIs). This decentralisation afforded by the 73rd Amendment has the potential to make the necessary resources and decision making powers available to even the most marginalised communities if democratic values and practices are promoted by the PRI representatives.

To ensure women's issues are taken into consideration, the Indian Constitution now incorporates a number of affirmative action policies, including a 50% quota system for women in *panchayats*, through the 73rd Amendment. In India, a gender quota is more commonly referred to as "women's reservation" or "reservation for women". Therefore this term will be used throughout this thesis. When the 73rd Amendment was passed by the Indian Parliament in 1993, it included a 33% women's reservation. This was subsequently increased to 50% in 2010. Differing types of women's reservation systems now exist in over one hundred countries, most of which have been implemented since the early 1990s (Franceschet et al, 2012). The effectiveness of these women's

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[2] The *panchayat* is the lowest unit of local self governance in India.
[3] See details of the 73rd Amendment in Annex 3
[4] PRI are *panchayat* level governance structures through which local people can influence official governance processes, including decisions on the utilisation of government development funds.

reservation systems in providing opportunities for increased women's representation and women's empowerment has been debated globally for over four decades, with evidence now available to demonstrate both the positive and negative impacts of such systems. Franceschet et al (2012) maintain that while reservations for women may be effective in increasing the numbers of women in politics, they ultimately provide a simplistic answer to the complex issue of women's historical exclusion from political life. The complexities of this issue have therefore resulted in contradictory evidence of the overall benefits of women's reservation systems.

There is some evidence to show that reservation systems are more effective in proportional representation electoral systems and in decentralised political structures (Franceschet et al, 2012; Birchall et al, 2010, Powley, 2008). However, to understand the impact of a reservation system, it is necessary to understand the historical and cultural processes which led to the implementation of such a system, as well as understanding how the system is implemented in practice. This makes comparing the impact of reservation systems across countries extremely difficult, as they are based on different historical and cultural processes, and are often implemented within extremely different political systems and in communities with very different attitudes to gender equality and the role of women in society. This is not to mention the different methodologies used in research on reservation systems – thus making comparisons more complicated, and not always possible (Franceschet et al, 2012).

There are a significant number of case studies and statistics highlighting the positive impact of women's reservation systems. Coelho et al (2008) maintain that women's reservations are a key strategy for addressing the numerous barriers women face in entering politics. When reservation

systems are implemented, political organisations are obliged to "find, train, nominate and field women candidates in large numbers" (2008:22). "They have forced open doors that otherwise might have allowed only a few privileged or extraordinary women to squeeze through" (ibid).

Some studies claim that women's political participation and representation in decision making can ensure more equitable policy outcomes (Hoare and Gell, 2009), lower levels of women's poverty (Baden, 1999), and increase the focus on gender based violence (Whitman and Gomez, 2009; Hoare and Gell, 2009). Women's participation has led to assigning higher priority to women's, children's, and family issues and are more likely than their male colleagues to initiate related bills (Pearson, 2008; Whitman and Gomez, 2009; Powley, 2008; Hoare and Gell, 2009). For instance, in Norway, female members of Parliament brought about the 'politics of care', "which obligates the state to increase publicly sponsored child-care services, extend parental leave and flexible working, and improve pension rights for carers" (Hoare and Gell, 2009:2).

Other benefits of increased women's participation include improved public opinion of women's abilities, more accountable governments (Whitman and Gomez, 2009), and greater confidence of women outside of the political sphere in engaging with political processes (Birchall and Noble, 2010). As Alcantara Costa (2010: 25) notes "with a few women in politics, women change, with a lot of women in politics, politics change".

In the Indian context, the case studies in Bhattacharjya's (2009) *Sarpanch Sahib* outline examples of changing household dynamics as a result of women's reservation systems. Bhattacharjya (2009) maintains that women are no longer dependent on their husbands to make

decisions, which she argues is a direct result of the women's reservation. A report by the Department of Women and Child Development claims "increased female political participation has ensured that issues such as health, nutrition, family income and education have taken centre stage in the village development boards and other governance structures" (2007: 113).

A UNDP (2009) report, which includes a study of capacity building of elected women representatives in Odisha, concludes that the experience in Anugul district of Odisha has been a positive one: "while 33% of seats are reserved for women, in Anugul district, women contested 42% of the seats and were elected to 40% of them. Furthermore, as cluster meetings began to focus on social issues such as domestic violence, harassment for dowry and the opening of liquor shops, the participation rate of women increased" (2009: 49). This UNDP report highlights the importance of the support required in order to ensure that the women's reservation is properly implemented and leads to political empowerment. As a result, as Hust (2002) maintains, "a reservation for women in political bodies can only be an enabling condition for the larger good of women's empowerment" (2002: 5). As power permeates all aspects of society, women's reservation systems alone cannot lead to female empowerment.

In contrast to the positive impacts highlighted above, other scholars have argued that women's reservations have not in fact changed women's position in the household or wider communities (Batliwala, 2007; Beaman et al, 2012) and can actually reinforce existing hierarchies and power structures (Batliwala, 2007; Nielson, 2012; Mathew, 2002). Research by Beaman et al (2012) in West Bengal shows how, as a result of women's reservations, attitudes towards women as

elected leaders has changed, but attitudes towards women's role within the household has not changed, leading to women being overburdened with domestic chores and public roles.

Patriarchy within Indian society has led to a fundamental resistance to the idea of a reservation system for women in politics. For example, according to Mathew (2002), prior to the passing of the 73rd Amendment, resistance to the women's reservation system was based on four main grounds: disturbing the harmony of homes and family life; increased violence against women as they become more involved in public affairs; increased proxy leadership as men maintain real power even if women are elected to office; and finally the reservation system would not change existing power structures - "instead of Ram Singh, Ram Singh's wife will be there" (Mathew, 2002: 135). Other arguments, as summarised by Menon (1999: 28) in her analysis of arguments against the Women's Reservation Bill were that women should not be seen as a homogenous group, and therefore should "not be equated to socially backward communities" and that "such a measure would lead to demands from other groups/communities, which could pose a threat to national integration".

Both Doshi (2009) and Bhattacharjya (2009) argue that in many cases a female elected representative is not accepted as such in a patriarchal cultural context. "Even though there is organised pressure to elect women into positions of power, this has not necessarily led to a society willing to accept women as political entities, especially in rural areas" (Doshi, 2009: 49). Bhattacharjya (2009) expands on this point when she discusses the even greater challenges when women from lower castes and tribal areas are elected through a reservation system. She

highlights examples of where these women have faced opposition and severe threats from upper caste communities, and are denied entry into meeting venues because of their caste status.

Patriarchy has not only led to resistance to women's role in politics, it has also hugely impacted on the opportunities women have available to them. Hoare and Gell (2009) highlight a number of significant barriers to women's participation in the political arena including, amongst others, scepticism and mistrust of women's ability to lead; low levels of literacy; lack of financial resources and the overwhelming burden of reproductive labour within families that women living in poverty carry[5] (2009: 5-6).

It is crucial to understand the multiple barriers women face in both entering and being active members of political systems, as this helps us to understand some of the unintended consequences of quota systems. Paradoxical effects of women's reservation systems are outlined by Franceschet et al (2012) and Hoare and Gell (2009), where evidence has shown that while there is a general expectation for women to represent women's interests, this should not be assumed. There are multiple factors which may prevent women from highlighting women's issues in the public arena, including women's own political and ideological beliefs, the official party line which women are expected to follow, the barriers they face in ensuring their voice is heard in the political arena as well as social and cultural barriers which prevent them from highlighting issues which may be important to them. Women who are elected to public office may feel obliged to speak on behalf of women, or alternatively, they may try to overcome the stigma which can be associated with women's reservations systems and purposely avoid talking about women's issues if they feel that by doing so they will gain greater respect from their male

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[5] E.g. collecting fuel and water, cultivating subsistence crops

colleagues (Franceschet et al, 2012). Hust's (2002) research in Odisha, India, demonstrates the power issues which women may have to face in order to remain within the political arena. She highlights an example of a female elected representative who is aware of the alcohol problem in her area, and its direct relation to domestic violence, but is also aware that if she speaks out about this issue, she may not be re-elected because of the powerful influence of certain men in the area who benefit from the alcohol production and sale.

A further paradox, as highlighted by Franceschet et al (2012), is that elected women are not only expected to represent women, but they are also expected to be well educated and meet the professional criteria required to be elected to political office, as set by male political elites. As a result, they are likely to have more in common with their male peers than with the general population of women they are expected to represent.

The numerous complexities outlined above have sometimes led to perverse and unintended outcomes. It is therefore important to understand these complexities, rather than writing off women's reservations as inappropriate for increasing women's representation in decision making structures. Proponents of women's reservation systems maintain that this system is only one of a number of different initiatives which are necessary to ensure women's empowerment – the problem is that there is no clear blueprint which outlines the numerous other support mechanisms which are required alongside the implementation of women's reservation systems, and thus further research, within a feminist framework, is required in this area.

The women's reservation system, has again reached a peak of critical debate. At the local level in India, the 33% women's reservation in the PRI was brought into force through the 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution in 1993. In the eastern Indian state of Odisha (see map of location of Odisha and research area in Annex 1), this Amendment was subsequently implemented in the 1997 *panchayat* elections. However, in 2010, the Indian Parliament passed a law raising the women's reservation to 50%, which was implemented in the 2012 elections in Odisha. These elections brought in huge changes, as 64% of PRI representatives in the state are now women, and there are now two *panchayats* in Khurda district where 100% of PRI members are women.[6] Annex 2 provides details of the Amendments and Acts that are discussed in this thesis.

As the state of Odisha has had four elections since the introduction of the women's reservation, it is now crucial to assess its levels of success. Current global evidence highlights very mixed results of quota systems. Women's reservation systems s can have very different impacts depending on the political system to which they have been implemented, as well as the historical and cultural processes which led to their implementation and the cultural and social attitudes to gender equality prevalent within communities. While many studies were carried out on the impact of the reservation system in India when it was first implemented,[7] there has been very little recent evidence of its impact in Odisha, particularly in tribal communities, and globally according to Franceschet et al (2012), there has been very little research on which women actually benefit from quotas.

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[6] Personal communication with Trócaire Governance Programme Officer in Odisha, March 2013
[7] Research carried out between 1999-2012 include Hust (2002), Baviskar (2009), Chandrashekar (2009), Jairath, V.K and Sajja, S (2009), Joshi (2009), Kundu (2009), Mahanta and Sinha (2007), Mathew (2007), Mohanty, BB. (2009), Mohanty, M and Selden (2007), Panda (2009), Patil (2009), Shariff (2007), Singh, S. (2009), Singh, S.B(2009), Strulik, (2010), Suresh (2009), Thara Bhai (2009), Bonu et al (2011), and Beaman et al (2012).

Tribes in India also have their own political and social systems, which operate in parallel to the PRI. This also greatly affects the success of the women's reservation, as in many Indian tribes women play no formal political role. As the women's reservation increases to 50%, it is important to understand how effective this system has been in tribal communities in India.

This thesis attempts to answer a number of questions in relation to the reservation system in a tribal context: How do state imposed systems of governance interact with tribal governance structures? In what ways has the 33% and 50% women's reservation in local governance helped to empower tribal women? How has women's entry into local governance challenged ideologies, changed patterns of access and control over resources and transformed institutions? How have women outside the political process benefited from women's political presence in local governance?

In order to answer these questions, I conducted ethnographic research in a Santal community in the village of Maddur[8], Keonjhar district in Northern Odisha in 2010 and returned for a short follow up visit in 2013. This particular community has been electing women representatives to its local institutions since 2002. By analysing the women's reservation through the eyes of a Santali community, and drawing on Marxist and Foucauldian analysis to understand historical shifts in socio-cultural norms and practices, as well as local level encounters with state institutions, I highlight Santali women's formal and informal influence in local power structures.

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[8] The name of the village where I conducted my research and villagers names has been changed to protect their identities.

I also show how their views on women's involvement in politics impacts on their perceptions of the state and the subsequent success of the reservation system in these areas.

Taking into account the larger socio-political environment, as advocated by, amongst others, Agar (2008), Gledhill (2000), Wolf (1997) and Tilly (1985), I analyse the impact of political and social change on women's empowerment, thereby assessing the appropriateness of a reservation system in a tribal context, and the impact it has had on women's lives. My framework of analysis uses both Marxist and Foucauldian perspectives on power relations. I frame my understanding of 'empowerment' on Batliwala's (2007) definition of the term. Chapter 1 outlines these differing power perspectives, which are then used throughout the thesis. Chapter 2 outlines the functioning of the PRI, particularly highlighting some of the challenges relating to women's active participation in local level politics. Chapter 3 relates the general interpretations of the functioning of the PRI to my research in Maddur village. Chapter 4 focuses on the role of women in Santali institutions and their methods of informal influence. Chapter 5 analyses material gains through the changing patterns of access and control over economic and natural resources, highlighting political tensions in relation to water provision in the community, the effectiveness of government poverty alleviation schemes, as well as continuing inequalities in relation to payment of wages for men and women.

Through assessing power relations within a Santali community, I show the degree to which women's entry into politics through the reservation system has changed the social dynamics in the community. While elected women continue to face a number of obstacles, and the benefit women outside of the political realm have gained from this process has varied, the power

dynamics have shifted. How far these dynamics continue to shift will depend on the manner in which the challenges of implementing the 50% reservation are addressed and the extent to which other external influences impact on social change in the area. The remainder of this introductory chapter provides a description of Odisha and the village of Maddur in particular.

Odisha

Odisha is a state in eastern India, by the Bay of Bengal. It has a population of about 40 million, who mainly reside either on the fertile coastal plain, on the banks of the river Mahanadi, or in the western highlands which form part of the Chota Nagpur Plateau and the Eastern Ghats (Skoda and Otten, 2013). As Gupta, P. (2000) explains, prior to Mughal rule in the 1600s, Odisha was largely ruled by Hindu Emperors. The British subsequently occupied southern Odisha in the early 1760s, and the northern and western districts of the state were incorporated into the Bengal Presidency. Following local agitation for a separate state, the Province of Bihar and Odisha was formed in 1912 and in 1936; Bihar and Odisha were subsequently split into separate provinces. In 1950, Odisha became a constituent state in the Union of India (Gupta, P. 2000). Odisha has the highest percentage of tribal populations in India, whose customs have played a significant role in shaping political structures and cultural practices in the state. However, the increasing influence of Hinduism has undermined much of these practices, as the tribal governance structures and practices in tribal communities have weakened (ibid).

Odisha remains one of the poorest Indian states with 47.2% of its 40 million inhabitants living below the poverty line (Bhandari and Kale, 2007). The majority of these are Dalits and tribals (comprising 22% of the total population), usually referred to as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled

Tribes[9] (SC/ST), who face the brunt of unaccountable governance and social and economic discrimination and exploitation. Literature on India refers to indigenous populations as "tribes" or "*Adivasi*" (meaning first inhabitants), they are officially recognised in the Indian Constitution as "Scheduled Tribes" and in Government affairs this term continues to be used. As Guha (2007: 332) maintains, the concept "is politically uncontentious, and in common parlance to speak of a tribe or tribal does not have the pejorative connotations that it might have in some parts of Africa". Xaxa (1999) suggests that the administrative term has been adopted by tribals themselves to assert their identity, and in discussing development issues with villagers in Maddur, they used the term scheduled tribe. It is for this reason that I use this term throughout this thesis. Most STs live in small villages or remote habitations in the hills where their geographical isolation underlies much of their poverty. Freeman's (1979) work provides a vivid account of how marginality is manifested in reality, where upper caste communities deny Scheduled Castes use of public wells, entry to schools, upper caste shrines and force them to perform despised jobs such as scavenging, cleaning latrines and disposing of dead animals.

Along with caste and ethnic discrimination, gender discrimination is prevalent throughout the state and violence against women is a constant feature in daily newspapers. Cases of reported rape in Odisha increased by 17% between 2010 and 2011, while there were 127 cases of reported dowry related suicide in 2011, compared to 46 in 2010 (Odisha Diary, 2012). While this increased reporting could be a result of increased awareness of people's rights, and increased services in Odisha, the figures still show high levels of violence and discrimination towards

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[9] Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Scheduled Castes (SC) are population groupings specifically recognised by the Indian Constitution. They represent the most marginalised and vulnerable populations in Indian society, largely due to their history of exclusion. SCs are also known as Dalits, and STs are also known as Adivasis. SCs and STs are entitled to a number of benefits through various government schemes. For example, there is a reservation system for SCs and STs in government jobs and for elected positions through the 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution.

women across the state. Measuring the prevalence of violence against women is extremely difficult, due to the sensitivity of the issue, women's fear of reporting violence they have experienced, and stigma experienced by women who have survived violent attacks. However, it is clear that women from scheduled castes and tribes are often victims of a multiplicity of forms of discrimination and violence, as is outlined by Ms Rashida Manjoo's, the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, public address during her 2013 visit to India (OHCHR: 2013). Dalit and *adivasi* women's stories of violent experiences are far less likely to reach news headlines (Thekaekara, 2013), and as a result of their position in society, they are less likely to receive quality support and assistance by service providers. Odisha ranks well below the national average in terms of social indicators; in particular it has the highest infant mortality rate in India. The child sex ratio for age groups 0-6 in Odisha is very much skewed towards the male child – the recent 2011 census shows only 934 girls for every 1000 boys (down from 953 girls in 2001) (Pradhan, 2011).

Odisha is endowed with vast mineral deposits yet the state has not benefited from its natural wealth. Padel and Das (2010: 419) maintain that Odisha suffers from a "Natural Resource Curse", whereby rich natural resources lead to increased levels of exploitation. They show how there have been numerous cases of displacement due to land acquisition, less than fair compensation, loss of forest cover, loss of agriculture, degradation of land, and rapid introduction of commercial culture in Odisha. The Natural Resource Curse is based on the theory that a state can become rich through selling off its mineral resources. However, as Padel and Das (2010) demonstrate, selling natural resources has benefited a few to the detriment of the majority, as Odisha remains one of the poorest states in India. They subsequently argue that

poverty becomes an excuse for taking over land to make it more profitable in the long run. While there is an acknowledgement by those in power that there will be short term losses for the local population, they argue that it will ultimately help to draw more 'primitive societies' into the mainstream. As a result, this theory prioritises capitalist development over all other models of development and human rights considerations.

Padel and Das (2010) outline levels of exploitation from the very micro level of people preying on each-other's produce, but they also focus explicitly on the macro level exploitation of companies taking people's resources and land. High levels of exploitation have been particularly evident in bauxite mining, which has had huge environmental impacts and has resulted in human rights abuses as local villagers try to defend their land against state and corporate powers. Bauxite mining and exploitation in the Niyamgiri Hills area of southern Odisha, an area considered sacred by the Dongria Kondh tribe has made international headlines as a result of protests against the mining. These hills are part of the Fifth Schedule[10] area, which prohibits transfer of tribal lands to non-tribal people. Some of the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) involved in supporting the rights of local people have been blacklisted, face regular harassment, and labelled as terrorists as a result of their work. Both Vedanta and POSCO, international mining corporations, are currently engaged in mining activities in the state, despite huge local opposition to their presence.

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[10] The Fifth Schedule refers to Article 244 in the Indian Constitution, which provides rights and affirmative action to more than fifty tribes who are understood to be indigenous people of India.

Political and Religious Tension in Odisha

Maoism

Political and religious tensions are on the rise in Odisha. From West Bengal, the Maoist movement has spread to Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Andhra Pradesh through the activities of the Communist Party of India (Maoist) (CPI Maoist). The history of the Maoist movement in India is a complex one, and is generally outlined in three different phases (see Menon and Nigam, 2007; Banerjee, 2009; Shah and Pettigrew, 2009). The Maoist movement in India began in the Naxalbari area of West Bengal in 1967 as an uprising of peasant farmers against exploitative landlords. The protests spread to Bihar and Andhra Pradesh, and came to be known as the Naxalite movement, led by the Communist revolutionaries who formed the CPI Marxist-Leninist Party (CPI ML). This was subsequently suppressed during the Emergency period in the 1970s, but following the lifting of the Emergency, there was a split amongst the survivors of the movement, which led to its second phase. One group favoured participation in parliamentary elections and trade union activities (the Communist Party of India Marxist), while the other focused on armed struggle. The impact of the armed struggle movement spread during the 1980s and 1990s, and has now entered into what is known as the third phase of its history (Banerjee, 2009), through the formation of CPI Maoist in 2004. This group is made up of a number of different left wing groups which merged together (the People's War Group, the CPI ML and the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC)). This merger has resulted in a strengthened force which aims to capture state power through armed struggle in order to set up a "people's democratic state" and obstruct the Indian government's plans to set up Special Economic

Zones[11] (SEZs) which have resulted in massive tribal population displacement (Shah, 2009; Banerjee, 2009).

Mukherji (2012) claims that the CPI (Maoist) includes thousands of armed guerrillas who have gained military control of thousands of square kilometres of Scheduled Tribe habitats, generally referred to as the "red-corridor". In 2006, the Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh declared the Maoist movement the most serious internal threat to India's national security, and reiterated these concerns again in 2012 (Weightman, 2011; BBC, 2012). In 2009 the Indian government labelled the Maoists "terrorists", and officially banned their activities. The Maoists are mainly dominant in *Adivasi* (tribal) areas, which are more remote and underdeveloped. They claim to be supported by the poorest rural populations, and have frequently targeted corrupt contractors, police and government workers in what they say is a fight for improved land rights and more jobs for neglected agricultural labourers and the poor.

The Maoist movement has strengthened as inequality across India has worsened. As Mukherji (2012) maintains, it is an elite minority in India who have benefitted from national wealth, while a vast majority have become increasingly impoverished. As a result of neo-liberalism since the 1990s, a number of Indian corporations have entered the Fortune 500 club, and about 20% of the population has emerged as an affluent middle class. However, "the rest of India essentially turned into what the noted economist Utsa Patnaik has called the 'republic of hunger'" (Mukherji, 2012: eBook location 615-627). As a result of this rising inequality, Maoists have

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[11] Special Economic Zones are areas which are established to mass produce and export goods at globally competitive prices. These areas are exempt from national laws relating to taxation and customs/excise duties in order to ensure that goods can be exported at the lowest possible price. While providing employment, this is often at an extremely low wage with very little job security.

challenged the prevailing capitalist ideology through violence, and are willing to cause untold damage and death in a bid to stamp out corruption. Banerjee (2009), Padel and Das (2010), Shah (2010) and Mukherji (2012) all outline the very clear link between the rise in corporate exploitation through SEZs and strengthened Maoist revolt. However, these authors also outline some of the more nuanced implications and unintended consequences of these actions. Padel and Das (2010) caution that any protests against corporate power has now been labelled Maoist (and therefore "terrorist" by the state and media) in an attempt to crush all indigenous opposition to land acquisition and population displacement. Similarly, Shah (2010) maintains that through labelling protests as "Maoist", the state is able to suspend normal legal procedures. This could result in mass evacuations (as happened in Chhattisgarh) to wipe out "terrorists", which in the long run could be a useful excuse of the state to clear mineral rich land.

Shah and Pettigrew's (2009) research also highlights some of the more nuanced reasons why certain people join the Maoist movement – it is not always to revolt against economic reform. Other reasons include attraction to the Maoist theoretical ideology, but also the role of ancestral conflicts[12]. They highlight the example of dalits in Bihar who supported Maoism because they felt it was a way of overcoming caste violence which they were experiencing. Shah's (2010) work in Jharkhand outlines the role of rural elites in initially supporting the Maoist movement, as they saw it as a way of gaining protection to access the informal economy of state resources. Her research counters the popular misconception that the movement was supported by the rural poor.

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[12] Banerjee's (2009) research shows how the history of the 1855 Santal Hul Revolution was used by Maoists to encourage Santals to join the Maoist ranks.

Roy's work (2011) demonstrates the growing involvement of women within the Maoist movement through the *Krantikari Adivasi Mahila Sangathan* (KAMS), which now has 90,000 enrolled members. Roy (2011) maintains that many women who witnessed abuses carried out by the Salwa Judum[13] joined the People's Liberation Guerrilla Army and subsequently KAMS. Members of KAMS interviewed by Roy (2011) explained that joining the party became a way of escaping the suppression of their own societies. This then, highlights a broader debate of the Maoist cause and reasons why women in particular have joined the ranks. While these authors support the Maoists to different degrees, all of them counter the popular media portrayal of Maoists as "terrorists".

Mainstream media supports the state official line in the way in which Maoism is being addressed. The media reports that the 'Naxal menace' has spread to 15 of 25 states and in 180 of 600 districts (Mukherji, 2012). The mainstream media hostility towards the Maoists is outlined in Roy (2009) where she quotes a typical newspaper column titled 'Stamp out Naxals':

> "This government is at last showing some sense in tackling Naxalism.
> Less than a month ago, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh asked state
> governments to 'choke' Naxal infrastructure and 'cripple' their
> activities through a dedicated force to eliminate the 'virus'. It signalled
> a realisation that the focus on tackling Naxalism must be through
> enforcement of law, rather than wasteful expense on development" (2009:16).

Roy (2009) argues that the media portray a clear need to "exterminate" the Maoists, but her own writing provides a much more nuanced and human account of the Maoists and their work. Roy (2011) is suspicious of media claims that the state has control in Maoist areas. She gives the example of her time walking and camping with the Naxals in an area which the media were proclaiming was entirely under police control, yet in Roy's time there they did not come across

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[13] The Salwa Judum was a group of tribal youth who received training and support from the Chhattisgarh state government to counter the Maoist movement.

any police forces. In some ways, this exaggeration serves to further undermine the authority of the state – if the media are claiming certain districts are under police control, but Maoists are active in those same districts, citizens may place less trust in the protective role of the state, and the Maoists may be perceived to be stronger than the state.

While the Maoists are demanding justice on behalf of the marginalised and exploited, their methods and the state's response have created a sense of fear, and has undermined development efforts in the conflict affected areas. This will likely have an impact on levels of participation in the PRI. There are many parts of south west Odisha that are completely controlled by Maoists and government bodies are too afraid to work in these areas for fear of attack. According to the Odiya[14] *Samaja* (4th July 2009) newspaper, many PRI representatives in Malkangiri district in South Odisha are resigning in fear of the Maoists, as both the representatives and their relatives have been attacked and threatened. In the 2012 *panchayat* elections, the Maoists contested unopposed seats, and were elected as PRI members across 30 blocks within the state (PRI Update, March 2012). Evidence from the November 2012 PRI update shows that Maoists have prevented *Gram Sabhas*[15] from happening in certain *panchayats* "Maoists put up posters at several places asking locals to boycott the meetings" (PRI update, Nov 2012: 6). While the Maoists are fighting against exploitation and corruption, the state is trying to suppress their violence. In areas where the authority of the state has been undermined, implementing state welfare measures has not been possible (Mukherji, 2012).

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[14] Odiya is an official Indian language, mainly spoken in the state of Odisha.
[15] Village level meetings.

The violent state suppression of the Maoist movement, without addressing the underlying causes of the conflict, will not provide a sustainable solution and will only serve to further undermine the PRI. Mukherji (2012) maintains that the Maoist uprising should be understood as a part of the general phenomenon of democratic deficit. Mukherji claims that there has been a loss of democratic space in India since the State has started to suppress the Maoist movement, as people who protest against the state are often categorised as "terrorists" regardless of their alignment to the Maoist movement. Furthermore, while the PRI on paper is based on fundamental democratic principles, there are many issues relating to autonomy in funds, functions and functionaries which serves to undermine the democratic spaces that have been established through the PRI. These issues will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 2.

Nugent's (2010) analysis of the Peruvian state's attempt to suppress the *Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana* (APRA) has synergies with the manner in which the Indian state is attempting to address the Maoist movement. Drawing on the analysis of Abrams (1988), Mitchell (1991), and Ferguson and Gupta (2002) (amongst others), Nugent (2010) demonstrates both visible and invisible forms of power and the manner in which the APRA were able to undermine the Peruvian state. Nugent's framework relates to the power of secrecy – states maintain control through maintaining secrecy, and maintaining a boundary between state and society. However, Nugent shows how through the actions of the APRA, the boundary between state and society became blurred and the state was no longer able to demonstrate its secrecy, as it was required to show it knew everything about the APRA. When it transpired that the APRA had become a strong underground movement despite the state claiming the movement had been wiped out, the state's secrecy and subsequent authority was undermined.

With increasingly aggressive state suppression of the Maoist movement in India, there has been a subsequent, equally violent, Maoist backlash. The police operations Salwa Judum and more recently "Operation Green Hunt", have resulted in a massive deployment of forces to Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Odisha since November 2009. This operation has only resulted in increased retaliation from the Maoists. For example, when Home Minister P Chidambaram vowed to "wipe out the Maoists in two to three years" during a visit to the blood soaked West Bengal district of Midnapore, the Maoists subsequently killed eleven police officers in Koraput, South Odisha on April 4th 2010 and 76 Central Reserve Police Force Officers in Dantewada, Chhattisgarh, two days later. While the Indian state is openly trying to suppress the Maoists, the Maoists have gone underground, and in particular have established power in inaccessible areas such as Malkangiri district in Odisha, where the state has less visibility. When the Indian state tries to claim they are effectively 'wiping out' the Maoists, the movement demonstrates its strength through violence, thus undermining the power and control of the state.

Adivasis – marginalised and historically isolated – now find themselves caught in the middle of the Maoist uprising and the state suppression. Banerjee (2009) highlights the example of the armed vigilante group – the Salwa Judum – where the state recruited from amongst the tribal population to counter the Maoists. This meant that one group of tribals who showed allegiance to Maoists were fighting another group of tribals who were armed by the state. Moreover, Mukherji (2012) explains that tribal areas are now covered with hundreds of explosive devices planted by the Maoists, while state forces have set up hundreds of camps and occupied school buildings in preparation to attack. Thousands of *Adivasis* have been jailed on suspicion of being Maoists or aiding and abetting their cause – Mukherji (2012) maintains that most of these arrests are on

false charges. While some Santals may have joined the Maoist ranks, many are certainly now caught in the middle of the Maoist insurgency and the subsequent state suppression. One pertinent example is the case of Nabin Hembrum, who the Maoists apparently tried to kill in July 2010. Nabin escaped, but two Santal women, Kamala Hembrum and Saraswati were burnt alive (Times of India, 11th July 2010).

The Maoist movement has not yet directly affected Maddur village, but there are serious Maoist threats from neighbouring districts which, given the opportunity, could easily spread. During my research in 2010, there was already an increased police presence in neighbouring blocks, carrying out random questioning of tribal villagers. *Panchayat* offices in Keonjhar district have also been targeted by Maoists. Tension in the area had increased substantially between my visits there in 2010 and my return visit in 2013. As a result of the Maoist kidnapping of Italian tourists in 2012 (BBC, 2012a), foreigners' access to tribal areas has been severely restricted. The increased tension in the area also had an impact on the extent to which I thought it was safe to talk to villagers about Maoism[16].

Interestingly, Maddur's *Sarpanch*[17], Mahak Murmu, does not feel threatened by Maoism. She explained that when she reads in the papers about *Sarpanchs* being attacked, she knows they only attack the corrupt people, and they warn them first. She stated 'I feel safe because I don't like corruption'. Her views on this matter differ markedly from the official government line. Mahak seems to ascribe to the Maoists a sense of fair play through the warnings they give prior to any action.

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[16] My assessment of this situation was also in line with Sluka's (1995) advice of conducting research in potentially dangerous situations.

[17] A Sarpanch is a locally elected representative for a *Panchayat*.

Communal tensions

Religious and communal tensions are also a problem in Odisha. In 1999 the Government of Odisha adopted an amendment to the Freedom of Religion Act prohibiting all conversions without prior authorisation from the local police and the district magistrate. The rationale given was that this was intended to restrict forcible or unlawful conversion. Such a law affects Dalits in the majority, many of whom convert from Hinduism, trying to escape from being branded as "Untouchables" by their religion.

The Hindutva movement – calling for Hindu nationalism – is championed by the Sangh Parivar, a 'family' of Hindu right-wing groups (Chatterji, 2009)[18], that are particularly vocal against conversions to Christianity as it is seen as a threat to the Hindu nation. Chatterji (2009) and Blom Hansen (1999) maintain that the Hindu nationalist agenda was developed in response to British colonisation as Hinduism was conceived as a way of promoting an Indian national identity. However, as Chatterji (2009: 45-46) argues, it was also a "political design for a 'free India' where 'upper' class and caste Hindus could accumulate and maintain social, cultural, religious and vernacular power and privilege over religious and other minorities, and disenfranchised caste, Dalit and *Adivasi* people". As Menon and Nigam (2007) explain, unconverted Tribals are considered backward by other dominant groups, and therefore in some ways, conversion to Hinduism provides opportunities for upward mobility.

A relatively recent and particularly brutal example of the impact of this movement was the murder of Australian missionary, Graham Staines, and his two young sons, in Keonjhar district

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[18] While there is a vast literature on Hindutva, I draw primarily on Chatterji because her work is based on the experiences of tribal populations in Odisha. I draw on other prominent writers for a gendered perspective on the Hindutva movement in chapter 4.

in 1999. Dr Staines, the director of the Leprosy Mission in Baripada, Mayurbanj district, Odisha was accused of forcefully converting *Adivasis* to Christianity. He was burned to death with his two sons while they were asleep in his car. Dara Singh, the ring leader of the attack, was a member of the Bajrang Dal, a right-wing organisation which is based on the Hindutva ideology. According to Chatterji (2009: 251), Graham Staines' murder has acted as a "violent inspiration in enabling mobilisations in Keonjhar".

The Hindutva movement in Odisha has continued to grow in recent years. For example, in 2006, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), the national Hindu organisation based on the Hindutva ideology, met in Puri district and issued a statement on laws to be enforced to "ban cow slaughter, conversions to Christianity, and the 'infiltration of Muslims from Bangladesh'" (Chatterji, 2009: 48). As a result of the rise of the Hindutva movement, communal tension has been simmering for a number of years in Odisha. However, much of this tension relates to control over resources, while religion is used as a front.

Menon and Nigam (2007) maintain that there was a high level of involvement of *Adivasis* in the organised violence against Christians and Muslims in Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat, and they show how the Hindutva movement has used imagery of past Dalit and Tribal heroes "constructing them as warring identities against Muslim invaders" (2007: 39) and used them as part of the "Hindu identity". In response to the *Adivasi* involvement in the Gujarat violence[19], Shah (2010) describes the work of Jharkhandi indigenous rights activists to revive a different campaign highlighting the cultural autonomy of *Adivasis* from the Hindu mainstream. Chatterji (2009) highlights numerous examples of *Adivasis* who are forced to join the Hindutva movement

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[19] The Gujarat Violence refers to serious communal tension between Hindus and Muslims in 2002.

so that they can continue to be employed as wage labourers in Odisha. Her work also shows how Christians are regularly denied daily wage labour on the basis of their religious identity. A further issue relates to privileges accorded to Scheduled Caste communities through government affirmative action policies. These policies include quota systems within public service employment for Scheduled Castes. Current law stipulates that "no person who professes a religion different from the Hindu religion shall be deemed to be a member of a Scheduled Caste". Therefore, if Hindu Dalits convert to Christianity, they are currently denied affirmative action privileges. As Chatterji (2009: 117) maintains, "this rejection disregards that benefits reserved for Scheduled Castes and tribes are premised on feudal, colonial and postcolonial structural mistreatment of such peoples, not religion alone". Hindutva claims that Dalits have acquired economic benefits as a result of their Christianisation, and therefore continue to demand that Scheduled Caste privileges should only be available to Hindu Dalits. While Hindus in Odisha claim to feel threatened by the supposed rise of Christianity, in reality, it is the Hindu casted business community that maintains economic dominance in the area (Chatterji, 2009). There is thus a strong sense that this power will only be maintained through the maintenance of the Hindu nation. Therefore, while many *Adivasis* and Dalits claim that Hinduism is distant to them, as they become politicised and demand their rights, they are subsequently categorised as 'terrorist', 'Maoist' and 'militant' by the *Sangh Parivar* (Chatterji, 2009).

Communal tension came to a head in Odisha in December 2007 when communal violence between Hindus and Christians in the district of Kandhamal led to seven deaths and many homes and churches destroyed. Worse was to follow in August and September 2008 when Lakshmanananda Saraswati, the Hindu fundamentalist behind the December 2007 violence, and

four of his disciples were brutally assassinated. The *Sangh Parivar* blamed the Christian community for the attacks, while state authorities alleged the attackers to be Maoist (Chatterji, 2009). The murders lead to a huge backlash against the Christian community across the state but mainly in Kandhamal district. According to Chatterji (2009: 316), Hinduised *Adivasis* were mobilised to reclaim lands they claimed were appropriated by Dalit Christians, and they "decried Dalit Christian demands for equal wage, affirmative action and human rights as intrusions of a 'foreign' religion into Hindu culture and norm". 53,000 people fled their villages and up to 80 people were killed. Over 4,500 homes and 200 places of worship were destroyed across 450 villages (Trócaire, 2011). While the violence has now ended, tension and mistrust between both communities remains with land issues in the area unresolved. Even though the Maoist People's Liberation Guerrilla Army claimed responsibility for the murder, there remains a "disproportionate focus" on Christian community members within the Maoist group (Chatterji, 2012: 350).

Maddur

Maddur is a seven hour local bus journey (250km) from the Odisha state capital of Bhubaneswar – on a bus which stops every few kilometres to pick up and drop off people along with their goats and chickens. The village is comprised of three main hamlets,[20] and represents a microcosm of the larger context described above. The Santal tribe form the majority of the population, living mainly in two hamlets, Nayapalli and Bilaspur. The third hamlet is inhabited by Nayaks (from the Sounthi and Bathudi tribes). Santals, Sounthis and Bathudis are included in the list of Scheduled Tribes (ST) formulated by the Odisha Government. There are two other smaller hamlets, Dabari hamlet, which is included with Bilaspur hamlet for administrative

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[20] See maps of the village in Annex 4.

purposes, and the Majhi/Mohanta hamlet which is included with Nayapalli hamlet for administrative purposes.

According to the 2010 Block[21] office records, the total population of Maddur village is 927, consisting of 443 males and 484 females. As well as Santals and Nayaks, there are three Mohanta families in Maddur. In some Indian states, the Mohantas are categorised as ST, but in Odisha they are categorised as "Other Backward Castes" (OBC)[22]. These families have slightly larger land holdings than others in the community. While most Santals and Nayak families own less than five acres of land, one Mohanta family owns twelve acres. There is not an obvious preference for sons in the village, as the child sex ratios in the communities between February and September 2010, outlined in Annex 5, demonstrate. However, the gendered roles of men and women are markedly different as will be described throughout this thesis.

The majority of houses in Maddur are made from mud, with thatched roofs. Approximately 15% of houses in the village are made from bricks. The majority of villagers are involved in rice cultivation, but there is no formal irrigation system in the area, so the villagers are largely reliant on the monsoon rains to irrigate their crops. Insufficient rains in 2009 and again in 2010 resulted in reduced crop outputs. The neighbouring district, Mayurbanj, was categorised as drought affected by the Government of Odisha in 2010, and communities living in this area were entitled to some form of assistance from the state Government. However, villagers from Maddur, which

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[21] A Block is a district sub-division within the Indian Administrative system

[22] Other Backward Castes (OBCs) are described in the Indian constitution as "socially and educationally backward classes". OBCs are citizens who are not the most marginalised in Indian society, but have been recognised as citizens who have been exploited or marginalised in the past, which has resulted in their comparatively low economic condition. OBCs as outlined in the Mandal Commission (1980) are defined on the basis of 11 social, educational and economic criteria. See Deshpande (2010) for a succinct review of the complexities of OBC categorisation.

is situated in Keonjhar district, on the border with Mayurbanj, do not live in an officially categorised drought affected area, and were therefore not entitled to any compensation for their expected reduced crop output for 2011. The rainfall in 2011 and 2012 was equally problematic for villagers, and resulted in a price increase in rice due to its low production. According to Biswa Besra, a lawyer from the area, the price of rice on the open market in 2011 was Rs20 (€0.33)[23] per kg, but this increased to Rs30 (€0.50) per kg in 2012. While villagers cultivated both rice paddy and jute in the past, the insufficient and erratic rains in recent years have limited the community's output to rice paddy cultivation. However, some changes were evident during my return visit in 2013 – Sandeep Biswal, an elected *panchayat* representative, explained that a decision had been taken during the 2012 *Gram Sabha* to construct canals to improve irrigation. During my visit in February 2013, the construction had started from the Deo river, 10km from Maddur. If this construction is carried out properly, it is likely to have a positive impact for farmers in Maddur. However, as Padel and Das (2010) highlight, there has been a shift in government policy in Odisha over recent years to give preference to the water needs of corporate business over agriculture. While at the time of writing there are no major industrial developments in the area of Maddur, this is not to say that the water from the Deo river will be required for industrial development elsewhere, which could have an extremely negative impact for the villagers in Maddur.

Up until the late 1970s, Maddur was surrounded by dense forest, but there are now only a handful of trees in different parts of the village, as most trees were cut by locals who sold the wood for commercial use. Padel and Das (2010) highlight the role of the timber mafia in the deforestation of Odisha. They maintain that the timber mafia employ *Adivasis* to cut the trees,

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[23] Exchange rate based on average during my field research: Rs60= €1

but it is the mafia elite who benefit financially from the deforestation. Villagers have adapted to deforestation by burning leaves instead of wood for cooking. However, deforestation has resulted in some drastic changes in people's livelihoods, as they previously earned their incomes from selling forest produce, but are now reliant on purchasing these items and as a result they seek employment as daily labourers – making them vulnerable to exploitation by local contractors. Deforestation has compounded the effects of water scarcity, and has also had an impact on the resources Santals own, many villagers have had to sell their land because of lack of income.

Villagers in Maddur have very limited access to nutritious food. Most families eat two meals a day, mainly a meal called *pokara*, consisting merely of rice and water. Meat is only eaten during festivals and fruit and vegetables are seasonal. There are mango, jackfruit and *kendu* fruit trees in the area, and villagers make use of these when they are in season. Some families have small kitchen gardens, but these do not produce anything during the hot summer months. Malaria is a big problem in the area – while most families have mosquito nets, they tend to have only one net per family, which is insufficient.

Maddur has a number of important amenities, such as a primary school, middle school, high school and two *anganwadi* (health) centres[24]. One *anganwadi* centre is located in the Bilaspur hamlet, the other in the Nayak hamlet. The *anganwadi* centre in the Bilaspur hamlet opens regularly, and Santal children from both Bilaspur and Nayapalli hamlets attend it. Children aged

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[24] The *anganwadi* centre is a state sponsored child care and mother care centre. The *anganwadi* system is mainly managed by the *anganwadi* worker. She is a health worker chosen from the community and given four months training in health, nutrition and child-care. *Anganwadi* workers provide outreach services to poor families in need of immunisation, healthy food, clean water, clean toilets and a learning environment for infants, toddlers and pre-schoolers. They also provide similar services for expectant and nursing mothers. In Maddur, the *anganwadi* worker attends a block level meeting on the 9th and 10th of every month where she presents the birth, weight and death report for the village. The *anganwadi* worker in Maddur receives a monthly salary of Rs2000 (€33.33), and her assistant who cooks the food receives Rs1,000 (€16.66) a month.

between 3-6 years are given rice, dhal, and soya six days a week (the centre is closed on Sundays), and mothers of younger children below the age of three years collect food for their children. Pregnant women receive check-ups at the centre, are given 100 iron tablets, and receive two tetanus injections during their pregnancy. They also get a double portion of rice, dhal and soya beans on the 25th of every month until their child is six months old. However, the *anganwadi* centre in the Nayak hamlet is rarely open, mainly because the nurse who lives 6km away in Sabalpura has the key, and does not visit the village regularly. The Nayak *anganwadi* building is much bigger and better equipped than the small Bilaspur hamlet centre. The fact that this centre is locked so regularly is not only a waste of resources, but also impacts on the health and education of the Nayak community.

While there is a primary, middle and high school in the village[25], student drop outs are a problem, according to Mr Manas Majhi from the Bilaspur hamlet. He stated that many students leave school before they finish their education as they find paid work and their families are in need of the money. Sanjeev Mohanta explained that the main reason for drop outs is because the majority of the families are poor, and when both parents are working in the fields, their children have to stay at home to look after younger siblings or do the housework. Seasonal migration is another reason for student drop out, as some families migrate during the summer months to find work. Women are less likely to be as educated as men in the village. As of 2006, 150 men and 104 women from the village had completed primary school, 84 men and 40 women had

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[25] In India, children of the age of 3 – 6 years attend the *anganwadi* centre – the equivalent to pre-school education. Primary school starts at the age of 5 – 6 from Class 1, and continues to Class 5, when the child is usually 9 – 10 years. Middle school usually covers Classes 6 and 7, for children within the age range of 10 – 12 years. High school starts from Class 8 and continues to Class 10, when the child is usually 14- 15 years. In India, education is now free and compulsory for all children of the age 6 – 14 yrs. After class 10, a further two years of upper secondary education is termed "Plus 2", where students have the option of choosing a commerce stream, science stream or humanities stream.

completed high school and 78 men and 21 women had completed higher education (CYSD, 2006).

Electricity is available in the village, but most families cannot afford to use it. This was an issue many villagers spoke to me about during my return visit in 2013. In 2012, the *panchayat* introduced an initiative to provide all households with electricity. The connection is free for Below Poverty Line (BPL)[26] families, but they have to pay Rs3 (€0.05) per unit of electricity. However, as Manjit Hasda, the teacher in the local school, explained, there have been a number of issues with the implementation of this scheme. The Electricity Commission are supposed to conduct a survey in the community to decipher who is eligible for an electricity connection. However, the surveyors did not go door to door in the village, they merely used the *panchayat* BPL list (which is from 1997). This meant that some families who are actually eligible are not connected to the electricity grid as they are not officially on the BPL list.

Manjit explained that Above Poverty Line (APL)[27] families are also facing difficulties: these families have to pay for a connection, but as there is a long waiting list, some families are offering bribes so that they can be prioritised on the list. There is a further issue with false reporting of completed work: Manjit explained that in Bilaspur hamlet, only the first house at the

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[26] This is a Government of India administrative term. Families who are below a certain income threshold are entitled to social welfare benefits if they have a BPL card. However, the Government of Odisha is still using a Below Poverty Line list that was devised in 1997. A subsequent poverty line census was carried out in 2002, but this list has not yet been finalised. The criteria for measuring poverty during the 1997 census was based on consumption rather than income, based on a calorie intake of 2400 calories in rural areas and 2100 calories in urban areas. A number of households were automatically excluded from the census: families who earned more than Rs20,000 (€333) a year, who had more than two hectares of land, or who had a television and a refrigerator. According to the Department of Health and Family welfare, 47.15% of the population in Odisha live below the poverty line.

[27] APL is a government categorisation for families who are above a certain income threshold and therefore are not entitled to social welfare benefits

entrance of the village has been given an electricity connection, even though the list with the Electricity Commission maintains that all houses have been connected. Therefore, from the Government perspective the job is completed and staff have been paid, but in reality most houses still do not have an electricity connection.

There are nine tube wells in the village, but in 2010, only four of them provided access to safe drinking water. In 2009-2010, the community constructed a water tank close to the Nayak hamlet, and constructed a similar tank near Bilaspur hamlet in 2012 for the Santal communities to use. While these water tanks will be crucial for addressing sanitation issues and reducing women's household labour, their construction has caused political tensions in the community, as will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Even though the majority of villagers in Maddur are Below Poverty Line (BPL) card holders, levels of wealth and education differ markedly between neighbours and also within families. For example, the Hasdas are a well educated Santal family; Manjit is a primary school teacher, and Sita, his wife, is an *anganwadi* worker. They have three children; their eldest, Rajesh Hasda studied Arts in Bhubaneswar and wanted to become an actor. When I met him in 2010 he had already featured in a number of Santali films. However his parents preferred him to have a more secure job, and persuaded him to join the police force, which he did in 2012. In 2013, Rajesh's brother was studying civil engineering in Bhubaneswar, and his sister was in a Women's College in Karanjia. The Hasdas have clearly saved their earnings, and even though part of their house is made of mud, they are building a concrete extension. Their assets include a motorbike, television, and they are one of the few families with a functioning electricity connection. At the

other end of the scale is the widow Rama Kisku and her daughter Rani, who survive by stitching leaf plates – for every 1000 leaf plates they stitch, they earn Rs90 (€1.50). It usually takes about one week to stitch 1000 plates.

Elements of a past hierarchical structure between the hamlets is still evident. Previously, the Nayaks assumed themselves to be superior to the Santals, and they refused to eat and socialise with each other. While this is slowly changing as a result of education, marriages between these tribes are still prohibited. The Santals and Nayaks tend not to mix during cultural festivals – they worship in different areas of the village, and celebrate different festivals.

There is also a clear separation between Scheduled Caste families and Scheduled Tribe families in the area. This was very evident in the Santal hamlet after the 2012 *panchayat* elections. Seema Majhi, a Santal lady had been the *Naib Sarpanch*[28] and *panchayat* elected representative for Nayapalli hamlet from 2007-2012. However, in 2012, Preeti Patra, from the Scheduled Caste community in Nayapalli was elected as ward member to a reserved seat. When I visited Maddur in 2010, all of the Santal men and women that I spoke with knew that Seema Majhi was their ward member. However, when I returned in 2013 and enquired who had been elected to represent their hamlet, the Santal men and women that I spoke with knew the house where Preeti resided and knew she was their ward member, but none of them could tell me her name, and none of them had spoken with her about any *panchayat* issues since she was elected. This is despite the fact that she lives at the entrance to the village, and anyone from Nayapalli hamlet who wants to go to the *panchayat* office has to pass in front of her house. It was actually a

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[28] The *Naib Sarpanch* is the elected representative who is the assistant to the *Sarpanch*.

Scheduled Caste lady from Bilaspur hamlet who knew Preeti's name and brought me to her house to introduce me to her.

A hierarchy between the Tribals and Other Backward Castes (OBCs) (the Mohantas) is also evident. For example, Sanjeev Mohanta describes himself as an 'idle man'. He is well educated (he studied economics, mathematics and political science in university), and speaks perfect English. As his family owns ten acres of land, he was not concerned with finding paid employment when he completed university; he believed he would be able to easily live off his parent's land. However, when he spoke with me in 2010, he was 41 years old and clearly regretted his decision, as the changing power dynamics in the village, erratic rains and recurring drought situations have made living off the land extremely difficult.

Sanjeev explained that up until the 1990s, the Mohantas were the most important family in the village because they were the ones with the most property. However, Sanjeev believed that the government's Public Distribution System (PDS) has changed the power dynamics in the village, as workers are now less motivated to work for him in his fields. Through the PDS in 2010, families with BPL cards were entitled to 25kg of rice per month at a cost of Rs2 (€0.03) per kg. In 2013, the government changed this to Rs1(€0.01) per kg. As a result, Sanjeev, Biswa and Sandeep believe that villagers are now no longer interested in hard work, as they only need to earn enough to buy their rice at subsidised rates. When I spoke to academics, development workers and politically aware members of Maddur about this price reduction in 2013, there was a general consensus that the price was reduced because of a vote-bank policy and the price is likely to increase again after the 2014 state level elections. This reduced price could lead to increased

possibilities for corruption, as people buy rice at the subsidised rate and subsequently sell it on the open market.

Sanjeev also explained that the villagers can use the forest to collect forest produce and stitch leaf plates which is easier than working in the fields. He said "Now it is difficult for middle class families who have property". Sanjeev's family hire labourers to work from 9am to 2pm in their fields, which includes a one hour rest. However, Sanjeev is not impressed with the standard of labour, as he said "people only want to spend time laughing and merrymaking in the field. If I hire twenty labourers, only fifteen will actually be working". Sanjeev's perception was not verified by my observations of women's and men's work in the field, as I outline in chapter 5. Climate change and provision of government benefits for below poverty line families seems to be causing a power shift in the village, as the Mohantas are finding it more and more difficult to use their land effectively.

As an OBC, Sanjeev is resentful of the benefits Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) villagers are entitled to. He explained that even though most of his daughter's friends in school were given a bicycle from the government, because they came from SC or ST communities, his daughter was not entitled to one as she is an OBC. However, this policy changed in 2012 when the government issued an order that all girls should receive bicycles.

Sanjeev was elected as a *Panchayat Samiti*[29] member, but he could not contest a second term as it was subsequently reserved for an ST/SC member. Government categorisations of APL, BPL, ST, SC, and OBC have created tensions and hugely influenced power dynamics in local

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[29] Middle tier of the PRI.

communities. While these categorisations aim to compensate for the many injustices ST and SC communities have experienced in the past, their implementation, alongside above and below poverty line benefits increases the visibility of the state in local communities. However, these very visible categories also reinforce the perceptions of more privileged and powerful members of the community that Santals are poor because they are lazy and unwilling to do hard work.

Methodology

The inspiration for this research was provided by the ongoing debates and calls within the women's movement for a 33% women's reservation system in national parliament, and the lack of research on the impact of a 33% women's reservation within tribal societies. This led me to look at the social situations which are produced through state led initiatives of such ambitious scope. Between February and November 2010, I spent approximately two weeks of each month in Maddur village, and returned for a short visit in February 2013. On my first visit to the community, I discussed my research with the *Sarpanch*, who agreed to permit me to complete my research in the area. She invited me to a village level meeting where she introduced me to the villagers and explained my research to them. This proved to be an important entry point for gaining trust amongst the community. I was very aware that I was a white female entering a small rural community and the fact that the *Sarpanch*, who was a trusted and respected individual in the community, publicly endorsed me in front of a large number of villagers helped alleviate many of the suspicions they had of me. On my first visit to the community I also ensured I spoke to the Santali traditional leader, the village *Majhi,* in order to explain my research and ask his permission to talk with villagers about Santali culture and village life. He

was also very open to accommodating my research, and regularly spent time with me discussing the Santali governance structures and the challenges he observed in the community.

Initially my time in Maddur was spent conducting a village mapping exercise. This gave me an opportunity to meet with and be introduced to all the villagers, and allowed me to gain an insight into the various kin relationships and economic activities of the community. While I was open to speaking to anyone in the community who wanted to talk with me, the core participants of my research were the locally elected representatives in the community – the *Sarpanch* (elected local government representative), assistant *Sarpanch,* other PRI members, Santali leaders and previous Santali leaders. I also spoke frequently with women who were active in the community in other ways – for example women involved in Self Help Groups, teachers and health workers.

I collected oral histories from elderly women in the village, as well as women and men elected representatives in the community. In total I interviewed twenty six women and sixteen men. These histories helped me to understand social change in the community and to gain an insight into the different power relations between individuals and families. Discussing issues with both elderly women and younger females helped to give me a better understanding of the difference in generational mindsets within the community. I tried to ensure that my discussions were with groups of people but also with individuals, to try to avoid any hierarchical restrictions in the way certain individuals (for example daughters-in-law) spoke with me.

I ensured that I first developed the trust of the men in the community so that they understood my research, and gave me permission to talk to their wives and sisters. The fact that the female

Sarpanch endorsed my research also helped to provide an entry point to discussing issues with women in the community. I also came across some situations where a husband would prefer to talk to me and not allow his wife to speak. In such situations, I ensured to engage the husband and gain his trust, while asking his wife some very general questions (for example about her daily chores). If the wife was involved in a self help group, I would ask if I could attend one of their meetings, and subsequently talked to the wife in more detail at these (all female) meetings.

I frequently participated in the daily work of the community, and discussed issues with villagers as I worked with them. I also attended and observed village level meetings, and participated in self help group meetings with women. I was invited to take part in local festivals, and I observed a number of *panchayat* meetings. These meetings gave me an opportunity to assess the level of participation of female villagers, and the reactions of their male counterparts to their suggestions. As well as field notes and oral history transcripts, I kept a personal diary which helped me to reflect on the impact of my own presence in the communities, and how different members of the community reacted to me.

I learnt Odiya prior to my field research, but the majority of the Santali women in the community were only able to speak, or were more comfortable speaking, in their native tongue, Santali. As a result, I worked with a translator for most of my visits. During my first two weeks with the community I worked with Sita Baske, a Santali woman who was studying for her M.Phil in Botany. Sita was 23 years old, and had excellent English, Odiya and Santali. In *Veiled Sentiments*, Abu-Lughod (1988) outlines her entry to a Bedouin community through introductions from her father. While this made her feel very unlike an anthropologist, her father's

presence proved essential in being accepted by the community. In some ways, my initial visit with Sita was similar, as her presence was crucial in terms of developing a rapport with the community. The fact that she is Santali ensured an initial level of trust, and as we were both young females, neither of us were seen as a threat.

The perceived social identities of my research assistant proved important to the success of my research. This issue is outlined by numerous ethnographic authors, including Johnson (2007), Berreman (2007), Elyachar (2005) and Gal (1991). While Berreman was carrying out research in the Himalayas, he worked with a Brahmin interpreter who was close to the other Brahmins in the village, whereas when he subsequently started working with a Muslim research assistant, he was able to develop a better rapport with lower castes in the village, which allowed him the opportunity to understand the village community from a very different perspective. Gal (1991) highlights the impact of having a female ethnographer to work with women in the Solomon islands – she notes the different quality of speech from women in the Kwaio community when they spoke with a female rather than a male anthropologist, although she notes the importance of the presence of the male anthropologist (with questions from the female anthropologist), as the Kwaio women were "attuned to his established role as mediator between the Kwaio and the outside world" (1991: 192). Elyachar (2005) draws on the work of Crapanzano, outlining how much richer her research was as a result of the work of her research assistant. She maintains that "the presence of the third does drastically alter the nature of the ethnographic experience, and transforms a one-to-one interaction of individual with field into a dynamic social terrain where a different kind of learning can take place and a different kind of knowledge can be produced" (2005:33). She claims that the work of her assistant was crucial to her understanding of power

relations and allowed her to gain entry into spaces where, as a foreigner, she may have been denied. The fact that her assistant was male also presumably allowed her to have further insight into the male workshop domain, although she does not allude to this. As with Elyachar, Berreman and Gal, the different translators I worked with had a huge impact on my work. On one occasion, I worked with an Odiya male, who had limited Santali. As a result, we were unable to have any meaningful discussions with the women in the community, and the men became sceptical about my presence in the area. After a couple of days working with him, I decided it was better for me to conduct limited research on my own in the community rather than spending two weeks working with a translator who clearly was not going to be accepted by the locals.

From September to November 2010, I worked with a Santali male, Suresh Murmu, who was an Anthropology PhD student in the local university in Bhubaneswar. At this stage of my research, the fact that Suresh was male had very little impact on the quality discussions I was able to have with the women in the community. Having studied Anthropology, Suresh had a very good understanding of ethnographic methodologies, and was easily able to build a rapport with the community. Moreover, the relationship I had already established with the community at this stage, along with Suresh's friendly and respectful approach, meant that we were able to collect valuable information, adding an important contribution to my previously collected data.

Unfortunately, neither Suresh nor Sita were available to work with me during my return visit in 2013. However, Suresh recommended a friend of his, Amit Hasda, who happily assisted me. While Amit is Santali, he is a student of commerce, had no experience in ethnographic methodologies, and did not have a very equitable attitude towards women. He often made it clear

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that we should be talking to the men in the community instead of women, and in particular he was quite vocal about his impression of the lack of value in speaking to elderly women. Working with him provided some very important lessons in terms of the interpretation of research assistants of what exactly is being discussed. As many of the conversations I had with villagers in Maddur were in Odiya, I was easily able to verify the accuracy of his translation. Villagers were very happy (and surprised!) to see me again, and I found it easy to catch up with villagers with whom I had previously developed a strong rapport. However, it was far more difficult to talk to villagers I had not previously engaged much with, and this was largely because of the barriers I faced in working with Amit.

Given the challenges I faced during my 2013 research, I am acutely aware of the validity of my 2013 findings, and have only updated my thesis in areas where I believe my research findings were reliable. This reliability is based on the accuracy of the translation with Amit (where I am certain his own opinions did not influence how he translated my questions or villager's responses) and triangulation of my findings by asking numerous villagers similar questions.

Chapter 1 – Perspectives on Power

Introduction

There are two physical locations that may be regarded as the centres of power in Maddur village. The first is a spiritual Santali structure in a wooded area, called the *Jaher Gar*. This is a sacred space which only men can enter and which lies behind a row of houses on the main village road. This structure is core to the Santali *Majhi* system – the system of societal governance specific to the Santal tribe. Five hundred metres north on this same village road is the second centre of power – a set of concrete buildings belonging to the *panchayat* office. While these two centres provide a clear spatial boundary between state and society, it is through understanding how these two power centres work separately and interact with each other, how decisions are made both within and outside these institutions and who makes them, that we can come to understand women's formal and informal influence on these structures.

My analysis of power within the PRI and Santali institutions draws on anthropological writings in both Marxist and Foucauldian traditions. Although these traditions do not easily sit together, there are anthropological interlocutors that have tried to draw on both Marxist and Foucauldian frameworks. This chapter uses these perspectives to analyse the boundaries between state and society and provides a feminist theoretical framework for understanding "empowerment". Through relating Marxist and Foucauldian perspectives to feminist approaches to understanding power relations, I highlight the complex and nuanced effects of power, the strategies employed in power relations, and the manner in which power works at different levels through different systems.

While Marxist and Foucauldian perspectives on power are very different, I argue that their analyses can be complementary. Both perspectives provide different insights into understanding power relations, which is particularly useful when coming to understand how power is embedded within structures but also how it is entangled within society. Marx placed a particular emphasis on the role of the economy and class conflict in determining power structures and his work is based on a historical analysis of changes in power. As Roseberry (1997:35) maintains, "Marx placed the historical and political development of capitalist social relations at the centre of his analysis, not as a mere appendage to a more rigorous and logically satisfying formal analysis". The fundamental difference between Marx and Foucault was that Marx saw power as concentrated in particular structural or institutional locations, whereas Foucault emphasised a more dispersed conception of power (Roseberry, 1997). As Roseberry (1997) has argued, Marxist perspectives have a particularly important value within anthropology.

Foucault's analysis helps us to understand the more local dimensions of power in how it weaves through society, as his work focuses on "local and subjugated knowledges" (1980: 83). Foucault critiques Marx on the basis that his theories are "totalising", or "universal" and therefore not relevant to local discourses of truth and knowledge (Roseberry, 1997). Foucault rejects Marx's economic determinist arguments, and maintains we need to move beyond mere class struggles. However, Marx's "economic determinism" and totalising theories are shown to be more nuanced in his later work.

As Roseberry (1997: 26) argues, Marx did not see his work as a "universal scheme or master narrative". Marx maintained that his work was capable of development and modification

through analysis and interpretation of particular events and processes. "Indeed Marx warned against the mechanical application of his ideas or the construction of grand historical schemes" (Roseberry: 1997: 26). In his letter to the Editorial Board of *Otechestvennye Zapiski* regarding his analysis of the development of Western Europe and Russia, Marx (1877) maintains that the development of both regions involved events that were similar but which took place in different historic surroundings and as a result led to totally different results. "By studying each of these forms of evolution separately and then comparing them one can easily find the clue to this phenomenon, but one will never arrive there by the universal passport of a general historic-philosophical theory, the supreme virtue of which consists in being super-historical" (Marx, 1877).

I argue that the perspectives of both Marx and Foucault are relevant to my understanding of power relations: the strength in Marx's analysis is an emphasis on historical events, the state and economic power, while the strength of Foucault's work lies in the localised dimensions of power – power within associations and community, which helps us to understand power within "multiple sites and modalities" (Roseberry, 1997: 44).

State and Society – where is the boundary?

Both Marx and Foucault's writings have informed more recent debates on state-society boundaries, which are helpful in understanding the interaction between the *panchayat* and the Santali *Majhi* system. In an important article, Abrams (1988) distinguishes between the 'state-system', centred in government which can be examined in straight-forward empirical ways, and the 'state-idea', as an ideological projection. It is through the 'state-idea' that Abrams highlights

the importance of the invisible in state formation and influence and argues that "the relationship of the state-system and the state idea to other forms of power should and can be central concerns of political analysis" (1988:82). Abrams (1988) subsequently argues that the study of the state should analyse the processes behind the idea of the state and its cultural acceptance. Anthropologists such as Shah (2010: 181) have drawn on Abrams' understanding of "the reification of an idea that masks real power relations by legitimising them under the guise of public interest". She uses this framework to interpret the Indian state's violent reaction to the Maoist insurgency, and how it uses the name of protection from insurgency and terrorism to suspend normal legal practices in supporting land rights for tribal populations. In such a manner she looks behind the "mask that protects the state" (ibid). Chapters 3 and 5 provide examples of how the state is interpreted at the local level, and how the 'idea' of the state is played out in practice.

Abrams (1988) argues that it is impossible to effectively study the state-system, because the state inherently denies access to full information at the centre. He maintains that as a result, most research focuses on the periphery and never gets to the centre. However, as Gupta's (1995) research in India demonstrates, through studying the periphery, and subsequently the manner in which the state interacts with civil society, it is possible to show how the 'state idea' is reinforced. Through analysing the linkages between the Santali *Majhi* system and the PRI, it is possible to understand how the state is perceived at the local level, and how the perceptions of the state impact on the manner in which state led policies and programmes are actually implemented.

Mitchell (1991) builds on Abrams' (1988) analysis, arguing that definitions of the 'state' always depend on distinguishing it from society, and "the line between the two is difficult to draw in practice" (1991: 77). He maintains that it is impossible to divide the boundary between state and society, citing the example of the banking industry and how it crosses the private industry and public system to prove his point. He argues that the state should not be taken as a free standing entity, but as an effect of detailed processes of "spatial organisation, temporal arrangement, functional specification and supervision and surveillance" (1991: 95). This is similar to Ferguson and Gupta's (2002) discussion on state spatialisation in terms of 'verticality' (the state is 'above' society) and encompassment (the state 'encompasses' its localities). They argue that state power is both vertical and encompassing through the state's role in shaping local communities. Part of their analysis focuses on how global organisations work through local organisations in influencing national and local level politics. They cite 'community organisations' which may be interpreted as locally owned 'grassroots' expressions of civil society holding state governments to account, or as parts of vast international bureaucratic organisations, as they are often funded by foreign governments or international non-governmental organisations (Ferguson, 2008). Ferguson (2008: 398) subsequently argues that "analysis of state power relations needs to be conducted through an ethnographic approach that focuses on the processes through which the exercise of governmentality (by state and non-state actors) is both legitimated and undermined", with reference to both verticality and encompassment.

The value of Abrams' and Mitchell's work for anthropology therefore is through deepening our understanding of the power relations which are embedded in the boundary between state and society. As Gupta and Sharma (2006) explain, it is through this understanding that anthropology

can throw light on the cultural constitution of the state – that is how the state is perceived and how people's encounters with the state are manifested. Sharma's (2006) research on a government "women's empowerment" programme in Uttar Pradesh provides a good example of how this understanding can be used in practice. Her work shows how government officials, development activists and NGO workers interact and how these interactions re-draw the line between state and non-state actors. This is particularly evident with the formation of a "GONGO" (Government Organised Non-Governmental Organisation), which allows staff on different occasions to either be represented as government officials or as non-governmental development activists. She shows how this process enables the Indian government to reconfigure the state and its governance and shows how non-state actors become further entangled in the "web of governance as instruments and not just targets of rule" (2006: 78).

My understanding of Gaventa's (2006) power cube approach is as a possible progression of Ferguson and Gupta's (2002) analysis of verticality and encompassment, as he focuses on the spaces, places and forms of power and their interrelationships. "Spaces for participation are not neutral, but are shaped by power relations which both surround and enter them" (Gaventa, 2006:26). Gaventa differentiates between closed, invited and claimed/created spaces and shows how these interact with visible, hidden and invisible forms of power at the local, national and global level. He emphasises that each of these spaces "exist in dynamic relationship to one another, and are constantly opening and closing through struggles for legitimacy and resistance, co-optation and transformation" (ibid). Gaventa places a particular emphasis on 'invisible power' – this form shapes the psychological and ideological boundaries of participation, influencing how individuals think about their place in the world. "This level of power shapes people's

beliefs, sense of self and acceptance of the status quo – even their own superiority or inferiority" (Gaventa, 2006: 28). This analysis is important from a gendered perspective, as men and women internalise the accepted discourse on what it is to be a "man" or a "woman", which subsequently impacts on how they influence power relations. The work of these authors reinforces our understanding that analysing how state and society interact and how the state is perceived and imagined helps us to understand the power of the state.

Das's (2007) work is particularly useful in understanding the power of the state and the relations between state and society from a gendered perspective. Overseeing her themes of the everyday, voice and language, Das (2007) outlines an important gendered account of the role of the state, and how the state itself is embedded in people's lives and how political decisions impacts on people's everyday lives. In describing the events following the 1947 Partition of India, and the state laws which were developed to "rescue" abducted women, Das (2007) demonstrates how the law was implemented to shape the nation as masculine and was framed in terms of upholding the honour of the nation. The law portrayed women as sexual and reproductive beings who were being forcibly held, which Das (2007:25) argues further entrenched "kinship norms of purity and honour as they were transformed into the law of the state". Das (2007) argues that the state subsequently became the medium for re-establishing the authority of the husband/father within the family.

Her analysis of the 1984 Delhi riots is also insightful in terms of understanding a gendered perspective of the state. Her work shows how the state was perceived as both "a distant power and one that burrowed itself into the nooks and crannies of everyday life" (2007: 161). She

demonstrates how state power was incorporated into everyday life by the "representation and performance of its rules in modes of rumour, gossip, mockery and mimetic representation" (2007:162). Her analysis of state decisions around compensation for survivors of violence provides an important contribution to the gendered implications of state decisions. Das' work is important in understanding the state-civil society boundaries and power from a gender perspective.

Caste as the locus of power in India

Understanding how our social identities impact the power that we have, also helps to better understand the complexities of power within state and society. In India, the caste system is a core social identity which either permits or denies power. This system is rooted in much of Indian society and is a division around which much inequality exists. As Worseley (1970: 260) explains, the caste system exists in two distinct levels. One is an India wide classification into priests, warriors (land-holders), merchants and the "broad mass of people on the land". The whole Hindu population and a number of other groups are fitted into these four *varna*. However, at the village level, there is a further division called '*jati*' (also translated as caste). "The '*jati*' is a group of individuals who live in a cluster of villages, often with the same occupation. They maintain their group identity by marrying exclusively within their caste" (ibid).

On the margin of society are the outcaste 'Dalits' (SCs) with whom caste members could historically have only the most minimal contact for fear of 'pollution'. Untouchability is the most commonly expressed stigma towards Dalits, still prevalent in rural India. Some of the common forms of expression of stigma in Odisha include prohibition of: drawing water from the same

source, inter-caste marriage, inter-dining, entering certain houses and temples, discrimination in employment and wages, and denial of education (less schools in Dalit areas, discrimination in seating arrangements).

While it is acknowledged that Dalits hold the least power within the Indian caste ideology, there are contesting theories on the links between hierarchy and power within the caste system, and how this power relates to power of the ruling classes. In *Homo Hierarchicus*, Dumont (1970) argues that caste was founded on a religious principle of hierarchy defined by both the opposition between the pure and impure (1970: 299), and the absolute separation of religious status from politico-economic power (Galey, 2008).

In Dumont's argument, *Brahmins* (priests) anchor the top of the system, and Dalits anchor the bottom. "And as *Brahmins* produce and reproduce purity, so Untouchables are perpetual human disposal systems for the impurity of others" (Appadurai, 1986: 750). This hierarchy subsequently relates to ruling classes and the subsequent entanglement of religion, society and rule. As while material rule was vested in the king (the *Kshatriya* caste), spiritual rule was vested in the *Brahmin,* but their power is interlinked. Dumont argues that hierarchy culminates in the *Brahmin*, "but while the *Brahmin* is spiritually supreme, he is materially dependent and while the *Kshatriya* (warrior caste) is materially the master, he is spiritually subordinate" (1970: 300). Therefore, according to Dumont, status encompasses power, and power is determined by virtue of its subordinate relation to status. Thus, "while *Brahmins* are superior to the *Kshatriya* caste the *Brahmin's* precedence and encompassment is a condition of the *Kshatriya's* power" (Kapferer, 1988:10). Deshpande (2003:204) criticizes this understanding on the basis that it

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"blunts the sharp edge that inequality acquires in other contexts". He argues that as a result of this analysis, everyone is seen as unequal, and in some sense equalised by this fact – because each group is reliant on a different group. According to Appadurai (1986), Dumont does not see Dalits as harbouring any critique of the caste system, and in neo-Dumontian views, "Dalits are seen as replicating, both ideologically and structurally, the hierarchical structure of the caste world" (Appadurai, 1986: 752). In contrast, the Marxist view, as outlined by Mencher (1974), sees Dalits as "cynical about the ideology of the upper castes and function within the system largely due to a lack of realistic alternatives" (Appadurai, 1986: 755).

As Tambiah (1972) explains, Dumont argued that Indians, unlike Westerners, devalue politics and economics. He therefore saw the particular ordering and weighting of religion, politics, and economy as unique to India. As a result, Dumont (1970) argued that the caste system was a 'concrete manifestation' of an ancient Hindu system of values and that India was an unhistorical, holistic, hierarchical society.

Criticisms of Dumont largely focus on dominance of 'caste' within his analysis, accusing him of being an Orientalist (Lardinois, 1996). As Kak (1996) maintains, Indian Muslims and Christians also have castes, it is not limited to Hindus. He further claims that eighteenth century German society was divided into princes, nobles, burghers, peasants and serfs between whom marriage was prohibited and that Korea and Japan also had the practice of untouchability. Kapferer (1988:9) maintains that Dumont "reduces complex, highly variant cultural and historical ideas to rather simple, coherent schemes". Appadurai (1986) criticises Dumont on a number of bases,

most notably the fact that his caste analysis has overshadowed other forms of power analysis, gender being one of them.

While Dumont's analysis of caste has been used to analyse gender hierarchical relations as he discusses at length the rules of marriage, his analysis does not explain gendered power relations, as within his analysis, women are viewed as passive recipients of an ideology. In contrast, Dube's (2008) work on *Caste and Women* and Ciotti's (2009, 2010) work on women's political agency in northern India, highlights how the boundaries and hierarchies of caste are articulated by gender, yet how these boundaries are changing, such as possibilities of marriages outside the bounds of caste and resistance in the form of the word 'Dalit', which has provided women increased opportunities for greater agency.

Deshpande (2003) highlights some of the nuances of understanding caste in contemporary India. One of the key issues is the lack of data in recent history on caste inequality. This is largely because disaggregation by caste has been excluded from the Indian census post-Independence. Despite the paucity of census data, Deshpande (2003) shows through the use of data from the National Sample Survey Organisation that economic inequality can be analysed across castes, and that "caste is alive and well" in India today (2003: 182). Deshpande criticises anthropological studies of caste for their core focus on religious texts, ritual status linked to notions of purity and pollution, and rules and customs about marriage and food sharing. He maintains that we need to move beyond this to understand the "rough and tumble of competitive

caste politics in independent India" (2003:204). The Mandal Commission[30] has opened up important opportunities to better understand intercaste politics and make caste, which had been considered "invisible" a fundamental framework for understanding power relations in India.

Debates on the Women's Reservation Bill in Parliament have also opened up discussions on the role of gender and caste. Menon (1999) and Menon and Nigam (2007) highlight the caste based arguments against the Women's Reservation Bill, for example, Shared Tadav, a politician from the Janata Dal party stated that "reservations would only benefit women with cropped hair" (Menon, 1999: 29) (i.e. the stereotype of urbanised, western women). Menon (1999) argues that this statement is better understood as an expression of fear that the composition of Parliament would be altered in favour of upper classes and castes. The BJP arguments for the Women's Reservation Bill, Menon maintains, which on first glance are made in feminist terms, should be understood in the context of its protests about the Mandal Commission reservations – in this sense, the BJP arguments are actually to contest the Backward Caste assertion. Menon (2009, 2012) argues that the Women's Reservation Bill should actually include sub-quotas, so that it includes quotas for OBC and Muslim women within the Bill.

Understanding the interconnections between power and other social relations and identities such as gender, caste and class help to provide a nuanced analysis of the boundaries between state and society. According to Mohanty, BB (2009), all the major political parties in Odisha are dominated by higher caste men. In analysing the role of women in the Communist Party, Marxist, (CPI M) in West Bengal, Kundu (2009) argues that the issue of powerlessness of the

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[30] The 1980 Mandal Commission Report affirmed the affirmative action practice under Indian law to apply quotas for SCs, STs and OBCs to government jobs and to study in Universities. See Deshpande (2003 and 2010) for further information on the Commission.

lower class has received a lot of attention by the party, while the issue of women's powerlessness has been neglected. Kundu (2009) believes that this may be due to an inherent weakness of the Marxist ideology itself. In Marx's vision, the success of the class struggle would automatically remove the gender oppression through which women are exploited by men. However, this perspective overlooks the important contributions which Marxist feminists have made to the structural basis of gender oppression in capitalism.

Nanala (2008) maintains that there is a direct and causal relationship between gender, caste and class in the case of Dalits. While the majority of Dalits in India are landless, Nanala (2008) argues that there is therefore little possibility of a Dalit woman owning land. Moreover, the restrictions on certain types of employment and the assignment of unclean work lead to further subjugation and poverty. Nanala (2008: 461) subsequently argues that "the very direct, causal, supportive and reinforcing role of caste is evident in our class structure. The impact of caste and class on Dalit women is more than the mere sum of these and even more than the impact of caste and class on Dalit men or non-Dalit women."

In conflict and polarising situations, such as the increased violence against Dalits and minority communities, or the violence during Partition and 1984 Delhi riots, caste and religious community can be more powerful than gender in women's lives. Menon (2012) maintains that through these events, patriarchal control within the community can be strengthened, as women's rights are further denied and abused in these situations. The cases of Shah Bano and Roop Kanwar (outlined in detail by Menon, 2012) are further examples of the interconnection between religion and gender, and demonstrate how the needs of women can become subsumed by the

"discourse of community" (Menon, 2012: 356). As Das (1999) explains, the Shah Bano case raised issues regarding secular law, rights of minorities and rights of women, while the Roop Kanwar case raised questions about violence against women and the rights of a community to religious customs. Therefore, in understanding the interconnections between gender, caste and class, a historical analysis of the emergence of particular class and caste issues is important.

Understanding empowerment - Women and Power

Power relations between men and women have been analysed by feminist anthropologists primarily since the 1970s. Leacock's (1977) analysis of primitive society is fundamental in highlighting the flaws of authors who do not take a sex-disaggregated consideration of history into account. Leacock claims that in primitive communal society, decisions were made by those carrying them out. Therefore, the participation of women in socially necessary labour did not reduce them to "virtual slavery, as is the case in class society, but instead allowed them decision making powers in relation to their contribution" (1977:34). She maintains that the fact that men typically made decisions about hunting and warfare in primitive society is used to support the argument that they were the "rulers" in the Western sense. However, she also highlights the fact that the literature on primitive communities reveals the autonomy of women and their role in decision making; "albeit such data are as often as not sloughed off with supposedly humorous innuendos about "henpecked husbands" or the like, rather than treated seriously as illustrative of social structure and dynamics" (ibid: 34). Leacock (1977) therefore argues that the manner in which history has been recorded has further embedded notions of patriarchy. Ethnographic research which looks at both formal and informal power relations can thus help to redress the balance in understanding women's voice and agency within decision making structures.

An interesting example of formal and informal power relations is given by Joyce Riegelhaupt (1967) (cited in Eriksen, (2001)) in her analysis of a Portuguese local community in the Saloio area outside Lisbon. Riegelhaupt analyses the relationship between male and female power in a society where male power is officially all pervasive. Her findings show that even though men have official power, it is the women who have the important networks through their agricultural work, marketing and shopping activities. These women were able to influence the wives of local political leaders to influence their husbands into taking the right decisions on issues that affected the local community. As Eriksen notes, this example indicates that "the subordination of women cannot be assumed a priori" (2001: 131). The examples highlighted in chapter 4 relating to domestic violence in Maddur village clearly highlight women's informal influence in negotiating their demands and using their networks. While at first glance, it may seem that women have no power as they are not permitted to enter the *Jaher Gar* where issues about domestic violence are discussed, their agency becomes evident through the informal strategies they employ to influence decisions.

In *Envisioning Power*, Wolf (1999) notes the importance of focusing on speech, which opens up possibilities for investigating the contextual role of power in language. Gal (1991) takes this analysis further, by analysing gendered aspects of speech and silence in relation to power structures. Gal notes that silence gains different meanings and has different material effects within specific institutional and cultural contexts. She highlights the contradictions between perceived power within speech and silence and notes that in religious confession, modern psychotherapy, bureaucratic interviews, and in police interrogation, the relations of coercion are reversed: "where self-exposure is required, it is the silent listener who judges, and who thereby

exerts power over the one who speaks. Silence and inarticulateness are not, in themselves, necessarily forms of powerlessness" (1991: 176). Shaw's (2011) gendered analysis of speech in the UK and Scottish Parliaments also demonstrates how women and men are treated differently within public decision making bodies, while DeFrancisco's (2011) work highlights a similar theme within private relations. Devika's (2013) analysis of what she terms women's 'gentle power' is insightful in demonstrating how elected women representatives use their power in a way which plays on the stereotypes of what it means to be a 'woman' to influence decision making. These issues are explored in greater detail in Chapter 4 where I look at women's fears about speaking in public and the informal strategies they employ to influence decisions.

Hutchinson's (2002) analysis of the Nuer and Dinka tribes highlights influence that women hold outside of official power structures. "Nuer women have retained considerable influence over patterns of inter-community violence through their well recognised abilities 'to shame' their husbands, brothers and sons into either participating or not in specific military campaigns" (2002: 50). Women's informal influence between the Nuer and Murle tribe in Sudan led to peace negotiations between the two communities.

In her analysis of the "Mothers Front" campaign in Sri Lanka, De Alwis (2007) highlights the numerous contradictions in the cause as well as inadvertent power perceived by the women involved in the campaign. The campaign centred on women calling for justice for their husbands, brothers and sons who had 'disappeared' during the 1987 – 1991 nationalist Sinhala youth uprising. De Alwis outlines how women were used by the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), as a "non-political" force to achieve an end, how the term "motherhood" excluded certain women

from the campaign, yet it was a campaign that affected the majority of Sri Lankan society, and how religion and spirituality were brought into the campaign through the idea of "motherhood". Menon (2012: 169) succinctly reports on De Alwis' work through explaining that the women "subverted the idea of motherhood by invoking maternal suffering, but also marching militantly on the streets, confronting the Sri Lankan state".

As De Alwis (2007) explains, the women involved in the campaign used religion to publicly curse those who had taken their sons and other male relatives during collective *pujas* (religious ceremonies). The SLFP also subsequently highlighted the women's campaign, "enthusiastically promoting their curses as powerful political weapons of the weak" (2007: 127). These curses created fear in the ruling party and when the superstitious President Premadosa was killed by a suicide bomber, the women involved in the campaign felt that this had been a direct result of their curses. "For a group of women marginalised by class and gender for much of their lives, such Pyrrhic victories as effecting the death of a president were very precious" (ibid). Fundamentally, the women's participation in this campaign was crucial to the overthrow of the Sri Lankan government.

Abu-Lughod's (1988) and Unnithan's (2000) work in Egypt and Rajasthan respectively show that through an analysis of poetry, song and prose that women in patriarchal structures "do not necessarily internalise the values of suppression and subordination indicated by their lack of formal authority" (Unnithan, 2000: 67). As Abu-Lughod (1988: 251) maintains, women's use of poetry demonstrates a "discourse of opposition to the system and of defiance of those who represent it: it is anti-structure just as it is anti-morality". Abu-Lughod's and Unnithan's analysis

demonstrates that it is crucial to understand the nuances in power relations in order to show what "agency" means in specific contexts. As Unnithan (2000:67) argues, "we need to remember the context of women's daily lives when we talk about their ability to be powerful in their community or affect a transformation in their lives".

Bourdieu's (1977) work on *habitus* is important in helping us to understand people's agency in given circumstances. He rejects an objective notion of the social world which constitutes it as an observable spectacle which can be viewed almost as if it were only there to be observed, and the interactions within it were purely symbolic exchanges. His 'theory of practice' outlines that objects of knowledge are constructed and that "the principle of this construction is the system of structured, structuring dispositions, the *habitus*, which is constituted in practice and is always oriented towards practical functions" (Bourdieu, 1977: 72). He claims that *habitus* is produced through "the structures constitutive of a particular type of environment" (ibid) and refers to it as the "internalisation of an externality and externalisation of internality" (ibid). One of his commentators, Navarro, describes *habitus* as a "durable set of dispositions that are formed, stored, recorded and exert influence to mould forms of human behaviour" (2006:16). In other words, *habitus* relates to the socialised norms and behaviours of individuals in given circumstances. The *habitus* makes a person disposed to behave in a particular way because to behave in any other way would not be logical in the context of the environment in which that person exists. Bourdieu (1977) maintains that the possibility of strategic calculation, through estimating the chances of transformation based on knowledge of past effects and with a view to an expected objective, cannot be ruled out, but the ability to do this is first defined by a kind of 'negative freedom' which circumscribes the things to do or not to do, to say or not to say, in a

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manner devoid of calculation. An awareness of the things that are likely to happen within one's own parameters affords the possibility of just doing as one always does without deliberation. Bourdieu (1977) maintains that *habitus* is not fixed, but can change over time and to specific contexts. His work provides an insight into hidden power mechanisms of social domination, which is related to his underlying concept of 'fields' – a "network, structure or set of relationships which may be intellectual, religious, educational or cultural" (Navarro, 2006:18).

Bourdieu understands power as culturally and symbolically created. In discussing power and domination, he (1977:183-84) maintains that domination does not need to be exerted in a "direct, personal way when it is entailed in the possession of the means (economic or cultural capital) of appropriating the mechanisms of the field of production and the field of cultural production, which tend to assure their own reproduction by their very functioning, independently of any deliberate intervention of the agents." He therefore argues that domination does not reside necessarily in specific individuals, but rather in the "fields" in which people experience domination as a result of social processes. People can experience power differently depending on which "field" they are positioned within at certain moments, which subsequently influences habitus. Unnithan's (2001) work on women's reproductive health choices in India shows how women place a higher value on the work of local healers for their reproductive health than on government appointed health workers. She claims their choices are a result of "specific, complex experiences of a combination of physiological, social, economic and psychological factors which form part of women's everyday lives" (2001:38). She therefore shows the numerous fields which women occupy to make particular decisions, and how their choices change over time as their powers of negotiation within their families change. Madhok and Rai's (2012) important analysis

of the Women's Development Programme in Rajasthan clearly shows the unintended outcomes when local "fields" are not properly understood, and when "agency" is viewed in "ahistorical, universalist and acontextual" frames (2012: 646). Their work analyses the case of Bhanwari Devi, the social worker who was raped for openly protesting against child marriage in her community. Madhok and Rai (2013) argue that the Women's Development Programme was implemented in a manner which did not take the local context into account and framed "empowerment" and "agency" within a neoliberal ideology which expected individuals to be "rational, self-affirming, self-reliant, self-sufficient, responsible, and capable of authoring and executing her own actions" (2012:638). However, this understanding does not take into account the local patriarchal power dynamics which women are expected to navigate. Madhok and Rai therefore argue that "when we think of agency, we also need to think about the spaces within which it is exercised" (2012:662). We need to acknowledge that while the local space is one where a community is nurtured and sustained, it is also a complex space where "the levels of locally validated oppressions, exclusions, violations, and surveillance that women experience in villages can be extremely high" (ibid).

Chapter 5 demonstrates how the *Sarpanch* is able to navigate different fields of power within the PRI and Santali *Majhi* system at different times, and how she uses both formal and informal strategies to navigate these fields of power. Chapter 3 outlines how the *Sarpanch* needs to rely on her husband in certain circumstances when she is discussing issues with higher level officials. This chapter also shows how the *Sarpanch* obeyed her husband's orders, particularly when she was first elected. Thus, Bourdieu's concept of fields and *habitus* is helpful in explaining women's agency within certain circumstances – how some-one can resist power and domination

in one field, and be submissive in another. For example women may have public authority, but also be subservient to their in-laws and husbands. Bourdieu maintains that "social categories disadvantaged by the symbolic order, such as women and the young, cannot but recognise the legitimacy of the dominant classification in the very fact that their only chance of neutralising those of its effects most contrary to their own interests lies in submitting to them in order to make use of them" (1977:164-5). These contradictions can therefore lead to simultaneous empowering and disempowering systems.

One of the aims of the 73rd Amendment is to "empower" women by giving them voice within key decision-making structures at the local level. However, having "voice" in certain structures does not necessarily imply "agency". While analysing decision-making structures, and who has voice within these structures, it is also crucial to understand the interaction between differing formal and informal structures, as well understanding the implications of speech and silence from a gender perspective.

The term 'empowerment' has been used within civil society movements and government policies in South Asia since the mid 1980s and a body of critique has subsequently emerged around its use. Batliwala (2008) maintains that as 'women's empowerment' has been 'mainstreamed' in numerous government and development initiatives, it has been robbed of its original meaning and strategic value - 'power' no longer has a central meaning in the term. While feminists originally used the term to challenge patriarchal gender relations, it has since become watered down to applying "technical solutions" to what are seen as apolitical "technical problems", for example setting up self help groups (SHGs) to address poverty and implementing reservation

systems to include the marginalised. If these strategies are implemented without an understanding of the local political realities, they ignore prevailing power structures, and as Batliwala (2007) argues, they merely add to women's burden while at the same time maintain or reinforce existing power relations. Moreover, as Mohanty (2008: 85) argues, this apolitical understanding of "empowerment" implies that an external agency has given power to – or 'empowered' another section, "a patronising idea rather than power redistributed through a process, including a process of struggle".

Batliwala (2007) makes a strong call for redefining empowerment, in order to bring 'power' back to its centre. She defines it as a process of transforming the relations of power between individuals and social groups, shifting social political power in three critical ways: "by challenging the ideologies that justify social inequality (such as gender or caste), by changing the prevailing patterns of access to and control over natural and economic resources and by transforming the institutions and structures that reinforce and sustain existing power structures".

From my reading of Batliwala, she combines both Marx's and Foucault's analysis of power. From a Marxist perspective, she maintains that our understanding of empowerment should incorporate a political economy approach which analyses power structures and relations from a historical perspective where forms of resistance and community's engagement with local and global structures are not static, but constantly changing. From a Foucauldian perspective, she calls for a reclamation of the term that recognises power as ubiquitous. Her work could also be interpreted within Bourdieu's concept of differing fields of power. It is from these perspectives that I aim to analyse the impact of the 73rd Amendment on a Santali community. In order to do

this, it is first necessary to provide a brief overview of Marx's and Foucault's differing perspectives.

Marx

Central to Marx's theory of social change and power relations is his analysis of historical processes in terms of the relationship between the forces and production, and progress made through class struggle and conflict. For Marx, situating social change within historical processes was crucial, as is clearly outlined in his *18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), where he states "Men make their own history [….] but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past". In *The German Ideology*, Marx (1845) demonstrates how conflict between classes, the struggle of the oppressed against the oppressors, led to social change as he highlights the changes from primitive to capitalist societies, and ultimately to socialism. For Marx, social institutions operate under the influence of a society's economy which steers the direction of social change. Marx clearly links economic power with political power, stating in *The German Ideology* (1845) "the class which is the material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force." He argued that through capitalism, individuals understand their rights to private property and ownership over resources as natural, because the state protects their wealth.

Other Marxists

The debate between Miliband (1970, 1973) and Poulantzas (1969, 1976) helps to deepen Marx's analysis of the state through a discussion on the power of the 'state elite'. For Miliband, the state was an instrument of the ruling class. In *The State in Capitalist Society* (1969) he argues that the

state will always act in the interest of the capitalist class, and he explains this statement through differentiating between the 'state-system' and the 'state elite'. The state is defined by Miliband (1969) as a set of institutions, which includes the government, parliaments, civil society or bureaucracy, police, legal system and the armed forces. He argues that these institutions are run by a few people – the state elite – which is made up of Cabinet Ministers, top judges, top civil servants and those in the top ranks of the police and the army. Miliband believes that the class position and origins of the state elite determines why the state acts as an instrument of the ruling class. He maintains that the members of the state elite are drawn predominantly from the ranks of the upper class and upper middle class (i.e. the bourgeoisie, the landed aristocracy and the highly paid professions). Thus, for Miliband, wealth and power were intertwined, as those who have wealth, (in the form of private property or ownership of the means of production), have power.

In contrast, Poulantzas' work stems from a more structuralist perspective, as he argues that even if people from different backgrounds occupied state elite positions, it would make no difference in a capitalist system, because the state would still operate in the interests of the ruling class. Thus, for Poulantzas, it is the structures, not the social origins of the state elite that determine the results and choices made by those in power. However, both Miliband and Poulantzas agree on the importance of Gramsci's work in relation to his analysis of ideology.

The importance of historical political economic analysis is central to Gramsci's *Selection from Prison Notebooks* (1971), which has provided a fundamental contribution to Marxist power analysis. Central to Gramcsi's analysis is hegemony, which relates to how power is produced and reproduced. He argues that power is maintained by the state or dominant class by both force and

consent. This is related to Marx's analysis of the ruling class ideas becoming the ruling ideas, as Gramsci also argues that hegemony is a result of both political and ideological leadership. In his *Notes on Italian History*, Gramsci (1971: 57-58) writes:

> "A social group can, indeed must, already exercise 'leadership' before winning governmental power (this is indeed one of the conditions for the winning of such power); it subsequently becomes dominant when it exercises power, but even if it holds it firmly in its grasp, it must continue to lead as well."

Hegemony is thus a power relation between classes and other social forces.

As Crehan (2002: 200) notes, Gramsci's concept of hegemony helps us to understand how "power is lived in a given context and how certain regimes of power are produced and reproduced in the day to day lives of individuals". This subsequently helps us to understand how patriarchy can be embedded in both state structures and civil society. Gramsci shows how the state cannot be understood without a detailed understanding of civil society, and thus his analysis is based on historical processes that consider both class and culture. Throughout his prison notebooks, Gramsci refers to civil society in various forms, but in general defines it as "the ensemble of organisms commonly called 'private', organisations like the church, trade unions, schools etc." (1971: 12). In discussing hegemony, civil society and the separation of powers, Gramsci maintains that it is in civil society that hegemony of the dominant classes has been established by means of political and ideological struggles.

While Gramsci acknowledges the importance of economic relations in society in driving social change, he equally emphasises both ideas and material realities "seeing these as always entangled, always interacting with each-other" (Crehan, 2002: 200). Gramsci argues that class and culture have their roots in the same power relations. This is evident in his analysis of class realities in rural Italy, as he shows how class is a result of both productive relations and the

development of subaltern cultures in historical processes. Thus, as Crehan (2002: 194) notes, "what it means to be a worker or a peasant in a particular time and place is not simply given by the basic wage labour or other economic relation, rather over the course of particular histories specific subaltern cultures have developed. And it is these contradictory and incoherent subaltern cultures that inform the meaning that given class positions have as lived realities". Agnes' (2000) chapter in the *Subaltern Studies* series demonstrates how subaltern cultures have been affected by historical process as she shows how British law influenced women's rights in India, and in the process undermined local customary law. Agnes maintains that even though divorce was prohibited in some local customary laws, women had lifelong economic security through their right to property. However, the Hindu Marriage Act, which was influenced by British rule, allowed Hindu women the right to divorce, but took away their right to property. Agnes (2000) argues further that recent debates on the Uniform Civil Code have neglected both the centrality of an economic analysis and the plurality of customs for women's rights. Therefore, understanding the influence of historical processes and political economy in the entanglement of class, caste and gender, is crucial. These issues will be highlighted with reference to the Santal community in further detail in chapter 5.

Foucault

In contrast to Marxism and Marxist writers, at the core of Foucault's analysis of power was knowledge. Foucault's research led him to the conclusion that modern power and knowledge are entangled and interlinked to such an extent that the possibility of freeing truth from power is prevented. He maintained that knowledge was a form of control and the production of 'facts' a key part of maintaining dominance. Rabinow (1984:22) outlines the "documentary apparatus" of

the state was used to control and supervise populations. Foucault (1980) claimed that each society had its regime of truth which is subject to constant economic and political incitement, and is produced and transmitted under the control of political and economic apparatuses (university, army, writing, media).

As Gledhill (2000) explains, Foucault links truth and power by emphasising power's productive properties, and refusing to reduce power to negative control through prohibition. He perceived the production of the regimes of truth as the positive dimension of power, "positive in the sense that power relations construct human subjects who act and think in a certain way which cannot be reduced to 'false consciousness'" (Gledhill, 2000: 130). Therefore, Foucault's work is in direct opposition to more simplistic versions of the Marxist view where false consciousness, "delusion and mystification that prevents subordinate classes from recognising the fact of their own exploitation" (Heywood, 1997: 190) was the framework of analysis.

> If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything
> but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it?
> What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply
> the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that
> it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge,
> produces discourse (Foucault, 1980: 119).

In his interview with Alessandro Fontanta and Pasquale Pasquino, Foucault (1984) outlines how the mechanics of power in Marxist terms had not been analysed, as it had been denounced as class domination. He therefore draws on psychiatric and penal institutions, not for their economic significance, but rather to understand the general functioning of the "wheels of power" (1984: 58). It is through understanding the wheels of power that Foucault is able to extend his analysis of state power and analyse how the state operates with already existing power relations.

Feminist approaches to Marxist and Foucauldian perspectives on power

For Marx and Engels, women's subordination is based primarily on the development of private property. In *Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State,* Engels ([1884], 1972) believed that women's subordination began with the development of private property, as he argued that modern civilisation was based on restricting women to the sphere of the home in order to produce heirs to inherit property. According to Engels, with the development of the state, the monogamous family changed into the patriarchal family in which the wife's household labour became "a private service, the wife became a head servant, excluded from all participation in social production" (Engels, 1972: 144). He therefore believed that once private property was abolished and women joined the labour force, patriarchy would disappear.

However, several feminists have critiqued Engels' and other Marxist explanations, claiming that the focus on economic factors makes for an inadequate explanation of women's subordination and that even in societies which practice matrilineal inheritance of property, women do not automatically have significant decision making authority (Bhasin, 2009, Rubin, 2006, Kappen, 2009). Rubin (2006) argues that while Marxism explains women's usefulness to capitalism (as being a reserve army of labour, earning cheap wages and carrying out household labour), it does not explain the genesis of the oppression of women. Despite these criticisms, a Marxist analysis can help us to analyse the political economy from a feminist perspective, as this framework helps to ensure the often missed category of class is included in an analysis of how power is embedded within gender and caste.

Having a feminist understanding of Marx's historical analysis can help in understanding the life choices women make. While, as previously mentioned, Marx stated that men make their own history but under circumstances encountered from the past, this helps us to understand that "women make choices – but they do not make them in circumstances of their own making" (Menon, 2012: 212). As Unnithan argues (2000:51), it is important to understand that "structures which empower women may coexist with, or be inherent within patriarchal institutions". Therefore, a historical analysis which focuses on systemic and structural issues is important in understanding how women are able to make choices, and ultimately what "agency" means in given contexts.

Roseberry's (1988) analysis of Ong's (1987) work shows the importance of a Marxist understanding of power. Ong's work is based on female workers in a factory in Malaysia who use spirit possession as a way of resisting capitalist driven work ethics. As Roseberry (1988:178) argues, Ong (1987) initially situates these women as historical subjects in terms of their "particular experiences of class, gender, village and household life" prior to outlining their lived realities in the factory set-up. From this starting point, Ong (1987) is able to highlight the nuances of women's use of spirit possession, as well as other forms of resistance and move beyond the simplistic understanding that spirit possession was purely a form of resistance to capitalism. As Roseberry (1988:178) maintains "Ong's careful placement of the young women within a complex set of contradictory experiences makes such an analysis possible and should carry discussion of such phenomena to a new level". Ong places her subjects "at the intersections of local and global histories" (Roseberry, 1988: 179) and therefore shows these very different categories are particularly important within anthropology. As Roseberry (1987) argues, in

discussing culture, history and practice, we need to also consider class, capitalism and power. This is what this thesis aims to do within a feminist framework.

In contrast to Marx, Foucault's model of power involves recognising the existence of multiple power relations, as his analysis extended beyond power merely exercised by the state. He explained that the state can only operate on the basis of the other, already existing power relations. "The state is super-structural in relation to a whole series of power networks that invest the body, sexuality, the family, kinship, knowledge and technology" (Foucault 1980: 122).

Foucault focuses on institutional power, and rejects the idea that power is generated by the state over lower classes or even by men over women (Gordon et al, 1991). He argues that the "state has no essence" (ibid: 4) – for Foucault, the nature of the institution of the state is a function of changes in practices of government. Therefore, Foucault rejects Marxist notions of power, but does not deny that power exists. His analysis moves beyond the hierarchical power of the state, and focuses on forms of social control in disciplinary institutions (schools, hospitals, psychiatric institutions, etc.), as well as forms of knowledge.

Thus for Foucault, "power is considered to circulate and be exercised rather than be possessed and resistance is seen as an inevitable companion of power" (Mosedale, 2003: 8). As a result of Foucault's analysis, feminists have challenged accounts of gender relations which emphasise domination and victimisation in order to move towards a more nuanced understanding of the role of power in women's lives (Armstrong, 2005). The feminist assertion that the 'personal is political' was part of the process that power was exercised in personal relationships (and not just

between men and women) as well as in more public arenas (Mosedale, 2003). Foucault's analysis of power is therefore crucial for understanding the manner in which power is gendered and works through "cultures, customs and disciplinary technologies that shape the way we think, perceive, act and react" (Shariff, 2007).

Conclusion

The boundaries between state and society are no longer simple to define, as it is now recognised that states are not merely "functional bureaucratic apparatuses but powerful sites of symbolic and cultural production that are themselves always culturally represented and understood in particular ways" (Ferguson and Gupta, 2002: 981). Thus, an analysis of state interventions must be framed in both historical processes and include a consideration of the interlinked and entangled power relations between state and society.

The following chapters build on both Marx's and Foucault's frameworks to analyse power relations of the spatially very close but culturally very different PRI and *Majhi* systems, in order to understand the impact of state imposed 'women's empowerment' in a Santal community from a gendered perspective. Through this analysis, Marxist perspectives are used to highlight the impact of historical events on the Santal *Majhi* system and the PRI, and to understand the relations between caste and class. Foucault's work helps to define how the 'state' is encountered in local communities and how these encounters interact with other forms of power and knowledge. Through these perspectives, I demonstrate how power weaves through state and society, flowing through the Santali *Majhi* system, while working in parallel to the Government *Panchayati Raj* system. I show how men's control over finances and decisions on wages in the

community help them to maintain control, but at the same time I highlight women's informal influence throughout the system. My framework for analysing 'empowerment' is largely based on Batliwala's definition, as she outlines the three critical areas in which power impacts on women's lives: ideology, access to and control over resources and institutions and structures that reinforce and sustain existing power structures.

Chapter 2 - The history of the *Panchayati Raj Institutions*

Introduction

Panchayats were originally established as early as 1200 BC as a council of five male elder members of the community, who were considered to represent the voice of God. The feudal system during the Mughal rule in India altered the self-governing powers of village *panchayats*, as the focus turned towards local defence, maintenance of law and order and tax administration. British rule again altered this process, introducing democracy at superficial levels. In independent India, the 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution has become a landmark turning point in India's history of implementing a devolved form of self governance in rural areas, through the *Panchayati Raj*, which now includes a reservation system for women and for SC and ST communities.

This chapter provides a historical account of how the *Panchayati Raj Institution* (PRI) and the 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution were developed and implemented. In doing so it outlines the role of external influences, the top-down nature of the process, the key disagreements and compromises made and the process of women's entry into the public arena that led to the devolved form of government India operates today.

Decentralisation during colonisation

While village committees comprised of village male elders were in place prior to British rule, Mathew (2002) maintains that local self-government in India, in the sense of a representative institution accountable to the electorate, was the creation of the British. "The government resolution of 18th May 1882, during Lord Ripon's vice-regal tenure, providing for local boards

consisting of a large majority of elected members and presided over by a chairman, was considered the Magna Carta of local democracy in India" (Mathew, 2002:4). By 1925 eight provinces in British India had passed acts for the establishment of village *panchayats* (units of self governance), and by 1948, twenty states had enacted Village *Panchayat* Acts (ibid).

Bandyopadhyay et al (2007) also acknowledge that Ripon's 1882 resolution contained democratic principles, as it included establishing local government institutions and providing civic services. However, they argue that the subsequent 1885 Bengal Local Self Government Act (which at the time also included the state of Odisha) had little correspondence with the key principles of the resolution. "The Act envisaged the constitution of district and local boards as well as union committees for a group of villages. While members of the local boards and union committees were elected, the electorate was very restricted and provisions were made for including government officials both in the district boards and the local boards" (2007:53). Bandyopadhyay et al (2007) maintain that in reality, power and authority was exercised by government officials rather than the local boards.

In 1919, the Bengal Local Self Government Act was superseded by the Bengal Village Self-Government Act. However, "only property owners had voting rights, and women were denied the right to vote" (Bandyopadhyay et al, 2007: 53). The effectiveness of the *panchayats* deteriorated over time, as is evident from the report of the Village *Panchayat* Committee of the All-India Congress Committee (AICC, 1954). In analysing the main reasons for the disintegration of the village *panchayats*, AICC stated "the inordinate greed of the East India Company caused slow but steady disintegration of these village *panchayats*. The excessive

centralisation of the executive and judicial powers in the hands of the Government officials deprived the village functionaries of their age long power and influence" (cited in Mathew, 2002: 13).

Bandyopadhyay et al (2007), thus claim that even though the local government institutions created by the imperial state were locally based, they were far from self governing units of administration. They argue further that this form of administration was instrumental in embedding a particular mindset and administrative system, which has stifled the possibility of the emergence of genuine local self-governing institutions based on democratic participation.

> "A colonial government can integrate the colonised people and
> their institutions only bureaucratically. And that is what they did.
> The key words of such an arrangement are control and
> subjugation, as people are considered "subjects" and not "citizens".
> The institution of rural local self-government bred within
> such a framework, therefore, did not have either autonomy
> or a representative character. As such, they remained distant
> from the people and created little enthusiasm among them.
> The people never considered these institutions as their own [...]
> (Bandyopadhyay et al, 2007: 56-57)

Bandyopadhyay et al (2007) therefore argue that the perception that local government institutions are merely dependent appendages to higher level government continues today, despite the important 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution. The cultural mindset in which this form of state bureaucracy has been embedded, and how the 'state' is subsequently imagined by local communities, severely impacts on the manner in which it functions in the 21st century.

Independence and the making of the Constitution

There was serious debate regarding the role of *panchayats* during the making of the Indian Constitution. Gandhi saw *panchayats* as a perfect democracy based on individual freedom, and argued for "village republics" in which the government would be annually elected by adult villagers and have the authority and jurisdiction in the fields of legislation, judiciary and executive decision making without interference from the state government (Mathew, 2002). The Gandhians sincerely believed in the immense potential of *panchayats* to ensure democratic decentralisation, devolving power to the people. They strongly believed that "village *panchayats* could play an important role in social transformation and in the implementation of development programmes" (Mathew, 2007:37).

However, B. R. Ambedkar[31] saw village *panchayats* in a different light, evident from his address at the Constituent Assembly: 'What is the village but a sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow-mindedness and communalism?' (BR Ambedkar, Constituent Assembly debate, 4th November 1948, cited in Baviskar and Mathew 2009: 1). Furthermore, the choice of the term '*panchayat*' was criticised by B.R. Ambedkar on the grounds that it "implied the appointment of five males from the upper castes to decide the affairs of the village" (Mohanty, M., 2007: 25).

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[31] B.R. Ambedkhar was the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Indian Constitution and was instrumental in raising the awareness of untouchability in India, and openly criticised the Hindu Caste system. He converted to Buddhism, which led to mass conversions of Dalits to Buddhism. While Gandhi and Ambedkhar both worked towards the creation of a more socially just India, their approach was different, as is outlined in detail by Guha (2004). Guha (2004) explains that Gandhi aimed to save Hinduism by abolishing Untouchability, whereas Ambedkhar's solution was to renounce Hinduism by converting to Buddhism. Gandhi was an admirer of rural life, and wished to make village republics the cornerstone of Indian society, whereas Ambedkhar focused on city life and modern technology. Gandhi favoured non-violent protests while being suspicious of the state, whereas Ambedkar worked within the state, using the framing of the Constitution to develop solutions to social problems.

Baviskar and Mathew (2009) outline both sides of the debate. They maintain that the reservations voiced by both Ambedkar and Nehru in relation to the ability of marginalised and excluded communities in taking over the reins of power were actually grounded in the social realities of Indian villages. Ambedkar and Nehru argued that the enabling conditions were not yet prevalent for democratically elected and politically powerful institutions in the villages to be viable. They maintained that the dominant sections of people in rural India would have undermined those institutions in their infancy. However, those who opposed Ambedkar and Nehru believed that if democracy is given a chance to prosper at the grassroots, "in the long run it does create powerful institutions, transforming the very hierarchical, iniquitous and caste ridden society into a modern one" (Baviskar and Mathew, 2009: 2).

Mathew, (2007) argues that there was a weak recognition for *panchayats* in the Indian Constitution because of the disdain among the urban and rural elites at the time. This is evident from the compromise that was reached through the Gandhi − Ambedkhar debate. A provision for *panchayats* was included in Part IV of the Constitution (in the Directive Principles of State Policy) under Article 40 which is not legally enforceable. Mathew (2002) further maintains that this disdain still continues and has prevented the *panchayats* from becoming truly decentralised institutions of government. This is despite a "history of the village as the basic unit of administration, the nationalist movement's commitment to *panchayats*, and Gandhi's propagation of the ideal" (Mathew, 2002: 35).

Committee Recommendations leading to the 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution

Since its Independence, the Indian Government has sanctioned numerous committees to assess the effectiveness of *panchayats* and to recommend alternative models of devolution. However, it was not until the mid 1980s, that there was real increased momentum for a constitutional amendment (Mathew, 2002). Prior to the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, a few states such as Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka and West-Bengal had well-functioning systems of local governance (Patnaik, 2009). However, in most states, *panchayats* were waning institutions with elections held irregularly and infrequently, limited autonomy, resistant bureaucracy, irregular *Gram Sabhas*[32] and domination in decision making by powerful elites. According to Mathew (2002), by the mid 1980s, the concentration of power in Delhi had reached a critical point, and the popularity of governments which had implemented successful *panchayats* in West Bengal and Karnataka had sent signals that this was an effective instrument to win the hearts of the rural masses. This subsequently ensured that "grassroots democratic institutions came to the centre stage of democratic discourse" (Baviskar and Mathew, 2009: 2).

The reform measures developed through the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution strengthened the democratic potential of the PRI by granting constitutional status, seat reservations, fixed tenures, designated powers and responsibilities and establishing a mechanism for distribution of finance to *panchayats* (Patnaik, 2009). As Baviskar and Mathew (2009: 2) note, the Amendment was "a turning point in the history of local governance with far reaching consequences for Indian federalism, decentralisation, grassroots democracy and people's participation in planning for development, gender equality and social justice". However, it took numerous committee recommendations, over a span of several decades before the Amendment came into force.

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[32] Village level meetings

The Balwant Rai Mehta committee (1957) was established to assess the extent to which the Community Development Programme and National Extension Service were succeeding in improving economic and social conditions in rural areas. Among its many recommendations, the committee advised setting up a three tier structure of elected bodies. The recommendations of the committee came into effect on the 1st April 1959, and the *Panchayati Raj* formally came into existence. It was based on democratic decentralisation and local participation in planned programmes. However, as PRIA (2006) explains, there was political and bureaucratic resistance to sharing power with local level institutions, and the Government of India regularly bypassed the *panchayats* and launched its own rural development schemes.

In 1963, the Santhanam Committee was established to assess issues of PRI finances. It recommended that *panchayats* should have the power to levy taxes and a *Panchayat* Finance Corporation should be set up to look into financial resources of PRIs at all levels. However, nothing substantial came of these recommendations.

In 1979, the recommendations from the Ashok Mehta Committee (1978), which was established to assess the working of the PRIs, resulted in a turning point in the *panchayat* movement in India. According to PRIA (2006), the Ashok Mehta Committee Report (1978) paved the way to make *panchayats* an integral part of Indian democracy and formed the foundations for second-generation *panchayats*. Some of its recommendations included a reservation system for SCs, STs and women, as well as the preparation of a list of functions for the PRI based on location-specific programmes. According to Patnaik (2009), Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal passed

new legislations based on this report. However, as PRIA (2006) notes, the flux in politics at the state level at the time did not allow the PRI to develop in other areas.

In 1985, the Rao Committee was constituted to review the administrative arrangements for rural development programmes and poverty alleviation schemes. The committee subsequently recommended that PRIs at the district level and below should be assigned the work of planning, implementing and monitoring rural development programmes.

In 1986, the Singhvi Committee was established to assess how the recommendations from the 7th Year Plan in strengthening the PRIs could be put into practice. The committee recommended that the *Gram Sabha* should be the base for decentralised democracy and PRIs should be institutions of self governance which would facilitate the participation of people in planning and development (PRIA, 2006). The committee further recommended that local self government should be constitutionally recognised, protected and preserved by the inclusion of a new chapter in the Constitution (ibid).

In 1988, the central government established the Sarkaria Commission to examine the relationship and balance of power between the states and central government in the country and suggest changes within the framework of the Constitution of India. The final report contained 247 specific recommendations (PRIA, 2006). The Commission observed that local self-governing bodies were not working efficiently due to irregular elections and the suspension and super cession of local bodies on flimsy grounds.

At the same time, the Parliament Consultative Committee appointed a sub-committee to consider a Constitutional Amendment in 1989. On the 15th May 1989, Rajiv Gandhi's government introduced the Constitution (64th Amendment) Bill in Parliament. The Bill suggested setting up *panchayats* in every state at the village, intermediate and district level. However, according to Mathew (2007), although the 1989 Bill itself was a welcome step, there was serious opposition to it on two basic grounds. Firstly, the Bill overlooked the states and was seen as an instrument of the centre to have direct control over the PRI and secondly, the Bill imposed a uniform system throughout the country instead of permitting individual states to legislate the details, which would be cognisant of local circumstances. "There was an outcry against this Bill not only by political parties but also by intellectuals and concerned citizens" (Mathew, 2007: 38).

Although the 64th Amendment Bill got a two-thirds majority in the *Lok Sabha* (the lower house), it failed to meet the mandatory requirements by two votes in the *Rajya Sabha* (the upper house) on the 15th October 1989. "The National Front Government introduced the 74th Amendment Bill (a combined bill on *panchayats* and municipalities) on 7th September 1990 during its short tenure in office but it was never taken up for discussion" (Mathew, 2007: 38).

73rd Constitutional Amendment

In September 1991, the Congress Government introduced the 72nd (*panchayats*) and 73rd (municipalities) Constitutional Amendment Bills. The *Lok Sabha* passed the two bills on the 22nd December 1992 while the *Rajya Sabha* passed them the next day and finally on April 24th 1993, the Constitutional Amendments formally came into force after ratification by more than half of the state Assemblies, assent by the President of India and publication in the Gazette of India.
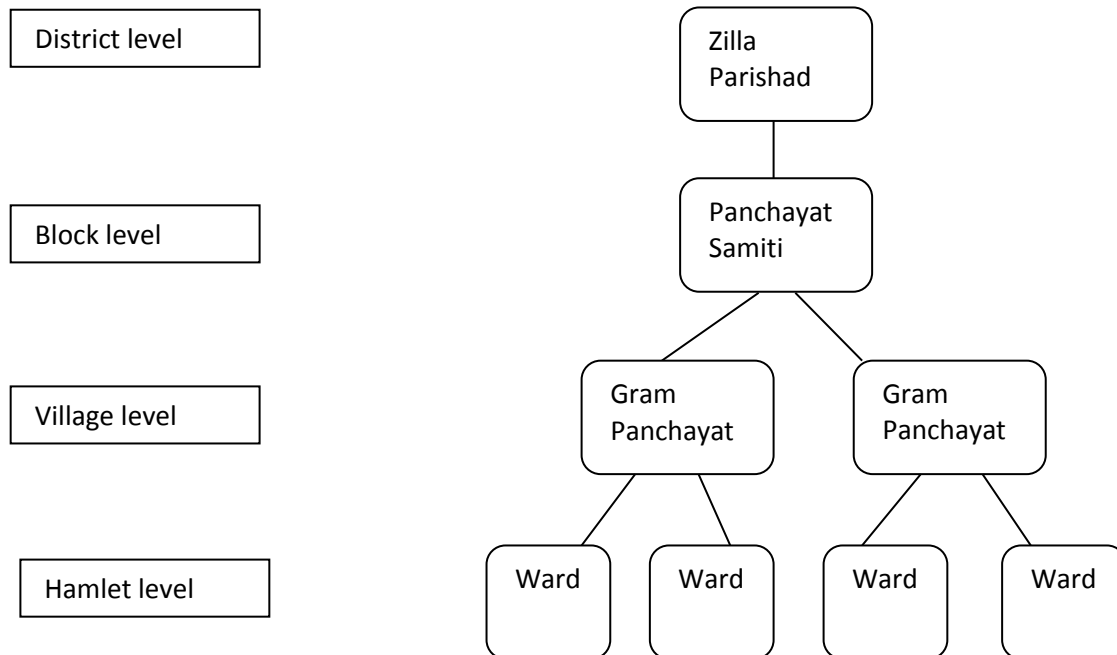
When both houses of parliament passed the Bills, their sequence changed to the 73rd and 74th Amendments respectively. "These were historical legislations in the post independent history of local self-government in India" (Patnaik, 2009: 13).

The Amendments meant that *panchayats* and municipalities became parts IX and IXA in the Constitution, respectively, and were defined as 'institutions of self-government'. Articles 243G and 243W of the Constitution state that "*panchayats* and municipalities will be endowed with such powers and authority to function as institutions of self government with respect to the preparation and implementation of plans and schemes for economic development and social justice" (Baviskar and Mathew, 2009: 2). However, the most important articles impacting on social change were: "Seats and offices will be reserved for SCs and STs in proportion to their population (and for women not less than one third) at all levels of *panchayats* (Article 243D) and municipalities (Article 243Q)" (ibid).

Amendment to Odisha's Gram Panchayat Act

Odisha became the first state in the country to make provisions for the reservation of seats for elective functionaries in the local institutions at the village level even before the enforcement of the 73rd Amendment (Mohanty, BB., 2009). In 1992, Biju Patnaik, during his second term as Chief Minister of the state, called for local level elections, much against the wishes of the Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), including those from his own party. "These elections took place after a lapse of 12 years, made all the more historic because Odisha was the first state to implement the 33% reservation of seats for women in municipalities and

panchayats, at a time when the centre was still only deliberating on the issue" (Mathew, 2002: 74).

District level	Zilla Parishad
Block level	Panchayat Samiti
Village level	Gram Panchayat — Gram Panchayat
Hamlet level	Ward — Ward — Ward — Ward

Diagram 1: Indian Panchayati Raj Institution

In Odisha, the PRI is now comprised of four tiers of government. As can be seen from Diagram 1, the hamlet level is the first tier of local level participation, comprised of a "ward". A ward member is the elected chairperson of the ward, which usually includes up to 250 voters in an area. The *Palli Sabha* is the hamlet level meeting, constituting all eligible voters within a ward. At the village level is the *Gram Panchayat* (GP), covering a population of up to 5,000 citizens. The *Gram Sabha*, which constitutes all eligible voters within a *Gram Panchayat* area serves as a principle mechanism for transparency and accountability, and is required to meet at least twice a year at the village level. A *Sarpanch* is the elected Chairperson of the GP, and the *Naib Sarpanch* is the elected assistant Chairperson. At the next level, the Block, is the *Panchayat Samiti*, which is the elected body covering between 10 – 20 *panchayats*. Finally, at the District level is the *Zilla Parishad*, which covers 4 - 10 Blocks and is the link with the state government.

The *Odisha Gram Panchayat* Act, 1964 (amended in 1992), goes one step further than the 73rd Constitutional Amendment. It has a unique provision by which if the *Gram Panchayat Sarpanch*, elected or nominated, is not a woman, the office of the *Naib-Sarpanch* will go to a woman. A similar provision exists for the chairperson of the *Panchayat Samiti*. "This step is a radical one, considering the fact that neither the 73rd Amendment nor any other state has a provision as progressive as that of Odisha" (Mathew 2002: 74).

The responsibilities of *Gram Panchayats* in Odisha include the provision of major public services such as health, education, drinking water, and roads; setting rates and administering local taxes; implementation of local development plans; and selection of beneficiaries and implementation of social and economic programs established and paid for by the central government (Deininger et al, 2011).

Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act

The 73rd Amendment was not automatically applicable to the Scheduled Areas[33] because of the unique characteristics and special needs of the tribal people. Subsequently, based on the Bhuria Committee report, '*The Provisions of the Panchayat (Extension to the Scheduled Area) Act*, 1996 (PESA), was enacted in December 1996 and it came into effect from 24th December 1996 (Baviskar and Mathew, 2009). PESA ensures that the organisation and functioning of the *panchayats* in scheduled areas is different from that of *panchayats* in non-scheduled areas. As Baviskar and Mathew (2009: 11) explain, "while the 73rd Amendment visualised *panchayats* as instruments of participatory democracy, the PESA Act conceptualised these institutions as representative democracy". According to Baviskar and Mathew (2009), the crucial importance of

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[33] A Scheduled Area is an area that has a majority population of Scheduled Tribes

this Act is that it recognises the vulnerability of STs to any action against their interest by state functionaries. The provisions of PESA extend to the *panchayats* in the Fifth Scheduled Areas of nine states: Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha and Rajasthan (ibid). The state Government of Odisha implemented the provisions of PESA by amending its state laws, and as a result of this, communities in Scheduled Areas have been given the power "to safeguard and preserve the tradition and customs of the people, their cultural identity, community resources and customary mode of dispute resolution consistent with the relevant laws in force and in harmony with basic tenets of the constitution and human rights" (Patnaik, 2009: 48). The *Gram Sabha* in Scheduled Areas has been given some additional powers in Odisha in relation to the sale and consumption of any alcohol, ownership of minor forest produce, prevention of alienation of land and restoration of any unlawful land of a scheduled tribe, control over money lending to scheduled tribes, control over all local markets and to safeguard the cultural identity, community resources and dispute resolution of the tribe (ibid).

In discussing PESA with the *Sarpanch* of Maddur, Mahak, she explained that it has been difficult to properly implement in the area because the majority of the villagers are illiterate, and do not understand its potential power. She has tried explaining it in *Palli* and *Gram Sabha* meetings, but the villagers do not seem to see its direct benefit. They can see direct benefits from schemes such as the water and sanitation programme, but as the power of PESA lies in the process rather than the direct benefit, it is difficult for people to grasp.

Women and Politics

It is globally acknowledged that women remain marginalised in politics in many societies. In 2012, women accounted for only 19.6% of parliamentarians worldwide (Quotaproject, 2012). This marginalisation leads to increased feminisation of poverty as women are not given the space to voice and demand their needs, and as a result, this marginalisation becomes further disempowering.

India's 73rd Constitutional Amendment strives to increase women's participation at the local level through its initial 33% and now 50% women's reservation system. However, as Sharma, L. (2009) explains, women's entry in large numbers into local governance in India is not a conventional tale of excluded women fighting to gain entry into arenas of male power. "It arose from a mixture of political opportunism and an ethical sensibility that regarded the implications of gender as integral rather than peripheral to the creation of a more just society" (2009:56 – 57). As Menon (2008) outlines, women's entry into politics was a result of the stagnation of the economy after the 1960s, the growing agrarian unrest in Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh and the rapid rise in the prices of necessities, which further encouraged women to take to the streets and some leftist parties to take up issues of major concern to women. Desai (2008) explains that some of the fundamental opportunities for greater women's involvement in public decision making structures were due to increased food prices. This led to women's organisations such as *Shramik Mahila Sangathana* (The Working Women's Organisation) taking up the issues of rising prices of essential goods, adulteration, and empty hearths. The Anti-Price Rise Movement in 1973 led to increased women's involvement and was perceived to be a united

front organisation of women belonging to the Communist Party of India (Marxist), Socialist Party, Congress, and non-political middle class housewives.

The landmark *Towards Equality* report which was published in 1974 further galvanised many feminists and activists and was hailed as a founding text for the women's movement (John, 2008). As Sharma, L. (2009) explains, the 1970s also saw the observance of the International Women's Year in 1975, preparation of a National Plan of Action for Women and the introduction and amendment of the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act 1971. In 1974, the Committee on the Status of Women in India proposed the formation of statutory women's *panchayat* as part of the *panchayat* structure. "The objective was to ensure greater participation of rural women" (Sharma, L., 2009:5). However, the women's movement rejected the idea of a reservation for women, and there was no consensus on this issue until the end of the 1980s. Some women such as Renuka Ray claimed that "reservations prevented women from standing for general constituencies and constituted an impediment to our growth and an insult to our very intelligence and capacity" (John, 2008: 49). Resistance also came from class and caste distinctions in Indian society, as it was mostly women from high caste and class who had joined the women's movement and they did not want to be associated in the same bracket as lower caste members of society through a reservation system (Sharma, L., 2009). Omvedt (cited in Jackson, 2003) argues that the gap between leadership and membership of women's movements was greater than in the Dalit or peasant movements because there was no generation of educated rural women to take on leadership roles. These roles were generally performed by older, upper caste highly educated women.

As Sharma, L. (2009) outlines, while the 1974 *Towards Equality* Report rejected the idea of a reservation (but called for a statutory all women *panchayat* to look after the welfare of women), the National Perspective Plan for Women (1988 – 2000) strongly recommended a 30% reservation in local government. Given the divisions within the women's movement and the diversity within the group, a unified call for a reservation was not possible. However, as Agarwal (2003) notes, "does the absence of a widespread demand indicate the absence of a need? Is voiced demand (or lack of) a sufficient indicator of needs and preferences, and an adequate basis for social policy?" (2003:189). The fact that there was no unified call for a reservation system does not necessarily mean it was not required. Furthermore, following the introduction of the women's reservation at the local level, there has been a call for a women's reservation at the parliamentary level in India – the debate amongst feminists in India is no longer whether or not there should be a women's reservation in Parliament, it has turned to how that reservation should be implemented, as there is division within the women's movement regarding the inclusion of a quota for marginalised groups within the women's reservation (see Menon, 2009, 2012). The Women's Reservation Bill for parliament was passed by the *Rajha Sabha* in March 2010, but there are still ongoing discussions on the Bill in the *Lok Sabha*, and as a result it has yet to be passed.

Conclusion

As this chapter has shown, the PRI came out of a series of committee recommendations, rather than a grassroots movement. As will be argued in the following chapter, this top-down initiative has hugely impacted on how local communities imagine the 'state', and limits the effective functioning of the state at the local level as real autonomy in funds, functions and functionaries is

lacking. Franceschet et al (2012) argue that the manner in which women's reservation systems s reach political agendas can have important implications for their perceived legitimacy, which subsequently impacts on the changing dynamics of political representation. The fact that women's entry into the public sphere stemmed largely from a top-down initiative has, I believe, impacted on the role the majority of women in local level politics now play. This also highlights questions of inequality and democratisation, as outlined by Kumar (1997). She explains that while there is now a broad acceptance of the importance of women's representation in Parliament and local decision making bodies, there is also a reiteration that "bourgeois women cannot represent proletariat women, upper caste women cannot represent dalit women" (1997: 6). She questions whether or not this relates to a society which is experiencing the spread of democratisation while remaining "reft with inequalities" (ibid), and therefore makes us question who represents whom? This line of questioning is also relevant to the implementation of PESA – while it was established to ensure the rights of tribal communities, and to perhaps address accountability issues, the fact that its contents are not fully accessible to the majority of those whose lives it concerns has hindered its proper implementation, and thus hindered the rights of tribal populations to development on their terms. These issues will be discussed further, using ethnographic material, in the proceeding chapters.

Chapter 3 - *Panchayati Raj* in practice – a unit of self-governance?

It is through understanding the historical development of the PRI that we can better understand how it functions today[34]. In analysing the PRI in its current form, I highlight some of the on-the-ground realities and challenges, where the principles laid out in the 73rd Amendment have not translated into practice, due largely to a lack of autonomy in functions, functionaries and funds. In many instances, this has led to the consolidation of party politics at the local level, undermining the true value of the PRI. The impact of historical processes, as well as the numerous power relations interacting between state and society fundamentally undermines the power of PRI, resulting in what Ferguson (2007) would regard as a technical solution to addressing poverty and 'empowerment'. Through my use of ethnographic material, I highlight the role of women within the PRI during the specific period of my fieldwork, and outline their lived realities at that particular moment in time.

Functions of *Gram Sabha* and *Palli Sabha* in Odisha

In Odisha, the *Gram Sabha* is statutorily required to meet twice a year, in February and June, in order to approve social and economic development plans and programmes, identify beneficiaries under poverty alleviation schemes, and organise community services. However, as per executive instructions, "another four meetings are required to be held on public holidays: on the 26th January, 1st May, 15th August and 2nd October every year" (Patnaik, 2009: 45).

The *Palli Sabha* has similar responsibilities and has been introduced to ensure greater participation of people at the village level in the decision making process. The *Palli Sabha* is

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[34] Marx, Wolf (1997) and Tilly (1985), amongst others strongly advocate understanding historical processes of social change, and I draw inspiration from their work in this chapter.

required to meet annually in February and may meet at other times as may be prescribed. Patnaik (2009: 48) rightly argues that the provision for an annual *Palli Sabha* meeting may defeat the purpose of it becoming a vibrant forum of discussion on people's problems. "It may be more effective for it to meet more frequently, at least once a quarter" (ibid). In Maddur *panchayat*, the *Palli Sabha* meets twice a year.

I observed two *Palli Sabhas* and one *Gram Sabha* in Maddur *panchayat* in February 2010, where I witnessed a number of malpractices. In all three meetings, villagers signed the minutes book before the meeting even took place – this is supposed to be signed at the end of the meeting, after the villagers attending have read and understood the minutes. The seating layout in all three meetings reflected the importance of men in the village, as they either sat on chairs or on logs, while the women sat on the floor. The Maddur *Palli Sabha* took place in the *panchayat* office, which at the time consisted of three rooms off a corridor. The *Sarpanch* and Executive Officer[35] sat at a table at one end of the corridor, while approximately twenty men sat on plastic chairs along the wall of the corridor and approximately forty women sat on the floor in one of the office rooms. This set up meant that the men had a clear view of the *Sarpanch* and the Executive Officer, who were easily audible. The majority of the women, however, were unable to see the *Sarpanch*, and hearing her would have been difficult for the women seated towards the back of the room – holding a government to account when one cannot hear what is being discussed is obviously problematic.

Attendance for all three meetings was very low. Despite the fact that more women than men attended, in total less than the required quorum of 10% of the *panchayat* population were present

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[35] The Executive Officer is a government appointee.

at the *Gram Sabha*, and the majority of the villagers did not stay for the whole meeting. When I asked some women the following day why they had left the meeting early, they said they did not understand what the *Sarpanch* was talking about, they had not eaten all day and were hungry. In line with Maslow's 'hierarchy of needs' theory, where basic needs must be addressed before self actualisation can take place (Heywood,1997), attempts to decentralise democracy when people are living at basic subsistence levels is particularly challenging.

Despite the fact that the *Gram* and *Palli Sabha* meetings I observed were chaired by a woman, the women attending the meeting remained largely silent. Instead, the female *Sarpanch* and male Executive Officer did most of the talking. When villagers were asked to state their needs for the coming year, there seemed to be little analysis of the needs, instead random suggestions came from various (mainly male) villagers – improvement of the village road, pond renovation and bore wells. There was no discussion or prioritisation around these needs, they were simply recorded in the minutes book.

Only in one *Palli Sabha* were the recorded minutes read out to the villagers at the end of the meeting. However, not everyone who had signed the minutes at the beginning of the meeting stayed throughout to listen to the minutes recorded. In fact, some people arrived just at the end of the meeting and signed the minutes, without reading them, even though they had not participated in any of the discussion.

There seems to be a serious level of disillusionment with the *Palli* and *Gram Sabha* processes in the Santal community in Maddur. Most people I spoke with about the issue explained that they

are generally too busy to attend the *Gram Sabha* meetings. Nitisha from Nayapalli hamlet explained 'if you go to a *Gram Sabha*, you waste a whole day' – earning a day's wages is more important to the majority of villagers. Anusha Morandi, who comes from an Above Poverty Line family, and who is therefore not entitled to the government widow's pension, explained that she attended the *Gram Sabhas* in the past, but when she realised she would not benefit directly, she stopped attending. Anusha feels she is fully dependent on her family for food, as she is not getting a pension and she has no assets in her name. She said 'I taught everything to my family, but now they know everything, and I am of no use anymore'. Sneha Hasda, who has completed her first year in university in politics, economics and Sanskrit explained that previously she attended *Gram Sabhas*, and has often complained about the fact that there is no tube well and no proper road in her area. However, as her demands have never been fulfilled, she does not think these meetings are very useful, and therefore did not attend the *Gram Sabhas* in 2010.

In the Nayak hamlet, Kasturi Nayak explained that she does not attend the *Gram* or *Palli Sabha* meetings. Her husband goes on her behalf, because she needs to look after their children. She explained that her husband does not go regularly, and he does not talk with her about what has been discussed at the meetings. Prior to her marriage, she attended the *Gram* and *Palli Sabha* meetings, and while she is still interested in attending, her duties towards her family prevent her from doing so.

When women do attend these meetings, they tend not to speak at them - the local *Naike's*[36] wife, Priya, explained that she sometimes attends the *Palli* and *Gram Sabha* meetings, but she does not have the confidence to speak at these – she relies on other women leaders, such as the local

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[36] A *Naike* is a Santali Priest

health-worker to speak on her behalf. Baviskar (2009) finds similar issues in Maharashtra, where women in a sample research area attend the *panchayat* meetings but rarely speak, and as a result, matters of particular concern to women are not discussed. "The women and STs have willingly submitted to their role, accepting continuation of their traditional subordination" (Baviskar, 2009: 25). In contrast, the *anganwadi* worker from Bilaspur hamlet in Maddur did not attend the October 2010 *Gram Sabha* meeting because she was busy, however, she does feel that she has some influence at the meetings that she attends. In previous *Gram Sabhas* she highlighted the fact that there was no tube well in Bilaspur hamlet (which has now been provided), and she requested that the *anganwadi* centre roof be retiled, which was approved and completed.

In general, the women from the Nayak hamlet were more positive about the *Palli* and *Gram Sabha* meetings than those in the Santal hamlets. While Santali women informed me that attending the *Gram Sabhas* are a waste of time, as it means a loss of earnings, most women from the Nayak hamlet seem to regularly attend these meetings. One Self Help Group (SHG) member explained that these meetings provide an opportunity for villagers to learn about government schemes and how they are implemented.

In analysing the *Gram Sabha* records for 2010, it is clear that more Nayak women have (at least partially) attended these meetings than Santali women. For example, 111 people signed the *Gram Sabha* minutes on the 15th August 2010, but while sixty of those signatures are from women, only five of those sixty are Santali women. Similarly, on the 4th September 2010, a meeting was held where over sixty people signed the minutes book – thirteen of them women, but only four of those women were Santali.

Aside from issues of attendance, a further serious issue is the type of development work sanctioned at the *panchayat* level. The majority of proposals approved for the Annual Action Plan 2010 relate to road construction – with less focus given to water harvesting and water conservation. Road construction was more likely to be a priority for men in the community as it is socially acceptable for men to travel longer distances than it is for women in the community. In 2010, 42 proposals were passed for road and bridge construction/renovation in the *panchayat*, while 20 proposals were passed for pond renovation/construction. Five new *anganwadi* centres were proposed, and a proposal for the renovation of the *anganwadi* centre in Bilaspur hamlet was given. 12 proposals for the renovation/construction of tube-wells were given, but none of these were for the tube wells in Maddur village itself – despite the fact that the tube-well in Nayapalli hamlet was broken at the time, and was still broken during my return visit in 2013. The *anganwadi* centres and tube-wells were more likely to be priorities of women in the area, as they are responsible for caring for young children and collecting water.

Issues of Functions, Functionaries and Funds

Despite the 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution, there remain serious issues regarding the functions, functionaries and funds for the PRI. While governments can transfer up to twenty nine functions to *panchayats*, as Patnaik (2009) argues, these nominal transfers of subjects are not enough to enable *panchayats* to perform those functions as they continue to be implemented as activities and sub-activities by line agencies. While every state Act gives lists of a wide range of functions to be performed by the *panchayats*, no exclusive functional area is actually specified for these bodies. Moreover, Patnaik (2009) claims that there is no clear-cut demarcation of functions between different tiers of PRIs in the state of Odisha. "This clearly leads to confusion

in relation to responsibilities, when, for example, "education" or even "agriculture" is listed in the functions of PRIs at all levels" (Patnaik, 2009: 30). Thus, as Bandyopadhyay et al (2007) maintain, *panchayats* are allowed to work within the functional domain of the state, but are subject to such conditions as the state government may deem fit to impose. Singh, S.B, (2009) claims that *panchayats* act merely as an arm of the state, and do not interfere in everyday life of the people. "The government has not only decided what the *panchayats* have to do, but also how they have to do it. In most of the development projects the components are fixed, and the *panchayats* has only to select the beneficiaries" (Singh, S.B., 2009: 399). During his research in Gujarat, Joshi (2009) noted that while the *Gram Sabha* meetings take place regularly, hardly any discussion takes place on planning, accountability and governance of the village – these are very similar to my own research findings from Maddur. As clear cut functions between the different levels of the PRI, and between the PRI and line agencies are lacking, *panchayats* do not feel that they have any real power, and as a result, their *Gram Sabha* meetings are often considered by the community to be pointless endeavours.

In terms of functionaries, as Mathew (2007) explains, states such as Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh have taken measures to transfer functionaries but have faced strong resistance from different unions and associations. The fact that six states (including Odisha) have nominated a minister, rather than a district *panchayat* President to head the District Planning Committee (DPC) is further evidence of the limited power provided to the PRI. According to Mathew (2007), this undermines the position of the elected members of PRIs and municipalities, including the President of the *Zilla Parishads*. "Nomination is a convenient

tool that may be used by the state government for political expediency and to load the committee with political heavyweights to weaken the role and position of the *zilla parishad*" (ibid: 43).

In relation to funds, Mathew (2007) and Singh, S.B (2009) claim that neither Members of Parliament (MPs) nor Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) are giving the *panchayats* and municipalities their due, as the MPs Local Area Development Schemes (MPLADS) and the MLAs funds running into millions of rupees undermines the role of the local bodies. "After creating *panchayats* to prepare plans and to implement the schemes for economic development and social justice, why should the MPs and MLAs get millions of rupees from the exchequer for local area development? Definitely, it is aimed at marginalising and debilitating these constitutional bodies" (Mathew, 2007: 44). Other development plans such as watershed development also have an independent existence outside the *panchayats*. "Though technically the *panchayats* can ask for all the information, it hardly ever does so because there is tension between the *Sarpanch* and head of these committees. Thus, it leads to parallel power centres and consequently marginalisation of *panchayats*" (Singh, S.B 2009: 387). In Maddur, the *Sarpanch* supports the Congress party, while the local MLA is from the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) Party[37]. This difference in allegiance has caused serious political tension in relation to receiving funds for the area, as will be highlighted in chapter 5.

In his analysis of the tax structure of *gram panchayats* in Odisha, Patnaik (2009) shows that taxation powers given to *gram panchayats* are not used in Odisha. This is largely because enforcement provisions used for tax collection are not in place. In Odisha, the secretary of the

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[37] The BJD was formed as a regional party by Naveen Patnaik in 1998. It was named in memory of his father, Biju Patnaik (Chatterji, 2009).

gram panchayat is supposed to collect taxes, but there is no bill collector in the state. Moreover, some of the tax rates have not been revised for decades: for example "the rate of tax for vehicles was set in 1975 and has not since been updated" (Patnaik, 2009: 187).

In his detailed case study of *panchayats* in Koraput and Nayagarh districts in Odisha, Patnaik (2009) shows that the sampled districts suffer from fiscal ailments, with too much dependence on the state and central funding. This prevents the PRI from working as institutions of self-government, as there is little scope for resource generation besides tied funds received both under central and state sponsored schemes. "Investment of funds on the basis of service delivery is not demand driven and there is no systematic planning for development" (2009:195).

Table 1: Maddur *Panchayat* Income and Expenditure September 2010

Income	Expenditure
Sarpanch Allowance: Rs 7200	Sarpanch allowance: Rs 7200
Naib Sarpanch allowance: Rs 4800	Naib Sarpanch allowance: Rs 4800
Licence for bicycles: Rs 1500	Cycle licence: Rs 8100
Marriage Certificates: Rs 140	Meeting costs: Rs 7920
Market rent: Rs 4000	Tour expenditure: Rs 3000
Pond: Rs 18,000	Calling meetings: Rs300
Birth certificates: Rs 200	Worker's salary: Rs18,000
Government grant: Rs 21,000	'Contingency': Rs10,000
Shop rent: Rs 5,000	Electricity bill: Rs10,000
Meetings: Rs 7920	Sports organising: Rs 7,000
Total: Rs 69,960	**Total: Rs 69,030**

In Maddur, the 2010 income and expenditure of the *panchayat*, recorded in the *Gram Sabha* minutes is not very clear, and does not add up – as can be seen from Table 1 above. Firstly, the total figures do not tally with the details – as can be seen above, the total income should be Rs 69,760 (€1162.67) and the total expenditure should be Rs 76,320 (€1272). Secondly, many of the details in the expenditure column are unclear – the need for a Rs 10,000 (€166.67) 'contingency' fund and why Rs 8,100 (€135) was spent on cycle licences are particularly confusing. Furthermore, while there is no money to repair the broken tube wells, or to provide proper water

harvesting systems, the *Panchayati* Raj Department gave Rs 1,000,000 (€16,667) to every *panchayat* to improve their offices in 2010. The Maddur *panchayat* has decided to use this money to build a conference hall with an upstairs gallery, which was under construction at the time of research in 2010 and was completed by the time of my return visit in 2013. In 2010, I was told that the purpose of this building was to facilitate *Gram Sabhas* during hot summer months and during the monsoon, however the completed building merely contained three small rooms, and is used for trainings and *panchayat* meetings, but none of the rooms are large enough to host a full *Gram Sabha* meeting. Unfortunately, neither the Executive Officer nor the *Sarpanch* were willing to clarify these issues.

In their historical overview of the functioning of *panchayats*, Bandyopadhyay et al (2007) conclude that the *panchayats* of India suffer from an identity crisis. "This crisis of identity results from our colonial mindset of treating the local domain as a dependent domain not fit for self-rule. The clientelist political culture of the country derives its strength from such a mindset" (Bandyopadhyay et al, 2007: 66). The fact that *panchayats* did not come into existence out of a popular demand or popular movement does not help this crisis of identity. The *panchayats* were "a 'gift' from the top, superimposed on a very powerful and historically structured system of bureaucratic, non-accountable, non-responsive and autocratic district administration" (ibid).

In *Europe and the People Without History*, Wolf (1997) shows how local and global processes interact by analysing the creation of the Global South. He claims that the birth and expansion of global capitalism in Europe affected both the societies that Europeans encountered in their expansion and the European societies themselves. He further argues that the non-European

communities were active participants in the progress of history – not static, unchanging cultures as was often claimed in colonial writings. As a result, Wolf argues that the local context needs to be understood in terms of the accommodation or resistance of local people to economic and political forces at the macro level.

Therefore, in line with Wolf's framework of analysis, the effect of governance at the local level is directly linked to national level decisions (through an imposed system) and global historical processes (through the effects of colonialism). These processes subsequently impact on how the 'state' is viewed at the local level. Until the PRI has adequate funds and functionaries, and autonomy in functions, people will continue to consider it a waste of a day to attend *panchayat* level meetings as it will be viewed as a mere arm of the state government, and will be lacking a true identity of its own.

The PRI and Party Politics

In India, *panchayat* elections are legally conducted on a non-party basis. Political parties do not formally endorse candidates and candidates do not run on party affiliations. However, a Foucauldian analysis is helpful here in understanding the numerous networks of power relations throughout the PRI. As Mohanty and Selden (2007) explain, in practice the Indian party system has permeated the village and hamlet levels, and elections are actually fought on party lines – blurring the boundary between the PRI as it is laid out in the Indian Constitution and party politics at the state and national level. According to Mohanty and Selden (2007), after the *panchayat* elections, the parties announce their victories or losses of the number of *Sarpanchs* at the village level, *Samiti* Chairpersons at the block level and *Zilla Parishad* Presidents at the

district level. This was evident in the 2012 *panchayat* elections when, as is outlined in the March 2012 *PRI Update*, the BJD won a landslide majority at the *Zilla Parishad* level. During the 2012 elections, both Congress and BJD prepared manifestos, with the BJD focusing on development issues and success of government schemes for women and children, whereas the Congress party "tried to defame the BJD party by depicting the Chief Minister, Naveen Patnaik as a ten–headed demon or Ravan of Odisha on the cover page of the manifesto" (March 2012 PRI update: 8). This may be one reason why the BJD won by a majority in the elections, as they were perceived to be addressing the real concerns of the population. What is clear from the party manifestos in the elections is that *panchayats* are increasingly being used as recruiting grounds for the party cadres, as well as the state level leaders (ibid).

Kundu's (2009) research in West Bengal also shows that the boundary between the *panchayat* and the party is vague, as in many ways the *gram panchayat* and the party function in a complementary manner. Where the dominant political party of the region is strongly organised, a *panchayat* member may enjoy some freedom of decision making, only when he or she is powerful within the party. Kundu further claims that many of those who are becoming *panchayat* members through reservation are not only less educated, less experienced, but also less acceptable to people as leaders. "Such a phenomenon helps to consolidate power in the hands of extra-constitutional authorities, who prefer to pull strings from behind the curtain" (2009: 132). As a result, Kundu (2009) maintains that the 73rd Amendment, may have, unintentionally, "strengthened the alleged tendency of the local *panchayati raj* to be transformed into a party raj" (2009: 135).

Similar issues are highlighted in Rajasthan, through Singh's (2009) research. The MLAs and the MPs are the members of *panchayat samitis* and of *zilla parishads*, and they have a say in these meetings. Singh S.B., (2009) claims that it is equally important to get one's candidate elected at the *gram panchayat* level, so that the *Sarpanchs* can help higher level politicians at election time. The *Sarpanch* also needs the help of the higher level politicians, not only at the time of crises but also to get projects sanctioned. "Those who have better linkages get more funds and development projects" (Singh, S.B., 2009: 387).

Understanding the linkages between the PRI and party politics is crucial to understanding how the PRI functions, and how it is undermined by the power relations within these institutions. While on paper, the PRI functions as a form of local level democracy, in practice, it is embedded within a series of institutions with differing levels of power and vested interests. Therefore any attempt to further decentralise democracy has to be done in a manner which takes the numerous other power systems into account. Ensuring women's participation within these power structures adds a further layer of complexity which also must be considered.

Women in politics

Even though the reservation system has been implemented at the grassroots level since 1993, its effects have not yet permeated upwards to the level of the state assembly. The representation of women in the Odisha state assembly and the state ministry is negligible, apart from Nandini Satpathy, who was chief minister for a brief period in the 1970s. "Though a handful of women participate in state politics, they belong to the rich section of the higher castes and ex-royal families" (Mohanty, 2009: 43). In Odisha, in 1990, only 4.8% of MLAs were women. This

figure increased to 7.48% in 2004, but in the 2009 elections, only 4.7% of MLAs elected were women. At the national level, there were only 58 female MPs out of a total of the 542 MPs who were elected to the 15th *Lok Sabha* – they constitute only 10.7% of the total number of MPs, and there is no female representative from Odisha in the *Lok Sabha* (Government of Odisha, 2010).

There is serious resistance to women entering formal public life, as those already in power fear that their positions will be threatened. As a result of this resistance, violence against women who attempt to enter politics has increased, as women's entry into the PRI has challenged men's power (Batliwala, 2007). This is clearly evident in the case studies in *Sarpanch Sahib*, where Sharma, K. (2009) outlines a study of the 2006 *panchayat* elections in Bihar. "Out of twenty cases of gender violence investigated, twelve women who stood for elections were murdered, four were physically attacked, one had a false case registered against her, two were threatened with murder and one was kidnapped" (2009: 125).

If the Women's Reservation Bill is passed, some of the learning from the women's reservation in the PRI should be taken into account in order to facilitate women overcoming many of the obstacles they face in entering politics. Some of these obstacles are highlighted in the oral histories below - showing that a reservation for women in politics can be an enabling factor to achieve women's empowerment, but on its own, it is not sufficient.

 Women in the PRI – Oral Histories

Maddur *panchayat* is comprised of eleven wards, and in 2010, 45%, or five out of eleven ward members were women. Four of those women were elected to reserved seats, whereas Ms Savita

Majhi, a Santali from Sahajpur village, was the only woman elected to an unreserved seat. As Maddur *panchayat* also has a female *Sarpanch*, who was elected to an unreserved seat, it is clear that women are now in key decision making positions. During the 2012 *panchayat* elections, the numerical dominance of elected female representatives further improved: 54% of elected representatives, or 7 out of the 11 ward members were female, and Mahak Murmu, was elected as the *Sarpanch* for the third time. This now means that within Maddur village itself, there are two female ward members, one male ward member and they have a female *Sarpanch*. Of the seven elected female representatives in Maddur *panchayat*, three of them are Santali. Despite this, the narratives outlined below highlight a number of issues relating to Santal women's involvement in the PRI: issues of family support, levels of education, awareness of government programmes, and how the opportunities created through the PRI interact with Santali traditional practices.

Saloni Hembrom

Saloni Hembrom, who graduated with an Arts degree from the local university, was the first woman and youngest person to be elected Block Chairperson at the age of 23 in 1997 and served a five year term from 1997 – 2002. Her interest in politics stems from her family background, as both her father and uncle were government employees, and political discussions were a frequent feature of family life. Saloni is still keenly interested in politics, and is still involved with the Congress party. In 2010 she explained that household activities and caring for her father, husband and four year old son took up the majority of her time, and she therefore did not have time to be involved in politics. However, when I met her again in 2013, she explained that she decided to stand for the *panchayat* 2012 elections to a reserved seat for women, as her son was

now in school, which gave some more free time. Unfortunately she campaigned against three other contestants but lost the election by 40 votes. Her family were very supportive of her campaign, and her husband campaigned with her. She was not affiliated with any political party, and therefore did not align herself with any party campaigning material, but argued that she would help to develop the community and represent the electorate. Despite this setback, she stated that she has a strong interest to run for MLA/MP in the next elections in 2014. However, she explained that finances will be an issue, as it will cost approximately Rs1,000,000 (€16,667) to stand for the Assembly election.

Saloni explained that she has seen a change in women's participation in politics in recent years, as previously only female ward members or women involved in party politics attended the *Palli* and *Gram Sabhas*, whereas now other women who are not directly involved in politics are also attending these meetings. She thinks these meetings provide an important opportunity for women to voice their needs and concerns. However, she cautioned against the women's reservation system: while she agreed with it in principle, and felt there should be a quota system for women both in the PRI and in Parliament, she highlighted the challenges when illiterate and uneducated women are elected to PRI positions, as she stated they are often unable to conduct the job properly. While more women are now attending the *Palli* and *Gram Sabhas*, there is a lack of educated women coming forward for PRI positions – which Saloni believes has an impact on what can feasibly be done to develop *panchayats*. However, she also highlighted that the reservation system provides an important opportunity for interested female candidates to stand for election, and believes that women play a crucial role in politics because "only a woman can

properly understand the problems other women face" and can develop appropriate strategies to address them.

Despite her feminist analysis of women's role in politics, Saloni does not consider control over property as a woman's need or right. Saloni's mother died soon after Saloni's marriage, and Saloni and her husband moved back to her family home to care for her father. Even though Saloni has spent more than ten years caring for her father, she feels no entitlement to his property upon his death. Saloni explained that her brother will inherit the family home and stated "things would be different if I was not married. Then I would be allowed to have a small part of my father's property". While Saloni is resigned to her lack of inheritance rights, she also admits that she sometimes feels inferior to men, that men are more important and there is an issue of dependence on men in Indian society. She thinks that even if a woman is highly educated, she will still have a low morale because of male domination. These are issues which Saloni has clearly thought about, but like many women in patriarchal societies, is unable to challenge these social norms on her own.

In 2012, when Saloni stood for the *panchayat* election, she did so in her in-laws area, despite the fact that she was still living with her own father. When I asked her why she decided to stand in her in-laws village, her husband, Biswa, answered on her behalf, saying "Everyone will prefer the in-laws area; this is always the first preference". Saloni sat silently as he said this, neither agreeing nor disagreeing. This seems to suggest that while the particular interest in the *panchayat* elections originally came from Saloni, it was her husband who decided that she should stand in her in-laws area. It transpired from Saloni's and Biswa's explanations that the fact that they were not actually living in Biswa's native village was one of the reasons she lost

the election. They explained that a number of villagers were suspicious of her because she did not live in the area. They questioned her on how she would be able to represent them if she was not living in the village, despite her assurances that she would move to the village if she were elected. Saloni also explained that rumours started spreading that she was standing for election in both her in-laws village and her native village, which further served to undermine her campaign.

Since Saloni lost the election, she has set up an Amway[38] business with her husband in her local area. Amway is very similar to the Avon business model, where individuals become company representatives, selling the produce door-to-door. In discussing the business with both Saloni and Biswa, it seemed that this was something very much driven by Biswa. He explained that this was a far more beneficial option than being involved in politics, as the money they would earn through Amway would be "white money". He stated, "In Amway we can secure white money; but in politics there is no security and there is a lot of black money". He also stated "There is no peace in politics, but there is peace in Amway. Amway provides monetary freedom and is the symbol of peace, prosperity, love, recognition, support and nature building". Biswa thus clearly linked the neo-liberal agenda of Amway to love, concern for the environment, peace and prosperity. While it is highly questionable whether or not Saloni and her family will actually be able to earn a substantial income, and gain "monetary freedom" from Amway's expensive products when the majority of their neighbours, and therefore customers, are living at basic subsistence levels, as Dolan (2012) maintains, this model is increasingly becoming the new face of development.

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[38] Amway is a direct selling company, selling beauty and home products.

Saloni comes from and has been inspired by an educated Santali family who strongly believe in keeping the Santal culture alive. Her upbringing, as well as the women's reservation system in the PRI, have provided her with a number of opportunities and have allowed her to take part in what was traditionally a man's world. Saloni feels a strong sense of identity towards her culture and feels proud that she can read and write the Santali *Olchiki* script, which her mother taught her. Male domination and female subordination are clearly issues which she has thought about. However, while she is empowered to take decisions on her own income, she is not willing to disrupt family relations by demanding her entitlement to property, nor is she willing to risk cursing her family by cooking or worshipping during menstruation. Saloni still has a deep passion to be involved in politics, but her efforts to campaign in the 2012 elections were undermined by the fact that she campaigned in her in-laws village, where she was not residing. While she is confident, strong willed and has stepped outside the norm by being active in politics, her frame of reference through which she is able to make life choices is the patriarchal one of a "good Santali woman".

Mahak Murmu

Mahak Murmu is a well educated (graduate student), comparatively affluent, strong, Santali lady who along with her husband commands respect in the village. She has been Maddur's *panchayat Sarpanch* since 2002 and since then has grown in her role and has gained in confidence. She is knowledgeable about the various government schemes and Acts for which she is responsible, and has made some important changes to her *panchayat* since her election.

Growing up, Mahak had no interest in politics, but her in-laws encouraged her to get involved. She then realised that if she was an elected official, she could help people who are suffering. When she was first elected to a reserved seat for women, she was nervous and unaware of the extent of her role and responsibility. Initially the community was not supportive of her and made passing comments regarding her inability to lead, but her family stood by her and encouraged her.

Towards the end of her first tenure, Mahak had a far better understanding of her role and responsibilities and decided to contest for a second term. However, the role of *Sarpanch* was no longer a reserved seat for women, so she had to run for election in an open contest. She was the only woman to contest the *Sarpanch* seat, against three other men, and she won. The fact that she won an open seat is an important indicator of the success of the women's reservation in the PRI. If there had been no reservation system, Mahak would not have contested for a seat in the 2002 election. In 2012, she decided to again stand for election as she felt she had some unfinished work to do in the *panchayat.* This time, she contested against two other female candidates for an unreserved seat. She won by 322 votes in her first election, by 84 votes in her second, and 304 votes in her third election. As a result of her entry into politics, her confidence increased to the extent that she could successfully win an open election, and this has subsequently given her the confidence to apply twice for the position of MLA within the Congress Party. She explained that she hopes to apply again during the 2014 elections. She explained that all political parties are the same to her, but she chose to affiliate herself with the Congress party as it was established by Gandhi. She explained "as Gandhi fought against the British, I also want to fight against

corruption". She stated "my *gram panchayat* is developed, I now want to develop my state and my country".

Mahak appears to strongly believe in gender equality, and clearly fought hard to be where she is today. While her in-laws house is currently in the name of her father-in-law, she wants both her son and daughter to equally inherit the property. She takes a keen interest in women's problems and the women in the village have become more involved in political life since her election. Unlike other women in the community, Mahak's role as a mother has not prevented her from carrying out her responsibilities towards her electorate. Her in-laws have supported her and care for her children in her absence, a support system which the *Naib Sarpanch* from 2007-2012, Seema Majhi, did not seem to have.

When I asked her about the 50% reservation for women in politics, she supported it, but argued that at a minimum, women standing for election should be literate, as she thought their husbands would have less involvement if the female representatives were educated. This is similar to Saloni's analysis, and is an analysis neither woman highlighted during my 2010 research. Mahak explained that some political parties are forcing illiterate candidates to stand for election so that they can control them. She maintained that, as a result of this, illiterate people should not be given priority to run for election. She also stated that she supported having a reservation system for women within the state Assembly. Her reasons for this were not because of ensuring women's issues are brought to the table, instead she explained that she thought it would be a strategy to help overcome mobility restrictions that women face. She explained "I am very interested to stand in the MLA elections, but at the moment I am only known within Maddur

panchayat, and to win in the MLA elections, I need to be known across a much wider area." She therefore felt that having a women's reservation system would help women with this as they are more restricted in the extent to which they can travel in comparison to men. However, she also explained that there is a much greater joy to win an open contest election in comparison to winning in a reserved seat. She stated that she felt much greater joy in her second and third elections, because she contested and won against all candidates, not just female candidates.

Mahak is knowledgeable about government policies as well as her roles and responsibilities as an elected official. The positive impacts of her tenure are clearly evident: *Palli* and *Gram Sabhas* now take place regularly, and more women than men attend. Prior to her election very few women attended these meetings. The Public Distribution System is now working properly, whereby families categorised as 'below the poverty line' receive rice, sugar and kerosene at subsidised rates. When Mahak started as a *Sarpanch*, she gave priority to sanitation work and now almost all families have a latrine. In 2009 she received an award from the Governor of Odisha for her work on sanitation in the *panchayat*. When I met her again in 2013 she had been shortlisted to attend an award ceremony in Delhi, as Maddur village had been awarded Rs200,000 (€3,333) through the Central Government's "*Nirmal Gram Puraskar*" Award – an award given to individuals, organisations and *gram panchayats* who have been the driving force for effecting full sanitation coverage for a geographical area (Dept of Drinking Water Supply, 2010).

When Mahak was first elected, her husband, Rahul, controlled her movements and activities she was involved in, he did not like her attending meetings and would decide which projects she could work on. Rahul, who is an engineer by trade but not working at the time of writing, has

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managed to maintain some level of influence over Mahak's work. On most occasions that I visited the *panchayat* office (over fifty times during a ten month period) he was present, while Mahak was only present approximately half of the time. Mahak rationalised her husband's involvement in her work by explaining that he was very supportive and assisted her frequently. She explained that during her first tenure she had to go to Delhi eight times, and he accompanied her on three of those occasions. She maintained that he now helps her with training programmes, ensuring food and logistics are organised. He also helps with bill payments, and she emphasised that he helps mainly for "urgent" work.

Mahak's explanation may also be a way of ensuring her husband continues to be supportive of her work. If he feels involved and valued, rather than threatened by her role, she may be more likely to remain active in the public sphere, which is ultimately what she wants to do, as she has aspirations to represent not just her community, but also her country. Putting up with her husband's active involvement in her work could therefore be seen as one of the ways Mahak is able to navigate her way successfully through a patriarchal culture. Mahak may also be using her husband's support as a strategy to engage with the male senior authorities with whom she is required to interact. As Mohanty, M. (2007) explains, the husbands or other male relatives of female *Sarpanchs* shield them from the *panchayat* secretary and block development officers if they try to harass the women. In fact, some state governments (Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan) have passed a rule that women elected representatives should be accompanied by their male relatives to the *panchayats*. "This is because in some cases, the secretaries of the *panchayats* and male colleagues try to implicate inexperienced women by asking them to sign blank cheques, and in many cases, no-confidence motions are passed in the *panchayats* against the women

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chiefs on false charges" (Mohanty, M. 2007: 301). Mahak provided a number of examples where she has faced difficulties with the District Collector, and perhaps having her husband with her for these meetings has actually been beneficial. In 2010, the Odisha Government appointed a female District Collector to Keonjhar District, Mahak was clearly delighted with this, as she stated she feels more comfortable discussing issues with a female collector. This is similar to Strulik's (2010) research in Uttar Pradesh, where she found that women *Sarpanchs* feel more at ease working with female rather than male bureaucrats.

Seema Majhi

Seema Majhi was elected to the position of *Naib Sarpanch* in 2007. She explained that her family supported her and the villagers forced her to take up the reserved posting. While Seema is literate (she has been educated up to class 8[39]), when I met her in 2010, her two young children took up the majority of her time, which meant she was unable to carry out her *Naib Sarpanch* duties properly. She was unable to explain her duties to me, and a number of male villagers in the community stated they were not happy with Seema's work as she had been unable to get work for them under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA)[40]. During the *Gram Sabha* that I observed in February 2010, Seema spent most of her time walking around the grounds of the *panchayat* office with her three year old daughter, rather than participating actively in the meeting proceedings.

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[39] Class 8 in the Indian education system refers to students within the age group 13-14 yrs
[40] NREGA is a job guarantee scheme which stipulates that the state is responsible for providing 100 days employment per year per rural household paid at the minimum wage. NREGA is now called the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), but at the time of research in Odisha, it was referred to as NREGA.

While Seema complained to me about the non-functioning tube well in the village, she did not seem to see it as her role to address the issue and advocate for its renovation on behalf of her community. Seema's sister-in-law was denied a widow's pension, and Seema also seemed to be powerless in addressing this issue. She explained that if the *Sarpanch* told her to follow up on the issue at the Block office, she would go, but the *Sarpanch* had not requested her to do so. Seema clearly has a subordinate role in the village, and has not taken her own initiative in demanding rights on behalf of her sister-in-law.

Despite her limitations, it seems as though Seema has gained in confidence since being elected, and she stated in 2010 that she would like to run for the position of *Sarpanch* in the 2012 election. However, while the PRI seems to have expanded her horizons, she has not applied this thinking to her own cultural context. Seema has no interest in becoming a Santali *Majhi*[41], because "it would involve a lot of hard work, and I would need to travel to different villages". Seema's view is that travelling to different villages for Government work would be acceptable, but doing so for Santali based work would not be permissible. Similarly, Santali women are not allowed to visit the Santali sites of worship such as the *Jaher Garh*[42]. Seema has no interest in visiting this area, and does not seem to have questioned the fact that she is restricted from doing so purely because she is female. The fact that Seema does not want to be a *Majhi*, and has no interest in going to the *Jaher Garh* area, yet she would like to be a *Sarpanch* shows the clear division between the opportunities provided by the government policies, and how these have not yet permeated Santali culture.

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[41] Santali Village Leader.
[42] The *Jaher Garh* is a sacred Sal tree area at the edge of the village.

However, there are two other important explanations for this statement, which should be considered. Firstly, as the current *Majhi* is clearly one of the poorest in the community, being elected to such a position does not necessarily bring any economic benefits. As a consequence, Seema may not attach as much importance to this position, as she attaches to the position of *Sarpanch,* as in this position economic power and political power interact. Secondly, as Strulik notes, "'harmony' and 'happiness' within the family is presented as superseding all personal ambitions by the majority of women. Generally women will prefer a non-offensive subtle approach to negotiate ambitions and may accept certain limits, not necessarily feeling uncomfortable with them" (Strulik, 2010: 118). Seema may feel that being a *Majhi* is beyond the realms of possibility for her, and yet she may not perceive this to be disempowering in any way. In a similar manner, ordinary Irish Catholic women may not see it as disempowering that they cannot become priests in the Catholic Church, and accept that this is only a role for men as dictated by the Vatican's interpretation of the Bible, yet they may see it as disempowering if they could not be elected representatives of their local community as is laid out in the Irish Constitution.

As a result of the reservation system, Saloni, Mahak and Seema have had the opportunity to enter the PRI. While Mahak was subsequently able to contest a second election in an open contest, Saloni's family responsibilities when her son was young prevented her from doing so. Seema faced similar family responsibilities, and like Saloni has ambitions to remain in the public sphere as an elected representative. One of the fundamental impacts of the women's reservation in the PRI is that it has led to opportunities for women to be involved in the public sphere, and as a result, it has increased the confidence levels of those who have been elected. In this manner it

has helped to transform the institutions and structures that reinforce and sustain existing power structures to some extent.

Obstacles to women's active participation in the PRI

The women's reservation in India's local level politics was included in the 73rd Amendment in order to empower women and ensure their issues and needs were highlighted in the political arena. As the narratives above highlight, this legislation has shaken the social dynamics of local communities, but obstacles that women both inside and outside the political process face have slowed the pace of real change.

Women's access to information is a significant issue in Maddur, as the majority of women are illiterate, and are therefore unable to read the important information on the various acts and provisions on the *panchayat* building walls. Furthermore, they do not have the same access to the radio that men have. While men seem to regularly sit around a radio together, women do not. Padma Hasda explained that her family does not have a radio, so she cannot listen to one regularly, but she sometimes listens to a neighbour's radio. She likes to listen to Santal songs on it, she sometimes hears the news, but it is difficult to understand because it is in Odiya. The fact that most Santal men speak Odiya, but most Santal women do not, also hinders the information they are able to access, and this subsequently has an impact on their awareness of their rights and entitlements, and ability to hold their elected representatives to account.

Access to training for newly elected representatives is also problematic. During my return visit to Maddur in 2013, I spoke with the two new ward members: Preeti Patra and Navita Nayak.

Neither of them had received any formal training in the 12 months since being elected to their new role, and both stated that they had not been given any specific responsibilities by the *Sarpanch*. Neither of them seemed fully aware of their responsibilities in their newly elected roles, largely as a result of lack of access to information and training.

Contradictory laws, such as the two-child norm stipulated in the Odisha *Panchayati Raj* Act, which bars persons having more than two children (born after 1995) from contesting *panchayat* elections, further undermines the Amendment. This law was implemented to control population growth. However, in many situations, women do not have control over the number of children they would like to have, and this norm prevents women who may be interested and capable from being elected. A study carried out in Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Odisha, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, outlined by Rao, M. (2008) found that the two child norm has led to desertion of wives, denial of paternity, neglect of female infants, non-registration of births, and non-immunisation of daughters to avoid registration. There was also evidence of forced abortions and pre-birth elimination of females (ibid). As Rao, M. (2008: 302) argues, "the framers of this law utterly ignored how patriarchy and class intersect in India to deny women and the marginalised communities a place in the sun. Indeed, that law itself serves to further victimise them". A report by the Department of Women and Child Development (2007) also criticises this law. The authors claim that the two child norm is most often used against women and disproportionately impacts poor, Muslim and Tribal women. In Maddur, Saloni, Mahak and Seema actually agree with this law, as they state the government line that it is an effective method of population control. In line with Foucault's analysis of power and knowledge, Saloni, Mahak and Seema have accepted the

mainstream discourse on this issue as 'true'. However, for other women with larger families, this law creates a further barrier to their active participation in the PRI.

Opposition to the women's reservation is still prevalent in many areas, despite the fact that it was implemented two decades ago. Baviskar and Mathew (2009) cite examples in Rajasthan and Manipur, where they claim many tribal leaders are generally opposed to the reservation for women, as they believe women should contest along with men and win the seats. "They say if a woman is a good worker she will win even against men. According to them the reservation goes against the principle of merit" (Baviskar and Mathew, 2009: 13). In areas where opposition to the reservation system is not so obvious, men also play a dominant role in many situations. Baviskar and Mathew (2009) explain that husbands of women *panchayat* members attend and speak at the *panchayat* meetings in several states including Karnataka, Odisha, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh and it is also a widespread practice for husbands to carry out the actual day to day official work on behalf of their wives heading the *panchayats*. During the 2012 elections in Maddur, there did not seem to be much vocal opposition to the increased women's reservation. However, the National Alliance of Women (NAWO) in Orissa heard of cases where men were preventing women from contesting in open contest seats, claiming that it was only the reserved seats that women were allowed to contest in. Biswa Besra explained that men in Sabalpura block were not very vocal about the increased reservation because "even if men cannot stand for certain seats, they can still benefit, because their wives will be elected, but a lot of activities will still be done by men". Saloni highlighted a case that happened in 2012 where a female elected *Sarpanch*, who had disobeyed her husband's decision, was attacked and beaten by her husband

and paraded through the town. It is clear from Biswa's and Saloni's comments that men are maintaining their dominance, despite the increased women's involvement in the PRI.

In Tamil Nadu, Thara Bhai (2009) shows that women are not fully participating in the activities of the *panchayats*, and ignorance of the political system among elected women leaders in rural Tamil Nadu is a serious issue. Most women in the sample study area were elected due to their close relationship with male leaders of the village. A few women were not able to talk independently, but even the women who were educated could not take an independent decision because they were not permitted to do so by their husbands (Thara Bhai, 2009: 279). Thara Bhai (2009) also notes that the same women are participating very well on the economic front and attaining economic empowerment through self help groups. However, when it comes to political participation, they are silenced, and thus marginalised. "This may be due to the fact that the society considers political participation as the male domain, or they feel that political participation gives women too much power, which they do not deserve" (Thara Bhai, 2009: 283). This viewpoint is mirrored in Maddur, through discussions with Manas Majhi, the 2007-2012 ward member in Bilaspur hamlet. Manas was a *Majhi* in Maddur for 10 years, and subsequently became a ward member for the Bilaspur hamlet. He was also an ASECA[43] member and a school committee member. When I met him in 2010, he was married with three children, one daughter and two sons. Manas himself had received an education up to class seven, but his wife is illiterate. One of his sons is a graduate in commerce; the other son had completed class ten. His daughter is illiterate and has had no school education. Manas explained that when his daughter was born he was very poor, his parents had died, and they had no property or land. He therefore

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[43] ASECA is the Adivasi Social Education and Cultural Association, a Santali run association which promotes Santali culture.

had no money to send his daughter to school, whereas three years later they could afford to send his son to school.

Manas resigned from his post as *Majhi* due to an incident between a married couple. A husband was neglecting his wife and Manas called a meeting where the couple were separated. Manas decided that the woman should marry some-one else, but it was the man's own wish to marry his new partner. Manas resigned because he felt that if he was involved in controversial situations it may have an impact on his children's future. He explained that the position of *Majhi* carries a lot of responsibility, and if a controversial situation is not handled properly, it could cause major problems in the village.

When I spoke to Manas in 2010 about the women's reservation, he stated that the 33% women's reservation in the PRI is not sufficient – "there should be a 50% reservation for women in *gram panchayats*". He stated that if there was no reservation, there would be more abuse of women. However, Manas also explained that ASECA is only for men in order to limit the numbers and "there is no money for women to attend, because the annual membership is Rs30 (€0.50) and who will pay that for their wives?"

While Manas stated that he believes in equal rights for men and women, his sons are well educated but his wife and daughter are illiterate. While he agreed with the 50% reservation in the PRI, he did not think that women should participate in ASECA meetings. While he became involved in a situation where a husband was neglecting his wife, his solution was to choose an alternative husband for the woman, while the accused man was able to choose his own new wife.

These contradictory views could be an effect of the women's reservation system, as some male leaders become resigned to and accept the government driven directive, but still aim to maintain control in other social structures. Manas passed away in December 2012. Some of the villagers explained that he was killed by witches. While he was in positions of authority, his dominant influence in the community limited opportunities for women.

Kundu's (2009) research in West Bengal, highlights an unexpected social consequence of the reservation system. An elected female *Sarpanch*, who had no interest in contesting the election did so only because her father was approached by the left parties to allow her to be a *gram panchayat* member for a reserved seat. While she now enjoys working with the community, she finds herself a burden on her family. The marriages of her three sisters were easily arranged, but when her parents were ready to marry her off, the families of potential grooms rejected her because of her active involvement in the *panchayats*. "They were afraid that she would never be a submissive bride, and would cause the breaking up of a joint family" (Kundu, 2009: 125).

A related, but slightly opposing problem, is outlined in Chandrashekar's (2009) work in Karnataka. As is the case in other states, Chandrashekar (2009) noted a low level of political participation by women *gram panchayat* members. However, in discussing the issue with an outspoken and articulate sister-in-law of one of the *panchayat* members, she mentioned that she had not joined politics because the political parties would not take her – they wanted quiet, compliant women. "She said 'They did not select me because I am a fighter.' In other words, she implied that these women had been chosen by the political class because of their quiet demeanour, so as to lessen the political competition that they would otherwise have to contend

with" (Chandrashekar, 2009: 258). Whether or not the elected *Sarpanch* in West Bengal was chosen because of her "submissive" nature is unclear, but being elected has given her a new "fighter" identity, similar to the case of the unelected sister-in-law in Karnataka, which has impacted on her potential for marriage.

Conclusion

Baviskar and Mathew (2009) are optimistic about the changes taking place across the country. They acknowledge that India is not showing a uniform picture, and the variation and diversity demonstrates the vast differences in local social structures and regional histories. They maintain that the regions with a tradition of social reform such as Maharashtra, Gujarat and parts of south India seem to have responded favourably to the Constitutional changes for inclusion of previously excluded groups. "As the process continues with the active participation of positive social forces, the very dynamics of these changes and the grassroots democratic institutions could usher in changes in the less progressive backward regions as well" (Baviskar and Mathew, 2009:16).

However, Kundu (2009) maintains that when observations are superficial, the impact of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment seems enormous, but beyond the surface, the picture is not quite so hopeful. He argues that many active members from previously excluded categories play merely a bureaucratic role, not the role of a leader. "They cannot take major decisions by themselves, and simply follow the decisions made by others. Those who control them are usually some influential party members" (Kundu, 2009: 132).

Despite this, the reservation system has resulted in some nuanced changes in gender dynamics, as is argued by Mohanty (2007) and Jayal (2006). They claim that even if elected women representatives depend on their husbands, the power relations between husband and wife have already changed, namely as a result of the fact that the husband gets an opportunity to come to the public sphere because of his wife, and in the process the character of patriarchy is altered. Similarly, despite the strong belief in the Santali system, women's reservation in the PRI in Maddur has changed the gender dynamics in the community. In discussing the women's reservation with Mahak Murmu, she explained that prior to the reservation, no woman could run for election in the area, as the men in the community would not permit it. The women's reservation has given a chance to Santali women to take an active part in local politics.

The ethnographic findings outlined in this chapter demonstrate the complexities of the changes taking place in the lives of elected women representatives within a majority Santali community. The findings show many contradictions in the views of female and male village representatives in terms of their perceptions and beliefs in gender equality, but this needs to be contextualised in terms of the dominant patriarchal framework through which these views are held. It is through understanding how the introduction of legislation which aims to address gender inequality is implemented within a historically masculine state, that we can understand the choices women make and the circumstances in which they are forced to make those choices. A women's reservation system which has been implemented within a male dominated culture is unlikely to provide a quick fix solution to gender inequality. What my research shows is that there has been significant changes in elected women's confidence levels, which may prove to be an important catalyst for further change.

The expected changes in this complex issue must also be contextualised in terms of the political structures to which women have gained entry. Fundamentally, the structures that hold elected representatives to account, the *Palli* and *Gram Sabhas*, are lacking in real power. While the PRI women's reservation goes some way in transforming local level politics, its impact is limited because the underlying problems with the structure itself have not been addressed. If the community believed the PRI had the power to improve their lives, attending these crucial meetings would not be perceived as a 'waste of time'. As Sangma et al (2001) note, the *Gram Sabha* is a forum for registering 'voice' of individual citizens in the process of decision-making on matters that affect their lives. However, allowing for 'voice' without 'agency' merely results in participation in a disempowering framework. All of these issues subsequently create obstacles and barriers to empowerment, as has been defined by Batliwala (2007). Facilitating empowerment within a system that is itself disempowering may lead to serious disillusionment with the political process. The PRI in its current form is a 'technical' solution devoid of power. In Foucauldian terms, its 'unintended' consequence is the entrenchment of power within higher echelons through a discourse which calls for village republics.

Chapter 4 – Santal Institutions

To understand the impact of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, it is important to understand the relations, and 'blurred boundaries' (Gupta, 1995), between state and society. Authors such as Gupta (1995), Nugent (2010) and Aretxaga (2003), amongst others, have helped increase our understanding of power relations between state and society using ethnographic material. Foucault's work has also been fundamental to this debate, as his analysis of power within institutions beyond the state is crucial. This chapter looks at the linkages and interactions between Santali institutions and the PRI, in particular the role of women within these institutions. It outlines the functions of Santali institutions before focusing on the role of women within these institutions, including their role in Santali festivals, and the impact of Santali religion and culture on women's rights. Even though in some circumstances, women have no formal role in Santali decision making processes, many of them feel they have an informal influence through discussing issues with their husbands in private. While the ethnographic material in this chapter provides a snapshot of one particular village at a particular point in time, women's role within these institutions is subsequently placed within the wider context of Hinduisation.

The Santals are a Scheduled Tribe living predominantly in India, Bangladesh and Nepal. "Their administrative identity has ranged from Aboriginal Tribe in colonial discourse and Backward Hindu in nationalist frames, to *Adivasi* in sub-nationalist assertions, and indigenous community in internationalist debates" (Rycroft, 2006: 93). They constitute the largest Scheduled Tribe in East India (inhabiting West Bengal, Tripura, Northern Odisha, Bihar, Jharkhand and Assam) with a population of approximately five million (Shariff, 2007). Historically, the Santals inspired anti-colonial and sub-national movements over four centuries (18th – 21st) and have managed to

retain a strong identity through the development of their *Olchiki* script and through the maintenance of their political and judicial systems which pervade all aspects of their society. Santali was granted official language status in the Indian Constitution in 2003. Jharkhand and West Bengal now have Santali schools, and while some organisations are lobbying the government to establish Santali schools within Odisha, this has not yet been achieved.

The Santals are divided into seven major and five minor sub clans - the major sub clans are "Marandi, Murmu, Hembrum, Hansdak, Tudu, Kisku, and Soren" (Rao, N. 2008: 73). According to Bodding (2001) and Archer (2007), historically each clan was assigned a certain role. For example, the Murmus were priests, the Sorens were warriors, the Hembrums were the nobility, the Marandis were the wealthy class, and the Baske were merchants. However, these class distinctions have since disappeared. No marriages are allowed within these sub clans, as Santals believe members of each sub clan are derived from the same family.

Santal Political Institutions

Commenting on the functions of a Santal village *Majhi* (village headman), Sachidananda (quoted in Hembrom, 1996: 26) has remarked "Among none of the tribes under review is the office of the headman so important as among the Santals and on no other case have his rights and duties been so elaborately laid down". The village political system includes two key figureheads, the *Majhi* and the *Naike* (village priest). The *Godet* (village messenger) also plays an important role during birth, marriage and death rituals. These officers oversee ceremonies, give guidance and support to villagers and administer the Santal laws on trespass, marriage, divorce and theft (Shariff, 2007).

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The current *Majhi* in Maddur village is Surendra Majhi, who has held the position since 2005. Surendra and his wife Nikita have been married since 1993 and have four children. Their house seems to be one of the poorest in the village, made from mud, with a thatched roof. Their children were generally the least well dressed in the village, and did not seem to go to school on a regular basis. Surendra has only two acres of land, which in 2010 was not cultivated, because of a land dispute between Surendra and his brother. Surendra is involved in all religious and marriage rituals in the community – marriages in the village cannot take place without his agreement. As well as his social responsibilities, Surendra is also concerned for the general welfare of the villagers. He spoke to me on numerous occasions about families that he thought should be entitled to Below Poverty Line (BPL) cards, but who had not been given them. However, both Surendra and his wife are daily wage labourers, and do not have time to attend the *Palli* and *Gram Sabhas.* He therefore is unable to raise his concerns at such meetings.

In Santal communities, law and order is maintained through a three tier structure of customary courts beginning with the village court, which consists of a gathering of all male heads of households, and is presided over by the *Majhi*. Beyond this level is the *Pir*, which is a meeting of *Majhis* of up to sixty villages in the area, presided over by the *Pir Pargana*. The final level is the *Disham*, involving all the *Pir Parganas* from the area, presided over by the *Disham Pargana*. The *Disham Pargana* is based in Rairanpur (60km from Maddur). The posts of *Majhi* and *Parganas* were hereditary, but they are now slightly more democratic and are elected by the male members of the community on the basis of their knowledge of customs, maturity and fairness in dealing with disputes.

Ravi Tudu has been the *Pir Pargana* of the Udai *Pir Pargana,* which covers villages in Keonjhar District, including Maddur, since 1980. He is married and has seven children. Both he and his wife have been educated to tenth class. The *Pir Pargana* is responsible for ensuring rules and regulations in Santal society are properly followed. In explaining how these rules are maintained, Ravi gave the example of a *Pir* level meeting which included the discussion of 'bride price' given during marriages. It had come to the *Pir Pargana*'s attention that some villagers were demanding more than the customary two cattle and new clothes during marriages. It was therefore decided in a *Pir* meeting to limit the number of gifts that can be given during marriages. Those who violate the new rules will be punished.

The process of administering punishment is as follows: the accused who has demanded more than the agreed upon bride price will be called to a village level meeting where the rules are fully explained. If the accused does not obey the rules, their family will be ostracised from society. This process is called *'Nim Dhaura'*, as a neem tree branch is placed outside the family's house as a signal to others that they have been ostracised. In order to be accepted back into the community, a ritualistic sacrifice is required, where the accused provides a goat, two cocks, 20kg of rice and *handia* (local liquor). The men in the village then feast on this and welcome the accused back into the community. If the accused cannot provide this, the whole family is ostracised until they have the finances to provide for the feast. In cases where a monetary fine is required for a crime committed, the fine is equally divided into three parts: one third goes to the Adivasi Socio Educational and Cultural Association (ASECA)[44], one third goes to the victim and one third to the participants at the meeting who then arrange a feast (this is only for men).

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[44] ASECA is both a social and political arm of Santali communities. According to Ravi Tudu, ASECA and the *Majhi* system are interlinked, as ASECA acts as a managing body - for example, if there is a Pir level meeting,

Santali institutions and the PRI

Many tribal communities in India have their own political and judicial systems which operate in parallel to the PRI. In his analysis of power structures at the village level, Beteille (2002) highlights the difficulties of imposing a democratic system on top of a deeply entrenched alternative structure. From his research in Tamil Nadu he shows that the traditional *panchayat*, called the *cheri panchayat*, of the Pallas tribe is a "well respected institution, consisting of a group of elders responsible for organising collective action, settling disputes and maintaining social order in the community" (Beteille, 2002: 235). Interestingly, following the first elections in independent India, the structure of this *panchayat* changed from a group of four elders whose offices were hereditary, to a new form based on democratic and elective principles. This new form now consists of eleven persons elected from and by the adult males of the community (Beteille, 2002).

Beteille (2002) shows that the village *panchayat* has formal authority and large resources at its disposal, yet it works in a half-hearted manner. Meetings are irregular and are not widely attended; decisions are often taken outside the *panchayat* and later imposed upon it. There is a strong emphasis on "carrying out developmental activities such as maintenance of roads,

ASECA is responsible for informing the community. The association runs Santali schools, teaches Santali and aims to promote the Santali language. ASECA also deals with societal issues, for example it prohibits child marriages and ensures dowries are not given during weddings. According to Ravi, during the 2010 October meeting, ASECA members discussed issues such as religion (in particular preventing conversions to Christianity), birth rituals, marriage rituals and death rituals.
The Association includes both an Executive Committee and a general body. The Executive Committee is comprised of a president, vice-president, general secretary, and assistant secretary, and these are elected by ASECA members. In Maddur, this is an all male committee. Manas from Maddur explained that general members can complain to the Executive Committee, but they cannot make decisions. Some women in Maddur have attended ASECA meetings, but generally only to hear the final verdict in cases such as divorces, never to actually actively participate in the meetings. There was a split within the members of ASECA towards the end of 2010, and a separate "Santali Academy" was established to lobby the Government more strongly for opening Santali schools and teaching the Santali language in Odisha.

improvement of sanitation and protection of water for drinking purposes" (Beteille, 2002: 236). However, the village *panchayat* is made up of a number of hamlets, and therefore represents Brahmins, non-Brahmins and Tribals. The *cheri panchayat*, on the other hand, is specifically for the Pallas tribe, meets regularly and directly tries to solve Pallas village disputes and issues. Beteille (2002) argues that the weakness of the village *panchayat* seems to arise from the imposition of a democratic formal structure on a social system which is segmented and hierarchical in nature. "Although the formal structure of power is democratic, the value system within which it operates is inegalitarian. Formally, members of the *panchayat* have equal authority, but in its exercise the extent of this authority varies sharply with caste, class and other factors" (Beteille, 2002: 237). Beteille (2002) argues further that the effectiveness of the *cheri panchayat* follows from its social homogeneity and therefore questions the feasibility of building democratic structures based upon consensus in the absence of an egalitarian system of values.

While Beteille's research is based in the early 1960s, Thara Bhai's (2009) research, carried out in 2002, finds similar issues in Tamil Nadu, where the people of her study villages still believe in their tribal *panchayat*, rather than the elected one. They say "…the voted *panchayat* is only for roads, bathrooms and for getting loans for a few. The individual problems are solved by our *panchayat*" (Thara Bhai, 2009: 277). Thara Bhai (2009) outlines cases where the tribal *panchayat* has overturned formal court decisions and this has been accepted by the community. However, her research also emphasises the dominance of one caste, who possess over 90% of resources in the community, and who subsequently use this dominance to influence and control others.

With the introduction of the PRI in the Santal community in Maddur, two interlinking centres of power have emerged. In the past, the *Majhi* also carried out the roles that the ward members currently fulfil, but these tasks have now been divided – with the *Majhi* dealing with societal issues, and the ward members and *Sarpanch* addressing development issues. However, these power centres carry unequal weight, as most villagers attribute more importance to the *Majhi*. Sujit Hasda explained that at the village level, the *Majhi* is more important, as he is responsible for finalising marriages and carrying out rituals. "The *Sarpanch* is only responsible for the development of the area". Without a village *Majhi*, society would not function, as occasions such as births, marriages or deaths could not be celebrated or recognised. According to Sujit, the *Sarpanch* only implements government schemes, whereas the *Majhi* is part of the Santal identity.

As Dumont (1970) famously argued, in India religious power and not the state is the source of law. Despite much criticisms of Dumont's work (as was outlined in Chapter 1), there is some merit in his arguments if we use his analysis of Hinduism and apply it to the Santals and their Sarna religion, as it is very clear from the villagers' comments that they will listen to their *Majhi* first, and their *Sarpanch* second. Mahapatra (1986) argues that the PRI has not been able to fully take root in Santal communities, he claims that the village headman's traditional leadership is never challenged, as the *Majhi* knows what is good for everybody in the community. "This kind of belief in benevolent authoritarianism is not possible in the new political set up" (Mahapatra, 1986: 50). According to Mahapatra (1986), in the *Majhi* system, the *Majhi* is supposed to be a mediator between villagers and the super-natural powers, a diviner of the sacred knowledge and truth and a performer of ritual and sacred functions which keep society going. He is therefore the spokesman of the cultural self image of the tribe. "The new leader is at best a decision maker,

some-one who can manipulate the flow of some economic benefits from outside into the encysted tribal world" (Mahapatra, 1986: 53).

The distance between Maddur's *Sarpanch* and her electorate was clearly evident during the Santal festivals, especially the *Sohrae* festival, which is celebrated after harvesting the main paddy crop. During this festival, Santals relax, spend time together, and working in the fields is prohibited. The schools were closed for this festival, so all the children spent their days playing together. However, the *Sohrae* festival is not a government recognised holiday, so the *Sarpanch*, Mahak Marandi, seemed to be the only Santal in the area who could not take part in the festivities, and spent her days meeting Block level officials and District Collectors. It seems as though she has had to distance herself from community life, and as a result, the community perhaps feels a greater affiliation towards their village leader, the *Majhi*. However, while many in Maddur see the state (in the form of the PRI) as a separate entity, the fact that the *Sarpanch* is a Santal and believes in Santal myths and legends highlights how her societal upbringing informs her work. Thus, the *Majhi* system and the PRI may seem separate, but they are entangled, as the Santali *Sarpanch* tries to negotiate her way through both systems.

Role of Women in Santal Institutions

Women's role in the *Majhi* system is severely restricted – a woman cannot be elected as a *Majhi* or a *Naike*, nor can she participate in the election procedures. According to Maddur's *Pir Pargana*, Ravi Tudu, in mythology, women are portrayed in important roles in terms of protecting the Santal gods and the Santal community, and therefore have the skill-set to be effective *Majhis*. He gave the example of a story where Muslims kidnapped the Santal goddess

Jaher Ayo, and the *Naike*'s wife hid and protected the other Santal gods out of fear that they would also be kidnapped. However, in reality, as the Santal political system is intricately linked with Santal religion, and women are considered to be 'impure', they cannot formally take part in the *Majhi* system.

Excluding women from these spaces is not unique to the Santals. Mann's (1987) research on the Bhil tribe in Udaipur highlights similar issues, as she states that Bhil women are not permitted to take part in the village council for a number of reasons. "A Bhil woman's accepted inferiority does not permit her to occupy the position, and tradition demands her to be in charge of the household, rather than the village council" (1987: 118). As women are taken to be less knowledgeable and incapable of understanding the outside world, it would therefore be shameful to men if women start governing them. Fundamentally, Mann (1987) maintains that Bhil women cannot argue in the presence of men, at least of certain kinship category, nor can she decide for a man. Therefore there is no point in her occupying any position on the council.

Many of these issues are also relevant to the Santal tribe, as is evident through the 'avoidance' and 'joking' relationship customs in Maddur village[45]. 'Avoidance' relationships are very formal relationships, which are the only type permitted between a man and his friends' wives, and his younger brother's wives. Within this relationship, a man is not permitted (even accidentally) to touch his younger brothers' or friends' wives, nor say their name. If this happens, a purification ceremony is required. However, 'joking' relationships are informal, and can take place between a man and his elder brothers' wives – a man is allowed to joke and chat with these women. Thus,

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[45] My research assistant, Suresh Murmu, explained 'avoidance' and 'joking' relationships to me, as he had also studied them for his own anthropological research. For further discussion on this subject see Radcliffe-Brown (1940), Stasch (2008), and Shweder (1985).

if women were to be involved in the *Majhi* system, their participation would be limited by the presence of some of their male relatives. Rao, N., (2008) further outlines, in her research with Santal communities in Jharkhand, that Santal men believe any women's involvement in the *Majhi* system will be a direct threat to men's masculinity. Many women in Maddur have confessed that if they tried to speak at meetings attended predominantly by men, they would be mocked, and they therefore do not have the confidence to speak their minds.

When I questioned men in the community about women's role in the *Majhi* system, they either claimed that women did not want to be involved, or they spoke about the limitations women face and issues of impurity. For example Manjit Hasda explained that as the majority of the women in the area are illiterate, they cannot take part in the *Majhi* system. He then went on to say that even if women were literate, they would face resistance from the community and would not feel comfortable sitting with men at meetings. He further explained that "girls" do not have the same level of mobility as men, and therefore it is more difficult for them to attend *Majhi* meetings[46]. Biswa Besra stated "Our women live a simple life, they do not want involvement in such matters as the *Majhi* system". His Santali colleague from the Department of Education who was with Biswa at the time said: "practically there is no problem with women leading a community, but when religion is concerned, women will never be leaders".

Santali religious beliefs and witchcraft have had a substantial impact on limiting women's involvement in the *Majhi* system. As Troisi (2000: 239) maintains, "the life of every Santal is cast within the framework of his religious and magical beliefs". These regulate his relationships

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[46] It is worth highlighting that Manjit used the Odiya term '*jhiamane*' (meaning girls) as opposed to '*stri-lokamane*' (women), which reinforces the perspective that women are inferior to men, and considered to be children rather than adults.

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with the visible and invisible world around him. Underlying all religious and magical rituals and ceremonies is the conviction that "the welfare of the society and of the individual depends on establishing a balance between man, nature and the supernatural universe" (ibid). As Shariff (2007) observes, village officers have considerable power in the village and their appointment to the post is thought to be in accordance with the wishes of the spirits of the ancestors, "thus allowing them to act in a quasi-sacred capacity".

Women cannot have open relationships with *bongas* (spirits), for fear they will be denounced as '*dains*' (witches). Witches are believed to be married to *bongas*, who then teach them the art of killing. For Santal men, all women are potential witches who may use their menstrual blood or organs taken from their victim's bodies to do harm (Carrin, 2007). In such cases, "women are acknowledged as a malevolent power equal to that of the tribal deities" (Carrin, 2007: 287). Archer's research on witchcraft within Santal communities which he carried out in the 1940s while he was Deputy Commissioner of the Santal Parganas also highlights similar issues to Carrin's more recent work. "Witches usually extract a vital organ – heart, lungs or liver from their victims. If they eat the whole organ, the victim will die. If some of the organ is left uneaten, and if the *bongas* are appeased through a sacrifice, the victim has a chance of recovering" (Archer, 2007: 301). As Archer (2007) explains, once a witch has been identified, the action taken depends on whether the victim is still alive or already dead. If the victim is still alive and quickly recovers, nothing more is done. However, if a witch has 'eaten' the victim's organs, she will be beaten until she confesses, and then ordered to cure the victim.

Archer (2007) maintains that if the witch has been suspected for some time or the village doubts if of her own will she can now abandon the art, they attempt to prohibit her from further intercourse with *bongas* by causing her to drink a mixture of human excrement and urine. "No *bonga* will ever go near excrement and accordingly a witch who has been so polluted is deprived of all her powers" (Archer, 2007: 302).

According to Troisi (2009), among the Mundas, Oraons, Bhils and other tribes, a witch can either be a man or a woman, however, among the Santals only women are believed to practice witchcraft. The reason for this, as outlined by Bodding (2001) and Archer (2007), is due to a Santal myth. Santal men had requested *Maran Buru* (the Santal god) to teach them witchcraft so they could use it to subdue their women. However, upon hearing what the men had requested, the women dressed up as their husbands and met with *Maran Buru* while the men were sleeping. When *Maran Buru* found out he had taught the women witchcraft instead of the men, he showed the men how to become *Ojhas* (village healers) and witch-hunters.

Kelkar and Nathan (quoted in Rao, N., 2008: 228) maintain that "branding a woman as a witch legitimises violence against her, and is one way that men respond to a challenge to their authority by women". This is particularly evident in relation to land issues. As Carrin (2007) notes, in witchcraft stories, novices eat their husbands to take revenge on male domination. "But women suspected of witchcraft are often old widows who have land and thus attract the greed of their family" (Carrin, 2007: 288). Rao, N., (2008) also provides examples of Santals who have brought the charge of '*dain*' against female relatives in order to dispossess them of land.

In Maddur village, the belief in witchcraft is clearly evident through the example of the Kisku family. Sanjay's elder brother was a teacher, who built the concrete house where Sanjay, Soumya and their family live. After Sanjay's elder brother died, his mother and elder sister became very ill. They were taken to hospital, but no medicine worked for them. They eventually decided to consult an *Ojha* (village healer), who made a sacrifice, and worshipped for them, after which they recovered. However, during the *Sohrae* festival in 2009, after Sanjay's mother and elder sister had recovered, Sanjay got very sick, to the extent that he was unable to walk. His family spent a lot of money on medicine for him, none of which worked. They again called an *Ojha*, who diagnosed witchcraft. He worshipped, and within thirty minutes, Sanjay started to feel better.

However, during the 2010 *Sohrae* festival, Sanjay started to feel unwell again, and he and his family worried that their problems would re-occur. As a result, they decided to keep a low profile during the 2010 *Sohrae* festivities. They suspected that some-one (a witch) in the village was jealous of their wealth, as they are one of the few families with a concrete house in Bilaspur hamlet. They therefore did not even repaint their outside wall, which is customary for the festival, as they were worried that it would make the witch jealous again. Both Sanjay and his wife Soumya, who is a well educated woman, educated in the capital of Odisha, Bhubaneswar, expressed that they are afraid of the witches, feel scared and miss their elder brother. When he was alive, they had no worries, as there were more people to share the family responsibility.

Santal belief in witchcraft directly prohibits women from openly worshipping the Santal gods and spirits, as by worshipping, women are at risk of being denounced as witches. As a result,

women are not permitted to enter the *Jaher Garh* (spiritual area), where worshipping takes place and where village meetings are also often held. Fundamentally, the power that has been ascribed to the *bongas* directly undermines any power that women can formally gain from the *Majhi* system. For women to be empowered in Santali institutions, the links between witchcraft and religion would need to be separated. However, this societal belief in witchcraft also intertwines with the PRI, as Mahak Murmu sincerely believes in witchcraft and will not criticise someone she suspects to be a witch for fear of retaliation. This example clearly outlines the blurred boundaries and subsequent entangled power relations between state and society at the local level.

Even though women are denied access to the *Jaher Garh*, there have been some changes to the *Majhi* system, which Mahak Murmu believes is a result of women's involvement in the PRI. She explained that in recent years women have started to attend Santali meetings which are held outside of the *Jaher Garh* area (although they tend not to speak at these). She gave the example of a conflict between a boy and a girl, stating that previously there would have been nobody to represent the girl at the meeting, but in recent years this has become possible. While this is a very small shift, it is an important one, and shows there have been some changes to women's involvement in the *Majhi* system.

Women in Santal Festivals

The Santals celebrate a number of different religious festivals throughout the year, both to appease bad spirits, and worship their gods. Men are involved in all aspects of these ceremonies, while women play a minimal role, if any. The *Bojini* festival, celebrated in March, and *Sohrae*,

celebrated in November in Maddur, clearly highlighted the different role of men and women in their festivals.

During the *Bojini* festival, male villagers explained that a bad spirit, *Jogini*, causes disease in the area, and it must therefore be worshipped once a year in order to appease it. As I was working with a male translator that particular day, I was permitted to join a group of men at the edge of the village to observe the ceremony. This demonstrates the nebulous status of anthropologists, as I was permitted to cross gendered boundaries at certain moments. When I worked with Sita, my female translator, I was informed I could only watch some of the all-male ceremonies from a distance. A chicken and lamb were sacrificed for the *Bojini* festival and the meat was subsequently cooked with rice and offered to *Jogini*. The men who had attended the ceremony then ate the sacrificed meat.

Women in the community explained that they are not permitted to take part in the ceremonies. While there seemed to be a consciousness within these women regarding the restrictions placed on them, there did not seem to be a desire within them to change the situation. They accepted it as a man's role without questioning why men should have a public relationship with their gods and goddesses, which women do not.

Women do have a role during the *Sohrae* festival, which is celebrated in November, as they are responsible for blessing the cattle, but the majority of the four day festival remains a male domain. On the first day of the festival, the men in the village congregated in the middle of

football field and sacrificed chickens and goats. I was permitted to watch this from a distance (i.e. from the edge of the football field). There were no other women or girls present in the area.

After about two hours, there was a visible increase in the number of cattle brought to the area, and an egg and leaf cup filled with water were placed in the middle of the field. The cattle of the village were allowed to walk over the sacred area, and the villagers watched carefully. The cow that smells or treads on the leaf cup of water is considered to be the cow that belongs to *Gupi Kanhai* (Krishna), from a Santal legend. A group of men who were standing in the middle of the pitch pointed out one particular cow that had tread on the leaf cup, and they tried to catch her. However, at this point, because of all the shouting and commotion, all the cows started running, and the event turned chaotic as the farmers tried to catch them, and in particular to catch the 'lucky' cow, who escaped into the nearby fields.

While the men observed this ceremony and prepared and enjoyed their feast, the women continued with their daily chores. Walking through the village at 8pm on the first evening of the festival, it seemed no different to any other night – the women were collecting water from the tube well for the last time that evening. However, the men were nowhere to be seen, and were presumably still near the football field, enjoying the festivities.

There were no particular ceremonies on the second day, most people, particularly the elderly men and women, sat around drinking *handia* (rice wine) and chatting. The third day of the festival was more festive, and women were more involved. Most of the women in the community spent the morning pounding rice grain into powder, and then mixing it with water to make a

paste, to paint on the floors of their courtyards. They painted a design from the gate of their courtyards to their cattle sheds, and placed paddy along the newly decorated 'path', in gratitude for their cattle. The men in the community erected poles outside their houses, and decorated them with marigolds.

When the cattle came home from the fields in the evening, each family blessed them in their cattle sheds, and then chose one animal to tie to the pole outside the courtyard. In most cases, families chose a bull, although others chose calves, presumably to reduce the risk of them breaking loose from the poles. The animals were clearly uncomfortable tied to the poles, and tried numerous times to return to the safety of their courtyards. They were made all the more nervous by the numerous fireworks close to them.

When all the animals were tied, the women sang close to them, and worshiped them, bowing to them, and waving candles near them. The men approached each household and teased the animals – dancing around them and shouting loudly near them while beating their drums. It was therefore the women who showed their gratitude and worshipped the cattle, while the men showed their power and domination over them. A procession started through the village, with boys setting off fireworks along the way, men beating the drums and teasing the animals, and women worshipping them.

One bull managed to escape from his pole, and ran away; luckily no-one was hurt. The men were clearly delighted with this turn of events, and lifted the bull's owner onto their shoulders

shouting with joy. This household had to subsequently provide *handia* made from five kilos of paddy to the community during the festival in 2011.

The fourth and final day of the festival, again had a relaxing feel to it, with both men and women (mainly elderly women) sitting, chatting and singing. Families visited each other, and relatives from other villagers came to meet each other. However, while no work was carried out in the fields during this time, women continued with their household chores, collecting water, serving food and alcohol, and cleaning.

Birth Rituals

Aditya's (a local farmer) wife, Sarita, gave birth to their daughter in June 2010, and their story highlights the interaction between government schemes and Santali customs. Sarita stayed in hospital for two days after the birth, and was given Rs 1400 (€23) from the hospital for delivering there, under the *Janani Suraksha Yojana* (JSY)[47] scheme. Sarita also received the correct provisions (food and inoculations for her baby) from the *anganwadi* centre, and seemed happy with the manner in which the various government schemes functioned for her and her child.

However, there were a number of restrictions placed on Aditya's wife when she returned from hospital: she was not allowed to use the village tube well or village pond for nine days after the birth – some-one from her family had to bring the water to her so she could wash. She was not permitted to touch any cooking utensils or uncooked food, for fear of 'polluting' it. She was only allowed to eat food with no oil, and she was given less food than she would usually eat – instead

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[47] JSY is a scheme to encourage hospital births in order to reduce infant and maternal mortality.

of eating three times a day, she was given food only twice a day. The villagers explained that if these rituals are not properly followed, the child may be affected, either mentally or physically.

While these restrictions are not exactly the same as restrictions outlined from research in Santal communities from the 1940s – 1970s, they are not dissimilar. In his research during the 1970s, Troisi (2000) outlines a number of restrictions placed on pregnant women:

> "She must not take any life, nor look upon or touch a human corpse (which is believed to transmit danger). She must not weep when a death occurs. She must never go near rivers or streams where spirits are supposed to dwell. She must not lie down in the courtyard or any other open space lest bongas and a particular type of bird called Puni-Care 'might fly across her body'. She must not put a flower of the Ganthar tree (jackfruit) in her hair, lest the child should shrivel in her womb, as a Ganthar flower does when it dries. She must not make leaf-cups, lest the child be born with a split lip, nor look upon an elephant, lest the child's tongue be very long and his ears be large and floppy. The child's father also faces some restrictions, although not as numerous as the child's mother. The child's father must also observe the rule against taking any life and avoid contact with dead bodies. He is not to eat the flesh from the head of an animal offered in sacrifice or slain in a hunt" (Troisi, 2000: 158).

In assessing women's role in Santali institutions, it is clear they face a number of restrictions and while many have benefited from state policies to address infant and maternal mortality rates, their experiences of these state benefits are embedded in their own cultural understandings of ensuring a healthy child.

Violence Against Women

Cases of violence against women clearly highlight the informal influence of many women in Maddur, demonstrating how they are able to negotiate formal power structures to ensure women's rights are upheld. While both the Santal and Nayak communities acknowledged that violence against women is a problem in their areas, they address it very differently, mainly as a

result of the differing social structures in place in the respective communities. Ravi Tudu explained that in the Santal community, issues relating to violence against women usually stay within the *Majhi* system – the police do not get involved. In some circumstances in the Nayak hamlet, the issue has been dealt with through the police and courts, rather than through the village system.

Both Santal and Nayak villagers explained that if a situation of wife beating arises, families initially try to solve the problem without involving others in the community. In the Nayak community a village level meeting is sometimes arranged to solve the problem. This is presided over by the ward member, who consults the senior members of the Nayak hamlet on the issue. If the situation is very serious the *Sarpanch* is also called. In some cases the accused is fined, which is usually spent on village worship (for men) or village work. The amount is usually between Rs50-100 (€0.50 - €1.66). The accused is required to sign a document promising not to repeat the beating; otherwise he will be charged a much larger fine. However, if the accused cannot pay the fine, no further action is taken. There is no system of being ostracised from the village, as is the case in the Santal community.

While in theory the Nayak village level meeting is open to both men and women to attend, the Nayak hamlet women claim that only men attend these meetings, because the women do not have time. However, the women tend to speak to their husbands about the issue before and after the meeting. Minati Lata stated that women should participate in these meetings, but she also explained that women are involved in so many other meetings, and they are too busy in other work to take part in everything.

In the Santal hamlets, if the situation cannot be solved at the family level, it is brought to the attention of the *Majhi*, who initially only discusses the matter with those directly involved, and if the problem is still not resolved, a village level meeting is called. Generally only men are permitted to attend the village level court meeting, other women who were not witness to the event, do not attend. If the accused is found guilty, they are usually fined, and if the person cannot pay, his whole family is ostracised by the community until he is able to pay the fine. As Nitisha explained, the issue is brought to the *Majhi* as a last resort, because if a person is found guilty, ostracising him affects not only the accused, but his whole family. Despite the harshness of the punishment for the whole family, the system does seem to be somewhat flexible; if a woman feels she has not been treated justly, she can go back to the *Majhi*, and a second meeting will take place. However, the outcome depends on the witnesses' statements – if there are witnesses who defend the accused, the decision may change.

Despite the limitations placed upon them, most Santal women that I spoke with about this issue felt that they had some influence over the process. They explained that while they may not argue with the final decision, they would discuss the issue with their husbands before the meeting, and pass on any information they may have regarding the issue. One woman explained that women have a better understanding of the actual situation, as they can speak to the woman directly affected and understand her perspective. There was a perception amongst most Santal women that men were their 'guardians', and it was therefore appropriate that only men should attend the meetings, as the men automatically would defend women's rights. They felt they had an informal influence over the process by ensuring that their husbands understood both sides of the issue before attending the meeting.

Drawing on an example of the Malagasy and Laymi Indians, Gal (1991) highlights a gendered analysis of speech and silence. She explains that the Malagasy and Laymi Indians perceive that women are unable to talk in subtle, nuanced tones, and are therefore excluded from public political meetings on the basis that they will cause divisions and conflict through their direct, undiplomatic manner. However, as Gal explains, public meetings are not the main site of decision making. "Usually decisions are made and consensus reached before or after the meeting in informal discussions that employ a more direct style and in which women participate actively, thereby having considerable effect on decisions" (Gal, 1991: 188).

Similarly, in the Santal community, the formal decision may be announced at the community meeting, but the discussions that take place prior to this involve both men and women, and in such a manner, Santali women do actually have an influence. The fact that the *Sarpanch* is requested to preside over Nayak level meetings on domestic violence is a clear indication of how women's entry into the PRI is challenging patriarchy at this level. As the confidence of other women, such as the *Naib Sarpanch*, increases they may subsequently become more outspoken prior to such meetings, and thus help to ensure women's rights are upheld.

However, even if women are involved to some extent in influencing decisions, this does not necessarily mean that women's rights over their sexual and reproductive health are upheld. My discussions with villagers about the 2012 Delhi rape case, which received substantial media attention, highlighted people's attitudes towards violence against women, posing a major impediment to achieving women's rights. Most people that I spoke with about the rape and murder of a 23-year-old physiotherapy student in Delhi in December 2012 had heard about it

through the radio or newspapers. However, unlike in the major Indian cities, there had been no formal protests or discussions against the attack within Maddur or within neighbouring towns, although villagers had spoken about it informally amongst themselves. While in the cities, there was outrage over the brutal attack, within Maddur the analysis of villagers focused more on the actions of the rape victim.

For example Manjit Hasda stated there had been a rise in such incidents because of changes in women's dress codes, as women have started wearing more western style clothing. He also blamed increased access to alcohol amongst the youth, which he believed gave men courage to do what they want with women. Mahak Murmu also blamed the victim, saying "if a girl is well cultured, there would not be such problems." Mahak Murmu explained that girls should dress appropriately, and she questioned why the victim was out with a man at that time of the evening. The only person who spoke about the behaviour of the perpetrators was Nisha Mohanta, who was the only person we spoke to who had not heard about the case. When we explained what had happened, her first reaction was that the men should not have carried out such a brutal act.

Manjit Hasda claimed that such brutal attacks on women tend not to happen in rural areas, and he believed that the strength of the *Majhi* system helps to prevent such atrocities. He maintained that if a rape occurred in Maddur, the issue would be brought to the *Majhi*, and a decision would be taken that the convicted perpetrator would be required to marry his victim. If the boy refused to marry the girl, he would be punished and would be ostracised from the village. Manjit explained that there is a strong preference to solve these issues internally within the community, rather than going to the police. This is largely to save the girl's "honour" by not bringing the case

to the attention of people outside of the community. If the case involved a murder, it would go to the police, but if it was a "social case" such as a love affair or rape, it would be solved within the community. When I asked what would happen if the girl did not want to marry her rapist, Manjit did not seem to see this as a possibility – he explained that the girl's family would not object to the marriage because of "family honour".

Menon (2012) discusses the impact of patriarchy in limiting women's rights, particularly their sexual and reproductive rights. As she explains, from the patriarchal perspective, "rape is a fate worse than death" (2012: 113). She further outlines that the solution of the rapist marrying the woman he raped is also proposed by courts themselves as a result of patriarchal understanding of rape. "Once the rapist is the woman's husband, the act of sex is retrospectively legitimised" (2012:114). While changes in laws remain a key entry point for women to claim their rights, changes in attitudes away from patriarchal mindsets are more fundamental. Winkler's (1995) important and unsettling ethnographic writing on rape helps counter the 'blame the victim' mentality which is so often pervasive, and provides a crucial contribution to the needs of rape survivors which are so often neglected by service providers such as the justice system.

Since the 2012 Delhi case, the government has taken action, through setting up fast track courts for women survivors, and commissioning the Verma Report to assess possible amendments in the criminal laws related to violence against women. The Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill, more popularly called the Anti-rape Bill and is based on the Verma Report recommendations, was passed by the Indian Parliament in March 2013. As Mehra (2013) notes, the amended law has strengthened the accountability of the police and public servants for "acts of omission and

commission in respect of sexual offences". However, despite these positive actions, there are daily reports in the Indian newspapers highlighting severe violations of women's rights, as well as attitudes of people in authority to these abuses. One pertinent example was the reaction of the police to the rape of a 35-year-old woman in Lucknow in March 2013. The policeman refused to record a First Information Report (FIR) and asked "who would rape such an old woman?" (Siddiqui, 2013). The Delhi case has strengthened the voice of rightwing conservative organisations who are claiming that rape is a recent phenomenon in India, and is a direct result of westernisation (Burke, 2013). However, there is also an increasingly outspoken disgust, by both women and men at the violation of women's rights in India, and there is a sense that this rape case has resulted in a critical turning point in the mindset of Indian citizens (Kabeer, 2013; Jain, 2013).

Even though the Indian government has rapidly implemented a number of initiatives since the December 2012 case, there is a risk that these initiatives could be undermined. There is an increasingly outspoken right wing movement which aim to suppress women's rights, and there is a risk that in the run up to an election year in 2014, political parties may use tokenistic measures to support women's rights in an attempt to gain votes but ultimately lean back on misogynistic practices. Kumar (1999) highlights the example of an equally brutal attack in Hyderabad in the 1970s, which also resulted in national outcry, but which was ultimately exploited by political parties to win votes against rival parties. While India is again at a turning point on the international stage, the run up to the 2014 elections as well as the increasing role of the Hindutva movement may have a regressive impact on women's rights.

Hinduisation

The local factors relating to women's rights outlined above need to be framed within a wider context, of which Hinduisation is arguably the most influential. Many authors have noted the similarities between Santal and Hindu religions. Beteille (2008), notes that tribes who have been most influenced by Hinduism are the ones in the interior hill and forest areas where influences from other civilisations have been feeble or absent. These tribes include the Bhil, Munda, Santal, Oraon, Saora and Juang and account for the bulk of the tribal population in the country.

Some of the fundamentals of Sarnaism, the Santali religion, are very different from Hinduism – Santals worship nature, they do not believe in numerous gods, and their gods do not have a particular face. They believe in only two gods and one goddess: *Marang Buru* is their supreme god, *Jaher Ayo* is their supreme goddess and *Moneka Turuik* is a god who is worshipped only in collective *pujas*, this is very different from the multitude of Hindu deities.

Despite this, elements of Hinduism are very evident in Santal festivals, such as the *Sohrae* Festival. Manjit Hasda from Maddur village explained the origin of the festival: Gupi Kanhai, who was a cow herder, took his cattle to the forest every day. There was a river running through the forest, where seven sisters bathed daily, bringing with them seven leaf cups full of oil to use for bathing. One day, Gupi Kanhai added another leaf cup, without their knowledge. When the girls saw the extra leaf cup, they were surprised and requested Gupi Kanhai to come forward.

The girls then challenged Gupi to play a game with them – like 'hide and seek' in the water. Gupi agreed, but on the condition that if he won, he would choose one of the seven girls as his

wife. Gupi Kanhai easily found all seven of the girls who had hidden themselves. When it came to his turn to hide, he first prayed to his mother (a cow). His mother (the cow) came to the river and started drinking the water. Gupi Kanhai immediately entered into the body of the cow through her nose, and hid himself. The seven girls failed to find him, and requested him to come out. They then accepted that they had lost the game. On the advice of his mother (the cow), Gupi Kanhai chose to marry the youngest sister. This event is believed to have taken place during the full moon when *Sohrae* is celebrated.

This story is very similar to stories about the Hindu god Lord Krishna, who was also a cow-herder, and who is portrayed in some Hindu myths as a model lover. In some villages *Sohrae* is celebrated during the "full moon" of the Hindu *Diwali* festival, while in others, it is celebrated during the "new moon", about fifteen days after *Diwali*. In Maddur, it is celebrated during the new moon, although most of the villagers I spoke with thought it should actually be celebrated during the full moon, and many complained that ASECA is forcing people to change the celebration date. The Nayak community in particular thought it was ridiculous that the Santals celebrated *Sohrae* during the new moon, one of them said "do they not know that the gods already came here during *Diwali*? They won't come again".

From the villagers' explanations, it seems as though *Sohrae* was a much larger festival in the past. Anusha Morandi spoke very strongly about some of the changing traditions in her community in more recent years. She explained that there has been a huge decline in the number of dances that take place during *Sohrae*. She claimed that this is partly because outsiders started taking part in the festivities, and behaved inappropriately with the local girls. She also lamented

ASECA's decision to now celebrate *Sohrae* at a different time to *Diwali*, and stated that there has been an increase in the use of electronic sound systems instead of traditional musical instruments. Anusha explained that her son sees things differently – he is a teacher and believes the Santals should forget their old traditions, but Anusha believes that without these traditions the Santals will lose their identity. While older generations in Maddur remember and practice the songs and customs for their particular festivals, the younger generations are losing interest in these, and are becoming more involved with the activities of Hindu society. Only the older generation in the village were able to tell me Santal myths, the younger generations were ignorant of these.

One possible reason for these changing traditions may be a result of increasing assimilation with Hindu customs and Hindu society. Troisi (2000) maintains that the Santals were in contact with the Hindus for at least a thousand years before the beginning of Islam in the 13th century. As a result, "various aspects of Santal life – material, social, economic, linguistic and religious – have been affected by Hindu culture" (Troisi, 2000: 251). Manna (2000) observes that there is very little difference between the Santal festivals and the Hindu festivals. She notes that the agricultural festivals, *Badna* and *Sakrat* are celebrated by both Hindus and Santals, and both Hembrom (1996) and Manna (2000) highlight the huge gatherings of Santal families who join Hindus to celebrate *Durga* and *Kali Puja*. Hembrom (1996) also points out that the Santals' funeral rites and applying vermillion by the bridegroom amid the shout '*hari bol*' are adopted from the Hindu community. He claims that the influence of Hinduism on Santals seems to have come to them through lower caste Hindus with whom the Santals have had easy contact. Troisi (2000) claims that the Hindu influence on the Santal *ojha* institution cannot be denied. "The very

name '*ojha*' is not a Santal word, but a Hindu word meaning 'a diviner, soothsayer, sorcerer, exorcist, and magician'" (2000: 207).

However, despite these similarities, it is also clear that there has not been a total absorption of Hindu religious beliefs and practices within Santal communities. As N.K. Bose notes (quoted in Hembrom, 1996:59): "One might indeed say that tribes can be regarded as being fully absorbed in the Hindu fold if Brahmin priests perform Brahminical ceremonies for them during the three critical events of birth, marriage and death. If the latter are still celebrated by tribal rituals, then the communities are still true to their own faith in spite of the fact that in the outer fringes of their culture, they participate in some of the ceremonies of their Hindu neighbours". In Maddur village, the local *Naike* conducts all the religious ceremonies for the village. Brahmin priests play no role in these events.

Furthermore, Troisi (2000) argues that there has been statistical manipulation of religion in the Indian census material. The 1961 census showed that only 4.19% of the tribals in India declared themselves as followers of a tribal religion, while 89.39% have declared themselves as Hindu. Troisi (2000) argues that the Indian Government's figures on Hindu religious identification are largely an artifice of census methods, and often coercion. "While Santals have adopted a number of Hindu deities, festivals, customs and concepts, the basic character of Santal religion has not changed, as their belief in the *bongas* is still strong" (Troisi, 2000: 259). The data collected for the 2011 census has once again requested data on religion. The *Pir Pargana* for Maddur village explained that there is a misconception among the Santals that if they write 'Hindu' on an application form, they will be more likely to get a job than if they write 'Sarna'. As such, the

percentage of tribals in India who declared themselves to be Hindu in the 2011 census may also be inflated.

Regardless of the fact that Santals have continued to maintain important elements of their identity, Hinduisation has impacted on the social norms and roles of women within Santali society. Batliwala (2008: 60) notes that there has been a disturbing trend where the idea of "women's empowerment has been distorted and co-opted in the ideological frameworks of religious fundamentalism that is embedded in Indian politics". The status of women in certain minority groups, and their need for 'empowerment' is a key component of the Hindu nationalist ideological and political project, and the Hindu woman is constructed in opposition to these minority groups, as she is portrayed as their educated and empowered opposite. Despite this portrayal of Hindu women, Batliwala maintains that religious fundamentalists "remain deeply hostile to the questioning of the disempowerment and subjugation of millions of women with the spread of upper-caste Hindu practices such as dowry and female foeticide through sex selective abortions" (2008: 65).

Chatterji (2009) outlines a number of women's organisations which have been established by right-wing groups in Odisha, which she argues are more organised and commanding than women's resistance grassroots movements. She gives the examples of the BJP *Mohila Morcha* (the women's wing of the BJP), *Durga Vahini* (a VHP/Bajrang Dal subsidiary) and the *Rashtriya Sevika Samita.* As Blom Hansen (1999) and Unnithan (2000) outline, these groups instil the importance of procreation to support the Hindu-nation and emphasise the duties and obligations of women, especially in their role as mothers and caretakers of the family. While on the one

hand, as Unnithan (2000:62) explains, women's involvement in these groups "become a means for women to negotiate an entry into previously restricted political arenas beyond the confines of the household." However, at the same time, these groups promote patriarchal practices such as the dowry system, women's subordination through familial violence and they are opposed to women's equal participation in the workforce (Chatterji, 2009). It is through these processes that patriarchy is reinforced, and further strengthened through women's involvement within the system.

Archer's (2007) *Hill of Flutes. Life, love and poetry in Tribal India. A portrait of the Santals,* which is based on research carried out in the Santal Parganas from 1942-46, idealises tribal societies which he saw as free from the inhibitions of 'civilised' society. He discusses at length the sexual experiences of men and women prior to marriage, highlighting the prevalence of love marriages in the area. If this was the case in the 1940s, life in Maddur has become stricter in more recent years, as arranged marriages are now the norm. While love marriages still occur, the majority of women in the Santal community stated that theirs was an arranged marriage. In such situations, neither the bride nor the groom have much decision making power when choosing their life partner.

According to Archer's (2007: 56) research from the 1940s, "menstruation has little significance as a Santal woman's acts and movements are unrestricted. She can fetch water, cook food, cow dung a floor, pass through standing crops, participate in dancing and use a rice pounder." "There is no taboo on intercourse, but if a man takes a woman during her period, he cannot make sacrifices to any *bonga* the following day" (ibid). This is very different to recent accounts from

women in Maddur village. If a woman is menstruating, she is not allowed to attend festivals, places of worship or to touch the bride and groom during a marriage. She is also not allowed to cook for or serve men during this time, otherwise her family will be cursed. Intercourse during menstruation is also prohibited. As Santals become further embedded in mainstream society, restrictions on women in line with upper caste Hindu norms may become more widespread.

In Maddur, the fact that Mahak Murmu, the *Sarpanch,* is a female graduate automatically makes her different from the other women in her village, she is also different from some of the other well educated Santali women in the area, such as Saloni Hembrom, the first female block Chairperson. While Saloni has maintained strong connections to her Santali culture, Mahak has not. Although Mahak is Santali, she wears the traditional Hindu *bindi* on her forehead, numerous bracelets on both her arms and gold necklace and earrings. She is literate in Odiya, and she speaks Santali, but she cannot read the Santali script, *Olchiki*.

Mahak is embarrassed by the fact that she cannot read *Olchiki*. When she is invited to a youth festival or a club in a Santal village as Chief Guest and finds notices written in *Olchiki*, she is unable to read or refer to them. She therefore tries to limit the number of such events that she attends. While her maiden name is Hembrom, she uses her husband's name, Murmu on all official documents. This goes against Santali culture where women keep their maiden name after marriage. Therefore, Mahak seems to have fused Santali culture with aspects of mainstream Indian culture to some extent. She may have done this so that she is more accepted in mainstream society, but in doing so, she is affiliating herself with a culture that continues to restrict women. This example highlights the interlocking of different forms of patriarchy, how it

is embedded in multiple systems. This intricately interconnected nature of this web of power thus makes challenging the ideology of patriarchy particularly complex.

Conclusion

One of the key threads throughout this chapter is the role of Santali religion, in particular women's relationship with *bongas*, in limiting their active participation in political and social affairs. Within Santali society, women are prohibited from holding elected positions, and from participating in public meetings or judicial court proceedings at the village level. Socially, Santali women are restricted from openly worshipping the Santal gods and spirits, from taking part in religious sacrifices, and from consuming fowl which has been sacrificed.

Despite these restrictions, Santali women have managed to overcome many of the obstacles they face, through informally negotiating at the village level to achieve their goals. In numerous Santali folktales, women are represented as strong, decisive, intelligent and hardworking individuals who have positively contributed to their society's welfare. It is, however, the many folktales of witchcraft and women's cunningness which seek to undermine their position in society.

Women's entry into the PRI has increased their confidence, and as a result, has helped them address situations of domestic violence in some circumstances. The fact that the *Sarpanch* is sometimes called to address issues of domestic violence in the Nayak hamlet, makes the Nayak women feel that they have an influential woman guarding their rights. However, as a result of this, some of them feel it unnecessary to attend these meetings. While Santali women do not

have a formal role in village level meetings, they have carved their own spaces to ensure they have an informal influence over the proceedings. This can provide avenues to challenge patriarchy, but only if women can push the boundaries of social norms which restrict their rights.

There is a general perception in India that women in tribal societies face fewer restrictions than Hindu women. This may be true to the extent that tribal women are permitted to travel to the market on their own, and as a result have greater control over their finances. They are also more likely to be able to choose their marriage partner, as love marriages are permitted. Upper caste Hindu women are often forced to live in *purdah*, and are not permitted to leave the confines of their home without a male relative, nor are they permitted to choose their life partner, as it not socially acceptable to have a love marriage or marry outside one's caste. As Hinduism has an increasing influence in Santali society, the role of women may be further confined, making it more difficult to challenge patriarchal norms.

This chapter has highlighted the importance of Foucault's understanding of power as being "widely dispersed throughout capillary networks and not localised in the state apparatus" (Steinmetz, 1999: 9). The manner in which power dynamics in Maddur weaves through the PRI, the *Majhi* system, and relations between men and women will influence the direction of change in the interlinked boundary between state and society. Women's deepened engagement in the PRI could influence the *Majhi* system, where women may one day become accepted as elected Santali village leaders. However, it could also traverse an opposing path where the current power holders in the *Majhi* system become further entrenched, and Hinduism could help reinforce this power. The use of women's informal influence in these processes will be fundamental to their

powers of negotiation and will be instrumental in defining the outcome of the shifting power balance in years to come.

Chapter 5 - Material Gains

Aretxaga (2003) demonstrates how the separation between civil society and the state does not exist in reality. She argues "the state as a phenomenological reality is produced through discourses and practices of power, produced in local encounters at the everyday level, and produced through bureaucracies, monuments, organisations of space etc" (2003: 398). This chapter focuses on 'local encounters at the everyday level' in order to show the perception of the state from the perspective of women who remain outside of the political structure and 'state-system' (Abrams, 1988). While one of the roles of the state is to uphold the rights of its citizens, these rights get re-interpreted at the local level, resulting in outcomes which policy makers may not have intended.

The examples below highlight government policies and laws which are implemented to uphold rights, but how local contexts subsequently deny citizens their rights. One argument for this denial of rights is the tension between "rights" and "culture", stemming largely from the "pathologies of power" (Farmer and Gasinteau 2009: 150) which rights frameworks encounter at the local level. Issues directly affecting women become embedded in these power games, as they struggle to find time to care for their families, earn an income and involve themselves in decision making processes. Through using a rights framework to analyse state implemented programmes, I outline the power relations between the local community and the locally elected representatives, between political parties, between above poverty line and below poverty line families, and between men and women.

The Politics of the Right to Water

In 2010, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution that recognised access to clean water and sanitation as a human right. The resolution highlighted the importance of scaling up efforts to "provide safe, clean, accessible and affordable drinking water and sanitation for all" (UN General Assembly GA/10967, 2010). While India voted in favour of this resolution and access to safe water is now recognised as a universal human right, there remain a number of problems in relation to the supply of and access to water in Maddur, not only for consumption, but also for agricultural purposes. Firstly, as there are no water harvesting systems in the fields, the villagers are reliant on the monsoon rains, which have been both insufficient and erratic in recent years. By July 2010, only 25% of the expected rains had reached the village, and while October 2010 brought heavy rain, it arrived too late for the main paddy crop. By the end of October 2010, the Odisha government declared nineteen districts in the state drought affected. The impending drought situation in Maddur was a constant worry for all farmers and labourers in the area, and resulted in a noticeable increase in the price of locally produced vegetables. As mentioned in the Introduction, the rainfall in Maddur in 2011 and 2012 were equally problematic.

Secondly, while there are a number of tube wells in the village, about half of these were broken in 2010, and were not supplying safe drinking water to the community. Jagi and her family explained that the tube well at the far end of Nayapalli hamlet had been broken since February 2010, and that sometimes even earthworms came out of it, so they had to filter the water with a cloth. They claimed that they had informed the *Naib Sarpanch* about the problem, but the tube well remained broken. When I spoke to Seema Majhi, the *Naib Sarpanch*, about the issue, she explained she had informed the *Sarpanch*, but that there was no money to repair the tube well.

Seema further noted that the other tube well in Nayapalli is also in need of serious repair. When I questioned the *Sarpanch* on the issue, she claimed she knew nothing about it, and I saw no references to it in the 2010 *Palli* or *Gram Sabha* minutes. In 2013, women from Nayapalli hamlet explained that the tube well was still broken. Even though at that stage these women were getting piped water to their homes through a newly constructed water tank, they explained that the tube well was still used when there was no electricity to pump the water from the water tank. They therefore argued that the *panchayat* still needed to take responsibility to fix it.

Thirdly, in 2010, a major water and sanitation programme was underway in the *panchayat*. Every household in the *panchayat* was in the process of constructing a latrine, and water tank construction was also underway. While this initiative was supported by the NGO Gram Vikas, it remained an extremely costly endeavour for the villagers themselves. Each latrine cost Rs12,000 (€200) to construct, including a water connection. BPL families had to pay Rs 6,000 (€100) upfront for this construction from their own finances. Of this amount, Rs1,000 (€16.67) was a security deposit which would be reimbursed to them once the construction was finalised. However, as Mahak Murmu explained during the *Gram Sabha* meeting, the villagers' contribution could also be provided in kind, through their own labour or through collecting resources such as stones for the construction.

Despite the importance of the water and sanitation scheme both for sanitation purposes and to ease women's workload in the home, the success of the programme was jeopardised by political competition played out at the local level. This was particularly evident in the Nayak hamlet, where in 2010 the water tank had already been constructed, and half the village had connected

their latrines to the main pipe. The principle underlying this scheme focused on community ownership of the project, where the community contributed their own labour for the construction of both the latrines and the water tank. However, while the Nayak community initially agreed to this, in practice only some families contributed their labour, even though everyone from the village would eventually benefit from it. This subsequently created tension amongst some of the villagers.

Tension in the village increased over the cost of the project. According to Sandeep Biswal, the previous MLA from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) promised Rs180,000 (€3000) for the piping from the main water tank pipe to villagers' homes. However, this money was never given, and the new MLA, from the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) party, claimed the allocated money had already been spent elsewhere. To further complicate matters, Mahak Murmu, the *Sarpanch*, applied to be an MLA for the Congress party – this seemed to be the main cause of tension in the community.

As the MLA money never materialised, Mahak Murmu requested each household to pay Rs250 (€4.16) in order to connect their individual pipes to the main pipeline. However, as Sandeep explained, BJP and BJD party members gave alcohol and money to some villagers in the area and requested them to protest against the water tank payment, in order to halt its progress. Some villagers did not want Mahak Murmu to win the next election, and hoped that if her water and sanitation programme failed, she would not be re-elected. If the work was not completed, candidates from other parties would stand a greater chance of being elected.

In October 2010, the water tank motor was sabotaged as some villagers put stones into it. This was subsequently repaired, and during October and November 2010, some families who had initially refused to pay, began to relent. This seemed to be a result of two key strategies: Firstly, the *Sarpanch* requested two of the female water tank committee members to convince other women in the community of the importance of the project. As some men in the community attempted to sabotage the programme, encouraging women to convince their husbands about the importance of the success of the project was an important strategy to informally influence the political conflict. Das (2007) focuses on events that push cultural norms to their limits, outlining how forms of living change as a result of crises. While the water tank crisis was nowhere near as severe or intense as the violent situations Das (2007) wrote about, it did create an opportunity for the women on the water tank committee to push the boundaries and social norms within which they had lived, as they were tasked with challenging powerful men in the community.

Secondly, one of the tube-wells in the Nayak hamlet broke in October 2010, and the villagers were informed that it would not be repaired. Some villagers therefore paid to connect to the water tank as they felt there was no alternative. While the broken tube well in the community became a useful problem in persuading the community to connect to the water tank, there were a number of families, like Kalpana Nayak's, who would have liked to connect to the main pipe, but genuinely could not afford to do so. While political affiliation was the main cause of the conflict in the community, below poverty line families with little financial resources remained caught in the middle, and access to this resource was only for those who could afford it.

Moreover, a further problem arose during my final research stay in 2010; in relation to the electricity bill for the water tank, as those with a connection were due to split the cost of this. However, Sandeep was worried that villagers would refuse to pay this bill which could cause further tension in the community. Due to this complex situation, personal problems arose in the community, as some villagers supporting different parties were not speaking to each other. Women in the Nayak hamlet lamented over the water problem in the area, and explained there was no village unity, which created problems for finalising the piping to the tank. The Gram Vikas supervisor moved into the ground floor of the water tank, and Sandeep Biswal set up home on the first floor, mainly to guard the tank for fear it would be destroyed.

During my research, Gram Vikas were planning to install water meters in every household to measure the water usage in the village. Once installed, the villagers would have to pay the ten member water tank committee for their water, based on the meter readings. This money would be used to maintain the tank. However, while in 2010 there were six men and four women on the committee, not all of them were active, and none of the women on the committee were actually present in the meeting when they were selected. While the four women on the committee are active in their community; they are on health committees, are part of self help groups and attend the *Palli* and *Gram Sabhas*; none of them initially actually wanted to be part of the water tank committee, and all had to be persuaded by their families and are assisted by their husbands. Only one of the female committee members from the Nayak hamlet attended a two day workshop at the block level by Gram Vikas in relation to the water tank, where she learnt about the benefits of the water supply. Crucially, none of the female committee members had any financial responsibility in relation to the tank, and as a result, lacked control over the resource.

During my return research visit in 2013, it transpired that the initial disputes had been resolved, through Sandeep Biswal guarding the water tank from further sabotage, and the women on the water tank committee influencing their husbands to prevent any further sabotage. When this initial dispute was addressed, the piped water connections were installed to all households. However, despite this, when I reached Maddur in February 2013, the villagers in the Nayak hamlet had been without piped water since late 2012, and the women were back collecting water from the tube wells. This was a result of a number of issues: Sandeep Biswal and his wife explained that some people in the Nayak hamlet became suspicious about what the *Sarpanch* and the water tank committee were doing with the collected water tank money. A 'Youth Committee' had been established in the village, and they were particularly vocal about the money being collected for the water tank. According to CYSD, some of the members of the water tank committee were also part of the Youth Committee. Mahak Murmu explained that in order to gain the trust of the Youth Committee, and to highlight that the money was being spent appropriately, she suggested that the Youth Committee should be involved in the water tank maintenance so that they could oversee how the money was spent.

However, the Youth Committee (which was comprised of 16 – 35 year old men) was established to organise cultural events and festivals in the community, and was not initially set up to oversee development activities. Instead of using the collected water tank money for the maintenance of the water tank, Sandeep explained that all of the money was spent on festivals in the village. Without money to maintain the tank and pay the salary of the operator, the water tank could not be used. It therefore stopped working on 13th December 2012 and was still not working in early February 2013. Sandeep explained that the water tank committee had collected Rs100 (€1.67)

from each household to cover the electricity bill for the water tank. Furthermore, 105 households each deposited Rs1,000 (€16.67) to ensure there would be sufficient money available to maintain the water tank in case of any problems with the motor pump. All of this money was spent by the Youth Committee.

As the water tank operator had not been paid his salary, he decided to turn off the motor pump, lock up the water tank and keep the key until he was paid. At the time of research in February 2013, there was a stand-off between the water tank operator and the Youth Committee. Sandeep believed that there was nothing that could be done until the Youth Committee returned the money.

While the women water tank committee members had been able to influence their husbands during the previous tension in the village, the new developments in 2012-13 proved particularly difficult, as the women had no control over the water tank finances. Sandeep explained that the women had been previously active on the committee especially during the initial crisis, but not since the formation of the Youth Committee. To further complicate matters, Mahak Murmu explained that the Nayaks had not officially reported the water tank issue to her, because one of the water tank committee members is politically in direct contest with her. She did not elaborate from which political party this opposition was stemming from, but it was clear that the political tensions which had been prevalent in 2010 were still an issue in 2013.

In 2013 Sandeep was no longer the Ward Member for the Nayak hamlet, as Navita Nayak was elected as the *Naib Sarpanch* to a reserved seat for women in the 2012 elections to represent the

Nayak hamlet. When I spoke with her during my short return research visit in 2013, she was extremely shy, and explained that she had not attended any training for her new role, and prior to her election she did not attend the *Palli* or *Gram Sabha* meetings. She explained that a meeting had been planned in January 2013 to discuss the water tank issue, but nobody attended. It is likely that the reason for this is because the Youth Committee who are due to repay the misspent money did not attend the meeting.

Navita moved to Maddur in 2006, lives with her in-laws and has two daughters – a 6-year-old and 3-year-old. Her daily reality and personal context is therefore very different to Sandeep Biswal, who had been a ward member for 10 years, was respected within the community, was very vocal about community issues in *panchayat* meetings and was not afraid to defend the water tank during the 2010 crisis. During my discussion with Navita, the role of men in her life was very evident. Her father-in-law sat close to her for the majority of our discussion, and a number of men were within earshot in the doorway. While none of them actually intervened and spoke on her behalf, their presence and her shyness in speaking with me was very tangible. Given how entrenched the political tension within the Nayak hamlet has become, Navita will need a lot of support to carve her own space in resolving the water tank issue.

In contrast, the construction of the water tank in the Bilaspur hamlet was much less problematic. In 2010, all families seemed to be contributing their labour for the construction of the tank, and those who were government employees, such as teachers, and did not have time to contribute their labour, paid others to contribute on their behalf. The women carried the water, sand and other materials, while the men completed the brick work. There was some tension in relation to

villagers' labour contribution, but this was solved at a village level meeting. The ward member from the Bilaspur hamlet, Manas Majhi, who was also the president of the water tank committee, refused to contribute his labour because he felt he was already overburdened with all the paperwork for the tank construction. However, at a village level meeting, he agreed to contribute his labour, and a monitoring system was also established: villagers from Nayapalli hamlet monitored the work carried out by Bilaspur villagers, and vice versa.

The set up of the water tank committee in Bilaspur hamlet was similar to that of the Nayak hamlet. There were three women on the ten member committee, and once again, none of the female committee members were present when they were selected for the committee. Two of the women claimed to be happy to have been elected onto the committee, and one of them was active on it – she was a local health worker and was involved in reporting on water and sanitation in the area to the block level government. However, none of the women in the committee had any financial responsibility in relation to the tank.

It is clear that in both the Nayak and Santal hamlets, only one or two key people were in charge of the finances of the water tank. The majority of women on the water tank committee were merely proxy authorities, who had not received any training from Gram Vikas in relation to the importance of the project. If the less active women were given the opportunity to take part in the Gram Vikas water tank training, they may be more aware of their responsibilities, and be more willing to be active, and as a result have more control over the process.

The outcome of the tensions in Maddur's water and sanitation scheme has synergies with Ferguson's (2007) critique of a World Bank project in Lesotho in his work *The Anti-Politics Machine.* Ferguson uses Foucault's work on *Discipline and Punish* (1977) as the central analytical framework to outline the unintended consequences of planned development projects which fail to take local power relations into account. As Ferguson (2007) outlines, Foucault argues that while the prison was created as a 'correctional' institution, intended to make criminals into "honest, hardworking, law abiding individuals, who could return to a 'normal' place in society" (2007: 19), in reality the prison institution created a new category named 'delinquents'. This unintended consequence of prisons, Foucault argues, "proved useful in taming popular illegalities, and by turning one uniquely well-supervised and controlled class of violators against others" (ibid). Thus, the prison "is used as part of a system of social control, but in a very different way than its planners had envisioned" (ibid).

Ferguson (2007) uses this analysis to show that planned interventions may produce unintended outcomes, which may seem to be outside of the control of the authorities, but in actual fact work to the advantage of those who hold power. "This theoretical innovation makes possible a different way of connecting outcomes with power, one that avoids giving a central place to any actor or entity conceived as a 'powerful' subject" (Ferguson, 2007: 20). Ferguson's case study is a World Bank development project in the Thaba-Tseka district of Lesotho, where he examines the ways in which local and global politics influence the success of planned projects, and insists on the importance of analysing Lesotho in terms of the history of the region. He demonstrates how a World Bank country report on Lesotho labels the country as a subsistence-based economy with high population growth, untouched by capitalism. Ferguson refutes the Bank's analysis,

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arguing that Lesotho was actually affected by capitalism as early as 1910. The World Bank project in Thaba-Tseka was originally designed to convert mountainous regions into commercial livestock ranges by providing road connections and low-cost production techniques through a decentralised form of government. Ferguson subsequently shows how the project failed to achieve its intended outcomes by analysing the local and global processes that impeded its planned implementation.

At the core of the project's failure was that political processes and power relations were reduced to apolitical technical solutions by project staff, who saw 'decentralisation' as an apolitical administrative reform, and failed to take account of the crucial power relations and hierarchies within the state bureaucracy and government apparatus. "Government was seen as a machine for delivering services; but never as a way of 'governing' people, a device through which certain classes and interests control the behaviours and choices of others" (Ferguson, 2007: 224). As Ferguson explains, any real effort at 'social change' cannot help but have powerful political implications, which a 'development project' is constitutionally unfit to deal with. "To do what it is set up to do (bring about socio-economic transformations) a 'development project' must attempt what it is set up not to be able to do (involve itself in political struggles)" (ibid: 226).

As Ferguson (2007) argues, when poverty is reduced to a technical problem to be solved by technical solutions, it fails to take account of the relations between less powerful people and their oppressors. However, at the same time, "by making the intentional blue-prints for 'development' so highly visible, a 'development project' can end up performing extremely sensitive political operations involving the entrenchment and expansion of institutional state power almost

invisibly, under cover of a neutral technical mission to which no one can object" (ibid, 256). Thus, as Ferguson maintains, systems of discourse and thought where assumptions are systematically made have material consequences, which are often unintended, and in some cases, can put powerless people at the mercy of further entrenched forms of power.

In the case of the water tank construction in Maddur, it is possible to analyse the inter-linkage between state and non-state actors, the power balance between them, the manner in which local communities encounter the state and the extent to which rights are upheld. While the central government promotes improved sanitation facilities in local communities, this is implemented by the local state government in partnership with a non-governmental organisation (which is largely funded by Europeans). However, the process is hampered by local party politics (which stems from national and international ideologies), and as a result the families and in particular the women who are to ultimately benefit from the scheme have become marginalised rather than central to it. This marginalisation severely impacts their perception of the state, as they become embedded in what is essentially presented as an apolitical 'technical' development project.

In applying Foucault's and Fergusons's analysis to feminist work, the synergies of 'technical solutions' for 'technical problems' with feminist understandings of development discourse become clear. As Bhasin (2011) maintains, when we talk of 'gender' in development discourse instead of 'feminism' we reduce power relations between men and women to apolitical solutions. Thus 'empowering women' becomes meaningless as it fails to achieve a shift in access to and control over resources, and implies a top-down rather than a self-initiated process. In the case of Maddur, merely including women on water tank committees is seen as a way of "empowering"

them. However, the water tank committee is an 'invited space' (Gaventa, 2006) and therefore women's participation within this space, as a result of entrenched social norms and political tensions, is extremely limited. Cornwall's (2008) article on forms of participation is insightful in outlining the meaning and practice of participation for community development, and she states clearly that "being involved in a process is not equivalent to having a voice" (2008: 278). It is through understanding the manner in which these women were selected onto committees, their daily realities, and how they are involved in "shaping and reshaping the boundaries for action" (Cornwall, 2008: 276), that we come to understand how they have informally influenced conflict resolution in certain circumstances, but how power relations within the community, and specifically with those who hold control over financial resources, impacts on how the right to water is upheld.

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act – Upholding the Right to Work

The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), came into force in 1981 and was ratified by India in 1993. CEDAW establishes a universal set of standards and principles that are intended to serve as a template for shaping national policies towards the long-term goal of eliminating gender discrimination. Governments that ratify the Convention are obliged to develop and implement policies and laws to eliminate discrimination against women within their country. This Convention provides specific standards related to gender equality in the spheres of education, employment, healthcare and other areas of economic and social life. Article 11 of the Convention obliges states to "take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of employment

in order to ensure…a) The right to work as an inalienable right of all human beings" (CEDAW Convention).

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), introduced by the Indian Government in 2005, guarantees 100 days employment at the minimum wage for rural families willing and able to work. This scheme goes some way in upholding Article 11 in the CEDAW Convention. To access this scheme, families must open a bank account (as they are now being paid by cheque in order to counteract corruption), and must apply for a job card. The *Sarpanch* explained that in 2008-9 there were problems with payment, as there were huge delays in receiving the payment from the Government. To address this, a distress fund was given by a local NGO in late 2009. This fund was managed by an SHG in the area, who provided the salaries to the NREGA workers, and when the money was received by the *panchayat* from the state government, the SHG was reimbursed. However, the *Sarpanch's* husband seemed to oversee this fund, rather than the *Sarpanch* herself. While NREGA projects were implemented in other villages in the *panchayat* in 2010, (involving road construction and village pond development), there was no NREGA work taking place in Maddur village itself. Some families in Nayapalli hamlet were last involved in NREGA in 2007, whereas some families in Bilaspur hamlet were last involved in January 2009.

An important feature of NREGA is that if some-one applies for work and is not offered it within fifteen days of submitting an application, he/she is entitled to claim unemployment benefit through the scheme. However, this element of the scheme did not seem to be provided or explained to villagers. In other districts in Odisha, such as Nuapada, villagers in 2010 were

generally not given the receipt of their job application form and thus they could not claim unemployment allowance. Most job application forms were collected blank (only with signature/thumb impression of the job seekers), and the dates subsequently filled in when the work actually began. According to the Odisha Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (OREGS) Watch, workers in Dhanksar village of Khariar block demanded their unemployment benefit, but as their forms did not state from which date the labourers sought a job, they were not entitled to their benefit. OREGS Watch (2010) stated that the matter was reported to the Block Development Officer, Collector and the *Panchayat Raj* Secretary, Government of Odisha, but no action was taken. This type of exploitation may not be occurring in Maddur, but villagers I spoke with were not even aware of the unemployment benefit in NREGA.

Mahak Murmu has found it very difficult to motivate the villagers to enrol for NREGA work. This seems to be largely because the work involves difficult manual labour, especially during the summer months when the soil is extremely hard. Mahak believes that illiteracy and lack of awareness are also major factors in preventing people from signing up for NREGA. The fact that there were problems with the payment of NREGA in the past may also have de-motivated villagers to enrol for the scheme – Jagi Majhi stated that she would like to work under the NREGA scheme, but only if payment is given immediately. She explained that other villagers who have done work under NREGA had to wait more than two months for their wages, and she argued that as the majority of villagers are very poor, they require immediate payment in order to meet their basic needs. Furthermore, as payments are now given by cheque instead of cash, NREGA workers need a bank account in order to be paid. However, to open a bank account, villagers must deposit Rs250 (€4.16) and provide a passport sized photo. Many villagers

explained they do not have this money spare to open their accounts, which further limits the access they have to the scheme.

While payment through cheque may be an effective method of reducing corruption, it has serious implications for women's control over resources. If a family does open a bank account, they generally open one per household, and this is usually only in the name of the 'head of the household' – which is most often a male. As a result, if a woman does work under NREGA, her wages are paid into her father's/husband's/brother's bank account – which severely limits the access she has to this money. In Maddur, the more educated women in the community, such as the *anganwadi* worker have their own bank accounts. For other women, if they had a family bank account, it was in the name of their husband or male relative. As with the analysis of the water tank construction, this issue is also very much related to Ferguson's (2007) and Scott's (1998) analysis of unplanned side effects of development schemes. A simple technical solution was introduced to address corruption, but this was implemented within a highly complex system that did not take gendered power relations into account.

In 2012, road work construction under the NREGA scheme was undertaken in Maddur village, and villagers were entitled to receive Rs126 (€2.10) by cheque per day for their work. However, when I spoke to five Santali women from Nayapalli hamlet about the work they had done in March 2012, they explained that they only received Rs90 (€1.50) per day for their work, by cash. They were aware of their rights and they challenged the contractors about the payment. However the contractor threatened to dismiss them from the work programme by stating that if they were not happy with their wages, he could easily find others to do the work at that rate. The women

were very sceptical about the role of the state in upholding their rights, and stated "the government does not understand our problems". Even though these women were aware of their wage entitlements and challenged the contractor, the local level power structures between contractors and daily labourers undermined their rights.

A vigilance committee was established in the *panchayat* in 2010 to assess the development work of the *panchayat*, including NREGA work. The ten member committee included five men and five women. Mahak Murmu explained that Sarita Majhi and Amrita Nayak volunteered themselves onto the committee. However, Sarita subsequently explained that she only once attended a *Palli Sabha* meeting, about job cards and *anganwadi* related issues. She explained that the *Naib Sarpanch*, Seema Majhi, nominated her for the vigilance committee, in a meeting in which she was not present. She had no idea about her role or responsibility as a committee member. While Amrita was present at the meeting in which she was nominated for the position, she explained that she had no interest in taking part in the committee. During the meeting, she was told she should accept on an interim basis, until a replacement for her was found. When I spoke to her about the issue six months after the formation of the committee, she was still waiting for a replacement, and had not contributed to the work of the committee.

Had this vigilance committee been active, they may have been able to challenge the contractors who denied the women in Nayapalli their full wage. However, the "invited space" of the vigilance committee which imposed the participation of Amrita and Sarita meant that they passively participated in the process while stating clearly they had no interest in being involved. Cornwall (2008) discusses self-exclusion from participatory processes, which she maintains may

be because of a lack of confidence or because some people do not see any value in participating. As she states, "for some, the opportunity costs of taking part simply do not outweigh the benefits of so doing; these costs are rarely taken into account" (2008: 279). The technical solution of a minimum required number of women on the vigilance committee did not take into account the specific needs of these women, nor did it involve an analysis of the extent to which these women valued their role on the committee. It is no wonder that women in Maddur feel that the state does not understand their problems.

Women's Participation in the Village Education Committee

Women's role on the Village Education Committee (VEC) is similar to their roles on the water tank and vigilance committee, where they have limited formal power. The VEC is a scheme promoted by the state and was established to address some of the problems with the education system in the local area. Ajaya Majhi is the President of the nine member VEC. According to him, the members meet once a month and are responsible for the overall education provisions in the middle school (classes 6-7). They manage the school finances and school hostel accommodation. The committee also organises sports events, school uniforms, the mid-day meal for students and any construction or renovation that is required in the school. The committee has a joint account in the name of the President and the Headmaster.

There are three women on the VEC. However, as with the water tank committee, not all of these women are active members. Nita Soren explained that she has not attended any VEC meetings, her husband goes on her behalf. She was chosen to be on the committee by the teachers in the school, but she said she is too busy to attend the meetings, as she has a lot of housework. She

further explained that she does not talk to her husband about what was discussed in the VEC meetings. If her signature is required, the teacher brings the register to her and asks her to sign, but everything else is done by her husband.

In contrast, Jamini Behera, from the SC community, is very active on the committee, largely because she is a teacher in the school, and is the secretary of the VEC. Jamini's children have already left their parent's home and are attending university, while Nita's children are still young – the amount of time Nita has to give for this committee is therefore more limited. While Jamini is very active on the committee, she does not have any control over the committee's finances.

The Right to State Benefits for Below Poverty Line Families and Pensioners

It could be argued from a Foucauldian perspective that categories such as Above Poverty Line (APL) and Below Poverty Line (BPL) help to maintain a level of knowledge and subsequent power and surveillance over a community. In Maddur, families identify themselves as APL and BPL in interactions with state structures in order to receive certain state benefits. However, there are a number of cases of rights denied in the community, in clearly vulnerable families.

Sarita's father in law explained that their family had been classified as BPL, but this was taken from them in 2007. They complained to the *Sarpanch* about the issue, but she said there was nothing she could do about it. They suspect that she has taken this privilege away from them because they did not support her in her election. When they spoke to the *Naib Sarpanch*, she only referred them to the *Sarpanch*. Sarita and her family only have two acres of land, they do not have a bank account, they have a tiled roof, but there is nothing of any value in their court

yard – other APL families in the village have concrete houses and motorbikes in their yard, and have access to electricity.

There are also a number of cases of rights denied in relation to receiving state pensions. For example, during my research in 2010 Rachana Murmu had not received her widow's pension. Her family explained that they submitted the forms in 2006, and in November 2010 they heard that the money was approved, and were waiting to receive it. They were told Rachana will get Rs10,000 (€166.67) in back payments, but they suspect that in actual fact they will only get Rs7,000 (€116.67) as the *Sarpanch* will take Rs3,000 (€50). They said 'she's playing with us - sometimes she says the money has come, other times not'. They also raised the issue with the *Sarpanch's* husband, but he responded in a similar manner.

There are at least three other similar cases in the hamlet, including Rachana's neighbour who has also applied for her pension but has not received it. When I asked if they have ever raised this issue in the *Gram Sabha*, they explained that these kinds of issues are not discussed in the *Gram Sabha*: 'construction issues are mainly discussed in this' – their perception of the functioning of the village meetings is therefore distorted, as this type of issue should be discussed in the *Palli* and *Gram Sabha*. They also stated that 'widows from rich families are getting their pensions, but the poor are not'.

In the case of pensions and APL/BPL cards, both men and women are affected. Access and control over these benefits seems to be dependent on one's relationship with other individuals in the community, and some families feel specifically targeted and marginalised. Whether or not a

male *Sarpanch* would have addressed these issues in a different manner is debatable, and many villagers have expressed their satisfaction with the current *Sarpanch*, as they stated her male predecessor was very corrupt. However, whether or not the current *Sarpanch* has managed to change the prevailing patterns of access and control over resources for all vulnerable families is questionable.

Challenging Corruption in the Public Distribution System

The *Sarpanch* does seem to have had an impact on the Public Distribution System (PDS), where families who hold a BPL card receive rice, sugar and kerosene from the *panchayat* office at a subsidised rate. In 2010, villagers received 25kg of rice at Rs2 (€0.03) per kilo per month, 1kg of sugar for Rs14 (€0.23) per month and 4 litres of kerosene at Rs10 (€0.17) per litre per month (in 2010 the market price for kerosene was approximately Rs32 (€0.53) per litre). However, as was mentioned in the introductory chapter, the price of rice within the PDS system reduced to Rs1 (€0.01) per kilogram per month in 2013.

Despite a few exceptions where families feel they should be entitled to BPL cards and do not have these, the PDS system seems to be working properly. Those who are receiving their subsidised goods, are receiving the correct amounts. Sanjeev Mohanta explained how corruption worked in the PDS system in the past: "Suppose I have a BPL card and am entitled to 25kg of rice at Rs2 (€0.03) a kg per month. But in the month of April, I have no money, so I cannot purchase my ration. In May I have money and want to buy my two months ration, but the officials refuse and only give me one month's ration, as they sell my second month's ration at a

higher price on the open market." Sanjeev clearly stated that since Mahak Murmu came to office, this type of corruption no longer occurs and the PDS system is working properly.

Mahak Murmu stated that addressing corruption within the PDS system was one of her first successes upon being elected in 2002. She explained that when she was first elected, there was no mechanical weighing machine in the village, and a container was used to measure the amount of rice to be distributed. Mahak became suspicious about the manner in which the *panchayat* Secretary was distributing the rice, and initiated an independent enquiry. The enquiry found that false entries were being made into the PDS records, which showed that products had been received by villagers, when in fact they had not been distributed. The enquiry also found that the Secretary was selling uncollected products on the open market each month (as Sanjeev had also explained). As a result of Mahak Murmu's initial enquiry, the Secretary was suspended from his work. This example clearly highlights how Mahak was able to challenge the power structures which were denying citizens their right to food.

Economic Opportunities through Self Help Groups

Article 14e of the CEDAW Convention refers specifically to the rights of rural women and their right to "organise self help groups and cooperatives in order to obtain equal access to economic opportunities through employment or self-employment" (CEDAW Convention). The majority of women in Maddur village are involved in SHGs. Some women have been SHG members for over five years, and are now part of well established groups, while the majority (of Santals in particular) seem to have formed SHGs since 2009. All of the SHG members save regularly, their amounts ranging from Rs10 – Rs40 (€0.16 - €0.66) per month. These savings are deposited in a

joint savings account, and when the group has saved more than Rs6,000 (€100) and shown consistent savings for more than six months, the Odisha government through the *Mission Shakti* scheme, gives the group a grant of Rs5,000 (€83).

While these SHGs are promoted by the state and established in order to enhance the livelihood opportunities for women and increase their financial independence and therefore empowerment, there are a number of issues limiting the success of these initiatives. For example, most of the SHGs in the Nayak community are involved in goatery businesses, but they have had major problems with the health of their goats. One SHG member, who had been part of an SHG since 2003, explained that her twelve member group took out a loan of Rs270,000 (€4,500) to buy goats. Each member was given twelve goats, but they all died. She explained that they had received training from the government at the block level on how to look after them, but because the vet did not come to their village very regularly, the goats' health deteriorated. In 2010 these SHG members were trying to pay back their loan, and had no other choice but to borrow money from local moneylenders, who are known to charge exorbitant interest rates, which will subsequently drive them deeper into debt.

In his analysis of blurred boundaries between state and society, Gupta (1995) highlights the example of Sripal, who was entitled to government housing through the state *Indira Awas Yojana* (IAY) scheme, but as a result of corruption, he did not receive all of his full entitlements under the scheme. Gupta (1995: 383) maintains that "Sripal was among the beneficiaries of 'development' assistance who regretted ever accepting help. He became deeply alienated by the very programmes that the state employed to legitimate its rule." The example above of the

SHG's goatery business is unfortunately a further example of failed development assistance, which has resulted in disempowered and further marginalised women, and subsequently impacts how these women perceive the state.

A further failure of this state promoted programme relates to alcohol consumption, which is a growing problem in Maddur, and it is generally women who produce and sell the liquor. Without adequate entrepreneurial training and support, SHGs cannot currently provide an alternative to the production and sale of alcohol – in fact, it is more than likely this business that is providing the savings for many SHG members. Both Santal and Nayak women have acknowledged that domestic violence is largely a result of alcohol consumption, and yet they continue to produce it as it is a source of income for them.

While the SHGs are required to meet regularly, not all members actively participate, which results in a lack of awareness on their rights. For example, Kalpana Nayak is a member of an SHG that manages the mid-day meal scheme in the middle school in Maddur. Kalpana explained that she had not been paid for her work for over twelve months – she is supposed to receive Rs200 (€3.33) per month. She was aware that the payment for her work comes from the government at the block level, and she assumed it was delayed at that level. However, through numerous discussions, it transpired that her wages were being given to her SHG, and deposited in the group's savings account. As Kalpana did not regularly attend her SHG meetings, she was unaware of this fact.

Each SHG forms part of an SHG federation, which usually includes between 15-20 SHGs. The federation is structured to provide another layer of support to the SHGs, and allows them to come together in larger numbers and establish joint initiatives if required. The *Sarpanch* supports this initiative, and permits the SHG federation meetings to take place in the *panchayat* office. However, in the SHG federation meeting I observed, it was clear that while the President of the federation was knowledgeable and capable; others in the group did not seem to take an active role. The President was clearly in charge of the money collection, minute taking and record keeping but there was no detailed discussion regarding the activities of the SHG during the meeting, and most of the women were completely silent, some of them were even sleeping. While the SHG federation President could possibly be a great role model, her enthusiasm and dedication did not seem to permeate to the others in the group. Interestingly, the SHG federation President is a Mohanta – an OBC – while the majority of the SHG members present were Santali women. As Mohantas and Santals do not usually socialise together, the Santal women may not view her as a potential role model. If the SHG federation President was a Santali woman, other Santali women may be more likely be inspired by her.

A study in Odisha by NAWO (2009) showed that a vast majority of SHG members do not get any training either for skills development or for social leadership, and training is more likely to focus on financial management, rather than broader entrepreneurial skills. NAWO (2009) also found that the size of loans available through SHGs is of some help but it is not enough to start any livelihood activity on a scale from which one can get a reasonable income to overcome poverty.

However, an example of the important support provided by SHGs is evident in Seema Mohanta's story. Her husband migrated to Hyderabad in 2002, leaving her to care for their young daughter alone. She has not heard from him since he migrated, and found out in 2008 through a distant relative that he had re-married in Hyderabad and had no intention of returning to her. Through the support of her SHG, Seema took out a loan and attended tailoring classes. With the ongoing support she was able to establish a very successful tailoring business in Maddur village, and hoped to open a small beauty parlour and dry cleaning service. When I met her again in 2013 her business was still going well and she still hoped to open the beauty parlour and had been looking into training options for this.

Seema has taken every effort to ensure that her daughter receives a good education, and believes that her daughter's generation will grow up in a world more equal than the world she has known. Seema's SHG provides her with both emotional and financial support – their regular meetings are an opportunity for women to share their problems with each-other and find solutions together. Seema's case is proof that in some circumstances, SHGs can be a lifeline to women.

Right to an Equal Wage

CEDAW Article 11(d) refers to "The right to equal remuneration, including benefits, and to equal treatment in respect of work of equal value, as well as equality of treatment in the evaluation of the quality of work;" between men and women (CEDAW Convention). Despite attempts within formal government schemes to provide equal wages to men and women, the situation is very different in private employment. Differing wages for men and women has an enormous impact on the power dynamics in the community, and is a continuous obstacle faced

by women in Maddur. In 2010, women received Rs35 (€0.58) a day for land cultivation, while men received Rs60 (€1). In terms of construction work, women earned Rs70 (€1.16) a day for carrying the bricks on their heads, while men earned Rs150 (€2.50) a day for constructing the building. In discussing the issue of wages and 'men's' and 'women's' work with the *Sarpanch*, she highlighted the fact that in all government development work, women and men earn an equal wage. While she acknowledged that this should also be the case in private sector employment, she did not see it as her responsibility to use her influence in this area. The different wages was frequently justified by men and women in Maddur that men do more difficult work. As Sanjeev Mohanta explained, men do digging and ploughing, whereas women's work "is easy – they just plant the seedlings".

In observing women and men's work during the peak agricultural months of June and July 2010, I saw far more women than men working in the paddy fields. On average, for every 10 women working in the fields, there was approximately one man. Men are generally responsible for ploughing and digging, while women are responsible for transplanting the paddy. However, transplanting is much slower and more tedious than the work men conducted in the village, as it involves bending over for up to eight hours a day. Men who did transplantation work finished earlier than the women, as the women continued in the fields until 5-6pm in the evenings, while the men stopped at 4pm. During the month of August 2010, I observed that men's ploughing work in the fields started early morning, and finished by 10-10:30 am. The women then carried out their fieldwork in the scorching heat of the mid-day sun.

When I spoke to groups of women (in SHG meetings) about this issue, they were unanimous in explaining that their work is easier than men's, and they should therefore be paid a lower wage. It was not until I spoke to women individually about the issue, that some admitted that they would actually like to earn an equal wage to their male counterparts, but none of them felt this could ever be possible, because "women have always earned less than men".

Meena Tudu comes from a well educated family who own thirteen acres of land in the village. She stated that women and men should earn equal wages, but when I questioned her on the wages her family pays to their labourers, she explained that they pay women Rs40 (€0.67) per day and men between Rs60-Rs100 (€1 - €1.67) per day, and despite acknowledging these wages were discriminatory, she was not willing to challenge her family on the issue. This could be considered a classic instance of Gramscian hegemony through which Meena contributes to women's oppression. Gramsci (1971) regarded patriarchy as a form of hegemony, and Meena is caught up in this socialisation process. As an unmarried, educated woman, living with her parents, brothers and sister-in-laws, she was aware of her 'place' in society and perhaps afraid of the social consequences were she seen to be disrespecting her elder's decisions.

One fundamental reason for the continuation of unequal wages in Maddur is because women in the Santal hamlets are not involved in the village level meetings where the wages are decided. The Santal village priest, Jitu Baske, explained that the village wages are decided by the men in the village during *pujas*. As it is very difficult to arrange community meetings at a time suitable for everyone, the men in the community use the opportunity in *puja* celebrations to discuss other village issues such as wages for both men and women. These ceremonies take place in the *Jaher*

Garh – the spiritual area in the Santal hamlet where women are not permitted to enter. In explaining the 'village rules', Soumya stated all villagers must adhere to the final wage decision. She explained that even if a woman could enter the *Jaher Garh*, and tried to speak in the presence of many men, she would be mocked. She said 'if women were allowed to speak things might be different.' The fact that these discussions take place in a space only accessible to men prevents women from even being mere silent observers on the key decisions that affect their livelihoods. Therefore, while national policies such as the NREGA ensure that both women and men receive an equal wage (although control over these wages is a separate issue), policies such as these do not always translate into private employment at the local level which denies women their rights and may further entrench the view that women are of less value than men.

Unequal wages for agricultural work, and the idea that men do 'harder' work, is not unique to Maddur. In her research with a Pallar tribe in Tamil Nadu, Kapadia (2002) carried out an extensive study on wages and hours worked. She found that men generally earned twice as much as women for a similar four hours of daily work. There was a perception that men should be paid more 'because their work was harder'; on the other hand it was generally felt that it would be deeply humiliating for a man if he was paid the same wage as a woman for the same work. "Therefore, a differential had to be observed simply to secure the superior status of the man" (Kapadia, 2002: 198).

However, while Pallar women seemed to formally endorse the idea that male work was paid more because it was 'harder', Kapadia's (2002) analysis of their work refutes this assumption. She claims that while digging the earth ('male work') might appear to be harder than carrying

soil ('female work'), the different pace of these works does not mean that digging is actually more exhausting. "Men can dig a little and then rest, while women have to carry their baskets of earth to and fro almost unceasingly, often under a blazing sun. In these circumstances the men's work does not appear harder, but the men earn twice as much as women" (2002: 200).

Moreover, as Kapadia (2002) notes, with the sole exception of ploughing, Pallar women actually can and do perform 'male' jobs in the privacy of their family farms. This is also the case in Maddur, where women regularly carry out digging and levelling activities on their family farm. When no male wage is at stake, both Pallar and Santal men seem to be perfectly happy to let women perform 'male' labour.

In Santali communities, ploughing is one agricultural task that has been solely assigned to men. According to Archer (2007), who carried out his research in the Santal Parganas in the 1940s, the Santals believe that if women plough a field drought will occur. It is also dangerous for a woman to touch the handle or carry any part of a plough for this also causes drought and thus requires sacrificial ceremonies. This belief is still prevalent in Santal communities, as women in Maddur explained that if they plough a field, "the gods will be angry".

Rao N. (2008) also highlights this issue, and outlines a Santal folktale, explaining the reason behind assigning the role of ploughing purely to men. The god, Thakur, tried to help the villagers by making a plough for them to use in cultivation. However, his wife, Thakram, angry with Thakur for being late, threw the plough in the air. It broke into many pieces, as Thakur had joined together several small pieces of wood. Thakram then made a plough with a single piece of

wood which stayed firm even on being thrown and hit. "The god, Haram, was pleased and said 'You have invented a wonderful implement, so I am blessing the entire community of women for this. Women henceforth won't touch the plough, I'm saving them from the hard work of ploughing'. Simultaneous with the invention, therefore, came the taboo; at the same time, this was projected as a blessing from god" (Rao, N., 2008: 193).

As Archer (2007), Kapadia (2002) and Rao, N., (2008) note, a parallel is seen between ploughing the land (earth is seen as female) to sow the seed (seen as male) and men injecting semen into women's bodies. Therefore, the act of ploughing has become suggestive of the male role in sex and it would be regarded by the *bongas* as a symbolic perversion if a woman resorted to ploughing. As a result, according to Rao, N., (2008), the plough metaphor is one basis for constructing land as a male form of property, as even if physically manageable, land cannot be ploughed by women. "Female exclusion from ploughing has therefore led to the close association of ploughing with masculinity and male identity, and has reinforced male control over land" (2008: 193). This level of control subsequently impacts on wages for men and women – and if only men own the land, then they decide the wages for working on the land.

Conclusion

Human rights are embedded in power relations. Wilson (1997: 17) insightfully argues that "rights seek to constrain the flow of power like bottlenecks, by framing power as fixed, confinable and normative, but power leaks out, and flows around rights". He therefore maintains that human rights are dependent on power relations, and the process of marginalised groups achieving their human rights "alters forms of governance and the exercise of power" (ibid). To

better understand the relationship between power and human rights, Wilson (1997) calls for an ethnography of human rights, which can show how rights are transformed through local and global complex webs of power. In a similar argument, Preis (2009:349) maintains that human rights conventions "are grounded in the meanings accorded them through the ongoing life experiences and dilemmas of men and women and therefore do not – and cannot – in any straightforward, linear, or mechanical manner, form the basis of human rights action." She therefore maintains that we need to examine and understand the construction of human rights in the everyday life of communities. By understanding the life experiences of the women of Maddur, and the power relations through the wider community, in particular through the *Sarpanch* and the *Majhi*, we can begin to understand how rights frameworks are played out in practice, and why the ultimate goals of conventions such as CEDAW are so difficult to achieve.

In Griffith's (2001) ethnography of the provisions of marriage outlined in CEDAW, she demonstrates how some Batswana peasant women who are often precluded from entering into the categories of monogamous marriage as outlined in CEDAW do not benefit from the Convention. Her work demonstrates how these women negotiate economic security through alternative understandings of marriage and she argues for a more context sensitive application of human rights frameworks so that it can meet the needs of different groups of women. This chapter frames women's rights to material gains through international legislation such as CEDAW, which are often facilitated through the work of NGOs, or through government led development schemes. The power of these institutions becomes enmeshed in local realities and in the process alters how women's rights are achieved.

As this chapter shows, in 'women's empowerment' initiatives led by governments and NGOs, women are encouraged to participate in community level committees so that their needs are addressed. While this can address some of their strategic needs, their practical needs such as removing the drudgery of daily chores, remains. Women will not have time to enter or create political spaces and demand their rights or to place a high value on these participatory initiatives until there is a reduction in the amount of time it takes them to carry out their daily chores, and there is a shift in the current male dominated paradigm.

The power games and political tensions in the Nayak hamlet regarding the water tank demonstrates how rights are reinterpreted at the local level, how daily encounters with the state materialise, and who ultimately benefits from the schemes. While men in the community try to sabotage the water tank scheme, the women in the community are directly affected, as it means that their daily drudgery of collecting water continues. Women's informal role in influencing their husbands plays an important role in the success of the project, but their right to clean water depends on who has financial control over the initiative.

While the water tank construction in the Nayak community has created divisions and tensions, it is the *Majhi* system in the Santal hamlets that has provided unity in the construction of the tank for the Nayapalli and Bilaspur hamlets. When discussing the Nayak water tank issue with Santali villagers, they maintained that their hamlets were united which helped with the construction of the tank. They explained that if a similar issue arose in the Santal hamlet, it would be easy for the *Majhi* in the community to call a village level meeting and address the problem. In such a manner, the PRI and the *Majhi* system can work in harmony for the benefit of the whole

community, and the boundary between state and society becomes further blurred. Even though the *Majhi* system prohibits female involvement, the presence of this system has benefited women in the Santal hamlets as they now have piped water to their homes.

While the government is trying to stamp out corruption in development schemes such as NREGA by ensuring payment is made by cheque, the current implementation of NREGA has now further embedded men's control over finances – an unplanned side effect of a planned intervention (Ferguson, 2007) which has reinforced the current discourse on male domination. While national and state level development schemes such as NREGA and water and sanitation programmes aim to improve the lives of vulnerable people, these technical solutions are embedded within power structures which can serve to undermine their success.

Some villagers have accused the *Sarpanch* of denying them their rights under the Public Distribution Scheme, and denying them a widow's pension. These vulnerable families are directly affected by their inclusion or exclusion in these government schemes, and it seems as if they have no other avenues of influence to assert their rights – it is not something that falls within the mandate of the *Majhi* system, and does not seem to be a concern of political parties (at least until election time). In these cases, education and access to information is crucial, so that these families can create their own spaces of power in order to demand their rights.

The fact that women are members of decision making committees is encouraging, but they are not given financial responsibilities on these committees, and as a result, they lack control. While gaining increased control over current wages is problematic, women have the opportunity to gain

control over new initiatives through the entrepreneurial activities in their SHGs. The *Sarpanch* has encouraged women in the community to take part in these activities, but the newly established SHGs require support and entrepreneurial training, without this, the self help initiative will become another burdensome meeting for women to attend.

The development schemes outlined in this chapter demonstrate the power relations at different levels and through different systems – outlining how these schemes inform the perceptions of the local community in relation to the 'state' and ultimately how rights frameworks play out in practice. Many of the development schemes have resulted in increased marginalisation of the communities they were supposed to support, and as a result communities may prefer to minimise their interaction with the state. Shah's (2010) ethnographic work in Jharkhand clearly highlights this issue when she describes how rural elites intercept projects initiated by city based rights activists and in the process maintain their dominance while the poorest in the village experience an exploitative state "in whose shadows they seek to remain" (2010: 32). Realising rights through interactions with the state needs to take account of the fact that state officials are "multiply positioned within different regimes of power" (Gupta 1995: 388). Understanding how people navigate these different regimes of power and understanding that development schemes themselves are a playing out of power relations between rich and poor both nationally and internationally can help us develop locally appropriate strategies in implementing rights frameworks.

Conclusion

At the core of this thesis is the power dynamic between men and women in a Santali community, which takes account of the interconnections between external and internal political and economic forces. Using Foucauldian and Marxist perspectives to assess how women's participation in the PRI has enabled women from Maddur village to articulate their interests, I have shown how the constantly changing power dynamics between Santali institutions, the PRI, party politics and men and women have impacted upon the implementation of locally relevant, gender sensitive, policy outcomes. These power dynamics relate to Batliwala's (2007) definition of empowerment in terms of challenging ideologies, increasing women's access and control over resources and transforming institutions. Through this analysis, I have also looked at how women's entry into the PRI influences and is influenced by the *Majhi* system and the extent to which women outside of the political process have benefited from women's entry into the PRI. As well as highlighting what might be learnt from the implementation of a 33% reservation system in rural India, this thesis is also situated within and contributes to the broader debate regarding gendered power relations within state policies and local and national development schemes which are introduced into complicated social settings. In this concluding chapter I relate the significance of my findings to this broader discourse.

In analysing the changing social dynamics resulting from the imposition of a state led directive, I point to the extent to which power relations have shifted. The exercise of governmentality in Maddur is carried out both through the PRI and the *Majhi* system, resulting in two centres of power. While the introduction of the PRI has influenced the *Majhi* system, to the extent that the key positions within the Santali system changed from a hereditary base to a democratically

elected base, the 33% women's reservation in the PRI has not led to a subsequent formal inclusion of women in Santali institutions. If ASECA and the *Majhi* system in Maddur secure men's domination, and the *panchayat* system encourages increasing numbers of women to participate in local governance structures, a decision making divide may result, whereby Santali women see the PRI as their opportunity to improve their standard of living, and Santali men see the *Majhi* system and ASECA as an avenue for promoting Santali culture (and thereby restricting women in certain areas). In using Ferguson and Gupta's (2002) analysis of verticality and encompassment, it is clear that the *Majhi* system of power is all encompassing within the community, and the PRI works through a vertical system, which on occasion may also be encompassing, depending on how local people encounter and react to its authority.

The 73rd Amendment has therefore accentuated the division between the PRI and the *Majhi* system, as the power balance is now more clearly divided by gender as well as along social, economic and political lines. Through increasingly active participation of women in the PRI, the very dynamics of both the functioning of *Majhi* system and the PRI may change. However, for as long as Santali women continue to live at basic subsistence levels, and thereby leave *panchayat* meetings early due to hunger pangs, a devolved system of government will never be effective.

One of the aims of the 73rd Amendment was to empower women. It is clear that there have been substantial changes for many of the women who are directly involved in the PRI. The manner in which the *Sarpanch*, Mahak Murmu, has been able to negotiate the constantly changing power balances in the community is a testament to her own empowerment. As Cowan (2009: 315) maintains, we need to understand that an individual 'can be inside more than one culture at any

one time.' Mahak Murmu, a Santali woman, navigates on a daily basis the political and cultural tensions of being between the *panchayat* cultural space and her own Santali cultural identity. Understanding how she is able to navigate this space and contest cultural barriers and local power relations provides an insight into the difficulties involved in developing locally appropriate strategies in implementing rights based frameworks.

One clear example of Mahak's navigation of cultural and contested spaces was through the strategies she employed to overcome the water tank tensions in the Nayak hamlet in 2010. Her ability to ensure the support of other women in the community, who subsequently influenced their husbands through informal means, was crucial to improving the standard of living of the village. However, her role in addressing the subsequent tensions relating to the water tank is as yet unclear. While she is able to work within the *Majhi* system to ensure village unity in the implementation of village development schemes in Bilaspur and Nayapalli hamlets, her ability to unify the fractured relations within the Nayak hamlet is far from assured. Development schemes which are implemented in contexts where there are already fractured relations and tensions can often accentuate and reinforce those power relations if they are not considered when the scheme is designed.

In understanding women's empowerment through women's confidence in themselves, it is clear that the 33% women's reservation has been successful in building the confidence of elected women representatives in the community. Without this reservation system, Mahak Murmu would not be aspiring to be an MLA for the Congress Party, and Seema Majhi would not have

considered standing for the position of *Sarpanch* in the 2012 election. As these women expand their horizons, they act as role models for other women in the community.

Women's reservation has also contributed to challenging ideologies which reinforce patriarchy to some extent. The power that the female *Sarpanch* and female *Naib Sarpanch* hold in providing employment and other economic benefits has been recognised, and this has shifted some of the gender dynamics in the community, as men are now reliant on these powerful women for employment opportunities. Furthermore, women's entry into the PRI has challenged patriarchy through the strategies elected women use to resolve cases of domestic violence in the Nayak hamlet. Many Nayak women feel that the *Sarpanch* is a guardian of their rights, and request her to mediate between arguing couples. However, macro level processes, specifically the impact of Hinduisation and the rise of the Hindutva ideology, directly impacts on any challenges to patriarchy at the local level.

A tribal woman who adopts Hindu norms may be more accepted by mainstream society, which can be empowering for her, as she is less likely to be treated as an inferior tribal citizen. However, while adopting these norms, she is entering a world where women's movements are further restricted, and she is thus less able to challenge patriarchal customs. This is a clear example of how religion, caste and gender interact – and how the outcome can be both empowering and disempowering simultaneously. The extent to which Mahak Murmu becomes 'Hinduised' and the extent to which she is able to navigate the Hindu mainstream to her advantage will have a direct impact on the extent to which she will be able to challenge

patriarchy in her community. This issue underscores the need for the expansion of women's rights in both Santal and Hindu society so that an alternative empowering space can be realised.

The effect of women's reservation in local politics on changing patterns of access and control over resources has been slow in Maddur. The design of government schemes incorporates equal rights for women and men, but this does not lead to equal rights in practice. While women and men earn equal wages in government run schemes, women continue to lack access to the finances they earn because they do not hold their own bank accounts. Wages in the private sector continue to be extremely unequal, with women earning half of men's wages. Furthermore, government housing schemes ensure that women own property, yet their fundamental rights are denied because they do not own the land on which their property is built and inheritance rights continue to be biased towards the male child.

However, as a result of women's entry into the PRI, women are now involved in committees to oversee development work in the local area. While the women on village committees in Maddur lack control, and in some cases, lack interest in being involved, in time the power dynamic may slowly shift, so that both women and men share control and responsibility on these committees. The fact that women are involved, and some women are active on these committees, is an important starting point in shifting access and control over resources. However, the value that women place on the work of these committees must be understood and taken into account when establishing these committees. For women to actively participate in these initiatives they need to see them as meaningful in helping them to address their needs.

The 33% women's reservation was included in the 73rd Amendment to ensure that women's needs are both highlighted and addressed in the political process. The reservation system has led to increased female participation in *Palli* and *Gram Sabha* meetings which is a very positive starting point, but aside from Mahak Murmu and to some extent Seema Majhi, other women in the *panchayat* seem to have benefited little from this top-down directive. While Mahak has encouraged the establishment of SHGs in the area, their entrepreneurial activities such as goatery businesses has driven SHG members deeper into debt, and has not, as yet, helped them to become financially independent.

While most villagers now receive their pensions regularly and are also receiving rice, kerosene and sugar at reduced rates on a monthly basis through the Public Distribution System run by the *panchayat*, there are a majority of women who continue to be extremely vulnerable and live at basic subsistence levels. Fundamentally, women who are denied their rights, such as their widow's pension, do not feel empowered enough to raise these issues in the *Palli* and *Gram Sahas*, and in fact see these meetings as a waste of their time. The women's reservation in local level government has huge potential to benefit women who are outside of the political process, but this is unlikely to fully benefit these women until they see the value of devolution. This will not happen until the PRI has autonomy in funds, functions and functionaries so that local demands can be effectively addressed. This would subsequently allow for 'empowerment' to be driven by those currently disempowered by state and society. Until that happens, an "empowering" initiative has been implemented within a superficially participatory, but deeply disempowering institution.

From 33% to 50% Reservation for Women

While women's formal involvement in the PRI may lead to transformed institutions in time, they continue to face a number of obstacles in terms of active participation and influence. Laws such as the two child norm directly limits the number of women who can stand for election, and issues such as inadequate family support, lack of education, poor access to information, general opposition to women's reservation and proxy leadership all impact on the role elected women can play in what has traditionally been a man's world. The manner in which locally elected women representatives work with others to break down these numerous obstacles will determine their path to empowerment. This highlights the need for complementary policies alongside a women's reservation system.

As the women's reservation in the PRI moves from 33% to 50%, the example of Maddur highlights a number of important lessons to be taken into account if the 50% reservation is to be a success. These relate to the personal qualities, experience and support base of the elected representatives as well as addressing systemic issues. Firstly, those who are elected must have at least a basic education. Mahak Murmu was very explicit about this, as she believed that people with an education are less likely to be exploited, and more likely to be respected in the community. However, I would argue that it is crucial to have political awareness of roles, rights and responsibilities, as it is with this knowledge that elected members are less likely to be exploited. Government policies which aim to increase transformative education for girls are a crucial component of a successful women's reservation system, as are comprehensive training programmes for elected members on their roles, rights and responsibilities.

Secondly, an elected representative is more likely to be effective if she has family support – some-one to assist with household work and other family responsibilities. This lesson is fundamental to women's involvement in the PRI, but is something extremely difficult to achieve, as it touches at the core of gender norms, and impacts on the private sphere. The women's movement discourse in India challenges the current rise in religious fundamentalism and subsequent limitations placed upon women. If this movement was to gain a stronger footing in rural, inaccessible areas, it would go some way in addressing this issue. This discourse would need to be advocated by both men and women, as having male role models who contribute to household work can have an influential effect on other men in the community. The recent demonstrations by both men and women against violence against women in urban metropolises could be the start of some important changes in attitudes towards women. If this movement begins to find locally appropriate entry points to engage men in the women's rights discourse in rural areas, we may see an improvement in the implementation of international women's rights frameworks.

Thirdly, the role of the *Naib Sarpanch* should complement the work of the *Sarpanch.* The *Naib Sarpanch* should be able to take his/her own initiative in addressing some of the development issues in the area. This could be achieved if the *Sarpanch* gives specific responsibilities to the *Naib Sarpanch*, and in such a manner, a second line of command can be established. During my research this was not evident in Maddur, as the role of the *Naib Sarpanch* was merely to take over responsibility of the *panchayat* if the *Sarpanch* is absent for more than fifteen days. Mahak Murmu therefore only considers the *Naib Sarpanch* as a replacement if absolutely necessary, and not as her assistant with whom she should be working closely. This is subsequently

disempowering for the *Naib Sarpanch* and limits the potential for building up a second line of command of women in the community.

Finally, the PRI needs to be truly devolved. The PRI as it functions today is a direct result of the Gandhi - Ambedkhar debate which took place during Independence, which is linked to how the *panchayats* functioned during colonialism. Moving beyond this limited framework requires true autonomy in funds, functions and functionaries, as only then will people understand its true value. A starting point in achieving this could be the prohibition of MLA development funds, as these funds merely serve to undermine the work of the PRI, and cause political tensions in the community.

Increasing women's reservation to 50% while maintaining the current structures and obstacles to women's participation may only serve to further undermine the process and leave communities further disillusioned and disempowered. This could have an impact on the strength of the Maoist movement in the area, as the more disillusioned communities become, the more likely they are to join the Maoist ranks. Currently, Maoists in southern Odisha are requesting communities not to get involved in government development schemes, arguing that the officials overseeing them are corrupt. Unless the underlying causes of inequality and poverty in rural India are addressed, Maoists will continue to demand an alternative social system through violent means, the state will continue its attempts to suppress the movement, and innocent villagers will continue to be caught in the middle.

Creating Spaces

Gupta (1995: 392) argues that "any analysis of the state requires us to conceptualise a space that is constituted by the intersection of local, regional, national and transnational phenomena". This intersecting linkage is evident through the development schemes which are imposed by the Indian state on *panchayats* as they are driven from the national level, which is influenced by a neo-liberal ideology, determined by a global discourse. Moreover, as Gupta (1995: 383) argues, state promoted poverty reduction schemes are a result of a "regime of development that came into being in the post-war international order of decolonised nation-states. What happens at the grassroots is thus completely mediated by such linkages." Creating a real alternative space, which is locally driven, requires a very different interpretation of the nature of the 'state'. As increasing numbers of women are now involved in public decision making processes, there may be opportunities to move away from what has traditionally been a very masculine state ideology to a space where the state is very differently 'imagined' by local communities. Given that the majority of women's reservation systems have been implemented globally only since the 1990s, expecting them to already be successful in overturning centuries of male control is unrealistic. However, increasing numbers of women in politics globally may provide opportunities for women and men to interpret state power differently, and in the process there may be fundamental global shifts in gender dynamics which will impact on local social change.

Fundamental to the 73rd Amendment is its attempt to create a new space. It will go down in history as a progressive piece of legislation in devolving government. With a country as vast, society as complex and history so varied as India has, it is no surprise that the implementation of the Amendment has differed enormously, not just from state to state, but also from district to

district and even *panchayat* to *panchayat*. Odisha alone is twice the size of Ireland, with ten times the population, and includes 64 different tribal societies, as well as numerous castes and sub-castes. Expand these statistics across the Indian sub-continent, taking into account historical circumstances, and it is clear that ensuring a representative and participatory democracy in this context is difficult, problematic and extremely challenging. Overcoming these challenges will not happen until both women and men in local and marginalised communities demand that the newly created spaces for participation be used for social justice.

Annex 1: Map of India

Source: www.mapsofindia.com

Research Area

Annex 2: Amendments and Acts

Amendment/Act	Enforced Since
73rd Constitutional Amendment	24th April 1993
50% reservation system for women as part of 73rd Amendment	21st July 2011
Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA)	24th December 1996
National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA)	23rd August 2004

Annex 3: Article 243D and 243G of 73rd Amendment[48]

THE CONSTITUTION (SEVENTY-THIRD AMENDMENT) ACT, 1992

Statement of Objects and Reasons appended to the Constitution
(Seventy-second Amendment) Bill, 1991 which was enacted as
the Constitution (Seventy-third Amendment) Act, 1992

STATEMENT OF OBJECTS AND REASONS

Though the Panchayati Raj Institutions have been in existence for a long time, it has been observed that these institutions have not been able to acquire the status and dignity of viable and responsive people's bodies due to a number of reasons including absence of regular elections, prolonged supersessions, insufficient representation of weaker sections like Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and women, inadequate devolution of powers and lack of financial resources.

2. Article 40 of the Constitution which enshrines one of the Directive Principles of State Policy lays down that the State shall take steps to organise village panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government. In the light of the experience in the last forty years and in view of the short-comings which have been observed, it is considered that there is an imperative need to enshrine in the Constitution certain basic and essential features of Panchayati Raj Institutions to impart certainty, continuity and strength to them.

3. Accordingly, it is proposed to add a new Part relating to Panchayats in the Constitution to provide for among other things, Gram Sabha in a village or group of villages; constitution of Panchayats at village and other level or levels; direct elections to all seats in Panchayats at the village and intermediate level, if any, and to the offices of Chairpersons of Panchayats at such levels; reservation of seats for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in proportion to their population for membership of Panchayats and office of Chairpersons in Panchayats at each level; reservation of not less than one-third of the seats for women; fixing tenure of 5 years for Panchayats and holding elections within a period of 6 months in the event of supersession of any Panchayat; disqualifications for membership of Panchayats; devolution by the State Legislature of powers and responsibilities upon the Panchayats with respect to the preparation of plans for economic developments and social justice and for the implementation of development schemes; sound finance of the Panchayats by securing authorisation from State Legislatures for grants-in-aid to the Panchayats from the Consolidated Fund of the State, as also assignment to, or appropriation by, the Panchayats of the revenues of designated taxes, duties, tolls and fees; setting up of a Finance Commission within one year of the proposed amendment and thereafter every 5 years to review the financial position of Panchayats; auditing of accounts of the Panchayats;

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[48] Source: http://indiacode.nic.in/coiweb/amend/amend73.htm

powers of State Legislatures to make provisions with respect to elections to Panchayats under the superintendence, direction and control of the chief electoral officer of the State; application of the provisions of the said Part to Union territories; excluding certain States and areas from the application of the provisions of the said Part; continuance of existing laws and Panchayats until one year from the commencement of the proposed amendment and barring interference by courts in electoral matters relating to Panchayats.

4. The Bill seeks to achieve the aforesaid objectives.

NEW DELHI;   G. VENKAT SWAMY.

The 10th September, 1991.

THE CONSTITUTION (SEVENTY-THIRD AMENDMENT) ACT, 1992

[20th April, 1993.]

An Act further to amend the Constitution of India.

BE it enacted by Parliament in the Forty-third Year of the Republic of India as follows:-

1. Short title and commencement.-(1) This Act may be called the Constitution (Seventy-third Amendment) Act, 1992.

(2) It shall come into force on such date_680 as the Central Government may, by notification in the Official Gazette, appoint.

2. Insertion of new Part IX.- After Part VIII of the Constitution, the following Part shall be inserted, namely:-

            `PART IX
            THE PANCHAYATS
243. Definitions.- In this Part, unless the context otherwise requires,-

(a) "district" means a district in a State;

(b) "Gram Sabha" means a body consisting of persons registered in the electoral rolls relating to a village comprised within the area of Panchayat at the village level;

(c) "Intermediate level" means a level between the village and district levels specified by the Governor of a State by public notification to be the intermediate level for the

purposes of this Part;

(d) "Panchayat" means an institution (by whatever name called) of self-government constituted under article 243B, for the rural areas;

(e) "Panchayat area" means the territorial area of a Panchayat;

(f) "population" means the population as ascertained at the last preceding census of which the relevant figures have been published;

(g) "village" means a village specified by the Governor by public notification to be a village for the purposes of this Part and includes a group of villages so specified.

243D. Reservation of seats.- (1) Seats shall be reserved for-

(a) the Scheduled Castes; and

(b) the Scheduled Tribes,

in every Panchayat and the number of seats of reserved shall bear, as nearly as may be, the same proportion to the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in that Panchayat as the population of the Scheduled Castes in that Panchayat area or of the Scheduled Tribes in that Panchayat area bears to the total population of that area and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat.

(2) Not less than one-third of the total number of seats reserved under clause (1) shall be reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes or, as the case may be, the Scheduled Tribes.

(3) Not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat shall be reserved for women and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat.

(4) The offices of the Chairpersons in the Panchayats at the village or any other level shall be reserved for the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and women in such manner as the Legislature of a State may, by law, provide:

Provided that the number of offices of Chairpersons reserved for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes in the Panchayats at each level in any State shall bear, as nearly as may be, the same proportion to the total number of such offices in the Panchayats at each level as the population of the Scheduled Castes in the State or of the Scheduled Tribes in the State bears to the total population of the State:

Provided further that not less than one-third of the total number of offices of Chairpersons

in the Panchayats at each level shall be reserved for women:

Provided also that the number of offices reserved under this clause shall be allotted by rotation to different Panchayats at each level.

(5) The reservation of seats under clauses (1) and (2) and the reservation of offices of Chairpersons (other than the reservation for women) under clause (4) shall cease to have effect on the expiration of the period specified in article 334.

(6) Nothing in this Part shall prevent the Legislature of a State from making any provision for reservation of seats in any Panchayat or offices of Chairpersons in the Panchayats at any level in favour of backward class of citizens.

243-O. Bar to interference by courts in electoral matters.- Notwithstanding anything in this Constitution,-

(a) the validity of any law relating to the delimitation of constituencies or the allotment of seats to such constituencies, made or purporting to be made under article 243K, shall not be called in question in any court;

(b) no election to any Panchayat shall be called in question except by an election petition presented to such authority and in such manner as is provided for by or under any law made by the Legislature of a State Constitution, after sub-clause (b), the following sub-clause shall be inserted, namely:-

"(bb) the measures needed to augment the Consolidated Fund of a State to supplement the resources of the Panchayats in the State on the basis of the recommendations made by the Finance Commission of the State Constitution, the following Schedule shall be added, namely:
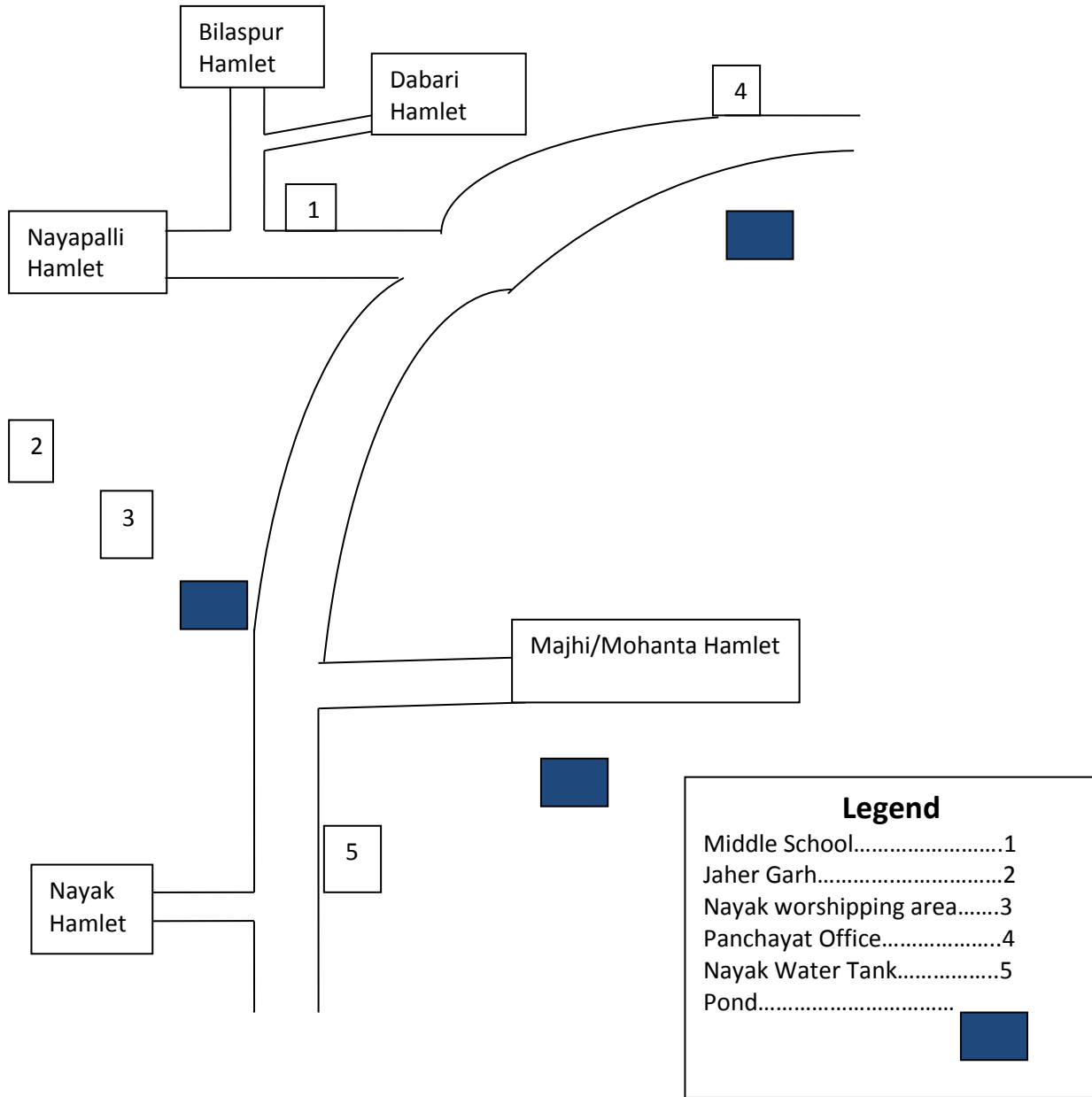
"ELEVENTH SCHEDULE

(Article 243G)

1. Agriculture, including agricultural extension.
2. Land improvement, implementation of land reforms, land consolidation and soil conservation.
3. Minor irrigation, water management and watershed development.
4. Animal husbandry, dairying and poultry.
5. Fisheries.
6. Social forestry and farm forestry.
7. Minor forest produce.
8. Small scale industries, including food processing industries.
9. Khadi, village and cottage industries.
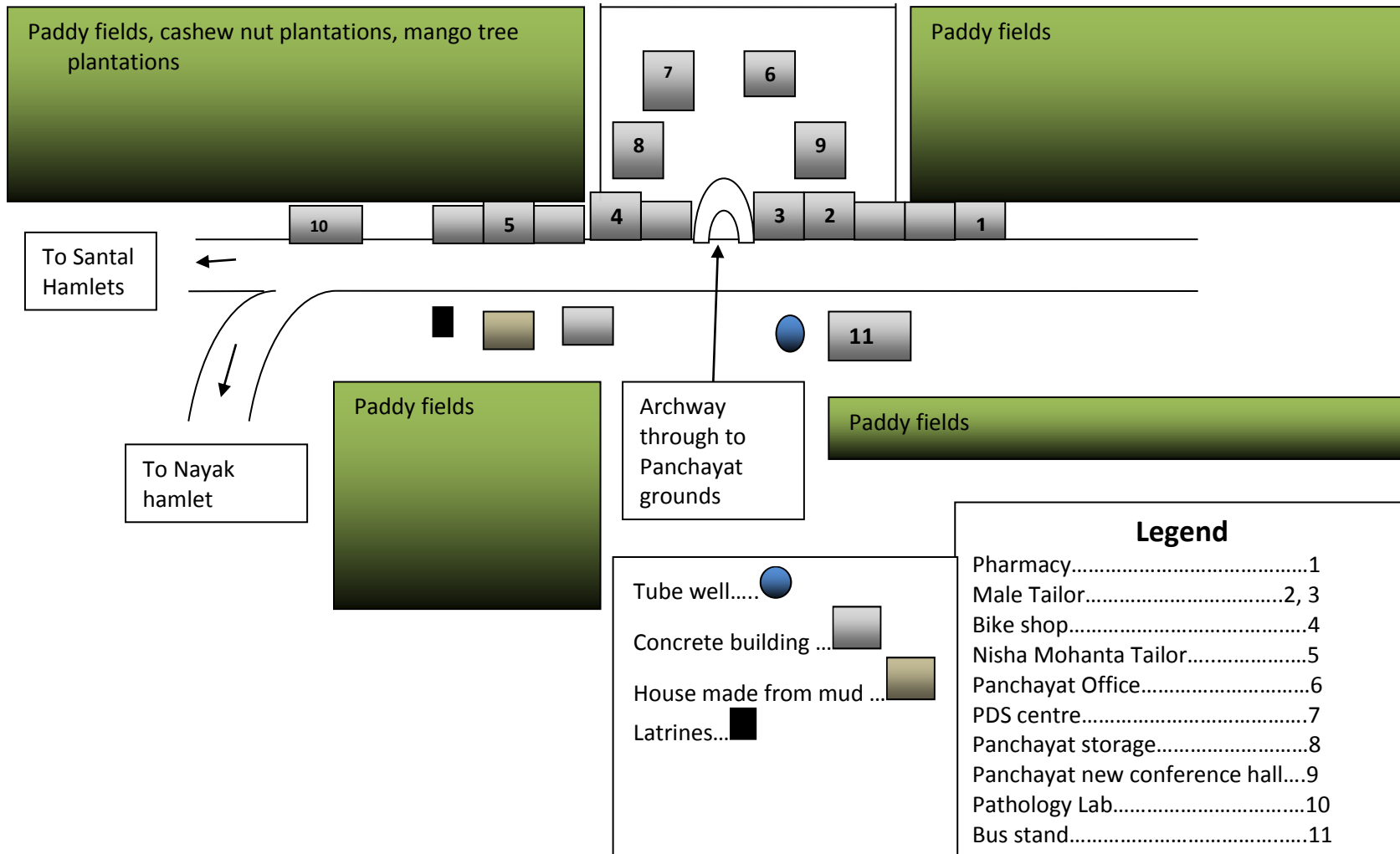10. Rural housing.
11. Drinking water.

12. Fuel and fodder.
13. Roads, culverts, bridges, ferries, waterways and other means of communication.
14. Rural electrification, including distribution of electricity.
15. Non-conventional energy sources.
16. Poverty alleviation programme.
17. Education, including primary and secondary schools.
18. Technical training and vocational education.
19. Adult and non-formal education.
20. Libraries.
21. Cultural activities.
22. Markets and fairs.
23. Health and sanitation, including hospitals, primary health centres and dispensaries.
24. Family welfare.
25. Women and child development.
26. Social welfare, including welfare of the handicapped and mentally retarded.
27. Welfare of the weaker sections, and in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes.
28. Public distribution system.
29. Maintenance of community assets."

Annex 4:

**Map of Maddur: Village Layout**

Bilaspur Hamlet

Dabari Hamlet

4

1

Nayapalli Hamlet

2

3

Majhi/Mohanta Hamlet

5

Nayak Hamlet

Legend

Middle School…………………….1
Jaher Garh………………………….2
Nayak worshipping area…….3
Panchayat Office………………..4
Nayak Water Tank…………….5
Pond………………………….

Map of Panchayat Area

Paddy fields, cashew nut plantations, mango tree plantations

Paddy fields

7

6

8

9

10

5

4

3

2

1

To Santal Hamlets

To Nayak hamlet

Paddy fields

Archway through to Panchayat grounds

Paddy fields

11

Tube well…..

Concrete building …

House made from mud …

Latrines…

Legend

Pharmacy…………………………………….1
Male Tailor……………………………….2, 3
Bike shop……………………………………4
Nisha Mohanta Tailor…………………5
Panchayat Office………………………..6
PDS centre…………………………………7
Panchayat storage………………………8
Panchayat new conference hall….9
Pathology Lab……………………………10
Bus stand…………………………………..11

Map of Nayapalli Hamlet

Legend

Small shop……………………………………	1
Jamini Behera…………………………………	2
Blacksmith family………………………	3, 4
Dadhija Hasda…………………………	5
Manjit Hasda…………………………	6
Jitu (Naike) & Priya Baske…………	7
Aditya Tudu & Ojha…………………	8
Surendra Murmu (Village Majhi).	9
Rama Kisku & Rimani Hasda………	10
Savita Hasda………………………	11
Nitisha Majhi………………………	12
Sunil Majhi (Mason)…………………	13
Padma, Jyoti & Mamita……………	14
Kajri Hasda…………………………	15
Sarita Majhi………………………	16
Ruchana Murmu & Jagi Hasda…..	17
Seema Majhi (Naib Sarpanch)…..	18
Towards Panchayat Office…………	19
Jaher Garh………………………………	20

Tube well…..

BSNL Phone Mast…

Gosane (worship area) …

Concrete building …

House made from mud …

Latrines…

Towards Bilaspur Hamlet

17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10 9 6 6 5 2 1

19

18 8 7 4 3

Fields

20

219

Map of Nayak Hamlet

Fields

Towards Santal hamlets and panchayat office

15 **16**

12 **13** **14**

1

2

11 **9** **8** **6**

7 **Fields**

10 **4** **3**

5

Fields

Legend

Health Centre……………………… 1
Water Tank………………………… 2
Aakar Nayak……………………… 3
Small shop………………………… 4,5
Anganwadi Worker…………… 6
Community Meeting area…… 7
Sandeep Biswal………………… 8
Balbir & Gajra Biswal (IAY)…. 9
Amrita Nayak……………………… 10
Raakhi Biswal……………………… 11
Ramesh Nayak…………………… 12
Alisha Nayak……………………… 13
Kalpana Nayak…………………… 14
Madhu Nayak……………………… 15
Sabhya & Lajita Nayak………… 16

Fields

Tube well…..
Nayak worship area …
Concrete building …
House made from mud …
Latrines…

Map of Majhi/Mohanta Hamlet

Towards Panchayat office and Santal Hamlets

Pond

Fields

Fields

Pond

Fields

1

Fields

Fields

Fields

2

3

4

Towards Nayak hamlet

Pond
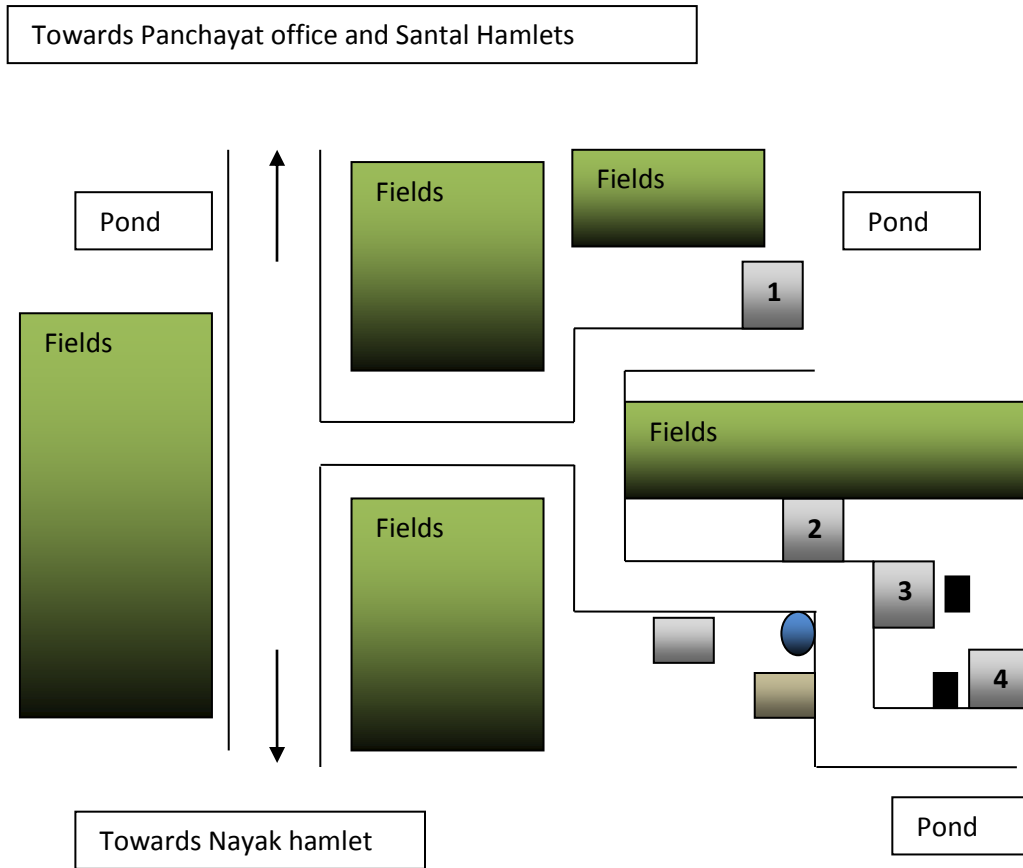
Legend
Sanjeev Mohanta……………………………… 1
Parvati Majhi…………………………………….. 2
Mahak Murmu & Rahul (Sarpanch)… 3
Darshana Majhi……………………………….. 4

Tube well…..

Concrete building …

House made from mud …

Latrines…

221

Map of Bilaspur and Dabari hamlet

Legend

Tube well…..	
Concrete building …	
Mud house ….. …	
Latrines…	

Panchayat buildings………….	1
Middle school……………………	2
ASECA office…………………….	3
Anusha Morandi………………	4
Water Tank………………………	5
Anusha's daughter in law….	6
Preeti Hasda……………………	7
Anganwadi worker……………	8
Post office………………………	9
Anganwadi centre……………	10
Haani Patra (Ojha)…………..	11
Meena Tudu……………………	12
Sanjay and Soumya…………..	13
Nita Soren………………………	14
Ritu Hasda……………………….	15
Udaya Soren……………………	16
Manas Majhi……………………	17
Sikuri Hasda……………………	18
Football field…………………	19

Fields

Fields

Dabari Hamlet

Bilaspur Hamlet

222

Annex 5
Population Profile – child ratios

Bilaspur Hamlet	0-6m	6m-1yr	1-2yr	2-3yr	3-6yr	Total
Feb 2010 Boys	0	5	4	7	13	**29**
Sep 2010 Boys	4	1	5	4	17	**31**
Feb 2010 Girls	1	6	2	8	14	**31**
Sep 2010 Girls	4	2	7	5	18	**36**

Nayak Hamlet	0-6m	6m-1yr	1-2yr	2-3yr	3-6yr	Total
April 2010 Boys	1	1	5	4	19	**30**
Sep 2010 Boys	3	1	2	5	19	**30**
April 2010 Girls	2	1	4	3	18	**28**
Sep 2010 Girls	4	1	2	4	19	**30**

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