



Intersubjectivity to Consensus ?

Politics of Recognition and Engendering Governance in Maharashtra

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1

Local Governance: Perspectives

Decentralized governance has recently been accorded a central place in the discourse on development. Decentralization has a whole set of advocates ranging from free market economists to a diverse array of social thinkers including post-modernists, multicultural advocates, grassroots environmental activists and supporters. They support decentralization for different reasons. Free-market economists tend to emphasize the benefits of reducing the power of the overextended or predatory state. In some international organizations pushing structural adjustment and transitional reform decentralization has sometimes been used almost as a synonym for privatization; similarly, in the literature on institutional economics, a mechanism for information allied with a decentralized system of individual decisions coordinated by a price mechanism is pitted against a system of central commands and plans. Agnihotri (2008) explains that decentralization, a key agenda of SAPs, transfers state responsibilities to lower levels, thereby reducing government expenditure. Further 'it may also be intended to deflect some of the dangers to the central government by making lower administrative levels the targets of popular protest and thereby weakening the ability of opposition movements to forge national campaigns. (Isaac and Franke 2000: 250). She adds that the governance agenda which aims at policies adopted within nations give a free play to market forces, also has an internal dimension: of institutionalization of a policy of exclusion with regard to citizenship rights. Proactive policies to stem social inequalities are ruled out and differential notions of rights that citizens can access in a market determined socio political arena are promoted in the name of free competition. As women constitute socially marginalized groups these developments could lead to circumscribing their rights with regard to state, citizenship and sovereignty.

Even those who are still convinced of the pervasiveness of market failures are increasingly turning for their resolution to the government at the local level, where the transaction costs are relatively low and the information problems that can contribute to central government failures are less acute. The diverse array of social thinkers: post-modernists, multicultural advocates, grassroots environmental activists and supporters of: post-modernists, multicultural advocates, grassroots environmental activists and supporters of the cause of indigenous peoples and technologies who Bardhan clubs under the label "anarcho-communitarians" are usually both anti-market and anti-centralized state, and they energetically support assignment of control to local self – governing communities.

While discussing on the subject of Local Governance, Mohanty (2007) discusses two divergent perspectives: one sees it as an arena for transforming an unequal local society into a democratic community; while the other treats it as an agency or the channel to implement centrally formulated policies and programmes. The former evokes the ideas of Mahatma Gandhi on gram swaraj or village level self rule. The latter is inspired by Maoist ideas on mechanisms of governance and stresses implementation of policies involving local institutions, local groups and local people in general. While Mao Zedong's ideas are tied to the politics of transformation, the Gandhian approach is embedded in self management. The historical appeal of local governance resides in the

belief that public life itself will be substantially transformed only when people deliberate, act and decide collectively. The heterogeneity of conditions and the misfit between national level solution and local conditions provides another basis for the local governance.

VILLAGE LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN INDIA

The Indian project of democratic decentralization needs to be understood against this backdrop. One of the most vexing contradictions of the Indian scenario of PRIs is the continual lip service provided to it right through the colonial rule and then in the five decades following independence as independent, self-reliant republics. On the other hand their institutional domain has been progressively undermined, making these institutions dependent on higher levels of government and political processes. In fact, five decades of planning has also alienated vast sections of rural vulnerable groups from positive participation in development discourse.

From a long period of non attention, Panchayats suddenly acquired importance with the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana which transferred funds directly to the Gram Panchayats. The subsequent passing of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment represents a movement both political and administrative in nature. Its timing coincides with the economic liberalization policies but its agenda is perhaps not as narrow as that of an economic revival project as suggested by its emphasis on the revival of the village general body ie. The Gramsabha and its attempts to make Panchayats adequately representative in caste and gender terms.

The Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in India, with 537 district Panchayats, 6097 intermediate Panchayats and 2, 34, 676 village Panchayats form one of the largest constitutionally elected local governance institutions in the world. Over the past ten years, PRIs in India have made remarkable progress in enhancing the representation of the marginalised in local governance structures¹.

1.1 GENDERED GOVERNANCE

Five decades of developmental plans, initiatives and programs had not produced significant impact on the gender empowerment of women in India. Women, who comprise half the population, in general, still remain marginalized and invisible in the socio- political and economic spheres of life. When exclusion takes place on the basis of historically deprived and socially ascribed identities like women, inclusion becomes complex, ambiguous and challenging. In many instance inclusion simply comes to mean seeking legitimacy, both from the state and from society. However, seeking legitimacy is only a preliminary effort to level the playing field for the larger struggle for inclusion. The critical issue is how to compete as equals or to carve out a course of action in a game, which is essentially between the powerful and the powerless, especially in a patriarchal society.

It is in this context that the notion of gendered citizenship acquires importance. Gendered citizenship requires citizenship to be conceptualized by taking into account the experiences of those whose inclusion remains problematic. This is crucial because gendered citizenship is not merely an extended conceptualization of citizenship; it also strives to turn citizenship into a set of practices. It thus becomes imperative to look at citizenship from the vantage point of marginalized collectives, so that their experiences of exclusion can help guide their action for inclusion. In other words, gendered citizenship comes to privilege citizenship from actors' point of view.

The 73rd amendment brought in women into the 'public' space of local governance in large numbers. The use of quotas and reservations to bring in women in large numbers into the political institutions is based on the understanding that a few women, no matter how strong they might be, cannot engender a system, and that equal or roughly equal participation is needed to ensure that both men's and women's voices are heard. The

criterion of numbers has thus been largely met for these institutions. (Sudarshan, 2008). More than fifteen years after this inclusion, a historical and analytical understanding of the gendered governance and its significance in altering the hegemonised gender equations in the socio- cultural and political web of the state becomes relevant.

GENDERED GOVERNANCE IN MAHARASHTRA

Maharashtra has a very long tradition of women's participation in public life largely owing to equally long traditions of social-political reforms. However, women's access to decision-making process has remained rather limited. Maharashtra adopted the policy of reservation for women in the institution of local self-government in the year 1990, much before the 73rd Constitutional Amendment provided these reservation for the entire nation.

In 1986, there were 22512 - gram Panchayat, 296 Panchayat samitis, and 25 zilla parishads. With the quota of 2 at each level, there were 45024 women in the gram panchayat samiti and 50 at eh zilla parishad level. But 95% of these women were nominated and in the absence of quota there were no women representative. Thus, the legislative requirement of the Act has been fulfilled. But merely mentioning the quota for women is not important, what is crucial is to analyze how successful they are in challenging the hegemonic gender power relations prevalent in the society and how far they can take up the responsibilities and what are the efforts required to make them effective participant in the governance.

The seventy third Amendment has definitely expanded the space given to women in local governance institutions. Simultaneously, there have been several initiatives to generate a conducive environment for collectives of women self help groups. On the one hand institutional space has been made available to women; on the other we find little or no change in the systemic variables that have strategically placed women lower in all rungs of the social hierarchy. The working of systemic variables in multiple complex ways have prevented women to access the institutional spaces available to her. Women have reacted differently to this situation: while some have confronted the systemic variables and entered the public political domain openly (and faced negative consequences), others have resorted to male family members to enter the public political domain and gave rise to the phenomenon of **proxy governance**, or even others have altogether shunned the public political domain and retreated to their private domestic spaces.

Moreover, the State of Maharashtra has been reluctant in effecting any real transfer of powers, resources to the Panchayats. Sixty per cent of the task allotted to Panchayati Raj as per Scheduled XI is not yet devolved to the local bodies by the state. The undeveloped tasks mostly are related to food security issues such as land, water, and forest produce-all issues of critical relevance to lives and livelihoods of the deprived groups. The importance given to assembly representatives and State ministers in the state has few parallels. Even in the panchayat, the gramsabha has been treated with secondary importance in relation to the elected body of the panchayat. The autonomy of the PRIs is thus seriously compromised.

The precondition for any good governance and decentralized planning is the existence of a well-informed citizenry which can make intelligent choices between various alternatives. Elected, representative democracy needs to be complemented by mechanisms of informed citizen participation, to enable those elected to gauge better the needs and priorities of citizens and to foster a sense of citizen ownership. What happens when such triangulation of strategy is absent? Can women at the grassroots hope to organize and initiate and demand a new perspective on local governance based on the principle of broad based inclusion? What are the potencies of such an approach? How do powers and functionaries in the village respond to it? What are the modes in which bureaucrats respond to it? Do these efforts bring alternative thoughts and visions to the fore?

One of the main concerns of the study is to understand how the rural woman's agency is an important variable and how she is involved in negotiating in the public domain (political, social and economic) and reworking the equations of invisibility to make her presence felt slowly but steadily. She may have the systemic variables working adversely against her and may have to negotiate in the political domain through **proxy governance**; however her agency is always at work. The present study seeks to understand the process whereby women constantly negotiate between their 'being' and 'not being' because her absence is marked by the markers of her presence as her presence is marked by the markers of her absence. As Thapan (2006, pp 209) observes that at no time are women's choices located outside their everyday existence; in that sense, they speak from within the multiplicity of their experience and location. But this does not suggest that women do not in fact articulate and exercise their agency in contesting, resolving, or changing oppressive conditions. It is only that they decide to use several and varying acts of resistance that need not necessarily fall into a universal pattern, but remain embedded in local acts or modalities of agency evolving from individual ways of perception and action. Their potential for change is therefore always limited and constrained.

Empowerment is about extending one's scope of action, or rather one's room to maneuver. The reservations for women are opening up new chances for women to do exactly this. Empowerment is about being able to make choices and to develop new strategies to attain one's goals, and should be always interpreted in relation to the social actor. Empowerment is about giving new meaning and transforming dominant discourses. Women are not proxies, but are transforming, slowly, the way the political field is constructed, and are reshaping their field of action in political activity.

The main questions thus being asked are:

1. What is the national gender discourse and its concomitant understanding of gender empowerment, gendered citizenship? How gender sensitive have the gender discourses, evolved in the form of policies, laws and other forms of institutionalization; have really been while moving through the phase of government to that of governance, specifically in the context of Maharashtra?
2. If there have been changes in these discourse over time, what are they? Are women part of the public sphere physically, if yes, then how crucial is their presence in influencing issues, or are they only physically visible but invisible in every other sense. How do women negotiate with institutions of public domain, namely the state, market and civil society? Where do they negotiate as individuals and where as collectives? Do they carry their gendered, familial and societal identities when they negotiate in the public domain or do they leave these behind when they come out?
3. How is the present gender discourse related and indexed with that in the past- as spelled out in customary, personal laws in the traditional set up? What are the continuities and breaks in the present discourse from the one in the past? When gender discourses get institutionalized in modern legal and official texts, and subsequently influence popular understanding, how do they impact the traditional customary relations and norms? Do they erode the social capital during the process of transition?

1.2 BROAD OBJECTIVE

To understand the gendered participation and local governance in the context of the State, Civil Society and social capital prevalent in the State of Maharashtra

1.2.1 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- To understand the different modes and practices in which gendered citizenship is institutionalized to the local governance in Maharashtra

- To understand how discourses, policies and practices at the local level of governance (inclusive of the state/national government policies which have a local component) shape the ways of living amongst local communities and women's collectives
- To gain an insight into how women with differing multiple identities confront, negotiate participate, and actualize in the space created in local governance
- To historically contextualize, understand and analyze the socio- cultural and economic modes and local strategic partnerships with which an NGO like Mahila Rajsatta Andolan (MRA) , working in the area of women and PRIs, facilitates towards an alternate perspective in the discourse of development and governance in Maharashtra

1.3 METHODOLOGY

The study used a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodology, but primarily qualitative, to analyze the changes effected by the gender component of the state and local plans as it would facilitate an enquiry into a real life context. This method also provided opportunities for in- depth analysis and an insight into people's perspectives, so crucial in understanding the process of participation.

A participative research approach (PRA) was used in the study. This approach of the PRA enabled an understanding of different groups (women self -help groups members, women elected representatives both at the assembly and Panchayat levels, bureaucrats etc, MRA members, women having multiple deprived identities, ex Sarpanchs, the significant others in the vicinity of the women leaders). Research as conceptualized by the PRA approach is praxis, with intertwined chains of reflection and action. The entire design of the study, the data collection, and the multiple scales of analysis and the various workshops organized as an integral part of the research process were planned in conjunction with the Mahila Rajsatta Andolan. Some features of the research process were-

- Our research investigators were drawn from the same regions and associated with the process due to a sense of contribution. None of them were familiar with research process and we undertook training for them through workshops. However, what they lacked in terms of formal research experience was more than adequately compensated through their commitment to the process.
- Workshops were conducted at different intervals during the study. This helped the study to expand the scales of observation and analysis. The following was the sequence of workshops –
 - o Training of Researchers
 - o Sharing of first phase of findings and evolution of new tools for the next phase
 - o Regional Analysis
 - o State workshop

All these workshops involved members of MRA and the discussions were a source of several insights into 'why's and 'how's of several things.

- The tools used for research have been characterized by flexibility. Several of these were evolved during the earlier workshops. These have included Direct observation, semi- structured interviews, open- ended questions with groups directly involved in the programs in the chosen area, flow chart, and historical time line. Discussions, both interpersonal and focused group, were conducted with the elected representatives, men and women, local officials and MRA members.
- Case study approach was used to document the life histories of women with multiple deprived identities and also to focus on the mode of functioning and strategies used by MRA. Similar process mapping of issues/events in villages was done to obtain insights into dynamics of governance at village level.

- Phasing was an integral part of the research strategy. It helped the intensely local nature of the study to scale up to a broader societal context.
- Secondary data used in the study included village statistics, budgets and proceedings of Panchayats, other regional and state studies relevant to the subject.

1.4 RESEARCH AREA

The choice of research sites was based on our understanding of distinct regional and socio-political trajectories of development. Thus we chose to work in Konkan, Western Maharashtra, Marathwada and Vidarbha. In all these regions, two villages were chosen as sites of study. The choice was guided by a multiplicity of factors which included their participation in the MRA (one village in each region was one where MRA was active and other where it wasn't) and the possibility of some local contacts as the study involved prolonged stays in villages and some consideration of distinct socio economic features. Additionally, two villages in Amravati were chosen as reflective of tribal issues.

1.5 ANALYSIS

The PRA approach meant that analysis was undertaken as a reading of the emerging texts and subtexts during the various phases of the study and was shared with the participants. Each workshop added a validating dimension to the emergent themes. Some of these themes were then actively pursued for more in depth exploration.

2

Maharashtra and its Regional Power Dynamics

Divisions	: 6
Districts	: 35
Talukas	: 353
Villages	: 41,095
Area	: 3,07,713 sq km
Population	: 96,879,000

2.1 HISTORY

Maharashtra's recorded history dates back to the 3rd century BCE. Much later, it was a part of Emperor Ashoka's Magadha Empire. The port town of Sopara, near present day Mumbai, was a centre of ancient India's trade with Eastern Africa, Mesopotamia, Aden and Cochin.

From the 8th century CE, Maharashtra was ruled by various Hindu kingdoms like the Satavahanas, Vakatakas, Kalachuris, Rashtrakutas, Chalukyas and Yadavas. After 1307 Maharashtra came under Islamic influence when the Delhi Sultanate rulers Ala-ud-din Khalji, and later Muhammad bin Tughluq conquered parts of the Deccan in the 13th century. After the collapse of the Tughlaqs in 1347, the Bahmani Sultanate of Gulbarga took over, governing the region for the next 150 years. After the breakup of the Bahmani Sultanate, in 1518, Maharashtra was ruled by five Shahs: the Nizamshah of Ahmednagar, Adilshah of Bijapur, Qutubshah of Govalkonda, Bidarshah of Bidar and Imadshah of Berar. Shivaji, born in 1627, founded a large Maratha empire that grew and spread across Central India till the 18th century.

A significant aspect of the Marathi identity derives from Shivaji who united the youth to carve out a niche amidst the dominance of the Muslim rulers of Ahmednagar and Bijapur, and the Mughals. The spread of these territories was significantly expanded during the reign of the Peshwas who operated from Pune. The Maratha reign was characterized by an effort to bring in a secular land revenue and village administration system, but this soon gave way to a Brahmin-dominated system of administration under the Peshwas, the Brahmin prime ministers to Shivaji's descendants who consolidated their power gradually. Their system of administration was similar to the systems adopted by the Muslim rulers such as jahgirdari (award of a group of villages including its administration and revenue), inamdari (award of revenue for a group of villages), and Khoti (award of village lands in lieu of revenue-collection responsibilities). There were also other functionaries of significant importance such as the Deshmukhs, Kulkarnis and others. These people had managed to consolidate their bases of power over generations and were the un-crowned kings of territories that they controlled, with few differences in the scales and realms of power.

The British gained control early in the 19th century and colonial rule changed some of these power dynamics significantly. There were profound changes in the economy and polity which was till then primarily agriculture and village based. The British brought in a system of uniform land and forest administration throughout the territories they controlled. They also brought in new codes of civil behaviour such as legislation and judiciary, as opposed to codes that were largely influenced by religion and religious practice. There was thus a differentiation of various functions and new modes and avenues of arbitration emerged.

When India became independent in 1947, the province long known as the Bombay Presidency became the Bombay State. The following year, a number of former princely states like Baroda (later Vadodara) were merged into the new state. On November 1, 1956, a major linguistic and political reorganization of the states resulted in the addition of large parts of Madhya Pradesh and the erstwhile Hyderabad to Bombay. The outcome of this reorganization was a state in which most of the Gujarati-speaking peoples lived in the north and most of the Marathi-speaking peoples lived in the south. Since both the language groups demanded separate states, it was divided into two parts on May 1, 1960, thus creating Gujarat in the north and Maharashtra in the south.

The State of Maharashtra was constituted on May 1, 1958 on the basis of language. It contained a large part of the erstwhile Bombay Presidency, which in turn formed the

bulk of the Peshwa territory. It also contained parts that had been earlier included in the Central Provinces and the Nizam's Kingdom of Hyderabad and some small principalities.

2.2 THE SOCIAL REFORM MOVEMENT IN MAHARASHTRA

In the 19th century western education had an impact on the elite of Mumbai and Pune. This gave a great impetus to the social reform movement. Reformists tried to examine their social system and religious beliefs with a critical eye and gave priority to social changes over political freedom. In their reform efforts, they had to contend with stiff opposition from the conservatives.

Foremost among the reformers were Balshastri Jambhekar (1812-1846), who condemned Sati and female infanticide; Gopal Hari Deshmukh (1823-1892) who, through his *Shatpatre* attacked orthodox Brahmins who opposed social and religious reforms; and Jyotirao Govindrao Phule (1827-1890) who revolted against an unjust caste system and upheld the cause of untouchables and that of education for women of lower castes.

Ramakrishna Gopal Bhandarkar (1837-1925) and Justice Ranade (1842-1901) were the pioneers of Prarthana Samaj, an organization for general, social and religious reform. Gopal Ganesh Agarkar (1856-1895) prioritized social reform, while Dhondo Keshav Karve (1858-1962) devoted his life to the cause of women's education. Behramji Malbari (1853-1912), a Parsi from Bombay, started Seva Sadan for the care of women of all castes.

Vithal Ramaji Shinde (1873-1944) fought for the eradication of untouchability through his Depressed Classes Mission, while Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur (1874-1922) defied the caste system, championed the cause of the untouchables and promoted education in his state. Karmaveer Bhaurao Paigonda Patil (1887-1959) was the architect of the Rayat Shikshan Sanstha. Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956), the chief architect of the Indian Constitution, created social and political awareness among the Scheduled Castes of India.

The social reform measures brought about a renaissance and social-awakening in Maharashtra. Women reformers too emerged in this period—Savitribai Phule (1831-1897), Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922), Kashibai Kanitkar (1861-1948), Ramabai Ranade (1862-1924), Rakhmabai (1864-1955), Dr Anandibai Joshee (1865-1887), Anandibai (Baya) Karve (1866-1950), Yashodabai Joshi (1868-1948), Lakshmibai Tilak (1868-1936), Tarabai Shinde and Parvatibai Athavale (1870-1955)—to mention a few. They shed centuries of traditions

and patriarchal hegemony to cross what Meera Kosambi calls ‘multiple thresholds’ in order to be educated, and later, to work in the public sphere. Writers, a doctor, teachers and reformers—these women covered a wide spectrum of roles with the vocations they chose for themselves. Their entry into the public space and the public gaze broke many social taboos and challenged the patriarchal structure of contemporary upper caste Hindu society. They attracted censure, ridicule, public scorn, and also—as in the case of Savitribai Phule—verbal and physical abuse.

2.3 A NEW MODEL OF URBANIZATION

Colonial rule also profoundly impacted the economy of the state by generating a new model of urbanization located in Bombay. The entire system of crop production and development of transport nodes was designed to develop Bombay as the processing place for cotton that would come from Vidarbha, Gujarat and the South. On the one hand, it increased the distress of farmers, and on the other, it created new opportunities of gainful employment for people from across different caste groups as opposed to their traditional ‘work’. It needs to be noted however, that these impacts were extremely uneven and much greater in areas around cities like Bombay and Pune, and differed across provinces and kingdoms.

This legacy of unevenness has persisted and deepened in the post-independence years. The difference among the various regions and districts in Maharashtra is stark. The Per Capita Net State Domestic Product (PCNSDP) of Maharashtra in 2004-05 was Rs 28,414/-. Kolhapur, Nagpur, Pune, Raigad and Thane had a Per Capita Net District Development Product (PCNSDP) greater than the state average; Nasik, Ratnagiri, Sindhudurg and Sangli had a PCNDDP higher than the state average calculated after excluding Mumbai, while 8 of the 13 districts in the Amravati and Marathwada divisions had a PCNDDP lower than this figure. Aurangabad, Beed and Osmanabad in fact showed a negative annual growth from 2000-04. The Net District Domestic Product (NDDP) was only 45% of the state average. The tale of economic indicators is also reflected in the Human Development Indices.

A second dimension of this unevenness is that of urbanization. Maharashtra is rapidly transforming into an urbanized state. As per the 2001 census, the urban population in Maharashtra was 42.40%, and the service sector acquired precedence over the agricultural sector in the economy. In addition, there are several villages (estimated to be around 100) which have a population of more than 10,000 but are still classified as villages. The ‘urban’ and its demands of land, resources and infrastructure occupy a prominent space in state planning. It also has implications for representation in legislature. Conversely, the space occupied by the ‘rural’ in public imagination and representation is dwindling.

The ‘urban’ has not come to be as a matter of accident, but as a result of three or four decades of locating critical developmental resources in urban centers and enhancing rural-urban differentials in access to work, education, health and infrastructure. The ‘rural’ has thus come to be associated with poor living conditions, while the ‘urban’ is the privileged big brother offering opportunities.

The implications on the rural economy are several. The urban extracts natural resources such as land, water, food and wood from the rural areas. It unleashes pressures on conventional uses of land. Local markets are proving to be inadequate for sustenance of local products, agricultural as well as artisanal. The dependence on urban markets that are distant paves the way for several layers of middlemen to creep in with exploitative terms of trade. It also influences the aspirations of rural people significantly.

There are certain parts of the state where irrigation has been able to create islands of prosperity. For example, Western Maharashtra and parts of Marathwada and Vidarbha have seen significant opportunities for socioeconomic development. However, existence of rain-fed agriculture in large parts of Maharashtra is making it increasingly unfeasible as the sole occupation. Sending at least one member of the family to an

urban centre, and the seasonal migration of several members of a family, are emerging as prominent realities of the rural scene.

2.4 THE REGIONS OF MAHARASHTRA

All of the factors discussed above have shaped the different regions of Maharashtra distinctly. It is only through an adequate understanding of these factors that we can understand the location of women's political participation in the villages.

2.4.1 WESTERN MAHARASHTRA

Size : 1,15,182 sq km

Population : 35,734,562

Districts : Kolhapur, Pune, Satara, Sangli, Solapur, Ahmednagar, Phule, Jalgaon, Nandurbar, Nashik

Western Maharashtra (also called Southern Maharashtra) includes the parts of the Deccan plateau that adjoin the Western Ghats. It is a region that is blessed with good soil and some large rivers. Western Maharashtra became the locus of regional power during the rule of the Peshwas, who had Pune as their capital. This period saw the rise of Brahminical systems and Brahminical ownership of land and agricultural production. Western Maharashtra has given the state many reformers and leaders like Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj, Kranti Sinh Nana Patil, Karmaveer Bhaurao Patil and Kisan Veer. Eminent political leaders like Yeshwantrao Chavan, Vasantdada Patil, Rajaram Bapu Patil, Tatyasaheb Kore and Ratnapa Kumbhar also rose from this region.

2.4.1.1 The Power of Produce

During the British rule, agriculture here witnessed profound changes. The new land tenures increased the fondness for land investment among the relatively well off farming communities such as the Marathas and the Kunbis. The traditional cropping pattern was changed, and emphasis was placed on the cultivation of cash crops, especially cotton. The construction of major irrigation works in the famine-prone districts of Pune, Satara and Ahmednagar opened up opportunities for irrigated agriculture (Brahme and Upadhyaya, 1979; Mohanty, 1999). Sugar cane cultivation became widespread in the boom following World War I, and many sugar factories were established in the canal irrigated area.

The Marathas and Kunbis largely reaped the benefits of these expanded forces of production due to their association with cultivation and landownership. By the first decade of the present century, a rich peasant strata, which characteristically borrowed, bought and sold most advantageously, and which belonged to the numerically large non-Brahmin upper castes (chiefly Marathas) had begun to dominate rural Western Maharashtra. This was aided by reform movements spearheaded by the Satya Shodhak Samaj and Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur.

After 1960, the introduction of community development programmes and the Panchayati Raj system, along with cooperatives, provided opportunity structures and encouraged the Maratha-Kunbi elite to participate in state politics. The cooperatives emerged as a source of state power and served as a training ground for emerging political leadership (Carter, 1975; Baviskar, 1980). The Maratha elite monopolized the cooperative institutions, especially the sugar factories, and used the policy processes of pluralist democracy with great sophistication to their maximum advantage (Rosenthal, 1977; Dandekar, 1973). The symbiotic relationship between cooperatives and politicians enabled the Marathas to consolidate their position in the economic and political fields and contributed significantly to a higher rate of overall development here (Baviskar, 1980; Attwood, 1992).

2.4.1.2 The Power of the Cooperatives

Western Maharashtra has four main cooperative sectors, and in one way or the other, these control the local political dynamics.

- **Cooperative Sugar Mills**

Cooperative sugar mills are primary power centers, and power is wielded here to influence political elections in the state. Between 1999 and 2000, 57 cooperative sugar mills functioned in the districts of Satara, Sangli, Kolhapur and Solapur. In 1999-2000, the sugar produced by these mills fetched a price of Rs 2,717 crores. Assuming that 30 villages are aligned to the processing of one sugar mill, about 1700 villages are directly connected to the production by these cooperative sugar mills. Every five years, the sugar cane grower in every village is associated with sugar mill elections. Electing the president/chairman to these factories is directly affected by issues like price of sugar, funding required to grow sugarcane and irrigation projects. Every village here, thanks to the cooperative sugar mills, has different power groups and opponents.

- **District Central Banks**

The second strength of the region's cooperative power is the District Central Bank. All the money required for production in the rural set-up is distributed by these banks. All the financial transactions in the rural areas are done through them. The total deposits in the district banks of Satara, Kolhapur, Sangli and Solapur during 1999-2000 amounted to Rs 3,020 crores. The elections to the district central banks are held every five years. The political race in these elections makes an impact on the political elections in the region.

- **The Cooperative Milk Sector**

Every village here has cooperatives that collect milk. These organizations are attached to the district milk organization. The Government of Maharashtra offers more than Rs 300 crores along with other concessions to the milk industry. Under the 'Dudhacha Mahapur' (Abundant Milk) project, the state government has developed the milk sector as a supplementary business to agriculture. This sector is prospering in Southern Maharashtra thanks to various loan schemes, monetary concessions and lending. There are in all 7000 cooperative milk organizations in the districts of Satara, Sangli, Kolhapur and Solapur. The cost of the milk collected in this business in 1999-2000 was Rs 396 crores.

- **Cooperative Cotton Mills**

The cotton mills in this region have been set up based on loans guaranteed and capital provided by the government. The power group in the cotton mills plays a vital role in the regional political elections. This region also has 1507 pump irrigation projects. In the last five years, various irrigation projects are underway under the auspices of the Krishna Valley Development Project. The District Banks that provide monetary aid to the irrigation projects, cooperative sugar mills and water distribution. These pump irrigation projects influence regional politics.

2.4.1.3 Agriculture and Poverty in the Midst of Plenty

Presently, the districts of Ahmednagar, Kolhapur, Pune, Solapur, Nasik, Satara and Sangli in Western Maharashtra collectively account for about three-fourths of Maharashtra's sugar cane. The region has the highest irrigation intensity (23%) and the highest cropping intensity in the state (39.14%). Western Maharashtra has a road network covering 19,698 km which is the highest amongst all the four regions. Western Maharashtra also leads in the number of villages with access to water resources and those with electricity. Nearly 68% of the region is under electrification and the Human Development Index (HDI) of the region is much higher than that of the rest of Maharashtra. Western Maharashtra, with its fairly good

infrastructure, is currently becoming the locus of urbanization in the state. A large number of SEZs and Foreign Direct Investment are directed to this region.

Western Maharashtra is regarded by many as a developed region, however it has several 'islands of neglect'. Sangli has eight drought-prone Talukas, as well as four highly developed ones. Welha Taluka of Pune district is among the most backward Talukas in India. Chandgad, one of the Tehsils in which some of the villages in this study are located, is considered a punishment posting for government officials. Besides the pockets of neglect, the region has also generated classes of deprivation. These include large numbers of landless labourers, project affected populations and dry land farmers. Movements for the project affected and experiments like '12 gunthe jameen' were initiated and they spread to a few parts. The 'dominant development' discourse as well as alternate development language is thus well entrenched in this region.

As per the 1991 population census, the percentage of farmers in the region's four districts is: 50% in Satara, 46% in Kolhapur, 44% in Sangli and 34% in Solapur. The percentage of families living below the poverty line is 16% in Satara, 14% in Sangli, 27% in Solapur and 17% in Kolhapur. In spite of agriculture being the main source of livelihood, the percentage of people below the poverty line is low.

2.4.1.4 Party Politics

Politics in Western Maharashtra revolves around cooperative sugar factories and other cooperative institutions. Satara district has 12 cooperative sugar mills, Kolhapur district has 16, Sangli district has 17 and Solapur has 12. It is politics of prosperity and institution building; its texture and aspiration are modern, though it finds continuities with the past power structures.

The Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), a largely regional party which has a broad liberal, nationalist ideology, and is headed by Sharad Pawar, is dominant here at present. The recent emergence of a Janswarajya Party that represents farmers who seek to be free of the stranglehold of cooperatives is an interesting development and has gained some political strength through its three members in the Legislative Assembly.

2.4.2 MARATHWADA

Size	: 63,773
Population	: 15,629,248
Districts	: Aurangabad, Beed, Hungoli, Jalna, Latur, Nanded, Usmanabad, Parbhani

The great tradition of Marathi poet-saints like Dnyaneshwar, Ramdas, Mukundraj and Dasopant and the Bhakti movement began in Marathwada. Their poetry enriched the cultural heritage of the language, and attempted to bring about change in the caste-ridden Hindu society. The region was part of the State of Hyderabad until May 1, 1960, when it was transferred to Bombay, which in turn was divided into Maharashtra and Gujarat in the same year. It forms the heartland of Maharashtra and yet paradoxically, despite its central location and water resources, has remained relatively undeveloped.

Most of Marathwada was part of the principality of the Nizam till independence. Marathwada did not witness agricultural development in contrast to Western Maharashtra during the colonial period. It was a neglected part of the Hyderabad state ruled by the Nizam of the Asafiya dynasty. The Maratha-Kunbis who held large holdings of fertile lands improved their position through cotton and sugar cane cultivation, and yet the region remained backward because of the neglect of infrastructure like irrigation.

Marathwada is a huge region. It is located in the rain shadow region of the Western Ghats with semi-arid agriculture. The annual average rainfall is 750mm and drought is a permanent feature. Geographically, the region is divided in two categories—Aurangabad, Jalna, Parbhani, Hingoli and Nanded with the Jaikwadi

dam canal and pump irrigation projects and on the other hand, the arid and famine-prone regions of Beed, Osmanabad and Latur districts.

2.4.2.1 A History of Neglect

The neglect continued even after independence. With the Samyukta Maharashtra movement, the Maratha elite of the region gained politically through their alliances with these groups in Western Maharashtra, but the social institutions were not modernized enough to take advantage of the changes in developmental politics. Thus though there has been some spread of irrigation and cooperative institutions in the region, it continues to be mostly backward. According to the V M Dandekar Committee, Marathwada had the highest development backlog.

Reasons for this can be found in the pre-independence era, during the period of neglect under the Nizam. Though the region was characterized by ryotwari land tenures which were conducive to the growth of enterprise and generated incentives for work, the social structure perpetuated by the oppressive rule was inimical to agricultural development. Moreover, the ryotwari settlement did not enter the districts of Marathwada. Though the Maratha-Kunbis improved their position through cotton and sugar cane cultivation on their large holdings of fertile land, the region on the whole remained backward.

However, under the Nizam's rule, Marathwada was at the forefront of the agitation for the cause of democratization. This resulted in mass mobilization along secular lines. The feudal rule of the Nizam ended in 1948 and the area came under the rule of the Indian government. Marathwada continued as part of the erstwhile Nizam's State of Hyderabad till 1956, when the Nizam's rule actually ended, and it was merged with Maharashtra. It has a developmental backlog of almost a century when compared to Western Maharashtra.

The social composition of Marathwada is striking. The Marathas form a majority in Aurangabad, Jalna, Nanded and Hingoli districts. As per the 1931 census, more than half of the people in some districts are Marathas. Muslims also have a strong presence. The Lingayat caste is prominent in some parts of Latur. The economy of Marathwada is based on agriculture. According to the 1991 census, people working as farmers and farm labourers comprise 70% of the population in Aurangabad district, 82% in Jalna district, 80% in Parbhani district, 82% in Osmanabad district, and 79% in Latur. Unemployment is a serious problem here. Though the average landholding in Marathwada is more than that in Western Maharashtra, that is, around 6 to 7 acres, the land is not as productive. About 26% people are landless. Moreover, the irrigation intensity is 15% while the cropping intensity is only 28%. Therefore, the rate of distress migration is high.

The infrastructure in Marathwada has several gaps. The region has only 8,117 km of roads, which is the lowest in the whole state. Marathwada has the least number of industries. More recently, Nanded has emerged as a center for education and, with considerable investment in infrastructure, has begun to attract industrial investment. Marathwada also lags in terms of human development. School enrolment, literacy and life expectancy are among the lowest in the state.

2.4.2.2 Agriculture and Industry—A Failure of Sorts

Economic development in the region came through the establishment of modern industries. Sugar cooperatives, which were previously unknown, began a little before 1957. However, the region still remains educationally backward. The percentage of literacy in all the districts is below the state's percentage of 47% (1991 census).

Unemployment is a serious problem here, with no efforts being made to increase productivity. In 1991, while all the districts of Konkan and most districts of Western Maharashtra and Vidarbha had achieved above 60%

literacy, not a single district belonging to the Marathwada region had achieved this. Marathwada's districts are the most backward in Maharashtra and score low on the HDI.

The economy of Marathwada is based on agriculture. Though the average landholding in Marathwada is more than in Western Maharashtra, the land is not as productive. Therefore, the rate of migration is high in Marathwada. According to the 1991 census, people working as farmers and farm labourers comprise 70% of the population in Aurangabad district. Around 7% of the population works in the industrial sector in the Aurangabad district, whereas in other districts this is as low as 2.5% to 3%.

Marathwada and Vidarbha are drought-prone, with agriculture subject to periodic droughts. This has an adverse impact on the incomes of the majority. Because of the lack of industrial development and transportation facilities, the region has poor infrastructure. Most of the people migrate to Mumbai or Pune for labour and construction work.

2.4.2.3 Politics, Power and Emerging Trends in Leadership

On account of the Dalit movement, a new leadership with a political will rose here. However, there are many groups and many ideological differences. The division of castes is seen at three levels: Marathas (the dominant caste), Other Backward Castes (OBCs) (at the middle level) and the Dalits. Political dimensions have changed with the funding pattern implemented by NGOs after the Latur earthquake.

Women's participation in decision-making has increased but it varies. Participation in the implementation mechanism has not increased much. Though people have now accepted women in politics, there are subtle differences in power relations between men and women when it comes to the ownership of the means of production. A patriarchal approach to politics looks at women's interference in sociocultural and political activities as a threat to male power centers. Increasingly however, women are exploring new avenues and trying to bring about a change by challenging those power centers.

The added dimension to their space has given them a lot of confidence, which is evident in the changes in their behaviour, dress and speech. Caste differences are decreasing with the rise of leadership in women, since women attempt to relate to each other across caste, religious and economic divides. The agenda of village development is also changing with women's leadership because they have priorities like water, health and schools.

2.4.2.4 Party Politics

Marathwada is as prominent as Western Maharashtra in the politics of the state; four of the state's Chief Ministers have come from here. The basis of politics is, however, different. Caste politics has a different edge in Marathwada with the relative scarcity of resources and its iniquitous distribution.

The region has been a Congress stronghold. It has consistently won in the local self government elections, Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha elections. The Shiv Sena started growing in Marathwada after 1988 by rallying the Other Backward Classes around anti-Muslim, and in some places, anti-Dalit, sentiments. There are also strong Dalit mobilizations though these have not translated into political formations. The struggle for naming the University of Marathwada after Dr Ambedkar in the 1980s is an epic one, indicative of the Dalit assertion. Expectedly, the region has also witnessed some of the most cruel caste-based atrocities.

2.4.3 KONKAN

Size	: 23,108 sq km
Population	: 12,905,380
Districts	: Thane, Raigad (Kolaba), Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg

The Konkan is a linear coastal strip of land extending from Damanganga in the north up to Goa in the south for a length of about 720 km. It is bounded by the Sahyadri Hills on the east and the Arabian Sea on the west. It is a land with rich mineral resources, dense forest cover, and a landscape fringed with paddy, coconut, cashew, jackfruit and mango trees. Earlier, Konkan was a part of the Bombay province. In 1961, the Konkan region became a part of the newly-formed state of Maharashtra. Kolaba district was renamed Raigad. Sindhudurg district was recently separated from the southern areas of Ratnagiri district.

Historically, the region has never occupied the attention of rulers. Its coastal economy was somewhat vibrant under the rule of the Siddis, and it received some attention during the Maratha rule, but this was never consistent. The Khoti System was introduced in 1504. Khots (intermediaries for revenue collection) were hereditary landholders who had received lands from former territorial chiefs or local land officers. Baden-Powell mentions that the Khots belonged to all castes. Before 1949, there were 952 Khoti villages in Ratnagiri.

The British ruthlessly exploited the rich forests of the Konkan region for the construction of railways, but never invested in irrigation or connectivity to the region. As the British had effectively pauperized the area, it became incapable of throwing up powerful leaders who could reap benefits from it, as in Western Maharashtra (Savur, 1980: 74). The region instead became a pool of reserve labour for the textile mills of Mumbai (Brahme and Upadhyaya 1979: 8). It experienced the disadvantages rather than the advantages of the twin forces of commercialization and expanded communication. Only the Khots (chiefly the Chitpavan Brahmins and Marathas) emerged as rich farmers (Rodrigues, 1998: 23). People mostly depended upon the employment opportunities available in Bombay. On the other hand, tribals began retreating into the hills and forests.

The trends of low development investment have continued post-independence. The socioeconomic survey of the region indicates that 67% of the total holdings in the high-migration villages are below 20 acres. Only 3% of the holdings are within 2 to 5 hectares in high migration villages. Such fragmented land holdings, especially in the undulating terrain of the region, do not augur well for the people who are dependent on agriculture for subsistence. Its irrigation intensity is 2.1% while the cropping intensity is 4.79%. In fact, the gross cropping area has declined continuously. Railway connectivity to the area is recent. Industrial activity is also low. However, in recent years, horticultural activity has increased tremendously in Konkan.

Migration to Mumbai is high (45% of immigrants to Mumbai from Maharashtra are from Konkan) and a money order economy has thus come to be a prime characteristic of South Konkan. The significance of this out-migration is so high that districts like Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg have sex ratios of 1135 and 1077 per thousand males respectively. Migration has a significant influence on the social composition of the region too. The high out-migration of males has meant that a giant's share of agricultural work has been left to women. The sex ratios among cultivators and agricultural workers are 1186 and 1338 per thousand respectively in these two districts.

Konkan has never played a prominent role in the politics of the state, given its low density of population. Its politics too is tied to Mumbai and revolves around the question of gainful employment opportunities.

2.4.3.1 Tribes and Communities in the Konkan

The Konkan demographic has in it Kolis who fish and farm. They have several sub-castes. The Kolis are spread all over the belt and live in villages called Koliwad. Konkan's Maratha community is spread from Mumbai to Raigad, Sindhudurg, North Goa, the southern tip of South Goa and Karwar. Konkani Muslims are found in Mumbai, Thane, Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg. They speak Kokani, a Marathi dialect peculiar to them. They are descendants of Arab traders and some are later converts from Hinduism. They work in the Merchant

Navy, and in shipbuilding and textile industries. They predominantly belong to the Shafi'i School of Islamic jurisprudence, unlike North Indian Muslims who generally adhere to the Hanafi School.

Ancestors of the Siddi community were probably North African pirates who were shipwrecked near Ratnagiri, and are found today around Ratnagiri and Raigad. The Mahars were probably the original dwellers of the Konkan region, as is evidenced in various rituals and customs of other castes which live near them. Other castes are the Gabits or Aarmari Marathas, Chitpavan Brahmins or Konkanastha Brahmins, Daivadnya Brahmins, Rajapur Saraswat Brahmins, Bene Israelis or Jews of the Teli caste and the Hindu and Christian Samvedi Brahmins.

2.4.3.2 North Konkan and its Districts (Thane and Mumbai)

Thane, due to its proximity to Mumbai, lies in the economic shadow of the city but certain parts of the district have been economically underdeveloped as well. Apart from the areas lying near the road and rail routes, the rest of the region is quite backward. The tribal population is high, with tribes like Warlis and Thakurs inhabiting the district.

Raigad district is a part of middle Konkan. Being near Mumbai, it has a higher level of industrial development. The state government has encouraged industrialization in the area through incentives and subsidies leading to the development of Special Economic Zones (SEZs). North Konkan has had more agricultural development than South Konkan.

2.4.3.3 South Konkan and its Districts (Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg)

The main occupation of the people of South Konkan is agriculture. South Konkan, comprising of Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg districts, is distinguished from the rest of the Konkan by the presence of a laterite plateau. Its thick and extensive layer of laterite soil discourages vegetation and makes agriculture difficult. The farmer in Ratnagiri finds it extremely difficult to make both ends meet as agriculture is below the subsistence level.

About 81% of the region's population is engaged in agriculture but only 18.33% of the total land is useful for cultivation (as per the 1991 census). Industrial development in the region is in sharp contrast to that in North Konkan. The existing industrial development is very meager in that about 588 units are able to provide industrial jobs for about 8514 people (Socio-economic Survey by the Ministry of Labour, Shimla).

The historical sketch of Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg districts reveals that the region's backwardness is the product of uneven development. Ratnagiri had plenty of economic and natural resources, which drew colonial powers like the Dutch, the French, the Portuguese and the British. In part, the tussle between these powers led to a sort of degeneration of the region. To paraphrase Savur, the British brought Ratnagiri district into contact with Mumbai by an elaborate system of water transport. Labour from here flowed into Mumbai (1980: 74). So did other resources, like Ratnagiri's forests, in particular its timber. Savur writes, '...The Railways is an infrastructural facility which has the potentiality for development and this potentiality was deliberately denied to Ratnagiri. Railway sleepers were made of durable timber and Ratnagiri trees were felled ruthlessly for laying the railway tracts, which brought in its wake ecological imbalance and contributed to the breakdown of the economy' (1980: 74).

Probably a lot of the region's present backwardness can be attributed to the legacy of the British colonial policy which left the area incapable of throwing up leaders, unlike in Western Maharashtra, where the sugar industry has created powerful leaders who negotiate well for it. 'In the ultimate analysis,' Savur writes, 'Ratnagiri continues to be an area of reserve labour; because its natural resources are underutilized, the land is also underutilized thereby leading to a demographic imbalance, which in turn, results in lack of protest movements' (1980: 74).

2.4.3.4 Revenue Farming or the Khoti System

In 1504, the Khoti system of revenue farming was introduced in the Konkan. It is a pattern of landholding peculiar to the Konkan. Under it, the government collected revenue from the Khots, or hereditary landholders who had received land from former territorial chiefs or local land officers. This system was prevalent in Ratnagiri district and in some parts of Kolaba (now Raigad) and Thane districts. Khots belonged to all castes, and there were Maratha and Muslim Khots too. However, during the rule of the Peshwas, many Brahmin families were made Khots, thereby reducing the number of the older Khot families. Before 1949, there were 952 Khoti villages in Ratnagiri. After independence, the Khoti tenure system was abolished by the Bombay Khoti Abolition Act of 1949.

New laws like Koolkayda (Agriculture Tenancy Act) and the new amendments for the Grama Sabha, imposed restrictions on Khot power. But this did not work universally. For instance, some labourers did not want to use the land given under Koolkayda, out of fear of the landlords. Therefore, in some villages here, half the land still belongs to the Khot or the Patil. This gives them sociopolitical power at the local level and the Grama Panchayat level. With people in the Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad (ZP) also working for them, the decision-making process is completely under their control.

Konkan is relatively poor in terms of industrial development. Forests cover 42% of the region, as compared to the rest of the state's 20.80%. The region has only 31.62% gross cropped area, compared to about 62.50% for the state. Uncultivated, fallow and pasture lands together amount to about 27% of the geographical area. Irrigated land in the state is about 7.10% and in this region, only 0.34%. Sectors like horticulture and tourism have been promoted aggressively by successive state governments. The region is known for its mango exports.

Mumbai provides employment opportunities to a large section of Konkan's adult population, especially among the well-educated, upper castes. Ratnagiri district contributes to 45% of Mumbai's immigrant population from Maharashtra, closely followed by Thane district. Perhaps understandably, people with large landholdings of cashew or mango orchards earn well and prefer to stay in the village.

2.4.3.5 Livelihood Patterns

Lands in Konkan are of different physical types, under different types of ownership, and are put to different uses. The land ownership is predominantly private, though there are some community owned lands. Government departments such as the Forest Department and the Revenue Department own the rest of the land.

Though not as intensive and high-yielding as in the other parts of the country, agriculture and horticulture in Konkan are the prime livelihood activities undertaken by local people. The agricultural produce of the Konkan region includes staple grain crops, pulses and oilseeds, along with seasonal vegetables. Konkan grows fruits like mango, cashew nut, jackfruit, coconut, kokam, black berries and papaya. It has commercial and large scale production of mangoes and cashew nuts.

A large number of local families rely heavily on forests (irrespective of their ownership) for basic needs like firewood, fodder, fruits, vegetables, timber, shelter material, and non-timber forest produce such as honey, gum and resins. Forest produce supports many families that are without any private assets, especially the forest-dwelling, landless and 'women-headed' families.

2.4.3.6 Tribal Land Rights—The Struggle for Dalhi Land

Before the advent of the British rule, tribal farmers practised slash-and-burn cultivation on common lands. The land settlement operations carried out by the British administration had an adverse effect on the hill

tribes. Later, as people began to protest, certain concessions were granted. One of the important concessions was to lease out patches of forest land to tribal communities or individuals annually. Leases given to individuals were called ‘eksali’ whereas those given to communities (as in Raigad) were called ‘dalhi’ assignments. In 1970, the Government of Maharashtra decided to confer individual property rights on dalhi plot holders but the decision could not be implemented due to bureaucratic inertia and the lack of political will. A mass movement was organized for the implementation of the concerned government resolution by the action groups in Raigad district and was sustained against all odds.

During the Peshwa rule, tax was levied on the system of dalhi cultivation prevalent in the hilly lands. Dalhi was a mode of preparing the ‘warkas’ land (which was not suitable for sedentary cultivation) by burning in-site vegetation and ploughing or hand digging and sowing in the burnt area. This method was used to cultivate millets on sloping lands. Dalhi was used in conjunction with ‘aalhi’, a method of cultivating rice on plain or terraced lands. Both involved slash-and-burn methods, but in different ecological contexts. Though the two techniques were often used jointly, they could be seen as metaphors for two distinct lifestyles. Aalhi can be viewed as a symbol of village-based, private landholding agriculture, whereas dalhi, hill-and-forest-based, was for common landholding tribal peasants.

Though dalhi lands were mostly cultivated by forest-based tribes like the Thakars, Katkaris and Mahadev Kolis, poor Maratha and Mahar farmers were also involved in it. This cultivation was formally stopped around 1878 under the Indian Forests Act, but restrictions were already imposed before that. The prohibition on dalhi cultivation gave rise to a lot of unrest among people, especially among the hill tribes. Various petitions were made to the government.

A number of land reforms and development programmes were started after Independence. The real impetus to land reforms was given in the 1960s when the state of Maharashtra was born. The major land reform legislation pertained to tenancy, acquisition of surplus lands (Ceiling on Holdings Act, 1961), redistribution of lands held by the government and regularization of encroachments on public lands. In the late 1940s and 1950s, tribal cultivators from all over the state had begun to claim their rights on waste lands and forests with a view to obtaining a source of livelihood. These claims were regularized by the government in the early and mid-1960s. In the same vein, a demand was made to bestow permanent land rights on tribal plot holders under the eksali and dalhi systems.

The Forest Conservation Act was passed on December 27, 1980. The Act prevented the transfer of forest land to non-forest purposes without the permission of the central government. In 1988, the amendments to the Forest Conservation Act worsened the situation. Following these amendments, forest land could not be transferred to anybody other than a government agency.

2.4.3.7. Party Politics

The socialist parties had a fairly strong base in Konkan but this has shifted to the right in favour of the Shiv Sena and the BJP. The Congress per se does not have much base in Konkan, except through local leaders like Narayan Rane.

2.4.4. VIDARBHA

Size	: 97,411 sq km
Population	: 20,630,987
Divisions	: Nagpur and Amravati
Districts	: Akola, Amravati, Buldhana, Washim, Yavatmal, Bhandara, Chandrapur, Gadchiroli, Gondia, Nagpur, Wardha

Vidarbha was part of the erstwhile Berar or Central Province of British India. This rich agricultural province became important to the British Empire during the second half of the 19th century. Prior to this, Berar had been a subha (province) of the Mughal Empire from 1526 to 1857. Vidarbha is culturally and historically rich, with a distinct identity from the rest of Maharashtra. Its economy is primarily agricultural and the region is rich in forest and mineral wealth. It has all of Maharashtra's tiger reserves. The region is famous for its oranges, cotton and soy bean production. Traditional crops here are jawar, pearl millet (bajra) and rice. In recent years, there have been many cases of suicides by farmers in Vidarbha.

Even though Marathi culture is the most dominant here, Vidarbha has been a melting pot of Telugu-speakers from the south, Hindi-speakers from Central India and the tribal people of Chhattisgarh. Its Varhadi dialect of Marathi is spoken in the rest of Maharashtra. Gadchiroli district has a large population of tribal people. Vidarbha's largest cities are Nagpur and Amravati. The Nagpur region itself has six districts, Bhandara, Gadchiroli, Chandrapur, Vardha, Gondiya and Nagpur. Nagpur enjoys the status of the winter capital of Maharashtra.

2.4.4.1 A History of Cotton

Berar possessed the most suitable climate and soil for cotton cultivation, making it an attractive proposition for the British who were looking for alternative production places for raw material for their textile mills. So it was developed as a cotton-growing belt to feed Mumbai's textile mills. The very first act of the British government in this regard was to do away with the revenue farming system altogether. Popularly called the 'navel of India', it was also strategically located at the junction of trade routes from all parts of the country.

The dominant caste and class structure of Vidarbha region is quite distinct from that of the other regions in Maharashtra. The Kunbis and Telis are the major land-holding castes of the region. In some specific areas, Pawars, Malis and Kirads are the dominant agricultural castes. Koshtis (weaver), Telis (oilmen) and Komtis (traders) form a significantly large population in Vidarbha.

Vidarbha witnessed prosperity during the colonial period due to expanded cotton cultivation, particularly following the American Civil War and the Lancashire cotton famine (Guha, 1972). However, by and large, the region remained agriculturally backward owing to the absence of any irrigation and due to erratic monsoons. With the increasing cultivation of cotton, famine was also a regular feature in this region (Mohanty, 2001).

Throughout its history, Vidarbha has been calm during communal troubles but has faced poverty and malnutrition. It is less economically prosperous than the rest of Maharashtra. In recent years, there have been sporadic calls for Vidarbha to secede from Maharashtra based on a feeling of neglect by the state government and the assertion of a distinct cultural identity. Vidarbha's people have felt that the region has fallen behind others in attracting investment and development funds. It has comparatively few roads, irrigation facilities and educational institutions.

The Maha-Vidarbha movement demanding a separate statehood for Vidarbha culminated in the Nagpur Agreement, which accorded Nagpur the status of the Second Capital of Maharashtra. But despite being accorded that status in 1960, nothing significant has been done for the development of the city.

Traditionally, it has been observed that the Maratha-Kunbi peasants were never united enough to push the cause of the region and to try to dominate the state's politics. There is a complete absence of a unified political class here, unlike in Western Maharashtra, where the Maratha-Kunbi unified political class dominated state politics through caste and kinship networks during the colonial as well as post-colonial periods.

Vidarbha's cotton growers were the worst hit by economic liberalization. Between 1999 and 2002, domestic subsidies given to farmers in the United States caused a significant price suppression of cotton in the international market. Private moneylenders and credit-lending societies had a complete monopoly of the regional economy. The procurement of cotton was gradually taken over by private players as the state receded into the background. This led to a spate of suicides in the region as the farmers sank heavily into debt.

Since Vidarbha did not have a large area under sugar cane cultivation, the region could not benefit from the state's intervention in sugarcane cultivation. Also in Western Maharashtra, the agricultural activities have been scaled up to match the global market and activities like floriculture, horticulture and vermiculture have been promoted vigorously. Vidarbha on the other hand has remained a backward region.

2.4.4.2 The Caste Dynamic in a Historical Perspective

The dominant caste and class structure of Vidarbha region is quite distinct from that of other regions in Maharashtra. Koshtis, Telis and Komtis form a significantly large population in Vidarbha. The Kunbis and Telis are the major land holding castes of the region, with the Pawars, Malis and Kirads being dominant in some areas. It is also interesting to note that Mahars (Dalits) in the Nagpur region own more land, as compared to Mahars in other parts of the state. In some villages, Mahar families own more land than the upper castes.

Vidarbha prospered during the colonial period due to expanded cotton cultivation, particularly following the American Civil War and the Lancashire cotton famine (Guha 1972). However, by and large, the region remained agriculturally backward owing to its erratic monsoons and the absence of irrigation. With the increasing cultivation of cotton, famine was also a regular feature here (Mohanty 2001). The cultivators (belonging particularly to Maratha-Kunbi, Rajput and Teli communities) who had surplus grains prospered even under such adverse conditions. The economy and trading on the other hand were completely dominated by the Marwaris and Komtis who were the archetypal moneylender-cum-traders (Phansalkar, 2005: 612).

Though a tiny business and urban oriented industrial class emerged in Nagpur following the establishment of textile and other industries, it did not show interest in agricultural development, as it was drawn from non-Marathi communities, who had almost no linkages with rural Vidarbha (Sirsikar, 1995; Lele, 1981).

Nagpur has historically been the capital of Bhoslas, the Maratha kingdom of Berar and Vidarbha. Since neither the prince nor the prime minister of this region has ever been a Brahmin, Brahminism was moderate here. But the Bhoslas favoured the Brahmins and sowed the seeds of Brahmin dominance in the region quite early in a systematic fashion. In spite of this, the Kunbis and Marathas owned more land than the Brahmins in the area. For example, of Yavatmal's 1,397 landlords, 301 were Brahmin and while 830 were Maratha-Kunbi as per the 1930 census.

In the early 1900s, the anti-Brahminical Satya Shodhak movement was active in Western Maharashtra and the non-Brahmin leaders of Vidarbha were attracted towards it. They too protested against Brahmin supremacy, especially their priestly status. All India Maratha Education Conferences were held at Amravati and Khamgao in 1909 and 1920 respectively. Both were presided over by the Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur and the focus was on the education of untouchables and lower castes. Also, a significant non-Brahmin leadership started to emerge in the region as a result of the social awakening. In the 1920s G A Gawai, a leading Mahar from Amravati, worked towards awakening the Untouchables. He was nominated to the legislature in 1920.

Thus the non-Brahmin leaders were successful in capturing most of the seats in the legislatures. During the Gandhi era, non-Brahmin leaders joined the Congress and gradually took up positions of power. Despite this they sought to push personal interests and could not really address the region's real issues of poverty and backwardness.

The Dalits of Vidarbha have been socially active and have fought against discrimination since the pre-Ambedkar era. Kisan Fagoji Bansode, an eminent early spokesperson of this movement, was from Nagpur. He went on to establish a press which enabled him to print various newspapers, brochures and books related to the reform of Untouchables. He also started a library in Mohapa, his native village. Kalicharan Nandagavli, also from Vidarbha, established a school for girls in 1909, fought against caste-based injustice and published booklets to mobilize people. He was also the convener of the Bhartiya Bahiskrit Parishad which was held in Nagpur in 1920 with the Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur acting as the Chairperson. He highlighted the problems of the Untouchables to the Simon Commission and the Southborough committee as well.

A significant conference, the Mahar Sabha was also held in the Vidarbha region in 1912 under the guidance of Vithoba Raoji. It is interesting to note that the leaders of the Sabha sought support and cooperation from British officers, Christian Missionaries and Hindu sympathizers for their educational and social uplift. The Mahar Sabha is considered an important event as it unified all the sub-castes among the Mahars of Vidarbha, and set the tone for the subsequent development of the Dalit movement in the rest of the state.

Another peasant movement that originated in Western Maharashtra but flourished in Vidarbha was the Shetkari Sanghatana. Laxmi Mukti, as defined by the Sanghatana, involves the legal transfer of some portion of land or the family wealth to the wife's name by the husband. However, the decision to carve out the portion of land to be transferred in the name of Laxmi is left to the husband and not to the Sanghatana.

The unit of the Laxmi Mukti Campaign is the village. The Sanghatana has made it compulsory that each village must have at least 100 cases of Laxmi Mukti or about 80% of the total landholders in case a particular village does not have 100 landholders. Once the required cases are successfully completed, the village is felicitated and called a 'Jotiba Village'. This particular programme has had major success in Vidarbha.

There are two possible explanations for this. One could be that the size of landholding is comparatively larger in Vidarbha and the price of land here is lower. Two, housewives in the Vidarbha region have been more proactively involved with family affairs.

2.4.4.3 Party Politics

The Congress was predominant in Vidarbha politics for a long time. Forming a broad front of interests in Vidarbha, it did not allow any party to be influential in Vidarbha's politics. However, after 1985, the BJP and the Shiv Sena entered the political fray here by bringing forward regional issues. Though the RSS had branches in Vidarbha, votes for the Jan Sangh were less than 8%. At the ZP and Tehsil level, however, there are multiple factions even within the Congress. Vidarbha has a strong Dalit presence, both in terms of numbers as well as assertion. It also has a long tradition of women who have been active in politics.

2.4.5 TRIBAL BELTS

There are 85,77,000 tribals in Maharashtra, with a share of 8.9% in the population of the state. They are concentrated in a few belts: Thane-Nasik-Dhule-Raigad, Melghat and finally around Chandrapur-Gadchiroli-Gondiya. All these belts historically had dense forests. The reason for including tribal villages as a special category in the spatial framework of the study is to focus on the specific features of these belts that have never been part of the 'settled village' culture and to understand the location of women's political participation in this distinct context.

Historically, tribals had a closer association with forests. Their way of life was largely communitarian with no concept of private property. Male-female relationships were much more egalitarian and the rituals were simple. Their modes of livelihood were multiple and revolved around subsistence. The relationship with the forest was symbiotic and formed a crucial part of their lives.

The colonial interest in forests was a rude jolt to the tribal way of life. The colonization of forests forced them into settled agriculture, fixation of property and with little cultural capital, tribals began to find themselves in an unceasing vortex of land alienation, indebtedness, bonded labour, malnourishment and drunkenness.

Several legislations and policy frameworks for tribal welfare were created in independent India. There are 13 tribal sub-plan project areas in the state. These areas are expected to obtain 9% of the state revenue for development expenditure, but a lack of resources, education and most importantly a lack of organized constituency and leadership have meant that the tribal belts bear the burden of developmental neglect, even in the shadows of prosperous centres in the state. The Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act has been passed in the Maharashtra assembly but the resource regime has few dents.

Some of the developmental parameters of tribal belts in Maharashtra are shocking:

- 42% tribals are landless; of those who do own land, more than 70% have less than 2 hectares
- 94% tribals are dependent on agriculture as a mode of livelihood
- 91% tribal households are Below the Poverty Line
- Literacy rate among tribals is 55% as opposed to the state proportion of 77%; in some pockets, it is as low as 22%
- 74% tribal children drop out before completing their secondary exams
- Infant mortality rate among tribals is high—in Chandrapur it is 137, in Yavatmal it is 143 and in Gadchiroli it is 144; Melghat is characterized by frequent episodes of child deaths following monsoons; in 1993-96, 4000 children under the age of six died in Melghat

The developmental backlog of tribal belts is huge. The state government has only once allocated the stipulated 9% revenue for the tribal sub-plan in 2005-06. Even monies that have been allocated have never been spent fully. The extent of non-utilization ranges from 45%-90% in the period of 1993-2009.

It is obvious that tribals are considered a political non-entity. There are a few tribal representatives in the legislature, but there has been hardly any articulation of the tribals as a larger group, perhaps due to their geographical and cultural dispersal as well as the fact that they have few resources.

Some of the tribal pockets have witnessed the emergence of rights-based organizations, some have fallen into right-wing politics, while the regions closer to the Andhra Pradesh border are caught in the cross fire between the Naxalites and State violence.

3

Decentralised Local Governance and PRIs

This chapter unfolds the backdrop of women's political participation in the villages of Maharashtra. The underlying postulate is that any understanding of gendered citizenship is incomplete without a reference to the context within which it is being played out. This context is multilayered. One layer is that of the socioeconomic and political realities of the village and how these are mediated by dynamics of power in the village. This in turn brings to question the historical legacy of these power dynamics and how they have been juxtaposed in contemporary democratic spaces and developmental politics. Finally, it traces the emerging location and potential of women's political participation.

Needless to say that tracing this context brings to the fore several underlying questions of immense relevance to the democratization of politics. What is the agency of the village Panchayat in Maharashtra? What are the historiographies of power in the village? What are the continuities and disjunctures in them? How are these reproduced in the Panchayat's functioning? How are women located in these realities and processes? How in particular do questions of reservation and caste impinge on the women's movement?

Power is here understood to be multidimensional. It is a 'power to' achieve goals for the self, and has an active relation to resources—tangible as well as intangible. It is a 'power over' others, influencing their life choices and thus bringing in an element of active use of agency in exploiting the strength of resources. Finally, power is also understood as a system of flows across networks of people—networks that may be multiscalar. These flows produce a confluence of currents as well as cross currents. The Panchayat is a site and a local space for the active interplay of these currents.

TRACING PANCHAYATS THROUGH HISTORY

3.1.1 PRE-COLONIAL PERIOD

The historical imagery of Panchayats in India is one associated with village republics. It draws on several interrelated ideas of an autonomous, self-contained and self-managed village whose institutions were broadly accountable to its people. This imagery is liberally strewn in accounts of Indian villages across the terrain given by British officials. It has formed the basis of the local government system founded by the British and then adopted by the various states of independent India. The following section is an attempt to trace the historical continuities and ruptures in the notion of the village Panchayat as a representative body. It then traces the movement and track record of Panchayati Raj in more contemporary terms. The current status of the Panchayats in India represents a product of several contradictory influences.

Indian economic life was primarily built around land, the principal means of subsistence. Since the village community generally owned land, a communal spirit developed in all the economic activities. Such a communal social life, it is clear, originated from below. The village, therefore, came to be the very hub of this

life (Majumdar, 1918). It was again in the village that local government had its birth. What, therefore, goes today under the name of decentralization—which denotes delegation or devolution of authority or autonomy from above—had its organic growth from the traditional Indian soil.

The village has been looked upon as a unit of administration since the early Vedic period. The earliest reference to villages (grama) is found in the *Rigveda*, probably the oldest of the ancient Hindu scriptures (Altekar, 1955). Accounts of Panchayats are so intertwined with those of other dimensions of the village that they are inseparable. There were also mentions of the village in the *Arthashastra* (400 BCE-200 CE), the *Mahabharata* (400 BCE -400 CE) and the *Manusmriti*. The presence of Panchayats is also recorded in the Kushan reliefs and in the writings of Al-Biruni in the early 11th century. These records distinguish a village from a nagar (city) and a pur (fortress).

The villages and the Panchayats formed an intricate tapestry which sustained agriculture and allied economy, and provided continuity to its functioning. Charles Metcalfe's (1810) comments on Indian villages are particularly significant. He wrote, 'These villages are little republics. They have nearly everything that they want within themselves and are independent of foreign relations. They have remained unchanged through the centuries. One ought to admire and conserve them'.

Several historians thereafter have contested the above both on account of the self-containedness and the illusion of stagnancy over time. However, it is undisputed that while villages were engaged in a dynamic relationship with the outer world of the rulers, an inner core of autonomy was always retained. It is this core which prompted Elphinstone to state in his 'Report on Territories Conquered from the Paishwa' that 'These communities contain in miniature all materials of a State within themselves and are almost sufficient to protect their members, if all governments are withdrawn.' These and other such codified views of Indian villages and their political system informed the British policy towards local governance in villages.

The village was governed by an assembly, which in the Rigvedic period, was known as Sabha (Altekar, 1955). It was this assembly that managed the affairs of the village and took collective decisions. But this practice does not seem to have endured. At a later stage, particularly during the Gupta period, the village assembly was supposed to have given place to a smaller council consisting of persons from among the village elders of the assembly. These councils were known as Panchmandalis in Central India. Later, these village councils developed into formal bodies regularly transacting administrative business and came to be known as Panchayats (Bhargava, 1979).

Participation in the affairs of the Panchayat was limited to the higher castes, where the lowest sections of the village, the Sudras, had no voice in the decisions of the council as they were not represented (Dutta, 1960).

3.1.2 COLONIAL PERIOD

In pre-British India, both caste and village Panchayats existed. Caste Panchayats were concerned with the issues related to jajmani, marriage and rituals. Village Panchayats consisted of elders of prominent households in a village. Such Panchayats continued to exist through the British period. They were concerned primarily with justice delivery through minor dispute resolution, management of village commons and revenue collection.

The introduction of private ownership in land, combined with the breaking up of the village industries during the British rule was the main cause of the disintegration of the village communities in India (Prasad, 1971). The main functions of the village community were twofold. The village was an economic unit. As an economic unit, it used to regulate its economic affairs after paying off the royal dues through its headman. It was also a politico-judicial body in the sense that all disputes arising in the village were decided by the village

Panchayat itself. These were the two bases on which collective life of the village rested. But these were the very bases that were undone by the British (Mookerjee, 1958).

Among the many changes that India witnessed with the advent of British rule, the most significant was the virtual extinction of the old forms of self-government and the disappearance of those ancient village communities of which India was the first home among all countries (Apte, 1960). However, by introducing the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) in 1860, the Panchayat's role in justice delivery was transferred to the Police System. Rural local governance and the transfer of powers to the Panchayats were more a matter of intent than practice during the British rule.

In fact, forms of local governance were first introduced in urban areas, that is, municipalities. In 1882, Lord Ripon, also called the father of Local Self Governance in India, introduced resolutions for District and Tehsil boards. While these boards had elected office bearers, they were dominated by their official counterparts. The electorate too was restricted to Zamindars, people who paid a revenue of Rs 48/- or more, and those who had an annual income of Rs 500/-. Both the electorate and inclination for people's representation gradually became more democratic through a series of references over the years. However, it was only in 1937, when elected Provincial Councils came into being, that concrete steps to strengthen the Grama Panchayats were undertaken. The Taluka Boards were abolished and District Development Councils came into being. The admiration of the self-sustaining village systems by British documenters thus translated into a theoretical proposition with no bearing in practice.

The Royal Commission on Decentralization was appointed in 1907-08 to go into the question of the village as the base of local administration. The Commission on Decentralization, for the first time, made comprehensive recommendations regarding the place of the village in the administration of the country (Prasad, 1971). The recommendations of the Commission received no serious attention from the government for about six years. It was in 1915 that the first step towards the implementation of the Royal Commission's recommendations was taken. The government of Lord Hardinge issued a resolution on local self-government, reviewing the position and largely endorsing and accepting the recommendations of the Commission (Bhatnagar, 1978).

During the British period, the decline of the Panchayats began with changes in the nature and basis of the economy. Increased connectivity between villages and towns, introduction of cash crop economy, industrial manufacturing, introduction of a central revenue and judicial system based on codified rules and laws, all served to break the integrated, decentralized village polity, giving way to a centralized governance system. For some observers, this change was positive. Marx (1893), for example, observed that the village Panchayats gave the illusion of idyllic communities, but in fact restrained the human mind within the smallest compass, making it an unresisting tool of superstition, enslaving it within traditional rules, depriving life of all its grandeur and historical energies. Ambedkar too called Panchayats cesspools of factionalism and dens of inequity. More recently Bumkey (1992) described the historical village life as life mired with customs which carry the stink of ages. Understandably, a shakeup of this system through external, centralized forces represented a promise of change. To cut a long story short, the very way of life that gave legitimacy and power to the Panchayats began to change fundamentally with the British rule.

3.1.3 GANDHI AND VILLAGEISM

The emergence of Gandhi at the head of the Indian national movement was, in fact, the point when the subdued expectations of India's villages came to the conscious level of political processes in the public sphere. The new direction in which he turned the whole current of the national movement was towards the village. Naturally, in the ultimate order of society, which he visualized, the village came to be the pivot. His concept of decentralization was derived from his concern for the village (Pyarelal, 1958).

The Gandhian concept of Sarvodaya describes a democratic socialistic pattern of economies and institutions suited to the conditions, realities and needs of Indian society. He stressed on village reconstruction rather than on urban industrialization. His ideology was based on the concept of Villageism (Bose, 1948). In practice, this was an attempt to produce powerful village communities by initiating participatory communication, developing self-reliant village republics in the form of Panchayats, enforcing reform of land ownership and encouraging the development of rural industries.

Gandhiji envisioned the village as a unit of social planning (Pyarelal, 1958). His vision of Villageism anticipated that the natural and necessary cooperation among villages in everyday matters of social, economic and political life would produce popular participation.

In the Gandhian plan, development was thought of in terms of human beings with the first objective of improving the quality of life by providing basic needs. Next, the plan envisaged the re-ordering of society by structural changes such as removing exploitative linkages, caste impediments and social and economic inequalities. He identified three aspects of traditional social structures as contributing elements to the problems of society.

- The feudal system institutionalized social roles in which people were linked by the exploitation of one by the other
- The rigid caste system, which institutionalized the marginalized people who were completely isolated from the economy
- The traditional attitude towards family and children resulted in a population that, literally, swallowed any increase in material resource (Bose, 1948)

British India had multiple forms of local self government institutions and processes. The presence of several princely states represented a significant break in the homogenous reality of centralized governance. These regional variations have had a significant impact on the nature and strength of the Panchayats. Erstwhile Maharashtra had several such variations

- Several districts of present day Marathwada were part of the princely state of Hyderabad and represented continuity with many practices of the Nizam, especially in terms of land ownership and control.
- Konkan and Uttar Maharashtra as well as the Western Region reflect the practices of land owning and revenue established by Chhatrapati Shivaji. These systems are more egalitarian in comparison with the Zamindari system practised in the Nizam State. The British continued this tradition through the Ryotwari system.
- Vidarbha was part of the Bidar kingdom along with several parts of current Madhya Pradesh. This part was largely tribal, heavily forested and the British policies of exploitation of forest produce and use of it by villagers have historical roots. One reflection of this is the Nistar rights enjoyed by villages in Vidarbha.
- In the princely territories, the status of Panchayats varied widely. One noted example is of the Oundh territory where the ruler gave special attention to strengthen the Panchayat system (P B Patil Report).

3.1.4 PANCHAYATS IN THE POST-INDEPENDENCE ERA

Centralized governance had become substantially discredited in the post-cold-war world, with the collapse of the erstwhile socialist states on the one hand and the whittling down of the welfare state apparatus on the other. In Western Europe and North America, decentralization was part of the institutional response to a fiscal crisis and a growing restlessness with the large and ineffectual public sector bureaucracies, paralleling the ideological shift from the state to the market.

The legitimacy of the public sector as a service provider was called into question. Hence, decentralization was often presented as a component of the strategy to manage the economic crisis by allowing for greater local diversity in public service delivery, and as part of the search for the appropriate institutional mix for an effective state-society synergy.

In the post-independence era, rural local self-governance was made a mandate of State Policy through its incorporation in Article 40 of the Directive Principles of State Policy of the Indian Constitution. Article 40 vested Panchayats as a subject with the States but did not elaborate on the relations between the States and this third tier of Government. A string of committee reports and recommendations since independence have emphasized the importance of Panchayats, mostly with a view to making development more effective through local participation.

Though Article 40 of the Constitution of India requires that ‘the State shall take steps to organize village Panchayats and endow them with such power and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government’, decentralization got constitutional status only through the 73rd and the 74th Amendments.

The amendments gave constitutional status to the PRIs and Urban Local Bodies (ULBs). As per the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act (CAA), the PRIs are the local level institutions comprising elected representatives entrusted with the responsibility of identifying, formulating, implementing and monitoring the local level developmental and welfare programmes. The constitutional provisions expect the State governments to enact necessary legislation not only to create PRIs but also to endow them with such financial powers and functional responsibilities, as they may deem appropriate. They were also required to appoint a State Finance Commission (SFC) to recommend adequate devolution of funds from State Governments to PRIs and ULBs. State Governments were also expected to create District Planning Committees (DPCs) in each district to formulate local level development plans for both rural and urban areas.

The initial ambivalence towards treating Panchayats as a third stratum or as representative bodies continued even till the years preceding the introduction of the 73rd Amendment. This ambivalence has translated into active resistance to decentralization at the level of most states and particularly in Maharashtra.

3.2. RURAL LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN MAHARASHTRA

3.2.1 PANCHAYATS IN MAHARASHTRA

In 1958, the Bombay Village Panchayat Act was enacted to bring about uniformity in the system of local governance in various regions. After the reorganization and formation of the State of Maharashtra in 1960, the government appointed the Vasantrya Naik Committee to consider the recommendations of the Balwantrao Mehta Committee and suggest a suitable model of governance for the state. On recommendation from the Committee, the Maharashtra Zilla Parishad and Panchayat Samiti Act, 1961, was passed. This new Act along with the Act of 1958 facilitated the introduction of a three-tier Panchayati Raj System in the state three decades before the constitution of the three-tier Panchayati Raj system in the country. However, this was short lived.

In 1972, the District Rural Development Councils (DRDC) and District Planning Councils were established following the recommendations of the Bongirwar Committee in 1970. This Committee also recommended the withdrawal of Panchayat status to habitations with a population of less than 500. Following the establishment of these agencies, the approach to Panchayats was increasingly characterized by suspicion to transfer powers, instead of increasing the prominence of the parent ministers to the districts, the MPs and the MLAs. The democratic character of the Zilla Parishads (ZPs) and Panchayat Samitis (PSs) was eroded and they were

dominated by the bureaucracy. The interference of the state government increased and they became more dependent on it for their finances. Irregular elections compounded the state of neglect of these democratic institutions.

The P B Patil Committee appointed in 1984 represented the first genuine attempt to restore the village Panchayats. This Committee, which submitted its report in 1986, suggested comprehensive measures to restore Panchayats as democratic and vital institutions of local governance. Some of its recommendations were

- Reorganize Grama Panchayats on the basis of population, that is, a minimum 1000 and a minimum revenue-generation capacity of 25 paise per capita
- Expenditure on localities in proportion to population
- Panch Sabha as an intermediary to Grama Sabha and Grama Panchayat, Grama Block to Grama Panchayat
- Independent taxing, auditing system for Grama Panchayats
- Integrate all local functions—with reference to the transfer of schemes, implementing organizations, allocation of staff and monitoring, and hand over to ZPs and Panchayats
- Revive the Nyay Samiti

Most recommendations of the Patil Committee, however, remained unimplemented. The Patil Committee thus was short-lived. Prior to the 73rd Amendment, Maharashtra had 39,354 revenue villages with 24,536 Grama Panchayats. A Grama Panchayat existed from population sizes of 250 onwards. Grama Panchayats did exist and so did the PSs and the ZPs, but their functioning was totally constricted by the existence of several parallel bodies, limited taxation powers, functional jurisdiction, and financial and administrative regulations. There were provisions of reservation for the members of Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) but these were nominated members whose roles were limited.

A study by Uday Mehta in the 1970s observed that the Panchayat Raj system had given a fillip to the caste system, intensified factionalism in the village, given a base to the ruling elite, brought the politics of manipulation into the village, created a new variety of non-officials and generally failed to enthuse people in local projects. These findings reflect the ‘real politik’ of the village in contrast to the ‘one village community’ imagery, as well as its appendage-like treatment in the state.

3.2.2 PANCHAYATS IN THE POST AMENDMENT ERA IN MAHARASHTRA

Consequent to the 73rd Amendment, both the Bombay Village Panchayat Act, 1958, and the Maharashtra Zilla Parishad and Panchayat Samitis Act, 1961, were amended with effect from April 24, 1994. Nearly 72 sections of the Village Panchayat Act and 47 sections of the Zilla Parishads and Panchayat Samitis Act were amended mainly to remove the inconsistencies between the two. The following are the main features of the Panchayat Raj system in Maharashtra after the 73rd CAA.

3.2.3 STRUCTURE

The basic structure of Panchayats in Maharashtra has not changed with the introduction of the 73rd Amendment of the Constitution. However, it is interesting to look at some of the finer details of the structure of the system. An organic linkage has been established across the three tiers of the Panchayats by way of giving representation to the members of the lower level in the higher bodies of the Panchayats. A committee of Sarpanches finds representation in Panchayat Samitis and all chairpersons of the Panchayat Samitis are made members of the ZP.

Decentralized governance in Maharashtra is said to work by what is referred to as the committee system of governance. There are nine subject committees—finance, works, agriculture, social welfare, health, education, animal husbandry and dairy, women and child welfare and water conservation. The Chairpersons of Subject Committees are members of the Standing Committee constituted in each district. The Standing Committee is headed by the Chairperson of the ZP. The Chairpersons of the committees are empowered with both administrative and financial powers. The Standing Committee supersedes all Subject Committees. The Chairperson of the ZP is the ex-officio member of all Subject Committees, and thereby coordinates all the work (World Bank, 2000)¹.

Panchayats are constituted on the basis of a population strength of 600 or more (300 in case of remote tribal areas or hamlets); existence as a revenue village; ability to expend Rs 10/- per capita annually and demand of the villagers to constitute an independent Panchayat. There are 28,211 Grama Panchayats in the state currently. Since 1997 this number has been increasing at an annual rate of 17. The total strength of the Grama Panchayat is between 7 and 17 members, depending upon the population of the area. Election to the posts of Sarpanch and Upsarpanch is indirect, and the position of the Sarpanch is rotated every term as per the reservation clauses. The election to the Grama Panchayat is to be held in a non-party based manner.

The secretary of the Grama Panchayat is expected to be a Class III cadre official from the district service. Currently there are 18,867 posts of Gramsevak to assist the 28,211 Grama Panchayats. This implies an average of two or more Grama Panchayats per Gramsevak.

Schedule I of the Act details 79 subjects as functions of the Grama Panchayat. However, these functions overlap with that of Panchayat Samiti and the ZP.

At the Panchayat Samiti level, each member represents a population of 17,500 to 20,000. A Committee of Sarpanches with 15 members or 1/5th the total number of Grama Panchayats is constituted by the Panchayat Samiti as an advisory consultative body. The election to the post of Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson is indirect. They hold office for one year each on a rotation basis. The election to the Panchayat Samiti is on party basis. There is a Block Development Officer (BDO) appointed by the State Government for each Panchayat Samiti.

Each member of the ZP represents a population of 36,000-40,000 with the stipulation that each ZP should have not less than 50 and not more than 75 members. All chairpersons of the Panchayat Samitis within the jurisdiction of ZP are the members of the ZP. The Chairperson of the ZP is elected from among the members and holds office for a period of five years. Election to the ZP is contested on party symbols. There is a CEO and one or more Deputy CEOs for each ZP, appointed by the State Government.

3.2.4 THE GRAMA SABHA AS A CONSTITUTIONAL BODY

The Grama Sabha is defined as body consisting of persons registered in the electoral rolls relating to a village or a group of villages within the area of the Panchayat.

The Bombay Village Panchayat Act, 1958, provides for the following as far as the organizing and conduct of the Grama Sabha are concerned:

- Six meetings a year
- Not more than three months to elapse between two meetings
- The first Grama Sabha to be held within two months from the commencement of that year.
- Ordinarily, Grama Sabha meetings to be held in the office of the Grama Panchayat or chavdi or chowk or at any convenient place decided by the Sarpanch or Upsarpanch as the case may be. However, in the case

of the Group Grama Panchayats, the first meeting in the financial year is to be organized at the place where the Panchayat office is located and subsequent meetings are to be organized in other villages which are part of the Group Grama Panchayat on a rotation basis.

- A meeting of women members of the Grama Sabha (Mahila Grama Sabha) is to be organized before every regular Grama Sabha meeting.
- Unless exempted by the Grama Sabha, all government and semi-government employees working in the village shall attend the Grama Sabha.
- The Grama Sabha should select and approve of the list of beneficiaries for individual beneficiary schemes of the Centre and State Governments.
- The Grama Sabha should approve the plans for socioeconomic development of the village before it is taken up for implementation.
- The Grama Sabha should grant permission for incurring expenditure by the Panchayat on development schemes.
- The Grama Sabha should convey its views to the Panchayat on the acquisition of land within its jurisdiction for government purposes.

The Panchayat should place before the Grama Sabha the following:

- Annual statement of accounts
- Report of administration
- Works proposed for the current year
- Last audit note

The Grama Sabha status has thus been elevated from that of a notional general body to one which acts as a planning and monitoring body to the Panchayat. However, the Panchayat itself has been given very few functions, powers or finances.

3.2.5 FUNCTIONS OF PANCHAYATS

The issue of functions is closely intertwined with that of the devolution of funds. Annexure 1 and Section 45 of the Grama Panchayat Act specify the functions of the Grama Panchayats. Nearly 78 different subjects of 12 departments have been transferred to the Panchayats. The Government Resolution of October 2, 2000 declares intent of transferring some 134 subjects, schemes and the 34,992 employees pertaining to these schemes to the ZPs.

In actuality, while Panchayats continue to pay attention to water supply, street lighting and public sanitation, as per their capacity, they have not been able to do justice to other functions such as regulating building permission, construction of roads, nullahs, bridges in the Panchayat limits, planned extension of the Gavthan, and so on. The transfer of subjects that has already been done is not effective because the Panchayats have not been strengthened in administrative, technical and resource terms. The transfer of functions is thus notional. This is reflected in the abysmal situation pertaining to critical functions like water supply, sanitation and planning. Schemes that benefit individuals such as the Sanjay Gandhi Niradhar Yojana are unnecessarily centralized in their implementation and can easily be transferred. There are few schemes like the sanitation programmes which have been devolved to the ZPs, but the level of devolution to the Panchayats is far from desirable. All in all, the village Panchayat acts as an implementing agency of the state government in most crucial matters, especially around resource regulation.

3.2.6 PANCHAYAT FINANCES

The Grama Panchayat can levy 18 different types of taxes and fees in its functional area. Of these, property tax, land improvement tax and water tax are obligatory; other fees and taxes which include lighting tax, sanitation tax and market fees are optional. Besides these, the State Government gives annual grants to the Panchayats. Grama Panchayats are also entitled to receive grants from some Central Government programmes such as the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana.

According to the Report of the Second State Finance Commission, the average income of Grama Panchayats in Maharashtra is Rs 1,55,000/- per annum. About 69% of them have an income of less than Rs 3000/- per year, while only 17% have an annual income of above Rs 50,000/-. The above discussion makes it evident that the Grama Panchayats are resource-strapped institutions and that they require a healthy infusion of funds if they are to do justice to their mandate and enhance the level of service provision.

The responsibility for the above clearly rests upon the State Government. The Second Finance Commission (SFC) Report observes that the proportion of funds transferred by the State Governments to the local governing institutions ranges from 18.32% to 24.62% in the years 1995 to 1999. The corresponding proportion for the Central Government is about 37.5%. The State Government has not heeded both the State Finance Commission Reports and the strictures of the Central Government to hold back 25% of funds if a comprehensive plan for devolution of functions, powers and funds was not drawn up.

The SFC in fact recommended a transfer of 40% income of the State from taxes and fees. It further suggests that this be done only under one principal head to simplify procedure. The criteria for disbursement of these funds would primarily comprise its distance from the district with highest per capita income, backwardness index, population, area, proportion of agricultural income to total income, and diversification of primary income sources. It is this critical recommendation of the Finance Commission that has been rejected by the State Government.

3.2.7 RESERVATION

Going beyond the mandatory provisions of the 73rd CAA, the Maharashtra Act has provided for reservation for backward classes as well. Following are the specific provisions regarding reservation in the state:

- Seats are reserved for persons belonging to the SC/STs in the Panchayat in the same proportion as the population of SC/STs to the total population of the area.
- The reservation of seats is rotated among different wards in the Panchayat. One third of the seats are reserved for women belonging to SC/ST.
- Nearly 27% of the total number of seats will be reserved for people belonging to the backward class of society. One third of the seats so reserved will be reserved for women from the same category.
- The seats of chairpersons at each level will also be reserved in a similar manner as the seats of elected representatives for members of SC/ST and Women and backward castes. It will be rotated among different Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis and ZPs as the case may be.

3.2.8 NO-CONFIDENCE MOTION

Notice of the no-confidence motion is to be signed by 1/3rd of the total members to remove the Sarpanch/Upsarpanch and submitted to the Tehsildar. Within seven days the Tehsildar convenes a special meeting to consider the motion. A voting of not less than 2/3rd of the total members is necessary for removal. No such motion can be brought within a period of six months from the date of election of the Sarpanch/Upsarpanch. If the majority does not vote in favour of the motion, no such fresh motion can be brought within a period of one year from the date of the special meeting.

The review of the State Government track record on real devolution of power, resources and functions to the Panchayat system is thus quite dismal. There is no commitment to this agenda as has been shown by several states like Kerala and West Bengal. On the other hand, the State Government has been extremely forward-looking in the matter of representation, bringing several hitherto neglected groups into the rubric of village decision-making. The strengthening of the Grama Sabha is also seen as an effort to make politics more broad based.

This creates a situation where the village Panchayat lacks effective agency in development planning and decision-making at the local level. Getting access to schemes requires linkages at the Block level and getting access to larger schemes needs liaisoning with the ZP machinery, and thereby the bureaucracy or the parent ministers.

The centralization of political and administrative decision-making has meant that party politics have become significant. This has restricted the emergence of a distinct 'local' politics at the village level. Positions such as 'parent minister' of districts, appointments to Corporations, have become more important than leadership in local institutions. It also has tremendous implications for the effective functioning of the newly elected members of Panchayats who lack such 'political capital'.

3.3. ALTERNATIVE CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF VILLAGE LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Viewing the Panchayat Raj system as a function of the Government, dependent on its decisions and devolution of powers and funds is an injustice to the spirit of local governance. The spirit for self-regulation which existed in historical forms survived through the British and then the Indian states' attempt to centralize powers. This indomitable spirit found expression in several forms in Maharashtra—an active site for voluntary efforts and people's struggles.

Some of these efforts are:

3.3.1 GRAMDAANI MOVEMENT

The Gramdaani movement, an offshoot of Vinoba Bhave's Bhoodan movement, represents a voluntary move towards equity. The janshakti triggered in the course of Bhoodan desired that path to be followed be of 'lokniti' as opposed to 'rajniti'. It was envisaged that this would culminate in 'Sarvodaya'. Local governance in this context is an extension of the voluntary subjugation of the self to community, and so there would be no difference between the objects of governance structures and the varied groups of people therein. For many, it represented an opportunity for village reconstruction.

The first Gramdan took place in Mangroth in Uttar Pradesh, and the movement subsequently spread to eleven states. Chowdhuri (1969) states that it had a high success rate in tribal areas. Maharashtra has 33 Gramdaani villages in which the land is cooperatively owned. The Gramdaani villages are expected to be regulated by the Gramdaani Act of 1964. The Grama Sabha has tremendous significance under the Act. It regulates the water, land, forests, records and revenues of the village as a unitary body. There are thus, tremendous potencies in the Gramdaani concept that aligns with self-governance than local governance. There are no studies of Gramdaani villages in Maharashtra, but Oomen's study of Gramdaani villages in Orissa (1969) concludes that the reality of the governance in these villages is far from participatory democracy.

People who matter in the decision-making process are few, and are continuous with earlier elite. He concludes that an overdose of communitarian values is in fact often antagonistic to the effective operation of the democratic political system.

3.3.2 RALEGAON SIDDHI

A small village in Parner Tehsil of Ahmednagar district, Ralegaon Siddhi demonstrated all the characteristics of poor villages in the vicinity of the prosperous sugar belt in 1970. There were 40 distilleries in the village; it had a high rate of out migration and water shortage. The entry of Anna Hazare, a retired army man committed to the development of this village, transformed it from a poverty-stricken village to a 'model' for development. The vibrant youth of the village, led by Anna, abolished liquor, developed the school building and playground, temple and public hall. Two years later, it turned its attention to making the village self-sufficient in terms of water through the construction of a 'pazar' talao, a nullah bunding, public wells and afforestation. Sanitation was the next step. Under Anna Hazare's leadership, the villagers created a model of development where planning began at the village level, and government schemes were complemented with local resources and shram dan to make them more effective. Ralegaon is truly a symbol of integrated development. It also demonstrated the potential of the combination of internal initiative and government resources. It paved the way for a 'model village' scheme.

3.3.3 MENDHA LEKHA

This is a small tribal village of 33 households and a population of 331 situated in Dhanora Tehsil of Gadchiroli district. In 1990, many villagers here began discussing the issue of local governance in response to the Gram Swaraj Yatra of B D Sharma. A key point that emerged was that the difference between the governments at the Delhi-Mumbai levels and that at the village level was not one of scale but of direct participation in governance. Thus the slogan: Delhi mein Humari Sarkar, Hamare gaon mein Hum Sarkar ('We are the government in our village'). The Grama Sabha is considered the supreme authority in Mendha. The strengthening of the Grama Sabha was a process that began with a range of discussions and decisions about key issues, concerns and developing plans of action vis-a-vis these concerns. The villagers revived their traditional ghotul, where the youth met. They identified their 'Nistar' rights and began to assert them. The Grama Sabha in this village is a body incorporated as a society, as the Grama Panchayat Act only incorporates the Panchayat. A lot of the development efforts in Mendha Lekha are focused around the forest as it is the lifeline for its Gond residents. Notwithstanding the small size of the settlement, the example of the village certainly serves as a marker of the fact that local governance is not equivalent to self-governance, and that a movement towards the same requires incessant efforts at the village level as well as in asserting a right to self-development.

All the above examples reiterate that the concept of village local governance as defined by the Grama Panchayat Act is narrow and emphasizes the powers of the elected body. It is thus limiting. However, there is tremendous potential for self determination in the organized constituency of the village when issues of self interest are given less weightage. It is also clear that these examples are exceptions in a larger landscape where Panchayats are sites for local power struggles, where efforts for development intermesh with these struggles.

These markers however raise new questions about the Elected Women Representatives (EWRs). Do the women experience the positive support of the village community? Do their aspirations find expression? How do women encounter the 'organized' might of the community when playing a non-traditional role?

3.4. PANCHAYATS AND POWER IN THE VILLAGES

This study places the power structures and Panchayats against the backdrop of the regions in which they are located. The attempt here is to enable the understanding of the continuities as well as disjunctures between regional profiles and local dynamics.

The following were the dynamics and the recurring themes that emerged when trying to analyse the villages:

- Who are the powerful in the village?
- The Panchayat as an extension of these power structures
- The Panchayat per se has little agency
- Importance of the local to these power structures
- The impact of democratization
- The location of hitherto neglected groups

These are the macro indicators of democratic decentralization that we were trying to understand while trying to analyze the village and the Panchayats as sites and institutions of local governance or of a deepening democracy.

4

Locating Villages

4.1 VILLAGES IN INDIA

The first major critique of village studies came in 1975 when Louis Dumont and David Pocock launched the new journal, *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, with a critical rejection of the village as a primary social unit for the study of India. Their argument begins with a general critique of structural-functional methods that presumed small communities—villages, in the case of India—to be autonomous wholes, self-contained islands that functioned for self-reproduction. They pointed out that this construction was complicit with colonial interests.

They argued that caste and kinship relations, not villages, were the primary foci of society, both within and between villages. For them, the village itself was not a functional microcosm of the Indian whole, but merely a territorial convenience, a unit of residence that could be at best considered a secondary social fact, not a primary one for explaining the Indian structure (1975). Villages were simply the locations in which more general structural (relational) principles could be studied in a social context. For Dumont, hierarchy in its social form (caste) replaced villages as the metonymic signifier ‘incarcerating’ India (Appadurai 1988).

The British in India, Cohn argues (1977), wrote history this way, as a ‘pragmatic charter’ to explain to themselves how and why to rule over India. The idea of the harmonious and self-sufficient Indian village was one such myth. It was a story that the British constructed to make sense of what they were already doing, and its function was to allow British officials to understand the nature and legitimacy of their rule, and also to shape it. British depictions instead posited that India was a static and ancient land of autonomous villages, ‘independent of foreign relations’ (Charles Metcalfe, quoted in Cohn 1977), which had survived wave after wave of exogenous despotic rule. Since, in British eyes, ‘the real India was in the village’, the British found it possible to claim their rule as a form of protection for the indigenous realities of Indian society enclosed in islanded villages, each its own ‘republic’, and each granted some internal autonomy.

As Pemela Price (1993) points out, these policies, which later became the foundation for Gandhi’s idealization of the village as the key to Indian national identity and for the nationalist Panchayat Raj system, have ironically resulted in creating more autonomy, though not necessarily more harmony, for the villages than had been the case under most actual pre-colonial political forms.

In South Asian studies, the colonial construction of almost everything that anthropologists had assumed to be traditional was ripe for inquiry—villages (Dewey 1972; Inden 1990.); jajmani relations (Fuller 1989; Mayer 1993); caste (Dirks 2001; Tolen 1991); and kingship and polity (Dirks 1987; Inden 1990; Price 1996). Perhaps what these authors are responding to is what Vikas Pandey (2003) reminds us of: that fiction gets at what Raymond Williams called the ‘structures of feeling’ of the places and periods in which they are written. This aspect of the village is that the village is not just a territory, but a ‘structure of feeling’, an embodied

reality that actors carry forth into the worlds in which they act. In short, Pandey advocates moving away from dichotomous constructions of either the rural or of villages, and moving towards an analysis that focuses on how actors shape and reshape the world, with the rule as part of the terms of their own 'discourses' and part of the embodied and socially created aspect of their activity. He shows how Panchayats are outreaching, historically constituted institutions that play important roles in linking villages to wider political agendas and institutions, including helping to shape or, as a verb, 'to village' Indian democracy today.

The figure of the village in postcolonial India seems to express the irony and ambiguity of some aspects of the India experience, where many people reach out to the world and metropolises, and at the same time feel the need to ground themselves in some bond of authenticity. The village as a trope of this ambiguity emerges in many different contexts. Ashis Nandy (2001) and Dipesh Chakrabarty (2002), for example, separately illuminate the place of village in Bengali intellectual history. Both show that the village has become a trope of loss or, in Nandy's phrase, an 'odd ruin' of the self and nation, set up as a disappearing ground of identity. Villages have come to stand in many different ways for the inequities and atrocities of 'others'; for backwardness and a sign for promoting national projects of development (Pigg 1992; Thakur 2005).

4.2 VILLAGES IN MAHARASHTRA

In a bus or a bazaar, at a government office, or during a yatra, 'Tumcha gav kuthla?' ('Which is your village?') is almost certainly the very first thing a Maharashtrian would ask a new entrant or a stranger. Among rural Maharashtrians' common practices and processes are such spoken questions as: 'Tumche gav kuthle? Kuthe nighala? Kuthun ala?' ('What's your village? Where have you set off to? From where have you come?'). There are many boundaries within the village bounds, especially as the agricultural land is separated from pasture and commons, and as it is divided and subdivided into holdings owned by different families, villagers live with, recognize and observe many borders. These borders include those that are relation driven and others that are administratively driven.

It is very interesting to understand the patterns of gendering relations in a village. Men are born in the village, leave it for other opportunities (education, service, income), and may or may not return to the village of origin. Yet their movement, significant as it is (and even essential for much of the village), counts as a demographic feature much less than does the movement of women.

In contrast, the life of nearly every village woman includes a permanent change of village residence with marriage. A woman's two homes, the maher and the sasar (that is, her mother's house and her father-in-law's house)—are in two different villages. The life which connects these two, however, is not just the woman's, because her marriage brings together, through continuing visits and exchanges, various kin—her brothers and her husband, sometimes her father and her husband's sister's husband, and perhaps at some later time, her children and her brother's children.

The networks of inter-village ties composed of the pahune (affine) of several village families, lineages, or even of a particular village caste or multi-caste grouping, thus sets the village in a larger region (perhaps several distinct regions for different pahune networks) of dispersed relatives, established by communication, hospitality, ritual obligations, gifts, and sometimes more marriages. The pahune ties that marriages generate and sustain make village affiliations obvious, because referring to one's pahune often involves naming their village. Pahune relations also constitute another kind of necessary village extension through exposure and exchange, usually but not always of women, but in all cases one that differs from the departure of village men as labour to enhance village income.

Caste affiliation itself, at least as displaying an aspect of village demography and some partial division of labour, indicates many who are more detachable and more detached from a village. The Kumbhars, Nhavis,

Parits, Sonars, Lohars, Sutars, Vadars and Guravs (potters, barbers, washermen, goldsmiths, iron-workers, carpenters, masons, even temple priests) are small artisan or service castes of whom the village today, almost regardless of its local population size, requires very few specialists to meet its needs. Many in these groups are unlikely to have enough land resources or a strong enough social network to hold them in the village. Dalit groups, especially the smaller ones like the Mangs and Chambhars (rope-makers and leather workers) and even some among the larger population of Mahars, find little reason to remain in villages when their working conditions are tough and social relations demeaning.

The village is a place, if not a world, of productive social forces, a field of particular constraints and currents, pulls and pushes, various manners of inclusion and exclusion which variably aggregate and differentiate people. It is a space where inclusion and exclusion themselves are not mutually exclusive, where either may include the other.

Selected Panchayats, representing different geo-political regions of Maharashtra, were taken as samples for the study. Around ten villages from Konkan, Western Maharashtra, Marathwada and Vidarbha, including the tribal belts, were studied and reports on them follow. The reason for including tribal villages as a special category in the spatial framework of the study was to focus on specific features of these belts that have never been a part of the 'settled village' culture, and to understand the location of women's political participation in this context.

4.3 THE REGIONAL CONTEXT IN THE KONKAN

Migration is a fact of Konkan's demographic and political make up. Nearly 45% of the immigrants to Mumbai from within Maharashtra are from Konkan. A money order economy is therefore one of the prime characteristics of South Konkan. At least one person from every family, especially from the Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg districts in Konkan, works in Mumbai. The significance of this migration is so high that districts like Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg have sex ratios of 1135 and 1077 per thousand males respectively. Migration has a significant influence on the social composition of the region too, and one of its impacts is that more agricultural work is now left to women.

Migrants from the Konkan to Mumbai were called the 'Chakarmane'. Dalits find jobs at the lower levels as sanitation workers in the MCGM (Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai) and as dock porters at Dockyard, while Marathas and OBC men work as BEST drivers and conductors, that is, work that needs physical labour. Brahmins and men from higher castes work as clerks and teachers. A few Muslims from the Konkan are engaged in fruit export and other small businesses. Most poor Muslims work as dish washers in hotels.

Konkan has never played a prominent role in the politics of the state, given its low density of population. Its politics too is tied to Mumbai and revolves around the question of gainful employment opportunities.

Around 20 to 25 years ago, working men left behind their wives and children in the village. The families in the Konkan depended solely on their men's money orders from Mumbai for their livelihood. This has changed in the past decade or so as the men, who earned well bought homes in Mumbai, moved their families there and built holiday homes in the villages. Others simply concentrated their wealth on bettering or building new homes for their joint families in their villages. Some others completely stopped visiting their ancestral homes and have severed ties for a life in Mumbai, reflecting the fact that the individual migrant's economic prosperity has not really improved the overall financial condition of locals in the Konkan.

Caste distinctions are prevalent here, and are constantly reinforced. The villages of Konkan themselves have a very different structure from the ones found elsewhere in Maharashtra as was observed in the two sample

villages for this study—Sherpe and Undil. Different castes form small clusters of homes located about a kilometer away from other castes' clusters. There is not much mingling between people of various castes either, which makes inter-caste marriages next to impossible. Broadly, the prevalent castes in Sherpe are Brahmins, Marathas, Buddhists, Dalits and the Muslims.

4.3.1 SHERPE

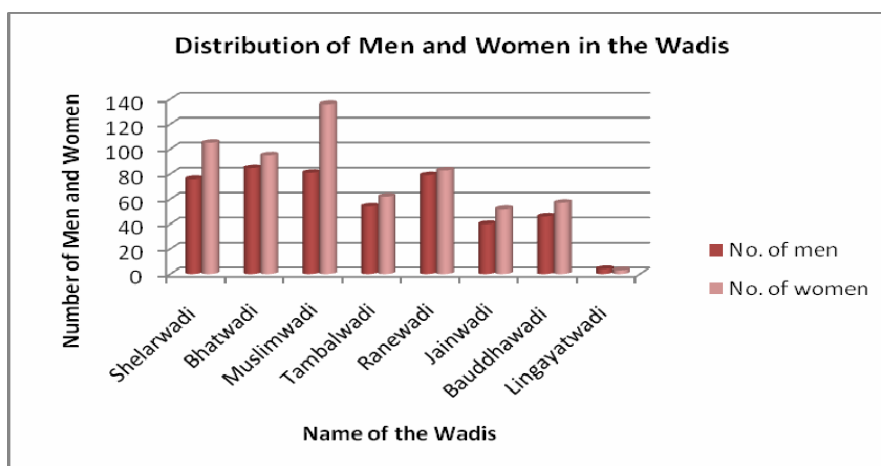
Area	: 683 hectares
Population	: 1079 (2001 census)
Literacy	: 90%
Taluka	: Kankawli
District	: Sindhudurg

4.3.1.1 DEMOGRAPHY

Sherpe lies 8 km from the nearest market town of Kharepatan. There are eight wadis or community based living areas here: Bhatwadi, Shelarwadi, Tambalwadi and Muslimwadi are in the same locality, while the Baudhawadi is located in the middle of the village. The three other wadis are located beyond the Konkan railway track. In fact, a track of the Konkan railway runs through the village, dividing it in two.

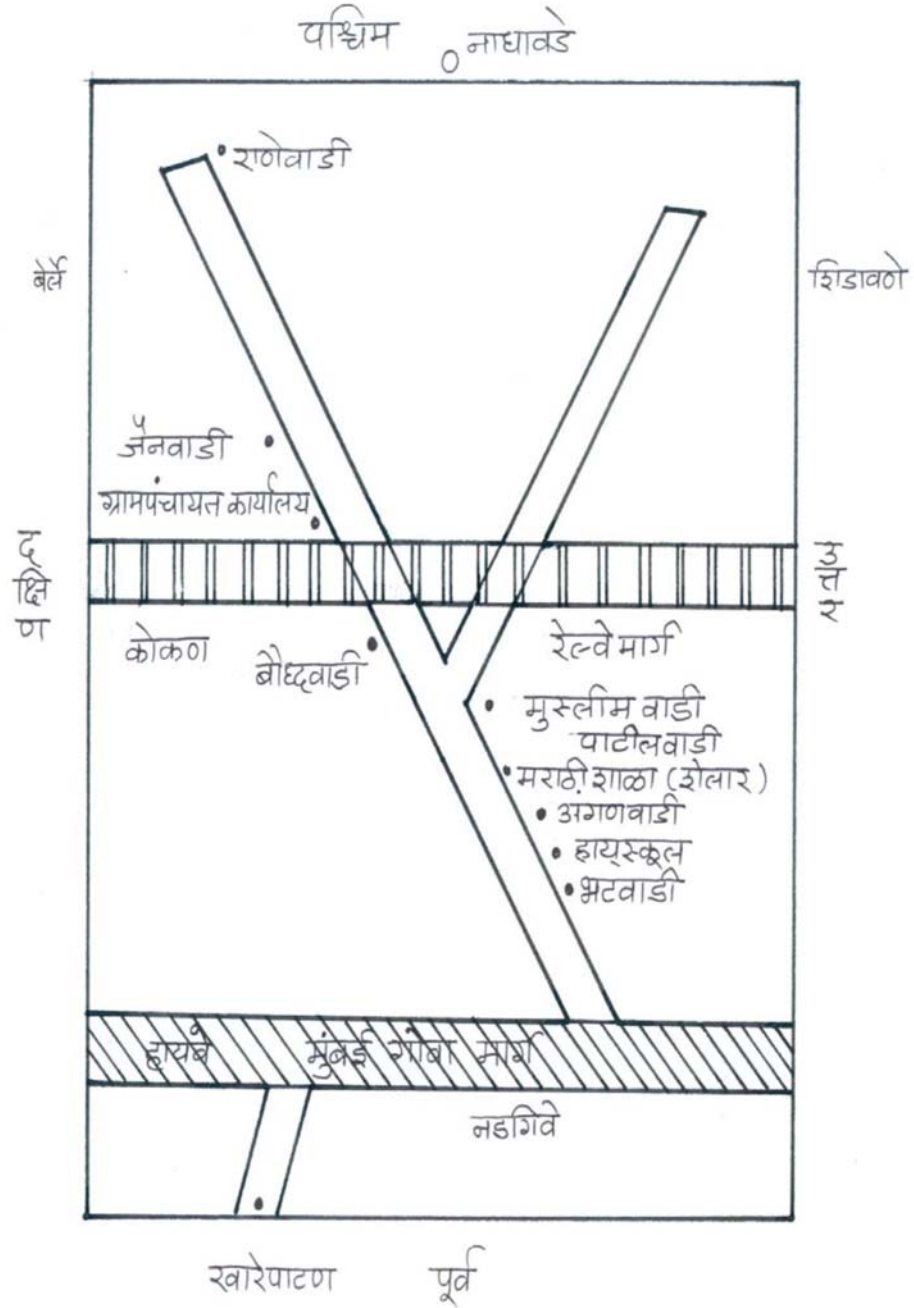
Parts of Sherpe lie on the plains, while others are on hilly terrain. Ranewadi consists of Rane families, while Shelarwadi is made up of Shelar families who belong to the Maratha caste, except for one Rane family. Shelar are the politically dominant caste—they have more land and they enjoy financial and administrative control of the temple. Tambalwadi is made up of the Wani community. There are more women in Sherpe than men.

FIGURE 4.1: Distribution of Men and Women



4.3.1.2 Infrastructure

The village's landmarks are its bus stop, the Grama Panchayat office, the post office, the ration shop, the school, the Sherpe Group Vikas Society and a small dairy shop. A tarred road reaches as far as Ranewadi, where the bus to Sherpe stops. People do use phones, television and electricity here. A temple stands to Kaleshwari and there is a mosque as well in the village. Sherpe has a Hindu crematorium and a Muslim cemetery.



Sherpe

Each ward has a facility for water through the water distribution scheme or a bore well or a traditional well. Most people use water from taps. In Patilwadi and Bhatwadi, sufficient water flows through the taps, and additionally, there are old wells too. The water scheme has brought water to taps in Jainwadi. Tambalwadi has a well and a government water scheme. The village has one primary school and a high school which teaches children up to Class 10. Children from nearby villages like Kurangavne and Berle also come here. All of Sherpe's girls and boys go to school, and there are no dropouts. The school has facilities like computer training, a library, drinking water and toilets. It has five teachers. The PHC sub-center is near the Grama Panchayat office and the PHC center is 2 km from Sherpe. Two private doctors and a nurse visit every Thursday. While people used to go to the bhagat (a sort of shaman) before, today they go to doctors.

4.3.1.3 Livelihood

The class divide in Sherpe is easily visible. Brahmin houses are built on lands of more than half an acre surrounded by banyan and mango trees, with a guaranteed supply of water. Brahmins own agricultural and forest lands—a feature unique to the Konkan (everywhere else, forest lands are solely owned by the government). The Marathas own most of the agricultural land and grow rice and other crops. Many Buddhist families also have agricultural land though most of them gave it up for the Konkan Railway Project when they were promised a job there for at least one member of the donor families, which according to the families, has not happened yet. The other Buddhist families with agricultural land practice shared-farming and grow rice in the monsoons and groundnuts and chawli in the summer.

Almost everyone from Muslimwadi is engaged in the fish-selling business. Most men here are employed by hotels in Mumbai. The fish-selling business is therefore completely under the control of women. They buy fish from Kharepatan and Kankawli and sell them in the local villages. It was observed that the Muslims do not have their own land for cultivation, though they do work on farms as agricultural labour.

The people of Ranewadi cultivate sugar cane, while those of Jainwadi are engaged in jobs and agriculture. The people of Tambalwadi also keep cattle. Farmers are given subsidies from the agriculture department for buying bullocks, fertilizers and equipment. There is no poultry or dairy industry in the village.

Sherpe's mixed population of Muslims, Marathas, Brahmin and Buddhists mingle with each other during festivals like Ambedkar Jayanti, Ganpati, Diwali, Shimga, Bakri Eid and Urus.

4.3.1.4 Grama Panchayat

There are seven Panchayat members in Sherpe—four men and three women. A board showing the details of different village development programmes is put up in the Grama Panchayat office. The allocated 15% of the funds meant for the Dalit community is used for them every year. The village has implemented other schemes like the Gharkul Yojana and the Rajiv Gandhi Yojana. The Panchayat collected revenue of Rs 43,000/- last year from water tax, and Rs 53,000/- from housing tax. Under the Konkan railway project, a few families belonging to the Baudhawadi lost their homes. They were given land elsewhere to build new houses.

The Sherpe Grama Panchayat also organizes Mahila Melava and Haldi-kumkum programmes from time to time. Schemes for women's welfare are discussed in the Mahila Grama Sabha and women who are in need are motivated to avail of them.



4.3.1.5 Grama Sabha

A government employee goes from house to house to inform people about the date and venue of the Grama Sabha. The date and time of important meetings are also announced on a mega-phone. The agenda of every Grama Sabha meeting is circulated from house to house. Around 25 to 30 people attend the Grama Sabha. If the quorum is not present, it is postponed for eight days. The Gramsevak first reads the minutes of the previous meeting and gets it sanctioned. Then the rest of the agenda, matters like planning, budget and development schemes, are read and discussed democratically. Schemes and plans are sanctioned by accepting the opinions of the majority. Finally, a decision is made, and signatures of the participants are taken. The Sarpanch or the Gramsevak winds up the meeting.

However, not everyone in the village attends the Grama Sabha. The few who are literate avoid attending the Grama Sabha, and for the poor, who work on daily wages, coming to the meeting would mean missing a day's earning. So the agenda of the Grama Sabha is often decided by the Sarpanch and the Gramsevak. Nevertheless Sherpe's Grama Sabha meetings are conducted democratically. All the government schemes are first described and then discussed in the meeting. The development here does seem to be people-centric.

- **Mahila Grama Sabha**

Around 25 to 30 women attend the Mahila Grama Sabha which takes place before a regular Grama Sabha in the Grama Panchayat office. They actively participate in the discussion and discuss women's issues, budgets, schemes, SHGs, training, funds for women and child welfare, construction and repair of public toilets, the Employment Guarantee Scheme, and read out GRs etc.

The 10% budget allocation of Panchayat funds for women and children are used to help economically weak women. It is also spent for buying necessary items for the anganwadi like toys, drinking-water tanks, chairs and mats, etc. Recognizing the trauma that alcoholism has wreaked on women's lives, two years ago all the women members of the SHGs collectively banned liquor from the village. They took a morcha to the local police station in Kharepatan and demanded a liquor ban. The police took immediate action and the sale of liquor has now completely stopped in Sherpe

Women also changed the timing of the Mahila Grama Sabha to suit their schedule. They strictly followed the practice of recording the minutes. They also demanded that a copy of the previous year's report be given to each voter. Over time, 22 women in the village have got joint ownership of their houses. The new houses built under the Gharkul scheme are in the names of the women.

- **CBOs**

There are various CBOs in Sherpe, like the Sherpe Panchakroshi Shikshan Prasarak Mandal which runs the high school in Sherpe (till Class 10); the Sherpe Vividh Sahakari Society provides fertilizers and collects milk; the Taluka Shetkari Kharedi Vikri Sangh runs the ration shop; and the Kaleshwari Bhajani Mandal. Apart from this there are seven SHGs (BPL and APL) like the Gurudatta, the Aaradhana, the Riyaj, the Gharib Nawaj, the Ahmed Raja, the Brahmadev and the Prerana SHGs.

All women involved with the SHGs and the above groups attend the Mahila Grama Sabha and have cordial relations with the Panchayat. Some are members of the Panchayat. Apart from the Panchayat, there is one other power centre in the village, and that is the temple. The Shelar community, which is in charge of the temple's financial and administrative activities, has all the power here. Cultural programmes are organized in the local temple—especially during the festival of the local goddess. SHGs have arranged Mahila Melavas to spread awareness regarding women in entrepreneurship. They have also received training to prepare rope out of a locally-available material called kathy (a form of coir) from a trainer in Kudal.

The 32 women in the Riyaj SHG, the Gharib Nawaj SHG and the Ahmad Raja SHG have started a fish-selling business. Being Muslims, they do not own any agricultural land. Fish-selling and labour are their traditional forms of livelihood. Since it was observed that agents used to charge them exorbitant amounts because they could not go to larger markets to buy fish, they took a loan from the Bank of Maharashtra which gave each group a capital of Rs 25,000/-. They found that buying the fish themselves with the help of the loan has been more feasible than working with agents and moneylenders. All the transactions are discussed in the monthly SHG meetings.

Sherpe's SHGs run smoothly. It is observed that the SHG movement has brought about lot of change not only in women but also in the community. It has challenged the patriarchal social system which has never allowed women to be independent. In SHGs, women come together, communicate and share their experiences. Apart from becoming aware of their capacities and rights, they develop leadership skills. Though Sherpe's SHGs do not always start their own programmes, they do participate in many at the local level, like the morcha on ration issues in the Sindhudurg district in 2008.

Significantly, they learn to save money through SHGs and Bachatgats. This has been specially seen among Muslim women, who, thanks to easy loans taken from banks through SHGs, are becoming more economically empowered and independent. The recovery of these loans is very good. The women find the SHG an open forum of sorts, sometimes a space where the pressures they feel from their in-laws drops. Using low-interest internal loans, they can meet basic financial needs like education. Thanks to the support of the Mahila Grama Sabha, SHGs have gained a lot of credit and support in Sherpe. There are no SHGs in the Baudhawadi.

It must be noted here, that while earlier, there were hardly any literate girls among the Muslims of Sherpe, today all the girls go to school. A few of them have studied up to BA and they do not wear burkhas.

4.3.1.6 Women in Politics

- **The Dynamics of Gender and Caste**

Women in politics have to face a lot of pressure from political leaders. There is also interplay between caste and gender. For instance, upper caste women in the Panchayat are given due respect. Thanks to centuries of feudal thinking, people of a lower caste are influenced by upper-caste Sarpanches.

- **Women in Sherpe's Panchayat**

The three female members in the Sherpe Grama Panchayat are: Rabiya Imam Manaji, Sarpanch, Vandana Dashrath Sawant and Anuya Ashok Kulkarni. None of them have been elected before. During the 2001 elections, the Shiv Sena and the Congress were the opposing parties. Pratibha Motiram Rahate and Sunanda Tukaram Teli, belonging to the Teli community, were members of the Panchayat. Both were illiterate and unaware of Panchayat-related work. But they looked into development work with the help of the Gramsevak and other people. At that point, it was proposed to the government that the village be given the Nirmal Gram Prize. Sherpe also won a 2nd prize in the Sant Gadge Maharaj Puraskar at the district level.

Relations between the Sarpanch and the other organizations in Sherpe are participatory and cooperative. Women also cooperate with local SHGs and youth groups. Female members of the Panchayat actively participate in and are present for programmes and activities organized by schools and societies. The Sarpanch has maintained good relations with government officials in the village, and therefore, channels of communication are open between them. This ensures that the people are kept abreast of activities and schemes available for the development of the village.

The Mahila Sarpanch and the other female members wear white saris to the flag-hoisting ceremony, where Rabiya Tai hoists the flag. She is a mother of four, and her husband works for a restaurant in Mumbai. [Read more on Rabiya Manaji in Chapter 5, Women's Narratives.]

Women in Sherpe pursued the Nirmal Gram Yojana by visiting every house in the village to mobilize families around the issue of sanitation. They also took leadership in the construction of public toilets in every ward. They successfully ran the Sant Gadge Maharaj Village Sanitation Program. Maintaining a clean and hygienic village is considered one of the great initiatives by the women of the Panchayat.

- **MRA Intervention**

MRA intervention in Sherpe helped bolster the rights of the economically weaker sections and women in terms of availing their entitlements. They have become aware of their rights and of the various schemes available for them. They held Mahila Melavas four times at the district and local levels to create awareness regarding women's issues. Trainers impart information about the Panchayat and the Mahila Grama Sabha. Various issues relating to women in Panchayat were discussed at those Melavas, and the MRA has helped organize morchas here as well. The objective has been to motivate women to step out and participate in clean politics with confidence. Anuya Tai's continuous efforts over ten years have made a gradual but positive impact. She has trained other women from the village to become MRA karyakartas. Anuya Tai is a part of Vikas Prabodhini, an organization that works for women's equality in the village. [Read more on Anuya Kulkarni in Chapter 5, Women's Narratives.]

To increase their participation in the Panchayat and to gender the spaces of power, Anuya Tai personally met women across communities in Sherpe. She tried to understand their problems by communicating with them and by participating in their lives. That she also helped them to meet their basic needs and find solutions for domestic problems helped to build their confidence to take part in the Panchayat. Women were organized by forming SHGs in each ward.

About 10% of the Panchayat funds are used for women's development. Anuya Tai has followed up on health funds and got them sanctioned. She also pursued the construction of toilets in the school. In 2006 and 2007, two camps were organized for women under the guidance of Kamal Tai Parulekar and Abaso Sheware to explain the rules and regulations for the working of the Panchayat. Budget, planning, development issues, GRs, and recording the proceedings of meetings were discussed.

In the Melava which took place in April 2007, active women' SHGs as well as those women who were active with the Panchayat were felicitated. The Mahila Sarpanch, Rabiya Manaji, and her husband were also felicitated by the MRA. The aim of such felicitation is to acknowledge the fact that women in Panchayati Raj Institutions overcome tremendous challenges to achieve what they have, and to encourage more women to participate.

4.3.1.7 Political Parties and the Power Structure

- **Changes in the Power Structures**

Power structures in Sherpe have changed. Traditionally, power was centered in the Khot's or the Patil's hands. Sherpe had a Patil family ruling since years. There are still many people in the village who respect the Patil's decision in matters like the celebration of festivals and agricultural works. The Sarpanch has always been a person from the Patil family.

Because of the 33% reservation, Pandurang Panchal (OBC) became the Sarpanch. Earlier, Vijay Kamble was the Upsarpanch and had fairly less power, as the Sarpanch was Dhanraj Patil, an upper-caste man. At this time, Anuya Tai had begun spreading awareness in the village through the Active Friends Circle, an organization that Dhanraj Patil himself had suggested her name for. SHGs were formed in the village. People started becoming aware of their rights through the organization of women and Mahila Mandals and the support of MRA. People started feeling detached from the Patil. Most of the women supported Pandurang Panchal and asked him to become the Sarpanch. But the Sarpanch's seat was reserved for women.

Festivals like Ambedkar Jayanti, Gramdewalay Utsav were organized across communities to break the caste differences in the village. The Patil was offended by these changes and threatened the women. But the women continued participating in various committees like the Dakshata Committee and the Tanta Mukti Committee. A few of the SHGs even started a dairy business. The fact that the women were displaying their entrepreneurial and leadership skills by participating in different power structures upset the Patil, who continues to harass them in different ways.

The Gramsevak is responsible for the actual financial transactions and the implementation of work taking place in the Grama Panchayat. Therefore, collecting revenue, planning a budget, informing the villagers about GRs and government schemes, arranging monthly meetings as well as the Grama Sabha and the Mahila Grama Sabha, and recording the proceedings, the income and expenditure are all tasks done by the Gramsevak.

The Gramsevak in Sherpe attends office every day and goes to the Panchayat Samiti in Kankavli every Monday if summoned by the BDO. Relations between him and the people are smooth. He explains all the government schemes to the people and cooperates with them when they are being implemented. When he informed them about the Nirmal Gram Yojana, the villagers organized themselves and cleaned up the village. They also successfully implemented the Hagandari Mukti Yojana and got a 2nd prize at the district level. Parties like the Congress, the Shiv Sena and the BJP are active in Sherpe. Sometimes, there are disputes between political parties and often it is observed that members with political affiliations tend to implement the policies and programmes of the parties with which they are affiliated. As a result, sometimes it is difficult to reach decisions on issues. However, most often members tend to reach an agreement when it comes to developmental initiatives in the village.

- **Political Relations**

Political relations here are dynamic and each Sarpanch's affiliations to a specific party will influence the village's power structure at the top. The Grama Panchayat members and the Sarpanch were affiliated to the Congress from 1997 to 2001. Amrutrao Rane, an MLA in the Congress at that point, was someone who

fought for the common man's issues, and therefore enjoyed the village's support. When Aappa Gogate (Shiv Sena-BJP) won in the next elections, the local power structure grew closer to the right wing. When the Shiv Sena panel won in the Grama Panchayat for the period of 2001 to 2006, power relations changed completely. Since the Sarpanch was affiliated to the Sena, it became powerful here. But things changed again in 2007, with Narayan Rane's move to the Congress. The Sarpanch, Rabiya Manaji, Ravindra Kamble and Sanjay Shelar are affiliated to the Congress. Bal Valanju is a district-level leader of the Congress. Manohar Shelar and Vandana Sawant are affiliated to the Shiv Sena, while Belnekar is affiliated to the BJP. The local MLA Ajit Gogate constructed two roads and repaired two more. When a bridge was built in Bhatwadi, Rs 6,00,000/- was spent from the MLA funds.

- **Issue Mapping**

The road connecting Sherpe to Kurangawane was constructed under the Employment Guarantee Scheme. But since it was not registered in the Grama Panchayat, the owner of the land on which the road was constructed closed the road by placing a stone in the middle. It was a convenient road for the villagers to use and the government had spent money on its construction and repair. While some of the villagers felt that it should be opened, most men felt that considering the ownership, it should remain closed.

However, the women got themselves organized and made a strong demand to keep the road open for traffic. They also questioned the Grama Panchayat as to why the road was not registered in the official documents. The women went to the police station, met the concerned officers and submitted their application. Then they all went to the road, removed the blockage of the stone and opened it for public use. The andolan was carried out without any violence or threat.

4.3.2 UNDIL

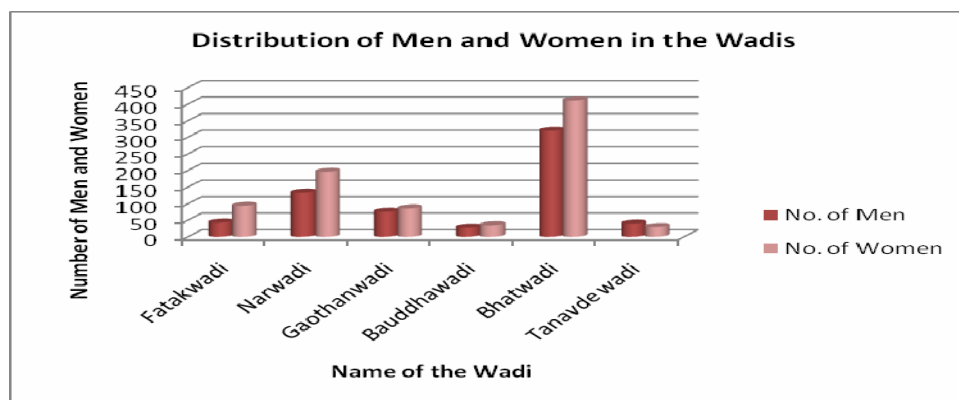
Area	: 784 hectares
Population	: 1492 (2001 census)
Literacy	: 80%
Taluka	: Devgad
District	: Sindhudurg

4.3.2.1 Demography

Undil, 8 km from Kharepatan, and located on a hillside, was home to trees which bore medicinal fruits called 'undil'. It was a point in the naval trade route since the time of Shivaji, and later, the British. The Vijaydurg fort is located nearby. Undil is made up of seven different wadis or communities. Each wadi is located about 1.5 km from the main road. There are about 130 households in Undil. There are more women here than men.

Undil's landmarks are its Grama Panchayat office, post office and the Public Health Centre (PHC) sub-centre. A few traditional houses remain, while some are modern with all amenities.

FIGURE 4.2: Distribution of Men and Women in the Wadis



4.3.2.2 Infrastructure

The village has electricity and phone connections. Tanavdewadi has no tarred road. The villagers have constructed toilets for themselves. There is a community hall in Bauddhawadi which is used for celebrations of festivals and meetings. Bauddhawadi has no roads and no electricity. While common toilets are found in some localities of Undil, a few families have their own toilets.

The PHC sub-centre is located in Fatakwadi in a well-equipped building, which unfortunately has had no staff for the past 15 years. A nurse from nearby Fanasgaon visits Undil thrice a week to provide health services. She also comes to the village for vaccination drives. Most of the people go to Kharepatan to avail of better health services. A decade ago, when there was no PHC sub-center here or transport, people had to walk 8 km to see a doctor in Kharepatan. The bullock cart was the only mode of transport then, but now people use auto rickshaws during emergencies. Though most people prefer going to doctors, some do still visit the bhagat for cures. For more detailed check ups, people need to go to hospitals in Kankawli and Talere.

The village has a ZP primary school (till Class 7), but no high school. To study further, children have to go to Fanasgaon, 4 km away. There are 90 high school students in Undil, most of who study in towns like Kharepatan, Fanasgaon, Devgad and Rajapur. Currently, the primary school has 87 students. The school has a sports ground, drinking water, two buildings and a hall for cultural activities. For the past two years, the school has had no principal or graduate teacher. Three teachers are burdened with the task of teaching seven classes. The procedure of sending proposals and applications has been carried out repeatedly from the Village Education Committee to the Education Officer, but no action has been taken as yet. Undil's only anganwadi was set up in 1985 and has 46 children.

In Fatakwadi, they have built a well under a government scheme and water is distributed in the village using taps. People in Tanavdewadi had wells but no water till recently, when the taps reached them. However, a few families still have to fetch water in a bullock cart from a distance. Narwadi has many water-related problems. Its wells go dry in the summer, and water has to be fetched in bullock carts from Gaothanwadi, 2 km away. One independent well built under the MLA fund works efficiently throughout the year. The source of drinking water for Bauddhawadi is a newly constructed bore well. Earlier, they too used to fetch water from 2 km away. However, summer still brings its share of water problems.

4.3.2.3 Livelihood

Rice and nachni (finger millet), the main crops of the region, depend on the monsoon. In Tanavdewadi, most people grow cashew and mango. Most of the people of Bhatwadi (which incidentally has just one Brahmin

family) are engaged in small businesses, while some grow rice, cashew and mangoes. At least one person in each family—mostly the young—work in Mumbai. The money they send is a great support for most families here. Some have stopped cultivating their lands because of this income. Bhatwadi has electricity, but there are no phones.

Though people in Narwadi grow rice and nachni, they have also recently started cultivating cashew and mangoes. They have phones and electricity. Most farmers of the region use chemical fertilizers and are assisted by the agriculture department. The rice and nachni they grow is consumed throughout the year. There are no other means of income like poultry or dairy in Undil.

A dam under construction here has displaced 10 Buddhist families. The government has compensated them monetarily (at Rs 15/- per acre per guntha) or 1000 sq feet of wasteland and cultivated land for Rs 550 but they have not been given land. This will deprive them of a livelihood, and because there is no space left in the village to build their houses, they will have to look for land outside their village. This issue has never been discussed in the Grama Panchayat. Though four villages were affected by the dam, they could not unite and organize themselves.

There is a stark difference between the affected people of different castes and classes. While the Brahmins of Bhatwadi have lots of land spread throughout the village, people in Bauddhawadi hardly have any agricultural land. Hence, their loss is very serious and they will have to find new land, relocate themselves and start from scratch. There are many aspects and linkages to this issue. For example, the Brahmin families in the village, being upper caste and educated, have gained better benefits and compensation than the Dalits.

There is no industrial development in Konkan, and most young men of Undil work in Mumbai. They visit during festivals like Holi and Ganesh Utsav.

The people of Undil are highly influenced by caste differences, which are reflected in the structure of the village itself. The inequalities between different castes can be observed at subtle levels. Vaishyavanis, an OBC caste, are dominant here. Among the Brahmins, the Kale family who are the Khots of the village, own most of the land. They sold it off for the dam project for which they allegedly got more than Rs 1 crore. Apart from the Brahmins, the Buddhists also own some land but have lost most of it to the dam project. In both the villages, the disparities and discrimination between the castes are evident. In fact, even if members of different castes from the same village work together in Mumbai and have a pleasant relationship there, when they come back to their villages, they prefer to maintain a divide.

4.3.2.4 Grama Panchayat

The Grama Panchayat office is located in Fatakwadi. Under the Employment Guarantee Scheme, tarred roads and wells are under construction. Not only do these benefit the village, they also help people earn. The Panchayat has received a fund of Rs 1,25,000/- under the Dalit Wasti Sudhar Yojana . In 2007, it collected Rs 34,000/- from water taxes and Rs. 58,000/- from housing taxes. Panchayat members and women in Undil have only recently become aware of the Panchayat funds.

4.3.2.5 Grama Sabha

Six Grama Sabhas were conducted in the Undil Grama in 2007. As in Sherpe, notice of the Grama Sabha meeting is given to each house in the village and signatures are collected in a register to acknowledge the information. Around 20 to 25 people are present for the meeting. The Gramsevak reads the agenda and then a detailed discussion takes place on each topic, after which, decisions are taken. Minutes of the earlier meeting are read and sanctioned. All the discussions and decisions are written in the proceedings book. New schemes and GRs are read and discussed in the meeting.

Important government schemes are discussed at length, touching upon various issues like how much labour needs to be hired for the Employment Guarantee Scheme, how to implement the scheme, and so on. Beneficiaries are identified and proposals are submitted according to the procedure—for example, bicycles and tailoring machines are sanctioned for girls, toilet-construction and road repairs are sanctioned, and health services are discussed.

The agenda of the Grama Sabha meeting is decided by a discussion between the Gramsevak and the Sarpanch. Though it is stated in the record that the weaker and more marginalized sections of society participate in the Panchayat meetings, field visits and enquiries, including an FGD at Undil, showed that in reality, the weaker section does not get a chance to participate. This deprives them of many schemes, especially those meant for the economically backward, such as distribution of sewing machines and bicycles for the handicapped.

The Grama Sabha is given all the fundamental rights for the development of the village. People get to know of things like equality, gender equality and development opportunities. The fact that they are there on equal terms helps to break the caste difference to some extent. It is also a place where people can see for themselves how much of an impact their participation can have in village development works.

- **Mahila Grama Sabha**

Women in Undil do participate in the Mahila Grama Sabha. Generally 35 to 40 women are present at the meetings, a small figure considering that all the Panchayat members are women. They talk about issues to be discussed in the Grama Sabha meeting, the 10% funds for women and child welfare, and other issues relating to the welfare of women. Considering the needs of the women in Undil, the 10% allocation seems less. It is spent for the provision of facilities for children in the anganwadi. When asked for details about the type of the fund, it was understood that the Grama Panchayat had not been given any GR by the government. Therefore, the women were officially unaware of those details.

Liquor has not been sold in Undil for a very long time. The Gramsevak follows the government rules and coordinates monthly Grama Sabha meetings, reads the GRs and new government schemes, collects revenue, plans, makes budgets, identifies beneficiaries and submits proposals. Undil's Gramsevak visits the village 15 to 20 days a month and goes to the Panchayat Samiti in Devgad or the ZP on official work or government training on the other days. Panchayat members and the Gramsevak cooperate with each other and are on good terms.

- **CBOs**

There is one SHG in Narwadi and one in Gaothanwadi. The Narwadi SHG is constituted of both men and women. They have bought a domestic flour mill with their savings. The Gaothanwadi SHG has not been active for the past two years.

- **Committees**

Undil has ten committees like the Gramvikas Committee, the Gramshikshan (Village education) Committee, the Tanta Mukti Committee, the Hariyali Committee, the Construction Committee, the Health Committee, the Building and Transportation Committee, the Social Welfare Committee, the Revenue Committee and the Water Committee. These were formed after discussions in the Grama Sabha.

Members of the committees are selected from among those who are efficient in the village and Panchayat members. Every month committee members meet to review the status of their work. For example, the

Education Committee keeps a close watch on the primary education in the village. It looks at assisting teachers, meeting the educational needs of the students, constructing new classrooms and providing educational material. The Health Committee concerns itself with polio vaccination, the status of the PHC and nurses and assistance for controlling diseases. The Construction Committee looks at repairing roads, building new roads and fencing, deciding on the house tax and collecting it, and giving permission for new constructions. All the functions of the committees are sanctioned after discussion in the monthly Grama Sabha meetings.

- **SHGs**

The Shree Ganesh and the Shree Samarth SHGs are both Below Poverty Line (BPL) groups. Shree Ganesh was formed in 2007 and has an account at the Gramin Bank in Fanasgaon, with a total collection of Rs 1183/-. There are 13 members and they collect Rs 20/- per month. The Shree Samarth SHG was formed in 2008. Its 13 members pay Rs 20/- per month which goes into the Gramin Bank at Fanasgaon, where the SHG has a saving of Rs 1920/-.

The Block Development Officer (BDO) had issued a notice that the formation of SHGs is a part of the official target, and so the Gramsevak organized women who are Below the Poverty Line (BPL) for the formation of BPL SHGs. Women were given information about subsidized loans and the importance of SHGs, but were not trained to manage them. Though they have monthly meetings, they are not aware of SHG procedures. The objective behind forming an SHG - to organize village women, open channels of communication between women of different communities, create awareness, and make them independent and empowered enough to demand their rights - have not been met.

Though the SHGs have good relations with government officials, they have no influence on the Panchayat. There are plans to give the women subsidized loans. There has been no effort to initiate any income generation activity. The Bank or the Panchayat Samiti has not yet graded the SHGs since they are newly formed.

The Ninadevi Bhajani Mandal in the village organizes their programmes in the local temple. Undil also has a Gaothanwadi Mahila Mandal which organizes Haldi-kumkum meets and a few religious functions every year. All the women are members of this group. Past students of the Vani community formed a youth group, Maji Vidyarthi Sangha. Its office is in Mumbai. But they help the students across communities in the school by distributing uniforms.

4.3.2.6 Special Schemes

- **Gharkul Scheme**

People from the weaker sections of society here had sent proposals to avail of the Gharkul scheme. Some proposals were sanctioned and five families were direct beneficiaries. Once they were identified for the scheme, proposals were sent with the required documents. The grant was given in three installments. A foundation was built with the first installment; two rooms and walls were constructed with the second. Works like roofing, doors and sanitary toilets were completed with the third installment.

Any extra amount needed was supposed to be added in by the beneficiary, failing which, they were supposed to contribute through labour. But they received all the installments in time and therefore the masons could complete their work.



• Water Scheme

Undil's hilly wadis do not have ample water. Wells have water till January and February, after which they go dry till the next rains. People have to face many water problems for four months. Wells in Gaothanwadi have water throughout year and the rest of Undil fetches water from there by bullock cart.

There is no facility to bring a tanker to Undil. River Poy flows beside the village, but presently a dam is been built on it by the central government. A water scheme was implemented from 2005 to 2007. A large water tank was built on the small streams near Fatak wadi. It was decided that the water would be distributed to the wadis through taps. It was a big task and was given to a contractor who started work with labourers. A pipeline was laid underground to Fatak wadi, Narwadi (Vaniwadi) and Gaothanwadi. A few landowners tried to stop the work, but ultimately issues were resolved in the larger interests of the village. The really needy people under this scheme were from Baudhawadi, Gaothanwadi, Narwadi and Fatak wadi. Presently, the work has stopped in Baudhawadi. The contractor bought pipes 18 months ago, but the actual work has not started.

4.3.2.7 Women in Politics

Undil's Panchayat has a significant female representation. The Sarpanch during the research work (2007) is Jaywanti Jagannath Nar, while the Upsarpanch is Darshana Dashrath Fatak. Other members are Parvati Shantaram Nar, Shashikala Hari Nar, Diptee Dilip Kale, Kajal Shishupal Wadekar and Bhagirathi Laxman Tanawde.

Parvati Nar and Bhagirathi Tanawde have been elected to the Panchayat twice. They belong to the Vaishyawani caste (Hindus). When Parvati Nar was elected in 2001, her opponents were affiliated to the BJP and the Shiv Sena. The Panchayat had only two female members then, and being inexperienced, they took some time to understand the process. Later they began pursuing developmental issues in the village. Wadis in Undil are located on hills, far from each other, and there were no tarred roads. They initiated the construction of a road from the main road towards Bhatwadi, for a distance of one km.

Bhagirathi Tai's father-in-law was active in the village, and she was therefore encouraged by her family to get involved in politics. Though Parvati Tai's in-laws were against her involvement in Panchayat, her husband

supported her in her efforts. The Sarpanch and the other members have good relations with the SHGs, Mahila Mandals and other organizations. They participate in cultural programmes and in the distribution of uniforms for school children. The Sarpanch has maintained good relations with the Gramsevak, the Talathi and the teachers, and is enthusiastic about helping people.

The past decade has seen 11 women become a part of the Undil Grama Panchayat. They are Vaishali Nar, Gopika Jadhav, Parvati Nar, Prabhavati Nar, Jaywanti Jagannath Nar (Sarpanch), Darshana Dashrath Fatak (Upsarpanch), Parvati Shantaram Nar, Shashikala Nar, Diptee Kale, Kajal Wadekar and Bhagirathi Tanawde. The Sarpanch's family had never been in power till Jaywanti Tai got involved two years ago. Her joint family has six brothers-in-law and their families living and working together in the fields. Parvati Tai's husband runs a small grocery shop and she helps him. While the sale of agricultural produce takes care of their basic needs, the income from the shop is used for medicines and the children's education.

The Sarpanch has personally looked into the matter of PHCs and health facilities. A nurse has been appointed in the PHC and the polio vaccine is given on time. Though the Sarpanch is not very educated, she is a good leader. Here too it is seen that upper caste women are more influential than lower caste women, irrespective of how educated, efficient and active the latter may be.

4.3.2.8 Political Parties and the Power Structure

The Kale family is the Khot or traditional landlord of this village. They have lived here for ten generations now. Undil's power structure has shown changes in the past decade. Initially, the Shiv Sena and the BJP were in power through the panel of Bhalachandra Manjarekar. Within the next two years, the BJP members withdrew support for Manjarekar and as he failed to prove his majority, he had to resign. In the next elections, there were three panels of the Shiv Sena, BJP and the Congress, out of which four of the BJP, two of the Shiv Sena and two of the Congress won. As Dilip Kale led the BJP panel, he became the Sarpanch.

After a few months, disputes started. This time Kale had to prove his majority, but could not. In 2007, the villagers got together before the election and decided to have a panel of women instead of political parties because clearly, the elected members were more of a hindrance in the functioning of the Panchayat than a help, thanks to their personal disputes. Everyone agreed, and a panel of seven women was elected unopposed. During the elections, women did not have to use liquor, money or violence. They won unopposed and Jaywanti Nar became the Sarpanch.

The BJP, Shiv Sena and Congress are still active in Undil and their disputes (especially between the Shiv Sena and the BJP) sometimes cause tension in the village. Relations between the activists of the three parties are not positive. Bhalachandra Manjarekar is affiliated to the Shiv Sena, while Dilip Kale is affiliated to BJP and Eknath Nar, Parvati Nar, Jaywanti Nar and Kajal Wadekar are affiliated to the Congress.

4.4 THE REGIONAL CONTEXT IN VIDARBHA

Vidarbha has been divided into two parts: Nagpur (East Vidarbha) and Varhad (West Vidarbha). The six districts of Nagpur, Bhandara, Wardha, Chandrapur, Gadchiroli and Gondiya fall in the Nagpur region, which has 53 cities. The Amravati region has 42 cities and five districts—comprising Buldhana, Vashim, Yavatmal, Akola and Amravati.

The issue of an independent state of Vidarbha is the foremost concern in the region. The main point of dissent leading to the demand for an independent sub-region is that politicians have time and again ignored this region, which has therefore remained undeveloped. This backwardness is being used for political mileage by all parties.

- **Social Structure**

The social structure in Vidarbha is multifaceted. There is no single dominant caste in Vidarbha. Two percent of the population belonging to the higher castes resides in urban areas. The Maratha and Kunbis form 20% to 21% of the population. Leaders of these communities claim that the line separating the two is obscure, which means that the Marathas and the Kunbis are the same. In social and economic hierarchy, however, the Kunbis are more backward than the Marathas, realizing which the Mandal commission granted them an OBC status. This led to a loss of their common identity. The Marathas populate West Vidarbha and the Kunbis are found in East Vidarbha. The Maratha community in Nagpur supports the West Vidarbha Marathas. They believe that they share common lineage and gotras with the Marathas of Western Maharashtra and are interrelated.

After the recommendations of the Mandal Commission, which separated them from the Marathas, the Kunbis started taking part in politics. As resources are unequally distributed among the Kunbis, divisive levels have formed within the community, making it non-cohesive. OBCs also form a major portion of the population. The Kunbis are a part of OBCs but do not support them. The OBCs in this region include Malis, Telis, Koshtis, Bhios and Baris.

The statistics of the Scheduled Tribes play a crucial role in the formation of Vidarbha. Western Vidarbha is 13.4% tribal and Eastern Vidarbha is 16.84% tribal. It also has a large number of people from the Mahar, Matang and Charmakar castes. The region has more neo-Buddhists as well, with a 10% population in Nagpur, Amravati and Akola districts. 23.55% of Gadchiroli's population belongs to the Scheduled Tribes category. Gonds are a strong faction among the scheduled tribes and the Govaris are the second. Pardhans, Halbas, Korkus and Kolis are lesser in number than the Govaris, but are not united. Opposition to the 'Hindutva' professed by the RSS is emerging as a thought process among the Adivasis who the original settlers. They want autonomous governance.

The Marwaris, Jaiswals and Rajputs are predominant in Akola, Amravati, Nagpur and Gondiya regions. Many North Indians and people of different castes from Andhra Pradesh have settled in Vidarbha, and have affected its composition.

- **Economy**

Since the formation of Maharashtra, Vidarbha has remained backward. Though agriculture is the backbone of Vidarbha's economy, the area is a bit backward in agriculture. In the agriculture sector, areas like Ramtek, Katol, Savner, Morshi, Achalpur, Amravati, Akola and Buldhana are cultivated by rich farmers belonging to the Kunbi, Mali, Bari, Koshti and Teli tribes. Yeshwantrao Chavan, as the first Chief Minister of Maharashtra had taken up the responsibility of developing agriculture and industry in the region but the development never materialized. In 1984, the Satyashodhan Committee, under Prof Dandekar declared that development in Maharashtra was imbalanced. This committee said that Vidarbha had a deficit of 39.22%. In 1994 that percentage had grown to 45.33%. The development that ensued, however, gave rise to a new, prosperous class. These wealthy farmers grow cotton, oranges and betel leaves. Compared to Western Vidarbha, industrial development is greater on the eastern side. Development in Eastern Vidarbha is 10.20% and in Western Vidarbha, it is 4.69%, in relation to rest of Maharashtra.

Along with agriculture, Komtis, Koshtis, Bhois, Malis and Telis have recently entered the service sector and trade, property dealing, hospitality and they also run wedding halls. The competition among these communities has now assumed religious shades resulting in a further Hindu-Muslim divide. Though the percentage of Muslims in the state is 9.3%, they are greater in number in districts of Vidarbha like Nagpur, Chandrapur, Akola and Amravati.

- **Politics**

The issue of development is the most crucial point in Vidarbha politics; an issue used to usurp power in politics. In 1956, a provision was made to establish an independent development board to look into the development of backward regions. These committees were to be special responsibilities of the Governor. However, in 1960, it was recommended that development boards be set up for all sections in Maharashtra, along with backward areas, thereby erasing the divide between developed and underdeveloped areas. For 34 years the leaders of Western Maharashtra prevented the formation of Statutory Development Boards (SDB) to help develop backward regions. And during this period, the SDB issue created chaos in Vidarbha politics.

Another bone of contention is the issue regarding the calculation of deficit since 1972. When the VM Dandekar Committee calculated the deficit in 1982, the payment was delayed by years. After 1992, deficit in nine sectors like the cooperative cloth mills, lending, etc., was presented but the deficit accumulated in sectors other than these was neglected. In 1992, Bhujangrao Kulkarni named 17 backward districts in Maharashtra, out of which eight districts were from Vidarbha. The president of the SDB, Madhavrao Jog rejected the recommendation of Bhujangrao Kulkarni to reserve 15% of the state planning scheme for backward districts as, according to him, instead of districts, the unit of measure had to be the 'Taluka'. A list of backward Talukas would be needed and the deficit would be paid after that. But no list of Talukas has been prepared as yet.

The deficit in Vidarbha meanwhile is constantly rising, denying development opportunities to the people. In 1982, the Dandekar Committee proposed a deficit of 39.22% for Vidarbha. In 1994, the Sensex and Deficit Committee suggested that it was 45.33%. In reversal, the deficit in Western Maharashtra has decreased.

A 33-point development programme for Vidarbha was declared by the BJP-Shiv Sena government in 1996. This Rs 2,700-crore-programme had given importance to canals, irrigation and roads. Large canal irrigation projects were begun by the BJP-Sena government, at a cost of about Rs 496.33 crores. The project involved completing 30 medium and 76 small canals but it remained incomplete. The government did not allocate funds to the Vidarbha Irrigation Board. The Congress and NCP governments had sanctioned Rs 400.48 crores in 2000-2001 as irrigation deficit, which has not been released. Between 1994 and 2001, Rs 480.40 crores has been overspent on irrigation in the rest of Maharashtra and the canal irrigation projects in Vidarbha have come to a standstill.

After 1980, urban areas saw significant acceleration in industrialization and services. A parallel economy grew in the urban and forest areas with an alarming rise in trade, hooliganism, ransom, the builder lobby and smuggling of forest products. The leaders in agriculture were toppled by those in the industrial and service sectors. As opportunities grew and money beckoned unemployed youth, cities expanded in the district and Taluka centres, and the BJP and Shiv Sena spread their tentacles in the urban and rural regions. It was difficult for the rich Marathas, Telis, Malis and Banjaras to retain the rural power centres, and their leaders did not have the vision to step away from the chaos. The Marathas here back the rich Marathas of Western Maharashtra and Marathwada, and hence oppose a separate Vidarbha. The movements that demanded a separate Vidarbha have not taken the Marathas into confidence, which proved to be a boon for the Shiv Sena as it enjoys support in Varhad that has Marathas as a majority.

Understanding this equation, the Shiv Sena has opposed the formation of a separate state. The BJP is influential in the non-Maharashtrian and tribal areas, which demand a separate state of Vidarbha, implying that the BJP supports its formation. The Mahar and Mang communities have an impressive presence in Vidarbha. The R S Gawai and Prakash Ambedkar factions are a part of the Dalit politics here. The BJP-Sena has formed a separate faction of Dalits who are non-Buddhists, by giving them a Hindu-Dalit identity. Dalit leadership is restricted to the caste, and the Congress, Sena-BJP have taken special efforts to minimize that

effect. Jambuvantrao Dhote compromised with the Shiv Sena; R S Gawai remained with Congress; and Prakash Ambedkar tried to multiply his fold by including the Other Backward Classes and Muslims along with the Dalits. As the Muslim community is divided on socio economic lines, Prakash Ambedkar was successful in getting a share in the Murtijapur and Patur Municipal Council, which is entirely dependent on the Muslim community.

The Congress was predominant in Vidarbha politics for a long time. Forming a broad front of interests in this region, it did not allow any party to be influential in Vidarbha's politics. Though the RSS had branches in Vidarbha, votes for the Jan Sangh were less than 8%. After 1985, the BJP-Shiv Sena' fight for local issues weakened the Congress foundation and garnered them a share in local self government. The RPI-Bahujan Mahasangh, Peasants Party and Bahujan Samaj Party form the third front of Vidarbha' politics. The third front is an option away from the Congress and BJP-Sena leadership. The RPI-Bahujan Mahasangh and Bahujan Samaj Party have entered the local self government of Akola, Amravati and Nagpur. Vidarbha's politics is thus divided between the Congress, the Shiv-Sena-BJP and the RPI-Bahujan Mahasangh and Bahujan Samaj party.

4.4.1 BOKARA

Area	: 460.72 hectares
Population	: 4704 (2001 census)
Literacy	: 90%
Taluka	: Nagpur
District	: Nagpur

4.4.1.1 Demography

Bokara grew around a stone mine in the 1880s. Miners and affiliated labour began living here as well. In 1940, Dajiba Mistri Kudavde built a stone well which had water throughout the year. Locals use the stone mined here to make kitchen utensils like jate and warwante, and idols of gods to sell in cities. There are 1274 BPL families here.

In 1972, the Maharashtra State Electricity Board (MSEB) built an electricity plant at Koradi, near Bokara, five to seven kilometers from Nagpur City. The plant became functional in 1980, providing employment to skilled and unskilled labour from Vidarbha and the rest of Maharashtra. The labourers eventually settled in the region, and housing and amenities like gardens, playgrounds and roads were provided for them in the colony built for the MSEB employees. The Bokara Grama Panchayat has middle-class localities like Sumati Nagar, Vidya Nagar, Tapovan Layout, Ganesh Nagari, Kolte Layout and Waghmare Layout (Godhani), as well as the original Bokara Village.

The original village of Bokara has about 300 households, with a population of approximately 1200 people. The Buddhists and the Beldars are the main castes here. The other families are made up of Matangs, Charmakars, Gounds, Thakurs and some OBCs. The Beldars have a strong political presence in the village.

4.4.1.2 Infrastructure

Since Bokara has no bus stop, its people have to walk some distance to catch buses. The nearest post office is in Koradi. However, the State Bank of India has a branch in Bokara. The village also has three temples and a Buddhavihar. Its internal roads are made of cement and the waste water is carried out through gutters. About 500 people have their own cell phones. Though the village does not have a library, it does have a community hall. Bokara has no ration shop. The thermal power generation centre at Koradi is close by. Bokara has a PHC sub-center. A total of 12 villages, including Gumarthi, Godhani, Gogali, and Belwada avail the facilities of

this PHC. Dr Gajbhiye and four residential nurses provide health services 24 hours a day. Facilities like an OPD, medicines, an ambulance, a jeep and bedding are available in the PHC which is also equipped for surgeries. Most people in the village avail of these facilities

The village has no water problem, as practically every family has a tap in the house. A water tank was built under the water scheme and water is distributed through taps. There are 9 public taps, 4 hand pumps, 4 public wells, 16 private wells and 16 private bore wells here. But there are no toilets in Bokara. Women have to walk to the fields to relieve themselves, which becomes a problem during the rains.

The sole hand pump in the Wadhwar community is the only drinking water source for them. They have to begin drawing water from it as early as 4 am. Open defecation is a common practice. The Grama Panchayat considers the Wadhwar to be illegal encroachers and refuses to take care of the community. They claim that whenever the village layout plan is implemented, the community will be removed from the village. Both boys and girls in the Wadhwar community marry early, at an average age of 15 years.

There are six schools in Bokara including a Zila Panchayat school which is up to Class Seven. The enrolment figure stands at 192, but the average attendance is 170-172. Children from the Wadhwar community often drop out because their families migrate out. They speak and understand Hindi, but the medium of instruction at the school is Marathi, and therefore, it is hard for them to sustain an interest in education.

Another school, Pragatik Madhyamik Vidyalay, is also government-aided. It has classes up to Class 12 and about 1100 students. Students of this school perform well in the board examinations. The MSEB has constructed 26 rooms for the school, for which it pays the Board a rent.

Bokara has two anganwadis as well. Nutritious diet and mid-day meals are provided in both the anganwadis.

In the last ten to fifteen years, five English medium international schools along with two engineering colleges and a hotel management college have been built in Bokara on village land. The villagers explain that though Bokara has been declared an 'educational zone', ironically, Bokara's own children have no access to the huge campuses, the modern buildings and the facilities. Some schools which stand on village land use the village's water and other resources, but do not pay the Grama Panchayat tax. While the villagers are proud of the fact that their land is benefiting education, they are angry as they have no access to it.

4.4.1.3 Livelihood

Half the villagers work as labourers at the power station and as construction workers in Nagpur. Some go to Nagpur and nearby villages to work as farm labourers. Soy beans, wheat and toor are the main crops of Bokara. Soy bean is cultivated on 60 to 70 hectares whereas toor is cultivated on 10 hectares. The total agricultural land is

600 hectares but only 70 hectares are actually under cultivation. Most women are engaged in household and farm-related work. Some also work as domestic help in the housing colonies nearby. Many people here have sold their farm lands and earned large sums of money, which have, in turn, led to a rise in vices and addictions. In fact, 30% of the men are alcoholics. Overall about seven to eight families in the village can be categorized as 'rich'.

4.4.1.4 Grama Panchayat

Chandrabhaga Domaji Awale is the Sarpanch of the Panchayat which has 13 members. Of the 13, eight are women. The last elections were held in 2007. The Jawahar Rojgar Yojana, the NRAP and the Dalit Wasti

Sudhar Yojana are some of the schemes at work. According to the Gramsevak, the Grama Panchayat bank account has about Rs 16,00,000/-. Since 2007, two Aamsabhas were held after a gap of six months. The Panchayat comprises of the original Bokara village, the Koradi Electric colony and the new middle class areas that have developed.

Since 1975-80, many educated people from outside joined the Koradi Electric Plant and began living in the colony. Soon their numbers were more than that of the original residents of the village. Later, retired people built homes in the layout and began participating in village politics. The Sarpanch for the period of 1997-2007 was a person from the colony. Even today, the Deputy Sarpanch lives in the colony. Compared to the village, more members from the colony and the layout are elected to the Panchayat. The people from the colony rarely visit the village. They carry out a large number of developmental works in the colony and the new settlements. According to Chandrabhaga Tai, this has resulted in the village remaining backward.

There is evident corruption in the functioning of the Panchayat, and funds are often left unused due to disputes between the two political groups in it.

4.4.1.5 Grama Sabhas

Around six or seven Grama Sabhas are organized in Bokara every year. An announcement is made in the village to declare the date and venue. It was observed that the announcement was made only in a few places, while some other areas were not informed of the meeting at all. As a result, the few people attending the meeting were largely upper class. The meeting was cancelled for a lack of quorum. When it was called again, the number of women present was quite large. Women talk about their problems in the Grama Sabha and express their opinions on the issues brought up by the Gramsevak, who sets the agenda.

The processes of planning and sanctioning are done by the Gramsevak and the Panchayat members. Members bring up the issues, which are then discussed. Sometimes the people do not approve of the Panchayat members' decisions and ask for further explanations.

Many Panchayat members belong to the Beldar community. They participate vocally in all the discussions taking place. The Grama Sabha is a medium for people-centric development because it is the only platform for bringing up issues that affect the village, for solving the people's problems and conducting social programmes.

- **Mahila Grama Sabha**

The woman Sarpanch of Bokara is completely unaware of the concept of the Mahila Grama Sabha. So a Mahila Grama Sabha did not take place in Bokara during 2006-07. While the women said that they were never informed about it, the Sarpanch says that the women do not come for meetings. Only 25 to 30 women were present for a Mahila Grama Sabha which was organized once. They talked about issues like water, sanitary latrines and village development. Most women are not aware that 10% of the funds in the Panchayat are meant for women and child welfare. However, the new Panchayat members seem to be aware of it and used the fund to hold a Haldi-kumkum gathering.

The three or four Mahila Mandals in the village limit themselves to financial activities and there is no NGO to help empower women or create political awareness. Liquor is not banned in Bokara and it has many liquor shops. Women had tried to organize themselves around the issue of alcoholism, but the sale of liquor went on. The police personnel who came to ban liquor accepted money from the shop owners and took no action. There is no organization in Bokara that can take up this issue. Though women have been elected as members of the Panchayat, the true players are the men from their families or political parties.

- **Liquor in Bokara**

There is just one liquor shop inside Bokara but nearly half the men are addicted to alcohol, the habit being more prevalent among the Beldars. About 2 km from Bokara, liquor is easily available and there are about eight beer bars en route to Bokara. Two years ago, an outsider started selling country liquor in the village, but women from the Beldar and Buddhist families came together, broke the shop down and closed his business.

- **CBOs**

There are five SHGs, a youth group, a Mahila Mandal and a Bhajani Mandal in Bokara. They have no relations with the Panchayat and none of the women from the above groups attend the Grama Sabha. Very few of them attend the meetings to discuss their problems. Savitribai Phule, Prerana and Jagdamba SHGs have been formed. Most of the SHGs do not function smoothly. The women are yet to receive any kind of training. No effort has been made to initiate any programmes or income generation activity. Girijabai Awale played a leading role when the SHGs were being formed. Women contribute about Rs 30/- to Rs 50/- every month through the SHG and float a loan in the group. They conduct meetings every month.

There are two committees as well, a Water Distribution and Sanitation Committee, and a Construction Committee. They were formed through the Grama Sabha and include members of Panchayat. The Water Committee keeps a close watch on water management, while the Construction Committee looks at gutters and road related work.

4.4.1.6 Women in Politics

There are eight female members in Bokara Grama Panchayat, including the Sarpanch Chandrabhaga Tai. Chandrabhaga, an activist from the SC community with the Republican Party of India, has taken part in morchas, Melavas and seminars in the past. She formed SHGs and contested Grama Panchayat elections in 2006 in an apolitical way, but lost. Her son, a BJP karyakarta, opposed her. Later, when the post was reserved for an SC candidate, Chandrabhaga again stood for the elections and won.

She constructed a cement road, gutters and put up street lights in the Dalit community. She also conducted a Melava for women and an eye check-up camp for women. In case of an emergency, Chandrabhaga Tai's response is quick and immediate. She keeps a close watch on the facilities provided by the PHC and the ZP school. She gets due respect from the community, but has opponents among men of the upper castes. She accuses the Beldars and Kunbis of troubling her as she is an SC. She routinely faces everything from having electric lines and water connections cut, to having her signature forged on Panchayat Samiti papers, the destruction of papers about meetings, withholding information and creating a ruckus during meetings. An ex-Sarpanch, Jaydev Kudavale, once abused her during a meeting. When she approached the police, they refused to register any complaint and threatened her son and her instead. The casteism that she faces also operates at another level, when the water supply is delayed or the streets are unclean and the drainage is choked, people come and fight with her at home. She feels that Beldar and Kunbi Sarpanches do not face the same wrath on such occasions. Compared to other women Sarpanches, Chandrabhaga Tai seems more empowered and with greater political know-how. However, interference from her son and his control over her curtail her ability to function independently.

Vrushali, the Upsarpanch and belongs to an educated family, which is supportive of her work. She is supported by the Congress. Another Panchayat member, Anita Bhalerao, was supported by the BJP. She insisted on using the 10% of the Panchayat funds reserved for women and children for a Haldi-kumkum programme, which was planned in great detail during the Grama Panchayat monthly meeting. Invitation cards

were printed and distributed to each household in Bokara. Around 500 women attended the function. The local MLA and members of the ZP were among the special guests. Speeches were made encouraging women to expand their spaces and participate in the Grama Panchayat. The Upsarpanch and some other Panchayat members felt that the expenditure was unnecessary. They said that the programme was conducted by a political party, and not the women. Apart from Panchayat funds, money had been taken from the MLA for the occasion.

Anita Tai was motivated by Vitthal Bhalerao and a few others from the village to contest elections. When she became a member of the Panchayat, she attended the training for the Employment Guarantee Scheme. She also participated in a course at the Savitribai Phule Academy of the MRA. Anita feels that political dynamics affect her work and would rather not contest elections again, but would like continue with her social work.

4.4.1.7 Political Parties and the Power Structure

The political environment of Bokara has changed from a time when it leaned towards the Shiv Sena and the Nationalist Congress Party. Today, the Congress and the BJP are dominant, and the power centers have shifted. Many more common people have entered politics through the Grama Panchayat. No more is power solely in the hands of political parties.

While the Nationalist Congress was influential from 1997 to 2002, the Congress was dominant from 2003 to 2007. During the ZP elections, Aarati Balsaraf (the former Sarpanch) withdrew from the elections to promote the name of her daughter (Kunda Raut). She was also under pressure from her political party. Finally, Kunda Tai won the elections. The present Sarpanch of Bokara is a BJP person and the Upsarpanch is a Congress person. There are six people with BJP affiliations and seven with Congress affiliations among the Panchayat members. A few of them are in power due to their political parties, while some are powerful because of the support of the local MLA, Chandrashekhar Bavankule.

The BJP, Congress and Nationalist Congress Party are very active here, with the BJP and the Congress being dominant in the Grama Panchayat. Panchayat members affiliated to the Congress discuss matters with Kunda Raut before every Panchayat meeting and take her advice, while the BJP members seek advice of the MLA. Members of the two political parties in the Panchayat often have strong differences of opinion. The Sarpanch is supported by the MLA who belongs to her party, the BJP, and the other Panchayat members are supported by the Congress.

Meetings are organized by different political parties before the selection of candidates for the elections. Apart from posters, pamphlets, loud speakers and door-to-door visits by candidates, there were parties with non-vegetarian food and liquor during the campaigning. But there were no cases of violence during the election.

4.4.1.8 Issue Mapping

- **Alcoholism**

Liquor is easily available in Bokara and most men are addicted to it. This leads invariably to domestic violence. With land being sold at high prices, men do nothing but drink the whole day. Women suffer due to this as they are the only ones working on the farms. There has been no organized effort to ban liquor in the village. Women say that they are ready to intervene, but they need help and guidance from an outside agency.

- **Sanitary Latrines**

Santarapur has no sanitary latrines and this leads to many problems for the women of the locality. They have to use the open area alongside the road. Since they can only do that early in the morning or late at night, they have to control their bodily functions throughout the day. No effort has been made to build toilets for the community.

4.4.2 JAMUNNALA

Population : 290
Taluka : Chikhaldara
District : Amravati

4.4.2.1 Demography

Jamunnala's population is largely Adivasi, belonging to the Korku tribe. Of its 44 households, only one belongs to the Gond community.

4.4.2.2 Infrastructure

Three buses pass Jamunnala every day and the bus stop is one km away from the village. A few private jeeps run in the day time, but no buses or jeeps come here after 6.30 pm. Most of the village houses are made of locally available material. Every household has electricity, but Jamunnala has no street lights. The only house with a toilet is the Upsarpanch's, Fulma Belsare's house. Her family and two others have their own two wheelers. Three families have TVs and two have CD players. Eight to ten families have radios. Women in Jamunnala do not watch much TV or listen to the radio often.

An NGO, 'Gale World Vision India' had built a crèche in the village which is lying locked. They also brought two big water tanks and positioned them near the school. Because of problems with the electric motor, these cannot be used. Since 2004, a few projects were completed under the watershed development scheme.

There is no PHC in this village. An anganwadi teacher provides medicines for fever and cough. For further medical treatment, people go to Chikhaldara, Paratwada or Amravati. If the situation of the patient worsens, a private doctor is called from Paratwada by phone. Vaccinations like the polio dose and the BCG are easily available. Earlier, there was no practice of seeing a doctor, since the Korkus are well aware of the medicinal and herbal plants available in the forests and have been using them for generations. Before they see the doctor, even today, they see the bhagat first. A nurse visits Jamunnala and provides medicines and health services to pregnant women. Most of the women call a local Dai for deliveries.

There are no cases of female feticide in this village. One of the reasons for this is that according to Korku customs, a bride is given dowry by the groom on getting married. The age of consent for a girl is 12, and once they are married, the groom goes to the bride's house and lives with his in-laws.

Jayju Wasudevrao Khadke, an anganwadi teacher, works in the only anganwadi in Jamunnala. She is from Chikhaldara Churgi, but she lives here with her family. The anganwadi was established in 2004. According to the new plan, local SHGs can take the responsibility of providing mid-day meals to the anganwadi. But the SHGs are not ready to come forward. Jayju Tai also dispenses medicines for minor ailments.

Jamunnala has a primary school, but students have to go to Salona and Chikhaldara for further education. Salona has a school up to Class 12. Most Korku children simply prefer to drop out and work on the farm or in the house instead. The language of instruction also proves to be a stumbling block. Sometimes the teacher has to walk to the child's house to fetch him to class. Children are given biscuits and eggs once a month.

The ZP school in Jamunnala was opened in 1991 and has two teachers who teach students from Class 1 to Class 4. Ganga, the daughter of the Upsarpanch, Fulma Tai, is the first girl from Jamunnala to have studied till Class 12. Following her example, many more children are pursuing education in towns while living in the hostels. But there are also girls and boys who have left school and are engaged in household work and farm

work. Some of them go to graze cattle and collect forest produce from the nearby jungle. The school has committees like the Gramshikshan Samiti, the Female Parents committee, and the Parents-Teachers Committee.

4.4.2.3 Livelihood

Being Adivasis from the Melghat area, the Korkus are dependent on the nearby forests, and they have more rights on them than any other villagers. Korkus get half their income from forest produce like mahua, hirda, tarof (charoli), tembhurni, amla and jamun. They also get vegetables like salgari, bumbdi, bhambda, chawdi, chamkura in the rainy season. They make bidis out of the leaves of the Tembhurni and sell jamuns for Rs 60/- to 70/- per bag in the months of June and July. Though the Adivasis have also been cultivating land for some years, they do not own it, and agriculture was never their main source of livelihood. Therefore, they look out for other income sources.

They sell the above on designated market days in Chikhaldara and Paratwada. The few who own land grow jawar, soy beans, bajri, moong, wheat and kutki. While about four farmers have wells on their farms, the rest depend on the monsoons. A few farmers buy fresh seed every year, while others save some for sowing the following year. Apart from agriculture, most of the people also keep hens, goats and cattle to add to their income.

People in Jamunnala wake up around 4 am, and the women fetch water from the hand pump, clean the house with cow dung, cook for the entire family and then go to the farm or the forest. Men water the cattle and take them for grazing in the jungle. Both men and women drink in the evenings.

4.4.2.4 Grama Panchayat

Jamunnala is a part of a Group Grama Panchayat which includes Bori, Kamapur, Jamunnala and Jamlivan villages. The Grama Panchayat office is in Jamliwan, 4 km away from Jamunnala. There are seven members in the Panchayat. The total annual income of the Jamunnala village is about Rs 10,000/-. People have to go all the way to Chikhaldara for any work with the Panchayat Samiti. And since the officials of the Panchayat Samiti are available only on Mondays, people have to wait until Monday to get work done. Rajkumar Patel is the local MLA. The Gramsevak does not visit Jamunnala regularly.

4.4.2.5 Grama Sabhas

Grama Sabhas are organized four times a year. People are informed about the Grama Sabha meetings through the public announcements. Most men are present for the Grama Sabha meetings. The discussions are fairly robust, so much so that there are fights too at times. People decide the agenda of the meeting and feel that the Grama Sabha is important as it is the only space where they learn about the different government schemes. Very few women attend the Grama Sabha. A Grama Sabha was held at Jamlivan on January 26, which was attended by about 15 to 20 women and 35 to 40 men, along with seven women from Jamunnala. Women sat away from the platform where the men discussed matters and they could not hear a thing. The issues discussed were drinking water, construction of a road from the main road to the village, electricity and load shedding, and the sanction of a school in the village to study beyond Class 5.

- **Mahila Grama Sabha**

Earlier, there were no Mahila Grama Sabhas. However, since Fulma Tai came to power, the Mahila Grama Sabha is held regularly. They have discussed issues like the need for toilet blocks and roads, and have started working on a plan for the construction of public toilets.

- **CBOs**

When a few missionaries had adopted Jamunnala some years back, they helped form the SHGs here. In Jamunnala, each SHG's meeting is called once a month. Chanda Belsare takes care of the organization of the SHG meetings and is present for all the meetings. They conduct a cleanliness drive every month, in which all the villagers take part. Sports like langdi and kho-kho are organized for the women. Korkus are very fond of dancing and perform their traditional dances like danda and jagra set to traditional songs during weddings and festivals like Holi and Ashadhi Ekadashi.

The Mahila Arthik Vikas Mahamandal (MAVIM) works in Jamunnala through the four SHGs here—the Ambadevi Mahila Bachatgat, the Swagat Bachatgat, the Durga Mahila Bachatgat and the Gangamaiyya Bachatgat. Ambadevi and Swagat are connected to MAVIM and received a loan of Rs 90,000/- with which they bought two goats for each woman in the group. They paid back the loan in time. MAVIM also trains the SHGs—they have even received Panchayat Raj training. Members of the Ambadevi SHG have been trained in the making and marketing of phenyl. They could not run the initiative for a long due the various dynamics of the market.

As a special scheme, MAVIM has approved, planned and budgeted for the construction of sanitary toilets.

4.4.2.6 Women in Politics

There are two women in this Group Grama Panchayat. Fulma Tai is the Upsarpanch from Jamunnala, while Shitay Kasdekar is from a nearby village called Bori. Both of them are Korkus.

Fulma Tai enjoys the strong backing of the women of her village—something that led her to contest elections. She is also the president of an SHG called the Ambadevi Bachatgat. Fulma Tai hoists the flag on independence and republic days.

- **MRA Intervention**

The MRA has been working in Jamunnala for the past two years. Initially they conducted a two-day workshop for men and women to increase their awareness about the Grama Sabha. Presently the focus of their work here is to solve women's problems through the Grama Panchayat. The Upsarpanch of the village, Fulma Tai, represents the best outcome of MRA's work here. She is enthusiastic, efficient and more active than the Sarpanch. With the help of MRA activists and the training she has had, she has learned quite a lot about Panchayat processes and has proved herself an effective leader of the village. She is not literate but has learned to be assertive and independent.

4.4.2.7 Political Parties and the Power Structure

The Upsarpanch, Fulma Belsare, is more active than Motilal Belsare of Kamapur, who is the Sarpanch of this Group Grama Panchayat. Neither liquor, nor money nor violence was used during the last elections. One can sense the cultural encroachment of the Hindutva movement in the region with more houses—including that of Fulma Tai—having photographs of Hindu deities like Shankar and Ganapati, a practice that is not traditionally Adivasi.

- **Issue Mapping**

Since the residents belong to the same community, there are no communal tensions here. Fulma Tai was elected as the Upsarpanch of the Group Grama Panchayat in 2005. The male Sarpanch had to resign after he had had a third child so Fulma Tai has been the acting Sarpanch for the last two years. She was handling both responsibilities when she joined the MRA.

- **Power Centres**

The political power centres of Jamunnala are Fulma Belsare, the Police Patil, an activist of the NGO called World Vision, and the Shiv Sena. The economic power centres are Fulma Belsare and activists of the Congress, while the social power centres are the anganwadi worker, the principal of the school, SHGs, MRA, CBOs, and the NGO activist. The religious power centres are senior citizens and Bhajani Mandals.

4.4.3 KUSUMKOT

Area	: 518.86 hectares
Population	: 2567
Taluka	: Dharni
District	: Amravati

4.4.3.1 Demography

Kusumkot is 3 km from Dharni, the market centre for nearby villages. The number of voters here was 1129 in 2005 and it is 1200 at present. The original inhabitants of the village are Korkus and Nihals (STs). Though precise dates are not available, it has been estimated that the Malviyas (from Malva in Madhya Pradesh), Muslims and others migrated here between 100 to 200 years ago. Currently Kusumkot consists of a mixed population of Hindus, Muslims, Korkus and Bauddhas. They mark Moharram and celebrate Navratri, Ganpati, Pola and Holi together. The Korku also celebrate Moharram. There are three wards here—most Muslim families live in ward No 1, Korku families live in ward No 2, and a few Hindu, Muslim and Bauddha families live in ward No 3. People speak Urdu, Korku, Gondi, Marathi, Hindi and Bhalai.

4.4.3.2 Infrastructure

Kusumkot has a post office, two flour mills and six grocery shops. It has one STD booth, a beauty parlour and three tailoring shops. People have cars and scooters/motorbikes. The houses are made of cement and most are two-storied. Kusumkot has a temple and a mosque. Three buses stop here every day. Most of Kusumkot's cultural programmes and meetings are conducted in the hall built by the Grama Panchayat.

A tarred road—built under the Employment Guarantee Scheme—connects Kusumkot to Dharni. But it does not reach the end of the village. The beginnings of ward Nos. 1 and 2 have tarred roads. Street lights are seen on a few roads only. The village has electricity (95% households), phones, and TVs, apart from appliances like CD players. Most places have proper gutters.

Kusumkot has a PHC sub-center with a nurse who lives in the village itself. A private clinic called 'Dayasagar' is run by missionaries. It has facilities for admitting patients and conducting deliveries. A vaccination programme is carried out every month. Polio and BCG vaccines are given from time to time. Patients are sent to the main PHC at Kalamkhar for further medical services and in emergencies. All the maternity health services are provided through the PHC—from registering pregnant women to providing medical care to the child till it is six years old. Most children are delivered with the help of a Dai and the nurse. In case of any complications during the delivery, women are sent to Kalamkhar. Under the 'Matrutva Scheme', ST women are given Rs 400/- per child up to the third child. The 'Janani Suraksha Yojana' began in March, 2006. Women living below the poverty line are given money for the delivery—Rs 500/- if it takes place at home, Rs 700/- if it takes place in the hospital, and Rs 2200/- if there is a C-section.

Kusumkot Village has two schools—a ZP Marathi school and a ZP Urdu school. Both teach students up to Class 7, and students have to go to Dharni for further education. The Marathi school has separate toilets for

girls and boys, a large playground, seven classrooms and 9 teachers. Students up to Class 5 are given khichadi, alu-bhat, barbate and moong-bhat at mealtimes. Once a month, they are given biscuits, eggs and bananas. The school has a big playground. Tribal girls are taught handicrafts as well. An annual health check up is conducted of the 151 boys and 137 girls in the school. Each girl gets Re 1/- for every day that she attends school as an incentive. The campus is clean and the school has planted many trees.

The Urdu school is in the same campus as the Marathi school. Though the schools share a common playground and flag-hoisting ceremony, their prayer services and toilets are separate. Because of a shortage of space, two classes are held in one room. The school has four teachers and children up to Class 5 get eggs, bananas and biscuits. Dr Khalil runs a night school under the 'Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan' which is open to people of all religions. Sunita Patel, the wife of the MLA Rajkumar Patel, has started an English-medium school for tribal children and the very poor for a fee of Rs 50/- per month.

Two out of Kusumkot's three wards have anganwadis. The anganwadis receive Rs 10,000/- for providing health services to pregnant women and children. A number of pregnant women, children and adolescent girls are registered here, and they are given a nutritious diet, mid-day meals, tonics and other supplements. Individuals and SHGs cook food here. Anganwadi teachers get Rs 2000/- as an honorarium and assistants get Rs 1200/-. Their job is also to create awareness regarding sanitation, superstitions, family planning and nutrition. A Mothers' Meeting is held here every fortnight.

There are water connections throughout the village. In some places, there are public taps, while a few people have private connections. The connections are attached to a 2500-litre water tank built under the 'Jalaswarajya' scheme. There are two hand pumps, of which one is in ward No 2 and the other is in the school. Taps are kept open only for half an hour every day, which is not sufficient for the village. The Panchayat has received Rs 5,00,000/- from the MLA fund towards building a new tank.

4.4.3.3 Livelihood

Most people in Kusumkot are farmers who grow cotton, wheat, jowar and moong. They send their farm produce to the Taluka to sell. Nearly 25% of the income is spent on the transportation of goods. Friday is a market day in Dharni where people take their produce to sell and buy essentials. About 50% of the villagers have hens, goats and cattle. Some people here work as thekedars or small contractors. A few have their own grocery shops. At Dayasagar, the missionaries run a tailoring class at a charge of Rs 50/- per month.

4.4.3.4 Grama Panchayat

The Grama Panchayat of Kusumkot was established in 1965 by K G Habibi, who was the Sarpanch from that year till 1984. Rukhmabai Bhilavekar is the current Sarpanch. Because this is her first time in the post, she has very little idea of the workings of the Panchayat. The Upsarpanch, Mustaq Ahmed Kadar, is also newly elected but has had some experience of working in Kusumkot. Owing to politics relating to different communities in the village, the local dynamics are very complex.

The Gramsevak, R G Rabde, visits five villages a week and comes to Kusumkot every Monday and Friday. He reported that in 2006-2007, a road was constructed under the 'Sampurna Grameen Swayamrojjar Yojana'. In 2007-2008, a cemetery was built at an expense of Rs 30,000/-. At the same time, the second anganwadi was renovated at a cost of Rs 4200/-. No programme for women has been conducted for the past two and a half years. The Panchayat members and the Gramsevak work together, and the villagers are on good terms with their Gramsevak.

4.4.3.5 Grama Sabha

Very few people attend the Grama Sabha. The announcement for the Grama Sabha is made by a notice which is put up at a public place ten days before the meeting. The participation of the Korku and other

economically-backward people in the Grama Sabha is less because attending it would mean the loss of a day's wage. Almost no women participate in the Grama Sabha. When asked why this was so, they said that the work at home and on the farm consumed all of their time. The Mahila Grama Sabha is organized before the Grama Sabha, but barely 15 or 20 women participate in the meeting and discussion.

There is no ban on liquor in Kusumkot. In fact, there is a liquor shop in the village. People say that the shop owner has a license and that no one can shut it.

- **CBOs**

The committees which are a part of the Panchayat are the Education Committee, the Tanta Mukti Committee and the Three Members' Committee. An Aamsabha was held to select the members of the Education and Tanta Mukti Committees. The Tanta Mukti Committee has resolved more than 15 cases. There is also a Vishakha Committee to make sure that the children in the Anganwadis get a proper nutritional diet on time. Undernourished children are identified and cured with the help of the clinic.

There are 16 SHGs in Kusumkot, like the Savitribai Phule, the Saraswati, the Gangasagar, the Gulshan, the Manzil, the Ekta and the Muskan SHGs, among others. There is also a Mahan Men's SHG. The SHGs have no influence on the Panchayat. The SHGs work efficiently, though their meetings are not held regularly.

4.4.3.6 Issue Mapping

Locals say there is no communal tension in the village though it has a heterogeneous population. However, there are cases of disputes between a few families.

- **MRA Intervention**

The MRA has recently begun its work in Kusumkot. The Sarpanch, Rukhmabai, has shown great interest in being trained by the MRA. She is in touch with Kalpana Khirale, the DO of the MRA in Amravati and Fulma Belsare, the TO of the MRA in Chikhaldara.

4.4.3.7 Women in Politics

For the first time since its inception, the village Panchayat has a woman Sarpanch—Rukhmabai Bhilavekar. In fact, currently there are three more female members in the Panchayat—Jyoti Dnyaneshwar Kanekar and Jashodabai Sawaru Bhilavekar. In 2003, the Panchayat had three female members. All the current members were elected for the first time and most belong to the Korku community. All reported considerable support from their families. On January 26, the Mahila Sarpanch hoisted the flag and other female members too participated in the ceremony. Rukhmabai said that her work suffered because of her lack of knowledge of the working of the Panchayat. But she is slowly trying to understand these things.

Rukhmabai is the head of her family and her husband consults her before taking decisions. Her niece who lives with her helps her with the Panchayat-related work, as Rukhmabai cannot read or write, and can only sign. She reports that she has a few opponents, for instance the husband of one of the members, Jashodabai. During a Panchayat meeting, he began to abuse people. When Rukhmabai asked him to leave, he got angry and has been campaigning against her by trying to use the no-confidence motion against her.

Since her daughter and niece do the household work, Rukhmabai is free to go out to the ZP whenever required for her official work. Since becoming the Sarpanch, she is yet to take up a developmental initiative or programme. She wishes to have the school grow to Class 12. Rukhmabai and other female Panchayat members do go to their farms, though there is no specific income from agriculture. Most of them are not yet trained and are diffident about speaking in public.

Another socially active woman in the village is Jarina Sultana who belongs to the Dawoodi Bohra community. She is the only Muslim woman to have participated actively in politics and become a ZP member. Though currently she is not into politics, she is certainly empowered. Her father Kamruddin Jama is unwell, and so she has currently stopped being too active in village works. She has got two degrees- a BA and an M Com. She could have taken up a government job, but she stayed behind to take care of her father and started a fabric business. She became socially active and stood for the ZP elections. There are more Muslim voters in Kusumkot and so the Shetkari Sanghatana wanted an active Muslim woman who was in the know of local politics. Jarina Bai's father was once the Sarpanch and had good relations with the Shetkari Sanghatana. He is one of the wealthiest people in Kusumkot and owns a large home and farm land. When they asked him if she could stand for the elections, he refused initially but gave in later. When Jarina returned from Amravati, she campaigned and won by 300 votes. She was the youngest member of the ZP, and quickly understood the working of the ZP and the Shetkari Sanghatana. She could also figure out the loopholes in the system and throughout her career, she addressed many important issues like education and modernization. She says that while all the men she encountered in politics have behaved well, there are a few who think that women are not suitable political candidates. Her father said that he never followed his religion's restrictions when it came to his daughter.

4.4.3.8 Status of Women in Different Communities

The different communities of Kusumkot give their women differing levels of freedom.

- **Malviyas**

Women of the Malviya community are confined to doing household work. Since they are usually well off, women do not need to work to run their homes. Servants from the Nihal community do their physical labour like drawing water from the well. Married women do not step out of the house, and there is no reason to visit the Grama Panchayat (as they do not need Ration Cards or job Cards). At the recommendation of Jashodabai, they had begun an SHG, which was dissolved within a month.

- **Muslims**

Many of the people in Kusumkot are Muslims. While a few are well off, the majority are poor. Women belonging to poor families go out to draw water from the well and even work in the farms. Most Muslims here are Sunnis except for Jarina Sultana's family, who are Dawoodi Bohras. The only the public spaces open to Muslim women are the SHG Meetings.

- **Adivasis (STs)**

Almost all the women of this community work as labourers to support their families. In Kusumkot many people have agricultural land and need labourers. Women labourers in Kusumkot get between Rs 30/- to Rs 40/- every day, while men get Rs 50/-. The health of these women is of great concern, as some tribal women are probably involved with prostitution and might be HIV+. There might be cases of HIV-related deaths which have gone undetected since the Adivasis go to Bhagats rather than to doctors.

4.4.3.9 Power Centres in Kusumkot

The Political Power Centres of Kusumkot are L V Malwiya, the NCP, the Congress, the BJP, the Shiv Sena and the local MLA. The Economic Power Centres are the ZP members, L V Malwiya, the Muslim community, the shop owners and contractors. The social power centres are the Muslim and Malwiya communities, the CBOs, the clinics, the anganwadis and the DRDA.

- **People in Power**

Four of the Panchayat members belong to the NCP and the rest to the Congress. The NCP and the Congress are both dominant at present.

4.4.4 MANEGAON

Area	: 903.48 hectares
Population	: 2886
Taluka	: Bhandara
District	: Nagpur

4.4.4.1 Demography

More famous than Manegaon is its nearest neighbour Ambhora, where a confluence of five rivers draws many devotees. The total land under cultivation in Manegaon is 682.20 hectares and it has 61 landless farmers. The Gavthan (or residential) area is 45.02 hectares. The forest area is 33.20 hectares. 97 farmers own less than 5 acres of land and 529 farmers own more than 5 acres of land.

4.4.4.2 Infrastructure

There are buses every half an hour from Bhandara to Ambhora and they stop at Manegaon en route. Local jeeps and six-seaters provide additional transportation services. The village has tarred roads. There are private phones in the village. Manegaon has five temples, one Buddhavihar and a post office. The Manegaon public library has won the Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar award for having a diverse collection of about 10,000 books.

There are three kerosene shops, two hotels and a ration shop. Under the Antyodaya scheme, 47 beneficiaries are selected and they get 20 kg rice and 15 kg wheat. Two beneficiaries are also selected under the Annapurna scheme. Widows in the village get 10 kg rice. There are 96 BPL cards in the village, which entitle the holder to 20 kg rice and 15 kg wheat on the card, depending on the availability of the stock. Manegaon has five public wells, five private wells, five hand pumps and two bore wells. Water supply is connected through the nearby river. There are 150 private taps and 21 public taps in this village.

One government hospital, one veterinary hospital and one private hospital serve Manegaon. It also has a PHC sub-center, with two nurses and a doctor. Most patients here have Chickenguniya and Malaria. The veterinary doctor is available from Monday to Friday and he also visits nearby villages.

Manegaon has a primary school and a junior college. All the teachers, three women and two men, come from elsewhere. The school has less than 200 students, no computer facilities, and no laboratory either. It has a playground and separate toilets for boys and girls. The college has around 900 students, equal numbers of girls and boys. It has seven computers and a laboratory for science projects. The rate of success in the college examinations is about 60%. There are two anganwadis in the village which were established in 1995. They have two teachers and quite a few children.

4.4.4.3 Grama Panchayat

The last elections to this Grama Panchayat were held in August 2005. Of its 9 members, four are women. The Sarpanch is Nathu Bante and the Upsarpanch is Hiramani Gangruji Nivarte. The Grama Panchayat is open on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. The Grama Panchayat office is housed in a building that is in good condition and the office has seating arrangements, a loudspeaker and a poster giving information about the MRA.

4.4.4.4 Grama Sabha

Grama Sabhas are held six times a year. Occasionally, an immediate Grama Sabha is organized for making urgent decisions. The Gramsevak and the Panchayat members decide on the agenda of the Grama Sabha meeting and read it out. Women's participation in Panchayat meetings is low. People who are very poor do not attend the Grama Sabha as they cannot afford to lose a day's wage. The Grama Sabha is a space that works as a tool for people-centric development. Here women can freely talk about their problems (like the water issue)—especially if there is a Mahila Sarpanch. In Manegaon however, the Sarpanch's seat is not reserved for a woman and the Sarpanch is a man.

Though people are informed of the Grama Sabha by public announcement, they prefer not to attend it. They do attend Grama Sabhas when the names of families in the BPL list are being identified. The MRA Taluka Coordinator and other activists attend the Grama Sabha meetings here.

The working body of the Panchayat sends a proposal for drawing government schemes to the village and this proposal is discussed in the Grama Sabha, where it is approved after discussion. Sometimes, schemes are met by opposition as well. Around 75% of the village is present while discussing government schemes. Ultimately, Grama Sabha makes the decision after listening to the entire discussion. But people are not very involved in the planning process, which is handled by the Panchayat members.

- **Mahila Grama Sabha**

Earlier, the Mahila Grama Sabha never used to take place. When Rita Sukhdeve, who is now a Taluka Sanghatika of the MRA, was a member of the Panchayat, she was not aware of it either. However, since her training with the MRA and its work here, Mahila Grama Sabhas are held regularly. Most women, SHGs, and Mahila Mandals do attend the Grama Sabha. They discuss issues relating to SHGs, drinking water, sanitary latrines and government schemes.

Women were not aware that 10% of the Panchayat funds were allocated for them and therefore it was never spent. But post regular meetings with the MRA, women are now aware of the 10% fund and its utilization. First, they demanded—through the MRA—that the fund be allotted for a Mahila Melava, and it was approved by the Grama Sabha too.

The Gramsevak of Manegaon (and three other villages) attends monthly meetings of the Grama Sabha. Though the people are not happy with him, the Panchayat members say that he gives them all the required information.

- **CBOs**

Manegaon has a Construction Committee, a Health Committee, a Village Water and Sanitation Committee, a Dakshata Samiti, a Yashvant Gramsamruddhi Yojana, and a Tanta Mukti Samiti. All of the above committees are formed at Grama Sabha meetings. Anyone in the village—including Panchayat members—can join a committee. Most committees in Manegaon are very active.

The SHGs, Mahila Mandals, Natya Mandal and Bhajani Mandal are the important CBOs here in Manegaon. It has 24 SHGs and two Mahila Mandals. Women in SHGs actively participate in the Panchayat, and so have influence on the Panchayat's working. But they do not put any kind of pressure on the Panchayat. SHGs have undergone training in cattle-rearing under the Jalaswarajya project and a few started a dairy business. The Dhanashree SHG experimented with cooperative farming. The Pragati SHG cooks daily meals for the children in the anganwadi. Around 16 SHGs were formed with the objective of making women economically independent and to motivate them towards social work. They function efficiently. The work was initiated by a member of MAVIM in Manegaon. After they realized the advantages of SHGs, women decided to organize themselves into different groups.

Gradually, they also began participating in Panchayat meetings. The Taluka Coordinator of the MRA also created awareness regarding the Mahila Grama Sabha. Today, the women easily handle economic transactions in their SHGs. They have started their own businesses grocery shops, farm business and cattle rearing, by taking loans from banks.

The village's Tanta Mukti Committee has helped ease the alcohol problem. Though officially, there is prohibition in Manegaon, illicit liquor continues to be brewed in the village. With Dalit women leading the movement, 10 to 12 women picketed the shops and broke the tubes and balloons that stored the liquor. They called the police and compelled them to take action. Parvata Badirat Nivarte and Rita Tai of the Tanta Mukti Committee decided to try and stop the sale and the use of liquor in the village. They decided to fine a person who was found to be drunk Rs 251/- and to give Rs 100/- to anyone who identified a drunkard. When this decision was strictly implemented, the Panchayat collected about Rs 6500/- in just 2 months. Later, 50 men and 30 women collectively searched for points where alcohol was being sold illegally, collected their cans and equipment and made a bonfire of it in front of the Panchayat. People caught selling liquor were fined Rs 1000/-. By organizing the villagers under the active leadership of the women, liquor has been completely banned from Manegaon.

- **MRA Intervention**

Rita Sukhdeve (Taluka Organizer, MRA) was the first woman from Manegaon to get in touch with the MRA. She has participated in many of the MRA's programmes, seminars and morachas. Earlier, her husband used to drink and beat her every day. He did not want her to participate in these programmes, but with some training and the strategies taught by the MRA, she became assertive. She also managed to bring peace to her house. She soon became the Sarpanch of the village. After having successfully banned liquor from the village, Rita Tai's next mission is to rid the village of gambling.

Yogita Yograj Niborte is one of the Panchayat members. She belongs to a family which has been in politics for many years. Initially she had difficulties understanding the political dynamics in the village. But with the support of her family and training by the MRA, she has learned a lot about the Panchayat. She is planning to organize a melava for women in her village using 10% of the Panchayat funds which are meant for women and child welfare. She and her mother-in-law both regularly attend Panchayat meetings.

Soon after Rita Tai encountered the MRA, she realized that the women of the Panchayat were not well-trained or confident about handling Panchayat work. Therefore, she started training them by teaching them about their rights, giving them GRs to read, and organizing workshops for them. At a Grama Sabha, they demanded that 10% of the Panchayat funds be used for women. The Sarpanch at that time refused to do so but relented when the women showed him the GR. The money was spent on a melava for the women. The women decided to open a branch of MRA in Manegaon and asked the Grama Panchayat to provide funds for its inauguration. All the participants at the opening were given information about the Panchayat, the MRA's objectives and its importance. Women collectively decided to come forward and take up all issues concerning the village.

MRA activists took up the issue of alcoholism in Manegaon and made every effort to ban it. They also encouraged women to participate in the Tanta Mukti Committee formed by Grama Panchayat. Today, people in this village approach MRA activists for problems or disputes in the village.

4.4.4.5 Political Parties and the Power Structure

The Shiv Sena and the NCP are dominant in Manegaon, though the BJP, RPI and Congress are also active. But there are no pressure-groups within the village, and no one single source of power either as political dynamics keep changing. The campaigning during elections is done using loud speakers, pamphlets, public speeches, door to door visits and meetings. Money is also distributed for conducting meetings before the

elections. Liquor was distributed too, but there was no case of violence. However, some years ago, there was an incident where a female candidate was forcefully taken away to change her vote.

4.4.4.6 Women in Politics

Earlier, women were engaged with SHGs, Mahila Mandals, household work and farm work. But now they are exploring new spaces in the Panchayat and have started talking about village politics and political parties. Oppositions are seen during elections but the main agenda of all the candidates is the development of the village. Power in Manegaon has often changed hands and has not been the monopoly of a particular family.

Manegaon has a male Sarpanch. After meeting the female Panchayat members in Manegaon, it was understood that they also have to do household work at home. Though husbands and mothers-in-law have been cooperative, cooking and taking care of children is still entirely a female responsibility. The families are supportive of the Panchayat-related work and there is no harassment on that score. The Grama Panchayat, library, SHG meetings and public gatherings are the spaces of informal communication. The Panchayat women in Panchayat prepare for ZP meetings before hand and decide what they want to talk about.

Every woman in the Panchayat represents her locality/ward in the village. She brings the problems of her locality to the Panchayat. The Mahila Melava was organized using the 10% budget allocation meant for women. The MRA initiated a move to have joint ownership of houses. The women in Manegaon's Panchayat have nothing much to do in terms of education, health and infrastructure facilities as these facilities exist.

They work in their paddy fields and earn Rs 1000/- per month on an average. Most of it is spent on household requirements, education, and children's health needs. The Panchayat women behave in an efficient and confident manner in public places and are given as much respect as male Panchayat members. Their opinions are considered important while making decisions.

Many changes have been observed in the village over a period of time, which could be crucial markers of development and empowerment. While women never used to participate in Panchayat before, with growing awareness, they now attend meetings and discussions. It is hoped that in the future, 50% of the village women will participate. Earlier women had to fetch water from a long distance, but now it is available in the village through taps and hand pumps thanks to the implementation of many water schemes. While women used to have to walk long distances to go to the toilet in the past, there is now a toilet inside almost every house. Under the Hagandari Mukti Yojana, there are plans to build toilets for those who do not have them.

Things have also moved ahead in education. Where girls never used to study before, they are now taking basic and further education in the village. With growing awareness, women's concern for their health is also going up. Care during pregnancies and deliveries have helped ensure less maternal mortality.

4.4.4.7 Power Centres in Manegaon

The political power centres here are Naresh Dahare of the Shiv Sena, Nanaji Panchbudhe of the NCP and Bandubhau Sawarbandhe of the Congress. The economic power centres are the SHGs, while the social power centres are the women of the SHGs, the MRA, and the Tanta Mukti Committee. The cultural power centres are the Kunbi Community, the Teli community and Lata Bavankule.

4.5 THE REGIONAL CONTEXT IN MARATHWADA

Maharashtra is rapidly transforming into an urbanized state. As per the 2001 census, the urban population in Maharashtra was 42.40% and the service sector is acquiring precedence over the agricultural sector in the economy. However, compared to the rest of Maharashtra, the Marathwada region lags behind in the

urbanization process. According to the 2001 census, the urban population in Marathwada comprised of only 24.58% of the total population. The urban population in Aurangabad district is 37.11% in Parbhani, 32.53% in Nanded, 24.02% in Beed, 17.16% in Jalna, 19.07% in Osmanabad, 15.84% in Hingoli, and in Latur it is 23.58%. The region's rural population is 76% according to the 2001 census.

Marathwada is primarily an agrarian region and has only a marginal 7% industrial investment. The people working as farmers and farm laborers comprised 70% of the population in Aurangabad district, 82% in Jalna, 80% in Parbhani, 82% in Osmanabad and 79% in Latur (2001 Census).

Marathwada has a total number of 51 municipalities. There are only two Municipal Corporations here—one at Aurangabad and the other at Nanded-Waghela. There are only four cities in Marathwada with a population of more than a lakh, which have category 'A' municipal corporations. There are six municipalities of the 'B' category and 41 municipalities of the 'C' category. The four major cities in Marathwada are Latur, Jalna, Parbhani and Beed, and these municipalities form the fabric of the politics in Marathwada.

The prominent national parties in the Marathwada region—the Congress and the NCP—are family-run affairs. In Marathwada, the BJP, Shiv Sena, Congress and NCP have different strengths based on the criteria of leadership and the party as an organization. Marathwada has been the fortress of the Congress. The Congress has consistently won in the local self government elections, Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha elections. The Shiv Sena-BJP alliance has an imposing presence in Marathwada. As an organization, the Shiv Sena has a stronghold in each city of the district of Aurangabad, Jalna, Parbhani and Nanded in Marathwada. Propaganda against renaming the University and an anti-Muslim stand helped the Shiv Sena build their rural network after 1984 to reach every corner of Marathwada.

Though local self government elections all over Marathwada saw triangular fights, the main opponents in Aurangabad, Jalna and Parbhani districts were the Congress and the Shiv Sena. In Beed, the NCP and the BJP were the main opponents. Osmanabad had the NCP and the Congress battling it out. The Sena won the elections in the Aurangabad Municipal Corporation.

The BJP is popular in Beed and Aurangabad due to its work with issues related to the cooperative movement and the farmers. The Congress on the other hand is popular in Nanded and Latur. The NCP is omnipresent in the cooperative sugar mills and banks in Osmanabad, Aurangabad, Parbhani and Jalna districts. Power in the cooperative sector means power in Marathwada. Party leaders therefore wield control only in those districts where they are in control of the cooperative sector.

4.5.1 ANANDWADI

Area	: 446.40 hectares
Population	: 643
Taluka	: Renapur
District	: Latur

4.5.1.1 Demography

The 128 households in this village are made up of Reddys, Lingayats, Marathas, Bauddhas, Muslims, Kumbhaches, Chambhars, Wariks and Sutars. There are three temples and a mosque in the village.

4.5.1.2 Infrastructure

The ZP Primary School, consisting of two rooms, teaches children from Classes 1 to 4. The anganwadi in the village was built ten years ago. It has two teachers and no other staff. Most of the young people of Anandwadi

pursue higher education outside the village and prefer to settle in cities. Only three of the village's children have managed to study further. In 2002, the task to build roads was initiated, but is yet to be completed.

The gutters built in the village are well-maintained. One tarred road goes to Kharola from Anandwadi. Most of the internal roads are still untarred. Radio, TVs, land phones and cellular phones are the means of communication here. A few houses have electricity.

Though wells and hand pumps were dug here between 1999 and 2000, the water scheme is yet to reach all the houses. There is no space left for the Gavthan and therefore the residential area has become very congested. ST buses—the main means of transport here—are not regular. Jeeps, six-seaters, and two-wheelers are also used.

Nearly 95% of the village's fuel needs are met by fodder and gobar or dung. The sole ration shop is owned by the Police Patil for the last nine years, and there is a grocery store. People have begun migrating out from the village. There is a police station in Renapur.

The PHC is in Kharola, 7 km away. There is no private doctor in the village because the population is so low. The village does not have a Dai or an Ayurvedic doctor. Very few people are literate. A doctor visits the village for Malaria prevention, but the visits are not regular. There was an attempt to bring a doctor to the village and have him live there. It worked for five months after which he left for personal reasons. In emergencies, especially during deliveries, a vehicle has to be summoned from Kharola or one of the two two-wheelers in the village is used.

The 'Swayamsiddha Bahuuddeshiya Sanstha' from Pangaon conducted a survey here two years back and now has begun working on issues relating to toilets. Presently, only 3% of the families have constructed toilets.

There are two wells, two hand pumps, and two water tanks, as well as a water-tap scheme. Fetching water is always done by the women here. There is no drinking water problem in the village, but people do not always pay the water tax, and the Panchayat has to use other funds to do so.

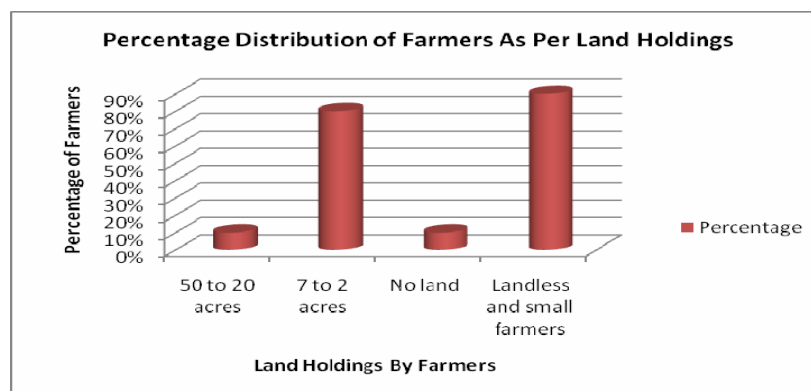
4.5.1.3 Livelihood

The main occupation of the people is agriculture. Rich farmers own about 20 to 50 acres of land, while small farmers own 2 to 7 acres each. Three farmers in the village own most of the land. Therefore, the number of small and landless farmers is more. 10% of the people are poor. There are landless farm labourers as well. The large farmers cultivate the land using modern methods and make their own arrangements for irrigation. Small and landless farmers work as labourers under rich farmers. On an average, about 10 to 20 litres of milk per family is sent to Latur from this village.

Soy beans, wheat and toor dal are the main crops. Vegetables are not cultivated here. Most of the economic activities are in men's hands and women are engaged only in household work and farm labor. No NGO in the region works on agriculture related issues. Market day is held on Wednesdays in Mauje Kharola, 7 km away. People go there to buy vegetables and grocery.

Apart from agriculture, cattle are the only source of income. There are no other income generation activities in the village. There is no government scheme, for instance, and people report that they would be willing to get into the dairy business if there were incentives given by the government.

FIGURE 4.11: Land in Acres vs Percentage of Farmers



4.5.1.4 Grama Panchayat

Janabai Ankush Kamble, the Mahila Sarpanch of Anandwadi, attends programmes like the health camp, if invited. The Sarpanch's husband and the Upsarpanch handle all the work related to the Panchayat. The new Gramsevak has not yet reached the village. There have been three elected women representatives in the village since the past 10 years, apart from the Sarpanch—Vimalbai Chandrakant Kaname, Sunanda Pandit Bande and Sumanbai Irappa Rajule.

The Sarpanch and her family have never been in power before. Reservation gave her the opportunity to enter politics. She goes to the farm to labour in the fields every day. The participation of other women in Panchayat activities is also low. They are illiterate and diffident. However, reservation has given them an opportunity to begin understanding the dynamics of politics. Most of them work with the help of their husbands. Very few women attend the flag hoisting ceremony.

The MRA has been working here for the past two years. Meetings were called twice for setting up the initial work in the village. Five women from here went to Gargoti to participate in a conference. This year, they have proposed that 10% of the Panchayat budget be used for the welfare of women and children. With their efforts women have been able to prevent the sale of alcohol in the village.

- **CBOs**

There are seven SHG's, of which two are men's SHGs. Anandwadi has two Bhajani Mandals and a Chhawa Sanghatana. The SHGs are not connected with the Panchayat. Their transactions take place regularly and on time. Though there is a board with the name of the 'Anuradha Bahuuddeshiya Mahila Mandal' in the village, no work has been started on it as yet. The SHGs have not yet received loans from the bank. People have heard of the MRA, but no woman is ready to come forward and participate in their programmes.

Premalla Pande, an anganwadi teacher, formed SHGs of men and women with the aim to make women economically independent. She also conducted programmes like get togethers and awareness programmes for women on population control, family planning, importance of breast feeding and the importance of cleanliness. She has also made an effort to stop alcoholism in the village, to stop violence on women and to increase the economic abilities of the women.

4.5.1.5 Power Centres in Anandwadi

The political power centre in Anandwadi is made up of Irappa Rajule and Vishwambhar Kamble. At the economic centre are Ram Waldhampaldhe, Balappa Dande and Harishchandra Ramle. While at the social power centre are Premalla Tai, Damodar Mule, Aruna Madhukar Dande and the MRA.

4.5.2 WADWAL

Area	: 2655.66 hectares
Population	: 8424 (2002 census)
Taluka	: Chakur
District	: Latur

4.5.2.1 Demography

Wadwal is famous for its gramdaivat (village deity) Vatasiddhanath Nagnath, and the temple dedicated to him. It also has a famous hill, the Sanjeevani Bet. The Nagnath temple attracts people, as does the hill, where the leaves are supposed to have therapeutic properties if consumed in the right season.

This village has a mixed population consisting of Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists. About 60% of the Hindus are Lingayats. There are 338 BPL families. There are six temples and one mosque in the village which is famous.

The village has a bus stand as well as a railway station. There are 150 two wheelers and 43 four wheelers in Wadwal, including trucks, jeeps and tractors. Wadwal has three ration shops, 20 grocery shops, many clothes, jewellery and medical shops. Four shops provide agricultural services.

4.5.2.2 Infrastructure

Almost 90% of Wadwal's roads are made of cement and were built four years ago. The rest are untarred, country roads. Nearly 70% of the village has a system for gutters. Only the remaining 30% (the new residential area) still needs the facility to be built. The village also has electricity. People have jeeps, motorcycles, autos, tractors, tempo and trucks. 80% of Wadwal's fuel needs are met by fodder and 20% by gas stoves and electrical appliances. It lacks a proper system of toilets.

The main PHC in the vicinity is in Janwal, 4 km away. People are aware of vaccines, but they also tend to be superstitious. There is a need to create awareness about sanitation. Though there are five private clinics, a sub-centre of the PHC and an Ayurvedic clinic, there is also the need for a bigger hospital. The various health care points are staffed with doctors and nurses.

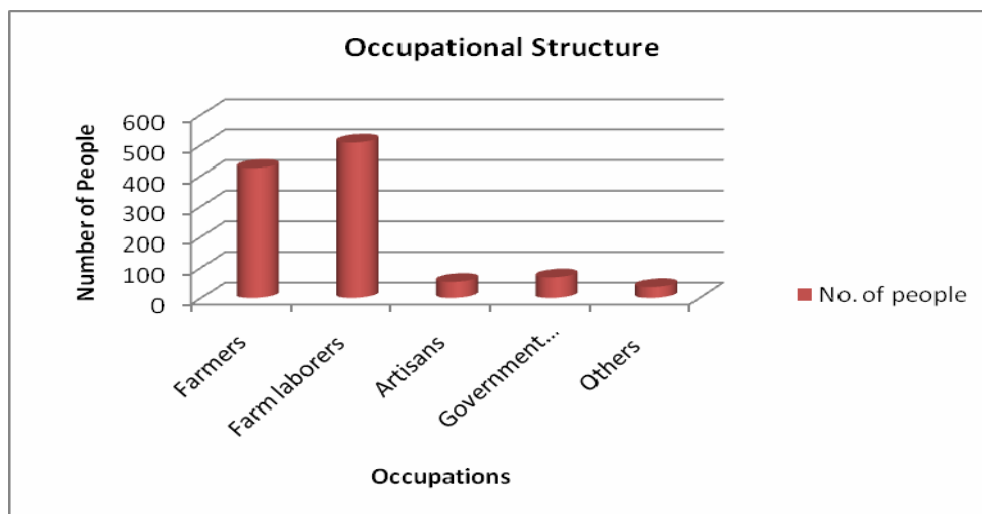
Wadwal has five schools: the ZP Girls' School from Classes 1 to 7; the ZP School from Classes 5 to 10; the Bapusaheb Patil Kanya Vidyalaya from Classes 5 to 10; the Vidya Niketan Vidyalaya, up to Class 12; and the Shree Vatasiddha Nagnath Ashramshala from Classes 1 to 7. Wadwal has seven students who have gone ahead to study medicine; two who have done law; 25 who are teachers (five of who are men); and six engineers (all men). Between 1996 and 2006, 9 anganwadis were formed across different localities in Wadwal. Though the village has many educational facilities, the level of girls' education is still very low. The Amarjyoti Granthalaya or Library was set up in 1976 by the local youth who performed a play to raise funds. The Granthalaya has 12,178 books, and a significant number of women members, which is growing every year.

There are two large water tanks to which water is brought from dams like the Shivli Manjara Dam and the Shiur Dam. There are no water problems.

4.5.2.3 Livelihood

Agriculture is the main occupation here, with 1185 people involved in farm based work. They grow soy beans, wheat, harbhara and kardai in their farms. Sugar cane grows on 100 hectares of land. Vegetables like cabbage, tomatoes, coriander, and dodka or ridge gourd grow here. They are also sent to Mumbai, Nijamabad, Nagpur and Vardha.

Figure 4.14: Occupational Structure of the Village



People have made their own arrangements for irrigation using bore wells or family wells. 60% of Wadwal's population farms, while 5% runs businesses and 20% work as farm labour. About 10% of the population is landless.

Radio, TV, newspapers, CD players, and cassette players are used more often by women than men. Women also use the library for reading newspapers and journals.

4.5.2.4 Grama Panchayat

The Panchayat gets a revenue of Rs 4,50,000/- from housing taxes, water taxes and general taxes. The following are the sources through which this village raised revenue for the development work in 2008: the Pay Commission Rs 1,20,000/-, Rural Development schemes Rs 4,10,000/-, Dalit Wasti Sudhar Yojana Rs 3,00,000/-, the MLA fund Rs 15,00,000/-, and Tourism Development Corporation Rs 5,00,000/-.

There are 15 Panchayat members, out of which ten are men and five are women. Wadwal has had a woman Sarpanch for the past three years, which has brought changes to the village.

Now that women are a part of the Panchayat, the men are a lot more formal in terms of their language, clothes and overall demeanour. They are also learning to cooperate with women. The focus is now on getting the work done rather than on chatting informally. Women have also brought with them a new understanding of the issues that Dalits and minorities encounter. They have become a lot more confident about solving their problems, and families here support their Panchayat work. This appreciation of the women's efficiency has led to the men becoming a lot more efficient in their dealings as well. The Mahila Sarpanch hoists the flag on special occasions.

The Panchayat has 29 committees, some of which are the Village Water Distribution and Sanitation Committee, the Women's Empowerment Committee, the Construction Committee, the Dakshata Committee, the Tanta Mukti Committee, the Education Committee, the Health Committee, the Women and Child Welfare Committee, the Street-lights Committee, the Finance Committee, the Ration Dakshata Committee, the Observation Committee, the Purchase Committee and the Gramdoot Committee. On an average, there is equal participation by men and women in these committees.

The Panchayat members meet every month. The Gramsevak discusses the funds with the members. Proposals are submitted after the discussion. Everyone in the meeting gets a copy of the income and expenditure statement of the Panchayat.

Apart from representatives of civil society like the Vividha Karyakari Cooperative Society and the Vidyaniketan Educational Organization, Wadwal has 37 SHGs, of which, 18 are BPL and 19 are APL. In 2005, while implementing the Jalaswarajya Project in Wadwal, the Samata Bahuuddeshiya Shikshan Sanstha, Latur, formed 26 SHGs here. The focus was on providing vocational training and skills development training to the SHGs. Vocational training included fields like the dairy business, the bangle business, gandul khat (or making organic fertilizers), goat rearing and stationery making. Bank loans were given to 8 SHGs. Ongoing income generation activities are being carried out by 20 SHGs.

Most SHGs in Wadwal are active and efficient, with meetings and transactions being held on time and on a regular basis. A few efficient SHGs prepare daily mid-day meals for the anganwadi children. The objectives of SHGs are usually to help women achieve economic independence, be able to conduct financial transactions, be capable of solving problems on their own, strengthening their identity in the family and in society and increasing their confidence by providing them with support, protection and personality development. The intention is also to keep away from the debt-traps propagated by traditional/informal lenders.

4.5.2.5 Grama Sabha

Six Grama Sabhas are held every year and the especially important ones are those that are held on August 15 and January 26. People are informed of the Grama Sabha by announcements carried out eight days before the meeting. A notice is also put up. Around 500 people (50% are women) attend the Grama Sabha, where the Gramvikas Adhikari reads the budget and the Sabhapatis of the concerned departments answer questions. Men and women discuss village development programmes and take collective decisions after discussion. The weaker sections of the village society make up 5% of the attendance, and express the need for developmental work for their communities. The issues discussed at the Grama Sabha were a new survey to decide on the BPL families, irregularities in the distribution of ration cards, toilets for women and employment under the Mahila Grama Employment Guarantee Scheme. Wadwal's women participated enthusiastically in the meeting.

- **Mahila Grama Sabha**

The Mahila Grama Sabha is organized before the Grama Sabha and around 400 women attend it. Issues like drinking water, health, sanitation, education, prevention of alcoholism, and sanitary latrines for women are discussed here. The 10% of the Panchayat funds allocation for women is spent on a Haldi-kumkum gathering and a women's get-together.

Wadwal's women organized themselves to eradicate alcohol from the village. A few local organizations supported the initiative.

- **MRA Intervention**

The MRA is very active here and has used strategies like dharnas, morchas and meetings, to help women achieve their goals. Thanks to their many training sessions, women are organized and have learned to plan the personal and social aspects of their lives. MRA has been working in Wadwal for the last ten years. The Panchayat member, Mayadevi Sorte initiated their work here. Thanks to the MRA activists, most of the women here are aware of their rights and responsibilities, and they are a confident and courageous part of the power structure.

Some of the programmes organized here by the MRA were

- A state-level training programme in Wadwal. The participants stayed with the villagers who appreciated this participatory training.
- The women of Wadwal were taken on a study tour to Gargoti and Saigata.

- A get-together was organized for 60 elected women of the Panchayat at the Taluka level and they were felicitated with shawls, flowers and certificates.
- The MRA has acknowledged families and husbands who are proactive towards women's empowerment. They are felicitated with certificates called the 'Pati-patni Gaurav' at MRA functions.
- A parents' meet was organized to discuss ways to prevent girls from dropping out of school. Teachers talked about the various reasons behind school drop outs. An Education Officer was also invited to the programme. Active women members of the MRA tried to identify such cases and made an effort to help them continue their education. The real issues behind girls dropping out of school were isolated and brought to the notice of the concerned people.
- A programme was organized to honour the widows of the village. The objective was to attain equal status for all women. On January 14, on the day of the Sankranti festival, married women honoured 10 widows and gave them gifts of books.
- A 'Political Skill Development Programme' was organized in which experts were called to deliver lectures.
- A leadership development programme was initiated for women here. Learning about leadership involves understanding the processes of planning and implementation. Clarity of information and the relevance of action are also important for the participation of people.
- The 'Grama Sabha Gaurav Abhiyan' was organized to strengthen the Grama Sabha and increase awareness among people.
- Health awareness and anti-feticide programmes were launched.
- Family problems such as disputes between husband and wife, and other tensions were resolved.

4.5.2.6 Political Parties and Power Structure

The Congress, the NCP, the BJP and the Shiv Sena are the active political parties in Wadwal. The tensions between these parties are not apparent, as most representatives here have cordial relations with each other. People vote for the candidate who can improve infrastructure in the village, get government schemes for village development and solve community problems. Political campaigning is carried out through personal meetings, house-to-house visits and the distribution of pamphlets. The use of liquor and money to influence voting is common during the elections.

4.5.2.7 Changes in the Power Structure

The Panchayat's work culture and its men's behaviour have changed with the entry of women in politics. Women are now respected in the Panchayat and the power structure has been decentralized considerably. While just one man used to rule the entire village, today there are many political parties, and therefore a healthy opposition. People are more conversant with their rights and are ready to fight for them. They are part of the decision-making process. The deprived section of village society and women are now a part of the power structure.

Most committees, organizations and SHGs here cooperate with one another and are on good terms. The Panchayat women participate in all the SHG meetings and programmes. Caste issues never come up at such meetings. Information regarding flag hoisting is shared with each member by a formal notice. All the women in the SHGs and Grama Panchayat participate in the flag hoisting ceremony. The flag is hoisted by the Mahila Sarpanch.

4.5.2.8 Women in Politics

In 2005, a woman Sarpanch Lalita Baburao Bhete came to power for the first time. It was her first foray into politics. Her husband is a member of the School Committee in the Bapusaheb Kanya Vidyalaya for the past 15 years and is the President of School Committee in Vidyaniketan Vidyalaya. Fond of social work at the village level, he is educated and supportive.

There are five female members in the Panchayat, of whom Mayadevi Sorte has been elected twice (in 2000 and 2005). She has been doing a lot of work as a representative of the people and is actively involved in the village development work. Maya Tai's leadership activities can be seen at all levels, including the Mahila Mandal, SHGs and the Panchayat.

Influenced by the philosophy of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, she strived to pass her Class 12 from the Open University. She first worked with a SHG and was recognized in the village for her work. She attended training sessions to broaden her vision and also became a part of MRA. [Read more about Maya Tai Sorte in Chapter 5, Women's Narratives.]

In 2000, she got elected to the Panchayat. Though there were a few other women members, they never attended meetings and had to be persuaded by her over six months to do so. Though things are different today, attending the Panchayat meetings has been a struggle for the women of Wadwal. For instance, Kalawati Tai, a member of the Panchayat, had become a member without asking her husband. He beat her up and broke one of her fingers. Maya Tai led 25 to 30 women to her house and fought for her. They ensured that justice was done to Kalawati, who has, since then, been actively involved with the Grama Panchayat.

When some women members sent their husbands for Panchayat meetings instead of going themselves, Maya Tai asked the Gramsevak not to allow the men to attend the meetings. The Gramsevak followed the rule, and when the men stopped coming to the meetings, the women came. With time, more women began to attend the Panchayat meetings. In a Grama Panchayat which not a single woman would enter, today more than a 100 women attend meetings.

When the women realized that the ration-shop owner was not giving them adequate ration, they organized themselves, gathered information from the ZP, and resolved the issue. When the UN organized an International Conference on Women's Status in 2006 in the USA, Maya Tai attended it and spoke about the 'Participation of Women in Local Self Governance'.

During Panchayat elections, women who stood in opposition to Maya Tai had more than two children, and were not eligible to contest elections. But they had filled the forms. Maya Tai did not object to this, because she believes, like the MRA, that this law deprives candidates of their constitutional right.

One of the greatest problems that women in politics have to face is that of their opponents spreading rumours about them and running smear campaigns against them. They are also verbally abused sometimes. But with the spread of MRA's work, many women have begun to participate in politics, and there has been a shift in attitudes. Nearly 50% of Wadwal's women have changed their views and have become confident enough to talk in public. Muslim women too have begun to participate in programmes organized for women.

With the MRA's training programmes creating awareness in women, they are now active and effective participants in the process of village development. At the personal level, they have realized their own strengths, wishes and abilities. At the familial level, the frequency of disputes has reduced because their husbands too have changed their attitudes. Women participate in all spheres of responsibilities, including decision-making. At the village level, most men now have accepted women's equal participation in the decision-making process regarding any development work.

A measure of economic independence ensures that women can now make their own decisions and even handle loan transactions through SHGs and banks. This has changed the attitude of men. Women stepping out of their houses and entering politics is a great sign of their empowerment, especially as they are escorted to the office by their husbands (but do not enter the office). If a woman is absent, her seat is kept vacant. Wadwal's women are now aware of many issues in the village, including sanitation, government schemes, and problems of the deprived sections of village society.

MRA's training programmes include activities on learning how to submit proposals, how to put forward one's idea with proper points and how to speak at a meeting. Women are also told about their rights in the Grama Panchayat. This has made them confident enough to handle Panchayat proceedings independently without any help from men. Trained women train other women members of the Panchayat. The Gramsevak in Wadwal has also been extremely cooperative.

- **The Status of Women in the Panchayat**

Most of the women of the Panchayat are helped with the household work by their families, so that they can also do the Panchayat work. Because they are village leaders, the women are also respected at home. Women elected after 2005 did not face many problems in politics thanks to the MRA's effective work in Wadwal. They are treated with due respect. While women do communicate informally at the temples, community halls, fields and households, they have demanded a hall for themselves. The Mahila Sarpanch participates actively in the Grama Sabha, SHG meetings and programmes. MRA activists also help her with Panchayat work. The Upsarpanch carries out works relating to the Panchayat Samiti and the ZP with proper planning. The Mahila Sarpanch receives as much respect as a male Sarpanch would. She is honoured in public places and behaves confidently and efficiently.

4.5.2.9 Issue Mapping

- **Darubandi**

Most of women here used to complain that their husbands get drunk and beat them up. A few men were unemployed and therefore had to leave the village. Though there was the urge to do something about these problems from 1997, the women were not organized at that time and did not know how to go about it. With MRA's training and support, women got to know a lot about dealing with these problems and also received the support of active men in the village. They submitted a proposal in the Grama Sabha which was supported by most villagers.

Wadwal comes under the Chakur Police station. All the women and MRA activists went there to submit an application asking the police to stop the sale of liquor in Wadwal. They pursued the matter for a whole year. At times, they entered the house of drunken men and beat them up with help from the drunken men's wives. Eventually, the consumption of liquor was completely stopped in Wadwal and most homes and marriages were saved. Today, the consumption of liquor is prohibited in the village, it can still be found here sometimes. The women did try every possible official method to ban alcohol, but it has not worked so far.

- **The Water Issue**

Wadwal faced lot of water problems before the Jalaswarajya scheme. They had two bore wells, one for the school and another for the Dalit community. Only the school's bore well was dug, while the Dalits suffered without water. The women really had to push and struggle hard against the system to get this very basic right. Finally, the government officials gave them the bore wells, solving the problem of drinking water for the Dalits.

- **The Ration Issue**

Wadwal had serious issues relating to the ration shop. The ration shop owner never gave rations on time and would suddenly declare that the supplies were over. Women came together on the issue and fought for it by

first requesting the shop owner in writing. They also went to meet him and tried to persuade him. Then they complained to the Taluka Officer responsible for the provision of ration. When none of that worked they approached the MRA and some MRA activists and women from the SHGs went to meet the Collector in Latur. The Collector took immediate action and resolved the issue. Maya Tai played a leading role in the whole action and today, there are no ration issues here.

When the women were threatened by a man from the village, all the women sat together in front of his house. Ultimately, his wife apologized and the issue was resolved. While sharing their experiences, a few women said that they did not want to fight the system. Their struggle was for the neglected and deprived sections of society, so that they could also be a part of the development process. This struggle was given a direction by the MRA with the active participation of local women.

- **Power Centres in Wadwal**

The economic centres are Annasaheb Patil, who controls Government schemes; the SHGs with the help of the MRA; and businessmen like Shankar Kalyani, Santosh Achwal and Mr. Komti. The Political Power Centres are Annasaheb Patil, the MRA and the BJP. The Social Power Centres are Annasaheb Patil and the MRA.

4.6 THE REGIONAL CONTEXT IN WESTERN MAHARASHTRA

Western Maharashtra consists of the districts of Satara, Sangli, Kolhapur and Solapur. This region boasts of a rich tradition of reformers and leaders like Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj, Kranti Sinh Nana Patil, Karmaveer Bhaurao Patil and Kisan Veer. There is also an equally impressive political legacy with leaders like Yeshwantrao Chavan, Vasantdada Patil, Rajaram Bapu Patil, Tatyasaheb Kore and Ratnapa Kumbhar. This region is also famous as the political stronghold of the NCP leader Sharad Pawar.

Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy of this region. The percentage of irrigated land here is greater than the average in the rest of the state. Large irrigation projects like the Koyna Dam have been initialized. Since the region has abundant monsoon, irrigation projects by and large have been successful. In the last five years, various irrigation projects are underway under the auspices of the Krishna Valley Development Project. The irrigated region in Western Maharashtra is dependant on canal and pump irrigation projects.

More than 80% of the wetlands in Western Maharashtra are used to cultivate sugarcane, earning it the name 'sugar belt'. Satara has 12 cooperative sugar mills, Kolhapur has 16, Sangli has 17 and Solapur has 12 mills.

Although it is a predominantly agricultural belt, cash crops like sugarcane thrive due to irrigation facilities. This in turn has led to the prosperity of the region. In spite of agriculture being the main source of livelihood, the percentage of people below the poverty line is lower than the percentage in the rest of Maharashtra. The percentage of BPL families is 16% in Satara, 14% in Sangli, 27% in Solapur and only 17% in Kolhapur. The percentage of people living below the poverty line in Maharashtra is 34.55%.

- **Power Centres**

The economy of the cooperative sector in Western Maharashtra is imperative to the economy of the region. Cooperative sugar mills, cooperative banking and the cooperative milk sector are three cardinal points of the power structure of the cooperative sector in Western Maharashtra. The cooperative sector that has developed under the patronage of the state government is the focal point of the economy of Western Maharashtra. This process of ushering in financial prosperity with the help of the power wielded in the cooperative sector has made this sector a power centre in the region.

In the fiscal year 1999-2000, 57 cooperative sugar mills were functional in Satara, Sangli, Kolhapur and Solapur districts. The sugar produced by these mills fetched a price of Rs 2,717 crores that year. Assuming that 30 villages are aligned to owning one sugar mill, about 1700 villages are directly connected to the production in these cooperative sugar mills. Every five years, all sugarcane growers in every village are associated with the sugar mill elections. They elect the president/chairman to these factories. This process is directly affected by issues like the price of sugar, the funding required to grow sugar cane, and irrigation projects. Every village in Western Maharashtra has different power groups and opponents due to the cooperative sugar mills. The cooperative sugar mills are the primary power centres as power here is wielded to influence the political elections in the state.

The second strength of the cooperative power of Western Maharashtra lies in the District Central Banks. The entire money required for production in the rural set-up is distributed by these banks. All financial transactions in rural areas are done through them. The elections to the district central banks are held every five years. The political race in these elections makes an impact on the political elections in the region.

The third power centre in Western Maharashtra is the cooperative milk sector. Under the Dudhacha Mahapur Project, the state government has developed the milk industry as a supplementary business to agriculture. The government allots more than Rs 300 crores as part of the concessions offered to the milk industry. Every village in Western Maharashtra has cooperatives that collect milk. These organizations are attached to the district milk organization. There are in all 7000 cooperative milk organizations in the districts of Satara, Sangli, Kolhapur and Solapur. The cost of the milk collected in this business in 1999-2000 was Rs 396 crores.

Local self government has been under a strong Congress influence since 1962. Within the Congress, the group that accepted Sharad Pawar as their leader fought the 1999 elections under the NCP banner. NCP was most successful in the districts of Satara, Sangli, Kolhapur and Solapur in Western Maharashtra.

The politics of the local self government units and of the cooperative movement are interrelated. The elections in cooperative sugar mills, district central banks, cooperative milk sanghs and cooperative cloth factories were not fought under the auspices of parties, but as local units. The party that is backed by leaders of the cooperative sector is influential. In 1999, the entire cooperative sector backed Sharad Pawar, leading to his victory in the 1999 Vidhan Sabha election.

Western Maharashtra has three municipal corporations—Solapur, Kolhapur and Sangli-Miraj. It has two municipalities of Satara and Ichalkaraji, and five category ‘B’ municipal councils and 24 category ‘C’ municipal councils. City politics is influenced by political parties and leaders that dominate the rural areas in the district. The cities of Solapur and Ichalkaranji are dependent on the industrial sector and the cloth production in power looms. Urban politics does not have an influence on the district politics. The category ‘C’ municipal councils are important as they are large constituencies.

4.6.1 HALKARNI

Area	: hectares
Population	: 4168
Taluka	: Chandgad
District	: Kolhapur

[illegible]

4.6.1.1 Demography

Halkarni Village, about 2 km from the main road, has a church, a large tree called ‘sarkari zad’ (or the government tree), a sugar factory called the Daulat Shetkari Sakhar Karkhana, dairies, the Umaji Naik Sarvajanic Vachanalay or public library, a post office, and a temple dedicated to Rawalnath.

The village has Christians, Dalits, Ramoshi Naiks, Sutars, Lohars and Marathas (who make up the majority). Each caste has a separate settlement. The Ramoshi Naik basti and the Maratha community have the biggest settlements. Both Halkarni and Sadawarwadi have a population of 404 BPL families.

4.6.1.2 Infrastructure

Halkarni has a large water tank with a capacity of 2,00,000 litres. There used to be a public water tap scheme in the village, but now each house has a separate water tap. There are also three hand pumps in the community.

Nearly 539 families in the village have had toilets constructed under the Hagandari Mukta Yojana. With people’s contributions and the money received under the scheme, a clinic, a water distribution scheme and Bharat Nirman Yojana for the Naik community are under process. Under the Nirantar Shikshan Kendra Yojana, a continuing education scheme, a motivator and an assistant have been hired at an honorarium of Rs 700/- and Rs 500/- each.

Earlier, chulhas were used for cooking food, which needed wood to be brought from the nearby hill as fuel. Wood had to be stored for the entire rainy season. Nowadays, most people use gas burners. Gobar gas is also used by some families. The license for the ration shop is with the Maratha community, and since the past five years, it is being run by the Jay Bhavani Vikas Sanstha. Earlier, it used to be located in the sugar factory. The villages of Halkarni and Sadawarwadi both use this shop. The beneficiaries of the Antyodaya Scheme—64 families (including two villages)—get 13 kg rice and 22kg wheat under it. However, sugar, oil and lentils are never available. The actual quota of the kerosene is 4000 litres—which never reaches the shop. Usually it has about 2500 to 3000 litres, and each family gets 3 litres.

There is no hospital in Halkarni, and women take their children to a private clinic. There are three doctors in the village but none of them is local. They are called in cases of emergency. In case of further medical intervention, patients are required to go to Belgaum, Chandgad or Mangaon. There is no nurse in the village. In case of complicated deliveries patients are referred to the Mangaon PHC, which has a sub-centre in Tandulwadi. Cases of female feticide are few in the entire Chandgad Taluka.

The ZP school has a provision to teach from Classes 1 to 7. The total number of students is 262, out of which 132 are girls and 130 are boys. It has an independent building with eight rooms. The teachers contributed to buy a computer which is used by the students. The school has a library (270 books) and a laboratory. The total number of teachers including the principal is 10. Students up to Class 5 are given mid-day meals, as well as eggs, bananas and biscuits once a week with the daily meal. There are separate toilets for girls and boys and a water facility.

Probably the sole benefit that the sugar factory offers the village is the Karkhana Shala, where students can study till Class 7 and go on to the college for further education. Today, there are 25 girl graduates in the village. Earlier, children of Dalits and Naiks were not admitted to school because of caste differences. If allowed, they were made to sit outside the class. But the picture has changed with growing awareness. A mid-day meal is also given to the children of the five anganwadis here by SHG members.

4.6.1.3 Livelihood

In Halkarni, the Brahmins are the money lenders and land owners, and they own most of the resources and the wealth, followed by the Guravs (temple priests), the Marathas and the OBC castes like Shimpis, Sutars, and Nhavis. The Brahmins own land and control education, culture and caste practices. The Guravs have a hold over the temple and land. Marathas own land, mills, lending agencies, dairies and have economic power, while the OBCs have a caste presence but no political identity. The Naiks are many in number, while the Kambles (Dalits) have negligible, dry-irrigated lands, and are mostly farm labourers who are dependent on others for their livelihood.

Brewing and selling liquor was the traditional source of livelihood for the Naik community. They would brew the alcohol and the Marathas would consume it. Earlier, alcohol addiction was rampant among all ages and castes—from 12 and 13-year-olds to 70-year-olds. But when the Naik and the Maratha women came together to fight the issue, the proportion dropped. Agriculture is the main occupation of people there. Rice, nachni, sugar cane, ratali or sweet potatoes, ground nuts, chilly, sunflower, cashew and potato are the main crops. The average landholding pattern varies from one acre to ten acres. A few people are landless and they work as labourers. Most of the villagers help out on each other's farms throughout the year.

While 30 years back women used to be paid Rs 3/- per day and men used to get Rs 5/-, now they get Rs 30/- and Rs 50/- respectively. A cup of tea and a meal are also included. Upper caste Brahmins do not give their labourers a meal, but give Rs 10/- extra and a cup of tea. Men and women work for seven hours at cutting sugarcane, for which women get Rs 40/-, while the men, who bind the sugarcane sticks together, are paid Rs 100/-.

The cooperative sugar mill, one km from Halkarni, employs 3000-3500 people. Successive chairmen have employed more than the necessary number of people in order to ensure their success during elections—often employing a 1000 men where just 400 were necessary. (The factory was located on lands owned by the Ramoshi Naik community. They were displaced without being given any kind of compensation and were forced to relocate on the gayran land in the village. They were displaced from there too when the MIDC bought the land. A new dam is coming up on the land they are currently living on, and they will be displaced for the third time.)

The dairy business happens on a large scale here. Every Maratha and Gurav family has at least some cattle. But OBC families like the Shimpis, Sutars and Nhavis, and the SC families don't have any. There are four dairies in the village and chilling centres in Tawrewadi and Shinoli, where people from Halkarni send milk. Cashew trees are planted but they yield a crop only three years later. They fetch around Rs 45/- to Rs 50/- per kg. In season, each family earns around Rs 15,000/- to 20,000/-. Chilli and potato are also a source of income. There are 10 tractors in the village.

All families in Halkarni have TV with cable network. *Sakal*, *Tarun Bharat* and *Pudhari* are the popular newspapers. People in this village are not rich but they are well-to-do. Women work very hard but take very little care of their own health. People send all the milk to the dairies and hardly any is used for domestic consumption.

4.6.1.4 Grama Panchayat

The Sarpanch is Sonali Sawant, while the Upsarpanch is Anil Patil. The Gramsevak, Shreedhar Maruti Bhongan, is available on Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. The Talathi office is situated near the Maratha cluster or wadi. In the next room is the Grama Panchayat office. The sanctioned site of the Grama Panchayat office is under construction. The office has loud-speakers for announcements. Apart from that, a peon goes from door to door to circulate the notice of the meeting. There are 13 members in the Grama Panchayat.



Of the 13 members, 9 are men and four are women. Four men are Marathas, three are Naiks, one is a Kamble (Dalit) and one is a Christian. But all the four women are Marathas and the members were selected unopposed. The reserved seat of the Sarpanch was shared by three political parties over three phases made up of two phases of a year-and-a-half each and one of two years.

The Grama Panchayat was formed in 1923. In 2005, the elected candidates won without any opposition. Earlier, the power structure in the Grama Panchayat used to be highly influenced by the leaders of the sugar factory. Because most villagers were employed in the sugar factory, they did not have the courage to go against their decisions. Local governance was completely under their control. The MRA first intervened here 2002. But before that, John Lobo was trying to create an awareness regarding people's rights in the Panchayat. Gradually, people began to cooperate with him.

Most of the water in the village was diverted to the factory, whereas the villagers had to walk for 4 km to fetch water. When an electric motor was put on the water tank, the people from the sugar factory took it away for repairs. Ultimately, the people contributed money and took the motor back. This stopped the water from being diverted towards the factory and the water problem was solved. Earlier, the Grama Panchayat used to earn only Rs 10,000/- to 15,000/- as a rent from the factory. But since the new Sarpanch came to power this was raised to Rs 75,000/-. People are organized now and have learned to make collective decisions.

The present members of the Panchayat have brought in and implemented many water schemes to the village to solve water-based problems like disputes between women for water and the spread of diseases due to stagnant water thanks to the lack of proper gutters.

A water tap scheme worth Rs 14,00,000/- was sanctioned by the state government and was built. Rs 41,00,000/- was sanctioned under the Bharat Nirman Yojana for the Naik (Dalit) community. With an increase in the population there is a need to increase the number of water taps as well. Under the Bharat Nirman Yojana, a central government scheme which was announced by the Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan

Singh, a water tank was constructed. The people of Halkarni used to feel very little sense of ownership towards the Grama Panchayat. With the MRA's activities here, however, some change is slowly setting in. People are growing more aware of their rights in the Panchayat. The local police station, Talathi office, Panchayat Samiti and ZP all recognize the active and efficient women trained by the MRA. This gives the women a presence and space in society at different levels.

Vidya Tavde is the local MRA activist here, along with Bhikubai Kamble, a Dalit. She and Mr. Gurav had begun the MRA's work in Halkarni and Sadawarwadi at the same time. But it showed fruits only in Halkarni and not in Sadawarwadi. Being a Dalit, Bhikubai has faced many problems while working here.

4.6.1.5 Grama Sabha

More than six Grama Sabhas are held in Halkarni. Panchayat members are elected without any opposition. The notice of the Grama Sabha meeting is put up at public places, announced on the loud speaker and a peon is also sent from door to door to tell people about it. The Naik and Kamble (Dalits) community participate in the Grama Sabha. The weaker sections of society are aware of their rights in the Panchayat thanks to the MRA's encouragement.

The Grama Sabha's agenda is decided by the Sarpanch after discussion with other members. New topics are introduced with their permission. There have been times when women put pressure on the Panchayat to call a Grama Sabha. New schemes and new topics are tabled by the Gramsevak according to the agenda. People participate in the discussion, make comments, give their opinions and also make complaints, if any. The Gramsevak, Sarpanch and women of Halkarni have cordial working relations with each other.

- **Mahila Grama Sabha**

The Mahila Grama Sabha takes place in Halkarni on a regular basis due to the MRA activists' demands and follow-ups. Around 100 to 150 women attend it. Issues like health, the liquor ban, water and development works are discussed. Suggestions are made for the utilization of the 10% budgetary allocation meant for women and children's welfare. But the Panchayat utilizes that fund for the anganwadi. The women once demanded that the fund be used for organizing a Mahila Melava. A subject prominently discussed at the Grama Sabha and the Mahila Grama Sabha was the joint ownership of the house. Many men protested against registering the house in the names of both the husband and the wife.

Many young women have lost their husbands and their sons to alcohol in Halkarni which has no government recognized country or beer bar. However, both country liquor and the 'English' variety are available at the bars located at a junction 3 km away. Illicit liquor is freely available in the village itself. The village has four main castes which include the Marathas (farmers), Naiks (Adivasi), Kamble (Dalit) and Christians. Brewing liquor is the traditional occupation of the Naiks. Previously, except for the Christian community, more than 80% of the families in the village faced addiction.

When the Asha Foundation organized women for a Bachatgat, the problem of alcohol topped the concerns. Women would take a morcha to the Chandgad police station 25 km away to protest against liquor shops accompanied by their men. When the women returned home, the men would convince the policemen that prohibition was not necessary. Halkarni has a cluster of 15 Mahar (Dalit) families where 10 young men lost their lives due to alcohol addiction in as many years. Bhikubai, a local activist, lost five of her seven uncles to alcohol abuse.

Today there is a drop in the number of addicts, with about 30% of the men giving up the habit, primarily due to health concerns. However, neither the police nor any other government force supported the women in their battle for prohibition.

- **SHGs**

John Lobo, the former Sarpanch of Halkarni and a present member of Panchayat, made an attempt to organize people in his village about 15 years ago. He increased the participation of youth in the village development work by involving them in sports. The people of Halkarni still remember how he organized the youth to work hard and fill a large hole near the Grama Panchayat office. This was the beginning of the process of organizing themselves. Ever since, the participation of people in the Panchayat and in developmental works has grown.

The process of forming SHGs started in 1985. There are 52 SHGs in the village out of which 25 are affiliated to the Asha Foundation, which has been working here for long. 11 SHGs were formed through the Panchayat while the remaining 14 were formed by the Asha Foundation and the MRA. There are 20 members in each group. In the beginning, Vidya Tai and Bhikubai handled the transactions, but now a new group of trained women takes care of it. They have accounts in Dena Bank (Halkarni Phata) and the Kolhapur District Co-operative Bank. They save Rs 50/- every month. Considering the capacity of the group, bank has given around Rs 20,000/- as loans at the rate of 2%. Loans are taken for agriculture, fertilizers, cattle-buying, goats and cashew cultivation.

Nearly 20 SHGs were formed by the motivation of the anganwadi teacher. About 7 SHGs are not active. The MRA could form its branch here thanks to the organization of the SHGs. The SHGs do have an influence on the Grama Panchayat. The Asha Foundation has conducted various training programmes like the working of the SHG, income-generation activities, organization skills and personality development. The Foundation has also trained adolescent girls in the school. They have tried to create agro-based income generation activities like buffalo and goat rearing. A Mahila Melava is organized on the third of January every year to commemorate the birth anniversary of Savitribai Phule. Women of different ages once took part in a street play in a Mahila Melava, which was a memorable experience.

Naik women are highly organized. Having had to look for labour work at some point has led to an increased sense of leadership among them. Seeing them, women in other communities like Marathas and Brahmins are now feeling the need to get organized. The Naik community has organized itself under the 'Umaji Naik Mitra Mandal'. They have set up a library, a milk dairy and a youth group. They are active in Halkarni's politics. There is a 'Development Service Society' open to all the villagers. There are two credit societies in the village, out of which one is defunct. The credit societies have a great influence on local elections. There was a credit society called Mauli Mahila Patasanstha, which had women members on the board, but was really completely under the control of men. Women had to recover the loans while men took all the decisions. It is on its way to closure.

With the leadership of the MRA and the Asha Foundation and the cooperation of the village women, female-centric development is taking place in Halkarni. But political groups and powerful leaders are constantly under pressure from the political dynamics of the sugar factory.

- **Committees**

Halkarni has a Water and Sanitation Committee, a Village Education Committee, a Tanta Mukti Committee and a Health Committee. They were formed at a meeting held on August 15. The committees work with the cooperation of the Sarpanch and the Gramsevak. The Darubandi and Tanta Mukti Committees were merged when the latter was formed.

The Water and Sanitation Committee monitors the smooth functioning of water management, while the Education Committee ensures the smooth functioning of the primary and pre-primary education here. They also try to reduce the number of drop outs. A Khadu-Fala Nidhi or Chalk-and-Blackboard Fund was set up to

improve the school with a 5% grant from the basic salary of the teachers, people's contributions, grants and donations. The Health Committee arranges health camps, helps improve women's and children's health, and keeps private and government records. The committee has received a grant of Rs 10,000/- from the central government under the 'Rural Health Mission'.

The Tanta Mukti Committee was set up by the Panchayat in 2008 with the intention of solving minor problems and squabbles at the level of the village itself, before the matter can escalate into a court case. The dynamic Parvati Bhatkhande is the president and other members are the Talathi, Police Patil, Sarpanch, Gramsevak, five other women and three men of the Maratha, Naik and Dalit communities. They meet every week to resolve issues like land distribution problems, poultry farm cases and familial matters and disputes.

It was observed that alcoholism was the main reason behind every dispute. Dhakuli Naik was the first woman of the village to demand a ban on liquor in the village. But there were limitations due to the local politics. Parvati Tai, president of the Tanta Mukti Committee and the Sarpanch called a Grama Sabha and set up a Darubandi Committee affiliated to the Tanta Mukti Committee, with Bhikubai as the president. Liquor shop owners were sent a notice to stop selling liquor. The members of both committees and a few people in the village participated in the rally. Journalists and photographers were also called, and the next day, a report appeared in the newspapers the following day. Accidentally however, the liquor shops were called 'jugar adda' or gambling dens, which incensed some people and led to the women being summoned to the Grama Panchayat. Some even threatened to beat up Bhikubai, the President of the Darubandi Committee.

The women protested and called a Grama Sabha in the temple to express their opposition. In the presence of the Tehsildar, Police Nirikshak, and the BDO, about 500 women expressed their feelings about the problems they faced because of alcohol. Finally the women said that if the men wanted to develop the village without the participation of the women, they were welcome to do so, but in that case, the women would also stop participating in village work. With intervention from the Police Sub-Inspector, the Panchayat members, the Police Patil and others apologized and cooperated with the women. Today, the liquor ban is successful. The Tanta Mukti and Darubandi committees were merged.

There are three youth groups in the village: the Jay Bhim Tarun Mitra Mandal, the Wadeshwari Mitra Mandal and the Umaji Naik Mitra Mandal. The Umaji Naik Mitra Mandal strongly believes that minds can be changed and shaped by reading books. To this end they started a library in the village with about a 100 books. They received a grant of Rs 10,000/- from the ZP. Hardly any girls use the library. The Umaji Mandal believes in equality and opposes female feticide, gender inequalities and communal violence. They celebrate Savitribai Phule Jayanti, Shiva Jayanti and Gandhi Jayanti. They also organize street plays on different social issues which have been presented in the nearby villages by girls and boys.

4.6.1.6 Caste and Identity

In 1956, under the leadership of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar the Mahars of Maharashtra accepted Buddhism as their religion at Nagpur. People who had previously belonged to the Mahar community and are Buddhists today, dislike being referred to as Mahars and might even protest if someone does so. However, when the Mahars in Halkarni are addressed as Buddhists, they reject the term and assert that they are Mahars—Hindus, and not Buddhists. This is in part due to their economic dependence on the Marathas. Buddhism is considered a rebellion and a protest against the untouchability and injustice meted out to Hindus belonging to a section of society—the 'lower' castes. But the Kambles of Halkarni have always been dependent on Brahmins and Marathas for their livelihood same. The little political existence enjoyed by a Kamble (in a dairy institution) is thanks to the Marathas. Hence the Mahars here make it a point to state that they are not Buddhists who have forfeited Hinduism or rebelled against its ways. The village has no presence of the Republican Party of India, the BSP or any other Dalit party.

Another instance of casteism here is the incident that took place with Bhikubai, a Dalit. Along with Vidya Tai, a Maratha, she works with the Asha Trust in Halkarni. They trudge through 25 or 30 villages of the Chandgad Taluka to hold meetings and training sessions on women's issues, health matters and the building of Bachatgats. They work to create awareness among women and to build a movement that will empower them.

On one such visit, after a local meeting in the small courtyard of an Adivasi house, they were invited to have tea by the woman of the house. Vidya Tai, a Maratha, stepped in but as Bhikubai, a Dalit, followed her, the Adivasi woman protested, saying, "Don't enter my house, our gods will disapprove."

Spaces are demarcated along lines of caste and power in the tall two-storied Rawalnath temple of Halkarni. Different spaces have been allotted to different people and castes. Inside the Rawalnath temple, is another temple, which is kept locked. The key to the lock is in the custody of the Gurav men and only Guravs have the authority to enter the temple and touch the deity. Maratha men and women can view the deity from the temple platform, but the Dalits and Naiks cannot stand on the platform. They have to stand in the yard beyond and touch the platform to worship the deity. Once when Bhikubai sat on the temple platform during a Grama Sabha, she was asked to get down.

- **Jaat Panchayat**

Halkarni's different communities have their own Jaat (Caste) Panchayats, for example, the Maratha, Brahmin and Naik Jaat Panchayats. Through the Jaat Panchayat, people are strongly united as a community group with similar habits, traditions and culture. It has a strong influence on the village. People do not take any decision without asking the mankaris, who have a certain spiritual standing in the community.

4.6.1.7 Special Schemes

Many village development schemes have been carried out such as building a concrete road using contributions from people under the Yashvant Gram Samrudhi Yojana at a cost of Rs 10,00,000/-. The Nal Panipurawtha Yojana or the water-tap scheme was implemented using contributions from people at a cost of Rs 22,00,000/-. Under the Dalit Wasti Sudhar Yojana, a water tap scheme costing Rs 2,97,000/- was implemented in the Dalit community. A water tank costing Rs 20,000/- was built at the Halkarni Phata and a pump house was built at a cost of Rs 1,10,000/- under the 12th Pay Commission. The Bharat Nirman Yojana has sanctioned a new scheme of Rs 41,00,000/- for the Naik community. Rs 34,00,000/- was sanctioned for a veterinary clinic which is under construction. 539 families have had toilets constructed for them under the 'Hagandari Mukta Yojana'.

4.6.1.8 Women in Politics

Female members of the Halkarni Grama Panchayat have an education level starting from just literacy to Class 12. Earlier, there were no women in governance. But in the past 15 years, 12 women have taken part in politics. It has raised the confidence of other women as well. Women participate in flag hoisting on a large scale. They have no political experience or background and sincerely wish to fill the gap by learning Panchayat work from the Gramsevak. Politics is influenced by caste, class and race even after the elections. For example, the Grama Sabha organized during the Darubandi campaign was called by women of the SC and ST community, whereas the Sarpanch was a Maratha.

The post of the Sarpanch is reserved for women from the open category. Powerful leaders in the sugar factory control Halkarni and the nearby village. The elections took place without any opposition because the three

different groups realized that none of them could come into power on their own. And therefore, the position of the Sarpanch would go to each group for a fixed duration—1.5 years each and then a two year period at the end. The female Sarpanch in the first time phase belonged to the Maratha community. Dhakuli Mavshi and Parvati Tai's names were suggested for the second period. But their forms were not accepted on the last day saying that the required documents were not there. Immediately, Bhikubai went to Chandgad and filled her form as suggested by the MRA and an activist from the Asha Foundation. But the form was not accepted allegedly because the stipulated time had passed. The Maratha group wanted Sonali Sawant, whose husband has a shop in the sugar factory and therefore follows Bharmu Patil, to come to power. Ultimately, Sonali Tai became the Sarpanch.

Both men and women opposed the naming of a man as the president of the Tanta Mukti Committee. This was because they felt that, typically, men tend to politicize matters. Parvati Bhatkhande was selected and approved of by everyone. Dhakuli Mavshi, the president of the Education committee, regularly visits the school and keeps a close watch on the students and as well as the running of the school. She took note of the fact that the students could not sing the national anthem and brought it up at a committee meeting. She pursued the matter until the teachers made the students sing well.

The Sarpanch, Sonali Sawant, is a graduate. Though she is not very experienced, during discussions on decisions, her educational qualifications ensure that her opinions are considered. However, because of family and political pressure, her confidence is low. Though her husband sends her to the Panchayat meetings, he does not like her participating in training sessions conducted by the MRA or the Asha Foundation. People are trying to make him understand the need for her to talk in public with confidence and therefore, the need to attend sessions which will train her to do so. To this end, an activist from the Asha Foundation makes it a point to send him a photograph of Sonali Tai whenever she gives a speech at a forum.

- **MRA Intervention**

The MRA has been active in Halkarni since 2003. Initially it started by explaining the role of MRA, the need for women's participation in politics and village development, and government funds. They conducted Mahila Melavas and trained women. Regular meetings were conducted for follow-ups. Programmes like Panchayat Darshan, the Joint Ownership of House campaign, Savitri Gatha, felicitation of a Jyotiba Putra, felicitation of the family, and organization of people with similar thought-processes were conducted, and a branch of the MRA was opened in the village. Halkarni's women are well organized and aware of their rights due to the continuous support and training by the MRA. There was a time when the Panchayat budget was a secret. Today, it is available for everyone to see and women demand their rights regarding the 10% budget allocation in the Panchayat. Most government schemes have come to Halkarni thanks to MRA activists, who also follow up on the matter.

4.6.1.9 Political Parties and the Power Structure

For the past 10 to 15 years, Bharmu Subharao Patil's group is in power due to his influence over the sugar factory. People had no access to the drinking water available in the factory. An electric motor on the bore well was taken away. Patil talked about those issues and earned political advantage in the Panchayat election. His panel won the election.

There were two panels: belonging to Narsing Patil (MLA) and Bharmu Patil. Five people from Bharmu Patil's group, two apolitical people and five people from Narsing Patil's group were elected. Bharmu Patil enjoyed power with the help of the two apolitical people. But he did not do anything significant for the village. Gopal Patil has another group in the Taluka. Therefore, voters are divided in three different groups and so no single group could come to power. Gopal Patil is a Sabhapati in the ZP. He took the

leadership and joined hands with the two other groups so that all of them could share power by equally dividing the time span of five years between them. The Grama Panchayat was under the rule of Bharmu Patil from 1995 to 2000. He won that election by using his strong ties with the factory and liquor, money and violence.

A major change in the political scenario in Halkarni has been that while earlier there used to be just one political party and one leader, these days, various political parties are in the fray, thanks to caste and communal differences. There is no blind faith in a political leader or a party any more. Power centres are in different hands now since there are three powerful groups. Recently, more minority women have been seen to participate in governance.

- **Status of Women**

Earlier, women had to cover their heads with sari pallus, and were not allowed to participate during marriage negotiations. They have now become more confident and do not cover their heads. They also intervene during marriage negotiations and help resolve disputes. At times, they do so even at the cost of having to give up a day's wage. They have gained this power and strength through the MRA and with the support of Sister Sheela of the Asha Foundation. For the past ten years, they have celebrated Women's Day with small skits, plays, lectures and songs. Child marriages have been banned.

Women do most of the house work and the work in the farms as well. Their work includes fetching water, cleaning the house with cow dung, collecting cashews, cooking, washing clothes and vessels, cleaning and watering cattle and labour on their farms. Men do not engage in any work except farming and sending milk to the dairy.

As a factor of heavy work load, women had poor personal hygiene. They were never given enough food to eat so that they would not become 'lazy'. Domestic violence was a common occurrence.

But things have changed a little. Daughters-in-law know their rights. They want their daughters to study further. They bathe once in two days instead of once a week. But they still prefer a male child to a female and get pregnant often in the hope of having one. The first two daughters are given normal names; the third is called 'Sarita' which signifies a river, but, by an extension of its meaning, also means 'Sarti' or the last; and the fourth girl is called 'Nakoshi' or the 'Unwanted'. On the whole, it was observed that women have a secondary status in society. Across the region it was also observed that men were dominant at the district and Taluka levels, while women were limited to the village Panchayat level.

- **A Panchayat Woman at Home**

Sonali Sawant, the first female Sarpanch of Halkarni, does most of the household work. Her daily schedule has not changed since becoming a Sarpanch. Her family members do not discuss Panchayat matters or do Panchayat work on her behalf, but they are proud of her. When people come to see her about Panchayat matters, she gives them priority over her household work. She discusses her experiences in the Panchayat with her husband. She has not yet gone to the ZP or the Panchayat Samiti.

The water scheme was started during her time in office. She insists on having all possible infrastructural facilities for the village and says that everyone should work towards it. However, during any kind of incident, she takes a stand favourable to the political group she is affiliated with. Sonali Tai works on her own farm. Her opinions are considered to an extent when financial decisions are being made in the family.

Sonali Tai has easy access to all public places and gets due respect as a Sarpanch. But she does not go to the Panchayat Samiti or the ZP. The Upsarpanch does all that work.

- **Changes in the Halkarni and Halarwadi (a part of the Sadawarwadi Group Grama Panchayat)**

Over time, social, political, cultural and personal changes have taken place in these villages. Untouchability used to be practiced here, with a division of labour across caste lines. The Brahmins were most important during religious rituals, while Marathas were responsible for tax and expenditure. Women were not allowed to go out and education for girls was unheard of. If a couple got married outside of their castes, they were killed.

Nowadays, by and large people of all castes and religions mingle at get-togethers. Unlike before, there is no monopoly of a specific caste during a village festival or saptah. Untouchability is not practised in public places or in daily life. Dalit and Maratha children study together. Women were never consulted on issues like marriage, but now women elders are also consulted. Inter-caste marriages are not yet approved of but after a while, the family does accept it. Overall, girl children are educated.

The practice of a woman entering the village with her slippers in her hand, pallu on the head, following her husband has changed. Nowadays, when women enter the village, it is with their husbands, pallu on the head, and slippers on the feet. Earlier women were segregated during their periods and touching them was taboo, but now by and large, they carry on their normal routine undisturbed. Change has set into other areas too, for instance, superstitions, the practice of having Devdasis, and going to quacks instead of doctors. In economic terms, while earlier 75% of the work was done by women, with men enjoying the entire control of the household economy, now 75% of the work is still done by women, but they have 25% power over the household economy.

4.6.2 SADAWARWADI

Area	: hectares
Population	: 424
Taluka	: Chandgad
District	: Kolhapur

4.6.2.1 Demography

The villages of Halarwadi and Sadawarwadi are part of a Group Grama Panchayat. Sadawarwadi is approached by a bridge which overflows during the monsoons, cutting it off from nearby villages. The school has to remain shut until the water level goes down. Sadawarwadi has 64 households. The entire population is Maratha. People do not let any OBC or SC families live in the village, and make every attempt to have only Maratha families here.

Halarwadi is very close to the Kalanandigad forest. Earlier, farming had to be stopped due to attacks by wild elephants. Slowly, over time, a community was established there. Ancestors of the present residents of Sadawarwadi migrated from Halkarni. During Shivaji's time, people from this village used to protect the 'sadar', or court. Hence, they were called 'sadawar' and their village was called 'Sadawarwadi'. Most of the families in the village bear the surname of 'Sadawar', apart from the two or three 'Tavade' families.

4.6.2.2 Infrastructure

There is a ZP primary school at the beginning of the village, which is surrounded by sugarcane and chilly fields. There are no clinics, flour mills or post offices. Electricity was introduced to the village in 1985. Sadawarwadi has one grocery shop. The Panchayat has not needed to introduce a water scheme because there are enough wells in the village to meet people's needs.

different committees of the students, like the Chief Minister, Health Minister and Sanitation Minister. A parents and teachers meet is organized regularly.

Despite the fact that there are many small children in the village, there is no anganwadi for them. People have hired a teacher for the balwadi and contribute Rs 10/- per child to teach 20 children. There is a room for students to have meals in. Though there is a toilet, it is not used because there is no water.

The village has 14 students doing their graduation, out of which six are girls. Around 32 students go to the high school or the Karkhana Shala in Halkarni, 3 to 4 km away. Since there is no bus from the village, they walk. In 2003, a Nirantar Shikshan Kendra was set up in the village. Under the scheme, a motivator and an assistant motivator are selected and paid by the ZP to teach adults and dropouts. But since the past two years the scheme has not been working since there is no allocation made for the payment in the Panchayat budget. It has recently been restarted. Many books and sports material are sent from the Social Welfare Department of the Government of Maharashtra to the ZP, and then on to the Nirantar Shikshan Kendra. It is the girls who issue books most of the time. Sports material is used exclusively by the boys.

The public library is located inside the temple and has 110 books. *Tarun Bharat* and *Sakal* are the newspapers brought to the Kendra from the Halkarni phata.

Before 1993, only 4 to 5 women had studied up to Class 4. In 1993, for the first time in the history of the village, a girl completed Class 10. Now the situation has changed with eight girls in the village appearing for their Class 12 exams. The nearest college is 5 km away. Most women married into the community from outside are educated. But the economic power in the village is controlled by men - there are only two households where women handle the money. But women do participate in making decisions relating to marriages and the sowing of seeds.

People are very superstitious. Seeing a bhagat is common practice. Most of the time, the daughter-in-law is blamed for any disaster in the family. Typically, the third girl child in the family is again named 'Sarita' or 'the last one'—indicating, subtly, the family's attitude to the girl child. In case a fourth girl child is born, she is christened 'Nakoshi', or the 'Unwanted'. Despite this, cases of female feticide are very few in the entire Chandgad Taluka.

The village has many sources of water. As a custom, women here bathe once a week. A daily bath is taken only during the time of menstruation. This is changing slowly, as women are now bathing every two days. When the household work is done (including cleaning of cattle, fetching of water, milking of cows and buffaloes, cooking, washing clothes and vessels), women go to the fields. Here their work includes separating cashew seeds, selling cashew pulp, grazing cattle and plucking chillies. When they come home in the evening, yet another round of chores starts.

Earlier, people used to brew alcohol out of cashew pulp in the cashew gardens, but the activity has been completely banned for the past five years. No one is alcoholic now in the village and the drive to stop alcohol abuse has been entirely successful. Cable TV transmission began here in 2007 and today, 28 families own TVs with cable network.

4.6.2.3 Livelihood

Agriculture is the main occupation of the people. When electric motors for water were introduced here, 80% of the land became cultivable. People started growing sugarcane as a cash crop. Rice, sugarcane, sweet potato, cashew nuts and nachni are the main crops, while chilly, potato and ground nuts are secondary crops. People are engaged in agriculture throughout the year due to cultivable land and the availability of water.

Because it is hard to find labourers in the village, people help each other in farm-related activities. There are two dairies in the village and about 130 milch cattle, apart from goats and hens. Everyone uses gobar gas. Wheat and kerosene have to be bought from the ration shop in Halkarni. Fodder is collected from the forest and sometimes sold.

4.6.2.4 Grama Panchayat

Sadawarwadi comes under Halarwadi's revenue department and the Grama Panchayat office is in Halarwadi. The Sarpanch is Dr Manohar Patil who has a clinic in Halkarni. The Gramsevak is Arjun Shinde, and the women Panchayat members are Shanta Goral and Lakshmi Gavde. Dr Patil is the traditional landlord of Sadawarwadi, and most of the land here still belongs to him. Most families here have been under his influence since the last 40 years, and are reluctant to go against him. He is a strong supporter of the ex-MLA Narsing Patil.

There is very little transparency in the Panchayat and it is in debt. No government scheme or infrastructure facility has reached Sadawarwadi. When people realize that their needs are pressing, they simply contribute money and sort matters out themselves rather than wait for the Panchayat to do anything for them. This is how they built toilets in the primary school. Since there were no nursery schools for children, they decided to contribute Rs 10/- towards an honorarium for the teacher and start one without any other government intervention. When there was no electricity in the village, people followed up matters and brought electricity to the village with their own money and efforts.

The Grama Sabha is never announced and most people are not aware of the concept of the Mahila Grama Sabha. Men do not allow women to step out and attend Panchayat meetings. In fact, a Grama Sabha meeting is never called in the village, but all villagers sign on the sheet of paper sent to their houses stating that they have attended it. Two wards in Halarwadi and one ward in Sadawarwadi support Narsing Patil. The Bharmu Patil group is in opposition with Narsing's group. Voting is defined by the distribution of liquor and money. Once elected, none of the candidates have been concerned with development of the village. Elections were held in 2005 and the candidates met no opposition.

4.6.2.5 Grama Sabha

The Grama Sabha for the Sadawarwadi and Halarwadi Group Grama Panchayat takes place only on paper. For instance, when the Gramsevak brings the Sarpanch a GR stating that it is compulsory to call a Grama Sabha with the notice of the ZP and the Panchayat Samiti, the Sarpanch takes the paper on which signatures are required for the sanctioning of the scheme, circulates it in the village, gets it signed and gives it to the Gramsevak so that he can write the proceedings. The Gramsevak completes the rest of the documentation and sends the proposals to the government.

- **Mahila Grama Sabha**

The people of Sadawarwadi do not seem to be ready to accept women's presence in spaces of public governance as yet. There has been no effort to call a Mahila Grama Sabha by the Gramsevak and the Sarpanch. The men are in completely opposed to women's involvement in politics.

- **CBOs**

There are committees in Halarwadi and a degree of participation by the people; but none of it exists in Sadawarwadi. They do not have Tanta Mukti or Dakshata Committees. But Sadawarwadi does have two SHGs with accounts in Dena Bank. Women take loans for household or agricultural purposes. Sometimes they face problems in paying back the loans.

- **Special Schemes**

The PWD has constructed a road connecting Sadawarwadi, Halarwadi and Karanjgaon at an expense of Rs 40,00,000/-. The Sarpanch says that the Panchayat is in debt for Rs 60,000/-, so there is no point discussing schemes, implementing schemes or any village development work. No one is aware of the fund allocation for women and children in the Panchayat.

4.6.2.6 Women in Politics

Women in Sadawarwadi and Halarwadi are not active in governance. In fact, they are purposely kept away from politics by their men. The former Sarpanch Namdev Goral's wife Shanta Goral is presently a member of the Panchayat, but her participation is limited to signing on the proceedings paper, which is delivered to her house for signature and approval. "Why should a woman enter the Panchayat? People will resent that and therefore there is no Mahila Grama Sabha in our village," she said.

When Bhikubai Kamble started forming SHGs here, the men said, "You will make us wash vessels if you teach our women such things—this is wrong!" There are two female members needed, but one post is always vacant. Women's names are included in different committees, but that too is just on paper. The formation of SHGs is still under process in Halarwadi and Sadawarwadi. A credit society, a development society and three milk dairies are active in this village.

4.6.2.7 Changes in Power Structure

Power dynamics have changed within the groups in Sadawarwadi. However, eventually power is always centered in the hands of the Bharmu Patil family, because all small groups in the village are finally dependent on him for their power.

4.6.2.8 Issue Mapping

The elections held in 2005 were won unopposed as usual. Only one family showed some opposition, which invited the wrath of the powerful village leaders. They were boycotted by the entire village. All the villagers except Vidya Tavade participated in the boycott. People still remember the incident and it is indicative of how dominant the leaders are.

4.7 A SUMMARY OF WOMEN AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE ACROSS THE VILLAGES

Given below is a brief status of the local governance and the presence of women in the governance of ten villages. For a detailed study, please see the report on individual villages in the chapter on Village Reports.

Name of the Village	Status of Local Governance
Halkarni Western Maharashtra	The village has a mixed population of Marathas, Christians, Naiks, Dalits, Brahmins and others. The Maratha community is dominant. It has an active Panchayat, with no political party but with three powerful groups. Politics is centered around the sugar factory. More than six Grama Sabhas are held with the participation of the weaker section. There is transparency in the Panchayat. Much of the developmental groundwork had been done by the Asha Foundation. Liquor, money and violence are used during elections. The Dalits and Christians are active and aware of their rights. There is some male dominance in the PS and at the ZP elections.

Name of the Village	Status of Local Governance
	Women in Governance Women are active and efficient in the Panchayat through the Mahila Grama Sabha which is held regularly. Halkarni's committees are active. Women participate in flag hoisting. While younger women are under male pressure, older women (40+) tend to struggle against patriarchy to gain equal status. Most houses are jointly owned. Women are seen only at the Panchayat level, which has four EWRs. Among upper class/castes, younger women are dominated by men. Older women have earned respect by struggling for it. Though women work very hard, economic power lies only in men's hands. Among the lower classes/castes, women are aware of their rights due to the MRA and the Asha Foundation. Naik, Dalit and Lohar women are economically more powerful than their men. The female Sarpanch does not go to the PS or the ZP. The Upsarpanch does all that work. Incidentally, the Upsarpanch's fourth daughter is called 'Nakoshi' or the 'Unwanted', a common practice if a fourth girl is born when the parents wished for a son.
Sadawarwadi Western Maharashtra	The village has only Maratha families and is patriarchal in nature, with economic power entirely in men's hands. Negligence by the Sarpanch, lack of government schemes, and a Panchayat in debt are the essential features here. The Patil family has had a monopoly over it since the past 40 years. The Panchayat has no transparency; the Grama Sabha is held only on paper. Committees here are not active and hardly anyone from the village is on them. Liquor, money and violence were used during elections. People contribute for village development initiatives, rather than access government schemes. Women in Governance Women participate in the decision-making process related to marriages. There is no concept of a Mahila Grama Sabha. There are two EWRs from Halarwadi. Women's participation on committees is only on paper. There is strong opposition to the joint ownership of houses.
Sherpe Konkan	Sherpe has clearly defined caste differences. Though the Grama Panchayat is strong here, the literate avoid the Grama Sabha, while the poor have no time to voice their demands. On the whole, the participation by the weaker sections in the Grama Sabha is very limited. But due to the MRA's efforts, people are now aware of their rights, entitlements and various schemes. Women in Governance Sherpe has three EWRs. A sense of gender equality has been cultivated due to the MRA. But it varies among women across different communities. The Grama Sabha is held regularly for which around 30 women are present. Women are aware of their rights. But there is no effort to plan any development scheme for the village by the Panchayat. Upper caste women in the Panchayat are respected. While the lower castes are influenced by upper caste Sarpanches, despite being in power, a lower caste or tribal person cannot influence others. Because lower caste women in particular have no experience of political dynamics, they are not treated as equals. Women got to know of all the Panchayat related work only after becoming Panchayat members. They became more aware of their rights and more confident too. They now

Name of the Village	Status of Local Governance
	speak about their problems and seek justice. They are not yet fully empowered but are certainly on the way to being so. The women here are well-organized thanks to the MRA.
Undil Konkan	This is a Mahila Grama Panchayat, or a Panchayat headed by a panel of women. Some families here will be affected by an upcoming dam. The Panchayat has many political dynamics and internal disputes. Women in Governance Despite its being a Mahila Grama Panchayat, there were only 35 to 40 women at the Mahila Grama Sabha. The Sarpanch has studied till Class 7, and is a good leader. She takes a deep interest in village development. SHGs are newly formed and still not trained. Upper caste women are more influential than lower caste women in the Panchayat. Lower caste women here face many problems despite being well educated, efficient and active.
Manegaon Vidarbha	Located near a district centre, Manegaon is comparatively better off. It has 24 SHGs and two Mahila Mandals, and a male Sarpanch. The MRA has been active here for two years. There is a school till Class 12, a bank, a credit society, two hotels and a library. There are toilets in every house. The participation of the weaker sections is limited to availing government schemes. Planning in the Panchayat is done by the Gramsevak and the members. The Chandekar and Dorle families are dominant in politics. Both money and liquor are used during elections. There are a few trained SHGs involved in income generation activities. The Jalaswarajya Scheme failed due to disputes and issues with tax. Women in Governance There are four EWRs here and women generally participate in local politics, with the Mahila Grama Sabha taking place too. The women managed to get liquor banned here. The women members are confident and efficient, and their families are cooperative.
Bokara Vidarbha	Bokara is part of a suburban area in Nagpur. Comparatively better off, it is easily accessible. Farmers sold their land during a boom here and earned a lot of money. It has a bank and 16 bore wells. The Panchayat is rich and Rs 60,00,000/- was sanctioned for a wedding hall. Politics here is complex, with disputes between all the political parties. The local MLA is influential. A few people attend the Grama Sabha. The Gramsevak is not active. The Vishakha Committee, Dakshata Committee and Tanta Mukti Committees are operational only on paper. Drinking water is a problem in a few localities. There are no toilets in the Santarapur community. Women in Governance Bokara has eight EWRs. Alcoholism and domestic violence are the main problems faced by women. The police here have joined hands with liquor shop owners. Female members in the Panchayat work in accordance with the wishes of their political parties. There are no Mahila Grama Sabhas and the five SHGs here function, but not efficiently or in a trained manner.

Name of the Village	Status of Local Governance
Jamunnala Vidarbha	Jamunnala is a tribal village located in the interiors of Melghat. It is part of a Group Grama Panchayat. Illiteracy and superstitions are prevalent here, as are child marriages. The MRA has been active for the past two years. The NGOs here are ineffective and transport facilities are poor. There is no food provided in the anganwadi and no PHC, which means that emergencies cannot be treated. There are no instances of female foeticide. There are water problems, no street lights and no toilets. Very few children go to high school. Women in Governance There are two EWRs here. The Mahila Grama Sabha takes place with very few women attending, though the women do attend the flag-hoisting ceremony. The dynamic Fulma Belsare is the female Upsarpanch, and though illiterate, she is more active and efficient than the Sarpanch.
Kusumkot Vidarbha	Kusumkot has a mixed population of Hindus, Muslims, Adivasis and Bauddhas. Located near a central market place, it is a comparatively larger village with three wards and 16 SHGs. Water and electricity have not reached the tribal community, as the tribals are in minority and are dominated by the majority. Kusumkot has a Korku woman Sarpanch. The Muslim community has power here. Health facilities are available, though the govt. officials associated with the village are careless. The Grama Sabha takes place in the presence of people, though there is no participation of the tribals. Alcoholism is prevalent here. The MLA and an individual called Lobhilal Malwiya are dominant in the village. Women in Governance Kusumkot has three EWRs. The newly elected woman Sarpanch is illiterate and not active. The Mahila Grama Sabha takes place in the presence of 15 to 20 women.
Wadwal Marathwada	In Wadwal the Panchayat office is open for 24 hours and there is no alcoholism here. There are five schools here, but a high number of drop outs. The village has no hospital or sanitary latrines. Thanks to the MRA's interventions and Maya Tai Sorte's work for the last decade, men's attitude towards women has changed. Apart from six temples and separate cultural halls, there is one mosque. They have an active Gramsevak, and Annasaheb Patil has been dominant here since many years. Women in Governance Wadwal has five EWRs and 37 SHGs, all trained. Nearly 20 of them are engaged in income generation activities. Mahila Grama Sabhas are regular, with about 400 women attending. Men respect women in the political space and the women actively participate in the decision-making process. Women have taken up many development issues here. However, the Sarpanch and Gramsevak have a joint account which is kept confidential. The women do not as yet know the process of writing up the proceedings.
Anandwadi Marathwada	Anandwadi has three temples and a mosque. It has untarred roads and no gutters in some parts. The weaker sections are not a part of the development process. The Gavthan is congested, with no space for further extension. There is a lack of transportation facilities and the PHC is 7 km away, resulting in grave difficulties during emergencies.

Name of the Village	Status of Local Governance
	There is an unequal distribution of land, with big landlords owning 20 to 50 acres of land, while 80% of the people are marginal and landless farmers. Only 3% of the families have toilets. There is no NGO in the village. Alcoholism is not prevalent here. Women in Governance Anandwadi has two EWRs. Women here are scared of stepping out and talking in public. The Sarpanch's and Upsarpanch's husbands do their work for them in the Panchayat. Very few women attend the flag hoisting ceremony. The woman Sarpanch is illiterate, untrained and not active. The MRA has been active here since the past two years.

5

Financial Delegation of PRIs in Maharashtra

5.1 FINANCIAL DECENTRALIZATION OF PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS (PRIS) IN MAHARASHTRA

Maharashtra is an important state in India. It ranks second in terms of population and third in terms of geographical area. All the standard economic indicators show it to be a leader among the Indian states. Indeed, it has been termed the 'industrial power house of India'. However, competition among Indian states has meant that this premier position is constantly under threat. Maharashtra, more than many others, displays a peculiar skewness when it comes to income and wealth distribution. Needless to add it is home to poor and vulnerable people, a fact which is incongruous with its overall economic achievements.

Like some of the other states, the tradition of PRIs in Maharashtra predates the passage of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment. Indeed, the pedigree in this regard not only predates the formation of Maharashtra, but also Indian independence. The earliest effort in this respect was through the Bombay Village Panchayat Act of 1920, which was amended in 1958. The Hatch Committee of 1925 saw a culmination in implementation in 1933. After the reorganization of states, the Maharashtra Zilla Parishads and Panchayat Samiti Act was promulgated in 1961, three decades prior to the 73rd Constitutional Amendment. This prior presence has been a bane because the 73rd Constitutional Amendment's efficacy has been reduced by the lack of a clean slate.

This chapter deals with the finances of PRIs in Maharashtra. For a lot of the theoretical and conceptual part it draws heavily on earlier work done for the *State of Panchayati Raj: 2008, an Independent Assessment* produced by the Institute of Rural Management Anand (IRMA) and commissioned by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, GoI. Thus for a detailed discussion on many of the issues and data analysis, the reader is referred to Pethe and Lalvani (2008). The section on SFCs derives from the special DRG study conducted by the author (see Pethe, et al., 2009) for the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) (in turn commissioned by the 13th Finance Commission). The aggregative data on the latest position of PRIs in Maharashtra is derived from inputs to Maharashtra's Memorandum Committee for the 13th FC. Some of the latest data has been made available recently by the Rural Development Department (RDD), GoM. Thus data heterogeneity (time periods) in different sections is unavoidable.

Although the overall study of which this chapter forms a part deals essentially with women's empowerment, in a sense it is circumscribed—in the economic dimension—by magnitude and sources (quality) of flow of funds to the PRIs. To that extent, therefore, the chapter provides a constraining contour of what can and cannot be achieved under the women's empowerment agenda.

The chapter is organized as follows. There are seven sections in this chapter including this introduction. The second section is a preamble which talks briefly about the context of decentralization. The third section argues for the need of an inclusive character of the growth strategy. The fourth section deals with SFCs and

some further related issues with reference to Maharashtra. The fifth section begins with the finances of PRIs that are visited severally covering different aspects as well as levels of aggregation. The sixth section talks about the specific empowerment of women. The seventh section sums up and concludes.

5.2 PREAMBLE

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment is a landmark in India's developmental strategy. This was achieved after much thought and effort. The concept has a long and rich pedigree starting from prehistoric times and is seen to engage the policy thought in the interregnum in fits and starts. Lord Rippon's famous slogan of 'power to the people' is in some sense the genesis. Closer to the present, it was the former PM Rajiv Gandhi's bold (and unsuccessful) attempt to push through the 64th Constitutional Amendment that must be acknowledged as the proximate precursor to the final outcome.

Large systems require organizational management strategies to help break up the whole problematic into manageable components and/or aspects. These are achieved through the process of decongestion, delegation and devolution. The most comprehensive and all-encompassing form of the above is the so called process of decentralization. The advantages and disadvantages of decentralization as a strategy are well documented (see Oates 1972, Tiebout 1961, and Prud'homme 1995), there is little need for such academic discussion. Since the passage of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, India has, in letter and spirit, opted for decentralized governance unequivocally. Whilst it is difficult to establish the positive effects of decentralization empirically and weigh them against the disadvantages of institutional capacities at the lower level, there are a multitude of individual examples of the positive impact of decentralization on governance as well as on human development measures. Good governance is recognized as a key to efficient welfare enhancing governance, of which decentralization is one of the constituent best practices. There is a fair consensus that whilst decentralization is a challenging and complex process that requires dedicated participation by all the stake holders, it promises to be a mechanism for improved democratic governance and sustainable human development.

In the current Indian situation, two things that are imperative are sustaining growth impulses and having inclusion at the epicenter. This requires that the policy strategy be structured in a decentralized way. In doing so it is also essential to pay special attention to the empowerment of vulnerable sections especially women. This provides a context for the study. In today's global world order, the mantra is to think global and act local. The complementary synergistic relation between local and global institutions and operations is well recognized (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2006). This is crucial for the effective adumbration of the *glocal* paradigm. There is no better vehicle in India than the meaningfully empowered, extant framework provided by the PRIs.

5.3 EMBEDDING INCLUSION: AN INTEGRAL PART OF GROWTH STRATEGY

It is important to understand that our insistence on inclusion as an embedded part of the strategy is not merely dictated by ethical/moral considerations (although these are not bad reasons either). It is a pragmatic position born out of the feasibility and sustainability of the much needed growth phenomenon, within the Indian socio-political milieu. Notwithstanding the current hiccup, the great Indian growth story of the recent past is too well-known to require much elaboration. In recent times, the upswing in the secular rate of growth of the Indian economy to around 7+%, wherein it has managed to make a significant break away from the 'Hindu rate' (3.5%) has had a positive impact on the way in which India is perceived the world over. The impact of this growth on the macro-level fiscal and income variables, in terms of the positive growth dividend, must finally put to rest all the anti-growth rhetoric. It is amply clear (in the context of the growth scenario) that all the good things in the social sphere, in terms of inclusion, can now be realistically afforded by the Indian

policy maker, perhaps for the first time! For purposes of satisfying the very important tenet of inclusion, greater weight needs to be given to social sectors in a targeted and performance based manner. It is equally crucial that growth (even when somewhat exclusionary in character) has to be sustained, with the further implication that the design of any policy strategy must have incentive compatibility as its cornerstone. Having taken care that the growth rate regime is not jeopardized, the essential step will be to concentrate on the 'inclusive' aspect of growth. Growth is after all only an instrument which can ensure that development takes place. Inclusive effects are intrinsic to the process of development—properly understood—and will surely require focused attention. We believe that not only does this make good economic sense but, good political sense too.

Inclusiveness may be said to have two dimensions, one in terms of sectors of economy and two in terms of groups/persons who have been by-passed in the growth process (Mujumdar, 2007). Both of these have to be addressed with equal importance. For this, apart from the PRIs that have to be pressed into action, the other significant change has to be in terms of the investment climate in order to up the magnitude seriously. After all, inclusive growth is a complicated phenomenon involving coordinated role of actors like PRIs, State and Central Governments, and NGOs (SHGs) amongst others on the one hand, and the vision of a new architecture of rural credit on the other. Supply led and (non-clinical) extension-based innovation in credit delivery has to be learnt afresh by the banking community at large. The mistakes in the interest rate policy that led banks to hold SLR securities thereby crowding out priority sector lending (including agriculture), leading to disenfranchisement of rural borrowers, under the wrong characterization of it leading to NPAs, must not be repeated. In the Indian context a macro view of credit risk needs to be developed that so that the dual role of growth enhancement and risk mitigation are fulfilled in the case of agriculture and allied activities (Mujumdar 2007). Changing the risk profile as well as the risk perception of the bankers must be an explicit and sharply defined policy objective of credit policy, with the capability to translate potential demand into viable risk projects.

What we are recommending—to be sure—is not a return to the old ways, but rather a move to a more enlightened market theology. In the newer context this calls for a redefined role of the State which simultaneously lets go and works more intensively on narrowly-defined objectives. There are two important strands of argument to be made in this context. One, it is important to consolidate central schemes that have grown and continue to grow exponentially with the absorption capacity at the ground level showing perennial decline. In doing so, priorities will need to be set so that the problem is tractable and manageable. We believe that the first such effort has to be concentrated on three areas: water, education and roads.

The road connectivity has a remarkable impact on the lives of rural folk, as has been amply documented. As Narayan et al have pointed out (see India Infrastructure Report 2007), the prevailing conditions make it difficult for people to get their goods to the market, or get to their place of work, access public services or health in an emergency. Education as a constituent of development needs no argument, but its delivery through various schemes (notably the SSA) as now designed is unsatisfactory. As far as water is concerned, it is the life line of civilizations, and in all likelihood, the next world war will be fought over water. It is important to combine all the schemes (funds there from) that look at the consumption (drinking/conservation/wells) as well as the investment (minor irrigation schemes/harvesting) aspects as play them through the instrumentality of PRIs. The water programmes are not functioning properly (especially the ones with respect to irrigation). Indeed the technical committee on watershed development has opined that given the estimate of about Rs 1,50,000 crores, and the fact that the actual devolution is woefully short, there is a good case for National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) funds to be merged. Only such programmes can save agriculture in rain-fed regions. Of course, there has to be a different approach for drought prone areas. There is evidence to show that the political empowerment of women has also thrown up such schemes as perceived priorities (for all assertions made above see, India Infrastructure Reports,

especially 2007, dealing with Rural Infrastructure, also see Annual Report of RDD, GoI 2007, Shubham Chaudhary, 2007, and NA Mujumdar, 2007).

The externality of such reorganization will be that utilization will improve, and through impetus to the rural hubs initiative, livelihoods will be created, which is the surest way of empowerment. Here one needs to emphasize that there are two important elements, namely health and power, that we have left out. The reason is that whilst some elements (extension) can be incorporated, prioritization requires that things be kept at manageable levels. There are indications (from experience elsewhere) that given the skill demands of both these sectors and the prevailing situation, these are not sectors that lend themselves to easy and successful decentralization.

The second strand of the argument here is that consolidation and transferring of the funds to PRIs (along with functionaries) will lead to possibilities of financial market access. This should be encouraged using various possibilities and experiences (see Pethe and Lalvani, 2006). There will inevitably be issues about the resident capacity of the lower level functionaries. These need to be faced squarely and yet the lack of capacity should never be used as an excuse for devolving less than optimal resources, which alone will truly signal empowerment and inclusion. This is the context within which we will see the actual figures related to the financial resources that reach the PRIs. It is also necessary to look at the relevant constitutional provisions which provide the parametric frame for the devolution to local bodies.

5.4 73RD CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT: STATE FINANCE COMMISSIONS

The passing of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment marked continuity in terms of taking forward the agenda sought to be put in place through the foiled attempt of the 64th Constitutional Amendment. The agenda was to bring about uniformity and constitutional validity to the third tier of governance across the country. Prior to this there were sporadic and heterogeneous attempts by different states at setting up local governments. This was meant to transform the erstwhile ‘creatures of state governments into children of the constitution’. It was seen as a major fillip to the decentralization process that was ‘always around but never invited in’. The 11th Schedule was added to the Constitution as a part of this amendment listing out the transfer of functions from the State to the local government. One of the most important provisions of the amendment was the mandate to set up a State Finance Commission (SFC) every five years. It was believed that this would mimic the Central Finance Commissions (CFCs) that are set up every five years at the central level as required by the Constitution and whose awards are well respected and accepted.

This is a huge area which has been widely researched (see World Bank/Geeta Sethi (2004), India Infrastructure Report (2003) as also Shubham Chaudhary (2007)). Our concern in this section is with the financial aspects of SFC reports. The SFCs have been required to be set up by a Constitutional mandate as a part of the 73rd CAA. However, they have not been very successful for a few reasons. First amongst these is that while they have mostly been set up rather mechanically, not much thought seems to have gone into the composition of the commission. The timing of setting these up has also not been synchronized with the CFCs (which work like clockwork), thus depriving the CFCs of crucial inputs. Some of the SFCs have taken their job seriously and have come up with useful recommendations. By and large most of the recommendations in the reports have been rejected and when they have been accepted (in principle), the States have dragged their feet in the matter of actual implementation of the awards. There are only a few states that have rigorously kept to a time table of setting up SFCs. Fewer still have actually gone through the process of acceptance and ATR by the respective governments and legislatures. There is varied experience where the newly formed states are only now initiating the process of setting up their first SFCs (Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand). Again, the quality of the reports by the SFC in different states shows heterogeneity. Some of the SFCs have recommended revenue (tax and non-tax) (Andhra Pradesh) and sometimes only the tax revenue (Assam)

shares are to be devolved as well as shared between the urban and rural local bodies. The inter se distribution between the different tiers is also recommended based on criteria that vary from simple and straightforward to complicated and detailed, formula-based formats that reflect social concerns (always where there is data to implement such recommendations). Some have gone to the extent of working out the first level of demarcation in terms of advanced ordinary and backward PRIs along with weights. Recommendations about assignments of taxes such as advertisement, profession and property tax have routinely been made. In addition, some SFCs have suggested newer handles for revenue mobilization or improvement in the efficiency of the existing ones. Some have recommended (and implemented) special grants for weak PRIs as well as incentive grants for well-performing ones.

For all this, mostly the end result is non acceptance of the SFCs' recommendations. It is difficult to justify the efforts taken by the SFCs resulting in ad hoc, non formulaic and paltry grants being handed down to the PRIs. Even several years after the submission of reports, states in their response to the query use phrases like 'accepted in principle', or 'under active consideration', or 'yet to be ascertained' (Assam, Tripura and Goa); or indeed the more drastic, 'details are not available' (Maharashtra). In most cases even the conditional acceptance means non-acceptance of recommendations that have financial implications.

However, there are exceptions where the recommendations been accepted, and actually implemented with a quick release of funds (Gujarat, Haryana, Sikkim and Punjab). In a rare case, rather than await the report of the next FC, a state (Haryana) has gone ahead and released advanced grants. Several new schemes have been initiated and implemented, backed by financial releases. This shows the proactive stance of the State and should be considered a good practice, especially in contrast to the generally prevalent attitude of finding excuses or shifting blame. In some cases like Jammu & Kashmir, one finds parallel bodies like the Halqua Panchayats (also Pani-Panchayats in Orissa) that are to be devolved funds. While they may be doing good work whether such parallel bodies are to be allowed is a moot point. The quantum of untied and programmatic schematic funds that reach each Panchayat is as high as 20% to 30% in some cases (Himachal Pradesh and Kerala). The practice of supporting weak Panchayats and creating incentives is laudable (Haryana, Punjab, Maharashtra). The enabling practice in some states of allowing outsourcing especially in technical matters and the mandate to raise resources through borrowings is a good practice that deserves emulation. So is the transfer of rights for extraction of minerals whilst keeping the revenues (Madhya Pradesh).

In the specific case of Maharashtra, there have been three commissions and the financial devolution as recommended by all the three has been uniformly ignored. In the case of the first SFC, a meager amount was devolved (as compared to the recommended devolution). In the case of the second award, the state government dragged its feet and the cabinet nod came just a few days prior to the end of its term of implementation (consequently, there was no resulting financial devolution). In case of the third one, an inordinately long time has been taken because it is 'under process of consideration'. This is indeed sad, especially for the State of Maharashtra that proudly carries the tag of being a progressive state on one the hand and flaunting its pedigree when it comes to PRIs on the other.

As in the case of the manner of transfer of funds, the 'best practices' here need to be documented and other states need to be encouraged to emulate them. As things stand, the SFCs as an instrument of devolution of funds seem to have been a singular failure. Some good practices with regards to the process and quantum of the flow of funds are undoubtedly in evidence, but these are largely in states that have already been converted to the dharma of decentralization. The role of the SFCs in converting a significant majority of other states is non-existent. Given the sharp contrast which this presents to the practice of practically mandatory acceptance of the Central Finance Commission, a good deal of soul searching is called for. Perhaps the centripetal bias of our federation needs to be invoked to take concrete steps (including constitutional amendment) to force the

issue of empowering properly constituted State Finance Commissions, who would in turn become agents of real change.

5.5 OTHER ISSUES IN MAHARASHTRA

Maharashtra has done some things right (especially as captured by our ranking scheme). For example, it has delegated the financial powers of considerable magnitude to the PRIs and transferred several schemes to them. Indeed 20 years ago (long before the talk of the budget window) it started the practice of compilation of a large matrix, on the basis of the financial year, which would depict fund flows from the line departments to the PRIs. The state has also instituted ‘incentive awards’ under the Yeswantrao Chavan Panchayat Abhiyan. However, other than purely fiscal matters there are some problems that warrant urgent attention and improvement. Despite the continued assertion of the state about ‘knowing-and-doing-it-all’, even prior to the 73rd CAA, the performance is not what it should be, and we are not just talking about the financial matters dealt with earlier.

Indeed because of the lack of a clean slate, we find an overhang of older processes and practices untouched by the new impulse. This overhang is clearly reflected in the mindsets that are in need of urgent change. It might be prudent to undo and redo some things, for example, in the case of activity mapping, instead of saying that ‘we don’t need to do it afresh since we have already done it’ (albeit in some other context). Just to cite one instance, the capacity utilization of a progressive state like Maharashtra should be clearly better than 23% and 16% in the last two years in case of the flagship PMGSY! The fact that only 9% utilization is reported in the case of the 12th FC funds does not encourage one. Neither does the consequence of the prospect of the impending vicious cycle of no utilization certificate and so no further grants. The common knowledge that there are around 50,000 assets created at the local level that have fallen into disuse is not particularly heartening. Finally, the convenient and easy interpretation of the expenditure control regimen has meant that a large number of vacant staff positions are reported (compression of revenue expenditure?). No wonder then that the work suffers.

Simply put, the SFCs have been given a go by, apart from some token gestures. Let us look at the details. The first SFC was set up in April 1994 and its report was submitted in November 1996. The state government accepted the report with modifications in July 1997 and an ATR was submitted to the State Legislature in April 1997. The Second SFC was set up in May 1999 and its report was submitted in October 2002. The state government accepted the report in October 2002 and an ATR was submitted to the State Legislature during the Budget Session that is, August 2003. The Third Commission has been set up and its report is awaited (this despite the common knowledge that the said report had been submitted some time ago).

This is the kind of trite reporting one finds sometimes in government documents and review reports. While reading through government reviews, some of the phrases show a peculiar mindset (sometimes euphemistically termed as bureaucratic ‘cleverness’) and/or utter lack of coordination between government departments and a blatant disregard for any right to information. Details of the recommendations of the Second SFC and the ATR of the State Government are not available—this after the passage of so much time since submission. Or in the context of the transferred scheme, ‘the quantum is *not given*’ and in context delegation of financial powers to PRIs, ‘details of financial resources or tax collection have *not been given*’ or indeed although by the ‘good practice’ of financial and revenue accounts being submitted to the auditor general, it is claimed that this is done every year, ‘however *no details available*’. These in the documents and review reports of the Government of Maharashtra! Need we say more? The point is not to be critical, but merely to point out the systemic fault lines.

The Comptroller and Auditor General’s report, makes for interesting reading (that the details are regularly submitted by the GoM and that the CAG report is online are both great). The diversion of funds and

sometimes the FC grants being passed off as ‘state grants’ is pointed out. Lack of reconciliation of the multiplicity of bank accounts by the DRDA (in some cases for the same scheme), non-reportage of physical targets, non-utilization of funds, and non-distribution of even the statutory grants makes for familiar reading. That the DRDA continues to be powerful and that much happens outside the gamut of PRIs is sad to say the least.

5.6 FINANCIAL DECENTRALIZATION

Financial devolution has to be understood in the broad framework of decentralization. The different facets of and motivations for this such as decongestion, delegation through agency and transfer are well known. The situation as it is currently to be seen has been analyzed by us in great detail elsewhere (see Pethe and Lalvani, 2008). There we had used data at a reasonable level of aggregation whereas here, in the case of Maharashtra, we intend to analyze at a greater level of disaggregation.

A comparison of the average per capita own tax revenues shows that own revenues as a whole have tripled in the second phase and own tax revenues have quadrupled. Clearly, there has been progress on this front however small the base was to begin with. A quick calculation shows that a decade after the path breaking Constitutional Amendment Acts, own revenues (per capita) still form a mere 9% of the total expenditure (per capita). The average increase in total revenues and total expenditure (in per capita terms) has been 1.7 times. The income measure that we use for the purposes of our study is the Gross Domestic Product from the Primary Sector. Per capita income in nominal terms (GSDPP) shows a growth rate of 44% while in real terms (GSDPR) it registers a growth rate of a mere 2%. Thus the key indicators suggest that while there has been some progress in terms of increase in own sources of revenue, it has been very slow and the PRIs continue to depend heavily on the upper tiers of government for their expenditure.

In the study referred to above (Pethe and Lalvani, 2008), this conclusion was further tested by examining some key ratios that we computed for the 15 major states. The variables used are fairly standard in literature and are listed below:

1. Two versions of Revenue Decentralization Ratio (RD Ratio 1 and 2).
 - (a) RD Ratio 1: PRI Own Revenue/State Own Revenue
 - (b) RD Ratio 2: PRI Own Revenue/State Own Revenue (as suggested by Oommen, 2005)
2. FA Ratio: Financial Autonomy Ratio: PRI Own Revenue/Total Expenditure of PRI
3. DR: Dependency Ratio: (Total Expenditure-Own Revenue)/Total Expenditure
4. DDR: Change in DR ($DR_t - DR_{t-1}$)
5. Two versions of Government Size measure
 - (a) GS1: PRI Total Revenue/GSDPP
 - (b) GS2: PRI Total Expenditure/GSDPP

Thus the broad story that emerges is clear – despite the much spoken about decentralization, a *de facto* fiscal empowerment of rural local bodies has moved at snail’s pace. Since it is always the case that the macro picture hides both the star performers and the laggards, let us note that there are clear and substantial variations within the broad conclusions:

- PRI own revenues in per capita terms have increased secularly and at a reasonably good rate for Maharashtra. It has done quite well in the recent past both in terms of its own performance and in relative terms.

- Grants (per capita) have also secularly increased rather impressively with Maharashtra showing more than average increase.
- As a consequence, the total revenues of PRIs (per capita) have increased with a growth factor of three times over the period in nominal terms. That it is still inadequate in many ways is a different issue. Maharashtra is the only state which had revenues above the national average in recent times.
- Given that it is mandatory for the budgets of local bodies to balance, the total expenditure (per capita) has increased commensurately over the same period. In recent times, Maharashtra has been able to spend more than average in per capita terms.

Juxtaposing the total expenditures with own revenues of PRIs we find that in recent times the own revenues of Maharashtra seem to have increased dramatically from a mere Rs 3.89/- (in 1998-99) to Rs 61.91/- by 2002-03 and this trend is accelerated even further in more recent times. This appears to be a secular trend and compares very favourably with the efforts in other states. Some of this may be due to and indicative of different definitions but there is no denying that there has been an increase in the own revenues of PRIs in Maharashtra. A significant part of this is due to taxes and fees. Pethe and Lalvani (2008) have ranked the states on the basis of each of the criteria mentioned earlier. 'Grand Rank' was computed by simply taking the average, it was seen that Maharashtra had shown a remarkable improvement in that it jumped from the 14th rank (out of the 15 major states) to the 3rd. Even in terms of buoyancies, Maharashtra's performance was quite good, with the underlying moral that decentralization is good for the state in terms of relieving the fiscal stress on itself.

5.6.1 DECENTRALIZATION AND FISCAL PERFORMANCE OF PRIS IN MAHARASHTRA

In this section we look at the decentralization efforts vis-à-vis PRIs in Maharashtra. We begin by looking at the 3Fs: functions, functionaries and funds, and comment on it. This is followed by an overall picture till date, and a somewhat disaggregative look. This study is confined to division level data and not the very latest because such data is available only sporadically after the Finance Commission reports. We shall then proceed to look at the structure of revenues and expenditure which are quite revealing in the context of this piece.

The overall picture of local bodies, shows that in ZII there are 249 urban local bodies in the State (22 Corporations, 222 Municipal Councils and 5 Nagger Panchayats). As per the 2001 census, Maharashtra's urban population at 3.91 crores constitutes 14.74% of the total urban population of the country. In Maharashtra 42.4% of the population resides in urban areas as compared to the national urban population of 27.7%. The decadal growth of urban population has been nearly 30%. The population dependent upon urban areas for their livelihood would be substantially higher due to a large population staying in peri-urban areas or those who come to urban areas for work. Despite large scale urbanization in the State, the rural population is still 5.57 crores. This is spread over Zilla Parishads, Panchayat Samitis and Gram Panchayats as shown in the table below. A total of 2.28 lakh elected representatives exist in these Panchayat Raj Institutions.

TABLE I: No. of PRIs and Non-Official Members

Sr. No.	Types of PRIs	Number	Average Population	Members
1.	Zilla Parishad (ZP)	33	17,00,000	1,961
2.	Panchayat Samiti (PS)/ Intermediate Panchayat (IP)	351	1,59,000	3,922
3.	Grama Panchayat	27,893	2,000	2,23,857

5.6.2 STATUS OF DEVOLUTION TO LOCAL BODIES

It is a well-accepted fact that the effective functioning of these institutions is dependent upon the delegation of the three Fs: functions, functionaries and funds. Of course while data/figures reveal a lot, they do not reveal everything. This will reveal whether it is decongestion, or delegation, or indeed full-fledged decentralization that is being achieved in Maharashtra.

• Devolution of Functions

Maharashtra has been in the forefront of delegating functions to the Panchayat Raj Institutions as well as the Urban Local Bodies. Maharashtra had a well established Panchayat Raj system even before the enactment of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment in 1992. This began with the report of a committee formed on May 1, 1960 for suggesting means for the strengthening of Local Self Governments in the rural areas of Maharashtra. The Maharashtra Zilla Parishads and Panchayat Samitis Act was enacted in 1961, thereby establishing a three-tier Panchayat Raj in the State. The Village Panchayat Act, 1958, enacted even earlier, defines the duties, responsibilities and powers of the Grama Panchayats. As per the Village Panchayat Act, 79 functions were given to Grama Panchayats and 204 functions are similarly entrusted to Zilla Parishads under the Zilla Parishad Act.

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment has given further impetus to the devolution of functions to PRIs and to revisit certain practices to bring them in line with national thinking. Accordingly, of the 29 subjects enlisted in Schedule XI of the Constitution, the state has already transferred 18 subjects to PRIs and the rest have been partially transferred or are in the process of transfer. In certain cases, the services overlap with that provided for the urban population. With a view to maintain a unified administrative system in the State, the transfer of such functions is not desirable. Here again one notices the problem arising out of the lack of a clean slate. All that is done in this regard precede the constitutional amendment, and the spirit and the form are sometimes quite different. But the State has all along taken the view that they are already in the decentralization mode and as such need not do anything *de novo*.

• Devolution of Functionaries

One of the most effective measures to access whether adequate functionaries have been transferred to the local bodies or not is to compare the staff strength of the local bodies vis-à-vis those of the state government. The table below shows that in Maharashtra, the PRIs have almost 60% of staff and local bodies together have more staff strength (102%) as compared with the staff strength of the state government. What we mean is that a staff being transferred should imply that the control of the staff is also with the local bodies. A group of Grama Panchayats have a common secretary. The GPs could have their own staff as per their need with own resources; all of this as per the 1958 Act. At the district and intermediate levels, it is the Chief Executive Officer who controls the staff. Class III and IV staff are recruited by the respective Grama Panchayats. Other staff comes from the Line Departments. Effectively the control rests with the CEO, Additional, CEO and the Line Departments. Maharashtra had institutionalized the cadre almost four decades ago.

The DRDA continues to be separate. The role of the ZP Chairperson is cosmetic—as the Chairperson of DRDA governing body with the CEO being the Chairperson of the Management Committee (and as such more powerful). Thus, even if formally that is so, the staff's perception of accountability implies that they would feel answerable to those who write their Confidential Reports (CRs). If this is taken into account we must conclude that figures in the table belie reality.

TABLE II: Functionaries Transferred

PRIs	Functionaries	State Government Staff	ZP Staff as a % of State Government Staff
ZP/PS/GP	3,52,979	6,09,723	57.89

- **Devolution of Funds (Own Tax and Non-Tax revenues)**

Maharashtra claims to have followed a consistent policy for the transfer of both the sources of income to the local bodies as well as to implement as many activities as possible through the local bodies with a view to the efficient use of resources. The success of decentralization lies in the readiness and ability of the PRIs to raise own resources through proper taxation and collection efforts. The state government has permitted ZPs to levy a cess on land revenue (up to a certain percent of land revenue). Also most of the state receipts of land revenue are passed on to local bodies. Revenue equalization grants are provided to ensure a certain minimum grants on this account. The table below shows the own tax and non-tax incomes of the ZPs and Grama Panchayats in the state over a seven-year period. The Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) for these revenues is also indicated. This clearly shows that more than Rs1,000/- crores is collected by the PRIs based on the powers given to them through their acts. Also the CAGR for these revenues is a healthy 9.20%. This is comparable and sometimes better than the growth in the State's GSDP/revenues.

TABLE III: Trend in Tax Revenues of PRIs in Maharashtra (Rs in crore)

	Particulars	2002-03	03-04	04-05	05-06	06-07	07-08	08-09	CAGR (%)
1	Own Tax (ZP)	186.72	391.72	260.00	154.00	147.00	161.70	177.87	8.47
2	Other Tax (Non Tax) (ZP)	0.00	0.00	0.00	181.00	189.00	207.90	228.69	8.14
3	Own Tax (GP)	172.93	197.57	215.00	239.00	258.00	283.80	312.18	10.36
4	Other Tax (Non Tax) (GP)	167.52	184.64	203.00	214.00	243.00	267.30	294.03	9.85
Total Income		527.17	773.93	678.00	788.00	837.00	920.70	1012.77	9.20

The table below compares the own revenue of the PRIs of Maharashtra with those of a few other important states. The per capita tax and non-tax income is also shown. This table clearly shows that the empowerment of PRIs in Maharashtra, as measured through the sources of own revenue—which admittedly is the best form of financial devolution—is substantially better when compared with other states.

TABLE IV: Tax Revenue of PRIs in Maharashtra vis-à-vis other states

Sr. No.	State	Rural Pop	Tax and Non Tax Revenue					Per Capita T&NT income (Rs)
			1998-99	99-2000	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	
1	Bihar	7.43	5.94	3.01	7.71	3.59	6.67	0.72
2	Uttar Pradesh	13.17	46.38	53.30	58.83	59.26	63.35	4.26
3	West Bengal	5.77	29.04	29.62	32.53	33.61	31.26	5.40
4	Gujarat	3.17	77.34	80.01	75.92	71.71	69.86	23.64
5	Andhra Pradesh	5.54	128.63	136.29	151.65	160.85	170.84	27.01
6	Madhya Pradesh	4.44	123.88	128.38	142.09	142.45	174.81	32.05
7	Maharashtra	5.58	237.98	284.72	327.98	384.29	527.17	63.15

Similarly, for the maintenance of water supply which, in almost all the cases is managed by local bodies, the minimum rates of water charges that have to be levied by these bodies has been prescribed. Local bodies are encouraged to ensure that these schemes operate on a self-sustaining basis. As a result, there has been a steady rise in the efforts of PRIs for levying and collecting user charges for the various services being provided to the rural population. The primary services rendered by Grama Panchayats include public water supply, health, education, sanitation, street lights, roads, markets, live stock development, agriculture, welfare of backward classes, solid waste management, public toilets, maintenance of public assets and play grounds, and afforestation, amongst other things. They have laid special emphasis on levying and collecting user charges on these services so as to ensure better quality and continuity of services.

The following table indicates the collection and trends of user charges by the PRIs.

TABLE V: User Charges collected by PRIs (Rs in crore)

Particulars	02-03	03-04	04-05	05-06	06-07	07-08
User charges (Water tax, street light, sanitary, cess, octroi, etc.)	167.52	184.64	203.00	214.00	243.00	267.00
% increase		10.21	9.94	5.41	13.55	9.87

Finally, a number of plan schemes have been transferred to the PRIs on a large scale. The number of schemes implemented by them has been going up every year since 1961. During the year 2008-09, out of the total state plan outlay of Rs 25,000 crores, Rs 7354 crores have been earmarked for being implemented through the PRIs. This is 29.42% of the total plan outlay. The position would even better in case the centrally sponsored schemes are taken into account, many of which provide funds to the local bodies outside of the state budget.

Maharashtra has a long tradition of having very powerful bodies for planning at the district/local level. District Planning and Development Councils have been in existence since the early 1980s. These bodies (currently called District Planning Council, though they are not strictly constituted as per the constitutional amendment) now have 80% of their members elected from amongst the elected representation of the local bodies. A substantial part of the annual plan of the state government is made available to these district bodies. They have been given all powers to give administrative approval, of re-appropriation and of monitoring the use of these funds.

- **Other Parameters of Devolution**

The state has claimed to have implemented most of the parameters of the Devolution Index indicated in the Report of Eleventh/Twelfth Finance Commission like amendment to the legislation, partial assignment of functions to local bodies, transfer of functionaries, assignment of taxation powers, constitution of SFCs, election to the local bodies have not been delayed. This is true in letter, the intent not completely above board. For example, functionaries continue to be (in most cases) accountable to masters other than PRIs. SFCs have been constituted, but the State has dragged its feet when it comes to implementation.

- **Efficiency in Governance/Reforms in Local Bodies**

Maharashtra has avowedly laid a lot of emphasis on the improvement of efficiency in the PRIs and the ULBs. Some of the important measures taken to improve the efficiency of these bodies can be seen from the following initiatives. (as reported in the Memorandum submitted to the 13th Finance Commission):

- **PRIs**

The fiscal devolution of powers and the transfer of most of the schemes having implications for rural populations to the PRIs have been reasonable. Over a period of time, the PRIs in the state have developed a

reasonable capacity of implementation and utilizing of the funds devolved to them by the state and by the Centre through various Finance Commissions.

- **Budget Matrix for the PRIs**

The budget matrix of the state may also be required to be modified to give a more clear and transparent picture of the budget window of the PRIs. However, the state is making sincere efforts in this regard. This can be seen from the statement of conclusions signed between the Government of India, Ministry of Panchayat Raj and the state government that a lot of new initiatives have been undertaken. It is accepted that much more needs to be done to empower the PRIs, to give them an autonomous and empowered status in line with the spirit of the 73rd Amendment, and the subsequent changes and discussions taking place from time to time.

The State has started the practice of compilation of the matrix of financial flows to PRIs depicting the funds from the State Departments to the PRIs. However, not having a clean slate has meant that they have not conformed to the requirement of their budget window as prescribed by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj.

- **Yashwant Gram Samrudhi Yojana**

The state is taking strenuous efforts for strengthening grassroots level democracy. The Yashwant Gram Samrudhi Yojana, one such initiative, was launched on August 27, 2002 by Maharashtra. The scheme motivates and empowers the Grama Sabha for resource based planning and to undertake need based developmental work in their areas. The concept of people's participation through monetary contributions has been introduced through this scheme. The state government provides a grant of 90% for any scheme for which the Grama Panchayat is able to collect 10% by way of local contribution.

Accordingly, local contributions of Rs 212 crore were made under the scheme and a commensurate share of Rs 1,193 crore has been given through the state budget. A total of 24,030 works were undertaken and 15,440 works have been completed till date. The total expenditure incurred so far is Rs 1,404 crore.

- **Yashwant Panchayat Raj Abhiyan**

This scheme for recognizing excellence in PRIs has been started from March 12, 2006. This scheme comprises evaluating the performance of PRIs, its officers and staff. The parameters of evaluation mainly includes the efforts of PRIs in tax collection, preparation of model budget, implementation of schemes, office management systems, response to public complaints, transparent administration, co-coordination with non officials, committee system of governance and special efforts in boosting public service quality. The winning institutions are given substantial cash prizes, mementos and certificates.

- **ISO 9001: 2000**

The state took the initiative and launched a time bound programme of ISO Certification for all the 33 Zilla Parishads so as to improve the quality of rendering public service by these institutions. In 2009, this objective was achieved and all the 33 ZPs have been ISO certified. The activities that have been standardized include goal setting, time management, positive attitude, approaches to problem solving, communication skills, healthy relationships in teams, common problems in departments/organizations.

- **Capacity Building of PRI functionaries**

To improve the focus, capability of planning and good governance, the state government laid special emphasis on the training of PRI functionaries. From 2003-04 till date 2,49,402 non officials, which includes 4,444 ZP members, 5,483 PS members, 2,39,475 Grama Panchayat members and 19,132 officials have been trained through various programmes.

- **Nirmal Gram Scheme**

The state has succeeded in creating sanitation facilities through the construction of 9.68 lakh toilet blocks for 46 lakh rural families till now. The expenditure incurred so far is Rs 339.71 crore. The achievement in this regard in Maharashtra is noteworthy when compared to the national efforts. Although it may be mentioned that compared to the state's own target, the picture is not as rosy.

The inter-state analysis of the fiscal performance of PRIs indicated that the state of Maharashtra has performed not unreasonably (especially if one sees the improvement) on the decentralization indicators and has yet been a loser from the 12th Finance Commission award (in terms of share ratio). Since we had access to some detailed data for Maharashtra, and since regional variations within Maharashtra have been the subject of much discussion in the recent past, we undertook a small exercise to see if we could zero-in on why specific reasons were lagging behind.

The three-tier PRIs in Maharashtra comprise Zilla Parishads at the district level, Panchayat Samitis at the intermediate level and Grama/Village Panchayats. Of the three, it is the lowest tier that is most significant and needs to be empowered to reach out to the large rural society. It is the expenditure and receipts and the composition of this tier of Grama Panchayats that forms the focal point of this section of our study.

Whilst the details of data (albeit for only one or two additional years) were available at a level of disaggregation, we thought it prudent (given our mandate) to restrict ourselves to division level analysis. Data constraints in terms of availability has meant that the data used here is not the very latest.

5.7. DIVISION LEVEL ANALYSIS OF PRIS

Maharashtra has been divided into six administrative divisions: Konkan, Nashik, Pune, Aurangabad, Amravati and Nagpur. The per capita District Domestic Product from the Primary Sector and rural population of the various divisions are tabulated below to give a clear idea about the size of these various divisions.

TABLE VI: District Domestic Product Per Capita (Rs) from Primary Sector and Population

DIVISION	2000-20001	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	RURAL POPULATION (2001 census)
Konkan Div.	6074.31	6799.19	7717.20	9213.68	8839.10	6,193,544
Nashik Div.	6516.25	7583.42	7872.48	9341.40	10120.26	11,294,179
Pune Div.	9034.48	9702.18	8793.23	10265.72	11555.21	12,489,965
Aurangabad Div.	5929.91	6039.15	6796.48	6650.64	6543.53	11,795,366
Amravati Div.	6643.29	7754.25	7689.07	7439.11	6212.51	7,312,251
Nagpur Div.	8913.90	10286.23	10717.91	11615.84	10037.55	6,692,342
Maharashtra	7211.40	7990.90	8151.23	8988.69	9020.73	55,777,647
<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>1411.33</i>	<i>1651.70</i>	<i>1359.28</i>	<i>1817.50</i>	<i>2126.55</i>	<i>2855888</i>
<i>Mean</i>	<i>7185.36</i>	<i>8027.40</i>	<i>8264.39</i>	<i>9087.73</i>	<i>8884.69</i>	<i>9296275</i>
<i>C V</i>	<i>0.20</i>	<i>0.21</i>	<i>0.16</i>	<i>0.20</i>	<i>0.24</i>	<i>0.31</i>

Per Capita District Domestic Product from Primary Sector (DDP) has risen from Rs 7211/- to Rs 9020/- in the five years under consideration. The Pune division registered the highest per capita income in 2000-01. It was surpassed by the Nagpur Division in 2001-02 which remained the top ranker for three years. It was only in 2004-05 that the Pune division once again overtook it. The Coefficient of Variation shows that the divergence between the divisions has widened.

The contribution of each of the divisions to the primary sector would also serve to indicate the prominence of each of these divisions in the rural economy of Maharashtra.

TABLE VII: Share of Divisions in District Domestic Product from Primary Sector

In % Terms	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	Average
Konkan Div.	9.35	9.45	10.51	11.38	10.88	10.37
Nashik Div.	18.30	19.22	19.56	21.04	22.72	20.28
Pune Div.	28.05	27.19	24.16	25.57	28.68	26.72
Aurangabad Div.	17.39	15.98	17.63	15.65	15.34	16.34
Amravati Div.	12.08	12.72	12.37	10.85	9.03	11.33
Nagpur Div.	14.83	15.44	15.78	15.51	13.35	14.96

The Pune division has consistently been the leader during the period of 2000-01 to 2004-05 with an average contribution to the primary sector DDP of 27%, followed by Nashik at 20%. The smallest contribution has always been that of the Amravati Division.

The size of the Village or Grama Panchayat government is approximated by total revenue as a proportion of DDP from the primary sector. The size of the Grama Panchayat, division-wise, has been tabulated below:

**TABLE VIII: Measure of Government Size for Village Panchayat
(Total Revenue of Panchayat/DDP from Primary Sector)**

In % Terms	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	Average
Konkan Div.	2.508	2.527	2.290	2.293	2.652	2.454
Nashik Div.	1.569	1.505	1.565	1.459	1.461	1.512
Pune Div.	1.415	1.466	2.034	1.855	1.817	1.717
Aurangabad Div.	1.239	1.402	1.535	2.307	2.288	1.754
Amravati Div.	1.120	1.277	1.471	1.863	2.681	1.683
Nagpur Div.	1.077	1.143	1.193	1.292	1.569	1.255
Maharashtra	1.429	1.489	1.679	1.806	1.944	1.669

The share of the total revenue of Grama Panchayats in Maharashtra is a mere 1.6% of the primary sector DDP of Maharashtra. Division wise we find that the largest share is that of the Konkan Division at 2.4% and the smallest is that of Nagpur at 1.25%. There appears to be no relation between the share of the contribution and the size of the government.

The total revenue of Grama Panchayats in Maharashtra comes from

1. Taxes which include tax on buildings and land, conservancy and public health tax, lighting tax, water charges
2. Other income
3. Grants from ZP/Panchayat Samiti/government grants and also via the DRDA (through which the centrally sponsored schemes are routed).

The table below provides the shares of these various sources of revenue.

TABLE IX: Contribution of the Various Sources of Revenue for Gram Panchayats

In % Terms	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	Average
1. Total Tax Revenue/ Total Revenue	33.77	38.23	40.05	37.36	37.25	37.48
<i>shares of various taxes in Total Tax Revenue</i>						
a) Tax on Buildings and Land	48.51	52.94	54.93	56.06	55.56	54.15
b) Conservancy and Public Health Tax	5.85	5.62	4.92	4.73	5.96	5.38
c) Lighting Tax	8.33	6.50	6.68	7.20	6.58	6.96
d) Water Charges	37.30	34.94	33.48	32.02	31.89	33.51
2. Other Income	18.92	16.04	16.20	14.90	14.57	15.86
3. Grants/Total Revenue	47.31	45.73	43.75	47.73	48.18	46.66

Total tax revenues (own taxes) have on an average contributed 37% to the total revenues available to Panchayats, grants 47% and other income 16%. Among the taxes, the tax on buildings and land have been major contributors (54% of total tax revenues), followed by water charges (33.5% of the tax revenue). Conservancy, public health tax and lighting tax have contributed 5% and 7% respectively. Fiscal Autonomy of these Panchayats can be gauged by computing the extent to which total expenditure have been funded out of their own tax revenues.

The table below tabulates these ratios over the five year period.

TABLE X: Fiscal Autonomy (Tax Revenue/Total Expenditure)

Year	Ratio
2000-2001	38.19
2001-2002	40.46
2002-2003	42.79
2003-2004	40.17
2004-005	39.28
Average	40.19

On an average, 40% of the total expenditures of Gram Panchayats have come from own taxes. What is noteworthy the above table is the fact that there has not been any significant improvement in these shares over the five year period. In fact, there has been a steady decline over the last three years from 42.7% in 2002-03 to 39.2% in 2004-05. A division-wise break up of the Fiscal Autonomy ratios is tabulated below:

Table XI: Fiscal Autonomy Division wise

	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	Average
Konkan Div.	44.95	46.42	49.51	49.25	47.69	47.75
Nashik Div.	39.58	43.60	52.16	46.05	42.86	44.98
Pune Div.	41.50	40.10	40.93	37.69	40.99	40.12
Aurangabad Div.	30.69	34.86	65.56	28.31	28.80	36.36
Amravati Div.	30.92	35.38	35.12	38.54	32.64	34.70
Nagpur Div.	34.59	39.75	42.26	45.67	41.36	41.27
Maharashtra	38.20	40.47	42.80	40.18	39.29	40.24

The Konkan Division is seen to be the most autonomous and has also shown an improvement over the years. Pune and Aurangabad are the two divisions where deterioration is noticed on this count.

Table XII: Shares of Various Components in Total Expenditure

	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	Average
Administration and Establishment	14.22	14.51	15.34	14.67	14.67	14.71
Water Supply	13.08	14.56	13.45	13.41	12.65	13.37
Conservancy and Public Health	8.88	7.44	8.48	8.84	9.57	8.72
Public Work	26.81	30.00	28.41	30.70	30.33	29.49
Other*	37.01	33.49	34.32	32.38	32.78	33.71

We find that the largest share has been allocated to public works which is a desirable trend and also the fact that there has been some increase in this share over the five year period. Conservancy and Public Health have a small average share of merely 8.7% in the total expenditures. Some small increase is noticeable, but clearly there is need for increasing this component of expenditures. Expenditure on water supply has remained more or less constant, as has the share of expenditure on administration. By and large, the picture that emerges is of *status quo*. No sharp hike in the share of expenditure on public health or public works is noticeable despite the hype created about focusing on improving the situation in rural areas.

A division-wise classification of the various taxes and expenditure categories presented below would be useful to gauge the regional variation in the revenues collected and the expenditures incurred.

**Table XIII: Contribution of Divisions in Average Collection
Taxes and Expenditure Categories (1998-99 to 2002-03)**

In % Terms	Konkan Div.	Nashik Div.	Pune Div.	Aurangabad Div.	Amravati Div.	Nagpur Div.
Tax on Buildings and Land	25.33	14.59	29.84	10.81	6.90	12.48
Conservancy and Public Health Tax	10.81	26.95	29.83	11.51	15.66	5.24
Lighting Tax	8.45	22.61	24.57	19.57	13.66	12.00
Water Charges	7.34	25.94	23.81	18.70	12.60	11.62
Total Tax Revenue	17.30	20.05	27.45	15.80	9.69	11.50
ZP/Panchayat Samiti/ Government Grants	15.56	11.72	34.69	18.54	9.85	8.32
DRDA Grants	10.25	15.84	22.50	22.20	15.17	14.06
Other Revenues	17.56	26.31	26.17	18.08	9.06	8.45
Total Revenue	15.09	18.13	27.30	17.17	11.14	11.18
Admn. & Estab.	13.97	20.30	31.28	14.13	9.48	10.84
Water Supply	10.25	24.23	29.33	18.38	9.85	13.99
Conservancy & Public Health	12.29	22.46	31.42	12.30	9.35	12.15
Public Work	16.58	12.52	30.12	19.62	10.07	10.90
Other Exp.	15.41	17.99	21.91	17.90	14.07	12.71
Total Expenditure	14.58	17.94	27.54	17.48	11.24	11.22

The major contributor in the total tax revenue of Grama Panchayats has been the Pune Division. It has contributed on an average 27% of the total tax revenue with the next highest contributor being Nashik which has contributed 18%. The smallest contributions have come from the Amravati and Nagpur Divisions. Naturally, therefore, on the expenditure side too, the highest spending division both on administration and on public works has been the Pune Division.

The surprising statistic that caught our attention in the above table is that the Pune Division received the highest share of DRDA and ZP/Panchayat Samiti/Government Grants. Our tables on district income had shown the Pune Division to have the highest per capita income. Despite this it was a relatively poor performer on the Fiscal Autonomy front and in fact has shown deterioration on this count over the past five years. The fact that the Pune Division has been the largest contributor to the total tax collections and to that extent needs to be rewarded, cannot justify the largest share of grants being directed to it. It is perhaps in violation of both equity and efficiency (especially the former) concerns, but more importantly, it brings to light the adhocism in intergovernmental transfers from state governments in the absence of well thought out formulae along the lines of the CFCs.

The regional variations that we have highlighted for the state of Maharashtra are illustrative. However, this has highlighted the urgent need to tap all possible resources to bring together comparable data at a disaggregative level for PRIs across the states of India.

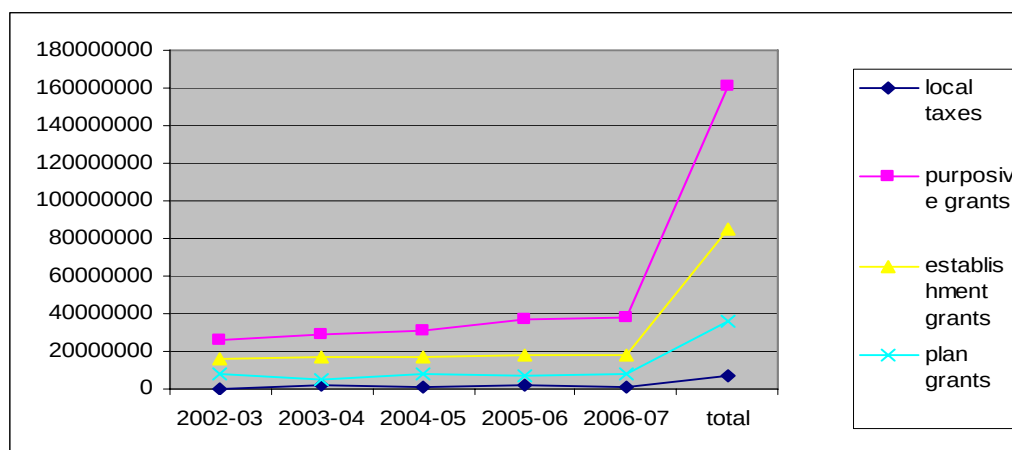
5.8 REVISITING THE ISSUES

On the basis of recent data we have computed some simple ratios and graphed some trends at the disaggregated levels. This will enable us to discern micro details of trends and dynamics, leading to some insights into the flows to PRIs. We have approached this in several ways from the macro view to the micro level, considering different dimensions.

5.8.1 REVENUES OF PRIS: TAXES AND GRANTS

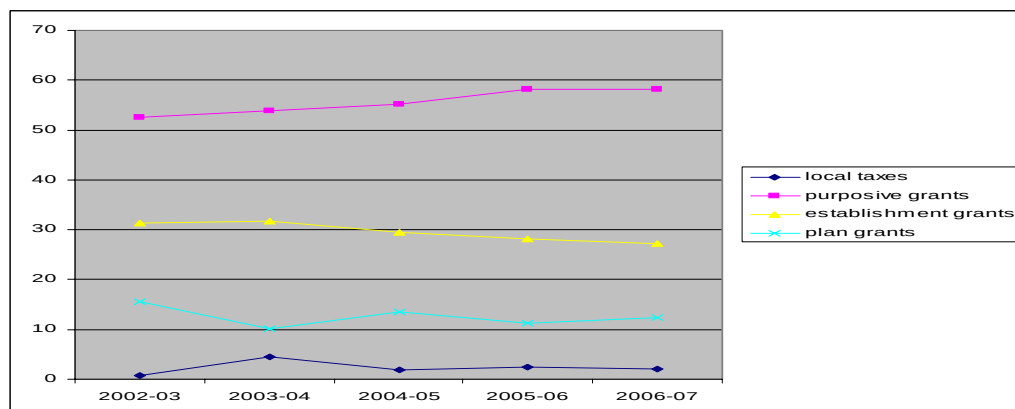
As far as the total grants are concerned there has been a steady temporal increase in all the components, namely, purposive, establishment and plan grants. However, when looked at spatially (division wise), variations emerge. Commonality of ranking is seen, in that, purposive grants dominate the other types, with plan grants being the smallest. The dynamic paths that these follow for each of the divisions vary (see Appendix III, A, B, C for division-wise graphs and data). Given that in no sense is there an organic link between the different types of grants, this is clearly reflective of non-formulaic adhocism.

GRAPH I: Revenues of PRIs: Taxes and Grants



The picture gets clearer when we look at the proportions involved. The first figure is indicative of the general trend but, it becomes more insightful if we look at the dynamics of percentage change.

Graph II: Revenues of PRIs: Taxes and Grants (Percentage Change)



It is clear from the graph above that taxes form a small part of the income of PRIs. Indeed, even the total own revenues of the PRIs (made up of tax and non-tax revenues), are very low. This, despite the fact that there has been an improvement in the collection of taxes, including stamp duty rationalization and the cesses on land revenue, water rates and forest revenue. All this goes to underline the miniscule size of the local government and hence its lack of strength and significance in the scheme of things.

The plan grants are also low, although they do form around 25%-29% of the state plans. This clearly shows the low level of the overall plan size in the state and is cause for concern. Since the growth momentum in the state's economy requires a sizeable planned investment, this is not good news. The establishment grants themselves are tapering off. In the nature of things, as one creates assets, these grants have to increase monotonically. Given that a large chunk of these are taken away by salaries, very little is left for operations and maintenance. The expenditure control regime, when implemented wrongly, leads to such a situation. This leads to not only the created assets falling into disuse, but also to the reduction of the potential revenue stream emanating through the rationalization of user charges.

Purposive grants are specific grants and have to be welcomed. However, by a quirk of accounting and reporting methods followed, they contain the salaries also and are not available for direct delivery of utilities or the purpose for which the grant is made. Finally, it needs to be noted that none of these are untied grants that would reflect real autonomy to the recipient institutions. These would come only through the mode of State-tax devolution as prescribed by successive SFCs. In the case of Maharashtra, the fact of the matter is that although three SFCs have submitted reports, so far, no devolution has taken place of untied grants as proposed by them. Even for expenditure of own funds technical approval is required in many of the cases.

5.8.2 TRANSFERRED AND AGENCY SCHEMES

'Agency schemes' are an eyewash, for they are neither formulated nor monitored by PRIs. They merely represent a book entry exercise and lead to misleading augmentation of local budgets without any control. Indeed, a case can be made for a wholesale withdrawal of this mode. Transferred schemes are wholly transferred to the local bodies and to that extent they are to be preferred to the agency schemes where the PRIs are merely pass-through nodes with no availability of the decision-making power with the PRIs. Thus the trend here is encouraging, in that most of the recent schemes are in the nature of transferred rather than agency. About 90% of the grants are being devolved via the transferred schemes and only about 10% are for the agency schemes (this percentage for agency schemes is further diminishing). Amongst the transferred

schemes (an overwhelmingly large proportion of the total grants), 85% are salary grants, which implies that the remaining meager component is to be used for maintenance purposes. It is no surprise then that the assets are never maintained properly and indeed fall into disuse. There is a further caveat that needs to be entered. Even in the case of transferred schemes, the formulation and structure is largely predetermined with very little leeway for flexibility and exercise of volition on the part of PRIs. In most cases they are transferred because by definition, they ‘have’ to be passed on to lower tiers. No possible inference as to the *intent* of the State may be thus drawn. The true test of decentralization would be if the CSS funds which have to be (by a directive of the PMO) integrated with the functioning of the PRIs were also released to them.

Unfortunately, parallel structures like the DRDO usurp these monies and exercise undue control, undermining the functioning of the PRIs. This has meant that the remarkable strength of the PRIs in earlier years have ironically diminished recently. ‘Ironically’ because on the one hand, more money is now apparently flowing to the PRIs and they are being empowered and further strengthened. Let us now turn to some other ways of looking at the fund flows.

5.8.3 RATES

One approach to the analysis of fund flows to PRIs is by computing buoyancies or elasticities. These were computed in the standard manner using log linear formulation. This would enable us to test the simple hypothesis whether income growth in the district/division is accompanied by greater flows in terms of revenues or expenditures. Different revenue sources have been considered separately. We have also looked illustratively at the expenditure on education.

We report the results (computations based on last five years’ data) in the following table:

TABLE XIV: Buoyancy Rates across Divisions

Divisions	Grants	Local Tax	Other Sources	Expenditure on Education
Mumbai	0.765	3.003	-0.613	0.755
Nashik	0.548	0.792	1.298	0.551
Pune	0.615	2.148	-0.747	0.615
Aurangabad	0.358	0.827	0.933	0.559
Amravati	-0.003	-0.579	0.363	0.0007
Nagpur	0.286	2.086	0.764	0.741
STATE	0.481	1.710	0.600	0.575

The relevant computations have been made at the district level and are provided in Appendix (II). The table given above is quite revealing. Mumbai, Nashik and Pune (The Golden Triangle) seem to be favoured as far as grants-elasticity is concerned. These are also the better performing regions (income wise). Hence the first law of development (*to whom that has, shall be given even more*) seems to be operating. The second column reveals that the tax efforts in Mumbai, Pune and Nagpur are very good. Indeed Nagpur does well even when elasticity with reference to ‘other sources’ is considered, (where Mumbai and Pune fare extremely badly). The overall picture seems to follow no particular pattern, leading to the suspicion that it is largely perceived capacity or political clout that seems to determine the grants in an ad hoc fashion. The more detailed computations show that each of the districts (from whom the division is named) appear to perform much better than the others in the division as well as in the average. The flow of grants thus does not seem based on ‘need’ or equity, or indeed on incentive compatible or ‘efficiency’ considerations, but it has been determined in a rather ad hoc manner. Political ‘pork barrel’ considerations or interests seem to be at work. Let us now look at the types of expenditures that are undertaken.

5.8.4 STRUCTURE OF EXPENDITURE

While the revenue flows available determine the strength and the ability of any institution (including PRIs) to deliver, the final delivery of core services is determined by the quality of expenditure as well as the different heads under which it is incurred. Determination of quality, while of prime import, is difficult to ascertain. We therefore only look at the per capita expenditure under the different heads that we consider important. The following table is quite revealing in that, despite being per capita, there is quite a variation to be seen. We leave it to the reader to make comparisons across divisions and heads, and to compare the performance with the grants that are being received, as well as the general development in the division.

For example, Aurangabad seems to be doing well in terms of per capita expenditure on education, roads, construction and health care as compared to divisions that are better on the basis of developmental parameters. The administrative expenditure is a big let down, in that, it is the highest. Given that so much is being spent on administration, it is a moot question why the expenditure on other heads is not reflected in developmental outcomes. Perhaps, it is a pointer to inefficient administration and the existence of leakages, and bears closer scrutiny. While the table only displays division-level data, the detailed district level data is reported in Annexure IV, which, along with specific case studies, will set out a rewarding research agenda.

TABLE XV: Expenditures

Average of 5 years (02-03 to 06-07) Per Capita Division Expenditure on								
Divisions	Education		Construction		Health		Administration	
		Rank		Rank		Rank		Rank
Mumbai	642	1	97	2	151	1	93.74	4
Nashik	480	6	65	6	114	5	79.82	2
Pune	541	5	105	1	105	6	74.25	1
Aurangabad	637	2	81	3	144	2	115.19	6
Amravati	568	3	74	4	135	4	109.08	5
Nagpur	545	4	70	5	143	3	92.50	3

It must be noted that casual empiricism raises doubts about the efficacy of these items of expenditure from the view point of outcomes. Serious monitoring and evaluation practices have to be put in place to ensure that this state of affairs improves. It is also to be noted that generally, the absorptive capacity of the PRIs in the not-so-well-off divisions is rather poor, and as a result, even the allocated resources are not expended. While some of it can be explained (in better-off divisions) by a move towards private delivery mechanisms, and the largesse available through CSSs, the full explanation calls for a serious review of governance structures (procedures) in place.

5.9 WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

The Gender Index for India languishes at the bottom (114 out of 128 countries). A uniformly dismal picture emerges when one looks at the component indices. India's rank is 122 for economic participation and opportunities, it is 116 in educational attainment and 126 on the count of Health and Survival. The sex ratio which is a rough (though reliable) indicator of the situation is marginally increasing at 933, but is considerably lower than the world average of 990. The one bright spot is political empowerment, where India is placed at 21, above Australia, Canada and even the USA.

Post the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, there have been some visible changes. The enabling reservations based on caste and gender (empowering provisions) have been met by and large (indeed, in some cases targets have been exceeded), and have started showing encouraging results. In the case of Maharashtra, the aspect of reservations has been followed strictly as per the rules, and the number of EWRs is large. Thanks to

reservation, over a million EWRs are making their presence felt in institutions of local governance in rural India. The act of reservation was seen by many as a 'shot in the dark [which] could really ensure nothing', is an enabling first step and is to be welcomed. Nearly 33% EWRs, with a 58% female literacy rate in rural Maharashtra, is again a welcome sign. There are no rotation of seats and no quorum requirements (in terms of women's presence), though the initial teething troubles arising out of resentment continue (no-confidence motions). Yet the development and empowerment outcomes through the clear prioritization of a work agenda are clearly visible (albeit supported by anecdotal evidence) even at this early stage.

The earlier feeling and suspicion that these women will merely be there for a 'thumb impression' can now be dismissed safely. Recorded and anecdotal, as well as personal, evidence suggests that they have started becoming assertive and have a good grip on relevant issues. One can state that the facilitation has been quite successful and that the women have been somewhat empowered. The identification of roads, water and education as primary challenges which need to be developed on a priority basis is clearly a result and manifestation of this empowerment not only in Maharashtra but elsewhere in India.

There is however no direct attempt to incorporate gender concerns in the governmental policy in any meaningful way. It would be useful to incorporate gender issues into specific purpose transfers rather than general purpose transfers. Ideally there should be a judicious mix of both types of transfers. In the first place however, gender sensitivity has to be manifest at the very level of programme formulation rather than in the ex-post facto computational sense as is currently done under the so called 'gender budgeting'. To elaborate, at the very beginning one must identify 'gender sensitive' concerns and translate them into specific schemes leading to a gender component in the plan.

As against this, the current practice is to do everything in much the same way as was being done and then, post facto work out what component of the existing plan schemes are going to benefit women and attribute that value towards putting together the gender plan component. This is being done in Maharashtra for the first time for 2009-10. Clearly much more education and sensitivity is called for on the part of the bureaucracy that makes the plans.

The Technology Dissemination and Empowerment Programme under the auspices of CSS of 'Women in Agriculture', Maharashtra has started capacity-building programs. While it started as a pilot in 2003,04, it has been scaled up to 66 Talukas, covering all the districts, leading to the creation of several thousands of SHGs. This is a welcome step and will undoubtedly lead to the empowerment of women with a positive externality vis-à-vis the PRIs.

All said and done there are early signs of success, with the recognition that much more needs to be done. There is of course the generic problem that notwithstanding cosmetic enhancements, the size of the local government continues to be too small and devoid of true power to make decisions. To make a substantive difference, this issue must be faced head-on and only then can one truly begin to evaluate the real impact of the gender agenda among many other things.

5.10 CONCLUSION

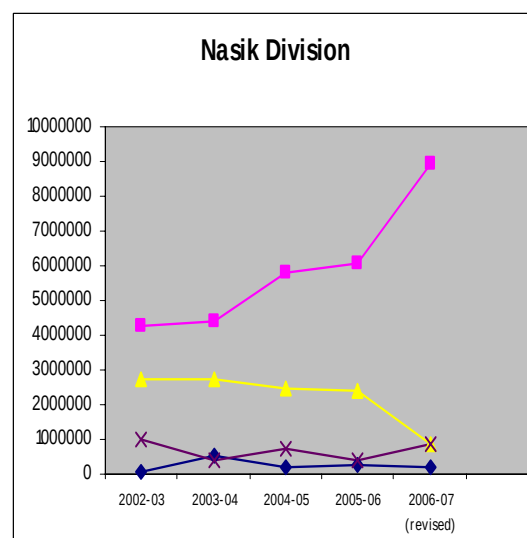
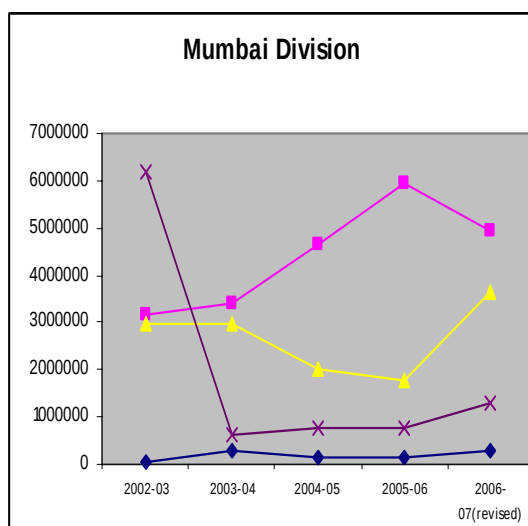
The flow of resources down to the PRIs at all levels (ZP/PS/GP) shows a secular increase over time. These flows in all revenue categories, whether it is taxes or user fees or grants, reflect an increasing pattern with acceleration in recent times. All of this is true even if we normalize using population that is, carry out computations on per capita basis (the data on the basis used by us is reported in Annexure V). Of course while one does welcome this as good news, one could argue about the specific increases not being adequate or optimal. Indeed it is our considered position that even with the increase, the size of the government continues to be insignificant and that size does matter. Also, decentralization in the true sense continues to be a distant objective what with the virtual non-existence of untied grants and revenue handles which would be the enablers.

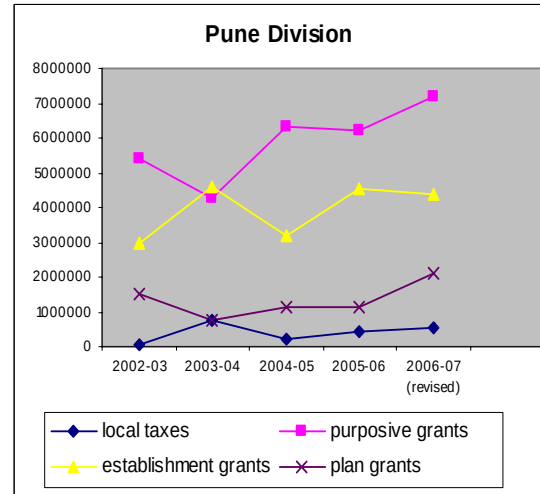
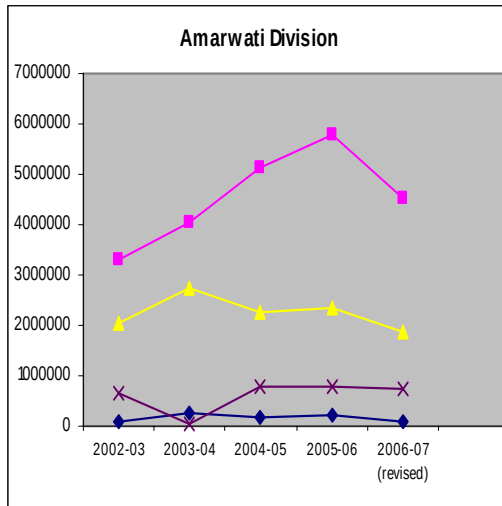
Thus, there is lot of scope for improvement and that is precisely the rationale behind the ‘not quite’ that was there at the end of the title of this piece. After all, finances and functionaries are meant to empower the lower tier of government, with especial reference to decentralization as a process with an adequately-represented gender dimension. This is where one encounters a few lacunae that we will now flag:

- The need to recognize the distinction between decentralization as against mere devolution and decongestion, and to set our sights firmly on the former.
- The spirit of the Constitutional Amendments (73rd and 74th) must be reflected in ‘action’ on the part of the State, which includes polity and bureaucracy.
- In dealing with the 3Fs, ‘smartness’ must give way to conscientious intent on the part of state-level political leaders and bureaucracy.
- Adequate devolution of grants (untied—statutory tax sharing way) has to be implemented. This implies that the SFC must not only be constituted but also that its wards must be discussed, accepted and then implemented.
- Here it is equally important to note that even the revenue handles (possibilities) that exist with the PRIs are not being exploited fully. It is necessary to, to formulate and send plans (felt needs) upwards and to persist with follow up. This requires the development of confidence and capacity.
- Maintenance funds should be made available adequately otherwise there is loss of credibility as well as the risk of created assets falling into disuse, which means a loss of revenue through rational user charges.
- Functionaries must be transferred (CRs and reporting and hence accountability) to the lower levels. PRIs must be given the ownership of the staff and be allowed to plan their agendas.
- Tackle the governance conundrum of parallel bodies with overlapping jurisdiction. This requires taking a fresh look and not holding on to the legacy of older systems.
- Legitimize women’s empowerment by allowing the plans and agendas to be set by the elected representatives rather than treat them as mere agencies.
- Strengthen civil society pressure to transform the nominal advantage (due to paper transfer of functionaries and funds) into real change.

In short, this is an opportune time to strengthen the decentralized set as per the spirit of Constitutional Amendments. This alone will lead to giving meaning to the age-old phrase: power to the people. At one remove and at a later date, this would lead to true empowerment of women in all its glory.

ANNEXURE I – Taxes and Grants Division wise





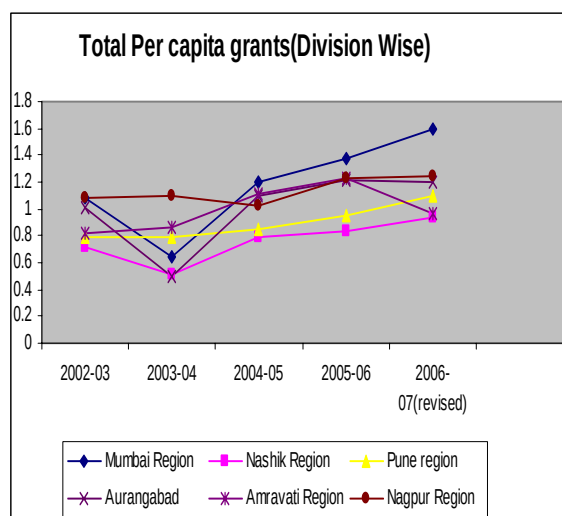
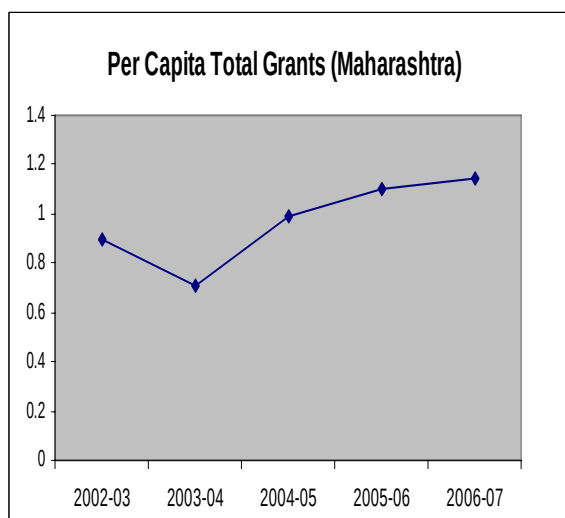
ANNEXURE II – Buoyancy Ratios

Sr.No.	Districts	Grants	Local taxes	Other Sources	Education
1	Thane	0.94	0.27	-2.75	0.85
2	Raigad	0.75	5.64	-6.59	0.78
3	Ratnagiri	0.73	1.89	0.73	0.84
4	Sindhudurg	0.65	1.8	0.73	0.71
5	Nashik	0.81	1.38	0.71	0.67
6	Dhule	1.09	1.42	1.16	0.68
7	Nandurbar	-13.41	1.02	1.59	-0.75
8	Jalgaon	0.38	0.02	1.1	0.48
9	Ahmednagar	0.27	0.56	2.84	0.49
10	Pune	0.68	2.28	0.07	0.63
11	Satara	0.52	2.55	0.62	0.49
12	Sangli	0.75	1.7	-0.29	0.45
13	Solapur	0.48	1.17	1.84	0.68
14	Kolhapur	0.61	2.35	-3.16	0.61
15	Aurangabad	0.4	2.07	7.26	0.56
16	Jalna	0.37	-10.05	3.1	0.5
17	Parbhani	-0.83	0.86	-0.83	2.25
18	Hingoli	0.96	2.46	-	0.45
19	Beed	0.59	1.44	0.78	0.54
20	Nanded	-0.08	-	4.39	0.52
21	Osmanabad	0.7	1.23	-4.37	0.47
22	Latur	0.39	1.6	0.87	0.53
23	Buldhana	-4.01	-2.92	-3.26	-7.91
24	Akola	0.78	0.5	0.99	0.66
25	Washim	0.7	-0.23	4.25	0.32
26	Amravati	0.01	2.29	1.02	0.7
27	Yavatmal	0.5	-	0.79	0.69
28	Wardha	-2.77	1.12	-2.72	-7.01
29	Nagpur	0.29	1.29	1.83	5.5
30	Bhandara	2.12	2.6	1.93	2.11
31	Gondia	0.31	1.41	0.52	0.78
32	Chandrapur	0.45	4.76	1.16	0.92
33	Gadchiroli	0.37	0.91	0.91	0.61
	S T A T E	0.48	1.71	0.6	0.57

ANNEXURE III Total Grants in Maharashtra

Per Capita Grants (Purposive+ Established+ Planned Grants) for Maharashtra					
Year	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07
Per Capita Grants	0.894699	0.704343	0.987769	1.101492	1.145563

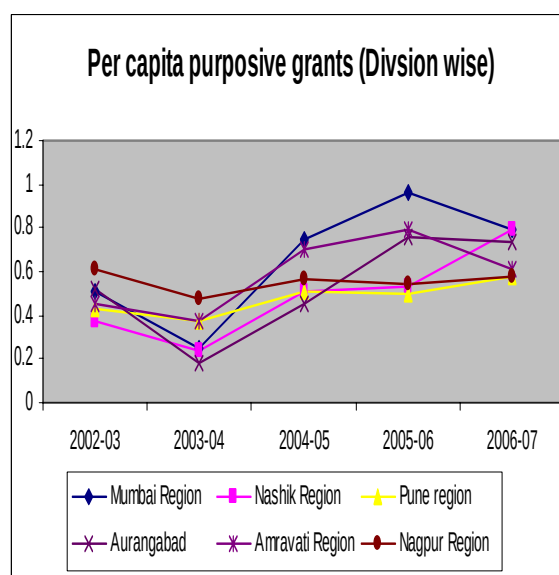
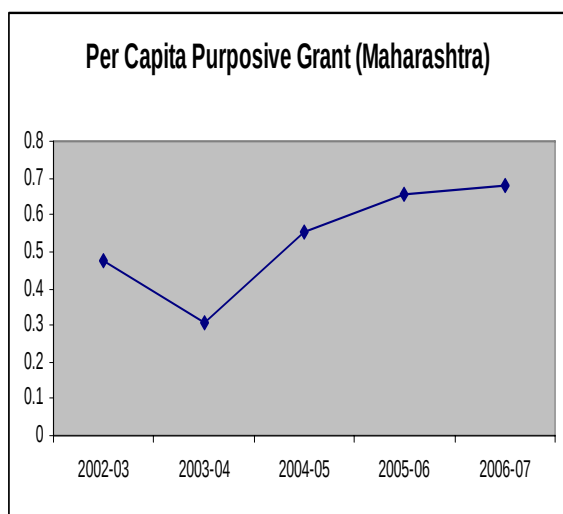
Per Capita Total Grants Division wise					
Divisions	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07 (revised)
Mumbai	1.089503	0.639559	1.19591	1.373322	1.599221
Nashik	0.713699	0.512992	0.795849	0.839388	0.941239
Pune	0.793367	0.797503	0.855871	0.954623	1.097397
Aurangabad	1.015582	0.499524	1.101607	1.213993	1.204697
Amravati	0.81995	0.860474	1.111444	1.223637	0.97196
Nagpur	1.077608	1.103762	1.02942	1.234614	1.245889



III A - Purposive Grant in Maharashtra

Per Capita Purposive Grants in Maharashtra					
Year	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07
Per Capita Purposive Grant	0.473065	0.303911	0.555218	0.656523	0.682173

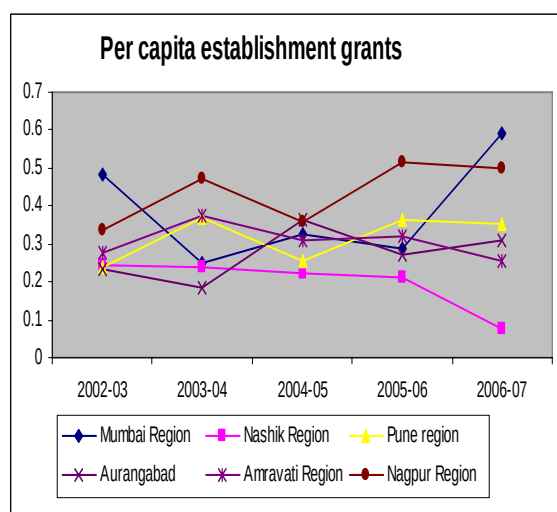
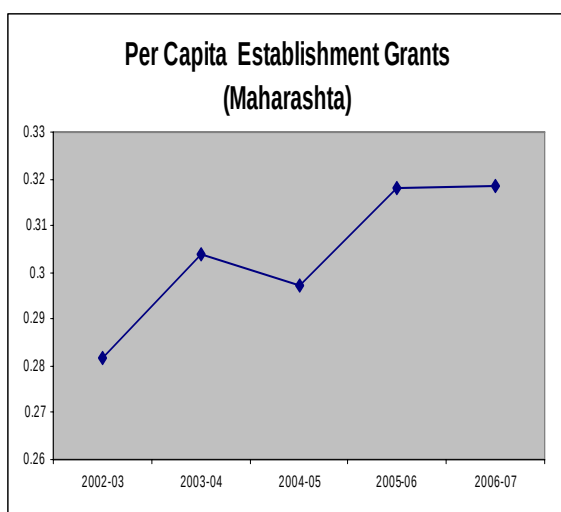
Per capita Distribution of Purposive Grants Division wise					
District	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07
Mumbai	0.508216	0.252085	0.747502	0.958663	0.794977
Nashik	0.379075	0.239282	0.512432	0.535898	0.789312
Pune	0.433453	0.368128	0.507393	0.498648	0.575514
Aurangabad	0.518692	0.184541	0.451944	0.759616	0.734157
Amravati	0.453934	0.374197	0.698666	0.792492	0.616598
Nagpur	0.613569	0.474694	0.564019	0.54485	0.576051



ANNEXURE III B – Establishment Grants in Maharashtra

Per Capita State Establishment Grants					
Years	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07
Per capita Establishment Grants	0.28192	0.303911	0.297154	0.318005	0.318286

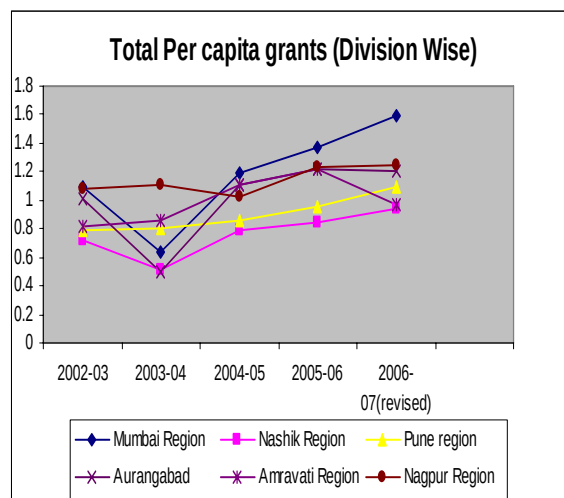
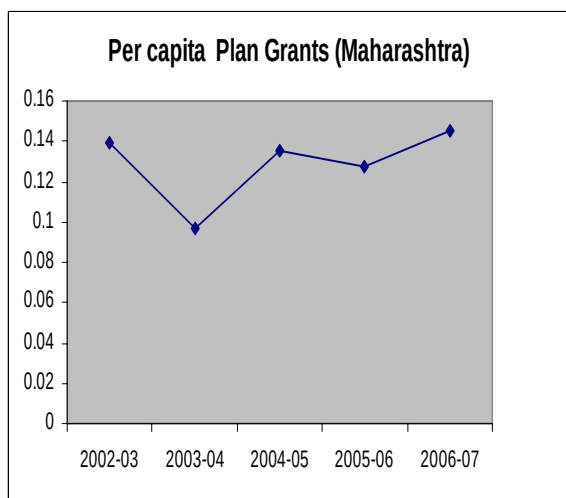
Per capita Establishment Grants (Division wise)					
District	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07
Mumbai	0.480361	0.252085	0.32388	0.288371	0.591666
Nashik	0.244316	0.239282	0.219858	0.211572	0.077282
Pune	0.239193	0.368128	0.256206	0.364275	0.351273
Aurangabad	0.231752	0.184541	0.361209	0.271509	0.307376
Amravati	0.276971	0.374197	0.306908	0.321512	0.255487
Nagpur	0.335304	0.474694	0.355735	0.51681	0.498286



ANNEXURE III C – Plan Grants in Maharashtra

Per Capita State Plan Grants					
Year	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05s	2005-06	2006-07
Per Capita Planned Grant	0.139714	0.09652	0.135396	0.126964	0.145104

Per Capita Plan Grants (Division wise)					
District	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07
Mumbai	0.100926	0.135389	0.124528	0.126289	0.212579
Nashik	0.090309	0.034427	0.063559	0.091918	0.074645
Pune	0.120722	0.061248	0.092273	0.0917	0.170611
Aurangabad	0.265138	0.130442	0.288454	0.182868	0.163164
Amravati	0.089045	0.112081	0.105869	0.109633	0.099876
Nagpur	0.128735	0.154373	0.109666	0.172954	0.171552



**ANNEXURE IV – District wise Per Capita Expenditure on Education, Construction,
Public Health Care and Administration**

Sr.No.	Districts	Education	Construction	Health	Administration
1	Thane	534.48	79.45	169.25	102.17
2	Raigad	538.67	111.59	139.8	67.7
3	Ratnagiri	714.47	80.1	114.04	112.14
4	Sindhudurg	1028.6	150.77	196.74	90.09
5	Nashik	589.46	80.38	121.22	85.79
6	Dhule	397.36	145.72	173.92	97.54
7	Nandurbar	0.059	4.58	4.97	4.74
8	Jalgaon	615.27	31.08	72.70	115
9	Ahmednagar	465.62	67.96	157.07	64.42
10	Pune	651.87	90.79	125.07	78.65
11	Satara	506.53	147.97	120.47	56.05
12	Sangli	487.09	94.46	87.68	82.42
13	Solapur	488.65	101.54	64.26	90.53
14	Kolhapur	541.054	97.05	122.76	62.86
15	Aurangabad	638.042	66.57	167.36	56.14
16	Jalna	478.51	83.28	114.13	85.97
17	Parbhani	550.83	48.42	89.51	150.9
18	Hingoli	655.9	63.18	97.21	117.83
19	Beed	701.65	69.058	156.8	135.97
20	Nanded	634.51	81.49	143.55	167.2
21	Osmanabad	709	103.52	180.35	106.1
22	Latur	691.09	126.41	159.8	94.04
23	Buldhana	539.07	58.75	116.02	100.34
24	Akola	753.86	103.71	178.54	64.45
25	Washim	605.69	71.89	168.95	92.58
26	Amravati	561.17	62.96	133.07	132.2
27	Yavatmal	491.46	84.17	118.20	126.33
28	Wardha	366.53	77.78	109.97	93.71
29	Nagpur	477.33	62.51	91.31	91.85
30	Bhandara	574.312	97.64	102.50	64.18
31	Gondia	641.14	103.76	125.95	101.53
32	Chandrapur	586.42	47.62	163.94	71.24
33	Gadchiroli	626.17	45.32	296.41	144.94
	S T A T E	564.68	83.24	129.01	92.95

ANNEXURE V – Rural Populations used for computing Per Capital

Sr.No.	Districts	Rural Populations
1	Thane	2,229,376
2	Raigad	1,673,094
3	Ratnagiri	1,504,568
4	Sindhudurg	786,506
5	Nashik	3,056,240
6	Dhule	1,262,062
7	Nandurbar	1,109,036
8	Jalgaon	2,629,896
9	Ahmednagar	3,236,945
10	Pune	3,031,718
11	Satara	2,410,873
12	Sangli	1,950,306
13	Solapur	2,624,259
14	Kolhapur	2,472,809
15	Aurangabad	1,809,863
16	Jalna	1,305,115
17	Parbhani	1,042,529
18	Hingoli	833,130
19	Beed	1,774,180
20	Nanded	2,187,195
21	Osmanabad	1,253,330
22	Latur	1,590,024
23	Buldhana	1,759,097
24	Akola	1,002,742
25	Washim	841,771
26	Amravati	1,707,581
27	Yavatmal	2,001,060
28	Wardha	911,695
29	Nagpur	1,453,886
30	Bhandara	960,418
31	Gondia	1,057,276
32	Chandrapur	1,406,034
33	Gadchiroli	903,033
	S T A T E	55,777,647

Sr.No.	Divisions	Rural Populations
1	Mumbai	6,193,544
2	Nashik	11,294,179
3	Pune	12,489,965
4	Aurangabad	11,795,366
5	Amravati	7,312,251
6	Nagpur	6,692,342
	S T A T E	55,777,647

6

Thus Spake the Woman.....

The narratives of the women discussed in this chapter are full of engagements with such complex themes. Gail Omvedt (1990) responded to the criticism (often from Left organizations) of reservation which argues that women from upper caste and landed families act as puppets of the men folk who dominate governance. However, she illustrated with examples of districts in Maharashtra that the collective action of women in governance has been significant in combating communalism and casteism and this inference is endorsed by the narratives in this section. ‘Agency in... women’s tales is connected,’ A K Ramanujan writes, ‘with their being able to tell their own story and with it being heard,’ because ‘speech is power’. Then the women started speaking with unspoken words...

6.1 WOMEN’S NARRATIVES

6.1.1 DHAKULI GUNDU NAIK

Age	: 50
Education	: Illiterate
Caste	: Adivasi (ST)
Religion	: Hindu
Village	: Halkarni
Taluka	: Chandgad
District	: Kolhapur
Panchayat Post	: None
Marital Status	: Widow (Husband—an alcoholic, committed suicide)
Children	: 3 (one son died an alcoholic)

• Dhakuli Maushi’s journey

“Previously women were married to the home and the hearth. A woman walks with such dignity today that she can ascend to the seat of the Sarpanch. The future seems promising... the efforts of Savitri Bai have not been in vain—we live in better days.” There is a deep sense of pride in this description of changing times by Dhakuli Gundu Naik, an illiterate social worker known as ‘Dhakuli Maushi’ to the people of Halkarni.

Next to the Marathas, the Adivasi Naik comprise a large segment of the population in Halkarni where almost every family has dry irrigated land (about half an acre to one acre) on which they grow rice. The Naiks also work as farm labourers and brew liquor from the abundant cashew in the region. Many people, some as young as 12 and 14, are addicted to cashew liquor. Dhakuli Maushi was the driving force behind building a women’s movement to resolve issues like the water crisis and alcoholism in Halkarni.

When she was seven or eight, Dhakuli Maushi lost her father, an alcoholic. Along with her mother, Dhakuli Maushi tended the fields. She looked after her siblings when her mother went to Belgaum to sell konda or coarse rice powder. Dhakuli Maushi was married at the age of 12. In her village, people went to the fields in the morning and returned in the evening to drink. Almost every man in the village was addicted to alcohol. Dhakuli Maushi brought up her children as well as her younger siblings after she lost her mother. Her son, who used to tend to six buffaloes, became an alcoholic and died.

After the birth of her child, Dhakuli Maushi's mother-in-law asked the couple to leave her house. Dhakuli Maushi's strong-willed, wise mother gave them rice, flour and groceries, and soon they moved in with her. Additionally, she gifted them a bull and a cow. Three years into their marriage, as soon as the bullock cart began yielding returns, her husband began drinking. This started off a cycle of drinking, followed by fighting and abuse. At this point, her mother asked them to return home.

When Dhakuli Maushi was pregnant, her husband beat her and bit off her nose. Her mother informed the Panch, who advised them to settle the matter amicably, since her husband had done it under the influence of alcohol. Dhakuli Maushi, however, was adamant that she would settle for nothing less than a police complaint at the Chandgad Taluka. She refused to buckle under pressure when people warned her against breaking village norms. With a broken nose, she felt that she would either have to end her life because of the humiliation or complain to the police. She threatened suicide when her mother refused to accompany her to the station and even as the Panch tried to convince her that they were trying to resolve the matter amicably. Dhakuli Maushi feared for her life and refused to give in. Accompanied by her mother and two children, she registered a complaint at Chandgad against her husband who followed her there with his mother.

With a bleeding nose and covered in blood, Dhakuli Maushi reached the police station and registered her complaint. The police slapped her husband and kept him under arrest for seven days. Then he was let out on bail. As they fought the matter in court for years, they lived apart. After her mother passed away it was difficult for Dhakuli Maushi to make ends meet as her brother was still young. One year after her mother's death her lawyer confirmed that divorce was not possible and it had become increasingly difficult for Dhakuli Maushi to feed four mouths. When her husband agreed to look after her, she returned to him.

They built a small hut on her brother's land and began living there with a bull and a buffalo gifted by her brother (since her husband had sold off their cow and bull). For a year, her husband behaved well. But he went back to his old ways the following year, and the drinking and beatings began again. It was difficult for her to live with a man who was affectionate by day and a demon by night. This went on for seven more years, despite which they did prosper. One night, her husband returned drunk, picked up one of their daughters and threw her. Dhakuli Maushi fled with her children. At home, her husband set fire to himself. He died of burns two days later.

For the next four years she stayed with her brother and worked as a farm labourer at a wage of Re 1/- a day and two measures of rice. Under a government scheme, she bought two buffaloes for Rs 5000/-. After the death of her husband, since she had a right to the property, her brother-in-law gave her Rs 10,000/-. She used it to build a house.

- **Milestones**

Today, caste distinctions are not very rigid in the village, but even ten years ago caste based segregation was rife. Hotels served different castes in separate cups, seated them separately, and the lowest castes even had to wash the utensils they used in hotels. Dhakuli Maushi believes that the reduction in casteism has happened due to the efforts of Savitribai Phule. Women are now seen not only at the Grama Sabha but also at the Tanta Mukti Committee and the School Committee. The Sarpanch of the village is also a woman. Dhakuli Maushi

explains, “We work on health issues, build Mahila Mandals and Bachatgats. We don’t expect any monetary gains for the work we do. Some praise us, some criticize our ways, but that is how it is. Our fight is to seek equal status for women in society.”

Dhakuli Maushi’s social journey began twenty years ago when she organized 80 Naik (ST) women to build a Suvarna Mahila Mandal for the Asha organization. Nearly twenty women collected Rs 50/- a month and started a Bachatgat. Dhakuli Maushi learnt to deliver babies with a nun at Asha, and in the last 20 years, she has delivered more than 25 babies for which she was gifted a sari and a blouse piece.

About ten to twelve years ago, Asha ran 25-30 balwadis in the Taluka. Suddenly they received an order to pay a fine of Rs 500/- per balwadi. The nun could not pay Rs 15,000/-. Dhakuli Maushi asked her to write a letter to the collector stating that the organization taught poor Adivasi children without charging fees, and was, in fact, doing the government’s work and that penalizing them for this would be unjust. The nun wrote the letter and the fine was revoked.

After organizing Adivasi women, Dhakuli Maushi helped the nun get Maratha women together, and today women from both the communities have a united front. Dalit women, however, are absent from the larger picture in the matter of participation and organization though it is not clear why this is so.

Among the cases of domestic discord that Dhakuli Maushi and the village women solved was one of a girl who had been deserted by her husband. When the women went to the boy’s house, his father sent them off, saying that the girl had probably come back because she was pregnant with another man’s child. Dhakuli Maushi and the women threatened to attack the boy at Halkarni junction when he reported for duty the next day and challenged the police to arrest them. They demanded that the girl should either be accepted or divorced. Judging the mood of the women, the police assured them of a meeting between the two parties at 11 am the following day, after the father-in-law and the husband had asked for the girl’s forgiveness. As a matter of principle, Dhakuli Maushi and the women did not take insults personally as they realized that if they were to be impacted by harsh words, then people would use insults as a tool against them.

● **The Fight for Prohibition**

Ten to fifteen years ago, alcoholism was a huge menace to the village as wives of both the Naiks and the Marathas were regularly beaten up by their drunken husbands. Teenaged boys also took to drink and ruined their lives. While Dhakuli Maushi accepted her husband’s suicide as her fate, she deeply regretted the fact that her son could not be saved from the addiction. Ten years ago an entire generation was wiped out by alcohol. To save the next generation, about 60 village women approached the nun at Asha to help them get rid of the menace.

When the liquor shop owners got to know of this, they slandered and threatened the women. The Sarpanch and police were hand-in-glove with the liquor shop owners. The women organized a protest march from Halkarni to Chandangarh (25 km) which drew 500 participants along with some political leaders. The women later realized that while the political leaders walked with them and promised them support, they also assured the police that no action need be taken. When prohibition failed to be implemented, 60 women took out a protest march to Kolhapur district 125 km away. The men in the village grew angry and resorted to beating and threatening their wives.

After two years of continuous efforts, the police refused to cooperate and as a result the question of prohibition remained unresolved. But the rate of consumption did drop. Dhakuli Maushi elucidates, “As a farm labourer, a man earns Rs 50/- per day which he spends entirely on liquor, whereas a woman earns Rs 30/- per day with which she is expected to run the house. Endless fights between drunken husbands and wives often result in physical abuse and a loveless life. The men boast of wanting their sons to be doctors but don’t provide money to buy a pencil.” Some men have given up alcohol and have moved on in life.

On being asked why she never contested an election, Dhakuli Maushi cites illiteracy as the reason. “Elected women members never stepped out of the house before being elected nor do they do so after being elected. Panchayat affairs are run by their husbands. I can talk but I am illiterate and I trust only the written word. What if I put my thumb impression on a wrong document by mistake? If I had managed to just about read and write, I would have contested the Panchayat for five years at least,” Dhakuli Maushi says matter of factly.

The women of the village do not attend the Grama Sabha as they lose their daily wage of Rs 20/- to Rs 30/- by doing so. They also believe that attending the Grama Sabha is a waste of time. Dhakuli Maushi and her group of women do attend it though, believing that it is their social responsibility. In fact, Dhakuli Maushi expressed her anguish that EWRs of the Grama Sabha remain absent for the flag hoisting ceremony when more than 100 women like her gather to witness the ceremony. It is a matter of pride for them that in the last ten to fifteen years, one girl from the village has gone on to become a doctor and another a teacher, while four or five men have got permanent jobs at a factory.

• **Changing the World—Water-Drop by Water-Drop**

When the research team was walking with Dhakuli Maushi in Halkarni, a Maratha woman walked towards them, balancing a pot of water on her head and another on the waist. The Maratha woman asked Dhakuli Maushi to help her balance the pot, which Maushi did promptly.

Dhakuli Maushi observed, “Previously the same lady would forbid our touch—when we served as labourers, if we asked for water, it would be poured from over a distance. Times *have* changed and the world is really changing.”

It would be safe to say that times have changed, as has the world, thanks in no small measure to the persistence and struggle of many men and women like Dhakuli Maushi.

6.1.2 FULMA BELSARE

Age	: 30
Education	: Illiterate
Caste	: Korku (ST)
Religion	: Hindu
Village	: Jamunnala
Taluka	: Chikhaldara
District	: Amravati
Panchayat Post	: Upsarpanch—Acting Sarpanch since two years, Member, Grama Panchayat
Marital status	: Married (Husband—Contractual Labour in Water Supply Department)

• **Fulma Tai’s Journey**

Fulma Tai belongs to the Korku tribe of Melghat. She has been an active Upsarpanch of the Jamunnala Village since 2005. Born in Salona, she studied till Class 2 and spent her childhood in acute poverty. With three other children at home, there was never sufficient food or clothing. To help out, she was put to work from the age of six, at half the normal pay, as she was a child.

At twelve, Fulma Tai was married off to Dayaram Belsare and brought to Jamunnala. Their family is comparatively better off in the village. Fulma Tai has even accompanied her husband to Amravati to work as a manual labourer. In the initial period of their marriage, Fulma Tai’s husband placed many restrictions on

her. She was not allowed to leave the house and to begin with, she followed his orders. But being an extrovert, she began to feel claustrophobic.

When she heard of a vacant position for an anganwadi helper in Jamunnala, Fulma Tai took up the post against her husband's wishes. Though her children were young and her job led to many fights, Fulma Tai continued to work there for ten years. She also worked on a voluntary basis for MAVIM for six years, and laboured on their farm. Gradually, her husband accepted her as a working woman.

In 2005, Grama Panchayat elections were held, and the villagers asked her to contest. This time, her husband supported her. She filled the form and stood against her cousin for the post of Sarpanch. Both of them got elected, but her cousin, Suraj Khasdekar being educated up to Class 12, became the Sarpanch, while she became the Upsarpanch. The village had had to wait for 20 years to get a female Sarpanch.

Her cousin a third child while in power and therefore, he had to resign as the Sarpanch. Fulma Tai then had to take care of the responsibilities of both the Upsarpanch and the acting Sarpanch. Then Motilal Belsare from Kamapur was selected as a Sarpanch.

MAVIM had organized a melava of the SHGs in 2005 where MRA activists met Fulma Tai. When she entered the MRA and started working, she insisted that the MRA also work in Jamunnala. The Korku were never allowed to enter the Grama Panchayat. They were never informed of Grama Sabha and the Grama Sabha itself had not taken place for a long time in the village.

Initially when Fulma Tai began attending monthly Grama Sabha meetings, only men would be present, with hardly any women attending. When asked to join in the women would say, "We cannot talk, and the Sarpanch is capable of handling everything". Fulma Tai herself was new to the Panchayat. She had never seen any Grama Sabha taking place in her tribal belt. She was not aware that the Upsarpanch and the Panchayat members could issue a notice for the Grama Sabha meetings.

Gradually, working with the MRA, Fulma Tai realized the full extent of her rights and responsibilities, and she also understood the importance of the Mahila Grama Sabha. While she used to conduct SHG meetings and Watershed Committee meetings, with time she felt the need to conduct a Grama Sabha to discuss their problems as well. She began by creating awareness about the Grama Sabha in her village. She used gatherings at the water tap, in farms and at the SHGs to talk about the Mahila Grama Sabha and the opportunities it held for better governance.

During Holi, an important festival for the Korkus, they collect fagwas or contributions to help celebrate. Fulma Tai asked people to collect their contribution in the Panchayat and then celebrate Holi.

- **Milestones**

Fulma Tai's village had many problems. Apart from having no electricity, the village had no roads and drinking water. There were problems with the ration shop too, as the owner was selling kerosene to outsiders. Women had to fetch water from a distance of 3 km. The electric motor owned by the Panchayat was kept in a member's house for ten years. Education and women's health issues were never discussed in the Panchayat. There was no PHC in the village, and if a patient became serious, they had to travel 12 km for help. Women were not aware that 10% of the Panchayat funds were meant for women and child welfare. Instead of listing the names of people without houses, the Gharkul scheme here listed those of people who already had houses.

The Gramsevak used to get drunk and fight in the Panchayat. Apart from not discussing government schemes at meetings, he often used vulgar language while talking to women. People never got their certificates on time due to his absence. Government schemes used in the village were all on paper and the benefits directly went to him.

Fulma Tai spoke to the villagers about these issues and explained that the Grama Sabha was probably the only way to solve their problems. Then she issued a Grama Sabha notice on her own and asked all the Panchayat members, the BDO, the Gramsevak, the Tehsildar and the Police Patil to be present. People of four villages in the vicinity were informed about the Grama Sabha.

The District Officer of the MRA and media representatives from newspapers like *Sakal* and *Lokmat* were also present by 11 am for the meeting, but the government officials turned up two hours later. Fulma Tai, being the Upsarpanch, started the Grama Sabha. Kalpana Khirale, DO of the MRA minuted the proceedings. The next day papers carried reports headlined: *Gramsevak absent for Grama Sabha!*, *No Grama Sabha for six months!*, *Government schemes in the pocket of Gramsevak*, and *Adivasis deprived of schemes*.

The thrust of all the articles was that the Gramsevak should be dismissed. The Tehsildar and the BDO began visiting Jamunnala and threatened Fulma Tai and the activists. MRA activists got phone calls asking to them to remove Fulma Tai from the MRA, saying that if they did not do so, something would happen to her. Displaying great courage and determination, Fulma Tai continued, supported by the women of Jamunnala. Finally, they were successful in getting the Gramsevak Mr Yeul transferred. The new Gramsevak, Mr Avghad, was aware of all that had happened before he joined, and since he knew that he would not be able to bribe anyone, he got himself transferred within a month.

The current Gramsevak, Vijay Lohe, is a responsible government official and is effective in his work. The village has electricity. The Grama Panchayat has its own electric motor and people are able to use it. For three days a week, the Gramsevak works for the Jamliwan Group Grama Panchayat, and for the three other days, he works for the Salona Grama Panchayat. People are now aware of the government schemes that exist for their benefit.

• **Gendering the Village's Governance**

Fulma Tai once contested elections for Panchayat Samiti with a BJP ticket. Baji Damu Athawle, the former Sarpanch of the Group Grama Panchayat from Jamliwan, was her opponent from a different political party. He was very influential due to his political, economic and social power in the village. And the source of that power lay in the illiteracy of the tribal people, who were out of the reach of the government and movements like the MRA.

Athawle offered to pay her Rs 1,50,000/- to join hands with him. When she refused, he abused her in front of the village and threatened to strip her and beat her up. Kalpana Khirale, the local DO of the MRA was in Mumbai then and was asked to return immediately. When she asked the villagers to sign as witnesses at the police station, most people fled out of fear of Athawle, except for Fulma Tai's husband and another woman. Kalpana filled her application, asked a few more people to sign it and met Mr Siddiqui at the police station. Athawle was arrested three days after the incident.

Fulma Tai was then given the post of a Taluka Sanghatika or Organizer in the MRA. She became the focus point of MRA activities in the region. Despite being illiterate, she picked up the training very well. Kalpana Tai and Fulma Tai often spend their own money to reach the interiors of Melghat (which costs up to Rs 400/- for each trip) and create awareness among the tribals about their rights and responsibilities.

At a Melava, Fulma Tai once addressed 250 women, telling them about Grama Panchayats and Grama Sabhas, and answering their questions confidently in Hindi. That she speaks Hindi well and is enthusiastic. Apart from this, she is also good at handling people and is strategic in her dealings with them. Having lived in a non-tribal area for some time, she is aware of urban mores and ways.

She knows that there are many women in her village who could, with some training, become confident and could take her place. Kusumabai, Sonaybai, Sonibai and Dhulaybai are a batch of women trained by her. At times they have come as far as Amravati for meetings at their own expense. Fulma Tai says that she had the ‘spark’ even before joining the MRA, but the MRA’s training and support have made her confident in her participation with the Panchayat. The MRA has been active in Melghat for the past two years.

For most problems in Jamunnala Village, Fulma Tai is the first person people go to, because she is always willing to help out. The villagers are united and cooperate with her. In fact, Fulma Tai is more active than the Sarpanch and often makes decisions herself. She is now a leading personality in the Taluka. Because the Grama Sabha is held regularly in Jamunnala, people talk about their problems and explore ways to solve their problems on their own through the Grama Panchayat. Though Fulma Tai had contested elections in the Panchayat Samiti in 2007, she did not win.

When asked about her future plans, Fulma Tai says that she wants to work in the ZP, through which she can help the poor. She sincerely feels the need to make all the government servants work efficiently and with a degree of accountability.

6.1.3 JYOTI MESHRAM

Age	: 42
Education	: MSW
Caste	: SC
Religion	: Buddhist
Village	: Kotgal
Taluka	: Gadchiroli
District	: Gadchiroli
Panchayat Post	: Ex-Sarpanch (2002)
Marital status	: Married (Husband—doctor)
Children	: 2

• Jyoti Tai’s Journey

Jyoti Meshram, a Masters in Social Work, lives in Kotgal, an extremely backward area in the tribal belt of Gadchiroli district. The district is a centre of Naxal activities. Janali, an OBC caste, plays a predominant role in Kotgal in political, social or economic decisions. In Kotgal, two families belonging to the same caste may support different political groups.

In the 2002 Kotgal Grama Panchayat elections, the Sarpanch’s seat was reserved for an OBC woman, whereas one ward was reserved for an SC woman member. Jyoti Tai fought the elections for this post. Her networking skills and sociable nature helped her win the elections. At the same time, another woman, an ST candidate, won from Jyoti Tai’s panel, and nine members of the opposing panel came to power. However, as the post of the Sarpanch was reserved for an SC woman, Jyoti Tai, who belonged to the minority panel, was elected to the post.

In the very first Grama Panchayat meeting after being elected Sarpanch, the opposition passed a resolution preventing Jyoti Tai from carrying on any financial transactions of the Panchayat. Challenging this resolution, Jyoti Tai sought justice from the Panchayat Samiti District Officer and the Commissioner. After seven months, she was finally awarded her right to carry on financial transactions. But this prevented her from taking up any development work in the initial seven months of her term.

- **Milestones**

The ZP looked into her complaint after about two and a half years, and the nine Grama Panchayat members accused of hampering developmental work in the village by passing an illegal resolution were suspended from their posts. In turn, they challenged the suspension order and obtained a stay order. When seven or eight Sarpanches proposed Jyoti Tai's name for the post of president of the Sarpanch organization which was being revived in the Gadchiroli district, some upper caste Sarpanches objected to it and prevented her from becoming president.

Traditionally, the festival of 'bail-pola' (when the bull that tills the farm is decorated and worshipped) is celebrated in Kotgal. An aarti thali from the Sarpanch's house is brought with great revelry, marking the beginning of the festival. Significantly, in the five years that Jyoti Tai was Sarpanch, not once was the aarti thali brought from her house. She was merely invited as a guest for the function.

- **Gendering the Village's Governance**

Three months after Jyoti Tai took over the reins as Sarpanch, came January 26, and with it, the flag hoisting ceremony. The upper castes and ex-leaders disapproved of the fact that for the first time, a Dalit woman would hoist the flag. On January 26, some people belonging to the OBC picked up a fight with her husband at the public water pump and beat him up. Jyoti Tai did not let the fight or her husband's injuries prevent her from reaching the Panchayat. She hoisted the flag and performed her duty as Sarpanch.

As has been mentioned before, Jyoti Tai had lost seven months in resolving an issue her opponents had created. In the very next month after she had procured an order that the resolution was illegal and had begun to work, a no-trust motion was proposed against her, accusing her of not taking the Panchayat members into confidence as well as of not undertaking the approved work. This resolution was passed with nine members voting for it and two against it, but Jyoti Tai obtained a stay against it. Six months later, a decision was made in her favour, allowing her to continue in office.

The opposition and the non-cooperation by the other members grew, till finally, on one occasion some members came drunk to a meeting. They were warned by others to be cautious as they had already been suspended once. Chastened, they were subdued for a while, but soon became high-handed. This was when Jyoti Tai decided to organize the women of the village. She began with one SHG, which inspired other women as well, and lead to the formation of up to 23 SHGs.

Jyoti Tai says, "Once men used to come drunk for the meetings... But today the presence of women is conspicuous... For example, the Grama Shiksha Samiti meeting was attended by more than 300 women. Earlier, only two women would attend the meeting." Jyoti Tai is a member of the MRA, and the founder and president of the Nagpur division of the Panchayat Mahila Aghadi. She now plans to contest the elections for the Panchayat Samiti of the ZP.

6.1.4 ANUYA KULKARNI

Age	: 44
Education	: SSC
Caste	: Brahmin
Religion	: Hindu
Village	: Sherpe
Taluka	: Kankavli
District	: Sindhudurg

Panchayat Post : Member (since 2007)
Other Committees : Member, Education Committee, Tanta Mukti Samiti and Parikshan Committee at Grama Panchayat
Marital Status : Married (Husband retired from the Merchant Navy)
Children : 3

• **Anuya Tai's Journey**

Anuya Kulkarni, a member of the Sherpe Grama Panchayat and a District Organizer of the MRA here, was born in a village called Bhalavali in Rajapur Taluka. Known as Atula Pandharinath Bagav, she became Anuya Kulkarni when she got married in 1981 and came to Sherpe. Anuya Tai had an unusual sort of upbringing, mainly because her father was socially active and never believed in inequalities. As a Gramsevak, he met the stern disapproval of the other Brahmin families when he shared food with low caste villagers. Anuya is proud of her distinct and more tolerant background, which has helped her gradually change the attitudes and mindsets at her in-laws' place.

Though Anuya Tai always felt the desire to do something for society, she could not step out until 1995 because she had small children to look after and a household to run. She also stitched clothes and helped in the annual school functions. She once held a health camp in her house. Her husband, Ashok Ganesh Kulkarni, was in the Merchant Navy and therefore always away on ship. He used to visit home for just four months a year, during which time, she was expected to leave all her other work and stay at home. He is now retired from service.

In 1995, an NGO called Active Friends' Circle from Ratnagiri entered Sherpe and started a nursery for children. Mr. Patil the Sarpanch then, ran it for a few months within his community. Then the school approached her. That was the first time she stepped out and conducted a meeting in the Panchayat to discuss plans with other women.

About 45 women were present at the meeting mainly because of the contacts she made while organizing various social gatherings (like haldi-kumkum functions). The NGO gave her many inputs and much encouragement and finally she started a Mahila Mandal of 120 women in Sherpe across all castes. Though many powerful people in the village were against it and tried to pressurize her, she continued working on it for six months. Anuya Tai conducted meetings in each community and about 10 to 15 women from each community were ready to join the Mahila Mandal. That was the first attempt at removing caste barriers in the village.

Gradually, she started working for NGOs in nearby villages. Alcoholism was a big problem in Sherpe, and the women asked her to help raise their voices against it. She helped organize the women. Since this issue existed in four or five neighbouring villages, she organized the women of those villages as well and started an organization called 'Sindhudurg Mahila Vikas Sanghatana' with the help of Shashikant Kamble.

The Sanghatana succeeded in banning liquor from those villages. Women from nearby Talukas like Devgad also joined the organization, drawn by the common cause of Darubandi, or the campaign against alcohol. The Sanghatana's numbers swelled to about 800. When the Sanghatana's work started becoming limited, Anuya Tai set up 'Vikas Prabodhini' with the help of Aba Shevare and Shashikant Kamble to work on women's issues. They decided to work on the local issues of each village.

While working with the 'Sindhudurg Vikas Mandal', Anuya Tai observed that the organization did not get involved with any political party because they did not wish to compromise on their principles. Though active through self-help groups (SHGs), the organization was confused when it came to dealing with women's

issues. Most women had little or no understanding and knowledge of politics, but were ready to learn from experience.

Anuya Tai had attended the Saigata conference along with Shashikant Kamble. There she was inspired to work with the MRA. Her in-laws were against this initially. When one of her brothers-in-law became mentally ill, they even blamed her for it. But now, after nearly 15 years she enjoys the complete support of her family, specifically, that of her mother-in-law, husband and children. Anuya Tai and Shashikant Kamble's continuous efforts over a period of ten years are showing results. She has even trained a few women who are now active MRA members. The MRA has conducted melawas, get-togethers and morchas in Sherpe. Most of the women attend the flag-hoisting ceremony in the village. About 10% of the funds meant for women's development are being utilized.

- **Milestones**

Caste differences are strictly followed in the Konkan, with untouchability still in practice. For instance, separate cups and plates are used for Dalits in upper caste homes. While working here, the MRA has used strategies like get-togethers and lunches across communities, organizing meals in the Grama Panchayat and so on. Despite threats from people of her own caste, Anuya Tai and other women strongly took the issue of untouchability forward and managed to stop the practice at least in the public domain. Anuya Tai is trying to focus on women in SHGs and bring them forward through training sessions.

In Konkan, the people who own the agricultural land are called Patil or Khot, and the labourers who actually cultivate the land are called Kool (tiller-tenants). There was an issue regarding a Kool in her village. She did not know anything about it and went about tracing the original documents of ownership (the 7/12 revenue records) of the land. According to the new law, the land cultivated by the Kool or tillers should have been registered in their names. But after seeing the documents, Anuya Tai realized that the land still belonged to the Khot.

The Kool used to vote for whichever candidate the Patils (their land owners) asked them to out of fear. Anuya Tai tried to explain the rights of tenants to them. She conducted meetings with each community and pursued the matter legally. She conducted these activities in 10 or 12 other villages. This process took time, during which the Khot and the Patil tried to threaten her. Being a Khot herself, she invited the anger of the rest of her community with her actions. However, years ago, her father-in-law, himself a Khot and the Talathi of Sherpe Village, had given away his land to the tillers gladly and had thus set a precedent.

Most of the men in the Konkan, apart from the Kunbis and the Baudhdhas, are employed in Mumbai. Therefore, farm work is entirely done by women in the family. This was the reason why very few labourers actually acquired the land they received under Koolkayda (Agriculture Tenancy Act). Anuya Tai observed that the women were working very hard on the land they did not even own. She organized a morcha of 2500 women in 2000. About 100 to 150 tillers have got their lands due to Anuya Tai's efforts. Surprisingly, when the land was officially given to the tillers, the men returned from Mumbai to transfer it in their names instead of in the women's.

Anuya has motivated 22 women in her village to seek joint ownership of their houses with their husbands. She went to the Grama Panchayat during the elections in 2007 and made an effort to transfer the land in the names of these women. Making an effective use of the GR, she has changed the timing of the Mahila Grama Sabha from 11 am to 3 pm, to suit the women. She pursued the completion of toilet blocks in the school and a water storage tank. She has even organized a morcha of about 1500 women on the issue of ration.

Most government officials know her very well since she makes sure that they work. A 14-year-old girl in Fanasgaon was raped and the case came to Anuya Tai. The girl was pregnant and some people tried to take

her away from the village. Anuya Tai tried to rescue her and take her to the police station, but fell down on the way and fainted due to the injury. She was hospitalized for a couple of days and the police inspector came to see her. He made sure that the girl was safe and that the people who had committed the act were arrested. Consulting advocates for legal matters, Anuya Tai is presently handling about 45 cases of wronged women.

Breaking the caste barrier is a specific quest for Anuya Tai, and she has formed SHGs of women across communities to help bring them together, so that they can share thoughts and see how similar their situations are. On Dr Ambedkar's birth anniversary, her organization, Vikas Prabodhini, puts together lunch and a programme among Dalits and the other village women. Ten women from different communities of the village have been trained by Anuya Tai to work in her absence. She has also trained women from nearby villages. Presently, there are four Taluka representatives, 10 members of the Sarpanch Mahila Front, and 30 women from SHGs working in the district.

- **Gendering the Village's Governance**

Initially, no village women would enter the Panchayat. Anuya Tai worked towards creating awareness about the Panchayat among the women. She spoke about the importance of the Grama Sabha and the Mahila Grama Sabha, GRs and government schemes in SHGs. She started a new programme through which every woman in the village was informed of the Grama Sabha. SHGs were also sent letters informing them of the Grama Sabha's dates. Today, women attend the Mahila Grama Sabha and the Grama Sabha regularly.

SHGs have received Rs 7,00,000/- to Rs 8,00,000/- from the bank. Therefore, women have become economically powerful. There are now two rooms in front of the Panchayat office for SHG meetings. Anuya Tai insists that the houses received under the Gharkul scheme be registered under women's names.

Anuya Tai has been successful in bringing women-centric politics into the village. She is also working towards making governance more transparent. A copy of the economic transactions taking place at the Panchayat will be sent to each voter in her village. A copy of the coming year's budget will also be given to each voter. The newly elected Sarpanch has learned how to sign from Anuya Tai.

People wanted Anuya Tai to be the Sarpanch of the village and she had the opportunity to stand for election. In the last election, it had been decided that a panel of seven women would be elected. But there was a lot of interference by political leaders from the Congress, the Shiv Sena and the BJP. They spent about Rs 50,000/- to get a woman who had been forced to stand in opposition to Anuya Tai elected. Two members of the panel schemed and planned this.

Though most villagers were committed to Anuya Tai, the extremely poor were manipulated by the powerful and given money to vote against her. Anuya Tai and three other women were locked in a room a day before filling the form for Sarpanch. Despite having worked for society and the village for ten years, Anuya Tai feels that she has not understood the dynamics of political plotting and planning. However, she is content that though she is not the Sarpanch, she can still do lot of work by being a member of the Panchayat. And she gives the credit for her awareness to the Mahila Rajsatta Andolan.

Recently, Anuya Tai along with few other women went to see the Collector to demand some Panchayat rights. The Collector noticed that the Sarpanch of Sherpe was the woman who had stood in opposition to Anuya Tai during the elections. He was surprised to see that Anuya Tai was there fighting for justice on her rival's behalf. It was evident that Anuya Tai had no problems with Rabiya becoming the Sarpanch—being women, theirs was a common struggle, she felt. If she did have a problem, it was with those who had plotted against her.

“After joining social work, I could feel the difference between the personal suffering and societal suffering. By considering societal suffering as my personal suffering, I gained a lot of self confidence,” Anuya Tai says.

Anuya Tai is now working with deserted women who are usually kept in support centres and are not well cared for. Instead of being trained, they are taunted and stigmatized, and their problems are never recognized. Anuya Tai wants to work on this issue and do something for their betterment.

The need of the hour, she feels, are women who believe in equality and can look at the Panchayat, the village, the Taluka and the district with a clear perspective. Women who can be strong and who can withstand the pressure of political leaders are needed, as are women who can bring a transparent work culture into politics. “If women do not bring about such change, then there will not be any difference between the methods used by men and the methods used by women,” Anuya Tai says in conclusion.

6.1.5 RITA SUKHDEVE

Age	: 43
Education	: HSC
Caste	: SC
Religion	: Buddhist
Village	: Manegaon
Taluka	: Bhandara
District	: Bhandara
Panchayat Post	: Ex-Member (1995-2000)
Marital status	: Married (Husband—Cycle Shop Owner)
Children	: 5

• Rita Tai’s Journey

Rita Tai’s passage into empowerment and governance was very difficult to begin with. She faced much opposition from her family but gradually managed to bring about a change in them. Her husband supported her initiatives against alcohol. But others considered her too outspoken for her own good. Her family did not approve of her going out for training and was suspicious of her.

Rita Tai used to be a member of the Grama Panchayat. She was also a member of the MRA. She could not do much work because she did not know much about the GRs, the 10% reservation of Panchayat funds for welfare schemes for women and children, and other Panchayat proceedings. Gradually, she grew aware of these aspects and also grew more assertive of her rights. To begin with, she demanded that 10% of the funds in the Panchayat be reserved for women. Most people opposed this. But she was persistent and persuaded other women to give this request to her in writing.

• Milestones

Simultaneously, she continued working and learning with the MRA. When the other Panchayat members realized that her knowledge of these matters was sound, they agreed to release the funds. Rita Tai then conducted a Melava for the women. She continued participating in Panchayat matters in the face of rivals who constantly opposed her. Within a year and a half, she demanded that a signboard of the MRA be put up on the road using the 10% funds meant for women.

In keeping with the GR, a Tanta Mukti Committee was set up in Manegaon on August 15, 2007. Two months were spent on a series of meetings. Alcoholism was seen as the root of most of the disputes in the village. The women decided to approach the issue through the committee. They imposed a prohibition or Darubandi and for the first five months, the villagers followed the ban. A drunken man was charged Rs 251/-, and a person

who reported a drunken man was given Rs 101/- as a reward. The Grama Panchayat collected Rs 10,000/- in this way. However, some people began to sell liquor in a room and gradually, they began to do this openly.

At this point, Rita Tai organized people, men and women, around the issue. They caught the liquor sellers, emptied the barrels of liquor and set fire to it. Some barrels were given to the Police Patil for further action. They plan to monitor the sale of liquor in the oncoming elections. Rita Tai has made a few enemies thanks to her demands for Darubandi.

- **Gendering the Village's Governance**

Rita Tai works in five other nearby villages. She has trained one woman from each village and they are expected to train more women in their villages. Manegaon itself has accepted the leadership of women, and the MRA's work here is recognized and approved of by the people. Rita Tai's women trainees are ready to work even in her absence.

Rita Tai says that caste differences were clearly visible in the 1980s. The earlier generation was rigid about it—the OBCs would not allow the SCs to use their wells, for instance. Once, the well that the SCs used got polluted. There was no other water scheme in the village. So Rita Tai went to the well belonging to the OBCs and fetched water. That was an extremely brave gesture on her part, though no one said anything. Today different castes can eat together and Rita Tai enters any house of any community without fear or pressure.

There are a few other politically dominant people like Naresh Dahare (Shiv Sena) and Nana Kunchalbudhe (NCP), but they do not have much influence on Manegaon. Rita Tai says that there is no system of contesting panels of political parties in elections. They are influential during the elections of the Panchayat Samiti and ZP. She was asked whether she got to meet political leaders because she was active through the MRA. She replied that she spoke to the MLA when she had some work. She also meets members of the Panchayat Samiti and the ZP. A few men and women cooperate with Rita Tai in her work.

Rita Tai observed that having gained respect, she can access all kinds of information in the Panchayat easily. In Manegaon, an OBC woman had been elected to the Panchayat. But her husband always spoke on her behalf at meetings. This stopped only after Rita's husband took him aside and explained to him that he was hampering the intellectual growth of his wife by speaking on her behalf.

Rita Tai led the fight for prohibition. Although Rita's husband used to drink, he gave up alcohol once she took up the fight for prohibition in the village. He explained, "I gave it up to help my wife in her fight. Had I continued to drink, her words would have been meaningless and no one would have respected her."

6.1.6 MAYADEVI SORTE

Age	: 32
Education	: HSC
Caste	: SC
Religion	: Buddhist
Village	: Vadval Nagnath
Taluka	: Chakur
District	: Latur
Panchayat Post	: Panchayat Member, President, Health Committee, Member, Tanta Mukti Samiti, Education Committee at Grama Panchayat, Member, Police Dakshata Committee at Taluka Level
Marital Status	: Married
Children	: 1

- **Mayadevi's Journey**

Mayadevi or Maya Tai Sorte was born in Kharola Village. Her parents were Dalits and landless agricultural labourers. Not only were they very poor, but when her father married for a second time, Maya Tai and her mother were abandoned. Maya Tai has dealt with both poverty and untouchability since her childhood. She had an upper caste friend whom she used to visit and eat with. Her friend's grandfather loved Maya Tai as his own grandchild. She was grief stricken when he died, and she remembers how, at his funeral, when she moved ahead to pay her respects, people objected to her presence and refused to let her do so.

Maya Tai says that she had a courageous streak in her even as a child. Her confident, extroverted nature had to be 'tamed' according to her relatives, and hence she was married when she was in Class 7. Despite becoming pregnant at an early age, she took care of her young son and completed Class 12 examinations with the encouragement of her in-laws. Though her husband's village was famous as a place of worship, it lagged behind sorely in terms of development.

- **Milestones**

Maya Tai gradually started working on the formation of SHGs and on organizing women. In this process too she faced caste-based discrimination. When she and her upper caste colleague went to different houses in the village to meet women, they were both given tea. Her cup, she observed, was always kept separately. Though this hurt her, she kept quiet about it, so that the process of building women's groups and SHGs would not be stalled.

In Maya Tai's village, there was a stark difference between the Dalit and Patil (upper caste) households. All essential resources like bore wells, roads, and electric supply were concentrated in the area where the upper castes resided. Near the Dalit households, however, there was no facility for water. Women had to move from one well to the other, walk over 3 to 4 km to fetch one pot of water. Roads and electricity were non-existent in the areas where Dalit families resided.

The only occupation in the village was agricultural labour work. Therefore, the Village Patil was the sole employer in the village, by virtue of which, he ruled over it. No one in the village dared to speak against him. The majority of Dalit households were dependent on the ration shop for food on account of the low wages paid to them and seasonal unemployment. But the ration shop dealer would not supply food grains on time. When he did, it would be less than the actual amount allotted on the card. All of a sudden he would stop the supply and announce that the food grains were over. He was supported by the Village Patil.

The women resented this but were clueless about dealing with it. They read about a programme being organized in Latur on the rationing issue. They collected money and sent one woman there. When she returned with information and written material, they discussed it at length.

Soon after, the women went in a large group and confronted the ration dealer. They asked him to produce documents such as his registration papers and register of accounts. When he was unable to do so, the women made written complaints against him and demanded that the ration be distributed fairly. Later the women also went to the Rationing Officer at the Taluka level and launched a complaint against the ration dealer. Since the ration dealer and the Taluka Rationing Officer were working hand in glove, this did not help.

Next the women met the District Officer, a woman, who came to the village herself, raided the shop, carried out an investigation and later sealed it. At this point the Village Patil started pressurizing the women to take back their complaint. Two women, including Maya Tai, who were the leaders of the agitation were summoned by the Village Patil to his bungalow and held back for a whole day and a night. So terrorized were the villagers by the Patil that the women's husbands made no efforts to free them. The next day, all the

women of the village gathered outside the Patil's house and demanded that either he set the two women free or arrest them all, since they had lodged the complaint together. By and by, the villagers started receiving their proper share of ration.

Every year a religious ceremony is performed in the temple of Nagnath and people of the village are fed prasad. On this occasion, a common dinner is organized for all the villagers with the funds collected from the entire village. However, the Dalit families had to bring their own plates and glasses and by the time it was their turn to eat, after everybody else had eaten, it would be almost midnight.

Maya Tai hated this discrimination and once she advised the Dalit community to boycott the prasad as a symbol of protest. It worked, and today the entire village participates together in all festivals and rituals.

• **Gendering the Village's Governance**

Despite being elected to power, most women representatives were actually powerless and their male family members held the real power. Some EWRs of the first generation refused to contest elections a second time and some were opposed by men from their families. But Maya Tai not only contested elections a second time, she also won them unopposed.

She has slowly and steadily consolidated her power in the village with small but significant work. She has also been able to win the confidence of the pressure groups in the village and encourage them to join hands in developmental activities. Because of the immense faith that people place in her, Maya Tai has remained a non-controversial and successful figure in the village.

Maya Tai believes, "Without power in our hands we can't do anything! I can say this from my experience of the last five years." For her, the word 'power' entails participation in developmental work through SHGs, the Rationing Committee, the Save Land Campaign and other works for the benefit of the village.

In July 2000, Maya Tai was elected as a member of the Grama Panchayat without any opposition. In all ten men and five women had been elected as Grama Panchayat members. At her first meeting, she saw that she was the only woman present among all the men. Maya Tai asked, "Why are the other EWRs not present for the meeting?" One of them replied, "Our women will not come. Henceforth we will be attending the Panchayat meetings!" She was angry with the Grama Panchayat officials, who had the authority to stop these men from attending the meeting, but preferred to stay quiet.

Maya Tai had assumed that elected representatives would work wholeheartedly for the welfare of the people and pay attention to the various problems they faced. Being a woman herself, she was aware that water scarcity was a basic problem. She was concerned about how clean water could be distributed equally among all the villagers. Though there was a common water tap meant for all the villagers, the rich and the powerful would divert water from this tap with the help of electric water motors to their houses, while the poor were left with no water at all. At the monthly Grama Panchayat meeting, she suggested that when water supply came to the common tap, the electricity be cut. This would mean that the rich were unable to divert the water through electric motors and everyone would have equal access to the water. A resolution was passed to this effect and everyone started getting their share of water.

Maya Tai made efforts to improve the educational standards of the village. A meeting was organized with the parents to encourage them to send children to school and help reduce the dropout rate. Though boys attended school, girls were kept away. Their names were registered and daily attendance was marked, but only a handful of children actually attended school. The education committee of the village was unaware of its rights and duties. In order to make these committees active, Maya Tai and her group started conducting monthly meetings with the committee.

Showing a keen interest in the issue, the women's SHGs of the village adopted a few girls and subsidized the cost of their education. They saw to it that the girls attended school regularly and tried to change the mindset of the parents. Gradually, the girl child dropout rate decreased.

Maya Tai feels that the other committees in the village should also work independently. This is possible only if enough financial autonomy is given to them and a proper budget is made available for each. But the fact remains that even if the committee plans for activities and programmes, finally it is the Sarpanch and the Gramsevak who are in control of all the financial resources. In her experience, she finds that women participate well if special attention is paid to the Mahila Grama Sabha and the Grama Sabha.

During her tenure as the member of Grama Panchayat, the Panchayat body passed a budget of Rs 67,00,000/-. Money was used from various funds, but the main problems of the village remain unresolved. In the Vidhan Sabha elections she tried to assess the utilization of MLA funds. It was shocking to know that in approximately 290 villages, this fund was utilized to build temple and walls around cremation grounds and to build temples. There is a dire need to allocate funds towards developmental work.

In a village of 10,000 like Maya Tai's, with no proper sanitation facilities, women are forced to defecate along the road. The roads have a continuous flow of vehicles and pedestrians, but the women have no option. When the village received Rs 10,00,000/- from the MLA fund, it was used to construct a temple in the village rather than the much-needed toilets. While Maya Tai does not oppose the construction of temples, she feels that it is crucial to assess the actual needs of the village and to plan accordingly. Needs should be prioritized according to their importance. She feels that the State's responsibility does not end with giving funds, it is also responsible to see that those funds be utilized for the development of the villages.

6.1.7 RABIYA MANAJI

Age	: 39
Education	: Class 5
Caste	: NA
Religion	: Muslim
Village	: Sherpe
Taluka	: Kankawali
District	: Sindhudurg
Panchayat Post	: Sarpanch (2007 onwards)
Marital status	: Married
Children	: 4

• Rabiya Tai's Journey

Rabiya Imam Manaji is the Sarpanch of Sherpe. Before becoming a Sarpanch, she used to go from village to village to sell fish. She has stopped selling ever since she came to power. Her husband, Imam Manaji, used to work for a restaurant in Mumbai and is working in Dubai now. Since he is away, Rabiya Tai runs the house on her own.

Rabiya Tai was never fond of social activities and was not aware of social work either. She was once made president of an SHG formed by an organization called Vikas Prabodhini. Rabiya Tai had even forgotten how to sign. Representatives of Vikas Prabodhini trained her to collect money from the members, conduct meetings, deposit the money in the bank and distribute loans. She learnt a lot thanks to that opportunity.

- **Milestones**

Rabiya Tai was elected in 2007-2008 and came to power in January 2008. The all-woman panel was elected unopposed. She became Sarpanch thanks to the reservation. She goes to the Gramapanchayat by 11 am, looks at important documents, signs them and returns home. She cannot go as far as the Taluka and the District offices, but is learning a few things from other Panchayat members, and the Panchayat Samiti and ZP representatives.

Since she became the Sarpanch, she has collected information relating to the Panchayat. Anuya Kulkarni, another member of the Sherpe Panchayat helps her in all her Panchayat work and guides her decision-making. The Gramsevak reads all the GRs. Rabiya Tai was involved in planning the Gharkul scheme. She implemented the water tap scheme and hired new labourers for the same. She also planned lakes, fencing, etc., for the village.

Rabiya Tai does all her household work in the morning before she leaves. Her family members do not directly help her in her Panchayat work but support her to continue working. For example, they encourage her to participate if there are any government training programmes outside her village. Most families regard her with respect since she is a village leader. But a few families do not have a positive attitude towards women in governance.

She does not face any kind of verbal or mental abuse, violence or harassment due to her involvement in politics in the village. For any visit to the ZP, she finishes her household work early in the morning and occasionally, family members help her by fetching water and sending her children to school. She visits her relatives in Mumbai frequently.

- **Gendering the Village's Governance**

Rabiya Tai took up some developmental work in the village. She submitted proposals for five beneficiaries under the Gharkul scheme to the Panchayat Samiti. She improved the management of water taps and recruited new labourers. She worked on village mapping and planning under the Maharashtra Gramin Rojgar Yojana which included building roads in different communities, building trenches and lakes, fencing farms, registering wells in the farms and preparing budgets.

In case of an accident in the village, Rabiya Tai reaches the spot immediately, requests everyone to stay calm and helps the victims. She calls the Gramsevak to write the Panchanama. Then a report of the required compensation with details is submitted to the government.

She feels that there should be educational, health and infrastructural facilities available in the village. Post her visit to the primary and secondary schools in the village where she enquired about existing facilities, she has tried to improve things by building toilets and water tanks in the school. Since the school has had no teachers for some time, she met the BDO and the Education Officer and submitted a proposal to appoint a teacher.

Rabiya Tai keeps a tab on the health services in the village. She has pursued the matter so that the nurse can come and provide services in the PHC. She is also pursuing proposals for repairing the roads.

Rabiya Tai's monthly income is about Rs.900/-, which is spent on household expenditure like food, medicines and education for her children. In public places, Rabiya Tai is confident and efficient. She takes active part in the flag hosting ceremony and involves other women in the programme as well. Women get together and share their experiences during Mahila Melavas. Rabiya Tai does feel that women Sarpanches do not get the kind of respect male Sarpanches get, and that this is probably because of society's traditional patriarchy.

6.1.8 RAZIA SULTANA

Date of Birth	: August 14, 1964	
	Education	: Graduate
Caste	: Sayyed Subedar	
Religion	: Muslim	
Taluka	: Amravati	
District	: Amravati	
Marital Status	: Married (Husband—Transport Business)	
Children	: 3	

• The Journey from Rajni to Razia

Razia Sultana was born in a Hindu OBC family as Rajni Kisan Rao Khavle. Her father was a tailor, while her handicapped mother worked in the fields. They were poor, had little land, and the girls had to sell grass after school to support their education. Razia Tai remembers that her father had sold their small piece of land to send one of her brothers to the city to study. The son, who was not interested in studying, did not pass the examination.

Razia Tai completed her matriculation from the village and then moved to Amravati to do her Diploma in Education (D Ed). By the age of 19, she had a job as a school teacher. She fell in love with a truck driver Munna, who, she realized much later, was a Muslim. By the time she had found out his religious identity, she was too involved with him and found it impossible to live without him. She was renamed 'Razia' during her nikah ceremony.

Razia Tai's family ostracized her and her mother was humiliated by her relatives. Razia Tai did not meet her mother for nearly a decade after this. Razia Tai's husband lived in a joint family of 40 members, including his brothers, sisters and their spouses. Munna's family, who were also against the marriage, harassed Razia Tai. She was pressurized to pray regularly and had to quit her job. She was not allowed to speak Marathi, as it was considered the language of the Hindus. She was also asked to bathe only on Fridays, after she had had intercourse with her husband. Out of desperation, she would wipe herself clean with a wet towel every day.

Razia Tai's husband was pressurized to divorce her. First, to marry the cousin he had been engaged to as a child, a second time when she was unable to conceive, and lastly, when she had had two daughters and had not 'given him a son'. Despite the pressure, her husband refused to leave her or remarry.

• Milestones

Under immense pressure, Razia Tai would offer namaaz daily. Sometimes, however, she muttered Hindu prayers instead. She was forbidden to read anything other than the Koran. Desperate to read, she bribed her husband's assistant to bring her some of the old newspapers which Munna used to sell. She would read these secretly, hidden in the pages of the Koran. When her husband found these clippings, he was enraged. He broke her almirah, tore her saris and refused to speak with her.

Razia Tai wanted desperately to write and managed to send an article to a newspaper. When it got published, her family was horrified. They burnt the paper and accused her of having an affair with the editor of the newspaper. This incident, coupled with the daily harassment, made her lose her mental balance. She was taken to a psychiatrist who heard her out and then asked her family to leave her alone. This proved to be a turning point. She started writing regularly for newspapers and magazines. Readers appreciated her articles and many suggested that she undergo training in journalism.

Since her husband could not read Marathi, he was not aware of what her articles were about. But the men, whom he met in mosques and other public places read them, and asked him 'to keep his wife under control'. The general feeling was that she was writing the truth, but coming from a converted woman it was not acceptable.

With her father-in-law's support and financial help, she took up a course in journalism. But she had to conceal the fact from her husband. When her children grew up, Razia Tai insisted on sending them to an English-medium school against the family's practice of sending children to an Urdu school. Her husband's attitude towards her underwent a change when the children did well at school and were praised.

Razia Tai also underwent a sterilization procedure, defying the prevailing norms of her community. She continued to write about the exploitation faced by Muslim women. Following one such article in a newspaper called *Deshunnati*, a mob of 100 outraged Muslim men gathered in front of her house. She was whisked away by the police to an undisclosed location. Maulvis issued five fatwas against her and she was also charged under Section 295 of the IPC which had been used against Salman Rushdie and Taslima Nasreen.

The five fatwas issued against her and her replies to them are

- Muslim men would not marry her daughters. *She replied that she was fine*
- *with this, as she did not believe there was anything special about Muslim men.*
- She would not be given proper honours after her death. *She replied that she*
- *had no need for this, as honour, if any, should be given to her when alive. She went to the mosque and donated her body to be used as desired after her death.*
- She should apologize for her grave sins in the Madghar, a confessional where
- all grave sins can be atoned for. *Razia Tai refused to do so.*
- She should be boycotted and ostracized from the community. *To this she said*
- *that since the community had never accepted her in the first place, they could not ostracize her.*
- Her husband should divorce her. *When her husband refused to do so, she told*
- *the Maulvi that her husband was not the one asking for divorce. If the Maulvi wanted her husband to divorce her, then as per Islamic law, she ought to be given alimony for the rest of her life and for all the 16 years that she had not been allowed to work. The sum of money she was asking for ran into crores. The Maulvi asked her husband to let her do as she pleased.*

- **Gendering Public Spaces**

While she is not active at the Panchayat level, Razia Tai is vibrant in the public sphere, in many spaces that are not easily accessible to Muslim women. She has written many poems and about eight books. She now works with the Criminal Justice System, especially looking at violence towards women of the minority community, Commercial Sex Workers and eunuchs in Amravati. She is a member of the Maharashtra State Human Rights Commission (MSHRC).

She also opened a family counseling centre related to sexual harassment and related problems. While working with prisoners, she began understanding the problems of the HIV-infected. In the course of this work, she made inroads into the world of eunuchs. Intrigued by their lives, she stayed with them for two months to understand and comprehend their realities. Her work with Commercial Sex Workers (CSWs) started when she visited a hospital. A woman had been stabbed in the back and dragged on the road. Other women who were with her said that she should have allowed the men to 'use' her. Had she done so, she would not have been hurt. Razia Tai overheard their comments and felt upset. She then decided to work with CSWs and train them.

She is also working currently in the Central Jail, in the free legal aid centre and police commissionerate. In prisons she works for equal rights for women and also runs a family counseling centre. She is proud to state that while earlier only women prisoners would cook, now even men cook food. She also trains police personnel and has introduced topics about sexuality in the police training manual. She creates awareness regarding free legal aid, especially for women. She has won a number of awards from different organizations, like the Smita Patil award but none from the government so far.

Her husband now drops her to meetings himself, even if they are at midnight. She believes that making her marriage work was a challenge for her and she is happy that she has been able to do so. But her greatest achievement has been the change that she has seen in her family. It overwhelms her to see that the women of her household are no longer beaten and are respected. Razia Tai feels that though there is increased awareness among women, violence against them has not really ended.

Razia Tai feels that women are now much more conscious about their rights. Earlier their conversations were limited to jewellery and saris but now they discuss issues in the Grama Sabha. Razia Tai would be happy to see the end of sexual exploitation that women have to face. She also feels that women who stay and work at home should realize their self worth and should never feel that they are not doing anything. Their husbands should also realize that while they have a lot more opportunities for self-expression, women who stay at home do not. It is important, in her view, that women recognize that any work they do is meaningful and contributes to society.

6.1.9 RATNAMALA SUDESH VAIDYA

Date of Birth	: 1964
Education	: HSC
Caste	: SC
Religion	: Buddhist
Village	: Ganeshpur
Taluka	: Bhandara
District	: Bhandara
Panchayat Post	: Member, Tanta Mukti Samiti, Finance Committee, Standing Committee
Other Positions	: District President, Dr Ambedkar Social Forum
Marital status	: Married (Husband—working in ZP)
Children	: 2

• Ratna Tai's Journey

Ratnamala Sudesh Vaidya's childhood was spent in Siddharth Nagar, a slum with a mixed population of Scheduled Castes (SC) and Muslims in Nagpur. The slum has been a site of communal riots, during which, young Ratna Tai and her family would hide in huge steel pipes near the industrial parts of Nagpur city.

Ratna Tai's father had had an early marriage but got married a second time due to his wife's infertility. His second wife, Ratna Tai's mother, had two children. Ratna Tai's parents were keen that the girls be educated despite the hardships they faced on a day-to-day level. Her mother was particular that the children should not do menial jobs and saw education as a means for them to get ahead. Ratna Tai was a bold, outspoken child and was considered rebellious.

Her father, who seemed different from other fathers, used to respect women and had a deep influence on Ratna Tai. Once when her step mother was humiliated by a man at work, Ratna Tai's father demanded that he

ask for her forgiveness in front of the Panchayat. When the man had bowed down in public, Ratna Tai's mother took off her slipper and hit him. Angered, the Panchayat members demanded an explanation for hitting a man who was asking for forgiveness. To this Ratna Tai's father who had planned it all said that when his wife had been humiliated in front of everybody why was it wrong to humiliate her attacker in front of the Panchayat? "Is a woman's dignity any lesser than a man's?" he asked. Ratna Tai believes that respect for women was inculcated in her at an early age by her father.

At 21, Ratna Tai got married to Sudesh Vaidya, a clerk. She moved to Ganeshpur Village in Bhandara district to live with his family. Soon, Ratna Tai's mother-in-law developed a heart condition and Ratna Tai was blamed for this by her badi saas, or grand-mother-in-law. She was labelled 'Pandharyapaychi', literally 'a woman with white feet' or a witch. Ratna Tai confronted her and explained that no one could be blamed for someone else's misfortune.

- **Milestones**

Ratna Tai's husband's maternal uncle, Nasik Raoji Tirpude, had been the Deputy Chief Minister of Maharashtra. Her husband, Sudesh, would visit them and try to understand politics. When the reservation for women was announced in Panchayats, Nasik Rao visited Ratna Tai's house. Impressed by her, he asked her husband to groom Ratna Tai for a career in politics. Though her husband was hesitant initially, repeated meetings with Nasik Rao convinced him about Ratna Tai's capabilities.

Ratna Tai was elected as a member of the Grama Panchayat in 1992-93. Her husband used to bring home copies of the Grama Panchayat Act and taught her how to speak and how to set the agenda for meetings. He would run errands for her to ensure that she devoted her time to the Panchayat.

However, while he was supportive in every way, he was also conscious of the fact that Ratna Tai was the member of the Grama Panchayat and so the ultimate authority lay with her. He encouraged her to express herself fearlessly and to take the decisions she wanted to. He said, "Don't go to the Grama Panchayat meetings just to have chai-samosa. If that is what you want to do, then you might as well sit at home." He would inform her of various meetings and seminars that were happening, and would even drop her at such gatherings.

A social activist, Vamanraoji Darpure, took her to an MRA meeting. She liked the work and decided to join the Andolan. Soon she was nominated and elected as the district president in Gondia and Bhandara districts. Her work was to empower other women like herself and to identify ten women who could participate in the elections from Gondia and Bhandara. She also had to focus on solutions to the problems that people faced there.

The other members of the Grama Panchayat (who were all men) laughed at her and ignored her completely during the meetings. Often she would raise a point that would be totally ignored. Undeterred, she felt it was her responsibility to speak there and do what she felt was right. Other women too would tell her not to speak too much. Ratna Tai was irrepressible and thanks to her husband's support, she was spurred on to go against the other members of the Panchayat, including the Sarpanch.

Ratna Tai recollects that she insisted that the minutes of each meeting be photocopied and given to the members for future reference. When she suggested this, a man asked, "And where will the money come for this? Are you going to sleep around for it?" Ratna Tai said that she was willing to use her meeting-bhatta (money that Grama Panchayat members are paid for attending meetings) to photocopy the minutes for herself. Since the rest did not, she was the only one with the photocopies.

Ratna Tai recalls one incident when she rose to the occasion and overcame all her fears. When she was in hospital for some treatment, the Sarpanch started repairing a sewer in her ward without the consent and signatures of all the members. This was against the rules and when Ratna Tai heard about it, she rushed to the

site and asked the contractor to stop all work immediately. When the Sarpanch came to the site, Ratna Tai asked him to show her the signatures and the consent of all the members of the Grama Panchayat.

The Sarpanch was from the Teli caste (OBC) and told Ratna Tai, “People from my caste don’t even urinate in the mouth of people from your community (SC). How have you gathered the courage to speak to me and look at me in the eye?” Angered, Ratna Tai held the Sarpanch by the collar and slapped him. Then she went to the police station and filed a complaint against him for abusing her on the basis of her caste. The Sarpanch also came there and demanded that she be arrested. The policeman told the Sarpanch that he could be booked under the Prevention of Atrocity Act which was non-bailable. The Sarpanch decided to withdraw his complaint and also requested Ratna Tai to withdraw hers, which she did after he had apologized to her.

- **Gendering the Village’s Governance**

In 1994-95, there was a flood in the River Vainganga and much of the village was submerged. People lost a lot of property and about 15-20 houses were completely under water. The fields were deluged and the harvest ruined. The village did not receive any aid for nearly two to three weeks after the flood.

Ratna Tai informed the Tehsildar, the Patwari and the Collector about the situation. She gave written applications but nothing happened. Then she heard that Harshvardhan Patil, a minister, was visiting the district. She gathered a few women with her and went to meet him, accompanied by her husband.

When the minister called her inside, she saw that the Tehsildar, the Collector and the Patwari were also there. She told the minister about the situation in her village and also that they had not received any aid. The minister then asked for the Patwari’s report which had been submitted the previous week. It stated that the village had only been submerged for one day and that there had been no damage. Ratna Tai was agitated on hearing this and told the minister that if each of these officials could stay in any of the houses in their village for even one night, she would accept the report. The angry minister ordered the Collector to submit a report by 8 am the following morning.

Next morning, the Tehsildar and Patwari came to inspect the village and complained about Ratna Tai to the Sarpanch. The Sarpanch refused to support her and called her mad. Thanks to her efforts, the village and surrounding villages got a relief package of Rs 500/- per head per household, and 5 kg of oil, sugar, rice and wheat per household. The Sarpanch alleged that Ratna Tai had slept with the minister. She ignored him, confident of her husband’s support. This was a turning point and the villagers began to support her.

Ratna Tai won the next election and became the Sarpanch. She held the post for five years and faced many challenges being a woman in office. There were times when she was still ignored at the Panchayat meetings and had to face nasty comments whenever she tried to say something or do something in the village. But on the whole, Ratna Tai says, after she was elected Sarpanch, respect for her in the village grew. The struggle was there but it was not as pronounced as it was when she was a member of the Grama Panchayat. Being the Sarpanch brought with it a sense of authority and power that made things easier for her.

The MRA’s training held her in good stead as well. She heard of the 10% budgetary allocation for women through the MRA. She helped resolve many women’s issues using this allocation and by making budgetary decisions. Ratna Tai gathered information for herself and disseminated it among other women as well. The 10% allocation was used to build toilets for women in slum areas and in market places. She also made uniforms for children in the anganwadis and ZP schools. When she brought up women’s issues, male officers would sometimes tell her not to bring up ‘issues of the home and the kitchen-stove to the Panchayat’. She even threatened some drunk members with police action if they came to the Panchayat meetings while under the influence of alcohol. Ratna Tai admits that being related to an influential political leader was quite an advantage, especially where the Gramsevak’s help was concerned.

Ratna Tai was keen to stand for elections again. But on the day before the elections, the ex-Sarpanch distributed pamphlets which claimed that Ratna Tai was a prostitute and had slept with various men in the village, as well as the Tehsildar to get developmental work done in the village. Ratna Tai lost the elections, and though she filed a complaint with the police, she was unable to prove the charges.

Currently, Ratna Tai is the regional co-coordinator of the Nagpur division of the MRA. She feels that the Andolan has helped her to find her feet. She believes that the MRA is a huge support because just knowing that there are people who respect women and understand their struggle. She makes efforts to empower other women and help them in their struggle in local governance.

Ratna Tai believes that EWRs should be inspired to be fearless, and that their husbands should support them. She feels that if her husband had not been there for her so wholeheartedly, she would not have been able to break barriers and travel this far. “Women should realize their inner worth and should never be afraid to speak out if they really believe in something,” she says in conclusion.

6.2 AND SHE SAID...

Our Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted in the four different regions of Maharashtra with EWRs from across the caste and class spectrum. In this section, we have compiled the information gathered from different FGDs, with personal experiences and observations.



Across the board we found that the women in the Panchayati Raj space in the villages of Maharashtra encounter certain issues and problems. These are problems that may be slightly different from each other in their manifestations, but grow out of the central well-springs of caste and power equations. In different villages of the four regions of Maharashtra, we see similar struggles which emerge when power and caste identity are placed in opposition to efficiency, sincerity and proactivity.

While many women of Maharashtra's villages still struggle to get their fundamental rights and needs; it is apparent that a space is being created where they can make their presence felt. From our conversations and discussions at the FGDs certain common strains and threads emerged. They are:

- Pollution and Purity
- Discrimination between Girls and Boys
- The Problems of being an Elected Woman Representative
- Problems Solved, Schemes Implemented
- The No-confidence Motion
- Women and the Gramsevak
- Women and the Grama Sabha
- Challenges/Motivations
- The Next Step
- Recommendations

6.2.1 POLLUTION AND PURITY

Caste-related mindsets and pollution practices are still a very significant part of life in rural Maharashtra, and this is true even in spaces like the Panchayat, as many women reported during the FGDs. Jyoti Meshram (42 years, Kotgala Village) reported that at weddings, people belonging to the SC community are served at the end. Water is mainly supplied to the centrally located village homes and not to Dalit settlements located in the outskirts. She does feel that there has been a slight change, though. Previously upper caste women never tolerated the touch of even a tip of the cloth of a Dalit near water sources. Today she feels that this attitude has changed.

According to Rajani Rajkumar Ghadale (43 years, Naka Dongri), whose maternal home is at Ambag in Nanded district, caste discrimination has been a part of her life since childhood. She recalls that Abasaheb Andhokar from the Harijan community stood for elections, but his nomination was opposed by the powerful and politically-dominant Bhausahab Borkar and his family (who were OBCs). He was refused permission to conduct programmes.

• Pollution in the Everyday and at Work

Jyoti Tai added that in Kotgal village in Gadchiroli district, farm labourers are served lunch. At an OBC farm, everyone eats the lunch. But after working at an SC farm, OBC women—of the Teli, Kunbi and Piwar communities—do not eat the meal for fear of contaminating their 'dharma'. While men do eat the meal, women refuse to eat, fearing social criticism.

There are also instances where women have left behind some caste taboos but fear to reject them in public. Women are afraid to eat when they work in SC-owned farms as a group. Alone, they do eat the meal. Sarpanch Mayawati Dnyandev Taide (49 years, Morwa Village) says that in her village, the Patil's wife eats with her if she is alone, but refuses to do so when she comes with a group of people. Likewise, when Mayawati Tai and others of her caste visit the Patil's wife, they are careful not to go near the kitchen.



Sarpanch Sangeeta Waghmare (26 years, Mendsi) says that tea is offered to SC women in broken cups which are kept separately. Mayawati Tai recalled an incident from the time when she first came to her husband's village. As she was fetching water one day, her hand accidentally brushed the Patil's wife water pot. The Patil's wife rushed at her, angry that she had contaminated the pot. She broke the pot and asked Mayawati Tai to buy her a new one.

There are worse cases of caste-based taboos. Rita Gulab Sukhdeve (42 years, Manegaon Bazaar) remembered being pregnant and at work on a farm as labour. When she asked for a glass of water, it was not served to her in a glass, but was poured into her palms. Humiliated, she refused to go to work the next day. She does feel that OBC attitudes have changed. They visit her house and share meals now. She is aware that they invite her for lunch and dinner probably because she holds an important position.

- **Building Houses**

The right to visit another's house on an equal footing becomes all the more important, since, as Sangeeta Tai observed, most of the time the SCs are the people who actually help build the house. Once it is built, the SCs are forbidden to enter the house. Pratibha Dharmal Patil (32 years, Thatri Village) said that even today SCs cannot buy houses in her village. People do not rent or sell their homes to SCs.

- **Pollution at Weddings**

At weddings, Mayawati Tai reports that their families would be invited but, markedly, they would be seated separately and asked to carry their own plates and bowls. As a sign of protest, some of them decided to stop

attending functions where this segregation was being practised. However, some extremely poor members of the community could not afford to do so and miss a good meal.

During weddings, Sangeeta Tai says, the SCs are asked to sit near the garbage disposal area, carry their own plates, bowls and water vessels to the wedding. This segregation continues all the way down to the SC children, who are made to sit apart from other children during wedding meals.

Kasabai Taide (59 years, Katri Village), a Sarpanch, reported that there was no discrimination in her native Kasanwadi. But in her husband's village, Katri, even today the SCs are served last at weddings. The gardener is designated to invite the SCs for the traditional meal. In her opinion, nothing has changed over the years. Rita Tai added that in her village not only are the SCs expected to sit in separate rows at weddings, but they are even expected to pick up their own plates.

- **Pollution at School**

Caste-based discrimination and segregation begins early in most villages. The concepts of pollution and purity are indoctrinated into children at school itself. This finds different expressions. Rajani Tai reported that OBC and SC children are seated separately, on different mats. SC children are not allowed to sit on the mats designated for OBC children. There is a caste hierarchy followed in answering questions—even if an SC student knows an answer, s/he gets a turn only after an OBC child has replied.

- **Pollution and Prayer**

Sangeeta Tai reported that caste-based discrimination is predominant at Mukhed Village in Nanded district. Matangs and Mahars are not allowed to enter the temples here, the discriminatory practices create a lot of problems for the SCs. To date, Sangeeta Tai said, she had never visited the temple for the mahaprasad offering, as it was not permitted. Rita Tai maintained that in the past, her village used to offer a mahaprasad but gave SCs a separate mahaprasad in a separate vessel. The other mahaprasad was never offered to them. However, she reported that, times have changed and today they offer the mahaprasad together. Earlier SCs were refused permission to serve at village meals, but for the last four years, they have been allowed.

Jyoti Tai says that at religious festivals, traditionally, the village Sarpanch sends a 'toran' or garland to the Polpal, the Mangs beat the drum and the Sarpanch performs the ritual. Since she was the Sarpanch, the celebrations should have been at her discretion, and performed according to traditional Dalits practices. However, the aarti still comes from the Patil's house. She is merely an invitee.

- **Pollution, Water and Other Resources**

Sangeeta Tai said that in her village, Mendsi, the well belonged to a Maratha family, who refused to let the SC women draw water. They would draw the water and give it to the women. Most resources in villages are owned by the upper castes like the Marathas and Marwaris. The cultivable land stretches from 100 to 125 acres with the Buddhists having a meager share. About two to three acres of land is owned by the SCs. Pramila Tai said that this was true of Marathwada as well, where, in villages like Chindwad and Jakapur, this sort of discrimination is a part of everyday life. Water cannot be filled at wells and the SCs are still expected to dispose the dead cattle. If they refuse to do so, they are threatened. Often, they are forced to eat the meat as well.

- **'Let us repeat Khairlanji here!'**

Pramila Tai recalled that a lady nurse had come to her village on work. She wanted to put up a photograph of Gautam Buddha, which was not allowed, and had to be done on the sly. As she was employed, she was treated a little differently. Daily wage workers would not have been treated that well.

6.2.2 DISCRIMINATION BETWEEN GIRLS AND BOYS

Gender discrimination is an issue in most villages, and it translates into injustice being meted out to the girl child. Forms of discrimination that begin during childhood are carried on into adulthood, and women find themselves discriminated against in various public spaces.

Hegemonic notions of gender relations are often internalized by women, so that often even EWRs have taken on similar notions of gender relations. Both Pratibha Tai and Mayawati Tai observed that women are blamed for all problems related to having children—whether it is the inability to have any, or the ‘misfortune’ of having only girls. Mayawati Tai said that a woman who could not give birth to a son to carry on the family line was rebuked and treated badly by society. Most women reported that a woman who had not borne kids is not allowed to hold the ‘aarti’ at any function, nor is she allowed to participate in the baby showers celebrated during the seventh month of pregnancy. Beholding such a woman first thing in the morning was considered a bad omen.

In some cases, the discrimination begins in infancy, with the issue of the baby’s primary identity, or its name. Jyoti Tai reported that the first two girls are given normal ‘girl’ names, but in some places, the third girl child in a family is usually given a boy’s name like ‘Kiran’. She said that while a girl child is associated with the potentially exhausting search for a good groom and the imminent dowry, a boy’s father usually has no such worries. Jyoti Tai insisted that her sister-in-law’s two daughters would get married only after they had turned 18, and had received some education.

In other places, the third daughter is called ‘Sarali’, ‘Sarita’ or ‘Sampathi’—all indicative of the hope that there would not be any more girl children born to the family. If a fourth girl is born she is named Shadu, Ambu or ‘Nakoshi’—the ‘Unwanted’. Women bearing this name are still found in many villages. Often this name is not on the birth certificate and as the women grow up, they switch to another name. But the formative years of many girls’ lives are spent being called ‘Unwanted’. The ‘Nakoshi’ or ‘Unwanted’ girls are often treated badly at home as well, and are discriminated against in matters of food and education.

The birth of a son is considered more important than anything else, including a Panchayat post. In Halkarni, for instance, the post of the Sarpanch was reserved for an OBC candidate in the 2000 Grama Panchayat elections. Shankar Vishnu Sutar, a teacher and an apolitical person became the Sarpanch of Halkarni as a result of this reservation. His wife was also a teacher and they had two daughters. Within three-and-a-half years of becoming the Sarpanch, his wife gave birth to their third child, a boy. He said that losing the post was less important to him than having that child. Had it been a girl, he would have had it aborted, while he waited to complete his term. But when he knew it was a boy, he was willing to forego the Panchayat post in order to have the child.

Vidya Tavade, Bhikubai Kamble of Halkarni, and Rita Sukhdev and Mayadevi Sorte of Marathwada reported that sex-determination tests are commonly used to prevent the birth of girls. When she is pregnant with her third child, the woman typically undergoes a sex-determination test if her first two children have been girls. If the third fetus is female, it is aborted. This cycle of pregnancies, tests and abortions continues till a male fetus is conceived.

Kolhapur, about 80 km from Halkarni and Belgaum, is where sex determination tests are possible and cost about Rs 10,000/-, with an extra charge of Rs 5000/- if the foetus is to be aborted. Abortion of the female fetus is seen on a large scale in educated and well-to-do families.

Rita Tai, a Buddhist woman, has five children, three daughters and two sons. Her daughters are far more capable and efficient than her sons. The older daughter, who took up sewing to support her education after

Class 10, has completed her BA and BEd, and is currently pursuing an MSW. She also won prizes in district level one-act plays and dance performances. Rita Tai's sister has four sons and no daughter. After the birth of her third daughter, Rita Tai asked her sister's husband to take one of her daughters. His reply was, "I have four sons, which means that I will get four lakhs as dowry. Why would I want to bear your expenses of Rs 50,000/- when it is time to marry off your daughter?"

6.2.3 THE PROBLEMS OF BEING AN ELECTED WOMAN REPRESENTATIVE

While the rewards may be a sense of empowerment, efficiency and confidence, being an EWR from a lower caste comes with more than its fair share of problems. As Sunita Tai asserted, 'being elected is like earning brickbats!' It is not just caste that is the issue (though it is a very big one). Women representatives face problems such as insubordination, lack of response from government officials, heightened expectations of the villagers, the very real problem of balancing household and Panchayat tasks.

Kasabai recalled that when she was first elected, women never went to the Panchayat and were kept away. "We were not allowed to sit on a chair," she said. Even though Geeta Tai was an elected representative, she was asked to stand as her husband was a peon in the Grama Panchayat.

Apart from struggling to assert themselves on a day to day level, women Sarpanches have to face an important political challenge—that of the no-confidence motion (See 2.7). Jyoti Tai reported, "Six months after I was elected, they passed a no-confidence against me but I did not let go of my seat and managed to solve the situation." (See 5 below for details.)

The manifold nature of women's problems was discussed during the FGD. Jyoti Tai pointed out to the many taunts and slights that came their way. If Jyoti Tai's husband accompanied her on a visit to an office, a function, the Panchayat Samiti or the ZP, people taunted him, saying that he never left her side. Rightfully, she resented this sort of thing. She observed that clerks gave her information in a piecemeal fashion, and not completely or comprehensively. They did not explain everything at one go, and refused to allow the women to sit in the Panchayat Samiti office. She reported that while higher officers treated them well, clerks wasted their time and troubled them over petty matters. While a male Sarpanch could drink tea with the clerk at a nearby shop and get his work done, women are not allowed to talk freely.

Other problems included malicious gossip. Rinku Tai reported that if she were to attend a meeting with a man, riding pillion on his bike, people would comment that they were having an inappropriate relationship and would malign her character. Pratibha Tai pointed out that men enjoyed a certain ease in these matters, and double standards existed in how society perceived men and women at work. Men can, for instance, could visit an official as many times as it was necessary, and sit in their offices for long stretches of time. However, if a woman were to visit a place or an official repeatedly, the validity of her visits would be questioned. There were different set of rules for men: they are never stopped from doing anything, and did not have to think twice before they went anywhere with anyone. Sangeeta Tai added that suspecting the character of a woman at work seemed to be part of the social psyche. Even visits to the village school to check whether the teachers were reporting to duty on time were misinterpreted.

The women felt that they were judged on every issue. If they went out on work, it was viewed as a dereliction of duties at home. Statements like 'She is always in Amravati—always attending seminars—as if she has no work to do at home!' were heard often. Educated EWRs too felt that they were not shown any respect and treated as if they were illiterate.

In other terms too, the women feel pressured. Jyoti Tai observed that while a male Sarpanch simply had to put on his clothes and step out of the house to attend meetings, a woman Sarpanch had to complete her household

chores and responsibilities before she left. Often, even when she intended to reach the venue in five minutes, by the time her work was wrapped up, she was invariably late by 10 or 15 minutes, and the other members were already seated—a fact that left her feeling embarrassed and helpless.

6.2.4 PROBLEMS SOLVED, SCHEMES IMPLEMENTED

The problems the women have solved are many—from those centred around the ration shop to problems with water and drains. In Mayawati Tai's village, the ration-shop dealer would give just two litres of kerosene to the poor and sell the remaining at a profit. The women organized themselves and helped seize 200 litres of kerosene which were hidden in the fields. In some villages, like Mayawati Tai's, people who own 20 acres land are listed as belonging to the BPL group. People who are really poor are not listed. At a tea-party hosted by the Patil, he submitted a list of false names. So the poor families do not get ration at subsidized rates, while rich land owners came on bullock carts to fetch their ration. The women of the Bachatgat that Mayawati Tai belonged to asked her to contest elections. In her village, there are other problems—the caste list has names of SCs listed in the OBC category so they cannot benefit from the schemes for the SC.

Rita Tai's village had almost no roads in the Dalit quarter. Bringing facilities like drainage and lighting up village roads are works that were carried out in some cases and need continuous monitoring and even implementation in some villages.

Jyoti Tai managed to build the school building, chlorinate the drinking water, build bandhare (or small dams), community halls, roads and nullahs, nullahs in Dalit areas. Pratibha Tai procured water from the river and was successful in removing grime from it. She also built cement drains and roads in her village.

Mayawati Tai observed that there is lesser implementation of schemes in the Dalit community. When the village receives 9% benefits, only 1% of this is passed on to the Dalit community. Even the lights in the Dalit settlement have low voltage whereas powerful lights light up other parts of the village.

- **Alcoholism**

Removing alcoholism is another issue that many EWRs strongly have felt the need to address, because many women's lives and families have been ruined by an alcoholic husband or father. Sometimes organized action has helped, while at in other cases, it has failed. The processes and the attempts are on, at times stymied by the underhand ties between liquor-shop owners and the police and politicians.

Sarla Kamble found that though alcoholism was at the root of the problems of many families problems, only 20 women were ready to participate with her in the struggle for prohibition. She observed that the police did not help women who seek prohibition in villages. Pratibha Kumbhalkar observed that today even women police officials want their share of the bribe. Nearly 40 people in her village brew illicit liquor. She tried hard to implement prohibition in the village and ran raids on these breweries, but they were always informed of the raid well in advance and the police failed to catch them red-handed.

Ten years ago, when movements like the Bachatgat and the Mahila Mandal reached Halkarni, Wadwal and Manegoan villages with the MRA, women were organized for the first time. The issues they discussed were prohibition, the bogus BPL ration card bogus, toilets, drinking water, the non-availability of goods and corruption in ration shops, roads, electricity, health centres, and hygiene. Alcoholism was understood to be the root cause of many woes as some women had lost their husbands to alcohol, some their sons, while some saw their daughter's houses destroyed by alcoholic husbands. The Dalit women were the most affected, as an alcoholic husband meant daily physical abuse, irregular attendance at work, no money given to the household, verbal abuse in front of the children, demanding sex in the presence of children, and suspecting the wife's character on being refused. The children too would be ignored and their education neglected, while other

common practices were throwing the wife and children out of the house in the middle of the night and selling vessels and household objects for money to drink. Women in the Bachatgat and the Mahila Grama Sabha took up prohibition as a primary issue to be tackled as it affected their family life directly.

- **Dowry**

The problem of dowry also causes much grief in poor families across the state. At weddings, the girl's father has to give the bride almost 10 to 15 tolas of gold. To meet this need, the father sells his field and then falls into heavy debt and, invariably, commits suicide. But women have managed to subvert this demand in some cases.

Apart from all these visible, material benefits is the deep sense of confidence the women Sarpanches have developed. Initially, many of them, who are stepping into the public space for the first time, find it difficult to cope. Understandably, when they do speak at functions and programmes in the presence of Taluka officers and village people, it is a matter of great pride and joy to them and their families. Sharda Dhanvijay felt that training imparted knowledge to her and gave her more information about running village affairs. Importantly, it also gave her strength. The benefits extend into most women's personal lives as well, like Sumitra Atram who felt that her husband had become far more sensitive towards her and, in her absence, had begun to serve himself and eat his meals on his own. Pratibha Patil reported that her husband even cooked at times. Shobha Tai Uike reported that her entire family extended help and in her absence and began to look after each other's needs.

On the whole, with the presence of women, corruption is on the decline. Pratibha Patil felt that if all the members of the Panchayat were women, village development would be accelerated. Pratibha Kumbhalkar observed that before taking a decision, she considers its fairness.

6.2.5 THE NO-CONFIDENCE MOTION

The no-confidence motion was the most effective political weapon used against the women. But apart from this, there were other sorts of hindrances too well. While some reported that affairs in the village still run as per the Patil's whims, others like Sangeeta Tai felt that people make life difficult for women representatives, creating obstacles even when they try to work. People even slowed down the steps Sangeeta Tai was taking on implementing the Employment Guarantee Scheme. The women representatives' steps are thwarted, and any measure of success they achieve in their tasks is resented by the OBCs, Maya Tai reported.

Perhaps the worst case is that of Jyoti Tai, the first woman SC candidate elected in 55 years in her village. The other members refused her right to handle any financial affairs. They refused to take her signature and she fought the no-confidence motion for seven months. She pursued the matter with the media, with the ZP, the Panchayat Samiti, with MLAs and Ministers, and was given her right only after a struggle of seven long months.

In the first meeting itself, the Panchayat members had decided to do away with Jyoti Tai as the Sarpanch. But she stood her ground tenaciously and did not let go of her seat. Once she got her right after seven months, she began to work. Two wells had been sanctioned in the Grama Sabha but with her rights taken away, the work was delayed. Upper caste people from the other parties criticized her, saying that despite there being funds, she could not work. Nobody really took the trouble to find out how she could access the funds without having the right to financial sanction as the Sarpanch.

The family the woman comes from also has a bearing on how she works and who works on her behalf. Pratima Tai reported that when the daughter-in-law of a Patil wins, her husband looks after the governing aspect; whereas when a Dalit woman wins, she has to govern by herself. The Patils, she observes, have an entirely different attitude—their wives do not cross the threshold, and the man looks after all the affairs.

However, when the women tried to pass a no-confidence motion against a male Sarpanch, they were often unsuccessful. Pratibha Patil and the women in her village tried to pass a no-confidence motion against the Sarpanch, but the motion was not passed.

6.2.6 WOMEN AND THE GRAMSEVAK

While the Gramsevak is a useful and cooperative official at most times, in some instances, he turns out to be a great impediment. Pratibha Tai's village, for instance, had a Gramsevak who was always drunk and did not conduct meetings. As the proceedings were new to her, the meetings were not held and this led to a no-confidence motion being passed against her. For three months, she floundered, unable to understand governance. After 8 to 10 months, she presented a letter to the SDO, the BDO and the MLA when they asked her why not even a single meeting had not been convened. After the BDO and the extension officers realized the true reason, they blamed the Gramsevak and spared Pratibha Tai.

Sunita Tai felt that perhaps being a part of an all-women Panchayat body would have made her task easier. A woman Gramsevak can be questioned, she said, and women tend to support each other. She felt there were many inhibitions they faced when dealing with men—she could not accompany a male Gramsevak to the Taluka, or question him or take him to task as that would cause a great uproar. Some Gramsevaks—like the one in Prajakta Tai's village—took leave without notice, and on being asked why, pointed out that they are not answerable to Sarpanches.

But there were cases and villages where the Gramsevak was cooperative. However, there were occupational hazards or face criticism the women had to follow the guidelines carefully. Also, the moment a Gramsevak is pressurized over an issue, he invariably tries to drag the Sarpanch into the controversy. Since the Gramsevak was not a permanent resident or official, he can always ask for a transfer, and in a sense, he is 'safe'. It was felt that more women need to understand that a Gramsevak is appointed to serve the village. Many Gramsevaks tend to work as per their own whims, and this should stop.

Tanta Mukti Samiti—the Ouster of a Woman President

On Aug 15, 2007, Parvati Bhatkhande was elected as the president of the Halkarni Tanta Mukti Samiti and she was the only woman president elected out of the 64 Grama Panchayats in Chandgad Taluka. Parvati Tai, an active social worker, is illiterate, but has an admirable grasp over matters and has led the prohibition movement in her village. After Parvati was elected president, five women were elected to the committee. In a year, this committee resolved 51 matters successfully, of which six matters had been pending in courts for the last 20 years.

However, these women refused to give unnecessary importance to Shivaji Sawant who had retained the seat of Sarpanch and had been a ZP member for 17 years. When this arrogant ex-Sarpanch sat on the chair reserved for the woman Sarpanch during a Tanta Mukti meeting, a woman activist had asked him to vacate the seat as it was no longer his.

Unable to bear this loss of face, along with a growing anger at losing power and control over village politics, he planned the downfall of Parvati Tai. He attended the August 15 Grama sabha, accompanied by a group of people who had never before attended one. Sawant brought up the issue of the Tanta Mukti Committee in the Grama sabha, and began by sympathizing with the women of the Committee who had been criticized by some villagers for their work. Saying that it pained him to see them being treated unjustly, he suggested that Parvati Tai be removed from her position as the president, and that a man be appointed in her place. His suggestion was obviously upheld by the horde that had accompanied him.

The president and the other women members of the committee strongly protested this, stating that the abuses hurled at them were not deterrents. Sawant had come prepared as he immediately proposed a mandate to decide on the issue. As predicted, more people voted for the removal of the president on that day. Parvati and the other women members resigned, and Sawant's nephew took up the post.

6.2.7 WOMEN AND THE GRAMA SABHA

Grama Sabha attendance by women is definitely low. Suman says that though 34 women attended the FGD, they would not have been present had it been the Grama Sabha. Partly this is because men insist that women have no place there. Wives of male activists attend the Sabha. In some villages women do attend the January 26 and August 15 ceremonies, but the Mahila Grama Sabha is held every alternate month. Because women have multiple chores, like looking after cattle, tending fields and house work, they see it as a drain on their time.

Often women lose interest in the Grama Sabha activities when they realize that their problems are not being addressed and their voices are not being listened to. In villages with a population of about 700-800 people, only 10 to 12 women attend the Grama Sabha.

Sometimes when the village is declared a 'Nirmal gram', women start attending the flag-hoisting ceremony, but few wait for the meeting later. In some villages, however, the Mahila Grama Sabha is held and women come up with issues such as lack of housing, lack of the BPL card and scarcity of kerosene. However, their presence at the Grama Sabha is still minimal. In some villages, about four Mahila Grama Sabhas a year are conducted, with about 100 women attending them.

Very often, the Grama Sabha is inaccessible to people simply because they are not aware of the Grama Sabha notice. Many men and women cite a lack of information as a reason for non-attendance at both the Grama Sabha and the Mahila Grama Sabha. In Wadwal, out of 30 people questioned, 28 were unaware about the Grama Sabha. When the Gramsevak was questioned about this lack of information among people, he pointed to the notice board that had displayed the notice. The notice was inside the Grama Panchayat office, where people rarely went if there was no specific need for it. Also, the notice was accessible only to those who were literate, and the rate of illiteracy among the Wadar, Matang and Buddhists Dalits and women is very high here.

An ex-Sarpanch, Harshavardhan Kasbe, explained this unenthusiastic approach by saying that most people simply did not know that the Grama Sabha was being held. People usually do not participate unless there is a personal issue/gain (for example-housing allotments, display of the list of people below poverty line). He said that attending the Grama Sabha did not change matters when the village Patil's word was final anyway.

In Wadwal, the Mahila Grama Sabha is held one day before the Grama Sabha, and the women develop a strategy to present the issues in the Grama Sabha. Whereas, in Manegoan and Jamangoan, the Mahila Grama Sabha is held an hour prior to the Grama Sabha. Often the timing is just not convenient for women. All the Grama Sabhas are held in the afternoon, which means that to attend it, people have to shut shops, be absent from fields or lose a day's wage, because of which, in spite of the will to attend the Sabha, it is practically impossible to do so.

In Manegoan, the first Grama Sabha is Always Adjourned

Only about twelve people gathered for the Manegoan Grama Sabha, which included some women like the Anganwadi and health workers, some staff, the Sarpanch and two or three members. A Mahila Grama Sabha was to be held an hour prior to the Grama Sabha, and the only women there were those mentioned above. This Mahila Grama Sabha and the Grama Sabha were adjourned and held after or within a fortnight. The next Sabha sees an attendance of 10-12 women and about an average of 30-40 persons. The Village Development Officer and the Sarpanch gave an interesting reason for this recurring phenomenon. A minimum of 100 people are required for the Grama Sabha as per government regulations and that number is never reached, which means that the first Grama Sabha is always adjourned. The villagers who know this don't attend the first Grama Sabha, but are present for the next one.

Still 150 to 200 women attended the Mahila Grama Sabha held on the previous day, but the number dipped to 40 on the next day as the women could not afford to lose two days' wages. They admitted that they could have been present if the Grama Sabha was held in the evening. When the research team asked the Gramsevak about Grama Sabhas not being held in the evening, he explained that it was because in the evening, drunken men created a ruckus. This seems implausible, because not all men get drunk in the evenings, and usually drunkards keep away from village gatherings and meetings out of fear of the Gramsevak and the Sarpanch. The team witnessed how easy it was to take care of the one or two such elements who had strayed into the Wadwal Mahila Grama Sabha. The research team organized a meeting on January 25, 2009 at 9.30 pm and it was attended by about 70 women till midnight with almost negligible trouble from drunkards.

6.2.8 CHALLENGES/MOTIVATIONS

That women in villages face various challenges, which can be resolved by better governance, is an observation that all the EWRs have made. Vaishali Tai said she had wanted to work for the women in her village who toil hard in the fields and are unaware of their rights. She felt that if she came to power, she could help them resolve issues. They decided that she would contest the Grama Panchayat elections against her family's wishes, and despite her poor health, Radhabai said that she has been in politics for the last 21 years and had a good understanding of it since her childhood. After she was married, she established a Mahila Mandal with 21 women and began working. She stood for Panchayat Samiti and ZP elections because she was urged by the women, but did not win. Undeterred, she contested again. She has decided to work for the development of the village, to complete unfinished tasks. Since she has become the Sarpanch, work is moving forward and getting done. "Without aligning with a party, village development work is not possible," was her observation.

Many women reported to us that even though they were elected to some positions of political power, they were constantly confronted with the socially stratified structures of power like caste. Sunita Tai said that on being elected Sarpanch, she visited the Panchayat. All the members sat in their chairs and she also began sitting on one. She was asked to get up and keep standing. She felt that she had been targeted as she belonged to the SC and that moment saddened her. The research team attended a Grama Sabha held on January 26, 2009. The flag-hoisting ceremony had been held at 7.30 am. As per the GR the Sarpanch Lalita Bhate, a woman had to hoist the flag. But the notice board claimed otherwise—that the Deputy Sarpanch Vaibhav Patil would hoist the flag. According to the government rule, no one but the Sarpanch should hoist the flag and in case she was unavailable, some other woman member of the Panchayat would have to hoist it. Though there were many women in the Wadwal Panchayat, the written notice proclaimed otherwise. In reality, the flag was hoisted by the ex-Sarpanch

Annasaheb Patil, Vaibhav's father. No photographs were taken and the records may show that Lalita Bhate hoisted the flag. The Gramsevak explained that the Sarpanch was ill and she could not be present, but whether she was really unwell or was forced to say so could not be verified.

Vaibhav Patil also presided over the Grama Sabha held in the afternoon, where 39 women, one woman member, five male members, the Gramsevak, the Panchayat Samiti Extension Officer and members of the research team were present. The issue was selection of Asha health volunteers and the Gramsevak requested the 'Sarpanch' (in reality the Deputy) Vaibhav Patil to preside over the Sabha. Though the ex-Sarpanch Harshvardhan Kasbe and member Maya Tai Sorte protested mildly over addressing Vaibhav as the 'Sarpanch', the Gramsevak did not take back his words. Government officers who keep records and document meetings also openly address the person traditionally coming from the previous Sarpanch's families as 'Sarpanch'.

Incidentally, four Asha volunteers were selected during the Grama Sabha with the proceedings entirely controlled by Vaibhav Patil. Although a few members showed some signs of discontent, no one dared oppose him openly. Though education, age and work experience were the criteria for selecting the volunteers, Gholap Bai, an experienced woman activist was not considered for the post.

The Deputy Sarpanch is the Hidden Administrator

Before the implementation of the 73rd Amendment, the post of the Sarpanch and the power in the village, was in the hands of a single person belonging to a wealthy family. Prior to the 73rd Amendment, people in many Grama Panchayats recall that the village Sarpanch was the same for years together—he would name the other Panch in the village by his will and that was the new Panchayat Working Committee.

After 1993, established political bigwigs had to let go of their positions, but were unwilling to let go of their power. After the post of Sarpanch was reserved for an SC/ST candidate, male or female, a person under the ex-Sarpanch's domination was appointed to the post of the Deputy. This is because the reservation rule is applicable for all seats from the Grama Panchayat to the ZP, but not for the post of the Deputy Sarpanch.

In order to retain power and decision-making rights within the family, the retiring administrator would appoint a family member as the Deputy Sarpanch, as, for example, in Wadwal and many other villages after 1993. So a labourer tilling the fields is made Sarpanch, while the Deputy is from a powerful, wealthy family. This way the power equation never changes, for example, as in the case of the Sarpanch of Mankheda in Amravati. In Manegoan too, though the Sarpanch has changed from K T Dahare (Kunbi) to Dilip Ghatte (SC) to Nathu Banata (OBC), the Deputy Sarpanch's seat has remained within the Nimbarte family's hold.

Irrespective of who is the elected Sarpanch, especially when the Sarpanch is an SC/ST or OBC candidate, people address the Deputy as 'Sarpanch' as he is either the son or the nephew of the ex-Sarpanch of many years' standing. The Deputy Sarpanch decides on beneficiaries of the housing scheme, on which families should be on the BPL list, on where to dig a bore well and where to build toilets and roads.

6.2.9 THE NEXT STEP

Most women reported that they would like to take their careers forward and stand for another election. Not only can this be seen as a sign of awakening ambition and awareness among women but also as a sign of their growing confidence. Among others, Rita Tai said she wanted to be an MLA, and dreamt of implementing the Sanjay Gandhi Niradhar Yojana in the village. Most, like Jyoti Tai, wanted to contest for higher posts, while others like Rajani want to be members of the ZP or even the president. In fact, Rajani's name had been recommended for various posts at the district levels. Others, like Mayawati Tai and Usha were less enthusiastic about it for personal reasons.

6.2.10 RECOMMENDATIONS

All the women were highly critical of the two- child norm and wanted it to be removed from the PRI rules. They were also quite vocal and supportive towards the need of fifty percent reservation of elected women representatives at the local governance institutions. Most women had common recommendations and demands. They wanted an increase in the honorarium of the Sarpanch and provision for a travel allowance so that travelling on work did not become a burden for them. They also felt that the BPL survey should be undertaken in the right manner. They demanded that the Sarpanch be answerable for all these responsibilities. Often in caste lists, SCs are named in the OBC list, so that they cannot benefit from special schemes meant for them. The classifications in the list are often wrong. Many rich people, often owning large chunks of land, are listed as being below the poverty line. Thanks to this, the poor remain deprived.

The women also felt that women that they should cooperate with each other and remember that they had attained office only with the support of others of their sex. In one case, despite the presence of 60%-80% people at the Grama Sabha, it was adjourned and conducted on the following day in the presence of just four people. There should be no quorum for women in the village Grama Sabha, if a separate women's Grama Sabha were to be conducted. People should be made more aware of the fact that schemes can be presented at the Grama Sabha.

Radhabai felt that there should be at least five women in the Panchayat and that the Sarpanch's honorarium should be increased to Rs 1000/-. Today they are paid just Rs 200/- (as per the population ratio).

7

Mahila Rajsatta Andolan

7.1 ABOUT THE MAHILA RAJSATTA ANDOLAN

When the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts were passed in December 1992, the first steps towards democratic decentralization of governance were taken in India. Grama Sabhas or village councils created platforms for people to participate directly in governance at the grassroots level. One of the hallmarks of this amendment was the reservation of 33% of the seats for women in institutions of local self-governance. The landscape of governance in the village would change forever, as would the identities of so many women who entered the machinery of local governance for the first time in centuries.

Changing centuries of thought processes and deep seated beliefs can never be an easy task. Patriarchal hegemony would be as much an obstacle as the reluctance or hesitation on the parts of women to step out and take what is rightfully theirs. Women's Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and other similar initiatives have emerged to support and strengthen the participation of women in local self-governance. Acting in a variety of contexts and environments, these initiatives have a common objective, that of ensuring and reinforcing the participation of women in governance at the local and grassroots level.

An organization that has worked consistently and patiently over the past ten years toward this goal is the Mahila Rajsatta Andolan (MRA), or the Movement for Women in Governance. In this chapter, we propose to look at the MRA from the point of its inception to the present, when future plans and paths are being charted.

7.1.1 GENESIS

The Resource and Support Center for Development (RSCD) which began work in 1994 in Maharashtra and Rajasthan created a network of organizations for focused, collective interventions for development. The underlying vision was a need to extend beyond organizational mandates to influence the course of development and governance through formation of networks. Soon, five regional networks grew in the five regions of Maharashtra: Western Maharashtra, Konkan, Marathwada, Vidarbha and Northern Maharashtra. More than 175 voluntary organizations were a part of these networks. The vision that grew out of this process decided that efforts would be converged at the state level on a unified agenda: that of women's participation in Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs).

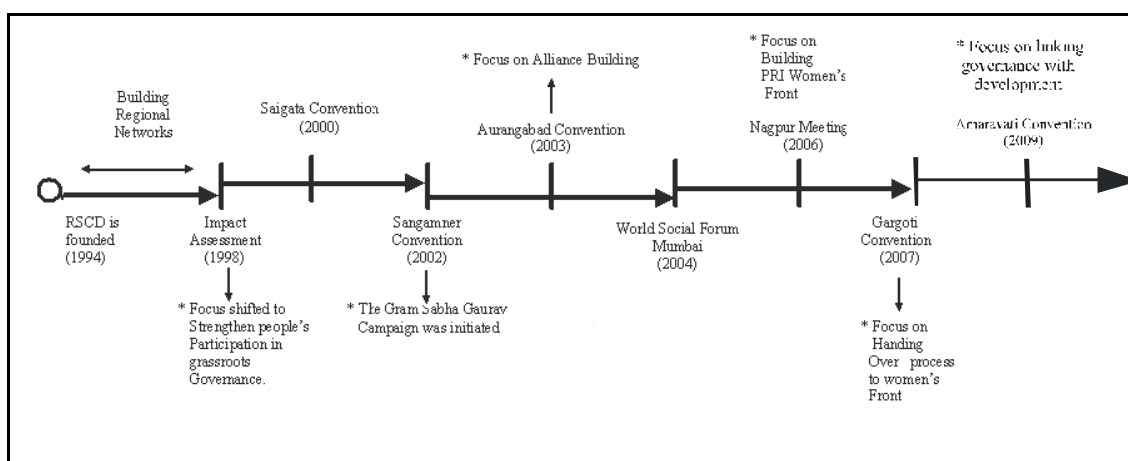
The RSCD Collective held during 1998-99 (covering the RSCD, and its five regional networks made up of Janapath Vikas Manch, Konkan Vikas Samanvay Vyaspeeth, Marathwada Lokvikas Manch, Vidarbha Lokvikas Manch, Uttar Maharashtra Lokvikas Manch and related groups) reviewed the impact that their work had had over the past years. They also set out to chart a common path for the future along with the groups in the network. The common factor among all the groups was women—their rights, problems, issues and concerns. The groups felt that this area needed the maximum effort and the sort of focused work that a network as wide as this one could aim for.

So in 2000, the RSCD launched a state-wide process to build up and fortify women's efforts in governance and the developmental processes. A convention was held and 3000 rural women from over 900 villages gathered together in Saigata Village, Chandrapur District, Maharashtra, in March, 2000. At the convention, the delegates who were EWRs, members of Mahila Mandals and other SHGs pledged to promote 'the active and effective participation of women in local government'. To this end, women delegates shared their experiences as elected representatives. They touched upon everything from the resistance they faced from their families to the problems they faced during elections, to the difficulties they had in dealing with local leadership, to not having enough information, and facing local hostility.

The EWRs were not just dealing with resentment and hostility at the challenge they posed to centuries of hegemony; they were also dealing with not knowing enough about their new jobs and the political processes that were woven into them. They were clearly willing to struggle to overcome the barriers posed by society and centuries of conditioning; all they needed perhaps, was support, awareness and a sense of community.

The fall-out of the Saigata Convention could be summed up in one slogan: 'Saigatanantar kaay, Mahila Rajsatta Andolan haai' (What comes after Saigata? Let's take Mahila Rajsatta Andolan afar!). The MRA, a movement that would work towards a more powerful presence of women in governance, had been launched at Saigata.

FIGURE 7.1 MRA's Journey



MRA began as an initiative of funded organizations that had formed regional networks. The Saigata Convention was the first step in declaring a commitment to women's participation in decision-making and development. The next steps involved developing clarity of perspective, strategy, principles and goals and thereby consolidating work of the campaign in 841 villages spread across 129 tehsils and 30 districts of Maharashtra. The process involved working at multiple levels- at the village level to create links between SHGs, women and the EWRs and to educate them about the space created through the new opportunities and secondly at the level of the partner organizations to internalize the agenda and prepare to work in a political mode. The second task was a particularly challenging one as several partners were oriented to a more neutral development stance.

The phase after 2002 has been particularly decisive in terms of asserting the commitment to a campaign mode. The loss of major funding by RSCD resulted in a gradual alienation of several partners who were in a 'NGO' mode while securing the commitment of several new actors- individuals, activists, CBOs and a few NGOs to the vision of the MRA. This resulted in a temporary loss of geographical base of the MRA but has over the years built up. In 2009, MRA was able to outreach 671 villages across 94 tehsils and 26 districts. 465

villages had local branches of MRA and it had an official membership of 8996 women. It has a network of 2000 Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) and works with 62 organizations and 40 grassroots women leaders.

The major transition has however been a qualitative one. It has meant an emphasis on building lateral, vertical linkages at village, tehsil, district and state levels besides alliance building with several other actors to influence the agenda of governance. It has also meant a deepening understanding and commitment to transformative women's politics.

7.1.2 MRA'S PHILOSOPHY AND IDEOLOGY

Perhaps it is only befitting that an organization which works for women in governance at the grassroots level should be inspired by India's first woman school teacher who stepped out of her home for the first time in 1852 to teach in the country's first ever girls' school. Educated by her husband Jyotiba Phule, himself a reformist, Savitribai Phule faced stiff opposition, stone-pelting and verbal abuse, when she set out to teach girls. She and her husband took a stand against prevalent patriarchal norms and contemporary problems like the remarriage of widows, the issue of unwed mothers, untouchability and much more.

At the basis of MRA's programme is the assertion that social and political empowerments are interlinked. To this end, the MRA works towards building the political consciousness of women and goes beyond just working with women in politics. The MRA also believes that women's participation in political decision-making is a crucial step towards making them aware of their own rights and responsibilities. Among other things, gender inequality had to be addressed along with other issues related to women's lives and livelihoods even while working with EWRs and women elected to Panchayats. One of the theme songs of the MRA reads- Vichara Apulya Manala (Ask yourself) and goes on to question the unequal share of women in labor and in decision making and resources. The path for this transformation is however believed to be political. Further MRA also sees an integral link between women's politics as part of larger transformative politics.

With wealthy, upper caste men in power in most cases, it usually follows that the balance of power is unequal, and that women are denied their rights and powers. Acknowledging these power dynamics at a local level and understanding them are often the first steps towards helping women assert and realize their political power.

'Vote hamara, Raj hamara, Leke rahenge, Leke rahenge!'—'The vote is ours, the power is ours! We will struggle and we will get it!' This was one of the two slogans raised at the Saigata Convention in 2000. It vocalized the fact that women had the same rights as men and that they also had the right to govern and to come to power. The other slogan—'Gavat lokshahi gharat hukumshahi, chalnar nahi, chalnar nahi'—'Democracy in the village and dictatorship at home just won't do!' This slogan addressed the public-private divide within women's lives, where they may have political rights outside the home but have fewer rights at home. Acknowledging the spheres and spaces where there were problems helped bring out the issues onto a public platform, so that attempts could be made to resolve them through discussion and strategy.

The MRA envisions 'a society in which women participate equally in the institution of local self governance, and are partners in the development processes and thus create an egalitarian, interdependent and humane society'.

Its mission is to 'strengthen the governance role of elected women members of the Grama Panchayats, other motivated members and development groups by capacity building and creating the support system to ensure their active, efficient participation in PRI towards re-building an egalitarian society.'

- **Its Objectives**

- To initiate massive education and awareness campaigns on women's equal participation in the PRIs in identified villages of all the districts in Maharashtra.
- In the future, to expand all over the state with trained women leaders.
- To evolve capacity building processes for identified women leaders and facilitators, and also for the development of activists at various levels to enable them to reach their goals.
- To create an interdependent support system from villages to the state in collaboration with existing actors and factors on advocacy, lobbying, research, PRIs and women-related policies of the state.
- To launch a state-level campaign on identified issues and gaps in the implementation of PRIs, with focus on women's participation for policy change.

- **Thrust Areas**

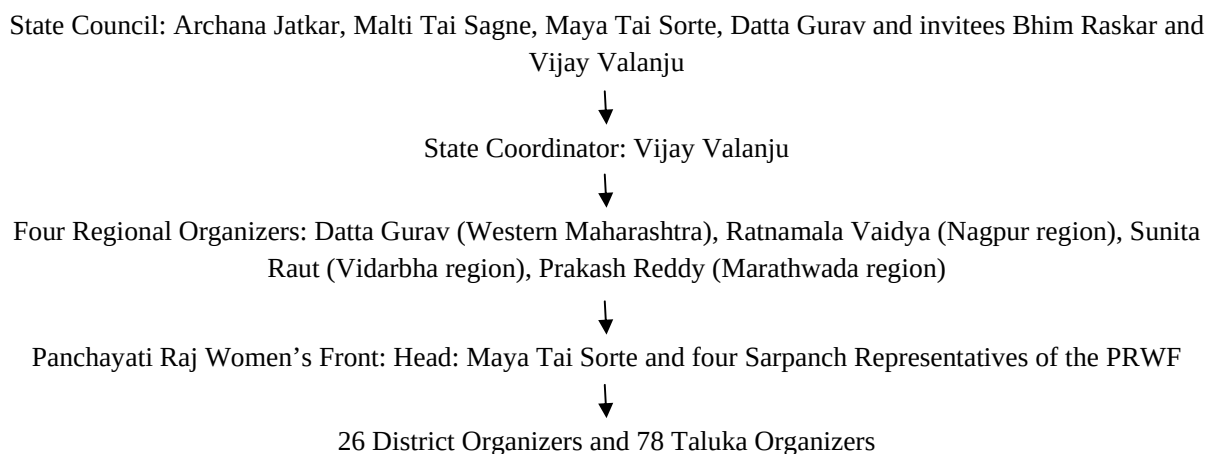
- Perspective building: developing a political ideology to strengthen the Grama Sabha
- Capacity-building: enhancing potential and knowledge building
- Organization building: developing a strong women's front.

- **Strategies**

- Use of state machinery
- Mass awareness, social mobilization and sensitization
- PRIs as an entry point for women
- A cadre of female activists to be evolved and trained to take up a statewide campaign on identified issues
- Establishment of support systems like cells for information, advocacy, research, training at the Taluka, district, regional and state levels
- Convergence of regional issue-based processes and efforts of all other actors such as judiciary, media, bureaucrats, NGO networks, etc., for direct linkages with the roles of women in governance
- Building groups of women engaged in various regional processes as local Mandals, SHGs, and elected women in Grama Panchayats and political women leaders.
- Strengthening their capacities, perspectives and attitudes so they can have an effective role in governance.
- RSCD, regional networks and alliance partners will play enabler roles in the whole processes and help build interlinkages of the macro level field situation.

7.1.3 THE STRUCTURE OF THE MRA

Ideologically, the MRA does not believe in organizational hierarchy. All its activists are ready to do any work required at any given moment or in any given situation. But below is the hierarchy they maintain for the better implementation of their Programmes.



The Taluka Organizer (TO) maintains data for the villages in the Taluka she works in. Every TO works in a maximum of five villages. She selects active women from the villages and trains them through various Programmes. They are first given all the information regarding the Gaoshakha, or the village branch of the MRA. Interested women are registered as members of MRA. The TO calls a District Organizer to her villages if there is any issue which she can not handle alone. It takes at least a year to train the women of a selected village.

The District Organizer (DO) is responsible for the entire district. She maintains the data for all the villages in every Taluka. She controls and directs all the actions of the TOs. She visits three Talukas every month. Apart from the villages where the TOs are active, the DO works in five villages on her own.

An annual plan is made at the state level meeting. The Regional Organizer (RO) implements that plan at the regional level with the help of the DOs and TOs. She attends the state level meeting every month in which the present work status is reviewed, gaps are discussed and future directions are planned. The RO spends at least 22 to 25 days on visits to the villages in her region. She also conducts meetings at the District level every month.

The DOs and the TOs of each District meet every month to discuss the status of various projects and future plans. A meeting with the RO is held every three months or even before that, depending on the need. A meeting is called every four months, at which all the TOs, DOs and ROs from the five regions of Maharashtra are present. The TO submits a monthly report to the DO. The DO writes her own report, combines that with the report given by the TO and then submits it to the RO. The RO too writes her own report, combines that with the TO's report and submits it to the RSCD.

A State Coordinator coordinates all the activities at the state level. He/she maintains contacts with all the TOs, DOs and ROs and directs their actions. State level meetings and programmes are planned and organized by a State Coordinator (SC). The SC gathers information from across the state. Information about any programme or training is given by the SC to all the activists at the Taluka and District level. The SC fills the gaps wherever required. The SC's role varies according to need.

Another aspect of the MRA structure is its bases. The largest and the strongest base of the MRA is the Mahila Aghadi which draws upon SHGs in villages as well as individually active women. A Mahila Aghadi exists in all districts except Wardha. Another strong base is that involving the EWRs. This is called the Panchayat Raj Mahila Aghadi and it basically plays a role in supporting and educating the EWRs. The Panchayat Raj Mahila Aghadi exists in all districts except several parts of Vidarbha. Two other bases that have not been well organized so far are Jyotiba Putra Aghadi (a front of men who support transformations centered around women) and the Bachat gat Aghadi (a mobilization of SHGs). MRA also has relations with other voluntary networks, NGOs and other likeminded people, however these alliances are also not firmed up.

7.1.4 FUNDING, BUDGETS AND TRANSPARENCY

There is transparency in the functioning of the MRA at each level. Representatives of TOs and DOs from each region are present for preparing the annual budget. Discussions are conducted in different groups and finances are adjusted according to the requirement. Then the budget is finalized by Bhim Raskar and the entire team. Proposals are submitted to the funding agency by the team consisting of the representatives of DOs and TOs. A copy of the budget is given to all TOs of the five regions of Maharashtra. The MRA is not an autonomous organization that can raise funds for its programmes and activities. They use funds given by agencies like The Hunger Project and Action Aid.

Most of the time, funds for the local programmes are raised at the local level. Women are enrolled into the Andolan by paying Rs 10/-. Of this, Rs 5/- is given to the Andolan and Rs 5/- is kept for the local funds which

are used for such programmes. People contribute money for morchas and dharnas since they fight together for their rights and benefits. Sometimes, the local shop owners, businesspeople or even social activists give money for such activities. At times, MRA activists contribute money from the honorarium they get. There are times when a powerful political leader is ready to pay for the entire programme. But MRA activists are careful about such offers, because politicians tend to hijack the programmes for their political advantage. But sometimes they do accept some contribution from political activists who have ideologies that are similar to those of the Andolan.

7.1.5 UNDERSTANDING THE MRA, ITS WORK AND ITS PROCESSES

For the purpose of this study, we interviewed MRA activists at every level, from Taluka Organizers to the State Coordinator. The process of bringing in a decentralized power structure is implemented in the organization first. We were given to understand that while initially the District level organizers were mostly men, gradually, that picture has now changed with the entry of active village women who were drawn into the organization and have grown into activists. Presently, all the Taluka level and District level activists are women.

The following are some observations and reflections on the processes seen during visits to different programmes conducted by MRA.

Most of the MRA activists come from a rural background and can therefore easily relate to rural issues. They mix with the local people to understand the history and background of patriarchy prevalent in the village and use slow but effective techniques to challenge the subordination of women.

MRA has a strong belief in simplicity and, as a group, and they avoid unnecessary expenditure. Personal attachment to causes, taking care of their activists, understanding ground realities, adjusting with the local environment and intervening sincerely at the grassroots levels are values which help them gain acceptance. These values ultimately help speed up the process of their work. Relations between all the MRA activists are very open and informal.

Most of the female activists at the grassroots level come from lower middle class families. All of them have had a desire, expressed openly or otherwise, to work for society, but never thought they would be able to step out of their homes to do so. Most women activists are also involved in local politics either by virtue of being Panchayat members or because they are willing to do so. This also inspires them to continue working with the MRA. The women say that their identities used to be limited to their household responsibilities before. Since joining the Andolan, their individual identities have emerged simply because the MRA has helped them see their own abilities and strengths, thus motivating them towards personal growth.

It was observed that the District Organizers and Taluka Organizers work under difficult conditions, including continuous travel and stay in remote villages, and facing the political heat generated in the process of intervention. Needless to say, the activists work on a meager salary. They undertake many responsibilities and feel a sense of pride in being a part of the movement.

• Process and Method

The MRA regularly conducts training and awareness programmes. As part of the campaign, they celebrate the birth anniversary of Savitribai Phule, Independence Day, Republic Day and the Foundation Day of the MRA (March 11).

Most of the time, people themselves come to the MRA for assistance. Activists observe the gravity and the cross-linkages of the issues, identify their causes, and prioritize issues to be dealt with. Then they gauge the

level of people's interest and participation with the problem. For example, if it is a morcha for banning liquor in a village, they first ascertain the number of liquor shops and the owners in the vicinity. They also evaluate how many people are ready to participate. Organizing people includes conducting meetings, strategizing further actions and motivating people towards the right kind of action. Darubandi, ration shops, violence against women, and the smooth functioning of the Grama Sabha are the some of the issues which the MRA activists have tackled across the five regions of Maharashtra. Though the main focus is to promote women's participation in governance, they also take up issues which directly or indirectly affect women's status in villages.

It was observed that lower caste women in politics face more problems from powerful people than upper caste women. Therefore, the focus of MRA's work was on Dalit women who could come forward. It was a good strategy as today many MRA activists belong to the Dalit community and they help mobilize many other women.

Most activists and EWRs were keen to know how the processes of the Panchayat are to be conducted correctly, including recording proceedings, making a budget and planning. Entering the Panchayat, sitting on the Sarpanch's chair, learning to speak in public were all big steps for some of the women. Support came from the MRA and the RSCD trained the women with resource material and in the actual conducting of politics at the village level. Campaigns conducted by MRA have been aimed at securing strategic gains for the women at the Panchayat level. To illustrate, the Gram Gaurav Abhiyan focused on the regular conduct of Gramsabha which is usually a formality in most villages. Other campaigns have included a campaign for flag hoisting, campaigns for Mahila Gramsabhas, campaigns for 10% budget utilization, and campaigns for elections free of corruption and alcohol.

The idea was to give women who are interested in entering politics complete support and backing, so that more women are motivated to do so. Acknowledging that women have to face a different kind of struggle in the village, the MRA teaches them strategies to handle difficult situations together with the support of other women. Initiatives like the liquor ban have always been a collective action led by MRA activists.

A few women have become victims of the politics that take place during elections. They get elected and then they are left with no choice but to toe the party line. Interestingly, according to Bhikubai Kamble, men turn to the political party while taking any important decision, whereas women make decisions on their own without being biased and without any expectations or influence from others.

MRA's training includes teaching EWRs the technical processes of the Panchayat and how to take a stand on various issues. Towards this, the EWRs are asked to get involved in most activities. This often changes the EWR's attitude towards her own village. Experience shows that there is a high risk of most of the female Sarpanches becoming typically corrupt 'leaders' as characterized by male leadership. Working with the MRA sensitizes the women into becoming more committed leaders.

Often the EWRs and MRA activists start getting phone calls from political parties around election time. Some of the women activists have joined political parties but still continue to work with the MRA. A few have joined parties with ideologies that are contrary to the principles of the MRA, but what is significant is that political parties now want these candidates as their leaders. Whether to join political parties and be in power, or to stick to social activism, or to balance both activities is finally the candidate's choice.

Crises, attempts to defame, humiliate, passage of no confidence motions and use of violence are common practices in the realm of politics. Women often find themselves at the receiving end of these in their struggle to be active. Support to these women and follow up of these cases is one of the hallmarks of MRA work. Often, work in particular locations has been initiated through such cases. Thus work in Thane began with

Sumitra Kanhat, a young tribal EWR being removed from the post of sarpanch as she was fighting illicit traffic of liquor.

The most important contribution made by the MRA is to be able to throw light on the reality of the present status of Panchayat Raj in Maharashtra. During the state-generated Panchayat Raj training sessions, only laws are discussed. The MRA sessions go beyond that, suggesting practical strategies to solve issues. The meetings, trainings and programmes conducted by the MRA are participatory in nature. The MRA's method of evaluation is also unique, in that, the opponents are also invited for the evaluation. They conduct Process Reviews which are facilitated by outsiders, power centres and opponents. They provide new insights on the process.

7.1.6 MRA INTERVENTIONS IN SPECIFIC REGIONS

- **Amravati Region**

Amravati consists of five districts. It has Gond and Korku tribals and a long tradition of women political leaders like Usha Tai Chaudhari, Vasudha Tai Deshmukh, Sudha Tai Korte and Bhawana Tai Gawali. There is a fair degree of caste-consciousness here, with members of the Scheduled Castes not being allowed to drink water in upper caste homes and not being allowed to enter upper caste homes wearing their shoes. If they are invited inside and asked to sit, the place where they sat is washed after they leave. Working with the MRA and getting sensitized about caste has helped many like Sunita Raut, who belongs to an upper caste family, to change her views.

The Amravati region has two clear divisions- the tribal division which is developmentally backward and the rest of the region. The flow of money in the tribal belt is slow. Kalpana Khirale of the MRA said that she has encountered a few cases of women trafficking in the region. There is no work for women since no government scheme has reached them. So women and their families explore employment opportunities outside the village, which often leads to women becoming victims of trafficking.

- **MRA Intervention in Amravati**

There are 35 Talukas in Amravati, out of which the MRA is active in 15 Talukas and 100 villages. In Amravati the MRA networks with many other organizations. They conducted the Grama Gaurav Abhiyan in 2001 in 25 villages. Soon after, there was an increase in women's participation in social activities and a change in their attitude towards the Grama Sabha. They were made conscious of their socioeconomic rights through a combination of activities by the MRA and the SHGs.

Grama Gaurav Abhiyan, Kanya Atyachar Virodhi Dharna, Kanya Sunwai and Mahila Sarpanch Melava are the main programmes conducted by MRA in this region. The Kanya Atyachar Virodhi Dharna is conducted each year from November 25 to December 10 to reduce the cases of female feticides.

Most of the time, they raise funds at the local level through the Panchayat's funds and people's contributions. A Grama Panchayat Vastav Darshan Programme was conducted in 2003 in 25 villages of each district. In the same year, participation by female Sarpanches in flag hoisting and the Mahila Grama Sabha were focused on. In 2004, thanks to articles by the MRA appearing in the media, the required number of people for passing the no-confidence motion was brought up to 2/3rd from 1/3rd majority. In 2005, due to the MRA's constant efforts, the government issued a GR to appoint a female Gramasevak in a village where there is a female Sarpanch.

The Dalit Hakka Abhiyan and MRA are networking organizations in the Amravati region. They called a joint meeting and issues like violence on Panchayat women were discussed and a Panchayati Raj Women's Front was set up in 2007. Recently, the MRA has conducted training Programmes for leadership development for

women in Panchayats. Apart from the above Programmes, the MRA also intervenes in issues on an ad hoc basis.

An organization called 'Samajwikas Sanstha' run by missionaries has worked in many villages of Amravati, with the objective of developing less developed villages. When the MRA organized a Programme for the Sarpanch here, they met Fulma Belsare from Jamunnala. The MRA had also conducted a Programme to study the real picture of the Grama Panchayat. There was no opposition to any of the MRA's activities, except from the Gramasevak. Not a single government scheme had ever reached the Korku village, perhaps because the inhabitants are uneducated and unaware of the process of pushing for reforms. But the women Sarpanches trained by the MRA began to pressurize the Gramasevak for village development schemes. This upset the Gramasevak because his ways had never been questioned before. Local activists had to deal with those tensions. Korku women have recently entered local politics but are not yet found at the District level.

The MRA works in seven to ten tribal villages. Vijay Valanju said that recently, they have made a plan for interventions in this region. A training programme will be organized by the MRA for 25 women Sarpanches under the 'Adivasi Swayamshasan Kayada' (Tribal Self-governance Law). The method of this training would be tailored to suit the needs and backgrounds of the tribal people. It will include games and songs rather than reading and writing exercises which require literacy. The trained women will be the basic contacts and the foundation of the future work of the MRA in the region. Contact is maintained with them through various workshops and training Programmes, and the initiative has taken place at the village level.

The power structure in the tribal village is different from that in other villages. Here people in power feed off the illiteracy of the villagers. The government and even the Andolan have not been able to reach out to them. The MRA has also worked with the wife of the local MLA, Rajkumar Patel. The activists often face family problems and personal ridicule. Sometimes they are mistreated because of their caste. People also watch whether the activist is working to promote her or his own caste group or is working for all groups.

- **Nagpur Region**

Nagpur is an important location for the Dalit Buddhist movement and Hindu nationalist organizations like RSS and VHP. It has six districts. MIHAN, the International Cargo Hub project currently underway at Nagpur, aims to exploit its central location and convert the present airport into a major freight hub with integrated road and rail connectivity, and a Special Economic Zone. Land prices have increased and farmers have begun selling off their lands. Cotton growing land has thus come under an economic threat.

Nagpur has many educational facilities. Caste dynamics do exist here though they are not apparent. A few talukas in Gondiya and Gadchiroli districts are under the control of Naxalites. Gadchiroli has a large population of tribals. The Chandrapur District has a good network of SHGs.

Though the government has cancelled debts, suicides by farmers continue unabated. Prakash Reddy of the MRA feels that this is because to the Indian farmer, agriculture is not just an occupation, but a holistic activity that goes beyond profit. When the farmer is told today that there is no future in farming, then his economic independence and pride are threatened.

- **MRA Intervention in Nagpur**

In this region, the MRA is active in 125 villages among 25 Talukas. The total number of members of the MRA here is about 2000. The first MRA convention was held here in March 2000 in Saigata Village, Chandrapur District. Before the intervention of the MRA most organizations in the Nagpur region were controlled by men and practically none worked on women's issues. The concept of a woman-centered power structure has not yet been accepted. All the power centres and resources are in the hands of men. Very few

women are politically aware and active. MRA activists find it difficult to change people's attitude towards politics, which is considered a bad thing. Women who are in politics have to face a variety of problems related to their caste, class, gender and age.

Every year MRA activists organize a morcha during the winter session of the assembly. They raise different issues like the 33% reservation, a demand for SHGs to run ration shops, provision of bus passes for the Mahila Sarpanches, etc. Since women had no property rights and were kept deprived of equal rights, the MRA pursued the matter and lobbied with the government to issue a GR on the joint ownership of houses by husbands and wives.

The MRA has conducted various programmes like the Grama Gaurav Abhiyan and 'Show us the Accounts', and has used different and innovative strategies for mobilization and advocacy. All the women sent post cards to the Chief Minister with their demands. Once they signed on a sari and sent it to the Chief Minister. Then they collected all the proceedings of the Panchayat and sent it to the government to communicate the real picture of women in the Grama Sabha. They stated since there was no clear space for women in the Panchayat, the Mahila Grama Sabha would be a great platform for them. This gave rise to the new concept of Mahila Grama Sabha from 2000.

The MRA has not able to reach out to the remote areas in the region which are Naxal-controlled. Since local women are scared of Naxalites, it has been difficult for the MRA to take its outreach Programme very far.

- **Western Maharashtra**

Western Maharashtra has five districts, 58 Talukas and 7058 wadis. Its Chandgad constituency is the last in the Maharashtra assembly. The cooperative movement started by the Congress and the Rashtrawadi Congress (NCP) has influenced the socio political environment of this region. Sugar factories, banks and the cooperative societies are the centres of the political dynamics here. Because sugar factories are located on land owned by the Grama Panchayat, power here is completely dependent on the sugar factory. Therefore, the chairperson of the factory uses every possible way to keep the Grama Panchayat under his control.

Because Western Maharashtra has ample water, fertile land and a favorable climate for agriculture, it has numerous sugar factories owned by powerful political leaders, who also own colleges, institutes and hospitals. The MRA's Datta Gurav feels that these 'islands of development' are showcased as models of development by the powerful people who created them. But the reality shows a grimmer imbalance. Sangli, with four well-developed Talukas, has eight drought-prone ones. Despite all the educational facilities the region boasts of, Welha Taluka of Pune District is the second most backward Taluka in India. Very few farmers own land more than four acres because their land was acquired for the projects like 'Krishna Valley Development Corporation'.

Though the caste system is still prevalent, it takes a discerning eye to spot it at work. Movements like those for Project Affected People, Drought Affected People and the 'Samanyayee Paniwatap Paddhat' are very active in the region. Some experiments like '12 gunthe jameen' were initiated here and have spread elsewhere. Chandgad is close to Karnataka state which is probably why the custom of Devdasis is also prevalent here.

- **MRA Intervention in Western Maharashtra**

The MRA is active in 100 villages of 17 Talukas of Western Maharashtra. It has been active in Halkarni since 2000. The Asha Foundation developed their missionary work through community service here and the MRA took it forward by facilitating the process of bringing women to power. Today, the MRA activists' decisions are taken into consideration while selecting political candidates.

Datta Gurav initiated MRA's work here through workshops, meetings and training Programmes. He first made contact with the Asha Foundation, which was active in 33 villages, and focused on women's empowerment. The MRA conducted a Grama Darshan Programme for women to encourage their participation in the Grama Sabha. This gave rise to a new trend—that of women entering the Grama Panchayat. The government hierarchy was pressurized by their demands and politicians here are a little intimidated by the MRA activists thanks to the respect they enjoy, their training and their commitment. Women now participate in morchas, dharnas and meetings for their rights. The Naik community, for instance, used to vote for alcohol and money, but thanks to the MRA they have understood the dynamics of power.

Women from one of the villages in Chandgad Taluka demanded that their husbands be appointed as PAs to the female Sarpanches. Bringing their husbands in as PAs would be against the law and would derail the democratic process in the Panchayat. The MRA team met the Gramasevak, the BDO and all the women Sarpanches who had made the demand and called a press conference. Once the women understood the ramifications of what they had proposed, they apologized and withdrew the demand. One of the MRA's initiatives has been to motivate people to have joint ownership of their houses. There are a few villages where all the houses are in the names of women.

- **Konkan Region**

The coastal strip of the Konkan has five districts, one of which, Thane, has a high tribal population. Though the women of Konkan labour more than the men, men have greater economic power.

Landholdings here used to follow a peculiar pattern called Khoti. The traditional landlords, called Patil or Khot, inherited large chunks of ancestral land. Under the new laws like Koolkayda (Agriculture Tenancy Act) and the new amendments to the Grama Sabha, there were restrictions on their power. But in some villages in the Konkan, half the land in the village still belongs to the Khot or the Patil. This gave them sociopolitical power especially in the Grama Panchayat. Even people in the Panchayat Samiti and the ZP used to work for them. The decision-making was completely under the control of the Khot or Patil.

Women, even educated women, had no say in politics. But gradually, active women in local organizations are being given preference. Muslim women in the Konkan were further repressed by religious impositions. But there are signs of gradual change here too. Anuya Kulkarni says that the Muslims are brought from outside by the Khot or the Patil. And therefore, they are not given any land for cultivation. They did not have the right to own the houses they lived in for years. The MRA has made efforts in this direction and has succeeded in getting the houses transferred in the names of the residents.

Since most men from the Konkan work in Mumbai, the women have to work on the farms. But since they also need the money sent to them from Mumbai to survive, Konkani working in Mumbai influence the economy and the governance here to an extent. Village development committees are very active in Mumbai. Some government officials coming to Konkan from outside marry local woman despite being married and having families in their hometowns. When the official is transferred, the second wife is deserted and left to her own resources. There are many such deserted women in the region.

- **MRA intervention in Konkan**

Earlier, the MRA was active in four districts of Konkan—Thane, Raigad, Sindhudurg and Ratnagiri. With internal disputes over the past two or three years, this has reduced. Anuya Kulkarni continued working in the Sindhudurg District due to her commitment to the Andolan. The MRA is now active in just two districts, Sindhudurg and Ratnagiri. Currently, it works in forty villages of eight Talukas of the two districts.

Farm work is entirely done by the women, which was why very few labourers actually acquired the land they received under Koolkayda. While working with the MRA, Anuya Tai observed that the women toil on the land they do not even own. She organized a morcha of 2500 women. When it was decided that the land would be transferred in the names of the women, the husbands came all the way from Mumbai and insisted that the land be in their names. Joint ownership of houses has been accomplished in three villages in the Konkan.

The MRA has conducted Programmes like Grama Panchayat Darshan in which they explained the 10% budget allocation for the welfare of women and children.. Women were given questionnaires to fill out about their problems. Later, interventions were carried out on those issues. They also studied the real status of the Dakshata Committee and Vishakha Committee. They have organized morchas and dharnas for issues like ration and light bills, etc.

Caste differences are strictly followed here. Separate cups and dishes are kept for the people from the Dalit community. Untouchability is followed to some extent. This is visible in all the villages where the MRA has not intervened. The MRA used strategies like get-togethers and lunches across communities, organizing meals in Grama Panchayat, to work around this issue.

When Anuya Tai was seen to be working against untouchability, people from her own caste threatened her. Despite this, she and other women took the issue forward and were successful in stopping the practice of untouchability to some extent. One woman asked the Patil, “If you men can drink liquor from the same glass, why can’t women drink water from the same glass?” Anuya Tai was trying to focus on women in SHGs and bring them forward through training.

- **Marathwada Region**

Set in the rain shadow area, Marathwada is the most backward region of Maharashtra. There is no industrial development and perhaps as a fall-out, no infrastructural facilities like transportation either. Most of the people migrate for construction work to Mumbai and Pune. While Marathwada was home to the poet-saints of Marathi literature, the Hyderabad Nizam’s rule also left behind traces of Islamic culture. Demarcations of caste are strongly held and followed here.

The Marathas have the largest landholdings here. However, 26% of the people are landless, while the average landholding is about 6 to 7 acres. Aurangabad is one of the few cities where industries are developing.

At present, educational institutions have emerged as the base of politics, particularly in Jalna, Hingoli and Parbhani. Government schemes are riddled with corruption. There is no production here unlike in Western Maharashtra with its cooperatives. Because of the Dalit movement, a new leadership with a political will has emerged. But this again is marked with factionalism and ideological differences. The division of castes is seen at three levels: Marathas (the dominant caste), OBCs (at the middle level) and the Dalits.

Despite unemployment being a serious problem here, there are no apparent efforts to increase productivity. Though the average landholding here is more than in Western Maharashtra, the land is not as productive. Therefore, the rate of migration is high. Political equations have changed with the funding pattern implemented by NGOs after the Latur earthquake.

Women’s participation in decision-making has increased, but it varies. While it has not increased in implementation, people have now accepted women in the political space. Though men are now more open in their support of women’s work, subtle differences in power relations remain between men and women when it comes to the ownership of the means of production. However, women here are exploring their abilities and trying to bring about a change by challenging traditional power centres. There is a marked increase in their confidence, as can be seen in their behaviour, clothes and speech. Caste differences are also decreasing with

the rise of leadership in women. The agenda of village development is also changing with women's leadership, as their priorities, water, health, schools, are distinct from those of men in power.

- **MRA Intervention in Marathwada**

The MRA is active here in 160 villages of 100 Talukas. They have 20 focussed villages and 20 contact villages in each district. The MRA has conducted many programmes here over the past ten years. The Grama Panchayat Darshan held five years ago, and recently, the Kanya Atyachar Virodhi Campaign have had good response.

The power structure in the villages is changing due to the MRA's intervention. Women are becoming active and powerful in politics. The attitude of men towards women in politics has now changed. In tangible terms, they have stopped whispering and eating tobacco in front of women. The mobility of the women is greater now, and the way in which they engage with Panch officials has been further facilitated by the presence of the MRA. The Gramasevak is available every day in the Grama Panchayat.

Women have made appropriate use of the training they received from the MRA. The Mahila Grama Sabhas are regularly conducted and minutes are read out. The decisions made in the Mahila Grama Sabhas are considered important. Women are actively involved in different committees formed under the Grama Panchayat. Maya Tai Sorte has trained many women from her village. The MRA has given extensive support to women who are encountering politics for the first time. The activists and the other women accompany the women Sarpanches while hoisting the flag on August 15 and January 26.

Caste differences are not visible in Wadwal. The MRA had once conducted a five-day training at the state level. The Programmes included a skill-development workshop, a leadership-development workshop, an Andolan and morchas. MRA activists organized a haldi-kumkum for widows, where they were given books.

The MRA was conceived of in Marathwada. The Marathwada Lokvikas Manch felt the need to work on irrigation, land, education, child labor and migration issues. It was observed that all of those issues were eventually related to women. But there were only three women in the network of the RSCD. So thirty other active women were identified to begin the process. At that time, the 33% reservation in local self government was enacted and all the networking organizations decided to work on women's issues.

There are eight districts in Marathwada and the MRA is active in 160 villages. The caste dynamics are very complex in Marathwada. Maya Tai Sorte herself cannot be the Sarpanch of her village due to caste dynamics. Her ability, experience and qualifications alone are still not enough. Presently, reservation is the only way for women to enter power centres. One can see the changes that have taken place within two decades. Many organizations other than the MRA have contributed to this. Thanks to the 33% reservation for women, political parties themselves need women in positions of power at the grassroots level. The MRA is trying to channelize this process by using different strategies and methods. It must be mentioned here that in a few villages women are bringing about change using their own will and strength, without support from the MRA.

7.1.7 IMPACT

The MRA's continuous efforts at the grassroots level have impacted different aspects and levels of local governance. People, especially women, have become more active and serious in their involvement with politics. They have become conscious of their political rights at a collective level. With the MRA's support and inputs, EWRs have become more assertive in the local decision making process. The impact of the MRA's activities has been multi pronged, touching individual lives as well as the functioning of the Panchayat. Here we look at some of the fall-outs of the MRA's efforts over the past.

With their growing awareness of political processes and a strong sense of support and community, the EWRs' leadership abilities have grown. This empowerment has many manifestations, for instance more acceptance for women leaders in general, increased confidence, growing awareness and leadership qualities, a better status in society and within the family for EWRs.

Transparency, information and a people-first approach has created positive changes in the Panchayat's functioning, especially when it comes to taking government schemes to the people. A seismic shift has happened in terms of a greater emphasis on the accountable, transparent and value-based working of the Panchayat. There is more accountability in local village affairs, even as more government schemes have been implemented. Sensitivity to issues affecting women, like rape, domestic violence, and sexual harassment, have also grown, and the PRIs are often used to deal with them.

Empowerment has enabled village women's collectives to deal with issues in a more strategic manner. Initiatives like joint ownership of houses and a ban on alcohol have led to greater acceptance of women as leaders in the village. Household work and domestic violence have also been raised as issues, as have issues like gender discrimination against girls and violence. Every year fortnight is now dedicated to an awareness campaign on the empowerment of women against violence. More attempts have been made to sensitize men about these issues.

SHGs have been strengthened and they now act as a base for uniting women for mass movements or actions at all levels. Established power centres have been challenged by taking on patriarchy and the roles it has created for women. By creating a feeling of collective ownership towards developmental issues and by looking at social issues holistically, a better rapport has been built with the various stakeholders in any given situation. With a greater understanding of the triple issues of class, caste and gender, priorities are clearly demarcated in favour of women, Dalits and tribals, all of who are extremely vulnerable. As a fall-out, Dalit women have begun to emerge as active participants in the process.

The Andolan has spread to most of rural Maharashtra and there is a large community affiliated to it. Many people like Datta Gurav are active in the local politics by being members or Sarpanches of their own villages. Their experience adds value to the MRA's work. Local police stations, Talathi offices, Panchayat Samitis and ZPs all recognize the active and efficient women trained by the MRA.

- **Impact on Policies**

MRA's demands at the policy level have created an environment that is more positive towards women's empowerment. The RSCD's demand to organize women's Grama Sabha meetings prior to the village Grama Sabha has been approved and endorsed in the policy solution of the state. Conducting a Mahila Grama Sabha is now mandatory before the general Grama Sabha. The number of Grama Sabha meetings held every year has also increased. Interestingly, many MRA villages have been felicitated and have received the 'Nirmal Grama Puraskar'.

As a result of MRA's lobbying, the Maharashtra government has issued a GR stating that on special occasions like Independence Day and Republic Day, the flag should be hoisted by a woman where one is at the head of the organizations like Grama Panchayats and the ZPs. Block Development Officers have been told to publicize Taluka meetings so that more women can participate. The gender biased use of the no-confidence motion to remove women Sarpanches has been prevented by making the 3/4th majority compulsory.

Even 15 years after the 73rd Amendment, people do not assemble for the Grama Sabha and the Mahila Grama Sabha. In villages like Manegoan, Vadwal, Halkarni and Jamunnala, where the MRA is active, women activists take the initiative to solve village problems. So women participate in village politics and attend the Grama Sabha in small numbers at least. But in villages where there is an absence of such organizations, the

Grama Sabha (specially the Mahila Grama Sabha) remains on paper. Women in many such villages have never heard of the Mahila Grama Sabha. The Mahila Sarpanch of Bokara has been in office for one-and-a-half years but was unaware of the Mahila Grama Sabha, which means that the Gramasevak had prepared false records of the Mahila Grama Sabha having taken place.

7.1.8 PATHS AND CHALLENGES AHEAD

2010 is a year where MRA enters its tenth year since the onset in Saigata. It has come a long way since then and has effectively transited from an organization led agenda to a women led one. It has also made its mark in a state where, currently people's struggles are on the wane and facing uphill struggles to exist. It has established itself as a campaign with both lateral and vertical spread and thus its demands are listened to seriously.

This also represents a crucial juncture as the campaign contemplates future directions of growth.

Several of the women emerging as leaders through the MRA process now eye the higher levels of politics in Panchayati Raj system. However, this politics at the block or district level is conducted on party lines and is distinct from the relative 'neutrality' of the local space. This raises crucial questions- Should it be a distinct political party wedded to a transformative agenda? Or should it retain its present character of educating women in politics but keeping its doors open to all party affiliations. This is a crucial question in the context of alliance focused electoral politics in Maharashtra. Should it stay away from electoral politics when it is so ingrained in everyday practices of governance? Can MRA retain its identity if it welcomes women, irrespective of political affiliations? Will political parties use MRA as a training ground for its women cadre?

Another crucial challenge is that of funds. MRA has successfully moved away from a project culture that dominates most NGOs. However the increasing scale of the process accompanied by even minimal requirements of support means a substantive requirement of funds. Search for an appropriate model of funding that can balance self reliance with necessary support, can help to respond to crises at the ground level in an open ended manner while remaining accountable, can balance process support with activity is a challenge. It is now clear that funding has an agenda but it does not take away the reality that working with groups that are resource scarce needs support from outside.

A critical challenge to MRA is placed by the larger level changes in the development trajectory of the state. As the state is rapidly urbanizing and globalizing, the natural resource base of the villages is eroding and so is its agency in making decisions. Many parallel forums to the Panchayat are thus being initiated. Politics itself is becoming centralized and communalized. In this backdrop, women are vulnerable to abuse and manipulation. Preparing women for engaging in such deep games of power while they are still mired in their day-day struggles is an immense challenge which has only intensified over time.

7.1.9 INNOVATIVE INTERVENTIONS BY THE MRA

• Engaging the Family, Showing Appreciation

When the rain and thunder come, it is the grass that survives— a Zen proverb.

Unlike feminist and women's initiatives in Kerala, for instance, where interventions directly confront the family structure, the MRA's approach is more subtle. It engages with the structure and challenges it with the support of the most marginalized, the women and Dalits. The MRA's approach, while being more tactical and strategic, has also been known to be more result-oriented.

There are many ways of trying to question and change prevalent patriarchal norms. Direct confrontation, often used by most gender driven, pro-women initiatives, can be perceived as being anti-men and may present

a direct threat to the structure of the family. This perception endangers the process, especially in a deeply patriarchal society like Maharashtra. The MRA's approach has been to recognize the importance of the structure of the family, giving due recognition to the husband's role in enabling the woman to assert her citizenship and her role in the political structure. This makes their women's initiatives a lot more gender oriented.

During the initial period, MRA activists faced strong opposition from the men in the village because the concept of women in politics was shocking in itself. Working with this ground reality helped the MRA evolve a strategy where they would engage actively with the entire family of the woman activist, including her husband and her in-laws. It has been observed across Panchayats in rural Maharashtra that when the husband is taken on board and made a part of the whole process, he becomes not only supportive but also facilitative of the process of gendered governance. The MRA has tokens of honour and social recognition like the 'Pati Sanman Patra' and the 'Kutumba Sanman Patra' which duly acknowledge the support of the husband and the family in the woman's sally into the public domain of politics. This token of social acceptance changes the whole nature of the moralistic gaze and positively endorses the progressiveness in men.

Showing appreciation at every step is an important aspect of the MRA's approach. Women who are newly elected into the Panchayat are also given due importance. They are recognized and felicitated in the early days of their office, because it is a big step for them. The MRA's felicitation is a gesture of appreciation for getting involved in politics.

- **Flag Hoisting**

In the rural scenario, the task of hoisting the flag is a matter of great honour and pride. It becomes an activity that endorses the identity of the person who is doing it in the public domain. The activity is a symbolic capital of sorts in a caste ridden society, and having a Dalit woman Sarpanch do it ensures that this capital is reinvested as a challenge to the hegemonic notions of caste. Hoisting the flag therefore becomes a symbolic gesture within the caste structure.

The village head, usually a wealthy man of the upper caste, hoists the flag, an activity that is highly institutionalized in the village's social fabric. When the flag is hoisted by a woman, and often a Dalit woman at that, the notions of caste, class and gender are questioned at a very fundamental level. When a Dalit woman hoists the flag, her citizenship is reinforced above the measures of caste and class. The simple act of hoisting the flag thus becomes a way of endorsing her constitutional rights and gives the woman prominence in the village's public space. Flag hoisting hence becomes a public activity of great importance, creating gendered citizenship.

In most villages which had women in appropriate positions of power, it was a common practice that the men would ensure the women did not get the opportunity to hoist flags. This was especially true of women who belonged to lower castes. Since this was such a significant act, the MRA prioritized the issue and lobbied for a GR which states that where a woman is the ZP president, the flag should be hoisted by her. This is one of the MRA's triumphs.

7.1.10 CHALLENGES

At the centre of MRA's interventions are the central challenges of caste, class and gender. Collective action by women has been known to invite the wrath of people in power, especially those who resent the democratic decentralization of power. Activists have been threatened often at the local Panchayat levels and met with violent verbal and physical abuse.

Despite the MRA's support during elections (for instance pre-election campaigns), female candidates have faced multiple challenges. This is because, in most cases, it was their first experience of political power dynamics. The MRA encourages women not to use any kind of incentive to attract voters. In such cases, voters are attracted to opponents who use incentives or even resort to violence. Women feel pressurized during such times also due to conflict if their families do not support them. But women like Anuya Tai have accepted it as a part of their political learning.

People from different backgrounds are involved with the MRA, and they work at different paces in different capacities. Sometimes they are inspired by the MRA's work and join the programmes. However, meeting their financial needs becomes difficult for the Andolan. Sometimes activists fail in explaining the political dynamics and strategies to newly-elected women in the Panchayats. In a few cases, MRA activists have said that they themselves took a long time to understand the political linkages and their consequences.

Male political leaders often feel jealous and threatened when they recognize that the women have managed to carve out their own identities. Bhikubai Kamble (from Western Maharashtra) had her name erased from the Dakshata Committee. To attack women leaders, a few politicians would speak against them at public gatherings and in speeches. Since Vidya Tavade's husband is no more and she lives with her parents, the attacks were of a personal nature. Instead of putting her off, this has only made Vidya Tai more determined to be active in her political work. She says being with the Andolan generates a feeling of togetherness and solidarity which is fostered by the MRA's activists.

Apart from the expected pressures to stick to traditional roles, there is often no assistance from men both in the community and in the administrative structure. There is pressure from political parties as well as heightened expectations from the community to prove oneself. Encountering political forces that are corrupt and aided by muscle power poses a challenge, as does the changing socioeconomic and political scenario in a globalized and privatized world. Above all, fewer resources for the poor means that livelihood is still a challenge.

7.1.11 FUTURE PLANS

The MRA is introspecting and planning its future political journey. The Andolan is so popular that people now look at it as a political party. When a village works with MRA activists and shows signs of development, neighbouring villages tend to want the MRA to work with them as well. Evidently, people are ready and able to forge ahead in the political journey, but there seems to be a lack of leadership to take the process forward.

A few activists feel worried that joining politics will take away their credit, power and status. There is, therefore, a need to further build the capacities of activists within the MRA. The MRA also needs to strengthen its capacity as a political party. There are signs of such efforts. Activists at the District level are coming together to build capacities and discuss future plans. A few activists said that the MRA is certainly an upcoming feminist political party, but it needs to do a lot of introspection before taking this step forward.

The MRA's approach to the future is one of multipronged growth. Apart from efforts to involve rural youth in their work, the MRA has planned to begin a youth front. There are also plans to spread its ideology through the MRA Manifesto Awareness Campaign, as well as to sensitize men (Jyotiba Jagruti Abhiyan) and to raise the issue of sexual harassment in the workplace with specific reference to Panchayati Raj Institutions (Vishakha Dakshta Patil Abhiyan). Apart from enrolling more members into its Panchayat Raj Women's Front and utilizing its budgets well, the MRA also plans to start the Savitri University to offer need-based courses to EWRs.

While these are the plans at the actual ground level, there were definite moves planned on the policy level as well. Recently, they lobbied for and got travel concessions on State Transport buses for women Sarpanches. This would help poorer women leaders especially, as their mobility would not come at a cost any more. More importantly, they plan to lobby for assured protection against violence for EWRs, to ensure their safety. Plans to ask for 50% reservations for women in local governing institutions, and one-third in the Parliament and the Legislative Assemblies are also on the anvil.

Finding funds has always been a challenge. To ensure that the Andolan stays financially independent, there are plans to seek resources from sympathizers and the community. Membership fees, local contributions and donations would hopefully sustain the activities of district-level units. There is also a plan to have working women from urban areas sponsor rural EWRs.

7.1.12 THE MRA AND THIS STUDY

For the purpose of analysis, we studied five Panchayats which have the presence of MRA and five which do not. The study clearly points out the significance of the MRA in making rural women sensitized and conscientized to negotiate with power structures existing at the local level of the PRIs. One could clearly discern the process of collective mobilization of women at the Panchayats where the MRA had intervened, and which in turn had evolved into a political mobilization addressing the concerns of the gender issues at the micro-political level. These scattered resistances at the micro level, though not documented in the macro context, become relevant when one tries to understand the ways in which micro politics tries to make a dent in the patriarchal and stratified social structures which have been hegemonized by dominant power structures. It is here that one understands the importance of an external facilitator like the MRA to make the women self-reflexive, and able to respond to and challenge the social conditions which inform and make them.

An MRA activist at the Amravati Convention in 2007 said, “I was rowing the boat with my women companions. We were rowing continuously for centuries hoping that it would take us to the next shore. But then some of us turned back. To our shock we noticed that the boat was still anchored to the shore. We realized the futility of our rowing an anchored boat. So some of us decided to jump into the sea. We knew that we may not reach the shore, but our jumping has been worth it for the sights that we could see which the others, sitting in the boat, could not. Now we are swimming in the sea... the deep sea. Strong currents block our movement but we are seeing sights which we could never have dreamt of. When we looked back, we could see that our other women companions were still rowing the anchored boat.”

This self reflexivity of an MRA woman gives the notion of an experience of speaking to the Other, thus trying to claim a different language in the historiographies, indicating that the ‘subaltern can speak’. The strong metaphor that the woman activist uses connects the conventional mode of women development programmes and their lacunae, and the radical need to challenge these modes to question the strong currents of patriarchy which resist the collective consciousness and political mobilization of women towards gendering politics.

7.2 AN INTERVIEW WITH BHIM RASKAR

Manjula Bharathy: How did the MRA come together? What was the premise on which you started it?

Bhim Raskar: The RSCD (Resource and Support Centre for Development) network was initiated in 1994 and grew into the Mahila Rajsatta Andolan in 2000. It has been a decade since the idea for the MRA was conceptualized. In 1998, we set out to study the impact of the networking and processes of the RSCD, and other important issues. We were with a network of 162 NGOs and were assessing the impact of this network on various issues. Every region had different NGOs working on issues—leading NGOs like Abhivyakti, Yuva, Paryay and VSP. These were also the nodal agencies at the regional level

to do issue-based work with like minded people. They had one focus in common—they were all for the empowerment of women. So we began by networking with NGOs. We interviewed villagers, NGOs and regional resource agencies.. Our team of 26 was funded by CORDAID. Village level meetings took place, not Grama Sabhas, but more in the nature of what happened after the formation of the SHGs. We met with core women leaders of the community and NGO staff, and a dialogue was initiated.

We found that the impact was taking place at the level of the people, but not at the policy level. Some of our senior activists were involved in formulating the 1994 Women's Policy of Maharashtra. Important provisions of this women-centric policy were that there was a gender-reserved budget, 33% reservation, and it was made compulsory that schemes must have a representation of women members in their committees.

MB: *Which other political party was interested in this area, apart from the Congress?*

BR: Shri Sharad Pawar of the Nationalist Congress was very involved, as were Com. Yeshwant Chavan and Dr P B Patil (who worked on the 'Decentralization Report'). These three individuals were the major contributors. The Shiv Sena's focus was only on urban areas.

Sharad Pawar and Chandra Iyengar (former principal secretary) were part of a committee of 40 people who worked on the Women's Policy and modified it frequently. These policy documents of the 1994 Women's Policy helped us greatly. They were a baseline which helped us demand their implementation—we could say to officials, you have the policy, now help us implement it. The Secretary was a woman, the policy was positive, plus there was the Panchayati Raj reservation.

But we were tired and down-spirited because we found that NGOs were only interested in project-focused activities, training and publications. They were not willing to struggle for political impact. In fact, in his study, Dominic D'Souza had said that to make a political impact we need more vision-based coordination and more grass-roots level work. For all of the year of 1999 we visited villages to test our assumptions. We attended 301 Grama Panchayat meetings. Our whole team of 26 went to each of these, and we were inspired by the actors and the factors of the situation to start the MRA.

Then in 2000 we held a convention in Saigata where nearly 2500 women leaders of different districts—especially women grassroots leaders and women from SHGs—participated. There was a lot of discussion which led to the creation of our charter. We debated various issues day and night, and among these was the name of our organization itself. Finally, 'Mahila Rajsatta Andolan' was the one that everybody felt summed up our concerns the best. In 2001, the women leaders stood for Panchayat elections.

MB: *You must have been a set of people with distinctly different ideological positions. How challenging was it for you to negotiate with people's different political and ideological stands to bring the organization together?*

BR: Actually, it is hard to narrate the entire process of building an organization in a few short steps. But I can tell you that it was very difficult to come together. We were faced with different questions: Are we becoming a political party? Can we go for funding? These were some of the issues that led to debates. But we did have some strong ideologies and principles in common—we all genuinely believed in the Constitution of India and its basic principles like secularism, equality and democracy. This essential commonality made it easier to start working together.

We also felt safer using the term 'governance' as it is not related to party politics. Since the village Panchayati Raj elections have no political parties, we could go ahead and fight the elections. Slowly we developed a common perspective for gender politics.

We realized that the network was only about capacity building. Women were of the opinion that while NGOs would say ‘Fight for your rights,’ they never actually guided the women in their fight or supported them if they went out and actually fought for their rights. NGOs would constantly tell them to be self-reliant strugglers and solve their own problems, without being in any way supportive or giving them any guidance. NGOs were not ready to fight themselves and were apolitical, often refusing to take a position on issues like elections. While the women had to go out and fight, the NGOs would manage the resources. NGOs had many hierarchical problems as well, and project management seemed to be the network’s main task. The NGOs had become very project-oriented.

This began to upset the women—what was the justice in their doing all the work when the NGOs controlled the resources? Women in Panchayat started questioning this. They wanted a controlled decentralization from the NGOs. As the women’s role grew, slowly, the network’s role diminished and came down to almost nothing. This process took four to five years. The Panchayat Mahila Aghadi was formed around this time. State governance councils also initiated their efforts in the process of organizational governance. At this point, the whole journey of organization-building began, involving the creation of different strategies for different regions.

MB: *That is an interesting observation. So what were the different strategies you employed in say Konkan and Vidarbha?*

BR: Vidarbha was the first project. The Vidarbha Lok Vikas Manch (VLVM) wanted all the control of the money and refused to be in the process otherwise. There was a problem here related to NGOs and male domination, where people like Rahul Bagde felt that resources should be in their hands.

The women, however, took the stand that if public money had been given to an organization, then there should be transparency in dealing with it. So the VLVM separated itself from the rest. After four or five years, there were problems again. Around 2006-07, when there was a sectarian approach and Dalit men seemed to be promoting only Dalit women. The women took a stand that this was wrong because they felt that too many weapons of caste and class, which were being misused against them. So in 2007, a team of women took the lead.

MB: *But in the whole gender discussion, don’t you feel that all women are not equal? That Dalit women are further stratified in an already marginalized social structure? What is the harm with positive discrimination—after all, all women are not equal?*

BR: Yes of course, an Anjana Tai Amrutsagar is different from a Maya Tai Sorte. But it is important that the principles of equality of caste, class and gender be upheld, first of all, within our organization. It is definitely difficult to bring together all the women in a village, because of the combination of the factors of caste, class and gender. However, it is important to look at caste, class and gender together—in Vidarbha, we have a good representation of caste and class groups.

The realities of caste and position that exist in society are reflected in the MRA as well. But we have to ensure that the principles we hope to see at work externally in society, should also be upheld within the organization. The same rules should apply to us.

MB: *This has been a journey where your base has grown from an NGO base to a mass base. Can you tell us more about that process?*

BR: We went from an NGO-level base to a mass base. We began by changing the membership base from NGOs to women leaders by incorporating 500 villages. You see, NGOs would not take a stand. If you want to make changes at the policy level, you cannot go with most NGOs because they don’t take a

position. You need to work with people, as they are the most affected. At the first instance, we worked to create a base of village women. Then, at the second level, we created a Panchayat Mahila Aghadi base. Since we were not doing funding-based work, most NGOs left us.

MB: *If you did not do funding-based work, then how did you mobilize capital needed for the kind of work you were doing?*

BR: To mobilize capital, we took just enough from like-minded funding agencies. We got enough, actually. I must add that even now, NGOs who share our ideologies or are willing to take a position are with us. We did not want those which were looking for projects as a form of livelihood. The Ford Foundation funded us for some time, and now Action Aid and The Hunger Project are helping us.

MB: *I am curious about this—how did you know when was the time you had to stop the ideological debates and focus on actual work?*

BR: Actually they have to go hand in hand and you have to keep both processes going. Our group of 125 people had different political ideologies—there were RPI members, people from CPI, and others. Yet the common thing was that they were fed up of the self-focused power games of the different parties they came from and by the fact that they were not getting results. Activities and debates are still going on—with every dissenting member's view being taken and a consensus arrived at. We have learnt that nothing is closed, no thought or ideology is final.

We work with the most marginalized and here, issue selection is most important. The factor of governance is a 'must' in major local issues—especially those of the most marginalized. Our work is issue-based and the most important issue, for instance, livelihood, is taken up PDS, the below-BPL card, the EGS issue—you need to select which is more important and work on it. When you are addressing their issues, the marginalized section will automatically come with you. The most marginalized are the Dalit women of course, and they mostly come to the fore front. But to form a pressure group at the village level, you need OBCs and Marathas, and minority groups too. The question is to what extent will you let the problem of marginalization define the situation. There are layers of identity—of the family, the hamlet, the village, gender, caste—how do you limit these and move on?

As a matter of fact, our Shakhas or village units have many Dalit women as they are the ones who are most ready to go out and fight.

MB: *How do you sustain the hopes of the marginalized and the very poor? How do you deal with the loss of hope if no solution emerges for their problems? Finally, they have to deal with and question the structure of the state, which is not an easy process. How do you sustain the hope needed to do this relentlessly?*

BR: People have to come together and decide to fight the structure. There is no service we are providing for them out of charity. We cannot have a service-based approach, as it is their struggle also and they have to take ownership of it. But there is an evolution of the process here, and it is important to let the process take its time and happen. You can't leave it to nature entirely and you can't dictate terms to it either. There is a need to be a bit careless here—consciously so. It is an organic process and we have to give it time to grow.

We basically have to relate development and governance. That is the space into which we—the MRA—have to fit. It is important to catch that space. To fight is not the issue—there are various fights our women have to fight, beginning at the family level to the level of the system. Eventually, it is not important how many people join you, but how much ownership they feel of the processes at the village level.

MB: *So how does MRA help the process of the struggle to happen? What do you actually do on the field?*

BR: Apart from publications and training, we also have practical, outdoor action-oriented training programmes to prepare women for the fight—like we had a 36-tehsil Dharna Andolan. It is necessary to train but also to focus on the application skills—you have to give them the space to apply what they have learnt. We facilitate for them the process of taking from the system strategically. It is their fight and they have to fight it, but we are a firmly supportive structure.

We also see the need for capacity building among our supporters. Dialoguing with opponents teaches women a lot. After all, there is no need to negotiate with the like-minded. It is important for us to learn along with the women how to understand the contradictions in politics and use them. Politics is, after all, not a straight path. The village is a changing, dynamic identity with cultural and power pressures. So you have to understand the consistent changes at the village level. Engaging with women and youth is a great way to get support. Dalit women have fewer resources and get less support but there is on the whole more freedom in the collective culture of the Dalits, thanks to Dr B R Ambedkar's inspiration. Women can listen to speeches all night long. Though upper caste Maratha women have more education and resources, they face intense cultural pressure. But this again differs from village to village.

We work on the social capital shared by women. We have struggle-sharing workshops—which only women activists take part in—where women share their troubles and think collectively of solutions. The women speak of this feeling of community that they share by saying that, 'Sakhya nahi, pun pakkya bahin'—'We may not be real sisters, but we share a strong sisterhood'.

MB: *Are there many people who discuss political issues actively at the village level?*

BR: It is very important to keep reminding rural women about political issues. They are mostly engaged in internal family issues, but we have to create a political community. There are some seven groups that carry out political education. They are working on creating a think-tank on their own—by involving women Sarpanches, and women from other community based groups. A 26-state member committee was formed during the Amravati Convention of 2009.

The pace of learning is admittedly a challenge. Sometimes it does not match the needs of the process. We also have to work on making ideology relevant—there is a need for a political spirit as well as a need to link various issues.

MB: *You say that the marginalized should fight, but they also must get tired as people—given their resources, their caste positions, and frustrations. What is the possibility of feeling defeated, of not getting what they want despite efforts? What are the ways in which they are motivated?*

BR: It is true, they do get tired. Sometimes, we get tired too. You get the feeling that you are banging your head against a wall. It is experienced during the election period and also when we take up issues. But it is important to come out of that feeling of fatigue. So collective appreciation is most important. Without it you cannot work. Leadership cannot be like a pendulum. We have to remember that the MRA is also within the process and that we are working with different forces. So we have to join hands with other organizations and support systems, and also have to have pro active relationships with the power structure.

Moral support to women should not be invisible—it should be clear and visible. A crisis is in fact an important learning opportunity for organization-building and management. For example, in Jalna a nurse was raped. There were women activists and leaders belonging to different political parties and coming from entirely opposing ideological perspectives. How do you get all the women and their parties together? We facilitated this meeting and they came together—because only by being together can we

influence the structure. It does not work if we are alone. We have to facilitate in the right way so that we find the positive force in every incident. There is no point viewing a crisis negatively. Every crisis has energy also, which leads to organizational growth and a sense of justice in the surrounding community.

At every level—in the family and the village—appreciating the women and the critical learning they get is most crucial. We tell them, ‘You lost the elections? The important thing is that you contested. That is more significant.’ When a woman is honoured and is given a certificate in front of everyone, the Tehsildar included, her confidence grows. At this time we also thank the husband and the in-laws for facilitating her participation by sharing chores, and in this way, respect for her within her family grows, as does the family’s status in the community. In fact, we often invite the women’s husbands to the office to see how their wives work with their teams. The present top-down structure is actually skewed towards the top, and it is equally important to have appreciation and inspiration from the grassroots perspective to make the system moving and dialogical. We always give opportunities for exposure to women from the deprived sections—for example, Maya Tai visited the USA and participated in a conference there with ease.

MB: *How do you stay in touch with all your activists at the grass-roots level?*

BR: You see, collective strength is very important. When we are an organization of the people, we have to be with them at all times. For this we use the cellular phone a lot—during happy times like weddings and at times of sorrow like death, we make it a point to call and speak to the family and the woman, or even to pay a condolence visit. We also use traditional forms of communication like telegrams to wish people during weddings, and other occasions. We may not be able to do this as much as we want to, but we really do try. And when we call up, it is always done sincerely, from the heart, it is not a drama. These small gestures are very important for the organization’s sense of togetherness and we make it a point to do so. People feel a lot more bonded with us and it helps create a feeling of solidarity. This extends to times of illness, when we collect money during meetings to contribute to surgeries, and so on.

MB: *Across regions, how do you get people to rise above caste-barriers and come together? How does this vary across regions?*

BR: In Vidarbha, for example, organization building is relatively easier given its culture—Vinobaji, Gandhiji, Sant Tukdoji, Sant Gadge Maharaj, and others have had a strong presence here and have shaped the culture of the region. On the other hand, Marathwada has had quite a distinct, Nizam-dominated culture. Dalit youth in Vidarbha started a separate movement and the leadership at the NGO-level here is largely made up of Dalit women as well. The thing is that women also realized that caste cannot be the basis for going forward. If we have to the end of casteism—*jaatitva ka ant*—then we have to forget caste and build a new synergy. There has to be a convergence between the OBC and Dalit bases. People have to recognize that they may be opponents on some issues, but they are not enemies. It is easy to converge on common sorrows and issues, and it is important not to get stuck on small oppositions. At all times, collective decision making is most important.

We work for the same issues—such as livelihood and land. Even in the Khairlanji issue, it is important to remember that people from diverse backgrounds came together. Coming together is important. And as an organization, we have to keep reminding ourselves not to think that if it is not working now, then it will not work in the future. We have to have a culture of convergence among women and the weaker sections. And to do this we dialogue with women’s wings of political parties and also engage with the silent networks and spectators. In Amravati for instance, there are links in the issues between governance and development. But to bring women together is more important if we want to counter the nexus between the power-holders and the bureaucracy. And also, of course, to celebrate every victory.

MB: *The women your organization has groomed—the faces of the MRA, so to speak—do they get appropriated by other parties?*

BR: Yes they do, and we don't worry about it too much because it is inevitable. For instance, we cannot reject Fulma Tai just because she joined the Shiv Sena. We have to understand the entire issue, see what all the pressures are and where they come from. We cannot behave as if we own the women just because we have trained them. We don't make a big deal of this, and we recognize the opportunity it offers the women. We have to give them the space to explore their potential. We encourage them to enter the party of their choice, to examine it and its ideology. When they do that, most of them come back. We also encourage them to get absorbed into the parties but to continue dialoguing and sharing with us. Often in rural areas, spouses belong to different parties, in which case, women should have the opportunity to change and examine all the parties.

However, we do stay firm on our own ideology. Despite that we believe in engaging with political parties, and in advocating and lobbying with them.

MB: *How are the BJP and the Shiv Sena able to make such in-roads into the tribal belt?*

BR: It's simply because these parties work and offer support at the ground level and engage with the issues present there. The Congress tends to delink with the grassroots issues. We feel that those who believe in the constitution should also deal with it on a day-to-day level. We tend to focus more on dialoguing with those who follow the constitution.

MB: *How do you deal with the fact that your wife is with the Congress and that you have links to the MRA? Whereas the organization itself is actually known for its Left leanings? Many of your members seem to be pro-Congress. How do you negotiate the MRA between these two ideological positions?*

BR: Among our core leaders, there is no one who is pro-Congress, and I have never heard anyone say this before. But we do engage with all political parties. We do debate and take anti-Congress stands often. It is important how one deals with political parties and we are careful not to be sectarian in what we believe.

MB: *What are the strengths and weaknesses of your movement? What are your challenges and what have been your victories?*

BR: Our strength is that our 300 leading women have gathered together to the MRA from different parties and ideologies. This has happened thanks to our dynamic facilitators, lots of shibirs and much talking to people—now in fact many men and women want to work with the Andolan. There are different parties drawn along caste and class lines; and we have survived for ten years in today's highly contrasted atmosphere. We have been able to mobilize people through direct contact, and at the political level in the districts, they can manage the grassroots dynamics and policy advocacy.

As for our weaknesses and defeats, in every village, we have at some time or the other, felt helpless. In a village, the PDS shop or ration shop is the political centre. The government had passed a GR asking for it to be made into a centre for women. The ration-shop owners, who have political affiliations, got together and filed a PIL against it. We fought it very hard, but now the government has passed another GR saying that only if the shop is closed will it be give to women.

Two victories that we are happy about are the GR on flag-hoisting of January 3, 2004, and the fact that we fought against the no-confidence movement and won, thanks to the persistence of this Adivasi woman who took the case to the high court and fought it to the end.

We also made an economic demand, that Panchayat women be given passes for travelling on ST buses so that they do not have to spend their own money while travelling on work. On the whole, we have noticed that while legal demands get passed easily, demands that are economical in basis are more difficult to get. Despite that, it has been sanctioned now. The honorarium and meeting allowance have been increased. Other victories were ones like the Cup-phodo Andolan (where we demanded that the segregation of tea-cups in tea stalls and eateries on the basis of caste be stopped) and the Khurchit basa Andolan (where we encouraged women Panchayat officials to sit on the seat which was theirs by office, and not let upper caste men and ex-Sarpanches sit on them).

On the whole, I would say we were successful because we were tactical and took the support of all the parties. We were also careful in choosing our battles. We picked those issues that the people were sure to support and were ready to fight for.

A great weakness is funding. Being funded involves maintaining unnecessary procedures, detailed accounts, writing and monitoring reports and all of these activities are time-consuming. How do we free ourselves from this so that we can concentrate more on our real work, which is organization-building?

We have observed that the women's wings of all political parties are very weak. Unlike them, both we and the women in our organization have freedom. We have to build and strengthen our cadres, of course, and this process is sometimes blocked by external pressures and attractions, including money. Strangely, of late, it is as if the government has decided that the voluntary sector will run the welfare state. How do we do that? This is not just difficult, it is impossible. It almost seems like the government is trying to abdicate one responsibility after another to the voluntary sector.

MB: *Tell us more about your symbol and your slogan.*

BR: At the Saigata Convention we had had much debate over the politics and aesthetics of the symbol that we should use. Three women raising their voices was finally chosen as the Andolan's symbol. Our name was also debated and decided there. The crucial message our organization's symbol tries to send out to women is that you are not 'abla' or helpless, but 'sabla' or entirely self-possessed and in-charge of your life. The movement is so popular now that our slogan 'Vote hamara—Raj hamara!' is widely known across the state of Maharashtra. This means that the vote is ours and hence governance is ours too. It is a long battle, which marginalized women from the weaker sections will fight jointly and proactively.

7.3 THE MRA—A CRITICAL READING

Support for NGOs like the MRA has grown in recent years largely because the government, the populace and the funding agencies have recognized the cultural sensitivity, innovativeness and dedication of such groups. Their role in decentralizing and de-bureaucratizing development initiatives has also been recognized. The advantages of NGOs over other development agencies are their flexibility, their small size, their shallow hierarchies, speedy operations and short communication lines—all of which contribute to effective collaborations, rapid decision-making and the ability to respond quickly to changing circumstances (Manuel Castells, 1994).

The process of participatory development did not emerge as a spontaneous phenomenon. To facilitate the process, the women in the rural areas needed to be stimulated and assisted. In order to undertake self-initiatives for change, these women needed to be conscientized about the socioeconomic reality in which they lived so as to equip them with the capacities needed to translate the many possibilities into concrete actions, and to manage those actions. That was not a matter of skill, or a manipulative process in the name of

participation. It defined the role of outsiders to assist women to come out and acquire the intellectual and practical knowledge needed for their self-initiated development process. And this was where the role played by Mahila Rajsatta Andolan, an NGO that mobilizes women at the grassroots level, became significant in Maharashtra.

The role of MRA as an outsider can be conceived of as having two main elements: animation and facilitation. We shall look at both of these roles here.

7.3.1 ANIMATION

This was the process of assisting the MRA women to develop their intellectual capacity to investigate the reality of their life situations, to analyze relevant issues, to understand factors creating poverty and deprivation; and through such understanding, to perceive self-driven possibilities for change. The outcome of the animation was conscientization. Here animation was the outcome of a specific mode of interaction between the MRA members and the women. The essence of that interaction mode was the evolution of a subject-to-subject relation between the two parties (replacing the conventional subject-to-object relation). The women had a knowledge base, rooted in experience, practice and living with nature and society. This knowledge had its own validity and rationality. To that pool of knowledge, the MRA members brought with them the knowledge derived from formal education.

The delivery approach to development sought to transfer formal knowledge to the women and to label the women's own knowledge as unmarked or irrelevant. Contrary to that, a participatory approach, like the one between women and MRA members, achieved an interaction between the two knowledge streams creating a mutual learning process (refer Bhim Raskar's interview). It was an interaction between the two worlds, capable of systematizing the knowledge of women, creating new knowledge and generating seeds of change.

The MRA took a dialogical approach to evolve such an interaction mode with the women. The teaching, instruction and transfer of skills were replaced by discussion, dialogue, stimulation of self-reflection and analysis, and sharing of experience and knowledge.

Rather than dictating solutions to their problems, the MRA members stimulated the women to come out with ideas, issues and factors that they perceived as barriers in improving their livelihood. Besides systematizing their own experiences, the interaction with the MRA members improved their knowledge base.

7.3.2 FACILITATING THE FELICITATIONS

The MRA members worked as facilitators also. There existed a host of factors, both at the familial and societal levels, which kept these women passive rather than active. Facilitation is an attempt at assisting women to overcome the practical barriers to action. The MRA members, with their formal education, wide knowledge of the PRIs, gender commitments, links with the Panchayat and other institutions, were able to assist the women in tackling their practical problems.

Certificates to the EWRs and Parivar Sanman Patras for the husbands and families of women leaders indicate a strategic way deployed by the MRA to make inroads into the private spheres of the EWRs. The MRA could garner popular support to such an extent that in villages these felicitation certificates started becoming a symbolic capital of prestige and status for the family. This was all the more prominent in the case of husbands who started taking this felicitation certificate as a symbolic indicator of their progressive and supportive role in the family.

It is important to understand the sociocultural contexts in which EWRs are positioned when one is trying to intervene into the deeply embedded patriarchal power structures. These interventions can be either

confrontational or negotiational. The MRA chose to take a non-confrontational stand and, most importantly, an inclusive position to bring the husband into the gendered public sphere, thus persuading him to think beyond the question, 'Who will make chapattis'. This path of negotiation can be seen as the trade mark of the MRA while dealing with opposing ideologies, or even with people of different political interests.

7.3.3 DIALOGIC INTERVENTIONS

Creativity, communication and community are three major factors that make human beings distinct from other species. Communication, as dialogue and debate, occurs spontaneously at any time of social change. But it is communication as a deliberate intervention to effect social and economic change that holds the most interesting possibilities. One of the crises of the post-modern context is the breakdown of the organic links between creativity, communication and communities. This often gives rise to hypothetical communities, which are mechanically connected but organically alienated from each other. When communication ceases to have organic links with communities, it becomes a dehumanised dissemination of information.

If development can be seen as a fabric woven out of the activities of millions of people, communication represents the essential thread that binds them together. Communication should be viewed as an integral part of development to create systems, modes and strategies that could provide opportunities for people to enter into dialogic interventions to improve the quality of their lives.

Jyotiba Putranshi Samvad (Conversations with the Jyotiba's Sons) is one such dialogical intervention initiated by the MRA. This notion interestingly comes from the notion that 'Savitri's Daughters are in every house, but the search for Jyotiba's Sons is still going on'—suggesting that it is difficult to find men with gender sensitivity in the village.

This reversal of the gaze on the 'powerful', to tell them of their inadequacy, is a very innovative method deployed by the MRA. Men have shared their personal experiences and narratives with a sense of tremendous insecurity: 'The knowledge that our wives have stepped out of the houses and can no longer be controlled by us is extremely horrifying. The thought that our wives were going to learn even more gave us sleepless nights!! However, we have realized that if we do not walk on the path of progress with society, we will be ostracized, and we are trying hard to understand and adopt the new values'.

Hundreds of open disclosures like this one emerged in the Samvad facilitated by the MRA to explore and address the power relations embedded and internalized in family structures.

7.3.4 CHALLENGES FOR THE MRA

To position a women's movement in the rights-based perspective is a difficult task, especially when it is not working on immediate and short term goals. Another important task for the movement is to make its presence felt among the people and in society by intentional interventions. Since the MRA believes in the path of negotiation, it has to keep itself continuously engaged with opposing ideologies from people with varied political interests. Facilitating a dialogue with these, without losing the identity and face of the MRA, is one of the real challenges. The MRA is facilitating the entry of women into governance structures through elections at a time when Panchayat elections in Maharashtra are assuming political importance. Different regional and national parties have strong stakes in local politics and the position taken by key workers of the MRA at this juncture can also be viewed as a political position of the MRA. This has the probability of entering into the sectarian interests of party politics (by no means belittling the importance of political parties).

8

Contextualizing Democratic Decentralization Theoretical Implications for Gender and Governance

8.1 CONTEXT

Decentralization, as enacted by constitutional amendments and enforced by state governments, is minimalist in its conception and design. However, the implementation of a proper form of decentralization remains unachieved as it is inundated by various institutional as well as social and political issues. Theoretically, the normative appeal of arguments for local democracy has resided in the belief that the quality of political participation and therefore of public life itself will be substantially transformed only when people gather to debate and deliberate on issues of common concern collectively, and are provided with decision-making powers to give effect to their shared concerns (Niraja Jayal, 2006). John Stuart Mill provided two important arguments for the sake of local democracy. First, local political institutions are ‘a school of political capacity’ making citizens capable of genuine and informed participation. Second, such institutions would be more efficient if informed by local interests and local knowledge. Local democracy thus effects both the participation and the deliberation affecting a direct form of democracy.

The aim for decentralization in India was the normative-political project of greater inclusion and the representation of historically disadvantaged or marginalized groups. The setbacks for decentralization in India have been due to inherited social inequalities, an absence of the required reform in law and a clear reworking of the relationship between local elected institutions and administrative structures. The picture is indeed complex and requires an understanding of the old and new institutions; of the changing rules of engagement between citizen and state; of politics and society on the one hand and law and administrative structures on the other. These complex engagements also make the public sphere vibrant with discussion and debate.

The evolution of the public sphere with ideas like nation, nationalism and freedom marked the beginning of the demand for citizenship in India. The most widespread and accepted hegemonic notion of citizenship is in the framework of the liberal school where an individual’s citizenship is centred on the concept of individual freedom. Such a conceptualization of citizenship has however been criticized by Marxist and feminist scholars from the point of view of women and marginalized social groups like lower castes and religious minorities. Gopal Guru (2009) argues that ‘Dalits in India are exiled citizens,’ and the purity-pollution logic has extended into the formal public sphere. Similarly, women, despite their presence and intervention in the public sphere, are confined largely to the private sphere, or at best to its margins. The privileges of a citizen are restricted to those who are bestowed with the status of being ‘full members of community’ (Yuval-Davis, 1997). To use Anupama Roy’s (2005) terminology, women have been, both in historical and the present-day contexts, ‘inadequate citizens’. It is necessary to emphasize here that one is not bringing in the ‘blaming the victim’ concept to account for the woman herself as the reason for her inadequacy, and this again does not imply that the onus to come out of this inadequacy needs to be on the woman herself. The inadequacies in the

status of a woman's citizenship arise because of the structural aspects of the social relations, she engages in her lifetime as an individual, and over generations within contexts of caste, class, race and nationality.

Once we recognize that citizenship is beyond 'given' privileges of equality, (because in fact, communities are not equal), we also need to recognize that there is a dynamic nature in the formation of citizenship. With the evolving notion of community, the individual goes through a process of acquiring citizenship. Thus, this study looks at the idea of gendered citizenship- as how these women travel from being 'inadequate citizens' to (if at all) achievable 'citizens' with the deepening of democracy. In reformulating the question of democratic citizenship, it is interesting to look at Murdock's definition of democratic citizenship, in which he defines the 'fundamental prerogative of citizenship as the right to participate fully in social life with dignity and without fear, and to help formulate the forms it might take in the future' (Murdock, 1999). The notion of the 'full participation' is co-terminus with that of 'adequate citizens'. In the case of gendered citizenship, one finds that this is a problematic feature in the everyday lives of women.

The questions that we face in the socioeconomic context of inequality where we are located are at various levels: Who are the citizens? Who is excluded from being a citizen? What are the various levels or tiers of this exclusion? What sort of process does an individual go through in the course of becoming a citizen? How does the perception of herself change in the course of her becoming a citizen? Is the process of becoming a citizen a democratizing process?

8.2 QUOTAS FOR WOMEN: ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST

In a landmark move in April 1993 the 73rd amendment to the constitution of India directed that a third of the total number of seats in all panchayats be reserved for women. A third of the offices of chairpersons of panchayats across levels were also to be held by women. Seats for the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes would be reserved in proportion to their population. By 1995, states across the nation had implemented requisite changes, and the presence of women in local government, or Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRI) increased by many multiples.

Women's reservation is an issue that has since the earliest days of its conceptualization excited deeply divided opinion, as much on grounds of ethics as around form. Therefore before we venture to explore how our own findings in Maharashtra intervene with these concerns, and what they may have to suggest to gender and governance theory, it would be useful to briefly map out significant themes/theoretical perspectives that have emerged over the years in the sphere.

As early as 1931, Sarojini Naidu and Muthulakshmi Reddi in a letter to the British prime minister refused 'preferential treatment', stating (in an accompanying declaration), "we look upon nominations, reservation of seats, and the co-option in any sphere of activity as a pernicious and humiliating system which must run counter to any real progress' (cited in Dhanda 2008). In more recent times, Vina Mazumdar, member secretary of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) admitted that as 'daughters of independence' her generation had been skeptical of special representation but gradually 'found our understanding of nation-building changing radically' (Mazumdar 1997).

But if those such as Mazumdar have come to acknowledge abstract citizenship as cover for privilege, there are feminist stalwarts such as Madhu Kishwar who continue to vigorously oppose quotas for women, as measures that would feed into existing faulty structures of governance instead of reinventing them. 'At the risk of sounding elitist I would say it is time we began taking our legislatures seriously or they will never function effectively. Parliament ought to be a forum for the most seasoned, thoughtful and well-informed individuals among us. It is supposed to perform the awesome responsibility of legislating and policy-making at the macro level for nearly a billion people. It is no place for political novices to learn their first lessons in

parliamentary democracy' (Kishwar 1996).¹ She advises instead that parties sincerely interested in seeing women take an active part in politics begin by activating their women's fronts at all levels, and by recruiting more women at decision making levels in their parties. Rather than reserving constituencies for women which she feels forces women to contest only against other women thereby ghettoising them, Kishwar recommends multi-seat constituencies where one out of three candidates has to be a woman.

While Kishwar makes a plausible case for the recovery of 'feminist politics as subversion as opposed to a passive seeking of space within already defined boundaries of power' (Menon 1997: 41), she has also been variously contested. Rai (cited in Dhanda 2008) while sharing Kishwar's skepticism on the use of gender quotas as envisaged in its current form, suggests that the frame of discourse around affirmative action would benefit from a shift from the language of 'power' to that of 'empowerment'. With its emphasis on 'power to' rather than 'power over', empowerment rephrases access to power as enabling, as competence rather than dominance. As it is in its current form however, political representation would be (to quote Fraser) a strategy of recognition rather than redistribution, restricting its transformative potential.

Dhanda (2008) rebuts (Kishwar's argument) arguing that whether the skills women have are 'inferior' is relative to the purposes for which collectivities come together, and perfection is relative to the particular *kind* of politics one practices'.² Women as 'heterogenous publics', have she argues, been excluded from parliamentary politics in different ways, and hence political measures for their inclusion too must be conceptualized with sensitivity to the differences between them. The picture becomes clearer if we pay attention to what these measures mean *personally* to those affected by them, i.e., how they affect their sense of who they are and which groups they can see themselves as forming. Gender quotas therefore hold a significant, though limited, promise of enabling the group formation of women motivated by the shared project of increasing their participation in politics. The limitation as she sees it arises from the fact that it is not just passive location within a collectivity, but the possibility of active 'identification-with' others that determines whether or not a project, such as that of the struggle for gender quotas is valuable.

The group as basis of representation however is ridden with its own set of questions, by no means amenable to easy resolution. Menon (2000) cautions for instance that if identities emerge in and through political mobilization, we then need to guard against the possibility that these identities may themselves freeze into new formations of power, blocking the emergence of new identities and new alignments. To quote Habermas - cautioning against the possibility of collective rights 'overtaxing' the theory of rights tailored to individual persons - group rights could represent a kind of preservation of species by administrative means. "To guarantee survival would necessarily rob the members of the very freedom to say yes or no if they are to appropriate and preserve their cultural heritage (Habermas 1994: 130)'.

Any attempt to summarise arguments for and against reservations would be quite incomplete without touching upon the theoretical contribution of Anne Phillips, whose work on the subject has been reflected, debated or contested in almost every paper on the subject subsequently (including most of those quoted here).

Phillips has a fairly straightforward case. There are particular needs, interests, and concerns that arise from women's experience and this will be inadequately addressed in a politics that is dominated by men. While they may find a few powerful allies among the men, they cannot really expect, as she puts it, 'the degree of

¹ At the panchayat level however, Kishwar qualifies that the 'biwi (wife) brigades' as she calls them, still serve the useful purpose of getting men used to including women in village debate and decision making, even if the women are totally lacking in political experience and are used as puppets.

² As Dhanda sees it, even if some 'undeserving women' benefit in the immediate future, the overall evaluation has to weigh long term desirable consequences against short term undesirable ones.

vigorous advocacy that people bring to their own concerns' (Phillips 1995). This takes on particular pertinence when a history of political exclusion has made it hard even to articulate group concerns. Changing the composition of decision-making assemblies is particularly compelling when the political agenda has been constructed without reference to certain areas of concern, and where much fresh thinking is necessary to work out what best to do. In such contexts there is little to turn to other than the people who carry the interests, and who does the representation then comes to be of equal significance with what political parties they represent.

Phillips terms this a shift from a politics of ideas to a politics of presence. The politics of ideas suggests 'a broadly secular understanding of politics as a matter of judgement and debate, and expects political loyalties to develop around policies rather than people'. A politics of presence on the other hand, privileges the question of 'who' rather than 'what' and demands equal representation of women, ethnic minorities, and other groups that see themselves as excluded (Phillips 1995).

The politics of presence has found its predictable criticisms. Louise Vincent (2004) for instance paints a cynical picture of the real use of quotas based on the experience of South Africa. The improved presence of women in South Africa's national legislature due to the African National Congress's quota has, she says, done little more than advance the careers of a select group of already well educated, politically highly well-connected women. In the prevalence of a culture of tight party controls, 'simply having members of marginalised groups present when unjust decisions are taken serves to legitimise these decisions because legitimacy is thought to rest not on what is decided, but on who was present when it was decided' (Vincent 2004: 84).

However some of the most obvious issues that one can have with Philip's thesis, for instance that of accountability to the interested group, or whether the election of more women in fact ensures their 'representation' are in fact raised by Philips herself: 'If the interests of women are varied, or not yet fully formed, how do the women elected know what the women who elected them want?' Philips acknowledges the possibility of failure to *know* particular women's interests (perhaps even more likely in India where a single constituency may be sharply divided along caste-class-ethnic lines), as even the as likely (conscious and unconscious) conflict(s) of similar (class, ethnic, linguistic or other) identities between elected women representatives and their (female) electorate. She also acknowledges, if cursorily, the possibility of (all too real, or perhaps more visible in south Asia) issues of failure of accountability as arising out of conscious dereliction of commitment, or corruption. There is indeed some evidence that women, once elected, may in fact be more attuned to the so to say, universal interests of women such as childcare or labour relations (Philips 1995). Nevertheless in the absence of enough empirical data on what kind of factors actually inspire/drive women to stand for election to such councils, and once in positions of power what would in fact motivate them to stick it out, even try for subsequent terms in office, would it be anything short of conjecture to surmise women as likely to per se make more ethical or committed legislators?

Phillips answer is a pragmatic yes, but unlikely. The case for gender parity among our political representatives as she sees operates in 'a framework of probabilities rather than certainties... Changing the gender composition of elected assemblies is largely an enabling condition (a crucially important one, considering what is *disabled* at present) but it cannot present itself as a guarantee'.

Nevertheless with or without 'guarantee of good intent', as Phillips puts it, discourse on quotas for women at least in India, is no longer really grappling today as much is the question of its desirability. The terrain of debates – both academic and political – is quite clearly now around its possible form and details, and its likely ramifications for women as well as for governance in general.

8.3 POLITICS OF RESERVATION

The need for the Women's Reservation Bill was realized in the post-independence era after feminist thinkers took on board the idea that patriarchy manifests itself in multiple ways irrespective of the way modernity sets itself in. Educated upper class nationalist women of the pre-independence era had seen reservation for women as not in keeping with the ideology of equality, and had resisted the intention of reservation while envisioning a democratic India. Asserting a liberal ideology of equality, Sarojini Naidu and Begum Shah Nawaz in a letter to the Premier in 1931, claimed that, 'To seek any form of preferential treatment would violate the integrity of the universal demand of women for absolute equality of political status'. Further, they asserted that '...there should be no sex discrimination either against or in favour of women under the new constitution' (Dhanda, 2008). Lolita Sarkar and Vina Mazumdar had initially followed a similar ideology as the 'daughters of independence' to oppose special representation of any form and had been critics of systems of reservation for SCs and STs, as they viewed it as a further institutionalization of the backwardness of certain groups. However, in the post-independence decades they felt the inadequacy of representation of women in the governance, and in 1974 they voiced dissent on the findings of the Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India, Government of India, in which they were co-writers, claiming that in spite of legal provisions meant to ensure equal representation of women, in reality women were grossly under represented. They also pointed out that the urban, educated, upper-class bias was even more evident among women representatives, thereby 'regretting' the fact that the committee had rejected the recommendation in the legislation. (Mary E John, in *Dhanda* (ed.), 2008).

In the post-1990s context, the political and socioeconomic scenario of the country has undergone much change, with a transition of the nation-state that was taken for granted in the post-independence era. Lower caste, minority and gender politics have moved substantially from existing patterns with a rise of various contradictions. Feminist voices have emerged, not in academic spaces, but also in the day-to-day lives and politics of citizens. Women's movements have reflected the unfolding nature of the citizenship. The conceptualization of reservation has emerged now in changing contexts—that of the post-Mandal agitation on reservations for OBCs, emergence of caste parties like the Samajwadi Party (SP) and the Bahujan Samajwadi Party (BSP), widespread emergence of Naxal ideology, the demolition of the Babri Masjid and the communal violence that followed in its wake.

The tabling of the Women's Reservation Bill took place in this context in 1996. The women's issue had never been exclusive of the concerns of caste and religion, and in this era, the overlaps were even more obvious. Thus a monolithic understanding of the term *patriarchy* is no longer viable, and the need of the hour is to understand the *diverse* patriarchal forces that come into play in making the representation of women unequal. Mary John asserts the need for 'a complex articulation of *unequal patriarchies*' (Mary E John, in *Dhanda* (ed.), 2008 p 54, italics original).

Having asserted the need for representational governance is not enough in itself. One also needs to understand the role of the representative in representing her community. The role of representatives in governance is of great significance because they don't just bring forth issues. More importantly, they engage in the politics around the issues. Representatives are not only expected to articulate issues of local concern, but are part of the formation of a political discourse. Thus representatives play an important role in determining the very *nature* of governance in a structure. In a governance system that is dominated by upper class and upper caste men, issues of mass concern will be interpreted through a hegemonic lens. The resulting political structure will, accordingly, be highly unequal. It is obvious that the discourse of equality in conditions of inequality only results in deepening inequality. Most of history is a thing of the past invisible to us, as written history is that of the privileged. Reservation is argued for as positive discrimination for historical correctives seeking to subvert regressive structures.

Arguments for the reservation for women fall broadly into two categories. First, reservation for women can be seen to ensure a higher level of gender justice. Thus, for representation to be meaningful, female representation in governance should be proportional to the population of women in society. Furthermore, if women are seen as an interest group, their interests can be represented sufficiently only by ensuring the participation of more women in governance. It is also argued that quotas are needed to compensate women for the social barriers historically imposed upon them within a patriarchal structure, which result in their unequal participation in comparison to men. Another line of argument for reservation is based on the assumption that since women go through different processes of socialization, their role in governance will be markedly different from that of their male counterparts.

The argument against reservation is in that women representatives elected through reservation could end up only as token representatives who are actually represented by their husbands. The question of proxy governance is a serious issue and has also been observed in the course of this study. This has to be seen in the context of the hierarchized division of labour within the family and the lack of women's access to education or control over resources. However, the argument that we want to stress on is that empowerment is not a one-step event. On the contrary, it is a long process, often accompanied by violent backlash. A woman is not singularly 'empowered' when she is elected as a representative. That is just a step in facilitating the further assertion of her agency in a patriarchal system. Reservation can further act as potentially powerful tools of redistribution, not only of economic resources but also of political spaces that have traditionally been dominated by upper class, upper caste men in patriarchal governance systems.

There are certain core themes that emerge recurrently in the otherwise diverse narratives of elected women representatives spoken to in Maharashtra. Predominant among them are those of caste, local administrative corruption, alcoholism/prohibition, domestic violence/repression, definition/reorganization of 'women's work', school education, availability of and access to water, village infrastructure (toilets, roads etc). Many or in fact most of these are (gendered) concerns they already had with them in prior identities as daughters, wives, mothers, (caste) community members, citizens and so on.

This section seeks to theorise how women's inclusion into the hitherto unavailable domain of 'formal politics' intersects, and often intervenes with their existing alternate identities and concerns. How do these women in new found locations of power in the public sphere negotiate with old power structures of caste, class and gender in their local contexts? How if at all does such affirmative action alter the existing structures of governance? How do women's experiences as elected women representatives relate to existing discourses on gender and governance?

8.4 GENDER AS COUNTERPUBLIC TO CASTE

Caste would seem to be a powerful marker of social identity and status in most regions surveyed in Maharashtra, recurring as it is in narratives of individual respondents as well as in focus group discussions. Geeta, an elected representative of a Gram Panchayat who spoke to this study in a focus group discussion for instance recalls how she was asked to keep standing by other members as her husband was a peon in the Panchayat. Another EWR, Pratibha recounts how when a statue of the Dalit icon Babasaheb Ambedkar was to be erected in the *chowk* opposite her house, the proposal was refuted as people from all (upper) castes would pass by *chowk*. When the statue was being erected, 'others' threatened a repeat of the Khailranji incident. Caste also appears as the predominant concern in narratives of at least four (of a total of nine) EWR's interviewed in Maharashtra. While three of these four women (Ratnamala, Jyoti Meshram, Mayadevi Sorte) are from underprivileged castes (SC), the fourth (Anuya Kulkarni) is interestingly, upper caste. (The narrative of another respondent, Rita Sukhdev (also SC) also dwells on the subject of caste, but more in the retrospective of positive change she has seen over the last two decades.)

The strength of caste structures in these regions is perhaps evinced best from the fact that despite holding elected positions of power in local councils (at the gram panchayat/higher level), these women were subjugated to open discrimination and humiliation. Mayadevi of Vadval Nagnath village in Latur district (elected member of Grama Panchayat since July 2000) recalls facing years of discrimination as a Dalit social/political worker in the village. For instance when she and her (upper caste) colleagues would go to people's houses to meet women (to organize Self Help Groups or SHG's) her tea cup would always be kept separately.³

Jyoti recounts on the other hand how in the very first Gram Panchayat meeting after being elected Sarpanch (the post was reserved for SC women) the upper caste 'opposition' passed a resolution preventing her from carrying out any financial transactions of the Panchayat. She challenged this resolution and sought justice from the Panchayat Samiti district officer and the Commissioner, and after seven months was finally awarded the right to financial transactions.⁴ In the very next month after she had procured an order that the resolution was illegal and began to work, a no-trust motion was again proposed against her, accusing her of not taking the Panchayat members into confidence as well as of not undertaking the approved work. Jyoti managed to obtain a stay against it, and six months later a decision in her favour, allowing her to continue in office.

However, the hostility from her upper caste colleagues continued unabated. When seven or eight Sarpanches proposed Jyoti's name for the post of president of a Sarpanch organization which was being revived in Gadchiroli, some upper caste Sarpanches objected, and prevented her from becoming the president. Again, traditionally, when the festival of 'bail-pola' (worship of the bull that tills the farm) is celebrated in Kotgal, an *aarti thali* from the Sarpanch's house is brought with great revelry, marking the beginning of the festival. In the five years that Jyoti was Sarpanch, not once was the *thali* brought from her house. She was merely invited as a guest for the function. Worse, on the morning of January 26 – three months after Jyoti took over as Sarpanch and the day when for the first time a Dalit woman was to would hoist the flag in the village - her husband was accosted and beaten up at daybreak at the public water pump.

Gender on the other hand shows up as much, if not more visibly in narratives of the EWR's studied as a powerful, and in many ways more insidious structure of oppression that has always divided their worlds into (more than haves and have-nots) into the 'deserving' (of voice, power, resources) and 'undeserving'.⁵ Though narratives of *all* respondents of this study across caste-class-ethnic identities portray evidence of such gendered stratification, for our purposes here, let us look more closely specifically into the narratives of caste-oppressed women to understand how access to political power (via assisted entry into Panchayat Raj Institutions in Maharashtra) has played with their gender identities, and interestingly, therefore caste status.

Let's take for instance the case of Ratnamala – a Dalit, and an ordinary woman who when her mother-in-law developed a heart condition, was labelled as 'Pandharyapaychi', literally 'a woman with white feet' or a witch. But thanks to efforts by her husband's uncle (Nasik Raoji Tirpude who had been the Deputy Chief Minister of Maharashtra) Ratna stood for elections and won a (reserved category) seat in the gram panchayat. Her narration of an incident during her tenure as an EWR is significant to understanding exactly how gender

³ Maya Devi's village, like most others in the region is clearly divided into Dalit and Patil (upper caste) households with stark differences between the allocation of resources and living standards of both. All essential resources like bore wells, roads and electricity supply were concentrated in the area where the upper castes lived. The Dalit area had neither roads, nor electricity nor water sources. Dalit women had to walk three to four kilometers to fetch a pot of water.

⁴ The Zila Panchayat looked into her complaint after about two and a half years, and the nine Gram Sabha Panchayat members who had passed the resolution were suspended on grounds of hampering development work. (However they in turn challenged the suspension and obtained a stay order on it.)

⁵ Marked citizens/full citizens...?

when brought into play from a hitherto powerless category to a (newly) *empowered* category is capable of being effectively pitted against another powerful category of social repression such as caste.

Ratnamala recalls that when she was in hospital for some treatment, the sarpanch started repairing a sewer in her ward without the consent and signatures of all the members. This was against the rule and when she heard about it she asked him to show her the signatures and the consent of all the members of the Gram Panchayat. The sarpanch – who was of Teli caste (OBC) - told Ratnamala, ‘People from my caste don’t even urinate in the mouth of people from your community (SC). How have you gathered the courage to speak to me and look at me in the eye?’ Angered, Ratnamala grabbed him by the collar, slapped him and then also went to the police station and filed a complaint against him for abusing her on the basis of her caste. Though the sarpanch also demanded that she be arrested, he was informed that he could be booked under the Prevention of Atrocity Act (a non-bailable offence). Predictably he withdrew his complaint and also requested Ratnamala to withdraw hers, which she did after he had apologized to her.

Let’s also revisit the case of Mayadevi, the Dalit EWR who had grappled with poverty, untouchability as well as gender discrimination since her earliest years. Her parents were landless agricultural labourers. When her father married for a second time, Maya and her mother were abandoned. She recalls that she had an upper-caste friend whose house she used to visit and even eat with. Her friend’s grandfather loved Maya as his own grandchild, and she was grief-stricken when he died. Yet at his funeral, as she moved ahead to pay her respects, people objected to her presence and refused to let her do so. A confident, extroverted child, she was also married off barely in her early teens early as according to her relatives, she needed to be ‘tamed’. (As consequence of the taming, she became a mother when barely a child herself.) Yet today as an elected woman representative of the gram panchayat, she has been able to alter an age old purity-pollution practice in the village. Every year a religious ceremony is performed in the temple of Nagnath and people are fed *prasad*. On this occasion a common dinner is organized for all the villagers with the fund collected from the entire village. However, the Dalit families were served at the end, after everybody else was done. They were served by an upper-caste person but had to bring their own plates and glasses. By the time it was their turn to eat, it would be almost midnight. Maya Tai, who had always hated the discrimination, now (as an EWR) advised the Dalit community to boycott the *prasad* as a symbol of protest. It worked, and today the entire village participates together in all the festivals and rituals.

Finally let us also look again at Jyoti’s narrative. Despite initial resistance she could finally manage to push back opposition and non-cooperation by other (male, upper caste) members of the panchayat. Though with great difficulty (her husband was beaten up), she could also finally reach the Panchayat, and hoist the republic day flag in her village.

All is not perfect for these women, or at least not yet. Ratnamala for instance lost the next round of elections as a day before, the ex-Sarpanch distributed pamphlets that alleged that she was a prostitute and had slept with various men to get developmental work done in the village. Nevertheless her story (that of a Dalit and a woman, who slapped an upper caste man who also happened to be the Sarpanch of the village and still completed her term unharmed) and similar ones of her colleague may have some lessons for transformative possibilities.

They were women, and also Dalit, ostensibly a category of citizens doubly oppressed. Yet as evidently, an ‘*empowered gender*’ identity in fact worked in the case of caste oppressed women as a powerful, strategically useful tool, actually capable of being pitted against (oppressive) caste ‘others’, and winning.⁶ Political empowerment based on gender status in fact worked as quick route to bring women in circumstances as structurally constrained as theirs not just into the restricted domain of state policy and initiative, but actually

⁶ Cumulative effect of ‘unmarked identities’... lower caste plus woman plus politically empowered ...??

gave them space and voice to emerge as effective 'subaltern counterpublics' (Fraser 1990) in the larger public sphere (s). That they are state representatives in current context and time should not matter⁷ if we see affirmative action (in this case through forums of the state) as creating (a possible set of – there may be others) core conditions that enable the emergence and development of counterpublics, and therefore discursive contestation for times to come.

8.5 POLITICS OF BEING

'He is the Subject, he is the Absolute, she is the other' wrote Simone de Beauvoir (1949, xxviii), summing up why the visibility of the self is such an important issue for women. The main thesis of *The Second Sex* revolves around the idea that woman has been held in a relationship of long-standing oppression to man through her relegation to being man's 'Other'. In agreement with Hegelian and Sartrean philosophy, Beauvoir finds that the self needs otherness in order to define itself as a subject; the category of the otherness, therefore, is necessary in the constitution of the self as a self. What Beauvoir discovers in her multifaceted investigation into woman's situation is that woman is consistently defined as the 'Other' by man who takes on the role of the Self—while woman 'is the incidental, the inessential, as opposed to the essential' (1949, xxviii). To be the Other is to be the non-subject, the non-person, the non-agent, an invisible self in a patriarchal society. In customary practice, in cultural stereotypes and in political and economic spheres, women's visibility has been systematically subordinated, diminished, belittled and deprived. Feminists account for this phenomenon by explaining that women internalize these pernicious patriarchal values and norms which then become integrated in the cognitive, emotional and psychic structure of womanhood (Soyal, 1994, Vogel, 1991). Once embedded in a woman's psyche, internalized oppressions condition her desires. To maximize the satisfaction of her desires, then, would be to collaborate in her own oppression. Paradoxically, the more completely she fulfils these desires, the worse off she becomes.

Women are consigned to selflessness—to invisibility, subservient passivity and self-sacrificial altruism (Burman, 1998). Most often this happens in an unconscious way as the hegemony of gender is strongly internalized by women, supporting their current status quo by providing visible roles to men, while women assume invisible roles in all spheres of life. The reservation of women at the PRIs and the politics of reservation assumes interesting dimensions in this inter-sectionality of politics of being, which is embedded in the 'phenomenology of absences' and 'politics of presence', which brings in forth an 'epistemology of presence'.

Intermeshed with the politics of reservation is the politics of identity and the divergent ways in which political agents regard their various, often contending, identities. Social beings are characterized by multiple selves and identities, and by complex relations between their selves and identities. One's self is not a coherent whole, rather it is a multilayered structure of one's own historicity—class, caste, ethnicity and gender. The politics of identity involves the manifestation of the multiple selves, and how individuals shift between selves to express group identities, and particular group identities over others. Our concern here is in understanding the process of political decision-making that women go through, having positioned various vulnerabilities within these multiple selves.

Within the multiple identities of the individual, political expressions involve giving priority to one over another. A woman who is a Dalit, rural, wage worker might have a strategic advantage of asserting one identity, often at the cost of another. Looking at the relationships conversely, within one group (say Dalit) one identity (say male) is dominant over another (namely the female), and thus within the group identity where

⁷ For Fraser - as for Habermas - participation in the public sphere was conceptualized as activity outside of the domain of state politics.

both the man and woman both belong, the other identity—that of gender, creates a hierarchy. There are central-peripheral relationships within a vulnerable group, and women emerge in the periphery of the periphery. There are areas where identities are collapsing, and within the converging identities, there are other identities that are diverging. The politics of reservation (on the basis of group identity) is inclusive of this politics of collapse and divergence.

To take an ideological position on the politics of identity one needs to ask the question: from where does an individual get the authenticity and legitimacy to claim/represent a particular identity? Identity politics confines the space of representation of a particular group to individuals with common historicity. What arouses the consciousness of identity in an individual? One aspect of identity is created and enhanced by the ontology of the individual, the consciousness of one's ontology and the perception of threat from other groups. In such cases, group identity becomes more overwhelming than individual identity, and one group identity is given priority over another. Such affiliations however result in violent assertion of group identity, often resulting in aggressive exclusion of others from processes and the complete negation of anyone else entering the group. Does just the ontology of being in a particular group give one the authenticity to represent that group? There is also the need to critically approach this question as we discuss the politics of reservation.

8.6 CONTINUITY WITHIN RUPTURES

One of the major issues addressed by the contemporary women's movement has been that of violence against women within the State, community, family and society against rape, dowry, sex selection, population-control policies, political violence and so on. The state's endorsement of family authority through its various policies has increasingly eroded women's rights. While the Constitution of India, in dealing with fundamental rights, refers to women as equal citizens (Article 15), the Right to Freedom of Religion embodied in Articles 25 to 28 provides for personal laws, which deny equality for women in several facets of personal, economic, sexual, social and educational life. The constitutional rights accorded to women and personal spaces hegemonized by societal norms are marked by sameness and differences, which constantly engage with continuity and ruptures.

The process of becoming citizens results in many changing and conflicting identities. Each changed identity is a rupture from the existing identity and these ruptures are often very violent indeed. An EWR on her new identity of being a politically active citizen has the multiple identity of being a woman in both the private and public spheres, with multiple roles and caste, class and gender historicities. Looking at the way women negotiate with the conflicts in their private and public lives, reflects the way in which various contradictions in her private sphere assists her in making a public citizen. The ruptures in these women's lives in these multiple roles are in contradiction, and the process of various contradictions coming together dialectically brings about continuity in the process of struggle. These struggles are important events in the women's lives and they change the perspective of the women's beings and citizenship. In many cases, the problems within their private lives become the trajectory of their struggle.

The story of Dhakuli Gundu Naik, better known as Dhakuli Maushi, an Adivasi (Naik) woman from Halkarni Village in Kolhapur district elucidates this. The process of politicization for Dhakuli Maushi happened as a reaction to alcohol abuse within her family. Dhakuli Maushi's struggle began as one against the menace of alcoholism in her village. Her long struggle (as explained in the case study) started off from the personal level and moved on to become a political one. Her struggle was seen as a micro-movement, wherein she mobilized the collective consciousness of women. This demands its merit and significance at the level of the local politics of the village. The caste and gender equations of Dhakuli Maushi's village have changed considerably from the time when she started her struggle. Women's mobility has increased considerably and they are a lot more politically aware and conscious. Now more women participate in the Grama Sabha and other committees.

At this juncture we return to the question of empowerment of women through reservation. One of the enduring contributions of women's activism and feminist theorizing is the challenging of the definitive political boundaries between public and private politics. Feminists argued that public political life was built on the absence of women from it, that the exclusion of the private sphere was essential for the primacy of the public. By expanding the definition of politics to encompass both public and private spheres—indeed by asserting that these two are mutually constitutive—feminists have been able to challenge the dominant understanding of the politics itself, and therefore of democratic practices and discourse. This Gramscian ideology, deconstructed the hitherto Marxian notion of public-private divide and it did reformulate the dialectic nature between the public and the private. Dhakuli Maushi herself has never contested the Panchayat election (citing illiteracy as the reason). However, the oral narrative of Dhakuli Maushi positions her as strong actor in the village, bringing in her political subjectivity in her real life world, despite her not being the member of GP. This notion of gendered citizenship is interesting and illuminating as the epistemological discourses are transcended beyond the institutional structures. Similarly, Razia Sultana has ensured that gender dynamics within her highly conservative nuptial family has changed considerably ever since she became politically mobilized. Her relationship with her husband has changed for the better and she proudly announced that the gender based violence and discrimination within her family had stopped, and that respect for women in general had gone up. It is important to note here how the micro politics of oppression within families work to reinforce patriarchal state structures and how women confront these structures. Travails in the women's daily lives act as motivation for change, and their positive role in governance is often seen to have increased their power of negotiation within the microcosm of their family.

This is of course to be noted with a word of caution. Often the patriarchal structures within the family are far too violent for the women to feel empowered with the new role as elected women representatives. Many women feel that this is an additional burden to their already heavy burden of housework.

There is a clear inter-relatedness between the economic and political spheres. There is an assertion of agency through a sense of control of their own access to economic and other resources, which in turn redraws the lines of the political spaces. We in our case studies have witnessed cases where women representatives not only managed to ensure more access to resources within the family, but also engaged other women in the struggle to claim property rights. Anuya Kulkarni from Sherpe Grama Panchayat motivated 22 women from her village to claim joint ownership of their houses with their husbands and made efforts to transfer land in women's names at the Grama Panchayat.

Another area where the woman representative's role is significant is in trying to ensure a higher level of nutrition within the family by pressurizing ration dealers to provide women with their entitlement. Women representatives seem to have a positive influence in countering the feminization of poverty. Unequal distribution of resources within and outside the family, coupled with patriarchal social norms, results in women and children being the most vulnerable to poverty and malnutrition. Gender division of labour within the household renders ensuring enough food at home the woman's concern, and accordingly, as has been observed in the case of Maharashtra, female representatives concern themselves with ensuring nutrition for household members.

8.7 POLITICS OF RECOGNITION

The usual approach to the politics of recognition transposes what Nancy Fraser calls the 'identity model'⁸ onto the cultural and political terrain. In this view to belong to a group that is devalued by the dominant

⁸ The identity model of recognition takes off from the Hegelian idea of identity as constructed dialogically through a process of mutual recognition. For Hegel, recognition designates an ideal reciprocal relation between subjects, in which each sees the other both as its equal and also as separate from it. Recognition from others is thus essential to the development of a sense of self, and to be denied recognition or be 'misrecognized' may result in both distortion of one's relation to one's self as well as injury to one's identity.

culture is to be 'misrecognized', to suffer a distortion in one's relation to one's self. As a result of repeated encounters with the stigmatizing gaze of a culturally dominant other, the members of disesteemed groups internalize negative self-images and are prevented from developing a healthy cultural identity of their own. In this perspective, the politics of recognition would aim to repair internal self-dislocation by contesting the dominant culture's demeaning picture of the group, by members of misrecognized groups collectively producing and publicly asserting a self-affirming culture of their own to (re) gain the respect of society at large.

Fraser proposes an alternative approach to address recognition: as a question of social status. From this perspective, what is important is not group-specific identity but the status of individual group members as full partners in social interaction. Misrecognition, accordingly, then does not mean the depreciation and deformation of group identity, but social subordination in the sense of being prevented from participating as a peer in social life. To redress this injustice still requires a politics of recognition, but in Fraser's 'status model' this is no longer reduced to a question of identity, but is a politics aimed at overcoming subordination by establishing the misrecognized party as a full member of society, *capable of participating on a par with the rest* (italics mine (this is not a quote)). Unlike the identity model, Fraser's status model then understands social justice as encompassing two analytically distinct dimensions: a dimension of recognition, which concerns the effects of institutionalized meanings and norms on the relative standing of social actors; and a dimension of distribution, which involves the allocation of disposable resources to individual social actors.

If we go along with Fraser – and it is difficult not to – it is easy enough to agree that patterns of cultural value while undoubtedly significant have in fact not been the only obstacles to participatory parity for EWR's in Maharashtra. Given the (deeply stratified, rural) social context of the respondents of this study, 'maldistribution' is an old structural reality impeding parity of participation in social life. While 'equal participation' as Fraser sees it is still a distant dream for most respondents, the first few steps to its realization were taken only when actors were given – in the form of quotas to PRI in this case – necessary local resources to interact with others as peers.

But while Fraser dismisses proponents of the identity model who transpose it to the cultural and political terrain where recognition is a relation *between groups*, and will ostensibly be rectified by undoing the misrecognition of the group (in our case that of gender), her own thesis on 'recognition' too somewhere is incomplete. Can we really theorise recognition without factoring in the matter of what individuals in the 'group' in fact see it as? What if we were to ask for instance, why do women really want parity, or what do they in fact *value* as a result of that parity of participation?

Initially, many EWR's, who were stepping into the public space for the first time, found it difficult to cope. But eventually – as evident from their own narratives again – most of these women not just coped but delivered to the imperatives of their role as political administrators with initiative and vision. Yet much more than the visible, material benefits of a foot hold in the local political sphere, narratives of women EWR's throw up a deep sense of personal confidence, satisfaction and *individual fulfillment* that these women developed by factor of their entry into PRI, and thereby into the public domain.

A simple but telling instance, when these newly empowered women, especially those from the oppressed castes speak at functions and programmes in the presence of Taluka officers and village people, it is a matter of great pride and joy to them and their families. Fulma is proud that she could address as many as 250 women (not so different from her) at a 'Melava', telling them about Gram Panchayats and Grama Sabhas, and answering their questions confidently in Hindi. She believes she is good at handling people and is strategic in her dealings with them - that she speaks Hindi well and is aware of urban mores and way of life (having also lived outside the village) add to her strengths as a leader. In her own words, she had the 'spark' even before

joining the MRA. For most problems in Jamunnala village, Fulma is the first person people go to, because she is always willing to help out. In fact, Fulma is more active than the Sarpanch and often makes decisions herself. She is now a leading personality in the taluka.

Fulma also later contested elections in the Panchayat Samiti in 2007, though she did not win. When asked about her future plans, she says that she wants to work at the district level in the Zila Panchayat. Several other respondents of this study too aspired for higher 'posts' and larger spheres of influence. Jyoti plans to stand for elections at district level. Rita's wants to now be an MLA (member of legislative assembly). She says she is happy that 'she has gained so much respect' - not from the 'other' but from community, from her peer group.

Razia on the other hand continues to find deep fulfillment in writing and being read.

Do these answers perhaps have more to do with self actualization than equalization? Narratives of women EWR's in Maharashtra do seem to indicate that (access to) these multiple public spheres are also important sites for the construction/reconstruction of *individual* identities of people in oppressed groups, along pathways not always predictable by the imperatives of the group itself.

8.8 GENDERED GOVERNANCE: INTERSUBJECTIVITY TO CONSENSUS?

At one level we can see women's inclusion in PRI in the all too real, 'this-worldly' terms of Fraser's multiple publics, contesting against other publics for space and voice, and thereby facilitating enriching democratic discursiveness. At another level however it is as possible – and perhaps more tempting - to view this inclusion as a step that not just aids the creation of conditions for shared understanding, but also perhaps holds the kernels of hope of manufacturing political consensus based on trust and truth, a matter of no small relevance in our contested times.

To understand the domain assumptions of the first project (of shared understanding), perhaps there has been no one better than the Vienna born phenomenologist Alfred Schutz. The core assumption underlying Schutz's work was his thesis of 'intersubjectivity', whereby he delineated how people interacting in small groups develop a certain shared understanding. This interaction is not covered symbolically but one of physical encounter. It is this physical encounter that leads to social meanings.⁹

For Schutz, the knowing subject, and the constitutive, creative nature of the human mind was exceedingly important. Nevertheless for him intersubjectivity did not mean 'subjectivity', but in fact occurs when we are able to transcend our subjectivity and meet each other on a common platform. His intersubjectivity is in other words a shared objectivity.

It does not take much conjecture to see the implications of his theory for women's inclusion into Panchayat Raj Institutions. A quick way to look at it would possibly be that while women already have a certain shared understanding with women of their own (caste/class/ethnic) community in these micro worlds (villages), the entry of women into local councils of governance engenders increasing intersubjectivity with women of other caste-class-ethnic groups, facilitating better governance. This is indeed borne out in narratives of most EWR's this study engaged with in Maharashtra.

Take for instance the case of Anuya Kulkarni, an (upper caste) member of the Sherpe Gram Panchayat and a District Organizer of the MRA, who successfully built a Mahila Mandal of 120 women in Sherpe across all

⁹ Schutz explains this vis a vis his theory of 'appresentation': how all physical encounters in micro worlds are immediately transcended by social identification.

castes.¹⁰ Though many powerful people in the village were against it and tried to pressurize her, she continued working on it for several months, conducting meetings in each and every community. Finally about ten to fifteen women from each community were ready to join the Mahila Mandal. This was the first attempt at removing caste barriers in the village. Anuya organized the women in four or five neighbouring villages too, and built an organization called 'Sindhudurg Mahila Vikas Sanghatana'. The Sanghatana eventually succeeded in banning liquor from all those villages. Women from nearby talukas like Devgad also joined the organization, drawn by the common cause of *darubandi*, or the campaign against alcohol. The Sanghatana's numbers swelled to about 800.

Schutz's theory of intersubjectivity is in fact very instructive to understanding Anuya's attempts to break through caste barriers in her village. Anuya formed SHGs of women *across communities* to help bring them together, so that they could share thoughts and see how similar their situations are. Caste differences are strictly followed in the Konkan, with untouchability still in practice. For instance, separate cups and plates are used for Dalits in upper-caste homes. Therefore while working here, the MRA has used strategies like get-togethers and luncheons across communities, organizing meals in the Gram Panchayat, etc. On Dr Ambedkar's birth anniversary, her organization, Vikas Prabodhini, puts together lunch and a programme among Dalits and the other village women. Ten women from *different communities* of the village have been trained by Anuya Tai to work in her absence. She has also trained women from nearby villages. Despite threats from people of her own caste, Anuya and other women could take the issue of untouchability forward and managed to remove the practice at least in the public domain.

Or take the case of Dhakuli Gundu Naik, an illiterate social worker known as 'Dhakuli Mavshi' to the people of Halkarni in Kolhapur district.¹¹ Many people here - some as young as 12 and 14 - are addicted to cashew liquor. Dhakuli was successful in organizing not just Adivasi women, but Maratha women as well into a united front. It was again the increasing intersubjectivity between women of different communities in Halkarni that became the driving force behind a successful women's movement that was in turn therefore empowered to resolve a complex local issue like alcoholism in Halkarni.

While deepening woman to woman ties of understanding are borne out amply in our research (and will perhaps have a higher probability of developing in contexts elsewhere as well), our findings with women's (assisted) entry into local councils of governance in Maharashtra are in fact indicative of a promise - even if very nascent - of the possibility of (or at the least better chances of) such 'shared understanding' developing also in the larger public sphere/s (in the small world local context), in other words between men and women as well. Take for example Fulma's example again. Illiterate, tribal, and a woman, she is nevertheless the first person people - men and women - now think of when in trouble in the village. She herself says the *villagers* are now united and cooperate with her. Mayatai Sorte (of Kharola village in Latur district) too says she now has (thanks to small but significant works in the village) the people's support. She has also been able to win the confidence of different pressure groups in the village and encourage them to join hands in developmental activities.

Habermas takes Schutz's case for intersubjectivity to another level of possibilities, with his magnum opus '*The Theory of Communicative Action*' (1981). Habermas was pushed towards a focus on intersubjectivity and mutual understanding by his practical concern with the possibility of rational moral and political

¹⁰ It probably helped that Anuya's father had been of an activist bent and never believed in inequalities. As a Gramsevak, he too had met with stern disapproval of the other Brahmin families when he shared food with 'lower caste' villagers.

¹¹ Next to the Marathas, the Adivasi Naik comprise a large segment of the population in Halkarni where almost every family has dry irrigated land (about half an acre to one acre) on which they grow rice. The Naiks also work as farm laborers and brew liquor from the abundant cashew in the region.

discourse in the public sphere of modern societies. His analysis of intersubjective communication was driven by a notion of emancipation as involving the demolition of systematic obstacles to understanding. Habermas then broadens Chomsky's theory of linguistic competence into a theory of 'communicative competence', a universal pragmatics whose task would be to identify and reconstruct universal conditions of possible understanding. Acts of linguistic communication, for Habermas, presuppose four validity claims: that what we say is comprehensible, that it is true, that it is right (i.e. that there is a normative basis for the utterance), and that it is a sincere expression of the speaker's feelings. The 'background consensus' between speaker and hearer includes the fact that they implicitly make these claims and could if necessary justify them. Finally Habermas argues that we can only distinguish as a matter of principle, between a genuine and a false consensus if we presuppose the possibility of an unconstrained dialogue to which all speakers have equal access and in which only the 'force of the better argument prevails'. This is what he calls the ideal speech situation.

It is undoubtedly easier to prove the applicability of Schutz's thesis of intersubjectivity in the context of our own findings in the micro world rural context of villages in Maharashtra. Habermas's is a humanistic promise, or rather hope of truth and consensus that is much harder to exemplify in practice. Nevertheless in a politics among whose deepest concerns today are guile, deception and corruption, it is perhaps worthwhile asking whether the entry of women into local governance in Maharashtra has at all any implications for 'ideal speech conditions' as Habermas would have seen it?

Based on the narratives we have with us, perhaps to some extent yes. As Anuya Kulkarni put it (in a somewhat different context), 'If women do not bring about such change, then there will not be any difference between the methods used by men and the methods used by women.' It does look like at the start of the new revolutionary road, women engaged with women/other publics in the multiple discourses of governance are more likely to seek political discourse with a 'background consensus' of truth. Not because women are more truthful or not because they care more, but because at this moment in time, gender empowered and (as important) *inspired* by political voice – and with very little to lose - makes for a powerful opponent, capable of, and desiring of dismantling not just existing structures of gender oppression, but other parallel structures of oppression as well.

8.9 CHANGING CONDUCT OF CONDUCT/PLAY ON WOMEN'S BODIES

Foucault's approach to 'power', and as such his concept of 'governmentality' are instructive to a nuanced appreciation of how the inclusion of women into a (modern, sovereign) state can co-determine each other's (re) emergence.

But first, a quick look at Foucault's description of power. For Foucault, power 'doesn't exist'. It is not an institution, a structure, or a certain force with which certain people are endowed, but is the name given to a complex strategic relation in a given society (1981). As such, 'Every relation of force implies at each moment a relation of power (which is in a sense its momentary expression) and every power relation makes a reference, as its effect but also as its condition of possibility, to a political field of which it forms a part'.

Distinguishing himself from 'para-Marxists' like Marcuse who as he sees it give the notion of repression an exaggerated role, Foucault posits that power, far from preventing knowledge, actually produces it. For him, the phenomenon of the social body is the effect not of a consensus but of the materiality of power operating on the very bodies of individuals.

Reminiscent of Foucault's premise on how power is in fact premised not so much on processes of repression as by more insidious processes of production, in Maharashtra this study found hegemonic notions of gender relations 'produced' and in turn perpetrated by elected women representatives themselves. Pratibha as well as

Mayawati for instance observed that women are blamed for all problems related to having children, whether it is the inability to have any, or the 'misfortune' of having only girls.

But it is possibly Razia Sultana, a key respondent of this study in Maharashtra, who makes for the most telling witness to argue Foucault's case. Her history as a newly converted, young Muslim wife living with her husband's (extended) joint family is one of continuous strife and contestation. Born in a Hindu OBC family, Rajni Kisan Rao Khavle was renamed Razia Sultana when she married Munna, a Muslim. She was forced to offer *namaaz* daily, though she sometimes muttered Hindu prayers instead. Forbidden to read anything other than the Koran, she bribed her husband's assistant to bring her some of the old newspapers which Munna used to sell. She would read these secretly, hidden in the pages of the Koran. When her husband found these clippings, he was enraged. He broke her *almirah*, tore her *saris* and refused to speak with her.

Foucault's thesis was that power, after investing itself in a body, invariably finds itself exposed to counter-attack in that same body. 'Suddenly what had made power strong becomes used to attack it' (Foucault 1981). Razia's sexuality, at one level an object of analysis and concern, surveillance and control (as Foucault would have seen it) at the same time engendered a deeper intensification of her desire for/over her body. Razia was for instance asked to bathe only on Fridays after she had had intercourse with her husband. Out of sheer desperation, she would wipe herself clean with a wet towel every day. Finally for Razia, the shifting locus of domestic power was reflected in, and simultaneously consolidated by her metamorphosis from a body *for* men to a body *of* a woman. Defying prevailing norms in her community, she underwent a procedure to sterilize herself.

Razia who had always wanted to write also managed to send an article to a newspaper. When it got published, her family was horrified. They burnt the paper and accused her of having an affair with the editor of the newspaper. This incident, coupled with the daily harassment, she recounts, made her lose her mental balance temporarily.¹² She was taken to a psychiatrist who heard her out and then asked her family to leave her alone. This proved to be a turning point and Razia started writing regularly for newspapers and magazines. Since her husband could not read Marathi he was not aware of what her articles were about. But the men he met in mosques and other public places were reading them, and told him to keep his wife under control. The general feeling was that she was writing the truth, but they still could not accept it coming from a woman who was a convert.

While she is not active at the Panchayat level, Razia Tai is now vibrant in the public sphere, in many spaces that are not easily accessible to Muslim women. She has written many poems and books. She now works with the Criminal Justice System, especially looking at violence towards women of the minority community, sex workers and eunuchs. She is a member of the Maharashtra State Human Rights Commission (MSHRC). She also opened a family counseling centre related to sexual harassment and related problems.

Foucault's concept of 'governmentality' is again useful to understand the (changed) analytics of power in Maharashtra. Foucault defines government as conduct, or more precisely, as the 'conduct of conduct' – a term that ranges from governing the self to governing others. It offers a view on power beyond a perspective that centers either on consensus or on violence, links technologies of the self with technologies of domination, the constitution of the subject to the formation of the state; finally it helps to differentiate between power and domination.

To begin with let us review how Foucault's hypothesis inquires into the conditions of a consensus or the prerequisites of acceptance. Foucault underlines that power is foremost about guidance, and governing the

¹² Razia's account of her own 'madness' is compellingly reminiscent of Foucault's earlier work on madness or how the state (power) delimits who is 'mad' and how the mad will be cured (controlled)

forms of self-government, structuring and shaping the field of possible action of subjects.¹³ As a consequence the concept of governmentality represents a theoretical move beyond the problematics of consensus and will on the one hand and conquest and war on the other. It is introduced by Foucault to study the 'autonomous' individual's capacity for self control and how this is linked to forms of political rule and economic exploitation. If earlier he investigated subjectivity primarily with view to 'docile bodies' and too strongly stressed processes of discipline, now the notion of government is used to investigate relations between technologies of self and technologies of domination. 'I think that if one wants to analyse the genealogy of the subject in western civilization, he has to take into account interaction between two types of techniques – techniques of domination and techniques of the self ... the points where the technologies of domination of individuals over one another have recourse to processes by which the individual acts upon himself. And conversely he has to take into account the points where the techniques of the self are integrated into structures of coercion and domination' (Foucault 1993). The contact point, where the way individuals are driven by others is tied to the way they conduct themselves, is what is government.

Foucault differentiates between power and domination thus: 'we must distinguish the relationships of power as strategic games between liberties – strategic games that result in the fact that some people try to determine the conduct of others – and the states of domination, which are what we ordinarily call power. And, between the two, between the games of power and the states of domination, you have governmental technologies' (Foucault 1988, p.19). Foucault then identifies three types of power relations: strategic games between liberties, government and domination.

Power as *strategic games* is for Foucault a ubiquitous feature of human interaction, in so far as it signifies structuring the possible field of action of others. It can take many forms - ideological manipulation or rational argumentation, moral advice or economic exploitation.¹⁴ *Government* refers to more or less systematized, regulated and reflected modes of power (a 'technology') that go beyond the spontaneous exercise of power over others, following a specific form of reasoning, a 'rationality' that defines the *telos* of action or the adequate means to achieve it. *Domination* is a particular type of power relationship that is stable and hierarchical, fixed and difficult to reverse. Foucault reserves the term 'domination' to 'what we ordinarily call power' (1988, p. 19), referring to those asymmetrical relationships of power in which the subordinated persons have little room to maneuver because their 'margin of liberty is extremely limited. But – and this is important – states of domination are not the primary source for holding power or exploiting asymmetries, on the contrary are the *effects* of technologies of government. It is the technologies of government that account for the systematization, stabilization and regulation of power relationships that may lead to a state of domination (see Hindess 1996).

It is not hard to see how technologies of government, as Foucault would have put it led to the evident (prior to their inclusion in PRI) state of 'domination' of elected women representatives in Maharashtra (as evinced in their narratives).

Elected women representatives were not allowed by the clerks to sit in the Panchayat Samiti office. Kasa Bai recalled for instance that when she was first elected, women never went to the Panchayat and (if they

¹³ This concept of power as guidance does not exclude consensual forms or the recourse to violence but reformulates coercion or consensus as means of government among others. They are 'elements' or 'instruments' and not the 'foundation' or 'source' of power (Foucault 1982 a pp. 219-222).

¹⁴ Power is not necessarily exercised against the interests of the other part of a power relationship; nor does it signify that to 'determine the conduct of others' is intrinsically 'bad'. Moreover, power relations do not always result in a removal of liberty or options available to individuals, on the contrary power in the sense Foucault gives to the term, could result in 'empowerment' or 'responsibilisation' of subjects, forcing them to 'free' decision-making in fields of action.

did) were kept away. 'We were not allowed to sit on a chair', she remembered. Even though Geeta was an elected representative, she was asked to stand as her husband was a peon in the Gram Panchayat. Educated EWRs too felt that they were not shown any respect and were treated as if they were illiterate. Information was given only in a piecemeal fashion, and not completely or comprehensively. Interestingly, EWR's observed that while clerks wasted their time and troubled them over petty matters, higher officers treated them well.¹⁵

Women sarpanches faced significant challenges to their ability to 'perform' and deliver in the public (political) sphere as they battled (often in an unselfconscious manner) intimidating 'technical means' of alienating and eliminating women from the political process – such as the no-confidence motion for instance.¹⁶ Jyoti reported, 'Six months after I was elected, they passed a no-confidence against me but I did not let go of my seat and managed to solve the situation'. At another level, Fulma (who contested elections for Panchayat Samiti with a BJP ticket) – by virtue of the fact that she was a woman whose body/chastity/honour was already pre-constructed as important/fragile/vulnerable – was abused by a former sarpanch in front of the village and threatened that she would be stripped and beaten. (The ex sarpanch, her opponent from a different political party enjoyed was influential in the village¹⁷ and had offered to pay her Rs 1,50,000/- to join hands with him. Fulma had refused his offer, and therefore the threat.) Nevertheless Fulma's new found location of strength as an empowered political representative had brought into play a hitherto unavailable (and quite clearly unexpected) dimension to the local relations of power, which had the potential to battle older structures of oppression. Fulma asked Kalpana Khirale, the local DO of the MRA (who was in Mumbai then) to return and take action. Athawle was arrested three days after that incident.

Women's narratives in Maharashtra also indicate how the (pre existing) heavily gendered conduct of conduct tilts the scales against the likelihood of women EWR's being effective at the outset. Jyoti points out how while a male sarpanch drinks tea with the clerk at a nearby shop and gets his work done, women cannot (or are not sanctioned to) talk 'freely' and are awkward. Pre existing technologies of government that place a high premium on female fidelity (as equivalent of virtue) also ensure that women will perforce be more vulnerable to gossip, and 'character' slander. Rinku pointed out that if she were to attend a meeting with a man, riding pillion on his bike, people would say they were having an inappropriate relationship and would malign her character. Pratibha pointed out that men enjoy a certain ease in these matters, and double standards do exist in how society perceives men and women at work. Men can, for instance, visit an official as many times as needed, and sit in their offices for long stretches of time. However, if a woman were to visit a place or an official repeatedly, the validity of her visits would be questioned. There are a different set of rules for men: they are never stopped from doing anything, and do not have to think twice before they go anywhere with anyone.¹⁸ Sangeeta added that suspecting the character of a woman at work is more the norm than the exception. Her visits to the village school to check whether the teachers are reporting to duty on time is misinterpreted, and people wonder why she was going there so often.

¹⁵ The ostensible paradox is perhaps explainable when one remembers that higher officers are hardly ever real stakeholders in the highly gendered local *social* sphere. So while the changed (patriarchal) 'conduct of conduct' in local politics in Maharashtra would have had implications on the stakes held by junior local staff, the outsiders (senior babus) were anyway never pretenders to the throne.

¹⁶ Attempts to run the political process thus are again reminiscent of Foucault's assessment of government as 'regulation of conduct by the more or less rational application of the appropriate technical means' (Hindess 1996, p. 106)

¹⁷ The former sarpanch's hold on the village was consolidated not in the least by the illiteracy of the tribal people, who were out of the reach of the government and movements like the MRA.

¹⁸ Yet at another level men are perhaps as bound by this gendered conduct of conduct. As Jyoti pointed out, if her husband accompanied her on a visit to an office, a function, the Panchayat Samiti or the Zila Panchayat, people taunted him, suggesting that he never left her side.

Again the history of governmentality, or the conduct of conduct is reflected in the gendered notions of 'women's work' in the villages worked in Maharashtra. To begin with, if women went out on work, it was seen as a dereliction of 'duties' at home. Jyoti observed for example that while a male sarpanch simply has to put on his clothes and step out of the house to attend meetings, a woman (sarpanch) has to first complete her household chores and responsibilities before she leaves. The narratives of newly empowered women entrants into the PRI however again shows up evidence that their entry into the corridors of formal state power has also resulted in clear visible changes in the conduct of conduct in the domestic sphere. For those like Rita, it entailed a new consciousness and therefore reorganisation of the very terms of 'women's work'. 'I was about to leave for a seminar when my husband asked me to get his bath ready. I replied that I was no longer the older version of myself. I cannot forget the look on his face.'

8.10 COLLECTIVE ACTIONS AS POLITICAL MOBILIZATION

Collective action has a two-way effect on political mobilization. On the one hand, it helps mobilize the collective, and on the other hand, the woman representative, having realized that she has mass support, deals with patriarchal, caste and class structures better. Also there remains a continuous pressure on the women to perform. Revathi Narayan argues that this is the collective's realization of their political rights in the most fundamental sense, of being able to question and demand credibility of their elected representatives.

An example of successful collective action is the one undertaken by Mayadevi Sorte, a Dalit landless labourer from Kharola Village, to protest against caste discrimination in her village (see Mayadevi Sorte's narrative for details). Collective actions further helped women in governance to garner support and claim legitimacy. A lot of the achievements of the women representatives have been primarily because of the collective mobilization that they ensured. Anuya Tai achieved a reasonable amount of success in providing land in the names of female agricultural labourers because she succeeded in mobilizing 2500 women in a morcha in the year 2000, demanding land rights for them. Similarly, one of Jyoti Meshram's (ex-Sarpanch from Kotgal Village) greatest successes was in forming women's collectives and Self Help Groups. Rita Sukhdeve had organized a collection of Rs 10,000/- in her Panchayat through the collective action of banning alcohol. Further, she organized women and men of the village to seize and set fire to liquor from liquor shops.

8.11 NEGOTIATING GENDERED SPACES WITHIN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS—SYSTEMIC AND INSTITUTIONAL OBSTACLES

The journeys that the women political activists go through depict the sort of patriarchal biases that they face in the process of becoming active citizens. Andro-centricity of the political system is reflected in the deep rooted and powerful ideological and logistical weapons used against women in the process of becoming active citizens. Anuya Kulkarni, not only faced heavy opposition from within her family (including being blamed for her brother-in-law's mental illness), but she also realized the heavy biases in the working of the Panchayat against women representatives. The timing of Panchayat meetings, their locations, the dealing with financial matters are all heavily controlled by male members of Panchayats. Women were kept out of these 'male' domains. The opposition passed a resolution against Jyoti Tai that prevented her from taking up financial matters. In her first meeting as EWR, Maya Tai was confronted with the fact that all her other EWR colleagues were absent, while their husbands attended in their place. A systemic obstruction to the participation of women in the political process reflects the ideological and hierarchical division of labour within the family, whereby women are primarily responsible for domestic work.

The participation of women in Grama Sabhas, as many of these women testify, is generally low, and even when there are women present, they hardly speak. To ensure more accessible political space for the women in the village, Anuya Tai ensured a working Mahila Grama Sabha and changed its timing to a more convenient

one for women. Other female-only spaces were also created for a greater mobilization of women, like that of a Haldi Kumkum ceremony that Anuya Tai organized for women in the village.

8.12 NEGOTIATING CASTEIST AND SEXIST ABUSE

The state and hegemonic groups' reaction against the feminization of polity can take violent forms. Casteist and sexist physical and verbal abuse are frequently used by upper caste men as modes to try and control the women's movements and political ambitions. Bhanwri Devi's is an example. A worker in the Women Development Programme in Rajasthan, Bhanwri Devi, was gang raped by the dominant Gujjar men in her village as she had taken a strong political stand against child marriage. Women in the political process of achieving full citizenship invite backlash from families, upper caste men, and the State, as they challenge the existing regressive and hegemonic structures. The way women deal with these abuses proves to be an important political statement which is significant for their establishment as credible political figures.

Casteist and sexist abuses come in various forms. They can range from simply being exclusionary like in the case of Jyoti Tai, who even after being elected Sarpanch, was not included in ceremonies that were generally performed by the Sarpanch. Traditionally, the festival of 'bail-pola' (when the bull that tills the farm is decorated and worshipped) is celebrated as a public festival in Kotgal. An aarti thali from the Sarpanch's house is brought to mark the beginning of the festival. Significantly, in the five years that Jyoti Tai was the Sarpanch, not once was the aarti thali brought from her house. She was merely invited as a guest for the function.

Fulma Belsare was offered a bribe to refrain from standing for the post of Sarpanch. When she refused to climb down, she was verbally abused in front of the village and threatened with sexist violence. These threats can be dealt in the open, in the public space, and also, more surreptitiously within the home. For example, in their struggle to end alcoholism, Dhakuli Maushi and other women from her village not only faced the threat of abuse by the local liquor mafia and politicians, but also faced domestic violence from men at home who were agitated by their wives' move to control their alcoholism.

Use of sexist and casteist language is often a patriarchal mode of control on women. Ratnamala Sudesh Vaidya reported that when she wanted the minutes of each meeting to be photocopied and given to each member for future reference, a man asked, "And where will the money come for this? Are you going to sleep around for it?" Ratna Tai said that she was willing to use her meeting-bhatta (money that Grama Panchayat members are paid for attending meetings) to photocopy the minutes for herself. In another case, the Sarpanch of her Panchayat had used excessively casteist language to stall her efforts at stopping corruption.

Caste, class and gender contradictions don't end with the women being elected as representatives. A landless labourer can still not afford to antagonize the landlord, and for women, often the responsibilities of being elected representatives are an added burden to their already heavy domestic work load. Control over modes of violence, and the violent State apparatus is an easy weapon for hegemonic groups because they steal control of the modes of livelihood and living of the lower-caste, landless agricultural labourers. However, the realization of the power and responsibility of the women in governance in many cases has provided the women with the confidence and assurance to counter such casteist violence. Ratnamala Tai was able to counter caste abuse hurled at her by the Sarpanch and had the confidence to file a complaint against him under the Prevention of Atrocity Act. In another incident, Jyoti Tai's fellow villagers injured her husband while trying to prevent her from hoisting the national flag since she was a Dalit woman Sarpanch. However, Jyoti Tai was not intimidated by this act of violence and did hoist the flag, in an act of subversion against dominant patriarchal forces.

A more inclusive and democratic governance structure enables history to be re-read through the lenses of subaltern. The negotiation of everyday casteist and sexist violence enables them to question the existing history and in turn, facilitates the subaltern to write their historiographs in negotiation of the powerful voices against them. The subaltern body is a site of vulnerability and marginalization. Their struggle to rewrite history is through their claims to political spaces. The role of governance in facilitating that can be, if not totally, then at least partially achieved through their proportional representation in governance.

8.13 CONCLUSION

Governance is presumed to be gender neutral. But in fact, the discourses, procedures, structures and functions of governance remain heavily skewed in favour of men in general. This unequal sharing of power leads to an unequal sharing of resources—time, income and property—between men and women. As discussed before, women at the grassroots level politics in Maharashtra did make a dent in the hegemonic power structures of the socially stratified structures of the village, and challenged the invisibility of women in political and public spaces. But the study also argues that Panchayats replicate the rural power structures. The deeply embedded patterns of dominance and the inequalities on women's lives are mediated by their class and caste positions. Interestingly EWRs had bitter experiences of being labelled 'immoral' or 'non-womanly' when they crossed the thresholds designed to curtail them. They were called 'inadequate' when they were well within the boundaries of patriarchal societies.

To quote Archana Jatkar, a Sarpanch: "I wonder why they insisted on humiliating me in spite of a fact that I was a responsible Sarpanch. Was it because I am a woman? Wasn't a woman capable of this kind of work?" This double gaze is problematic when one has to engage with the governance and family structures in both 'public and private' domains in day-to-day engagements. Despite these hurdles, one cannot ignore the positive changes in the sociopolitical lives of EWRs, where some of them are playing meaningful roles in the current PRIs and their process of self-responsibilization. Their experiences of leadership and collective action need to be channelized to form a political resistance.

But at the same time, it is equally important to mention that most often the uncritical use of the term 'empowerment' in development discourses disguises a problematic concept. Power relationships reproduce themselves, regardless of how participatory or democratic a setting is, unless a conscious, sustained effort is undertaken to alter them. This becomes more relevant in the case of Elected Women Representatives and their participation in the process of democratic decentralization. There is an important caveat to be entered between representation and participation, for the former is necessarily the first, but by no means a sufficient guarantee for the latter. Authentic participation of women in the decision-making bodies is a long term and complex process. The ubiquity of historically entrenched patriarchal practices is the most formidable social constraint on women's participation.

The experiences of the Peoples' Planning Campaign (PPC) in Kerala—the largest of its kind in the local democratic decentralization process in India—showed that one can in no way argue that the PPC completely changed the internalized structures of patriarchal subjugation and the invisibility of women. Challenges and problems highlighted by various studies (Chatukulma and John, 2000, Vijayan and Sandhya, 2004, Radha and Roy Chowdhary, 2002) need to be read along with the successes scored by at least some EWRs in Maharashtra, both as participants in local governance and as representatives

articulating the interests of women. Patriarchy is not overturned or even significantly eroded, overnight. But the entry of women into public spaces via grassroots institutions means that they are leaving behind the private and circumscribed spaces of the home. That they are—to an extent at least—neglecting the question of ‘...Who will make the chapattis’ (Datta, 1998) is an important indicator of change. Many EWRs shared the feeling of an enhanced sense of social and personal status within and outside the family. While the fact that the EWRs are now invited to weddings in upper caste/class families and that their men were willing to share household responsibilities, might seem trivial at the level of macro analysis, but at the micro level, it becomes a significant gain. (B Manjula, 2008) A dialectic view of truth must include the notion that there are always emerging possibilities that are not yet visible. A new trend of micro politics is emerging as part of this engendering process in rural Maharashtra. This could be the seed of a new democratic formulation.

