

Capable Subjects: Power and Politics in Eastern India

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ABSTRACT

The principal aim of this thesis is to elaborate a politicized reading of Amartya Sen's Capability Approach. It explores how capabilities are augmented through the forging of contentious political subjectivities. In it, I build on the criticism that Sen's framework can be more sensitive to questions of power and politics. Against some of his critics, however, I argue that its 'politicization' must focus analytical attention on politics as the struggle to produce subjects rather than limiting its understanding to negotiations over authority, resources and allocations. I draw on quantitative and qualitative analysis of ethnographic data from rural eastern India to substantiate my argument.

The first two chapters outline the contours of the debates and introduce the social, economic and political life of the study localities. Each of the four subsequent chapters elucidates the manner in which the contentious processes through which political subjectivity are forged augments capabilities. In Chapter 3 I advance the case that any discussion on capabilities needs to analyze how subjects interrogate the relations of domination and subordination which they have hitherto been compelled to inhabit. Based on an analysis of the contentions spawned by the Indian Government's National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, I point to how the notion of cooperative conflict is helpful in understanding these processes. In Chapter 4, I draw attention to the analytic importance that needs to be accorded to 'voice' in order to understand how subjects contest and reconstitute these relationships: I base my analysis on the claims made on elected representatives by different groups of people in respect to 'poverty cards'. This emphasis leads in Chapter 5 to an investigation of the ways in which agonistic exchanges in public spaces augments capabilities: this I do through an examination of two specific disputes involving a variety of local actors. I develop these insights further in Chapter 6 to show how our understanding of the processes through which capabilities may be enhanced gains analytically from an analysis of the manner in which subjects construct their identities. Chapter 7 concludes.

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GLOSSARY

<i>Aadmi</i>	Hindi/ Maithili: Person (Literally: man)
<i>Adibasi</i>	Bangla: tribal/ indigenous
<i>Ajuktipurna</i>	Bangla: unreasonable
<i>Aman</i>	Bangla: See Kharief
<i>Amin</i>	An official of the land revenue department
<i>Anyay</i>	Hindi/ Maithili/ Bangla: Injustice
<i>Ashphorda</i>	Bangla: Audacity
<i>Atyachaar</i>	Hindi/ Maithili/ Bangla: Oppression
<i>Babhan</i>	Maithili/ Thaiti: See Brahman
<i>Babu</i>	Hindi/ Maithili/ Bangla: Gentleman
Backward caste	Politically used to describe the <i>shudra</i> caste groups (classified as OBC/ EBC)- see below.
Badiya	See Shershabadiya
<i>Baithak</i>	Bangla: Informal decision-making forum where contentious issues and disputes are sought to be resolved through <i>bichar</i> (see ‘ <i>bichar</i> ’) and, eventually, consensus
<i>Bargadar</i>	Bangla: sharecropper
<i>Bataidar</i>	Hindi/ Maithili: sharecropper
<i>Bichaulia</i>	Hindi/ Maithili/ Thaiti for broker, someone who gets a job done, usually charging a small commission
<i>Bichar</i>	Bangla: Reasoned deliberation
<i>Boro</i>	See Rabi
Brahman	A General Caste group, traditionally associated with priestly functions. At the apex of the ritual hierarchy
<i>Bustee</i>	Hindi/Maithili/ Thaiti: human settlement
Caste Hindu	Literally: of a caste. Traditionally thought to include Brahmans, Rajputs, Kayasths and Shudras. Excludes ‘untouchables’.
Chamar	A Scheduled Caste group, traditionally associated with leather work. Categorized as Mahadalit in Bihar
<i>Cha</i>	Maithili/ Thaiti: Uncle
<i>Chai</i>	Hot beverage, comprising tea leaves, milk, sugar and local herbs
<i>Chengras</i>	Bangla dialect: Young boys, “chap”
<i>Da</i>	Bangla: elder brother/ a term of endearment for men
<i>Dabang</i>	Hindi/ Mathili: Dominant
<i>Dalal</i>	Bangla for broker, someone who gets a job done, usually charging a small commission
<i>Dalit</i>	(Literally: broken people) Marathi: oppressed. Now in use all over India to describe ex-‘untouchables’
<i>Dashavali</i>	Literally: Committee of Ten. Unelected deliberative body among the Desiyas in Maldah
<i>Dayad</i>	Maithili/ Thaiti: clan
<i>Desiya</i>	Self-description of the Rajbansi caste in north-central Bengal, literally “of this country”
<i>Devi</i>	Literally: Goddess. Suffixed with names of women to show

	respect
<i>Devta</i>	God/ male deity
<i>Dharna</i>	Sit-in
<i>Dom</i>	A Scheduled Caste Group, associated with basket-weaving, drummers in village festivals and sometimes work at cremation grounds. Classified as Mahadalit in Bihar
<i>Doya</i>	Bangla: pity, mercy
<i>Dusadh</i>	A Scheduled Caste group, widely believed to have cornered most of the benefits from affirmative action. Usually carry the surname Paswan
Extremely Backward Caste	EBC: A sub-classification intended to cover the so-called 'lower Sudras', those at the bottom of the 'caste' Hindu heap. Considered ritually superior to the so-called 'untouchables' and not to be confused with them
<i>Fair Price Shop</i>	Retail outlet through which the supplies of the Public Distribution System is distributed
<i>Faisla</i>	Decision
<i>Gangot</i>	A caste listed as Most Backward Caste. Claimed to have descended from the river Ganga
<i>Ganja</i>	Cannabis
<i>Gaon</i>	Village
<i>Garib/ Gorib</i>	Hindi/ Maithili/ Thaithi/ Bangla: Poor
General Caste	Caste groups not classified for protective discrimination or affirmative action. Usually an official term to refer to the so-called 'high' castes
<i>Gherao</i>	A tactic of protest to surround (gher) those against who the protest is organized and heckle him or her
<i>Goondas</i>	Henchmen
<i>Gorib manush</i>	Poor man
<i>Guru</i>	Teacher
<i>Haat</i>	Marketplace
High caste	Also sometimes called 'upper' caste or General caste. The caste groups that are supposedly 'pure'. Usually refers to Brahmans, Rajput and Kayasth in the study localities, although the specifics vary across the country.
Indira Awas Yojana	Subsidised Housing Scheme in rural India
<i>Izzat</i>	Hindi/ Urdu/ Maithili: Honor
<i>Jamindar</i>	Literally: Landholders. In Bihar & West Bengal, the term is usually associated to describe the absentee landlord and his sub-feudaries created by the Permanent Settlement, 1793
<i>Janata</i>	Hindi/ Bangla: Populace
<i>Jati</i>	Sub-caste. The 'real' unit around which social life in villages have historically supposed to have been organized
<i>Ji</i>	Hindi: Form of respect
<i>Juktipurna</i>	Bangla: reasonable
<i>Kaka</i>	Bangla: Uncle

<i>Karma</i>	Sanskrit: (Literally: deeds) In Hindu cosmology, a person's karma allegedly determines which caste s/he is born into in the next life. Very few of my respondents (only those of the 'high' castes took this notion seriously).
<i>Kayasth</i>	A General Caste group, with ambiguous origins and, consequently, low ritual status but high social and economic status
Kevat	Traditionally boatmen. Listed as Most Backward Caste, ritually inferior to Gangot
<i>Kharief</i>	Urdu: the rainfed cropping season. The crop is sown during the monsoon (July/ August) and harvested in the winter (November/ December)
<i>Khetmajoor</i>	Agricultural laborer
<i>Khomota</i>	Bangla: power/ influence/ ability
<i>Khomotaheen</i>	Bangla: Powerless
<i>Khomotashali</i>	Bangla: Powerful
<i>Kotha</i>	Bangla: Talk
<i>Krishak</i>	Cultivator
Kunjra	A green-grocer caste among Muslims. Recognized in Bihar as Other Backward Class
<i>Lathait</i>	Henchman/ Literally: armed with <i>lathis</i> (sticks)
<i>Machan</i>	A covered bamboo platform built by home-owners to entertain guests. Poorer households or communities often have community <i>machans</i> , where people can gather to chat. Also used as a safety platform up on trees by hunters.
Mahadalit	A sub-category designed by the Bihar State Government to target assistance to the 'lower' Scheduled Castes. Literally ' <i>dalitest</i> ' of the dalit (See 'dalit'). Political exigencies have, however, led to all Scheduled Caste groups save the Dusadh being classified as Mahadalit.
<i>Majhi Haraam</i>	'Traditional' Headman of the Santhal/ Saotal community
<i>Modol/</i>	Caste/ community headman. Could refer to community headman
<i>Morol/Maral</i>	as well as village headman
Most Backward Caste	See EBC
Mukhya	Head of the Gram Panchayat in Bihar
Musahar	A Scheduled Caste group believed to have been so poor that they survived by consuming the meat of rodents. Community leaders argue that this was a 'myth' perpetuated by the higher castes. No doubt the Musahars were poor, but the name referred to the practice among them to dig out the burrows of rodents, and consume the foodgrain (aahar) stocked by rodents, not the rodents (musa) themselves
<i>Nagrik</i>	Citizen
<i>Neta</i>	Hindi/ Bangla/ Thaithi: Political leader
<i>Nyayasangat</i>	Hindi/ Maithili: Just
<i>Nyayjyo</i>	Bangla: Just

Other Backward Class	OBC: A sub-classification intended to cover the so-called 'upper Sudras', predominantly farmers with small and medium-sized landholdings. Thought to have been the primary beneficiaries of the limited land reforms in the country, including Bihar. For historical reasons, the population of OBCs in West Bengal has been very low for them to emerge as an electoral bloc in the politics of the State
<i>Padas</i>	Bangla: Neighborhoods
Panchayat	The basic unit of decentralized governance in India. Derived from, but empirically and conceptually distinct from the panchayati.
<i>Panchayati</i>	Literally: committee of five. Informal deliberative mechanism used in several villages across the country, including Bihar. Panchayatis are thought to be valuable because they can forge consensus on contentious issues
<i>Pandit</i>	Hindi/ Bangla: priest. Sometimes used as a derogatory term to refer to the so-called 'high castes'
Pradhan	Head of the Gram Panchayat in West Bengal
<i>Pratishtha</i>	Hindi/ Maithili: Honor
<i>Pyraveekar</i>	Hyderabadi Urdu: broker/ fixer
<i>Qanoon</i>	Hindi/ Urdu/ Maithili: law. The more popular term for what is called 'neeti' in Sanskrit
<i>Rabi</i>	The summer crop: Sown in November to February and harvesting time is March to June
<i>Rajput</i>	A General caste, high ritual and social status coupled with economic dominance
<i>Rishi</i>	Literally, sage. Family name adopted by Musahars, who now claim they are descendants of the sage Gautam
Rozgar Sevak	A quasi-government employee responsible for the implementation of the NREGS
Rupee (₹)	Indian currency. ₹ 1= ₹80. In terms of PPP, US\$ 1= ₹ 17.2
<i>Sahajogita</i>	Bangla: Cooperation
<i>Sahib</i>	Hindi/ Urdu/ Maithili: Form of respect
<i>Santal/ Santhal/ Saotal</i>	A Scheduled Tribe group
<i>Samman</i>	Bangla/ Hindi: Honor
<i>Sardar</i>	Hindi/ Bangla: chieftain
<i>Sarkar</i>	Government. Can refer to either the state or other bodies or institutions (such as local landlord) who governs the population
Sarpanch	Head of the Nyaya Panchayat
Scheduled Caste	The official classification accorded by the Indian Government to the so-called 'untouchable' castes in order to identify those groups eligible for protective discrimination and affirmative action
Scheduled Tribe	The official classification accorded by the Indian Government to the so-called 'indigenous' tribal in order to identify those groups eligible for protective discrimination and affirmative action
<i>Shamaj</i>	Bangla: Social organization of Muslims

Sheikh	A Muslim caste, who claim descent from Arab settlers. Recognized as General Caste
Shershabadias	A Muslim caste, believed to be descendants of the Afghan troops of the north Indian ruler Sher Shah Suri. Despised by other Muslims as ‘dirty’ and ‘filthy’.
<i>Shotheek</i>	Bangla: Correct, fair
<i>Shudra</i>	Ritually impure (but not ‘untouchable’) castes. Primarily agriculturalists.
<i>Sikhmidar</i>	A person eligible to the <i>produce</i> from land that s/he cultivates.
<i>Tola</i>	Hamlet
<i>Tyag</i>	Sacrifice
Untouchable	Ritually polluting caste, whose touch was alleged to be polluting. Categorized by post-colonial Indian Government as Scheduled Caste
<i>Upamukhya</i>	Deputy Mukhya
<i>Upapradhan</i>	Deputy Pradhan
<i>Upasarpnach</i>	Deputy Sarpanch
<i>Upkar</i>	Favor
Upper caste	See ‘high caste’
<i>Vajeb</i>	Hindi/ Urdu/ Maithili: morally appropriate/ in consonance with justice
<i>Ward</i>	Administrative unit subsidiary to Panchayat
Ward Member	Elected representative of the Ward
Yadav	An OBC caste group

ACRONYMS

BDO	Block Development Officer
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BPL	Below Poverty Line
CPI(M)	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
CPI (ML-L)	Communist Party of India (Marxist Leninist - Liberation)
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Scheme
JD(U)	Janata Dal (United)
MBC	Extremely Backward Class
MDR	Major District Road
MPI	Mult-dimensional Poverty Index
NDA	National Democratic Alliance
NREGA	National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
NREGS	National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme
OBC	Other Backward Class
OPHI	Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative
PDS	Public Distribution System
RJD	Rashtriya Janata Dal
TMC	Trinamul Congress
UPA	United Progressive Alliance
VEC	Village Education Committee

CHAPTER 1

CAPABILITIES AND DEMOCRACY

All men (sic) are philosophers

Antonio Gramsci, 1996: 323

The question to ask ... is whether the analysis of justice must be so confined to getting the basic institutions and general rules right? Should we also have to examine what emerges in the society, including the kind of lives that people can actually lead, given the institutions and rules, but also other influences, including behaviour that would inescapably affect human lives?

Amartya Sen, 2009: 10

1. INTRODUCTION

This thesis investigates how Amartya Sen's Capability Approach may be politicised. It does this through an exploration of the manner in which the forging of contentious political subjectivities enhances capabilities. The study is motivated by an analytical engagement with the current literature and the preliminary formulations that have been made in favour of developing a politicised account of capabilities. It responds to calls by several scholars, not least by Amartya Sen himself, to develop such accounts based on people's lived experiences. Drawing on the quantitative and qualitative analysis of ethnographic data, it examines the contentious processes through which these subjectivities are forged. Thereby, I make a theoretical claim about how the realisation of capabilities might be linked with the ways in which the political subject is constructed through the practice of contentious politics.

In elucidating his view on what features analysts should concentrate on while assessing states of affairs in the world, a given society or of individuals, Amartya Sen draws attention to a person's capability to be and do things he or she values and has reason to value (Sen, 1985; Sen, 1992; Sen, 1999; Sen, 2002; and Sen, 2009). As he helpfully clarifies, the analysis of capabilities necessitates a focus on the freedom that individuals actually have. Thus, the concept of capabilities links closely with the aspect of freedom that has to do with advancing substantive opportunities. He specifically draws attention to its two dimensions: 1). Well-being freedoms, reflecting the freedom to advance one's well-being; and 2). Agency freedoms, concerned with the freedom to advance the goals and values a person has reason to advance (Sen, 2009: 287-9).

Critics have assailed Sen for not paying enough analytical attention to accounts of power and politics (Corbridge, 2002; Deneulin, 2011; Evans, 2002; Feldman, 2010; Ibrahim, 2011; and Stewart and Deneulin, 2002). These criticisms have enabled scholars working on capabilities, including Sen himself, to specify conceptual boundaries and analytical positions. Indeed, the work of these critics has enabled a focus on the institutional and structural dimensions of politics and power that contributes to extending or inhibiting substantive opportunities. Thus, authors highlight the impact of competition among different interest groups over resources, authority and power on individual or collective capabilities (Stewart, 2005, for analysis of identity-based groups; Deneulin, 2005, for a discussion on Costa Rica; Heller, 1999, for a description of the Indian State of Kerala), and the role of global structures where multinational corporations occupy a hegemonic position in shaping consumerist values among the general populace that further serves to bolster the existing system (Evans, 2002).

Together, the insights provided by these scholars as well as Sen's appreciative responses have contributed to the gradual politicisation of the Capability Approach. In this thesis, I intend to examine and investigate this further. I contend that the institutional and structural accounts of the politics of capabilities may be complemented by an account of the forging of the political subject (Rancière, 2010; Laclau, 2005; and Mouffe, 2000), and concomitant contentions. I build on the present institutionalist and structuralist interpretation of politics as it is linked with discussions on capabilities. Accordingly, I seek to complement this understanding by drawing analytic attention to the forging of political subjectivities. I hope to contribute to existing efforts to develop a politicised account of capabilities, to extend its scope and to embrace a more specific theorisation of capabilities and politics, especially its more contentious varieties.

In the next section (Section 2), I outline theoretical perspectives and examine analytical claims that emphasise the link between capabilities and politics. In particular, I investigate the relational spaces wherein capabilities should be analysed, especially the manner in which relations considered to be dominating are negotiated; the ways in which citizens make their voice heard; and the processes through which political identities are forged. In Section 3, based on the examination of analytical claims, I elaborate on the theoretical gaps and suggest ways of bridging them. In Section 4, I outline the research questions as these emerge from a critical evaluation of the literature. Sen calls for the construction of 'comprehensive' accounts of the 'realisation-focussed' perspective of justice, which entail *inter alia* a shift in focus beyond institutions to actually existing social relations. Accordingly, any study which seeks to make a contribution to how political subjectivities contribute (or not) to

expanding capabilities in the way I have identified earlier, needs to take into account the everyday social relations lived by people. One way to do this, the one I adopt in this study, is through ethnographic work. I conclude, in Section 5, with a discussion of the methodology of collecting and analysing data, and the selection of the ethnographic study sites.

2. THE ANALYTICAL PROBLEM

Two perceptions emerge while discussing the expansion of capabilities: one is evaluative, the other prospective (Alkire, 2008b: 30). An evaluative emphasis allows scholars to assess and compare states of affairs between different countries, societies and individuals. A prospective view, on the other hand, necessitates a consideration of the policies and actions that contribute to the generation and/ or expansion of capabilities. Such a perspective needs scholars to analyse the pathways through which substantive freedoms are expanded. This perspective informs the present discussion. In this section, I will first outline the two major theoretical gaps in the literature. I will then examine four analytical lacunae that one encounters while developing a ‘politicised’ account of capabilities. I conclude this section with an outline of my own conceptual and analytical proposal.

The theoretical literature provides us with textured insights into these pathways. An important strand in this literature emphasises the subjective and inter-subjective dimensions of capabilities (Alkire, 2002; Bohman, 1997; Corbridge, 2002; Crocker, 2008; Deneulin and McGregor, 2010; Evans, 2002; Stewart, 2005; and Stewart and Deneulin, 2002). Several of these authors have critiqued Sen for not *analytically* invigorating his notion of ‘capabilities’ with an account of power and politics (Corbridge, 2002; Deneulin, 2011; Feldman, 2010; Stewart and Deneulin,

2002). Their argument is often based on empirical work (including Sen's own) suggesting that the effective freedom to enjoy functionings (freedoms which Sen refers to as capabilities) are enhanced not as a result of superior public reasoning as Sen seems to hold, but rather through institutional and popular political action. In these accounts, Sen's ideas about what constitutes a good life appear to be uncritically accepted: the disagreement emerges on the means to achieve this good life.

A review of the literature reveals two theoretical gaps in the evolving discussions. One such, deriving from the above, relates to the apparently depoliticised manner in which capabilities have been conceptualised in Sen's work. The second, advanced tentatively by Thompson (2010), pertains to the institutional and structural focus which circumscribes the understanding of politics among Sen's critics. My contention is the following: I agree with several of Sen's critics that he could pay more analytical attention to the political implications of his own empirical evidence. Against some proposals of these critics, however, I argue that such 'politicisation' needs to engage with an account of the forging of the 'political subject' and the contentions that attend to these processes. In turn, this leads us to ask searching questions about what constitutes a good life. I will return to these theoretical themes in Section 3. In the rest of this section, I focus my attention on the subjective dimension of politics rather than a limited understanding of politics as control over specific institutions or successful cornering of resources (though I do not undermine their absolute importance). This follows my understanding of power as being about exercising domination rather than about securing positions of office and authority. In subsequent chapters of this thesis, I will draw on ethnographic work to substantiate these analytical connections.

2.1. The nature of human life

At the core of the discussions on capabilities- encapsulated in what has often been called the Capability Approach- lies a concern with the substantive freedom of individuals to achieve inter-related ‘functioning’ (Sen, 1992: 40)- i.e. being and doing what they value (Sen, 1985b: 197; Sen, 1999b: 75) and have reason to value (Sen, 1992: 5): in his more recent works, he has tended to highlight the latter aspect more (Sen, 2002: 5; Sen, 2009: 289). An individual’s capability set refers to the opportunities available to her to achieve her well-being, as well as realising different aspects of the self and societal goals (Sen, 2002: 37).

2.1.1. *Individuals, groups, structures or relations?*

Sen considers these substantive opportunity freedoms as important intrinsically, and not only to the extent that they yield utility (Sen, 1992: 43). Given the salience of freedom, it should be noted that the Capability Approach assesses the chosen, or achieved, combination of functioning¹ *and* the freedom of counterfactual choice available to an individual (Sen, 1992: 51). Any account of the latter, which he also calls ‘comprehensive opportunities’ (Sen, 2009, based on Sen, 1997), has to take into account the processes through which individuals realised a specific combination of functionings rather than the others available to them.

The framework of the Capability Approach may be used to assess societal institutional arrangements in terms of whether these enhance the ‘opportunity aspect’ of freedom. This ‘opportunity aspect’ for an individual involves them not only choosing one option over another, but also the extent to which they have the

¹ Sen describes them technically as vector of functionings (Sen, 1985: 198). Elsewhere, he refers to them as culmination outcomes (concerns with ‘ends’). These outcomes differ from the comprehensive outcomes (‘means *and* ends’) that are his larger analytical concern.

opportunity to develop their preferences and meta-preferences, based on reasoned scrutiny and/or socialisation (Sen, 2002: 514, 590). This ‘preference-dependence’ of opportunity freedoms needs to be underscored, since far too often merely the number of alternatives available to an individual is considered to be an indicator of available opportunities.

Against charges of Sen focusing too heavily on individual freedoms (Corbridge, 2002; Evans, 2002 and Stewart and Deneulin, 2002), Robeyns argues that the Capability Approach embraces ethical individualism: individuals are the ultimate units of moral concern, and structures and institutions are evaluated “*in virtue of* the causal importance that they have for individuals’ well-being” (Robeyns, 2008: 90). Indeed, Sen himself has conceded that the focus on individuals does not preclude the social influences that inevitably shape their values and choices. He admits that these are socially-dependent individual capabilities (Sen, 2002) and concedes that “(i)n valuing a person’s ability to take part in the life of society, there is an implicit valuation of the life of the society itself, and that is an important enough aspect of the capability perspective” (Sen, 2009: 246).

This clarification is welcome and one on which I hope to build. However, it serves little to specify how the capabilities of those inhabiting different, if not unequal, social domains are to be assessed. His critics remain, somewhat justifiably in my view, unconvinced with these concessions. Stewart (2005) calls for an appreciation of ‘group capabilities’ because of the instrumental and intrinsic importance of groups in the lives of individuals. Furthermore, given the influence of groups on shaping individual values and choices, she contends that the enjoyment of capabilities is contingent upon membership of and participation in what are often ‘ascribed’ groups. Her analysis of horizontal inequalities shows how groups form the

basis on which individuals are included or excluded from national and social life (Stewart, 2003). Based on this analysis, she suggests that group capabilities are an analytically important category because they are a direct source of well-being (or ill-being), provide a mechanism for the enhancement (or constriction) of individual capabilities, and influence the preferences, values and meanings that their members form.

Stewart's focus on groups is an important corrective to an analysis of capabilities at the individual level which does not devote sufficient attention to capabilities that are enjoyed primarily in, or because of, groups. By extending the analysis to groups rather than individuals, social researchers are able to develop a more realistic appreciation of how individuals act vis-à-vis their social and political environment. For instance, Corbridge (2002) points to how popular struggles in India have been predicated on explicitly group-based claims. These groups variously identified themselves and were identified as farmers, Dalits, 'backward castes', and the like. The discourse they espoused was one of claiming honour (*samman*) and/ or a return to the 'sweat and toil' of the social group as such. Asserting such group-based claims certainly exacerbates social conflict. But it also, undeniably, contributes to enhancing the substantive freedom that group members are able to achieve and sustain in the long term.

Peter Evans (2002) takes this critique even further, to account for the role of global forces in the ways individuals form and express their preferences and values. He argues that 'meaning-making' is often influenced by structures, not by individuals or even groups, thus making it important to incorporate 'collective capabilities' in the analysis. This line of critique has been extended by Severine Deneulin (2008), who builds on Ricouer's notion of 'structures of living together'. Such structures, she

suggests, refer to structures which shape historical communities to which individuals belong and provide conditions for those lives to flourish. They are irreducible to social relationships, although they bind these relationships together. These structures provide the collective, or inter-subjective, framework that binds together individual action with “irreducibly social goods” (Gore, 1997; based on Taylor, 1995). Drawing on her empirical work in Costa Rica (Deneulin, 2005), she claims that the successful implementation of social development policies which enhanced individual capabilities in that country cannot be understood without an understanding of the ‘structures of living together’ that have evolved there.

However, in uncritically following Ricouer’s emphasis on inter-subjective meanings inhered in the ‘structures of living together’, Deneulin (2008) underestimates the role of the web of social and personal *relationships* that comprise and influence those structures. Such an approach crucially undermines the role of relational spaces in shaping preferences, values and meanings. For example, nearly a century ago, in a non-descript town in western India, an ‘untouchable’ boy faced the plethora of discrimination and exclusion that was the lot of his community members. Nonetheless, his father had managed to secure a job in the army, and with the little salary he received was able to educate his son. The boy was not an exception, for in that part of India, ‘untouchable’ men of his caste had managed to secure employment in the army and had managed to provide for the education of children like him.

Now, a focus on capabilities in the individual space would lead us to believe that the boy was as ‘capable’ as the others in the school that he went to (although, it must be admitted he wasn’t. He was made to sit separately, but, one can argue, he received the same education). A focus on capabilities at the group level would focus on the continued discrimination that he, other boys like him and, indeed, members of

the entire community continued to face at the hands of the social elites. Such a focus, while a useful corrective to the euphoria over individual achievements, would undermine all the achievements and freedoms that this boy and thousands like him had secured thanks to the opportunity to go to school. A focus on the ‘structures of living together’ would not be very much more useful either, since the notions of pollution and purity that supposedly underpinned the caste hierarchies were hardly dented. However, changes had certainly been inaugurated, and can be appreciated only through an analysis of the transforming relationships which the boy inherited in. He continued to face discrimination in the school he was in, and from others in the locality. But he did go on to make lifelong friendships with people from other communities. His educational attainments enabled him to secure scholarships from local rulers who were not as weighed down under caste considerations as the men and women of the boy’s own village were.

Clearly, a focus on the relational dimension of the boy’s life would correct for unbridled enthusiasm for his individual achievements, but also safeguard against incessant pessimism about the freedoms that were to be available to him², due to his relationships with other actors and institutions. An exclusive focus on collective meanings negates relations of cooperation and conflict, and consensus and dissent. Deneulin is correct about referring to the co-constitutive nature of human life. Indeed, she makes a major contribution to the literature by emphasising the inter-subjective dimension of capabilities (although her empirical work remains focused on parties and institutions). But the different, and often contradictory, ways in which meanings are made by people inhabiting different relationships are diluted given what appears

² The boy grew up to be B.R. Ambedkar, the Father of India’s Constitution, acclaimed lawyer and civil rights activist (Jaffrelot, 2005).

to be her overemphasis on structures, communities and commonalities. In endorsing an image of the pre-existent structure and community, which supposedly shapes the moral development, identity and meaning of individual lives, it can be tempting to suggest that the collective is a ‘fixed forever’ immutable entity. Analysts who tread this path are in danger of accepting the putative ‘essence’ of the community as given, and only reify it further. In analysing the space for the assessment of capabilities, both Sen and his critics pay inadequate attention to the relational dimension of human life. As I hope to show through the discussion of ethnographic accounts in subsequent chapters, more analytical attention needs to be paid to these issues.

2.1.2. *Power*

Concomitant with the criticism that Sen’s is an individualist framework is a charge that his analytical arguments lack a focus on questions of power. On rehearsing some of the debates on that topic in the previous section, I concluded that the perspective that the individuals are the ultimate units of *moral*, rather than methodological, concern is a welcome clarification. However, there remains scope to specify what this means in a context where individuals inhabit different and unequal relations vis-à-vis one another. I then examined the arguments advanced by Sen’s critics and noted the ways in which their have extended the debate in new directions. I also noted the comparative inattention to the relational dimension of human life in these works. In this section, I will elaborate on this aspect through a discussion of how Sen and his critics have perceived the issues of power. In highlighting the lack of attention in his work on power, critics tend to focus on the structural dimensions of injustice. This is especially apparent in the arguments advanced by Deneulin (2011, Evans (2002) and Feldman (2010). However, it is not entirely clear from their

arguments as to with which specific theory of power these authors propose the Capability Approach should engage. The structural focus of their critique and early insights seem to suggest that an engagement with Steve Lukes' notion of power and hegemony (Lukes, 2005) would help the Capability Approach fill in this important lacuna.

There appear to be many reasons to consider this proposal favourably, though these are not, for reasons I will present subsequently, very fruitful. In an important intervention, Lukes suggests that analysts of power should first identify the "necessary conditions for human beings to flourish" (Lukes, 2005: 117) and thereby account for the material and social conditions that must obtain for them to lead lives adhering to certain normative standards. Following Nussbaum (Nussbaum, 2000: 72, 74, and 83), he claims that 'central human functionings', whose presence or absence is typically understood to mark the presence or absence of human life, could provide such an account. He approvingly cites Sen's observations on 'adaptive preferences' of Bengali widows and poor people in Bihar to extend this argument (Lukes, 2005: 137, citing Sen, 1984: 308-9). He extends the behavioural conception of power as about influencing decision-making and agenda-setting. He interprets Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony in an 'extended' sense to articulate the third dimension of power. Hegemony in this reading refers to the manner in which those exercising authority influence their subordinates to act in ways that favour the former. Spontaneous consent is created such that those subjected to power are not even aware or conscious of acting in the interests of those exercising power and against their own interests. Such a dimension of power is presented in his scheme as the most insidious. There are hints in Sen's work that he might be sympathetic to such accounts of power, for instance, in his analysis of intra-household inequities, when he remarks, "...acute

inequalities often survive precisely by making allies out of the poor.” (Sen, 1990: 126)³. His critics too seem to be influenced by Lukes’ emphasis of hegemony, if the few instances when they actually outline their tentative proposals are anything to go by (Evans, 2002: Deneulin and McGregor, 2010).

However, scholars such as David Arnold (1984), Ranajit Guha (1983) and James Scott (1985) are justifiably sceptical of the explanatory value of ‘hegemonic’ networks. To be sure, they recognise the merit of several of Gramsci’s theoretical observations. However, they follow sympathetic critics such as EP Thompson (1978) and Raymond Williams (1977) in arguing instead that hegemony is illusory, given the widespread (often undocumented) resistance among people against attempts to restrict their actions and aspirations. They argue, correctly in my view, that the exercise of power represents an act of domination: it resides in the *relations* between the dominant and the dominated. Through these relations, power manifests itself through coercive measures as well as by creation of stakes for different members of the dominated groups in the perpetuation of these linkages. These authors are unsympathetic to the notion of ‘false consciousness’ espoused by some orthodox Marxist scholars. What appears to be more important to them is to understand the ‘everyday’ forms and ‘middle ground’ manifestations (Turton, 1986) of domination and resistance to it that actually constitute the micro-physics of power.

Thompson (2010) tentatively advances the proposition that the Capability Approach might benefit from an engagement with Foucault’s notion of power. Recalling Foucault’s claims about the provenance of the disciplinary practices that permeate modern society, he suggests that the subjective acts that individuals perform

³ After recounting this fact, his position is “It can be a serious error to take the absence of protests and questioning of inequality as evidence of the absence of that inequality (or of the non-viability of that question)” (Sen, 1990: 126).

are expected to conform to rational belief and choice. This ‘conduct of conduct’, Foucault would argue, is a manifestation of pervasive power, which does not reside in hegemonic structure or political institutions; rather, it permeates every facet of social life. Foucault’s insights, if followed through, appear frustrating, for they imply that power cannot be escaped, but only resisted through the development of ‘counter-conducts’. Foucault’s insights have informed an influential formulation of domination as necessitating “a relationship. The dominant groups, in their exercise of domination, do not consume and destroy the dominated classes, for then there would be no relation of power, and hence no domination” (Chatterjee, 1983: 59). In my view, a *relational* account of power and domination serves the Capability Approach better than a static structural account embedded in an immutable notion of hegemony whose analytic value is dubious.

In Lukes’ analysis of the relations of power, domination occurs when the real interests of some restrict those functionings that are core to human nature, such as cooperation, reciprocity, practical reason and sociability. The subjection to domination hinders the ability to “reason correctly” or “well” and even *induces* what he calls “failures of rationality” (Lukes, 2005: 115). Domination adversely affects the real interests of the subject, real interests being “one’s explanatory purpose, framework and methods, which in turn have to be justified” (Lukes, 2005: 149). Lukes’ suggestions need to be weighed carefully. The insight that domination is defined as operating in those circumstances in which the conditions necessary for human being to flourish are constrained is well-taken. But the argument that domination always induces failures of rationality is more problematic than it seems. It is unclear as to when human beings begin to reason (or stop reasoning) ‘correctly’ or ‘well’. Who makes these determinations about correct reasoning, and using what

perspectives? A landless labourer belonging to the ‘untouchable’ caste or a tribal clan, is ostensibly driven by everyday exercise of domination by the local landlord and/ or moneylender to migrate to a faraway town. Arguably, life in the town is far from rosy and unproblematic, but from an analytical point of view, it is not clear how the migrant workers’ rationality has failed.

Furthermore, contesting domination need not be based on rational decisions or an ability to reason “correctly”, whatever that might mean. The contentions themselves may be predicated on the ‘failures of rationality’. For instance, inhabitants of ‘illegal’ settlements in Kolkata, Teheran, Durban, Rio or Essex effectively protest the ‘land hunger’ forced upon them by the prevalence of skewed land holdings: in digging in their heels and refusing to be relocated to ‘better’ localities with the promise of jobs and skills, they may well be failing the test of rationality. Likewise farmers who refuse to acquiesce in the acquisition of their land by corporate interests, even after being provided ‘adequate’ compensation, may be seen as not meeting the criteria of ‘rationality’. In both cases, however, the putative failure of rationality provides an antidote to, rather than, supports relations of domination. Scholar-activist Gail Omvedt points to the intense build-up of desperation and anger as contributing to the struggles against oppression by Dalits in India. (Omvedt, 1993; Omvedt, 2006). In these struggles, the failure of rationality and the unwillingness to reason well were centrally important to *interrogate* the relations of domination.

Recent discussion among scholars (Deneulin and McGregor, 2010) of the Capability Approach call for attention to a perspective that is more appreciative of the social nature of the human being, a ‘human ontology’ and an ‘ethic of the social human being’. In such an account, the proponents argue, there is greater scope to appreciate how individual freedoms are constituted by social arrangements that enable

us to live well together. This broadening of focus from structures to social relations is welcome as it allows for a nuanced understanding of the ways in which power operates and is contested through everyday social relations. However, I am more sceptical about their specific proposal to amend the *telos* of the Capability Approach to one of ‘living well together’.

Such a proposal appears to me to accord foundational status to structures that facilitate cooperation and undermines the *creative* role of social conflict. This, as Corbridge (2002) reminds us, is central to the achievement of substantive freedoms. The accent on ‘living well together’ is reminiscent of Sen’s privileging of public reason which I will turn to in a while: thus, even as the authors argue that the Capability Approach “does not deal explicitly or adequately with these questions of meaning formation, and the nascent and real conflicts that lie behind them” (Deneulin and McGregor, 2010: 513), it is unclear how their own proposal- admittedly tentative- represent an advance over Sen’s analytical framework. Ultimately, however I suggest that there remains considerable scope for them to follow their own insights to its logical analytical conclusion.

Any account privileging the inter-subjective, or shared, structures of living together pays too little attention to what some scholars have referred to as the fundamentally conflictual nature of human life (Schmitt, 1996). Chantal Mouffe develops the friend/ enemy or ‘we/they’ distinction emphasised in Schmitt’s early writings and suggests that analyses of power need to appreciate the inherent antagonism of human relationships. Since “conflict and division are inherent to politics ... there is no place where reconciliation could be definitely achieved as the full actualisation of the unity of ‘the people’.” (Mouffe, 2000: 16). Against attempts to overcome this ‘we/they’ distinction through rational discourse, Mouffe suggests

that, at best, this antagonism can only be reconfigured through the reconstitution of the relation of domination and subordination.

I agree with Mouffe's overall analysis and her suggestion that analysts must be more cognisant of 'antagonism' in understanding human life. However, I am wary of accepting any 'essentialist' notions of human life. Just as I am sceptical of perceiving social relations as marked by the desire to cooperate, I am as doubtful of characterising human beings 'pre-designed' for conflict. I find Sen's notion of 'cooperative conflict' particularly relevant: given the co-constitutive nature of human life, conflicting parties have much to gain from cooperation (Sen, 1980). This is despite the presence and pervasiveness of a fundamental conflict. I am puzzled that neither he nor his critics have sought to build on the insights from that paper. Although restricted to an analysis of intra-household bargains, the arguments made in that paper could shed some analytical insights on the contingent nature of social life, which is co-constituted by both cooperation and conflict. My ethnographic work, on which I draw in subsequent chapters, benefits greatly from this perspective.

2.2. Voice

From the foregoing discussion, it is clear that an analytical engagement with the literature on capabilities draws attention to the scope for incorporating the relational dimension of human life, particularly the relations of domination and subordination to which individuals are subjected. Any attempt at the enhancement of capabilities of individuals needs therefore to interrogate and contest these relations. An emphasis on such contentions leads to discussions on how to embark on such actions. In this section, I want to build on the role of 'voice', based on some of Sen's preliminary observations (Drèze and Sen, 2002; Sen, 2009) .

Arguing that ‘voicelessness’ is an important contributor to the perpetuation of economic and social inequality, he and his colleague Jean Drèze suggest that this problem can be overcome through the self-assertion by underprivileged groups through political organisation and through solidarity with the underprivileged by the better-off (Drèze and Sen, 2002). Pointing to the danger of over-relying on solidarity, he suggests that

“Overcoming voicelessness is not just a question of more enlightened ‘solidarity’, but also, ultimately, of much further ‘assertion’ on the part of underprivileged sections of society” (Drèze and Sen, 2002: 32).

In his recent work, Sen has sought to articulate the notion of voice with the perspective of social choice theory (Sen, 2009: Chapter 4). This builds on insights from his Nobel lecture (Sen, 1999) where he argues that the social decision-making process embodied in social choice theory is more informationally sensitive. He draws on social choice theory to justify his focus on social realisations, on making comparative assessments rather than transcendental claims and to recognise the inescapable plurality of competing principles (Sen, 2009: 106). Nonetheless, it is not at all clear how the self-assertion of the voiceless that he draws attention to in the earlier cited work with Drèze is facilitated through the mechanism of social choice and public discussion. In Sen’s own words, the discipline of social choice remains “deeply concerned with the rational basis of social judgments and public decisions in choosing between social alternatives” (Sen, 2009: 95). The insights from his earlier work on famines, public action and failures of service-delivery are clearly not followed up in subsequent analytical or theoretical writings.

How then can we think analytically about voicelessness, assertion and contesting relations of domination? To answer this question, I turn to the account of

politics developed by Jacques Rancière, whose insights (Rancière, 1999) suggest that deprivation of voice constitutes domination (Norval, 2009: 303). It bears citing Rancière at some length,

“Politics exists because those who have no right to be counted as speaking beings make themselves of some account, setting up a community by the fact of placing in common a wrong that is nothing more than this confrontation” (Rancière, 1999: 27).

The self-assertion by the voiceless is not only about being heard by those exercising authority, but also about being understood. Self-assertion is thus not only about appealing to shared meanings, or about advancing better arguments but about forcing the boundaries of what are considered acceptable demands to make. As Norval cogently summarises, the assertion of voices involves staging of demands that lie outside the “extant terrain of representation” (Norval, 2009: 310). She extends this further by suggesting that mechanisms to publicise the inchoate sense of being ‘deprived’ lie at the heart of contesting domination. At the same time, she correctly cautions against “over-valorising a ruptural conception of politics” (Norval, 2009: 318), which overlooks contentious practices with the potential to interrogate the relations of domination through which the deprivation of voice is both institutionalised and normalised.

The perspectives on voicelessness offered by Rancière and Norval could be deployed to specify Sen’s initial suggestion that overcoming voicelessness necessitates the self-assertion by the voiceless. In making these analytical linkages, I seek to contribute to the on-going interventions in making discussions on capabilities more attentive to questions of relations of domination and voicelessness. In the ethnographic work which I report in subsequent chapters, I fruitfully deploy several of these perspectives. I also find relevant in this context to draw attention to three related

aspects of ‘voice’ in understanding which the writings of Sen and his critics have helped immensely.

Sen’s preliminary thoughts on voice are bolstered by his putting *human agency* centre stage (Drèze and Sen, 2002: 6). He builds on this perspective by emphasising the importance of *public reasoning* in reducing injustice. Accepting that complete agreement on a perfectly just world is elusive, Sen suggests that a reasoned partial agreement on comparatively just situations may be adequate in ensuring that there is less injustice. Against critics such as Nussbaum (Nussbaum, 2000), he steadfastly abides by the “irreducible pluralism” of capabilities and human life, refusing to endorse any list of capabilities and urging colleagues that the formation of values cannot be a centralised exercise. I examine each of these below.

2.2.1. Agency: Who asserts their voice?

I have noted earlier that the notion of capabilities encompasses two distinct kinds of freedoms- well-being freedoms and agency freedoms. Agency freedoms can diverge from well-being freedoms and achievements as Sen describes, but cannot for that reason be undermined (Sen, 2009: Chapter 9). In her analysis of the way ‘agency’ has been discussed in Sen’s work, Sabina Alkire draws attention to the fact that references to this topic appear under titles such as practical reason, participation, self-expression, and autonomy and self-direction (Alkire, 2002:131). She notes that agency cannot be defined except in relation to goals (Alkire, 2008a) and entails a careful assessment of aims, allegiances and objectives. Thus, agency is characterised by ‘open conditionality’: it can be used to advance the well-being of the self as well

as of others: indeed, it may not advance anyone's well-being in the short run. The agent's responsibility has to, therefore, be incorporated into any account of agency⁴.

In a recent review of Sen's *Ideas of Justice*, Deneulin (2011) focuses her criticism on his apparent lack of sensitivity to the structural basis of injustice. She buttresses her argument by drawing attention to the fact that structures provide individuals with a collective framework within which they reason about choices and decision. Furthermore, she contends that unjust structures, rather than poorly-reasoning individuals, cause deprivation and lack of freedoms and opportunities. She cautions (Deneulin, 2008) that what we call agency is a product of the 'structures of living together' that I discussed earlier. In her reading, human agency is of less importance for substantive freedoms than is 'socio-historic agency' of a given community. Drawing on Evans' arguments again, she points to the manner in which such 'structures of living together' shape people's choices, effectively marginalising any sensible choices they might make. I agree with Deneulin's contention that Sen's account could take greater note of the structural basis of injustice. Nonetheless, her own prescription suggesting that we make the structure the unit of our analysis seems to occupy the other extreme of the spectrum. In her account, it appears that individuals have no control over the preferences they develop, the values they form and the meanings they make. However, I contend that even where individuals are 'subjected' to the same structures, they may respond differently. Even as they interact with different ideologies, subjects do not necessary make the same meanings of these messages: meaning-making may be influenced by structures and ideologies, but is not *determined* by them.

⁴ Fascinating recent work on 'non-human' agency (Latour, 2005; Sax, 2010) obviously complicates the notion of attributing responsibility.

In wondering whether the capabilities of self-expression (rather than of nutrition) articulated by poor and marginalised people bombarded by consumerist messages and imitating their rich neighbours ought to be valued (Deneulin, 2008: 119), she seems to disparage their contingent struggle for recognition and identity. The decision taken by members of the Dom caste in northern India, following the increasing assertiveness of other ex-‘untouchable’ and ‘backward’ caste-groups, *not* to eat leftovers from feasts and observances of the ex-‘high’ castes might adversely affect their nutritional well-being. In the face of starvation and hunger that many women and children of these households face, this decision might appear to be unreasonable. But can the value of this decision be denied on such ‘utilitarian’ grounds as she seems to? I think not.

In examining how capabilities might be enhanced through the assertion of voice and the staging of demands, I am compelled to turn to the notion of the ‘subject’, those who are ‘subjected’ to certain circumstances, relations and structures, but who want to inflect these with their own imagination and vision. Extending the notion, ‘the political subject’ is one who, while “subjected to a given set of political imperatives, nevertheless seeks to author politics and intends to appropriate the political vision” (Samaddar, 2010: xix). Following Laclau and Mouffe (1985), ‘subjects’ are bearers of structure, of ideology and of agency. I agree that the ‘subject’ is constituted by inter-subjective factors, but s/he also contributed to the reshaping of these inter-subjective spaces. The subject is emphatically not the voluntaristic ‘agent’ exercising their free will (Jessop, 1982). Neither is s/he an atomistic bearer of rights or citizens who derives her/ his political identity from legal-constitutional provisions (Smith, 1998). The subject’s identity is not primordially fixed and immutable. And

yet, they are not trapped in embedded social positions or in durable dispositions, whence there is no escape.

The notion of the ‘subject’ is important for me in this project to understand the characteristics of those who assert their voices. In referring to subjects, I benefit from the perspectives of scholars (Laclau, 2005; Mouffe, 2005; Norval, 2007; and Smith, 1998)⁵ who correctly point to the diverse social positionalities of actors. Referring to them as agents or as inhabitants of fixed structural positions threatens to obscure the diversity of their positionalities. If Sen’s work appears to endorse an image of the individual who is free to exercise agency, his critics’ accounts can be interpreted as undermining their agency. Neither of these approaches is, in my view, a realistic representation of the contingent contentions through which agency is expressed and through which relations of domination are interrogated, contested and eventually reconstituted.

2.2.2. Public reason: How are voices asserted?

Having established the analytical gains from talking about the ‘subject’ as those asserting their voices, I would now like to draw attention to some debates about how their voices may be asserted, especially given the limitations of elections as the sole measure of democracy. In his discussions on the manner in which social choice is formulated, Sen highlights the centrality of public reasoning. Indeed, for Sen, an analytical focus on public reasoning is crucial to the understanding of justice and democracy (Sen, 2009: 324-6). To this view, Alkire adds the reflexive effect of democracy, by which she refers to the manner in which democratic freedoms

⁵ Some of these authors also refer to social agents to describe the social positionality of subjects, who are ‘inserted’ into the political community through constitutive acts. See Smith (1998) for an interesting overview.

effectively *constitute* who citizens are (Alkire, 2002: 138)- including their preferences, values and meanings. Based on her formulation, it has been suggested (Crocker, 2008) that Sen's approach speaks to the 'deliberative' conception of democracy. In this conception, those engaging in open public discussions form partially joint intentions (Richardson, 1997: 365). These partially joint intentions are not the outcome of bargains where different individuals bring their pre-determined interests to a negotiating table; rather, they are constructed, or 'reconceived' (Crocker, 2008: 368) through rational discussions.

His analytical insistence on the central role of public reasoning has been severely critiqued (Deneulin and McGregor, 2010; Deneulin, 2011) on account of its inability to take into account the power dynamics that would subvert the entire process. I agree with Deneulin that the centrality accorded to public reasoning in the democratic process needs to be subjected to critical scrutiny. Deneulin's worries are grounded in an appreciation of the manner in which background inequalities can and do undermine and subvert the processes of public reasoning. This represents the most cogent *empirical* grounds for being wary of public reason. But let us assume for a moment that absolute background equality is achieved. Does that make the quest for public reasoning an analytically desirable or feasible project?

The answer to this question has sometimes been sought in the accounts of John Rawls, whose philosophical work has contributed to the resurrection of the ideal of public reasoning in contemporary times through the philosophical work of John Rawls. Rawls anchors the notion in a liberal conception of citizenship and political participation. He uses it to refer to the terms on which citizens in a constitutional

democracy agree to participate in forging a shared social agreement (Rawls, 1993)⁶. These citizens agree to participate in such ‘deliberative’ exercises as free and equal citizens, with an enduring desire to honour the fair terms of cooperation (Rawls, 1993: 55). Sen appears to follow Rawls’ conception of public reason (Sen, 2009: 324).

However, Bonnie Honig’s (1993) analysis compels us to be more sober and sombre about our enthusiasm for public reasoning. For Rawls envy, resentment and recalcitrance that individuals feel towards what appear to him to be just institutions is necessarily irrational. Such individuals are personally responsible for their failure to be satisfied with their life. Furthermore, public institutions are not obligated to engage with these emotions, which are merely epiphenomenal (Honig, 1993: 161). The focus on the desirability of public reasoning misses out on the possibility that those not engaging in public reasoning do not do so out of malice, but because to them the very forums for public reasoning appear to them to be an extension of unjust structures.

Sen also acknowledges Habermas’ contribution to developing the conception of public reasoning⁷, particularly his contribution to developing a more directly procedural account of democracy. However, the viability of Habermas’ analytical separation of the ‘procedural’ from the ‘substantive’ on the basis of a communicative rationality has been critiqued by, among others, Chantal Mouffe (1999, 2007). An agreement on procedures contains substantive designs. Procedures involve making and admitting critical ethical commitments. As abridgment of practices, she says, they

⁶ In his own words, “A political society, and indeed, every reasonable and rational agent, whether it be an individual, family, or an association, or even a confederation of political societies, has a way of formulating its plans, of putting its ends in an order of priority and of making its decisions accordingly. The way a political society does this is its reason, its ability to do these things is also its reason, though in a different sense: it is an intellectual and moral power rooted in the capacities of its human members” (Rawls, 1993: 212-3).

⁷ Sen suggests, not inaccurately, that the apparent contrast between the perspectives on deliberative democracy and public reasoning held by Rawls and Habermas is deceptive. For a useful overview of how Habermas’ and Rawls’ theories speak to each other, see Cohen, 1997b

are inseparable from forms of life. Procedures are, thus, the product of the dominant discourses. Apparently impartial procedures may not be as neutral as they appear to be. Thus, she challenges the very possibility of holding rational (or neutral) dialogue and questions the possibilities elucidated by Habermas for the prevalence of a universally-binding communicative rationality.

The form of politics that both Honig and Mouffe point to has been characterised as ‘agonistic democracy’ (Honig, 1993; Mouffe, 2007), one which recognises the legitimacy of those antagonistic to the political structure and system. A recent contribution to the literature has been made by Aletta Norval (2007), who uses Rancière’s notion of politics highlighted earlier to enunciate her version of aversive democracy⁸. There are subtle differences in the way these authors have conceived of agonistic democracy, but they share the concern with providing the grounds for antagonists in a democratic society to express their positions as legitimate adversaries, who are allowed to deploy putatively unreasonable means, such as emotions, passions and rhetoric, as long as they remain committed to the ethico-political principles of liberal democracy, such as social and economic equality, freedom from relations of domination and subordination and the defence of the pluralism.

A reading of Sen’s accounts provides two competing points of view. On the one hand, Sen endorses Bernard Williams’ position that “disagreement does not necessarily have to be overcome” (Williams, cited Sen, 2009: 14): this is welcome. In the *Idea of Justice*, he admits that not every social choice problem can be solved rationally and, further, that this need not pose a problem for assessing comparative

⁸ She used the term to refer to a version of popular participation which is ‘aversive’ to political conformism. Following Stanley Cavell, she understands conformism as the tendencies of individuals to let the community of which they are a part speak on their behalf. For Cavell, aversion is the manifestation of disagreement, which in turn constitutes the true meaning of democracy (Cavell, 1990).

states of injustice. My own inferences from Sen's writings suggests that his concern appears to centre more on public reason as the processes of critical scrutiny, including self-scrutiny (Sen, 2002: 40-42) and a disavowal of both dogma and coercion (Sen, 2009: Chapter 15), rather than as inflexible philosophical commitment to a particular epistemology. In his work, he acknowledges what he calls the "far-reaching role of instinctive psychology and spontaneous responses" (Sen, 2009: 49). Indeed, he invokes Adam Smith's extensive discussions on the interrelationship between reason and emotion and reasoning and feelings. Furthermore, he also points to the compatibility between rationality and 'other-regarding' behaviour, arguing for the constructive role of factors such as sympathy and commitment in public life (Sen, 2002).

2.2.3. Irreducible pluralism

On the other hand, I am mindful of his overarching alignment with social choice theory, and the centrality of public reasoning therein. Must we despair, since Sen's apparent insistence of public reasoning seems to leave us with no way out? However, a way out is provided by Sen's own insistence on a comparativist approach to justice, and the assertion that "freedom is an irreducibly plural concept." (Sen, 2002: 585). Commenting on his disagreement with Rawls, he has consistently expressed

"considerable scepticism about Rawls' highly specific claim about the unique choice, in the original position, of one particular set of principles for just institutions, needed for a fully just society. There are genuinely plural, and sometimes conflicting, general concerns that bear on our understanding of justice." (Sen, 2009: 57; emphasis added, but also see Sen, 1992: 78-79).

Sen's commitment to pluralism has remained steadfast. Against challenges from colleagues, he has refused to endorse any 'canonical list' of capabilities (Sen,

2005). Perhaps the best example is provided by his exchanges with Martha Nussbaum (Sen, 2004; Nussbaum, 2003). Nussbaum proposes a list of ten central capabilities (which, as we noted earlier, Steven Lukes too seemed to endorse) drawing explicitly upon the Rawlsian principle of ‘overlapping consensus’, couching it “as the moral core of a specifically political conception” and anchoring it with political liberalism (Nussbaum, 2000: 105). Sen finds such attempts both dogmatic and pompous. They are insensitive to social conditions and deny the possibility of social discourse. Such a list would inevitably represent a hegemonic consensus around the capabilities identified as valuable. Such a process presents, according to Sen, a real danger of undermining substantive democracy.

This commitment to pluralism is shared by Mouffe, who asserts that “a modern democratic political community cannot be organised around a single substantive idea of the common good” (Mouffe, 1991: 72). The symbolic value of pluralism, in her reading, lies in the challenge posed to a *single* way of conceiving the ‘good life’. Here, she refers not only to the fact of pluralism- the mere existence of difference that must be grudgingly tolerated, reduced and eventually eliminated. Rather- more importantly in my view, she emphasises pluralism as an *axiological* principle, something that must be celebrated and enhanced. Thus, pluralism “questions the objective of unanimity and homogeneity, which is always revealed as fictitious and based on acts of exclusion.” (Mouffe, 2000: 19). The acceptance of public reasoning as the *telos* of democratic communication contradicts a commitment to pluralism, since it envisages a single form and structure of reasoning emanating from and acceptable to a putative public. This inhibits rather than facilitates the ways in which we might address relations of power, domination and subordination.

In following Mouffe's account of pluralism, I also follow the caveat she advances to enthusiasts of diversity. She desists from valorising all difference, and appeals for an explicit recognition of the fact that "certain differences are constructed as relations of subordination" (Mouffe, 2000: 20). She defines her project as one of defending the ethico-political principles of liberal democracy. Her reconfiguration of the antagonism/ agonism distinction makes this clear: the task of democratic politics is to convert antagonism into agonism, thereby providing a common ground for the articulation of contentions that seek to interrogate and reconstitute the relations of domination and subordination. With Sen and Mouffe, then, I eschew the relativist view of pluralism according to which 'anything goes'. The reinvigoration of democratic communication in the manner suggested by Mouffe *strengthens*, I argue, the subjects' quest for augmenting their capabilities.

2.3. Identity

In the previous section, I drew analytical attention to the manner in which discussions on capabilities would benefit from conversations among post-structuralist scholars who share Sen's concerns with defending the ethico-legal principles of liberal democracy, and who have examined how to overcome the problem of deprivation of voice. Against existing claims, I have argued for the need to focus, not on voluntaristic individuals or collectives, but on political subjects, and the agonistic ways (neither public reasoning nor bargains) through which they might make claims that would contribute to securing their capabilities. An examination of the issue of voice leads to the further question of how the identity of those who assert their voices is formulated. It is to this question that I will now turn my attention.

Through his emphasis on human agency and public reasoning, Sen suggests that individuals can and do shape their *identities* in ways that can secure their effective freedoms (Sen, 2006). Alkire points to the “self-determining and self-creating” nature of identities forged (Alkire, 2002: 138). In making this case, she draws on John Finnis’ insight that “choices have constitutive implications not only for individuals but for communities” (Finnis, 1983: 57). Indeed, Sen asserts (Sen, 2006: 36), contra Michael Sandel’s well-known exposition of the ‘communitarian’ viewpoint (Sandel, 1982), that identities are not simply ‘discovered’ by individuals. Rather their expressed affiliation with different identities follows a process of reflection and the attribution of meanings and consequences to the chosen affiliation. Sen emphasises the multiple identities that individuals possess (Sen, 1999a: 16) and contends that they have the capacity to emphasise the ones they reason are appropriate, albeit within the constraints imposed by ‘ascriptive’ sociological categories of race and religion.

Teschl and Derobert (2008) suggest that Sen’s approach would benefit from focusing not so much on multiple identities as *personal* identities. Such an approach would enable analysts of capabilities to appreciate the differences between what individuals do or want to do, and who they want to become. This argument is echoed in Deneulin and McGregor (2010) who caution against a conflation of ‘doings and beings’ without a contextualisation of the socially constructed meanings that go into translating individual ‘doings’ into ‘states of being’. These nuanced accounts caution against an ‘essentialised’ view of identity, and contribute to enriching the capability approach. I propose building on these accounts by appropriating an ‘aspectival’ notion of identity, following Tully’s argument that that an identity transforms as “it is

approached from different paths and different aspects come into view” (Tully, 1995: 11).

The role of political discourse and ideology in shaping the identity of the subject tends to be obscured in these discussions. Against scholars who suggest that identities are waiting to be ‘discovered’ or ‘recognised’, Ernesto Laclau points to the constitutive role of political intervention in forging this identity. He invokes the psychoanalytical category of ‘identification’ to describe the process. The use of the term presupposes explicitly the lack “at the root” of any identity (Laclau, 1994: 3). Political interventions also include performances, as Honig points to in her important note on the US Declaration of Independence (Honig, 1991). As Kulynych reminds us, a performative act “is one which brings into being that to which it ostensibly refers.” (Kulynych, 1997: 330). The contingent struggles that I referred to earlier perform a significant role in shaping identities through the processes of subject-formation. Identities are necessarily context-dependent and, hence, potentially precarious (Smith, 1996: 88). This analysis implies that political discourses emphasising identities are not epiphenomenal: political actors do not deploy the rhetoric of identities simply to mask some other demands. The forging of the subject, in this reading, is the real and substantive task of politics. A forceful assertion to specify this notion of politics emanates from the writings of Rancière. Rancière describes the essence of politics as the struggle to construct the subject of ‘dissensus’ (Rancière, 2001: 12). As politics is about subjects asserting identities, so it is about them denying and displacing identities as well (Rancière, 1992: 62).

With Appiah (2006), I remain wary of endorsing either Sen’s ‘reason before identity’ thesis or some of the suggestions of his critics that leads to a notion of identities being immutable. An emphasis on processes of identification enables us to

appreciate the manner in which the subjects who want to challenge relations of domination construct their ‘beings’ in relation to perceived antagonists and those they hold responsible for their subjugation. As my ethnographic work shows, such a focus deepens our efforts to analytically understand how subjects might attempt to enhance their capabilities and secure effective freedoms.

3. REVISITING THEORETICAL STANCES

I began the previous section with an outline of the two major theoretical gaps in the literature, and moved on to elaborate on the analytical lacunae. The first of these analytical lacunae pertain to the scope in the literature to consider more attentively the relational dimension of human life, especially to relations of domination. The second relates to specifying how the voiceless might assert themselves and be heard and understood. In particular, there needs to be more sympathetic discussions on the diverse manners in which demands to strengthen capabilities may be staged. The third gap relates to relative lack of emphasis in the literature on the role that political interventions play in the construction of identities. Having considered these lacunae in the analytical literature, I now return to examine the theoretical gap in the literature on capabilities and politics. The first of these gaps relate to the apparent inattention to politics. The second focuses on the preliminary proposals to ‘politicise’ the Capability Approach, as advanced by his critics.

3.1. Politics and effective freedoms

In his nuanced critique of Sen’s *Development as Freedom*, Corbridge suggests that in the “absence of a politics that is confrontational as well as cooperative,” (Corbridge, 2002: 207) it is unlikely that human capabilities will be expanded. In

particular, he refers to two kinds of politics. The first is borne out of the exercise of state capability in pulverising local elites. The second kind of politics, of specific interest to me, relates to the enactment of popular struggles. For Corbridge, popular struggles clearly contribute to the securing of greater freedoms for several of the urban and rural poor. Social conflict is an inevitable consequence of groups (and individuals) seeking to expand their substantive opportunities through demands for redistribution and/or recognition. In the following sub-sections, I consider the theoretical implications of these issues by turn.

3.1.1. State capacity and synergies with society

The role of *state capacity* in advancing capabilities has been often emphasised in the literature. Sen's early work on famines shows the disastrous consequences of a 'lack of interference' by the state during such times of crises: his analysis of Ethiopia's 1974 famine, which caused the eventual overthrow of the authoritarian regime in that country is a case in point (Sen, 1992). In his intervention in the debate between market-enthusiasts and market-sceptics on the role of the private sector in a liberalising economy such as India, Sen consistently emphasises the significant role of the state in ensuring that markets perform in the first place (Sen, 2002). Furthermore, the overarching role of the state and its attendant institutions to enhance capabilities is a recurring and consistent themes in his writings. Commenting on the rapid growth rates in China and East Asia, he highlights the prior role of the state in such a manner that the benefits could be evenly enjoyed. He particularly decries the appallingly low levels of public investment on education, health, land reforms and food security in India, and urges the policy-makers there to learn from the experience of China, Vietnam and Bangladesh. Clearly, from Sen's own empirical work, a state with the

capacity and the political will to intervene strategically to invest in social provision and food security is a necessary factor for enhanced capabilities.

Another strand in the literature emphasising the role of the state and institutions inhered therein in securing capabilities focuses on the role of ‘state-society synergies’ in making services available to poorer citizens. In this strand, the focus of analysis is the social coalitions that states initiate with sections of local (usually subordinate) elites and poor people in order to marginalise the dominant elites. This stream of analysis originated with Peter Evans’ work on how states seek to initiate policy change, given the embeddedness of its functionaries in society (Evans, 1995). This analysis is extended by authors subscribing to the ‘polity approach’ (Houtzager and Moore, 2003). These authors focus attention on how *regime-types* facilitate improved services and contribute to poverty-reduction. They emphasise the ways in which the institutionalisation of cooperation, pro-poor coalition-building and intra-elite competition shape development outcomes. Their broad contention (see Angell et al, 2001; Bardhan and Mookerjee, 2007; Crook and Manor, 1998; and Harriss, 2005 for different expositions) is that state institutions that mobilise pro-poor alliances with key societal actors, often comprising poor people themselves as well as section of the elite, are a prerequisite for positive development outcomes and, arguably, enhancing capabilities. Deneulin’s analysis of the origins of the ‘structures of living together’ in Costa Rica also belongs to this genre (Deneulin, 2008), emphasising as she does the personal role of the country’s elite leaders shortly after the re-inauguration of democracy in 1949.

3.1.2. Political movements & their institutionalisation

The ‘political capabilities approach’ complements the state-centric focus of the hitherto mentioned perspectives by emphasising the *organisational resources developed through previous movements* of the poor. Arguing in favour of this approach, based on their work on the institutionalisation of popular demands, Whitehead and Gray-Molina (2003: 34) draw attention to what these resources comprise. These include: 1). Lessons that participants of the movements have learned from previous struggles; 2). Political networks that local organisations, especially of the poor have forged with supra-local organisations (of the poor as well as the non-poor) and; 3). The nature of the political claims that people, especially poorer people make, based on these lessons as well as the lessons learned from previous ‘rounds’ of struggle (Williams, 2004). Moore and Putzel explore in greater detail the circumstances that lead to the enhancement of the political capabilities of the poor. In their analysis, political capabilities of the poor depend on the character of the state and the politics it pursues (Moore and Putzel, 1999: 14). Thus, the manner in which political movements of poor people secure concessions or strike alliances with governing elites contributes to expanding the substantive opportunities for citizens.

A specific area of academic interest has been the role played by the *institutionalisation* of popular demands on augmenting capabilities. Popular mobilisations are often led by supra-local elites, such as urban professionals, exemplifying Sen’s faith in the possibilities of solidarity contributing to enhanced substantive freedoms. In explaining this relationship in the Indian State of Kerala, an example Sen quotes time and again, Heller (1996) emphasises “the particular class-based character of social mobilisation” which has pushed the “cacophony of fragmented societal demands” (Heller, 1996: 1057) to the background and linked

together a democratically accountable state with a mobilised society. This successful institutionalisation of class-based demands lies at the heart of the political arrangement in the State, resulting in wide-ranging investments in social development as well as redistribution of land. Jenkins and Goetz (Goetz and Jenkins, 1999) draw attention to the role of social movements in compelling the Government of the Indian State of Rajasthan to institutionalise the 'Right-to-Information' legislation that would allow citizens to investigate government records. Baiocchi's (Baiocchi, 2003) analysis of the processes through which participatory budgeting was institutionalised in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre is another important contribution to this genre. The accounts of these scholars draw attention to the role of cross-class solidarities in institutionalising political demands, which in turn arguably augment capabilities.

Yet another area of focus for scholars has been the role of political discourses in making certain kinds of claims acceptable. The argument is that where demands relating to expanding substantive opportunities are 'mainstreamed', there the capabilities of citizens have a better chance of being respected and augmented. This chimes with Sen's claims about how famines rarely occur in democracies, given the political potency of dealing with famine. This claim has been justifiably subjected to critical scrutiny. But it is difficult to turn away from other evidence that is more supportive. For instance, in India, the political discourses legitimising affirmative action for historically marginalised groups have led to seats in educational and administrative institutions to be 'reserved' for individuals belonging to these groups. Similarly, discourses promising to 'eliminate poverty' espoused by leading politicians in the country during the 1970s served to underscore the political importance the issue. The political rhetoric around both these issues served to reduce the sense of 'shame' that had been historically associated with being members of the poorer or

‘untouchable’ communities (Engberg-Pederson and Webster, 2002). Conversely, the fact that the political discourses in the country remain indifferent to issues of basic education, universal health and food security has been held responsible by some scholars, including Sen and his colleagues (Drèze and Sen, 1989), for the state’s indifference to these sectors, as reflected in the tardiness of public policy and relatively low levels of public investment.

These strands in the literature emphasise the role of the state, its attendant actors and institutions in enabling individuals and communities secure their functionings. They also direct our attention to the manner in which societal demands are raised, negotiated with and eventually institutionalised in governments. In important ways, this work contributes to extending some of Sen’s insights on the topic. However, for Sen, an exclusive emphasis on institutional frameworks obfuscates the appreciation of social realities and processes of change. For him, an understanding of ‘what emerges in society’ (Sen, 2009) is the more important, and fruitful, analytical question. Following this lead, I turn to an enunciation of how scholars have engaged with the role of informal institutions and other societal arrangements in enhancing capabilities.

3.1.3. Everyday contentions

The important emphasis on large-scale quasi-institutional political movements has tended to overshadow the significance of the continuous contentions that particularly mark the lives of subordinate groups. In their works, these authors emphasise the agency as well as autonomy of populations- sometimes as citizens, other times as subjects, not always as discrete individuals but as societal groups sharing common conceptions. These authors refer to the ‘infrapolitics’ of everyday

resistance that these groups necessarily engage in, to secure their dignity, livelihoods and security of life. In their works, it is possible to discern several inter-related struggles. The struggle waged by subjects inhabiting different relational networks to exercise their agency freedoms is one. Another is the struggle to translate these agency freedoms into well-being freedoms, and vice-versa. A completely different set of struggles has to do with pursuing agency freedoms that may not necessarily promote, at least not in the short run, well-being. In the works of these authors, subaltern groups engage in a variety of actions to secure, consolidate and expand their freedoms.

These scholars speak to our various analytical concerns noted earlier, including the need to focus scholarly attention on relations of domination, Sen's relatively undeveloped concerns about the self-assertion of who he calls the 'voiceless', the 'agonistic' ways in which voices may be asserted and the 'dissensual' forms of identification that may attend to these contentions. Scott (1985) notes the 'everyday forms' of politics and resistance that peasants across the world improvise in order to resist infringements by aggrandising states into their economic and social spaces. Bayat (1997) draws attention to similar processes through which the 'politics of the informal people' play out. These insights are mirrored in the perspectives offered on 'popular mobilisation' by Roberts and Portes (2006) and Beinart and Dawson (2010). Likewise, Chatterjee (2004) draws a useful analytical distinction (one that's not always empirically borne out) between the politics of the elite and 'the politics of the governed' played out by subordinate groups outside the formal domains of state and civil society. These authors point to the ways in which political spaces are created and extended outside of formal political institutions by economically, socially and culturally subordinate groups.

In emphasising the need to study how politics contributes to enhanced capabilities, Corbridge (2002) challenges analysts to come to terms with a variety of debateable and often incompatible claims in the literature. We noted earlier Corbridge's own suggestions in terms of greater emphasis on the role of the state in pulverising local elites as well as the importance of popular movements. In their analysis of how citizens engaged with the state in Bihar and West Bengal States in India, he and his colleagues (Corbridge et al, 2005) draw attention to the differential ways in the state is 'sighted' by people. They emphasise the different meanings that bureaucrats, politicians and citizens attribute to the putative functions of government, and how these influence their access to services, improvement of livelihood opportunities and facilitate the social recognition of groups that continue to suffer social marginalisation and economic deprivation

3.2. Political and the political subject

Having critically reviewed Sen's writings and the arguments levelled by his critics, I agree that his account of capabilities needs to be further politicised. I suggest that the current political analysis of how capabilities might be enhanced- by Sen, his critics and by other scholars studying the politics of capabilities- needs to appreciate politics as the struggle to produce the subject and to shape inter-subjective meanings. I find that much of the literature that explores the 'political' dimensions of the expansion of capabilities conceives politics as a competition for the allocation of resources, (re-)distribution of privileges, control over power recognised as authority, and exchanging reasons for forming political values. Among critics, even as they refer to the social or the structural bases of injustice in their conceptual scheme, their analytical and empirical focus remains limited to the role of specific actors in

implementing (un-)favourable policies, of specific contests over controlling government and the redistribution of assets and privileges. An account of politicising the Capability Approach will benefit, I argue, with a more ontological conception of politics. This conception is informed, as I will show, by insights drawn from post-structuralist authors who argue that politics is about the crafting of identities and forging of subjectivities. It is about the bringing into existence of a political being and about influencing the manner in which these beings interact with society, and negotiate with their surroundings. Politics is, thus, about the struggle over the construction of selves and sensibilities.

Laclau's conceptualisation of politics as the struggle over the political subject is particularly instructive and I follow this in my project. I begin with the premise that social agents perceive themselves in relation to one another. Some of the relations they are subjected to are egalitarian, whereas others are characterised by subordination and domination, and yet others by oppression. Subjects inhabit several identity positions, some of which are 'ascribed' to them by others. Furthermore, these identities are evolving and shaped by a range of factors, some of which the subjects have control over and others that they don't. When these subjects interact with different political discourses, they begin to reflect on their evolving identities, sometimes appropriating new ones and discarding existing ones. These transitions are not always, I must emphasise, of their volition, but subjects do have some autonomy in determining these identities. Based on their interaction with different ideologies and discourses, subjects begin to identify with, or oppose, the relations of domination: they begin to imbibe the antagonisms. Inter-subjective meanings are influenced by and further influence these subjectivities, but they are also contested and ruptured. It

is this conception of politics that scholars of the Capability Approach need to take seriously in order to make an analytical contribution to the literature.

I introduced Rancière's discussion on the substance of political dissensus in an earlier section. Political dissensus, he clarifies, "is not simply a conflict of interests, opinions or values. It is a conflict over the common itself. It is not a quarrel over which solutions to apply to a situation, but a dispute over the situation itself..." (Rancière, 2004: 6). In this sense, politics is about not only about the construction of the subject, but about the forging of the subjective dimension through a radical interrogation of inter-subjective meanings attributed to life. Furthermore, democratic politics, according to him, is based on the challenge to the principles of rule by those who, he argues, "are not qualified to rule" (Rancière, 2001: 20). This apparently unseemly suggestion resembles a fundamental ethico-political principle of liberal democratic thought: that political authority should be decoupled from social and economic authority, not only in the formal sense in that electoral competition should be free and open, but also in a substantive sense that allows for the staging of demands thought to be outside of the extant limits of representation. Not only should competing preferences about who exercises political authority be freely and openly articulated, but competing values and meanings of the social and economic bases that co-constitute relations of power need to be uncovered and appreciated. In specifying the nature of political subjects, I will focus on the construction of this 'dissensual subject'. However, even as I do so, I will bear in mind Laclau's qualified criticism of Rancière's work that the latter does not seem to offer a normative dimension to think about 'dissensus'. As mentioned, I am particularly careful in not valorising all dissent, especially those that might contribute to the entrenchment of relations of domination and subordination, and the exclusion and marginalisation of socially, culturally and

economically subordinate groups. Accordingly, I will consider as ‘dissensus’ those proposals that make an explicit claim to renegotiate the relations of domination and subordination *as well as* the foundations on which those relations are established.

Consequent to these conceptual clarifications, I argue that capable subjects are those who challenge the *relations* of domination that they are subjected to. Contrasted with the Liberal-individualistic conception of political actors, capable subjects recognise their location in diverse relationships. Although these relationships are often shaped by inter-subjective meanings, they also project their own interests, preferences, values *and* interpretations. Based on the discussions hitherto, I further contend that the *telos* of identifying and challenging relations of domination needs to be at the heart of the Capability Approach. In making this case, I build on Bagchi (2000), who shows some of the limits of Sen’s analysis in this regard. In his critical analysis of Sen’s approach, he wonders if in Sen’s worldview the sweatshop worker inhabiting the informal labour market is a capable human being.

Bagchi’s disagreement with Sen raises an important question. I agree partially with Bagchi’s intended rebuke, although I would view the sweatshop worker inhabiting the informal labour market in peri-urban Kolkata as *a more capable subject* than s/he was or would have been in the informal labour market in rural Purnea (in north-east Bihar), whence s/he might come. I would do so not because s/he has increased her earnings as a sweatshop worker, but because s/he is no longer constrained to lead a life punctuated by social indignity heaped upon her/ him by social superiors in the village of her origin. The prospects for collective political action in the slum neighbourhood where she now resides might be enhanced. Furthermore, if and when s/he returns, the relations of domination that s/he had

endured over her lifetime are likely to be indelibly altered, though not necessarily dissolved.

I find it useful to bear Mouffe's conception of the 'political' in mind. According to her, 'the political' refers not to a terrain of competition for the loaves and fishes of office in a constitutional regime, but one where subjects reconstitute the relations of dominance and subordination. Furthermore, the 'political' represents a contest between opposing hegemonic projects. Hegemony is here understood as the attempt by the dominant social agent to neutralise opposition by reconstituting antagonistic relationships into collaborative and consensual ones. In this reading, hegemonic projects are inherently unstable, and contested by other political projects, some of which may seek to advance their own hegemony, and others that might challenge these hegemonies. The antagonistic dimension present in the opposing political projects makes reasonable reconciliation well-nigh impossible. The task of democratic politics is to provide these antagonisms with a "playing field" that would allow for these to be legitimately represented and challenged (Mouffe, 2007: 21). The task of any democratic 'political' project looking to augment capabilities would need to contest hegemonic acts that aim to consolidate relations of domination. Such an reading of the capability approach compels us to think through what enhancing capabilities might entail, not only by revisiting the means through which capabilities could be expanded, but also specify what capabilities could *mean*.

My efforts in this thesis will be to provide a constructive basis on which to think analytically about securing and enhancing capabilities. With scholars of the Capability Approach and the post-structuralist thinkers I draw on, I intend to

contribute to a defence the ethico-political principles⁹ on which liberal democracy is based. These principles provide the starting point of my analytical interventions. I locate this thesis as an effort to contribute to on-going discussions about deepening a version, perhaps post-foundational (following Marchart, 2007), of democracy that recognises the individual as the ultimate unit of moral concern, even as s/he seeks to find ways to reconstitute relations of domination and subjugation between subjects. That liberal institutions as we know them today are struggling to live up to those ethico-political principles of liberal democracy (and India, arguably, is only one of the sites of this struggle) provides the basis on which these are subjected, in this thesis, to the searing critique that they are. Where non-liberal politics, political practices and contentions are celebrated, it is precisely because they strengthen the substantive freedoms we are concerned with, anchored in those ethico-political principles¹⁰. Sen himself provides the lead for following such an approach, when he rejects the lexical priority afforded to liberty by Rawls and observes, “Many blatant injustices in the world take place in social circumstances in which the invoking of ‘political liberalism’ and the ‘principle of tolerance’ may be neither easy nor particularly helpful.” (Sen, 1992: 79).

4. RESEARCH MOTIVATION AND METHODOLOGY

This study has been motivated by my analytical engagement with the Capability Approach. Through a survey of the literature, I have tried to expound the

⁹ Chantal Mouffe explicitly acknowledges “the novelty of modern democracy and the crucial contribution of liberalism. The defense of pluralism, the idea of individual liberty, the separation of church and state, the development of civil society, all these are constitutive of democratic politics” (Mouffe, 2000: 72).

¹⁰ I avoid framing the issue in terms of being in favour of the Enlightenment ideals or against them because, as Hansen (1996) reminds us, the Enlightenment itself was comprised of at least two dialectical trends.

criticism against the lack of attention to politics in Sen, the tentative proposals advanced by some of his critics to ‘politicise’ the approach, and the anemic conception of politics and power in these accounts. I share their enthusiasm for ‘politicising’ the Capability Approach. I build on their proposals, the grounds for which I summarise below before outlining my own proposed research framework. Following this summary, I lay out the specific research questions and the research framework that guides me.

4.1. Summary of gaps in existing literature

The critical literature around the Capability Approach has made important contributions to our understanding of how politics contributes to enhancing human capabilities. Sen acknowledges the role of these criticisms in the evolution of his work. Indeed, the conversations between Sen, his critics and those who defend him reveal a fascinating account of the ways in which the Capability Approach has evolved over the last few years. I rehearse below the major analytical lacunae in the existing scholarship on capabilities and politics. These derive from an inadequate acknowledgement in both Sen and his critics of: 1. The relational nature of human life; 2. The role of political interventions in the construction of identities; 3. The constructive tasks of ‘unreasonable’ methods in politics; and 4. The understanding of politics as the construction of the subject who contests the relations of domination in the society s/he inhabits.

The relational nature of human life can barely be exaggerated. Sen recognises the social basis of individual capabilities, but refuses to, for good reason, accord ultimate ethical value to group or collective capabilities. His critics argue forcefully, also with sound reasons, for an appreciation of the role of groups, collectives and

structures. However, I find that perhaps more attention needs to be accorded to the relational dimension of human life. This relational account of human life builds on the human ontology of social life that Deneulin and McGregor (2010) appear to endorse. It complements individual-centred and group-centred approaches to focus on the dynamism of social relationships, which in turn are characterised by both conflict and cooperation. In particular, some of Sen's preliminary insights on cooperative conflict could be developed further. Focusing on relationships would allow analysts deploying the Capability Approach to develop more realistic accounts of power, the concomitant relations of domination and subordination, and how these are resisted, subverted and reconfigured.

Domination is perpetuated by a deprivation of voice. Struggles against domination necessarily strive to overcome voicelessness. Preliminary leads in this regard are provided in Sen's own approach when he discusses 'the self-assertion of the voiceless. However, these insights are not followed up in his subsequent articulation of voice with 'social choice' theory. To fill the resultant analytical gap, I borrow from Rancière's account of politics as the staging of demands considered by those exercising authority as inadmissible within the extant framework. Forcing such demands is an effective way for the voiceless to assert their presence and make themselves heard and understood. In keeping with the manner in which such individuals are understood, I find it relevant to speak of them as 'subjects' seeking to push at the limits of political imagination imposed upon them.

How exactly can subjects push these limits of the political imagination? Sen reposes great faith in public reasoning. Such a focus obscures the numerous ways in which other forms of democratic communication might enhance substantive freedoms even more than public reasoning does. On the one hand, it draws attention *away* from

the roles played by displays and performances of emotion, rhetoric and passion in shaping identities. On the other hand, it lulls us into believing that antagonisms, which are as core a fact of human life as is cooperation, can be rationally overcome. The analytical focus on public reasoning may not be as productive as an exploration of the different ways in which antagonisms find their expression in other public domains, with less physically violent manifestations. Rather, to appreciate the irreducibly plural nature of capabilities that Sen is keen to highlight, it becomes necessary for political analysis to take the contribution made by agonistic forms of democratic exchange to enhancing freedoms more seriously.

Discussions on the ways in which subjects assert their voices inevitably turn to how their identities are constituted. Sen consistently places public reasoning and personal reflections as shaping individuals' evolving identities. In his writings, identities appear to don what Jessop has called a 'voluntaristic' quality, meaning one which assumes a "unitary, rational, free-willed, autonomous subject" (Jessop, 1982: 254). Critics have focused instead on the role of groups, collectives and structures in shaping identities. In both streams, the role of political interventions, especially discourses and ideologies, could be integrated in order to facilitate a fruitful analysis. Where researchers refer to such interventions, they limit their analysis only to the influence of political parties or organised social movements, rather than to the myriad of ways in which politics is performed outside of formal arenas. In order to understand precisely how capabilities are enhanced through these struggles, analysts using the Capability Approach would need to take cognisance of the ways in which political action and performances configure and reconfigure personal and social identities.

These limitations in the literature point to a wide hiatus between different ways of understanding politics. Insofar as Sen's empirical work engages with politics, he focuses on institutional arrangements and organised politics. Much of the empirical research on the political pathways to enhancing capabilities tends to emphasise this institutional dimension. It is possible to conclude from many such works, including some of Sen's own work, as Corbridge (2002) does, that good authoritarian government can be just as instrumental in securing capabilities, or at least the functioning the effective access to which define capabilities. Politics, where it enters the analysis at all, is understood in terms of policy implementation and formal political claims. Sen's critics, especially those calling for a more structurally rooted analysis of power, espouse this image of politics more than Sen himself does.

I have suggested that to politicise the Capability Approach, we need analytical frameworks that help us comprehend the ways in which politics represents the struggle to produce subjects who identify, interrogate and contest contingent relations of power, domination and subordination. If capabilities are about the substantive freedoms to lead lives in accordance with what we value and have reason to value, it is difficult to imagine how these might be secured without an appreciation of the ways in which political subjectivities are forged. Given the relational nature of human life, the constitutive role of political discourse and the importance of 'unreasonable' methods of democratic exchange, it is necessary to develop an appreciation of politics as the contest to produce different kinds of subjects. Such a subject is not the carrier of predetermined interests, preferences, values and demands; rather, these are co-constituted through political intervention.

4.2. Research questions

Based on a review of the literature on capabilities, power and politics, I advance the proposition that substantive freedoms are realised through the forging of a dissensual political subject who contests relations of domination. This study is an attempt to explore the processes through which this happens. In it, I elaborate the analytical claims about ‘politicising’ the Capability Approach outlined above. These claims lead me to formulate the following specific research questions for this study:

1. How do political subjectivities contribute to the enhancement of substantive freedoms? This is predicated on a prior assumption of equality whose realisation is blocked by power-holders and other elites. How, in particular, do the forging of political subjectivities impact social relations, especially those characterised by relations of domination and subordination? How do people interrogate relations of domination and subordination and assert their prior assumption of equality?
2. How are these political subjectivities forged? What is the role therein of different ways of democratic exchange?
3. What discourses attend to these processes? What identities are forged through these discourses?

These questions speak to my interest in examining how capabilities are enhanced through the interrogation and contestation of relations of domination, deploying agonistic exchanges and forging dissensual political subjectivities. As Samaddar reminds us, the hermeneutics of the political subject cannot be state-centred or self-centred (Samaddar, 2010). Accordingly, my study, which seeks to make a contribution to how political subjectivities contribute (or not) to expanding

capabilities in the way I have identified earlier, needs to take into account the everyday social relations lived by people. In particular, this is borne out from suggestions to develop an appreciation of ‘human ontology’ (Deneulin and McGregor, 2010) and to look beyond ‘ruptural’ events to understand how relations of domination are interrogated (Norval, 2007). This I propose to do through ethnographic work.

4.3. Research methodology

In order to explore the political mechanisms through which substantive human freedoms are augmented, I deploy what Taylor has described a “hermeneutic science of man” (Taylor, 1987: 71), a science which takes the study of inter-subjective meanings more seriously than do empiricist social scientists. I pay attention to the manner in which people practice politics in their everyday lives, and how they negotiate the collective structures around them. Emphasising the inter-subjective aspect of human living, Taylor cautions nonetheless that the primary focus on what analysts tend to call political ‘behaviour’ should not be abstracted from institutions, which also contribute to the forging of social meanings. I seek to understand the meanings that are constitutive of the ‘social matrix’ which individuals are subjected to and within which they act. At the same time, I recognise that I need to tread carefully: Taylor’s communitarian views emphasise the overarching importance of inter-subjective meaning-making, assuming that all members of a collective must always share these perceptions. My interest, on the other hand, lies in the ways in which political subjects *dissent* from the inter-subjective meanings: in this vein, I actively seek ruptures and discontinuities in the ways in which meanings are made. Indeed,

Taylor's clarification that inter-subjective meanings are not to be confused with 'consensus' (Taylor, 1987: 57) is something I build on.

I find Dipesh Chakrabarty's suggestion (Chakrabarty, 2008: 18) to develop affective narratives of everyday lives very useful. In following him, I study how social agents negotiate (or not) with the relations of dominance that they are subjected to. I do this by understanding the meanings that subjects attach to their political practices. To fathom political practices, I focus on select social decisions and disputes around these through ethnographic work in select localities. To study subjective meanings, I focus on the ways in which the decision-makers, those affected by decisions and other disputants interpreted the decisions. To appreciate inter-subjective meanings, I focus on the contested interpretations of these events as they were reconstructed for me by different participants and other observers. Thus, even as I focus on the social matrix within which subjects acted and were constrained to act, I am particularly alert to the task of identifying and noting divergences, discontent and dissent.

4.4. Study sites

For a study that makes claims about enhancing substantive freedoms and forging of political subjectivities through contentious practices, India is an obvious choice. The benefits of wide-ranging and relatively progressive constitutional provisions for its citizens are unevenly available among the population. The liberties enshrined in its constitution sit uncomfortably with widespread poverty, social discrimination and gross social inequalities. Without doubt, India is a robust parliamentary democracy, where elections to five distinct tiers of government are regularly held and considered by even the harshest critics as relatively free and fair:

the country boasts among the highest voter turnouts in the world, especially among the poor, baffling political scientists. However, citizens' participation in democratic institutions barely outlasts elections, and the institutional mechanisms for such engagement are characterised by lack of use, or worse still abuse. There thus exists plenty of scope for the expansion of substantive freedoms for the country's population.

India's federal structure, decentralised governance, and widespread regional disparities make the country an even more interesting location to substantiate different strands of the argument. Exploiting this advantage, the ethnographic work was grounded in select Gram Panchayats (the cluster of revenue villages that makes up the unit of village governance) in two States: my units of observation were Gram Panchayats, not States or districts. The need to conduct ethnographic fieldwork limited the selection of States to where Hindi or Bangla- languages I am familiar with and can speak fluently- were spoken. From within this narrowed range, two States were selected on the basis of them providing "maximum variation" (Flybjerg, 2001: 79). India's National Human Development Report provided me with the preliminary basis on which I made this classification (GoI, 2000: 25). Selecting on the value of the Human Development Index, I shortlisted one 'medium-performing' State and one 'poor-performing' State. The detailed decision-matrix for selection of States, districts and Gram Panchayats are presented in Annex 1.

To ensure variation, the 'medium-performing' State I selected was one with a perceptibly better reputation for pro-poor governance and the institutionalisation of pro-poor coalition. This reputation was buttressed with an apparent consensus about the feasibility and desirability of redistributive policies, a relative lack of identity-based cleavages, and the control of authority by a political party ideologically

committed to the formulation and implementation of pro-poor policy. The ‘poorly-performing’ State was selected in such a way as to be particularly notorious for misgovernance. The State appeared to lack any consensus on redistributive policies: politics in this State was marred by the assertion of ‘primordial’ identities such as caste, ethnicity and religion. Although all political parties claimed to prioritise social recognition, identity-based discrimination and violence against socially subordinated groups was rampant across the State. Political parties were notoriously de-institutionalised, unlike the cadre-based formations of the ‘medium-performing’ State. In following such a design, I could control for the analytical claims made by scholars who accord primacy to institutional politics and structures of living together in the realisation of capabilities. I must confess that my final decisions were based on impressions formed about these States from conversations with academics, observers, policy-makers, newspaper reports and academic studies. I believe the lack of ‘scientific’ rigor in identifying the States does not weaken my basic argument.

Despite these variations, the two States were selected such that they shared certain background similarities: 1). They had devolved formal and substantive responsibilities to Gram Panchayats, making these the obvious locus of contentions over resources and authority; 2). Their ‘politics’ was constituted by discourses of contestations, challenging dominant structures, and a rhetoric of empowerment of the toiling masses; and 3). Both the States shared similar administrative and juridical histories, especially tenurial systems. Based on these criteria, I selected West Bengal and Bihar as States to collect data from, where West Bengal was the ‘medium-performing’ State and Bihar the ‘poorly-performing’ one. Such a selection criterion enabled me to look out for obvious differences in overall context, but also record

similarities across the differences. Where I noted similarities, I was compelled to look for factors contributing to similarities across such widely differing contexts.

Within each State, I intended the selected Gram Panchayats to be located in the district identified by the State Government as the most 'deprived'. Based on data available from the Government of India, I selected Gram Panchayats from Maldah district in West Bengal and Araria district in Bihar. Within these districts, I purposively sampled two Gram Panchayats which fulfilled the following three conditions: one, the familiarity of my 'local contacts' with them; two, a tradition of organisation and participation in larger political and social movements, including the formation of community-based organisations; and three, both were to be within ten kilometres of one another so that there were no significant ecological differences. Based on these three conditions, I introduced a fourth condition in order to enable me focus on the contingent nature of local political contentions. Across the two States, I identified four Gram Panchayats with *similar* values of a crudely-defined proxy of capabilities- the performance of the much-acclaimed National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme measured in terms of the average numbers of workdays¹¹ generated. That the number of workdays obtained in all four Gram Panchayats was similar across States with very different institutional matrices, textures of state-society relations, socio-economic profiles and patterns of electoral mobilisation meant that I could concentrate my efforts on analysing local contentions. I should reiterate, however, that the intention of this project was not to explain variations in the

¹¹ NREGS employment provided an opportunity for workers to engage in work of their own volition, even as they expanded the number of favourable options. Hence, the number of NREGS workdays can be interpreted as a measure of capabilities. it remains a crude measure because it tells us little about the opportunity itself: whether facilities were available at the worksite, wages were paid on time, etc.

performance of the governmental schemes, but to understand the variegated ways in which political subjectivities were constructed across diverse settings.

4.5. Data collection

Both primary and secondary data inform the findings of my project. Data was collected over five months from December 2009 to April 2010. Primary data includes ethnographic data; survey data from 4,500 households and in-depth interviews with 500 randomly-selected households; and life histories of local politicians and ‘ordinary’ people. Secondary data includes data on financial resources available to local governments in the study localities, lists of households classified as ‘poor’, and data on the rural employment guarantee program.

The use of the survey technique in a study designed to be hermeneutic in approach calls for a brief defence. The surveys were conducted to understand the socio-economic profile of the study localities. Of particular interest was the profile of those who were deprived of access to key functionings, such as public facilities, and productive assets. The surveys also provide data on *actual and eligible* access to entitlements. The analysis of this data provides important information on the proportion of households that managed to secure BPL cards on which basis they could make further claims. The more focused survey provided information on key decisions that affected social life, local formal and informal leadership, and the perceptions of what individuals identified as integral to a ‘good’ polity and a ‘good’ politician.

4.5.1. The surveys

The survey was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, census data was collected from over 4,500 households in eighteen wards of the two States. The survey

response structure elicited nominal responses. However, for reasons that will become clear in Chapter 4, the codes were treated ordinally. Based on the analysis of this data, in-depth interviews were conducted with 500 households in four purposively selected wards from within select Gram Panchayats. Probability samples for West Bengal were generated at 7.3% error level and 90% confidence levels. Probability samples for Bihar were generated at 6% error level and 90% confidence levels. In the in-depth household surveys, the response structure elicited nominal as well as open-ended responses. The codes were treated nominally and categorically. The data was analysed using the STATA software package.

4.5.2. *Oral histories and testimonies*

I compiled oral histories of local political mobilisations, people's experiences of conflict and narratives of coercion that poorer groups faced vis-à-vis landlords and the state. In asking about descriptions of events that occurred several years, indeed decades ago, I could not but be sensitive to the kinds of questions that Amin asks while recalling an anti-police riot that occurred in northern India six decades after the event: "How does the passage of time affect the telling of stories? What structures existed prior to the event? What happens to a story-line in a village now freed from the constraints of law" (Amin, 1995: 195). I approached the archive, which was to me no mere than an 'official' fact. To me, the "local and familial memories" of these events were important in their own right as recollections of historic events, "historic because they are on record as infractions of the law which did not go unnoticed or unpunished" (Amin, 1995: 197). I was therefore not too concerned, as Amin was, to 'hear' these narratives in relation to the judicial records. Even though the rioters are alive, their voices- as those of Amin's "peasant-actors"- echo those of

more powerful and perhaps persuasive actors, sometimes as adjuncts to these, at other times interrogating them.

In analysing the data, I find the leads provided in Potter (2009: 205) to be particularly relevant. The conversations were carefully transcribed as they were delivered (rather than the conventional play script). From a careful reading of the transcripts, I categorised extracts from the narratives under distinct themes. The themes broadly corresponded to my four research questions. Within each theme, I formulated sub-themes. To the extent possible, the contents of these themes were mutually exclusive, as otherwise there remained the danger of significant overlaps. Thereafter, I developed the narrative and summarised the extracts under the relevant sub-themes.

4.5.3. Participant observation or observer participation?

Ever since Malinowski pioneered the participant observation technique, it has been considered “an essential element of all qualitative studies ... Immersion in the setting permits the researcher to hear, to see, and to begin to experience reality as the participants do. (Marshall and Rossman 2006: 100)” Personal reflections provide “new vantage points with opportunities to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange” (Glesne 1999 cited in Marshall and Rossman 2006: 100). However, in line with the hermeneutic approach I espouse, I can make no claims to have been completely objective. For, as Clifford and Marcus remind their readers, field researchers have to reconcile with the knowledge that ethnographic truths are “inherently partial” (Clifford, 1986: 7) and the apparently simple cultural accounts are intentional creations. Moreover, with the fractures in the delicate objective/ subjective

balance, it is now more common for researchers to let their thoughts and emotions infiltrate than earlier.

As reflexive field work accounts become more common, and acceptable, they also posit the ethnographer as an active ‘participant’. I cannot deny that I have been a participant in this sense, especially when faced with the early summer storm, the dreaded *kalbaisakh*: I have been asked to read out newspapers, explain government orders and official procedures, take respondents to hospital or other facilities, to attend government meetings along with elected representatives, been bribed so that I would not report the absence of financial data (I hasten to add that I did not accept it, thereby making myself look like an idiot!), and to present appeals to the lower-level bureaucracy. I have, in general, ‘hung out’ with different groups and individuals, partaking of the gossip (but never breaching anyone’s confidence), provoking my respondents by relaying taunts by political rivals, going to the movies with them, and joining them for their feasts. I welcomed these opportunities, since they did helped me develop the affective accounts of capabilities and subjectivities that I went to the field for.

In doing this, I might have thought I was empathising with my respondents and immersing myself in the field, and would thereby reconstruct ‘their’ points of view. While this was certainly useful to get ‘deep’ accounts of decisions and disputes, it does not ensure accuracy at all. A hermeneutic approach alerted me to the possibilities that the account of decisions and disputes that my respondents constructed for me in response to my investigations might be transformed from what they originally had been. Indeed, as de Certeau reminds us, “The story does not express a practice....It *makes* it” (de Certeau, 1985: 81; emphasis added). Indeed, the impossibility of ethnographic work uncovering all there is to know is emphasised in

critical reflections by ethnographers such as Willis (1981: 194) and Marcus (1986: 187). Recognising these limitations, I have made every attempt to triangulate the data with as many diverse sources as possible.

As with the data from the oral histories, I analysed this data by categorising emergent observations under manually-defined themes. Although I do not share with phenomenological scholars their approach, I borrow from their understanding of themes as “structures of experience” (van Manen, 1990: 79). These ‘experiences’ were based on the range of disparate actions, feelings and relationships that I observed and which were reported to me/ in my presence. Admittedly, I considered for further analysis only those themes that appeared *to me* to relate to the different political dimensions of human capabilities discussed earlier. For the thesis, I parse the analysis further to focus only on those aspects that relate to the decisions and disputes under discussion.

4.6. Chapter plan

This introductory chapter outlined key debates in the capability literature and offered analytical perspectives on how capabilities might be enhanced. It also lay out the research methodology and methods of data collection. It drew attention to the appropriateness of the ethnographic method in pursuing a study of this kind. In Chapter 2, I will introduce the study sites, particularly highlighting the contentions that dotted the landscape of these localities.

Subsequent chapters will take up for discussion each of the analytical themes explored earlier in this chapter in respect of expanding capabilities. Each of the chapters will use ethnographic data to substantiate the analytical arguments that I have offered earlier in this chapter. Chapter 3 will examine the contingent struggles

through which the relational dimension of capabilities may be enhanced. It will be based on quantitative analysis of randomly- sampled household survey data and qualitative analysis of the data from ethnographic observations, to draw attention to the ways in which subjects utilised the presence of a government-instituted development program, the widely-acclaimed National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) to assert their equality vis-à-vis their social superiors as well as local bureaucrats. Chapter 4 will investigate the ways in which people, especially those who might think of themselves as ‘less powerful’ (but not ‘less equal’) than others, assert their voice and stage demands whose admissibility is sought to be restricted by taking resort to bureaucratically and techno-managerially defined frameworks. It will analyse the manner in which people stage demands for ‘below-poverty-line’ (BPL) cards and are eventually allotted these. The analytical discussions in this chapter will be based on quantitative analysis of census survey data as well as qualitative analysis of data from the ethnographic observations.

These insights are developed in Chapter 5, where I will analyse two local disputes to examine the agonistic ways in which claims were made. The dispute in West Bengal arose as a result of the Ward Member trying to install electric poles in what was perceived to be a high-handed manner, and the numerous disputations against that action. The one in Bihar related to a dispute over a portion of the homestead land owned by a family from one of the so-called ‘backward’ castes and occupied by someone from a caste that was considered socially superior to theirs. The analytical discussions in that chapter will be based on qualitative analysis of oral testimonies and ethnographic observations.

In Chapter 6, I will analyse the ways in which members of historically marginalised social groups stage claims on the state as well as social elites. I will

draw attention to the processes of ‘identification’ that its members embark on and alliances it makes with other similarly constructed social groups. The social groups making these demands corresponded with groups that had historical memories of being socially and economically subordinated. The overarching dispute related to squatters of the Musahar community (categorised as Mahadalit by the State Government) who had allegedly illegally occupied land belonging to the local public school. One related dispute was between sharecroppers belonging to the Santhal community (categorised by the State Government as ‘Scheduled Tribe’) and the high-caste landlord whose tenants they were. The second related dispute was between devotees of the Kevat community (categorised by the State Government as ‘Extremely Backward Class’) who sought to make the high-caste trustees of the temple they worshipped at accountable for the incomes accruing to the temple. This chapter will draw on qualitative analysis of the oral testimonies, interviews with local politicians and ethnographic observations. The varied identities that members of each of the three social groups forge offer insights into the manner in which they stage their demands and make their claims, as well as the extent to which they force concessions from elites. In the concluding chapter, I review the manner in which the theoretical and analytical lacunae identified earlier in this chapter have been addressed, and perhaps point to some directions for further research.

5. CONCLUSION

The Capability Approach has spawned a wide-ranging literature. Many analysts have turned their attention to questions of power and politics. In this introductory chapter, I have examined the theoretical gaps and analytical lacunae that remain in our understanding of what is arguably an emerging and dynamic field. The

present thesis is aimed as a contribution to bridge the theoretical gaps in our understanding of capabilities and politics. On the one hand, it adds to the growing body of scholarship that aims to ‘politicise’ the Capability Approach. On the other hand, it introduces and defends a new way of doing so, by advancing the argument that politics is about the construction of a specific kind of political subject, the subject of dissensus who stages the demands for social and economic equality where such demands are considered inadmissible.

This chapter also discussed four analytical lacunae, each of which will be discussed in subsequent chapters of this thesis through a discussion of ethnographic data. I drew attention to the need for analysts of capabilities to take seriously the relational dimension of human life, especially the relations of domination to which individuals are subjected. I then discussed the issue of voicelessness and the problem of the voiceless asserting their presence and making themselves heard and understood by those exercising authority. I specifically highlighted the agonistic ways in which these voices might be asserted. Thereafter, I noted the need for capabilities analysts to study the processes through which the political identities of those considered voiceless is constructed and forged.

I then explained the methodological approach and the specific methods I propose to use in order to substantiate my analytical claims. I drew attention to the hermeneutic lens that an exercise seeking to study the forging of the political subject through contentious practices entails. The ethnographic work is not designed to ‘test’ existing hypotheses about the conditions under which capabilities may be enhanced. Rather, it is an attempt to draw lessons for how the political processes attending to the enhancement of substantive freedoms may be analytically studied and how our understanding of the ‘politics’ of these processes may be strengthened. As I

mentioned in an earlier section, it is the prospective application of the Capability Approach that guides me through this thesis. I will now introduce the study localities.

CHAPTER 2

THE SETTING

In the previous chapter, I outlined my analytical claims on politicising capabilities. I then discussed the framework of my research, through which I propose to explore these claims. I also presented my research questions, the research methodology- drawing attention to the ethnographic nature of my endeavour- and the criteria for selecting sites. In this chapter, I will draw attention to key features of the economic, social and political relations that characterise the localities. In particular, I will focus on select political contentions whose shared memories linger on till date, and dot the landscape of the study localities. This will enable us to contextualise the affective narratives that follow in the subsequent chapters.

Given the context of devolution of authority and responsibility to elected local governments, I find it appropriate to focus my fieldwork in ‘wards’, the basic stratum of formal political administration. In doing so, I take seriously the proposition that wards, like villages, are not “a priori a bounded ‘whole’...to be simply unveiled or tracked for changes.” (Mines and Yazgi, 2010:10). The inhabitants of the wards do not ontologically exist as traditional, superstitious, exploited entities. Rather, based on my discussion in the previous chapter, I view them as ‘subjects’ attempting to shape their politico-economic networks. However, the political and economic interactions of the inhabitants straddle the boundaries of the ward. Hence, it is appropriate for me to situate the wards themselves in the more macro and meso-level environment of which they are a part.

1. THE CONTEXT OF THE STATES

India adopted a republican constitution in 1950 with universal adult franchise. However, it was not until the mid-1960s that an effective opposition party system came into being, at least in the States (Kothari, 2005; Yadav, 1999). Most accounts of Indian democracy point to the proliferation of demands since that period (Bardhan, 1984; Corbridge and Harriss, 2000; and Rudolph and Rudolph, 1987). These demands were spearheaded by movements representing groups that had hitherto been unrepresented or under-represented in the polity. These included occupational groups such as farmers and agricultural labourers, as well as identity-based groups such as Dalits (Scheduled Castes), Other Backward Classes and- to a lesser extent- Scheduled Tribes¹². Their claims were provided coherence and political presence by the farmers' movements, agriculture labour unions, and organisations such as the Dalit Panthers, the Backward and Minority Communities Employees' Federation (BAMCEF) and the naxalites (Corbridge and Harriss, 2000; Jayal and Pai, 2000; Omvedt, 1993). Applying Rancière's definition of politics as being the act by those on the margins to assert their presence and the instituting of rule by those not thought to be qualified to govern, it might be argued that the Indian polity was far more politicised and politics far more democratised hereafter than in the prior two decades: a similar point has been made by Corbridge and Harriss (2000), Omvedt (1993) and Yadav (1999) against scholars who argue that the emergence of a 'demand' polity (Bardhan, 1998; Patnaik, 1994 and Rudolph and Rudolph, 1987) weakened democratic governance by holding it hostage to the strength of vested interests.

¹² In a significant marriage of individual rights with groups, the constitution provided for protective discrimination for historically marginalised social groups known as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Austin, 1966).

These demands impacted the political firmament in significant ways. The significance of this change in the States of West Bengal and Bihar can be best appreciated by a consideration of the historical legacy of the Permanent Settlement, the land tenurial system instituted by the British colonial government in 1793. Through this system, a quasi-permanent class of absentee landlords had been established over juridically defined 'estates', with unprecedented revenue-appropriating authority, backed up by the apparatus of the colonial state. The system was characterised by the hierarchy of feudatories (locally called *jamindars*), at the apex of which was the maharaja of the 'estate'. Of the various land tenurial systems established by the British in India, the effects of the Permanent Settlement are thought to have been the most pernicious (Cohn, 1987; Guha, 1983) for its exploitative and inefficient features. At the base of the pyramid were sharecroppers (*bargadars* in Bangla, *bataidar* in Hindi/ Maithili). The actual cultivators of land, they were recognised (often, only customarily) as tenants of the different *jamindars*, and liable to 'share' with them between one-half and two-thirds of the harvest. Sharecroppers could also be evicted by their social superiors at will.

The post-colonial Indian state sought to redress these inequities through legislation, especially after its legitimacy was threatened by insurgencies of landless labourers and the rural poor on the eve and immediate aftermath of the transfer of power. The Central Government's Zamindari Abolition Act of 1948 provided the framework for States- Bihar and West Bengal included- to pass their own laws to enforce the abolition of absentee landlordism. However, the legislations failed to substantially alter the deeply iniquitous and widely-resented relations of production till well into the 1960s. This resulted in the renewal of widespread popular agitation,

taking the form of *bargadars* and *bataidars* forcibly occupying the land on which they were tenants, harvesting the crop and refusing to share it with the feudatories.

Scholars remain divided as to whether these 'land occupation' movements, as they came to be known, were instigated by the various communist parties in these two States, or whether the impetus for organising and initiating the land occupations originated from among the landless and the rural poor. For West Bengal, scholars as widely divergent in their intellectual orientation such as Mallick (1997), Kohli (1987) and Ruud (2003) argue that it was the infiltration of the urban intelligentsia into the rural areas and their conscientisation efforts that sparked the movements. On the other hand, Omvedt (1993) suggests that the communist parties followed the lead, and translated the autonomous action of the rural labourers into electoral victory. She and Das (1982) make a similar case for Bihar even as they highlight the role of the then-unlawful Communist Party of India Marxist-Leninist (Liberation), against those who, like Dasgupta (Dasgupta, 1974) locate the rural poor as the objects of organising by the parties and the movements.

In both States, the role of the then-reigning Congress Party was perceived differently by the different social groups. In West Bengal, the party has been widely implicated for its brutal repression of the movements. In Bihar, on the other hand, its complicity with the dominant classes is less well-established, with scholars such as Das (1982) even arguing that it was its *failure* to contain the land occupation movements that propelled the *jamindars* to collude with the conservative elements in the anti-Congress alliance formed through the 1970s. Nonetheless, by 1977, riding on the crest of popular movements and its own support to and leadership of these movements, the Communist Party of India (Marxist), or CPI(M), was elected to form

the government at the head of the Left Front. In Bihar, the same elections brought to power a socialist government led by the Janata Party.

The electoral victors in both States benefitted from the short-lived wave of anti-‘Congressism’ that swept party out of power from the Centre for the first time. The CPI(M) outlived the Congress Party’s return to power at the Centre in 1980 and continued at the helm of affairs till 2011, when it was ousted by a coalition of the Trinamul Congress (TMC) , the Congress Party and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). In Bihar, however, the Janata Party succumbed to the machinations of the Congress Party when it returned to power at the Centre in 1980. Over the next decade, the State was ruled by the Congress Party till the electoral victory of the Janata Dal in 1990. Since then, different factions of the Janata Dal, with indistinguishable ideologies have ruled the State: the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) governed the state from 1990 till 2005, after which it was replaced by the Janata Dal (United), or JD (U), which has ruled the State since as the dominant partner of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) coalition.

The accession to political authority of these parties represented more than just a change of guard as the above account may seem to indicate. In West Bengal, the rise to power of the CPI(M) at the head of popular movements demanding a more equitable socio-economic arrangement characterises what Yadav has called the ‘second electoral system’ in Indian politics (Yadav, 1999): the once-dominant Congress Party was hereafter obliged to play the role of the opposition, a role it forfeited after factional infighting led to the creation of the TMC in the mid-1990s. The State Government consolidated reforms in land holdings and tenancy systems. In Bihar, the Janata Party, withstanding the pressures of conservatives, introduced the provision for reservation of seats in public educational and bureaucratic institutions

for castes classified as 'backward'¹³ (Robin, 2009), and hereafter bunched together as Other Backward Classes (OBCs). The return of the Janata Dal to power in 1990 inaugurated what Yadav (1999) has called the 'third electoral system', whereby the Congress Party is now just one of several poles around which politics in the State revolves. The introduction of post-Congress politics inaugurated a transformation in the very style of politics and the grammar of governance, making it imperative for governments to at least be seen as being pro-poor and governance actors to reflect the image of the poor.

A key distinction between the post-1977 political developments in West Bengal and Bihar should be noted. In West Bengal, the CPI(M), once they took over power, rapidly transformed itself from radical assertion to institutional management- a transformation lauded by some (Harriss, 2005; Kohli, 1987) and critiqued by others (Lieten, 1996: 63), to the point of jealously guarding these institutions for members of their own cadre (Bhattacharya, 2006) and preventing women and members of socially subordinate social groups from exercising any control over them (Webster, 1992: 118-121). In Bihar, on the other hand, the putative descent of the State into chaos, lawlessness and social upheaval has often been traced to the same set of events. The afore-mentioned affirmative action policies have made it respectable to make caste-based claims- lauded, reservedly, by some (Corbridge et al, 2005; Jaoul, 2009) but critiqued by others (Rodgers and Rodgers, 2011; World Bank, n.d.). Particularly since 1990, the State Government had allowed itself to be identified with a specific

¹³ The caste groups that were provided the benefits of affirmative action in educational institutions and public employment were collectively classified as Extremely Backward Classes. They are a subset, the bottom of the heap in Gopal Guru's words (Guru, 2005), of caste groups that have been categorised as the Other Backward Classes (OBCs). On a schematic caste hierarchy, they are considered socially and ritually subordinate to the so-called 'high castes', but superior to the Scheduled Castes.

coalition of castes comprising Yadavs, Paswans and a section of Ashraf Muslims¹⁴, all the while claiming to provide ‘social justice’ and ‘dignity’ to the so-called ‘backward castes’. Some of the political slogans, such as “Remove the upper castes, save Bihar”¹⁵ deployed by the ruling party were plainly incendiary; others were disdainful of ‘development’: “we want recognition, not development”¹⁶. In other words, while the establishment of the Left Front government in West Bengal was widely credited with consolidating institutions, the RJD in Bihar gained notoriety for seemingly hollowing these out. Following the advent of the new dispensation in the State since 2005, press reports have widely touted the emergence of a development agenda¹⁷.

2. POLITICAL CONTENTIONS

As a research student hoping to unravel contentious accounts of village pasts and presents, I was sceptical about villagers offering me any insights. My scepticism was unjustified. After the initial rapport was established, and I convinced my interlocutors that I was a harmless student of ‘development’ from distant England, I found respondents willing to offer their insights into what they thought I should know about the troubles in their localities. I was aware of the possibility that they would say things that they thought I wanted to hear. My conversations therefore began with such ‘inane’ matters such as rural life (*gaon ka rehen-sehen/ gramer manush ki bhabhe thaakey*). In time, they were assured that I was genuinely harmless (and useless). I

¹⁴ The Yadav caste group comprises the so-called ‘upper OBCs’, the Paswan caste group is one of the castes categorised as Scheduled Caste, and Ashraf Muslims refer to the so-called ‘high castes’ among the Muslims (Singh et al, 2008)

¹⁵ The slogan went *Bhurabal* (A Hindi acronym represented *Bhumihar*, *Rajput*, *Babhan* and *Lala* castes) *Hatao*, *Bihar Bachao*, personal observations

¹⁶ This slogan was: *Vikas nahin samman chahiye*, personal observations while growing up in India

¹⁷ For a skeptical account, see EPW (2010).

gradually understood that they also communicated stories or events in ways that they wanted *others* to know about.

Usually, a carefully constructed apparently casual comment suggesting “I have heard there was some *jhamela/ jhanjhat* in the neighbourhood few years ago” was enough to get them talking. For pointed questions or ‘facts’, I was usually directed to select leaders of movements. From my conversations, it appeared that the State-wide contentions over ownership of landholdings translated into bitter contests at the local level. It was here that seemingly immutable relations of patronage began to be interrogated and dissolved rapidly. Unsurprisingly, these transformations deeply affected the inhabitants of the study Gram Panchayats in both States in economic, social and affective terms. The people I spoke with passionately shared with me the vivid memories they bore of what came to be called the ‘land-occupation’ movements that had occurred in their localities during the last four decades. Across the study localities, I came across the familiar refrain about how those participating in the occupation movements looked up to the state in the first instance, but the state itself was unwilling to cooperate, so they were left with no option but to take matters in their own hands. Faced with repression by landlords, their paramilitary forces and a conniving police, the occupiers had no option but to defend themselves using violence. If they succeeded, the state would legalise their occupations- or so I was told.

2.1. Ditya and Rahimpur

The one thing that keeps recurring in the narratives from Ditya ward, located in Old Maldah’s Rohingya Gram Panchayat and the first of the two West Bengal sites to be taken up for discussion, is that of solidarity- the common cause forged by the

Panchayat's different social groups during the 'illegal' occupations of the property of the absentee landlords. From accounts in the village, it was clear that the leaders of the movement in the locality have assumed larger-than-life proportions, and continue to do so in the minds of younger people, many of who had no recollection of the movements, or were born after it was over. One such leader is Babul Sarkar, who we will encounter many times in this thesis. Babul *babu* (as he was locally known) was the Deputy Pradhan from 1978 till 1983, after which he was elected Pradhan till he was partially paralyzed by a stroke in 2002. He is sixty-five now, and no longer active in politics.

Till the 1970s, Ditya's residents were *bargadars* of an absentee *jamindar*, who was based in Maldah town. In 1965, when Majhiya Kundru, an activist of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) activist from Gajole came to their locality to "preach revolution"¹⁸, he had a ready audience. Tularam Sarkar, a 50-year old farmer owning 'medium-sized' landholdings and head clerk at the Circle Office in neighbouring Adina, recalls a story well-known to those who have studied the West Bengal of the 1950s and 1960s, "Those were dark days...When Majhiya [Kundru] came, Babul *da* [elder brother] became his first lieutenant. We all followed."¹⁹ That these 'memories' have been passed down from one generation to another is obvious from even fleeting conversations at the *chai* kiosk. Debu Pramanik, whose father took part in the movement, says, "The previous generation made many sacrifices. Had it not been for Babul *jethu* [uncle] and his friends' leadership, we would have been wiped out."²⁰ Recalls Kunal Moholi, another leader of the movement, now 63, "No one gave anyone away. *Aamra shobai ek shonge chhilam*. We were in it together.

¹⁸ Interview, Babul Sarkar, February 18, 2010

¹⁹ Interview, Tularam Sarkar, February 21, 2010

²⁰ Interview, Debu Pramanik, December 24, 2010

Babul *da* was Desiya. We were Moholi. But to the *jamindar*, we were all like dirt.²¹” Indeed, this appears to bear testimony to the sentiments recorded by a generation of scholars working on the West Bengal of the 1960s (Ruud, 2003; Kohli, 1987; Webster, 1992).

However, these collective meanings attributed to the struggles were not accepted in their entirety. Sixty-seven year-old Besaya Moholi, who reported being molested by the *jamindar*’s henchmen more than once, reminded Kunal Moholi, in my presence, of the manner in which “so many people in our hamlet, as well as theirs, had resisted the *jamindars*, even before that (sic) Majhiya Kundru’s advent. Babul *da* is a good man, but he was not the one who showed us the way. He joined us in the struggle. We were with him, not behind him.²²” Babul *babu* himself concurs, “We were relatively better off than the Saotals, the Moholis and other *adibasis*. The *jamindar* used to come to meet the *modol* (village headman), but he would never go to the Saotal hamlet. He said they were filthy, but we knew he feared them.²³”

In Rahimpur, located in Joshumati Gram Panchayat in the same block and the second locality studied in West Bengal, the narratives of the ‘land-grab movements’ appear far more fractured. The movement deeply divided Rahimpur. There were at least six households that were beholden to the local *jamindar*, based in Muchia. For them, the land-grab movements represented an assault on *their* social and economic privileges as well. The most important of these was the household of Sana-ul Ali, whose mild-mannered son Akbar Ali is the pre-eminent leader of the Congress Party today, and widely perceived to be the one man responsible for the Party’s revival. Other households that were threatened by these movements included those of Murad

²¹ Interview, Kunal Moholi, February 24, 2011

²² Moina Tudu’s intervention, Interview, Kunal Moholi, February 24, 2011

²³ Interview, Babul Sarkar, February 18, 2011

Hussain, whose son Shams ur Rehman is Akbar's close friend, and an active member of the local Congress committee; Alauddin Ali, another Congress activist, and member of the Village Education Committee; and Siraj ul Islam, whose son Babar Hossain is the present Ward Member. Much of the violence of the *jamindar's* henchmen and the police against the poor were mediated through these families.

The movements were characterised by the participation of landless labourers, at great risk to their lives. For many among them, those were heady days. Joynal Ali, associated with the CPI(M) since 1975 when he had been imprisoned under the draconian laws of the Emergency, reminisced, "Our own neighbours could not be trusted. We did not know who was friend and who was foe. First they tried to tell us—the Communists are Hindus, they will destroy your religion [Laughs]. By serving the communists, I was helping the needy. I was fighting for our *samman*. What more would Allah want? Anyway, I had 'young blood' [his words] those days. I wouldn't have cared..."²⁴ Thirty-year old Shamim-ul Islam, member of the local Democratic Youth Federation of India, remembers how he "grew up in a divided village. We would all go to common festivals and other observances. There the opposing factions would break bread together, all the while plotting their next political move against one another"²⁵.

But Abdul Hamid insists that the village stayed together. He vividly recalls the police searches, the disappearances, and the custodial deaths that were common those days. Somehow, he and five friends managed to escape the village to Habibpur, where they helped landless households of the Munda tribe occupy the land of the *jamindar*: as Muslims, they won over the *jamindar's* henchmen, so that when the Mundas

²⁴ Interview, Joynal Ali, February 7, 2011

²⁵ Intervention Amin-ul Islam, Interview, Joynal Ali, February 7, 2011

actually occupied his land, the henchmen ‘absconded’. He observed, “It’s true that not everyone supported us. But they didn’t give us away either. If they had, we’d have been finished even before we started.”²⁶ These splintered narratives tell us a great deal about the fragmented meanings that are made by different individuals of the same set of events that they participated in, or have heard about from very close quarters. Nonetheless, we are also compelled to recognise the extremely important role of these movements in shaping political imagination across the two localities.

2.2. Sargana and Roshanar

Contentions around land occupations and forcible harvesting of crops brought together many members of the landless from the disparate caste groups in Sargana block’s Sargana Gram Panchayat. Memories of the *jamindari* oppression as well as the continued pretence of social superiority among the scions of those households as well as among the emergent elite from among the so-called ‘backward’ caste groups (such as Yadavs) provided the opportunity to recall shared struggles. This continued to be the case despite the very real differences- both economic and social- among the once-oppressed groups.

The land occupation movements in the locality were ostensibly led by the CPI(ML-L), as recounted earlier²⁷. During the land occupation movements, the area’s sharecroppers- mostly of the Santhal, Musahar and Kevat castes²⁸- made common

²⁶ Interview, Abdul Bari, February 6, 2010

²⁷ An underground party in the 1970s, it reinvented as a popular front by the name of the Indian People’s Front. Since 1989, it has registered itself as a political party committed to militant communist parliamentarianism. Back in the 1970s and then in the 1980s, this group was widely credited with leading the land occupation movements in the region.

²⁸ The Santhal tribal group has been categorised as Scheduled Tribe. The Musahar caste group has been categorised as ‘Scheduled Caste’. In fact, in recognition of the extreme deprivations they face as a community, they have now been classified as ‘Mahadalit’. See Chapter 6 for further discussion. The Kevat caste group is categorised as ‘Extremely Backward Class’ (see note 2).

cause in their conflict with the local *jamindar* Jagdish Singh, and waged pitched battles with his henchmen. Both old and young recalled the once-troubled spots that had witnessed violence over the illegal occupations of land: in neighbouring Sahibganj, where 1000 acres was occupied by Dusadhs (Paswans), Chamars and Santhals; Lagrahi where 300 acres belonging to a Yadav landlord were redistributed among 150 Musahars, 36 Santhals and a few Muslims; and Kupari Pramanpur, where 600 acres were occupied by nearly 1500 Musahars and a few Santhals. Sargana's Musahar households been chiefly involved in occupying state-owned as well as privately-owned land, forcefully harvesting the crop of the *jamindar* whose sharecroppers they were.

Smoking his *ganja* (cannabis) under a huge banyan tree on the outskirts of the village, Savri Rishi, now in his 70s, spoke to me in conspiratorial tones, "We all knew exactly what needed to be done (in terms of occupying the land). The CPI(ML) was nowhere in the picture, neither were the naxalites. We did meet some folks from nearby Begusarai.²⁹" Savri affirmed the "common suffering that we endured. They [Jagdish Singh and his cronies] said we were rat-catchers and fit to live as such. They tried to divide us, saying we were of different castes. We showed them- yes we were all different castes, but we all had a common enemy. Moreover, we may have been born as rat-catchers, but we were determined not to die as one. We demanded that he give us *izzat*.³⁰"

Although Savri Rishi was a veteran of the movement, and in the CPI(ML), which he subsequently joined, his account was nonetheless openly, though respectfully, contradicted. Sadi Rishi, 28 years old and one of the few members of the

²⁹ Interview, Savri Rishi and Vinay Vishwas, April 12, 2010.

³⁰ Interview, Savri Rishi and Vinay Vishwas, April 11, 2010.

Musahar community to have completed college education, suggested that although everyone spoke the language of caste solidarity, in truth, people had joined (or refrained from joining) the actions of their own volition. He recalled- somewhat bitterly- that not everyone on the locality had supported Domi: people from his own Musahar caste turned informers. Contrary to Savri emphasising the self-organised nature of the movement, Vinay Vishwas, Savri's friend and long-time compatriot, now 70 and from the Kevat community, attributed their success to the coordinating role of the CPI(ML) and particularly the role of its well-educated 'high-caste' functionaries in warding off the police.

Understandably, the occupations alienated the *jamindars*. The pitched battles with Jagdish Singh represented only one part of the story. Other *jamindars* took recourse to the law, since it was easy to accuse those occupying the land as committing illegal offences, and to prove this as well. Often, scions of these *jamindars* were openly disdainful of the political organisation of their erstwhile tenants and sharecroppers. Some, like Gajendra Singh, used their positions as journalists in the Hindi daily *Hindustan* to discredit the movement and its leaders. His job as Post Master in the local Post Office allowed him access to the payments accruing to NREGS wage-seekers, the implications of which we shall explore in Chapter 3. On the other hand, there was Manoj Srivastav, who has served as the General Secretary of the CPI(ML) since 1995. Although members are ambivalent about his role as party functionary, his public stance of supporting select demands made by sharecroppers has understandably made him unpopular with others of his clan and social status.

In Roshanar Gram Panchayat, located in the same block and my second site for fieldwork in Araria, the 'land occupation movements' similarly evoke a great a

deal of contested narratives. Deokinandan Chauhan and Satyendra Yadav are credited with initiating the land occupation movements in this locality. The most prominent occupation here targeted the property of the premier landlord of the locality, Congress notable Parmeshwari Singh, father of the present Congress strongman Pritam Singh. Under circumstances similar to those of Sargana, landless peasants (sometimes led by CPI-ML activists or often on their own accord) occupied and redistributed nearly 1000 acres of his property to over hundred of his *bataidars*, who included Musahars, Chamars, Kunjras and Dusadhs. Elsewhere in Roshanar, 45 acres were occupied and redistributed among landless households, mostly of the Gangot Mandal caste. Other successful land-occupation cases included the occupation in Jahad and Panah, in each of which locality 100 acres had been occupied and redistributed among the *bataidars* there (mostly Musahars and Muriyari tribals).

Both leaders, Deokinandan Chauhan and Satyanarain Yadav, are widely-regarded for his self-less role during those movements. Manoj Srivastav, who we encountered a while ago, said of them, “They went against his own people in doing what he thought was right.”³¹ Savri Rishi and Vinay Vishwas, who Deokinandan Chauhan had recruited in the party, acknowledged his role in boosting their confidence. With Vinay Vishwas, Ramdev Hembrom, another ‘comrade’, of the same age and of the Santhal community, suggested that the leader’s role in neutralising the police was particularly valuable. They narrated an incident when the police registered a case against them, and accused them of being naxalite. According to them, Deokinandan *babu* roared back, “They are not breaking the law. You are- you are the

³¹ Interview, Manoj Srivastav, January 23, 2010

naxalite. They only want *izzat*.³²” Sohrab Ali, 35 years, landless and employed as a construction worker in Gurgaon, spoke similarly in glowing terms about Satyendra Yadav’s confrontation with the police when they came searching for insurgents in one of the Panchayat’s Muslim *tolas*, “He interceded on our behalf and told the police not to harass us. The chief of the police party also happened to be of the same caste as him, Yadav. He [Satyendra Yadav] told them him to uphold the ideal of Bhagwan Krishna³³ and not trouble poor cowherds. The police left.³⁴”

Deokinandan Chauhan himself was very modest. He publicly acknowledges the role of the central leadership of the CPI(ML), which issued him with directives about how to respond to situations. Satyendra Yadav was also rather quiet about his achievements, but differs with his senior colleague on the reasons for their success. For him, the land occupation movements were successful, largely because they were led by the sharecroppers themselves. He consistently downplays the role of the party as well as of leaders like himself. From both their accounts, it is perhaps appropriate to summarise that a consistent narrative about the land occupation movement eludes the participants as well as the leaders of these movements.

From the preliminary sketch of the contentious events, we may conclude that the memory of the land occupation movements remained indelibly etched in the shared, or inter-subjective, consciousness of the localities’ inhabitants. For several of them, these were testing times. For others, they represented failed promises and intrigue. There were even some who felt betrayed by actions of those they expected support from. Many interviewees frequently referred to “we” to refer to their villages

³² Intervention by Ramdev Hembrom, Interview, Savri Rishi and Vinay Vishwas, April 11, 2010.

³³ The allusion to Krishna appears to have been made in order to invoke the mythical linkage the Yadav caste claims for itself vis-à-vis Krishna. See Michelutti, 2008

³⁴ Interview, Sohrab Ali, April 6, 2010.

in general or specific hamlets, or even caste groups. Taylor (1987) suggests that narratives of bitterness point to strongly, rather than weakly, held inter-subjective meanings: the betrayal by co-villagers, co-caste persons and family members was rued because they disregarded values that were thought to have been shared.

Based on these insights, the ruptures in inter-subjective meanings of rural life which the occupations represented appear all the more appreciable. For many people, the invasion by sharecroppers into lands where they had no business being, either socially or legally, was not only about occupying a piece of property. It was about *izzat/ samman*, about being treated as equal, not in the eyes of the state which had already made the provisions to do so, but in the eyes of those who considered themselves socially superior, and who had hitherto been responsible for their subjugation. This account appears to chime with Rancière's ideas about the possibilities opened up by politics, but- following Norval (2009) - it is not what motivates this thesis. Instead of focusing on spectacular ruptures, what I want to draw attention to are the 'everyday' and 'middle-ground' contentions (rather than large-scale insurgencies) that shape political subjectivities and through which subjects enhance their substantive freedoms. It is to contemporary events, and to smaller-scale interventions that I want to turn my attention, although the accounts just described are important to bear in mind through the subsequent discussions.

3. THE PRESENT

TABLE 1: CORRELATION BETWEEN LANDLESSNESS AND MPI POVERTY IN STUDY LOCALITIES

Name of Locality	No of households (N)	% Landless	% MPI poor	X ² (Yates correction)	Two-tailed P-value
West Bengal/ Maldah/ Old Maldah Block/ Rohingya Gram Panchayat					
<i>Ditya</i>	326	40	84	4.331	0.0374*
<i>Rampur</i>	232	75	87	3.359	0.0668ns
<i>Jalun</i>	685	86	81	1.129	0.2880ns
West Bengal/ Maldah/ Old Maldah Block/ Jashumati Gram Panchayat					
<i>Dakkhin Bhabhuk</i>	182	80	90	5.674	0.0172ns
<i>Rahimpur</i>	424	74	81	46.186	<0.0001***
<i>Sindhugram</i>	461	75	87	0.832	0.3618ns
Bihar/ Araria/ Sargana Block/ Sargana Gram Panchayat					
<i>Sargana Ward 1</i>	165	70	66	15.997	<0.0001***
<i>Sargana Ward 4</i>	202	91	90	1.707	0.1914ns
<i>Sargana Ward 5</i>	202	85	80	38.884	<0.0001***
<i>Sargana Ward 6</i>	144	56	59	10.010	0.0016**
<i>Sargana Ward 7</i>	205	84	86	46.196	<0.0001***
<i>Sargana Ward 8</i>	276	91	90	2.395	0.1217ns
Bihar/ Araria/ Sargana Block/ Roshanar Gram Panchayat					
<i>Roshanar Ward 5</i>	161	80	83	0.018	0.8931ns
<i>Roshanar Ward 7</i>	109	61	57	3.850	0.0497*
<i>Roshanar Ward 8</i>	247	74	76	23.350	<0.0001***
<i>Roshanar Ward 9</i>	134	54	71	23.694	<0.0001***
<i>Roshanar Ward 10</i>	177	68	64	20.976	<0.0001***
<i>Roshanar Ward 12</i>	188	81	87	13.428	0.0002**

Source: Own census data, December 2010-January 2011

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001, ns = p>0.05

3.1.Current landholding and poverty profile

Control over land appeared to have been one of the important factors motivating the contentious processes I have drawn attention to in the above narrative. Three decades on, it is worthwhile to examine the extent to which agricultural land is actually *owned* by the inhabitants of the study localities. Table 1 above draws attention to the prevailing landlessness in eighteen purposively sampled wards of the four study Gram Panchayats. This data is drawn from the larger census survey I coordinated to profile the study localities and to enable me determine where to base my ethnographic work. Thus, the study wards include the wards I was based out of as well as select contiguous ones. The relevant question in the survey schedule elicited information on whether the household owned agricultural land or not. Admittedly, I could not follow up and cross-verify with the appropriate authority. Keeping this limitation in mind, I suggest that the data below offers some glimpses of the extent of landlessness that continues to prevail in these regions.

The two districts have been identified as among the most deprived in their respective States. It is therefore tempting to draw a correlation between landlessness and poverty in these regions. Following this intuition, Table 1 also offers insights on the extent of poverty in the survey localities. Following Alkire and Foster (2011) and in keeping with Sen's advice (Sen, 1999), I use the concept of the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) to encapsulate the diverse manifestations of poverty (See Annex 3) . It might be justifiably argued that this understanding of 'poverty' does not take into account the 'relational' dimension of poverty, one that could take into account more subjective elements such as 'the ability to appear in public without shame', 'feeling respected' and 'considering oneself as wielding influence'. Given the complexity in measuring these themes while at the same time controlling for real or

perceived adaptive preferences, I was left with no option but to limit myself to the use of MPI indicators to measure the extent of poverty in the given localities.

The analysis presented in Table 1 is based on chi-square tests and associated p-values. This approach was appropriate given the impossibility of predicting the extent to which landlessness *causes* poverty. Nor was it necessary. For my purpose, it was sufficient to understand whether the two phenomena (landlessness and MPI poverty) could be mapped on to one another or not. From the analysis presented, the correlation between landlessness and MPI poverty is far from evident. In some wards, such as Ditya and Roshanar Ward 9, the proportion of the population that is MPI poor outstrips the proportion of the population that is landless. In wards such as Jalun and Roshanar Ward 7, the converse is true. Even where the proportions are similar, as in Sargana Ward 4 and 8, and Roshanar Ward 5, my analysis suggests that the correlation between landlessness and MPI poverty is not as significant as might be assumed: true, the majority of the landless in these localities are MPI poor, but the majority of the landed groups are also MPI poor. For instance, in Roshanar Ward 5, the relation between these variables was $X^2(2, N = 161) = 0.018, p > 0.05$. Similarly, in Sindhugram, the relation was $X^2(2, N = 461) = 0.832, p > 0.05$. Nonetheless, the data from Table 1 also suggests that this correlation might be strong, even extremely significant, in select localities across the four wards. For instance, while the relation between these variables in Ditya was $X^2(2, N = 326) = 4.331, p < 0.05$, in Sargana Ward 7, it was $X^2(2, N = 205) = 46.196, p < 0.001$. With this note of caution, I now turn to a more detailed profile of the four study localities.

3.2.Social and Public infrastructure

Both the study sites in West Bengal, Ditya and Rahimpur, are located on the north-eastern periphery of Maldah town, within eight kilometres of the Border Security Force camp, fifteen kilometres of the National Highway that connects Kolkata with Guwahati, and thirty kilometres west of the Indo-Bangladesh frontier. However, the tarred roads that lead to these localities became indistinguishable from gravel in practically no time. Similarly, both the study sites in Bihar, Sargana Panchayat's Ward 1 and Roshanar Panchayat's Ward 5, are located in the district's Sargana Block. Sargana Ward 1 abuts to the east the Major District Road (MDR) that connects Purnea town eventually to the Indo-Nepal border town at Jogbani. Roshanar Ward 5 is located about six kilometres on the west of the same road. At the time of data collection, the approach road to this ward was being renovated, reportedly after eight years. Both villages are over a hundred kilometres from Araria district, and nearly twice as far from Purnea town.

The description of the wards that follows is a socio-spatial one. Given the salience of caste identities in determining the spatial layout of the wards, my account might read like a catalogue of different castes and communities dwelling in a given ward. I must admit my initial hesitation in embarking on such an exercise as I feared I might be reinforcing the stereotype about Indian villages being nothing more than federations of communities defined by caste hierarchies. Nonetheless, as the import of the self-description of my respondents dawned on me, and given the malleability of caste identities that I will draw attention to as the thesis progresses, I realise this to be a valuable exercise. The self-description of my respondents in terms of their caste/ community emphasised its importance not as a reified primordial essence, but as a

dynamic political identity. As reflected in their self-descriptions, I use caste and community interchangeably.

3.2.1. *Ditya*

Ditya ward is located three kilometres north of Kamra, a market town. The ward is widely dispersed, and follows an informal, but well-maintained, identity-based segregation. At the ‘entrance’ to the ward from the south, are the houses of the Desiyas, better known to anthropologists and bureaucrats as Rajbanshis, and also known by the somewhat pejorative Polia (literally meaning, those who had done ‘*polayon*’- fled- from their ‘original’ homes). Further north are hamlets (*tolas, padas*) inhabited by different communities enumerated as Scheduled Tribes, such as Saotals, Pahadias and Moholis. To the east lay other hamlets inhabited by Saotal households, as well as the neighbourhood of the Binds, a community enumerated as Scheduled Caste, who migrated to the area some three decades ago³⁵.

Nearly all the houses in this ward were made of mud, though a few were obviously wealthier than the others. On the whole, the locality appeared to be well-provisioned with public services. The ward hosted a primary school, which catered to children from the locality, as well as a sub-health centre, where patients were examined three days a week by the doctor on duty. Both were located on land abutting the Desiya and the Saotal neighbourhoods. The secondary school was located at Kamra. All three institutions were usually well-attended, although locals complained about the fact that they were staffed by individuals residing in Maldah town (a two-hour and *very tiring* commute in the public transport). Moreover, I

³⁵ Apparently, the settlement came up ‘overnight’, and was duly named Hatatpada (Hatat= sudden in Bangla)

personally observed the high-handedness of the sub-health centre doctor when it came to treating “illiterate superstitious Saotal women.”³⁶ The ICDS centre was located north of the ward, wherefrom it was easily accessible to most neighbourhoods. Villagers supported an informal tuition centre, which operated weekly at the Club House: this building was primarily used by young men to organise *bichars* (deliberations) that tried to resolve local disputes. The hamlets were connected to one another by gravel roads, many of which were being refurbished under the centrally-sponsored National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS), which I will have scope to discuss at length in Chapter 3. The Desiya homes were all electrified, unlike the others. The ward is dotted with publicly-provisioned hand pumps, many of which have been installed only as a result of protracted struggle between the villagers and the local bureaucracy.

Kamra itself is a vibrant hub of the locality, with kiosks selling grocery, plastic ware and motor and cycle repairs lining its main street. The thrice-a-week market (*haat*) is the source of most provisions for people of the area: the organisers leased an open space from the Panchayat for this purpose. The vendors- who are sometimes women- sold a range of commodities, from perishable items such as fish, meat, and vegetables, to clothes, crockery and even decorative items. The Panchayat office is the centre of attraction at Kamra, and its location here in turn spawned a host of businesses, such as stationery, Photocopy and kiosks selling *chai* and snacks. Kamra provides the social and recreational focus for most of Ditya’s residents, who use the vast campus of the Kamra High School to meet with friends from the neighbourhood, to gossip and converse, and to play cards and drink *chuhulu*, a locally brewed rice-based alcohol.

³⁶ Hanging out, Ditya sub-health center, February 18, 2010.

3.2.2. *Rahimpur*

Access to Rahimpur, which was nearer to Maldah town than Ditya was, was even more difficult, despite the fact that it was barely three kilometres from the National Highway. Rahimpur was nearly ten kilometres south of Ditya. It lay on a circular road that cut through the ward in a north-south axis while connecting it with Sindhugram and Dakshin Bhabhuk like a string of pearls, with Rahimpur, the most populated, as its centrepiece. It was a congested locality. A few hamlets lay on its outskirts, such as Dargapada and Thakurpada. Sheikh Muslims, followers of Islam's Hanafi school, were the numerically preponderant group here, with a sprinkling of Namasudra, Bind and Napit communities- all enumerated as Scheduled Caste- in Thakurpada. About three kilometres to the north of Rahimpur lay Intar Rahimpur, a hamlet populated by Shershabadiya Muslims, adherents of the Saifi school: this hamlet was conspicuously more congested and lacking amenities, and its relative isolation from the village proper contributed to its further impoverishment. The State Government categorises Shershabadiyas as OBC Muslims.

Rahimpur appeared rather unevenly provisioned. Only a few homes were constructed using cement, the overwhelming majority of houses were built using mud, but with bamboo rods holding the roofs. In Intar Rahimpur, thatched roofs were ubiquitous. A government school, catering upto the secondary level, was located in the southern edge of Rahimpur. It had been established in 1982, when a rich notable donated some land for it. A primary health centre also catered to residents, and was located at the southern edge of the ward. The ICDS centre was located at the main village square (to which children from Intar Rahimpur walked everyday if they wished to avail the services provided by it). A privately-operated pre-school tuition centre also operates here, on a daily basis, to 'prepare children' for school. From

what I saw, these institutions were well-attended, and almost always staffed. Staff at the health and ICDS centre, admittedly, arrived later than the stipulated opening times and left earlier, but they were present everyday. The houses located near the village square are all electrified, but not so for houses in the hamlets. At the time of the research, there were only six handpumps to cater to the 350-odd households in Rahimpur, and one each in Dargapada, Thakurpada and Intar Rahimpur.

Itinerant vendors of fruits, vegetables and dairy products meet the daily needs for perishable commodities in the village. Several butchers have set up shop on the outskirts of the village. Other shopkeepers also sell household items such as SIM cards, utensils, cosmetics and plastic items: they are also located on the outskirts of the village. The dealer of the Public Distribution System also doubles up as a retailer for household items. Three *chai* kiosks, situated in the village square where much of the village converges for *chai* and conversation every evening, provide the space where people could gather together in the evenings and early in the mornings. Younger men gather at the two club houses to play carom, to gossip and to counsel one another when in distress.

3.2.3. *Sargana Ward 1*

Sargana Ward 1 is an unevenly populated settlement, which lies mostly to the east of the Major District Road (MDR), with a few extensions to its west. The cluster of households at entrance to the ward is commonly, perhaps anachronistically, referred to as the Kayasth *tola*, after the caste of the preeminent landholding clan whose members live in the interior. At the time of the survey, concrete houses lined this entrance. Three of these were owned by Dhobhis (all teachers in the local primary school), categorised by the State Government as Mahadalit, a sub-category of the

Scheduled Caste. One brick-walled house belonged to a Bhagat (a contractor by profession), one of the groups classified as Extremely Backward Class (MBC). Three other houses belonged to Kayasths and one to a Rajput- as so-called 'upper castes', they were classed as 'general' castes. The only exception to the concrete houses was the conspicuously humble dwelling of a Yadav family.

Further to the east are the mansions of the Kayasth and Rajput landlords. Newer, but smaller houses made of brick and mud, belonging to Yadavs, sit in an uncomfortable tension with these older establishments. A brick road separates this 'orderly' neighbourhood from that of Musahars households located to the north. The Musahar neighbourhood is visibly poorer, more congested, and more haphazardly organised than the Kayasth *tola*, but easy to mark by the asbestos roofs over their houses which have been 'gifted' to them by the State Government. Adjacent to their colony are the homes of poorer Yadavs and Kayasths, recent migrants who were unrelated to the Yadav and Kayasth families already described. The 'western extension' of Sargana Ward 1 comprised of Musahar, Sheikh Muslim and Kayasth families. The Musahar families here live in mud houses with asbestos roofs in a settlement clearly, but informally, marked off from that of that of the other two. The houses of the Sheikh Muslims and the Kayasths are interspersed, often sharing the same compound. Both colonies are densely populated.

A primary school caters to the local population and was located in the Kayasth *tola*. The secondary school is located on the main road one kilometre to the south. Both institutions were well-staffed and well-attended. The nearest health centre is located four kilometres to the south. Given its location on the MDR, it was easy to reach, and was well-staffed though not well-equipped. There is an ICDS centre, located in the wealthier Yadav colony. Excepting the Musahars in the eastern part of

the ward, most households in Sargana Ward 1 have access to electricity. Depending on the availability of electricity, it is not uncommon for transistors to blare Bollywood music or religious chants. Unlike in West Bengal (but like in the rest of Bihar), most households have privately provisioned hand pumps. The few hand pumps in the Musahar colonies are provisioned by the Public Health and Education Department of the State Government: somewhat surprisingly for a State with such a reputation for misgovernance, residents of the hamlet said the pumps usually provided water.

The market located on the MDR meets most of the daily requirements of residents. Concrete brick-and-cement shops line the road, with a steady stream of customers. The range of commodities available here includes perishable food items including sweetmeats; clothing and cosmetics; wood, plastics and gas; SIM cards; and stationary. The market also fulfils an important recreational role, for it is here that men would gather in the evenings or early in the morning to gossip. Its *chai* kiosks and betel nut stalls are especially popular. Two bi-weekly *haats* further cater to people's needs. One of these is held on the west of the MDR, and the second one at the block headquarters. Fancy clothes and cosmetics, hand-woven bamboo baskets, fish and meat, and spices were sold at these *haats*. The *haats* provided women the opportunity to meet friends and acquaintances and to engage with the market as producer and seller- as do, for instance, the Dom women who sell the baskets that their husbands weave.

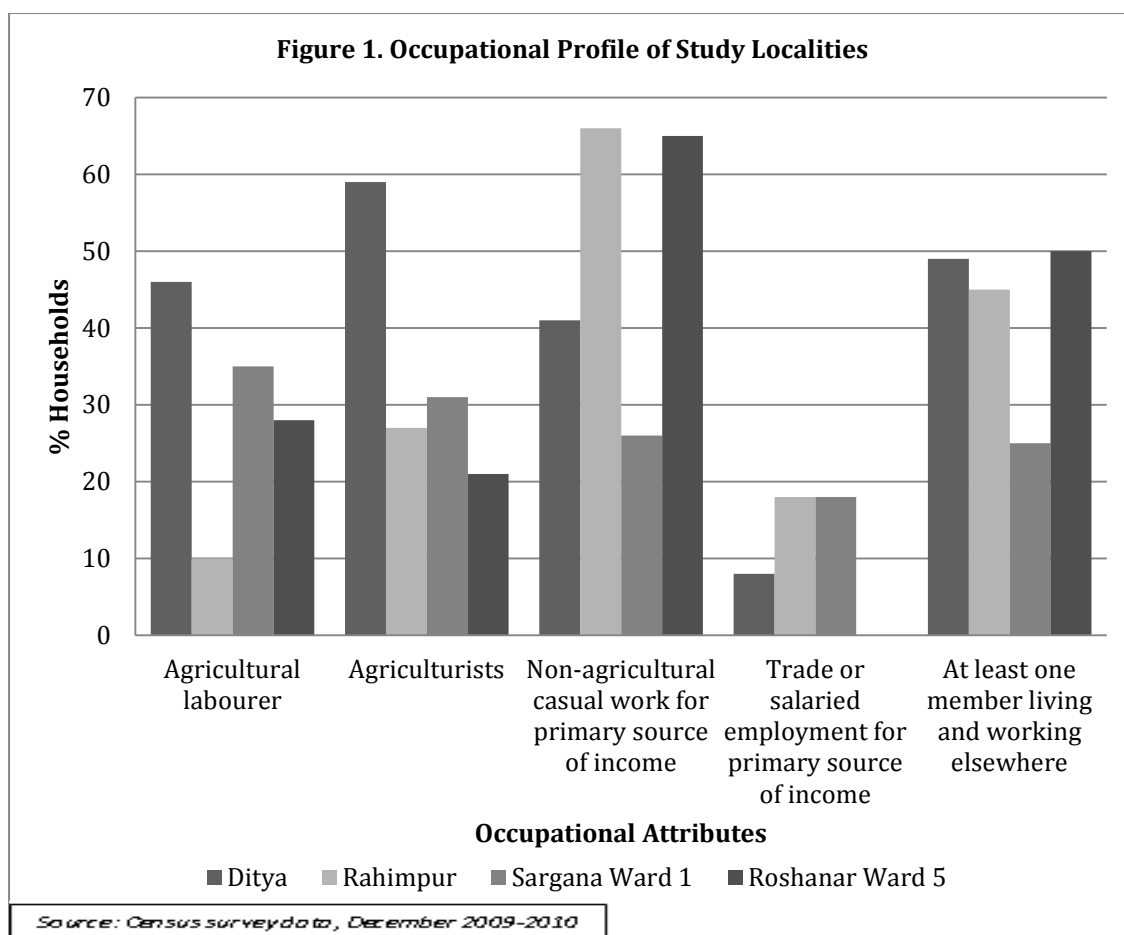
3.2.4. *Roshanar Ward 5*

The contrast with Roshanar Ward 5, located six kilometres to the west of Sargana Ward 1, cannot be starker. Tucked away on the border with district Supaul, it comprises houses located on either side of this road, arranged neatly- even the poorest

quarters. The two principal communities were Kunjra Muslims and Gangot Hindus. Though there are a few new constructions among the Gangot houses, many of the cemented constructions in the Kunjra houses were falling apart due to lack of repairs and maintenance. Many homes, of both communities, continue to be made of mud and thatch, contributing to the impoverished 'look' of the village.

Four primary schools cater to the children of this village: they are all located within two kilometres to the east. The neighbourhood supports a tuition centre, where a tutor comes to teach children three days each week. An ICDS centre also operates in the village. The schools and the ICDS centres were both operational during the time of the survey. The schools were particularly well-attended, and some of the students I met (boys as well as girls) recounted how much they enjoyed school and how much they adored their teachers. The closest primary health centre is located over ten kilometres away, and the easiest access to it is through unpaved roads. As in Sargana Ward 1, hand pumps are the source of drinking water. These are mostly privately provisioned, and owned either individually or shared between a group of neighbours.

Residents depend for daily provisions on two little shops located at the approach road to the ward from the MDR. For less pressing needs, they make their way to the same market as do the residents of Sargana Ward 1. In addition, a bi-weekly *haat* held at the western edge of the ward meets demands for clothes, perishable food items and spices. Given its location, this *haat* attracts vendors and retailers from across the district border as well. Often referred to as the 'Govindpur *haat*', this institution brought together the inhabitants of the putative Govindpur 'gaon', presently divided between two districts and five wards.



3.3.Socio-economic profile

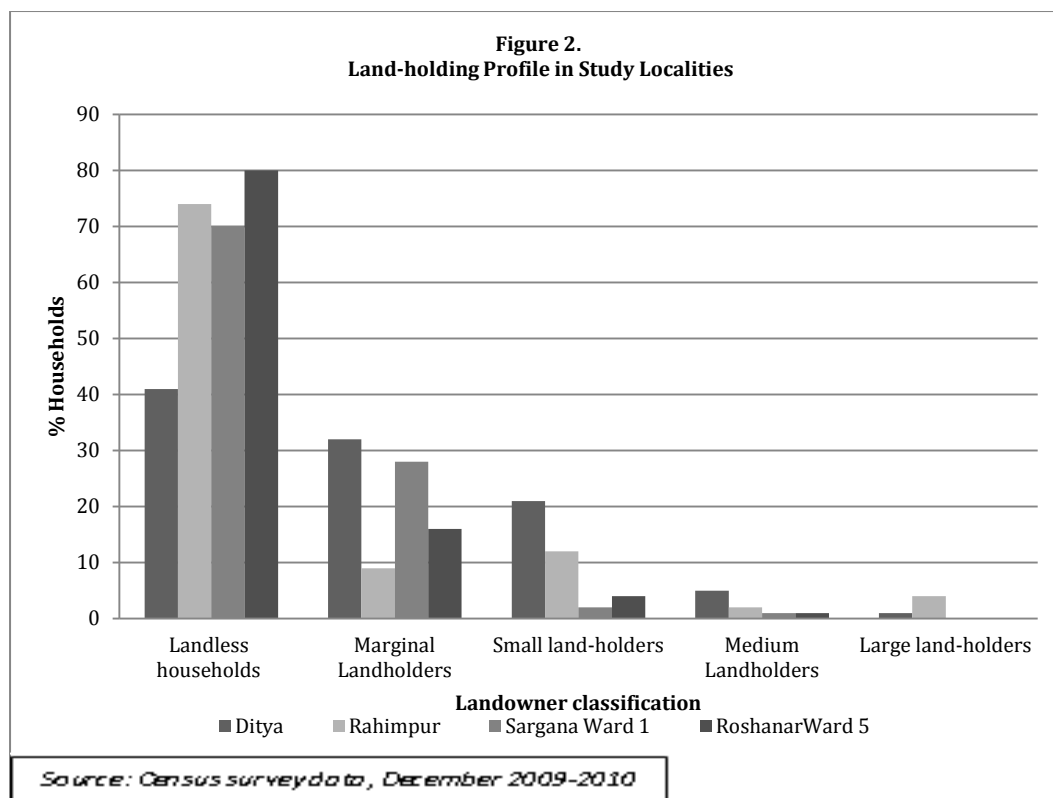
At the time of the fieldwork, agriculture was the preeminent employer in Sargana Ward 1 and Ditya. By contrast, its role in the lives of the inhabitants of Rahimpur and Roshanar was substantially less. In these two localities, participation in the local agricultural economy ceased to be the *primary* means of livelihood and sources of household income for a majority of inhabitants. Figure 1 bears this out.

Nonetheless, the cropping seasons continued to be important to the personal and social calendars in all localities, as migrant workers timed their ‘return trips’ to coincide with local harvests and festivals. Two cropping seasons predominated. In West Bengal, it was the *boro* (sowing: September, harvest: December) and the *aman*

(sowing: February, harvesting: May) with sometimes a third season. In Bihar, the cycles were the *rabi* (sowing: January, harvest: May) and the *kharif* (sowing: July, harvest: November). In both States, farmers were well-integrated into the agricultural markets. In the Maldah sites, they sold the produce at the agricultural markets three to five kilometres away in Nawabgunj, while the agriculturalists in the Araria sites took their produce to grain markets nearly forty kilometres away in Forbesganj. In both States, intermediaries known as *paykars* played an active role in physically transporting the produce from the farmer's fields to the markets, in return for a 2-5% commission.

Figure 2 shows the skewed land holding pattern across all four sites, more in some than in others. In a comparative perspective, it is clear that landlessness is much lower in Ditya than in the other three localities. The incidence of landlessness is highest in Roshanar Ward 5. Farmers owning small, marginal and medium- sized plots³⁷ of land together constitute the bulk of the households in Ditya, contrasted with the other three localities. Rahimpur comprised the highest proportion of farmers owning large-sized plots of land as proportion of the population, in comparison with the other localities.

³⁷ According to Government of India classification, marginal size farms = 0-1 hectares; small size farms = 1-2 hectares; medium size (including semi-medium) farms = 2-10 hectares; large-size farms = over 10 hectares



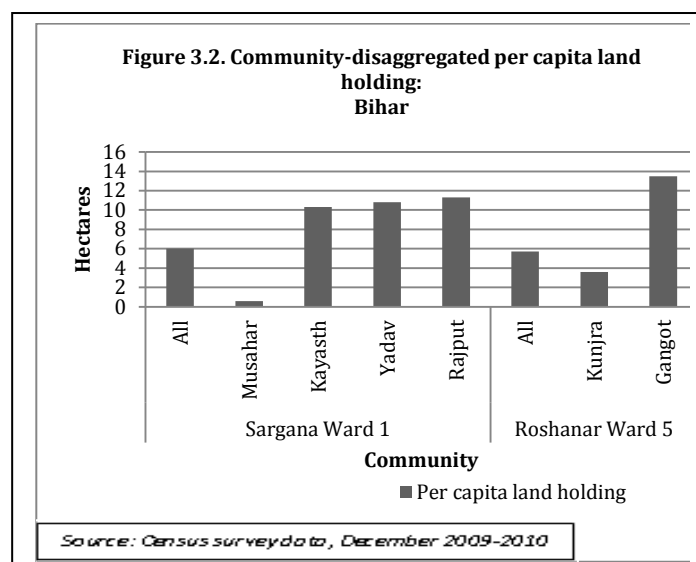
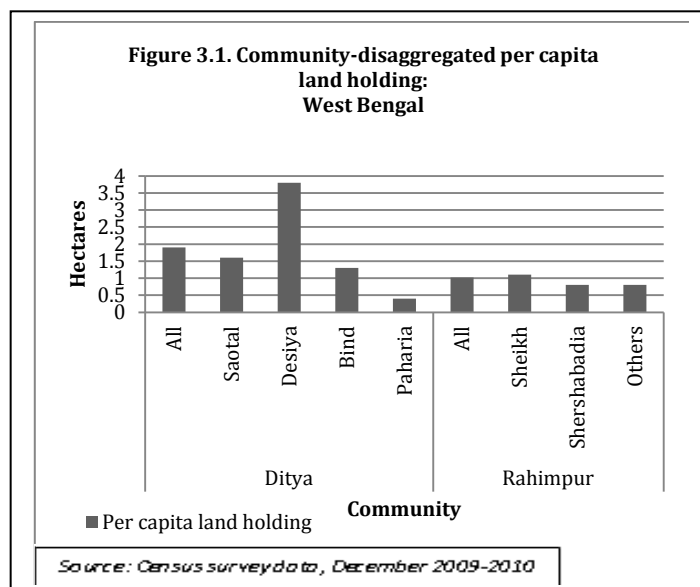
Three broad conclusions about the structure of ‘rural life’ may be drawn from the above. The first, following scholars such as Gupta (2005b), it is difficult to refer to these localities as ‘peasant societies’. This is especially if “peasants are considered to be rural producers who produce for their own consumption and for sale, using their own and family labour, though the hiring and selling of labour power is quite possible and compatible with peasant society” (Harriss, 1982: 24). The incorporation of rural producers into the national market has been a feature of Indian political life since at least the 1980s. The farmers’ movements gave concrete expression to this trend, especially by influencing the terms of trade in their favour, successfully demanding and obtaining the subsidisation of inputs and the maintenance of high support prices that would allow them to ‘buy cheap and sell dear’ (Nadkarni, 1987).

A major criticism of the farmers’ movements has been their attempt to gloss over the extent of rural inequalities (Brass, 1993; Banaji, 1993). Large-scale farmers

in particular have exercised their hegemony by neutralising opposition from the rural landless labourers, and portraying a congruence of interests. From Figure 2.2, the extent of land alienation in at least three of the four localities is evident, and even in the fourth- Ditya- the combined population of landless and small-scale farmers represents an overwhelming majority of the households in that locality. In Ditya, the nine (of 326) families at the apex of the landholding pyramid owned 19% of the arable land, whereas in Rahimpur, five (of 424) families between them owned 21% of the arable land. In Sargana Ward 1, the top 11 land-endowed families (out of a total of 165 families) owned 53% of all arable land, while in Roshanar, the top 12% (total 161 families) owned 77% of land. The extent of concentration of land holdings appears the starkest in Roshanar Ward 5, although it appears to be a feature of life in all four localities³⁸.

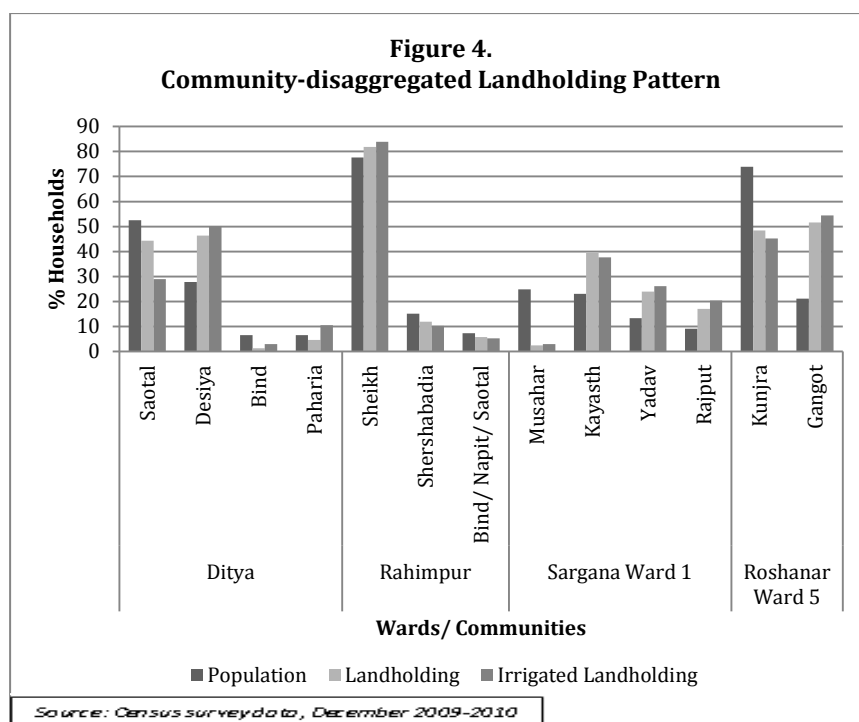
The concentration of land holdings among a tiny majority of the local population, however, needs to be viewed in the larger context of declining agricultural productivity (Chakrabarty, 2011), and an overwhelming sense of crisis that engulfs the agricultural sector in India (Aerthayil, 2008; Mishra and Reddy, 2011; Vakulabharanam and Motilal, 2011). Under these circumstances, sociologists have justifiably spoken of the “vanishing village” (Gupta, 2005b: 757). Those at the apex of the rural economic hierarchy might, if this analysis is taken to its logical conclusion, be commandeering a sinking ship, although recent data also shows rising median incomes among rural elites, and suggests that they may be materially far better-off than their urban counterparts (Jayadev, et al, 2011: 92).

³⁸ This information is drawn on my census survey. Details about the survey are presented in Appendix 2.



Figures 3.1 and 3.2 provide a snapshot of the shares of the major caste groups in their ownership of land across the study sites. In many cases, there were clear patterns of overlap between resource-control and these ascribed identities, resulting in evident patterns of caste-based exclusion. The lop-sided distribution of land reflects asymmetric per capita land holdings among select caste groups in all the four localities. The possible exception is Rahimpur where caste differences do not clearly map onto inequities in land holding. Thus, in Ditya and Roshanar Ward 5, per capita

landholding among the locally dominant caste group was nearly twice as high compared with their co-habitants. In Sargana Ward 1, the per capita landholding among Musahars was six times less than per capita land holdings among co-inhabitants.



Data presented in Figure 4 confirm these inequities. For instance, in Ditya, the Desiyas comprised under 30% of the population, but owned nearly half of all irrigated land area. In Roshanar Ward 5, Gangots contributed 20% of the population, but owned over half of all irrigated land. Similarly, in Sargana Ward 1, Musahars who make up a quarter of the Ward's population, controlled less than 5% of its total irrigated land area. There appears to exist a structural basis to the caste-based discrimination. From this, it might be tempting to conclude that the caste-based discrimination is a derivative of class-based exclusion. As a corollary, caste-based

assertions appear to be epiphenomenal to class-based demands, or caste could provide basis of class. Stressing the caste-specific alienation from public resources calls to mind Beteille's assertion of the structural dimension of caste (Beteille, 1997). While important, I find it worthwhile to consider the assertion of caste identities as important in their own right. The origin-myths that each of different caste groups in the different localities subscribe to bear testimony to the fluidity of caste identities as well as their refusal to assent to inter-subjective meanings that ritually dominant castes might have attempted to forge (See Deliege, 1993, for a nuanced account). Following Dipankar Gupta's insightful distinction between a politicised caste *identity* and a substance-based caste *system* (Gupta, 2005a), therefore, I refrain from highlighting a supposed essentialised identity that characterises each caste group and assumes that they each accept the position ascribed to them in a putative caste hierarchy.

The belief that socially subordinated and economically marginalised caste groups accept the social and ritual position accorded to them by the self-styled ritually superior caste groups in the caste hierarchy (Weber, 1958) has now been shown to be inaccurate (Kolenda, 1964; Houska, 1981). The elders of Ditya's Desiya community narrated a remarkably secularised account of their origins- they were itinerant travellers, originating in Tibet, and making their way to northern Bengal sometime during the previous five hundred years. Even in folklore, there are no connections drawn with the caste hierarchy. Similarly, narratives about the Saotals' origins make no reference to the Hindu pantheon. The origin-myths of Bihar's Musahars pay scant regard to classical accounts, such as the Purusasukta or the notion of 'karma' of the emergence of different castes. Rather, as I shall elaborate in Chapter 6, they regard themselves as descendants of a sage renowned for his spiritual powers: their material

downfall was brought about by the chicanery of the ‘upper caste’ Brahmin. Likewise, the origin-myths of the Yadavs emphasise their putative links with the god-king Krishna and those of the Gangot Mandals emphasise their origins in the bed of the river Ganga considered sacred by millions of Hindus. Neither of these castes agreed with the interpretation among the socially superior castes of their ‘lowly’ origins. Ironically, Rahimpur’s Sheikh Muslim community emphasised their origins as Brahmins and deployed that to express their social superiority over their neighbours, the Mundas, Saotals and Shershabadiyas. The Shershabadiyas traced their advent to the wandering Afghan troops of the North Indian Emperor Sher Shah Sur, thereby trying to establish their ‘superiority’ over the Sheikh Muslims, to whom they were socially and economically subordinated. Roshanar Ward 5’s Kunjra Muslims possessed no such pretensions: the accounts of their quasi-formal historians spoke of their conversion to Islam some four centuries ago. With the exception of Rahimpur’s Sheikh Muslims, every community claimed to have migrated to the present location not more than a century ago. And clearly, it is striking that not one of the communities shared the classical notion of their origins. Furthermore, not everyone within the communities subscribed to the same ‘origin-myth’ either. Different ‘clusters’ (Michelutti, 2008) appropriated different stories, as did other groups and individuals. Many others were indifferent. Thus, just as I am compelled to question the essence of the putative whole (‘rural society’, ‘the village’, etc.), I am persuaded not to essentialise the fragments either.

However, from the invocation of ‘upper caste’ icons in the origin-myths of some of the caste groups such as the Musahars, Yadavs and Gangot Mandals, it might be argued that these groups were attempting to emulate ‘upper castes’, thereby confirming the survival of the caste hierarchy as such. Scholars such as MN Srinivas

(Srinivas, 1952) have referred to the imitation by 'lower' caste groups of the practices of those 'superior' to them as the process of Sanskritisation: the processes we noted above appear to confirming the Sanskritisation hypothesis. Indeed, among some Musahars and many Gangot Mandals in Bihar as well as among Saotals and Desiyas in West Bengal, there have been recent converts to vegetarianism, as I noted during my fieldwork. However, critics of this hypothesis (Cohn, 1955; Singer, 1972) have pointed to the spurious assumption made therein of an undiluted classical Hinduism that absorbs a plethora of popular practices. Changes in lifestyles and religious practices are not only motivated by a desire to emulate the practices of the 'upper castes', but in response to a variety of stimuli. Furthermore, the practices of these castes are rarely static.

For instance, Ditya's Desiyas recently agreed to build a temple in their village. While the critics accused the proponents of the temple of mimicking what they called "Hindu practices", the temple-builders themselves offered one of two justifications, neither of which had anything to do with emulating 'upper caste' practices. Some said that the temple-building would institutionalise the management of community funds that was currently accounted for by an unelected executive body. Others pointed to the need to emulate the *Muslims* who, they argued, worshipped in a designated place. It bears mention that the most important community-wide issue for the Desiyas during the time I conducted fieldwork was a campaign to get themselves classified as Scheduled Caste from being labelled 'general' caste. In other words, if anything, one notes a 'reverse Sanskritisation' process taking place in Ditya. Indeed, given that conversions in lifestyles noted above are mediated through popular gurus, often practicing forms of Hinduism that do not resonate with the scriptures, it might be more realistic to suggest that there is an attempt to emulate what Susan Bayly has

called ‘clean-caste’ *behaviour*, rather than an abstractly-defined Sanskritic Hinduism (Bayly, 1999).

That each caste group sees itself not as ‘undervalued’ vis-à-vis the other, but as equals if not as ‘overvalued’, can be gleaned from the narratives of internal organisation of the different caste groups. Each of the different caste and religious groups comprises an informal group of members. Ditya’s Desiyas organised themselves under the Dashavali Committee (Committee of Ten), whereas the Ata Hu Mone was the community organisation of the Saotals, led by the Majhi Haram. Similarly, the Yadavs, Musahars, Gangot Mandals and Doms all comprised their own *jati panchayats*, each with a caste headman (*madal*). Rahimpur village was divided into five *shamajs*. The important point to note is that none of these committees were considered subservient to the other, nor were members of other caste groups expected to be present on these committees. Also, there were numerous internal disputes and tensions within these groups³⁹. Following Gupta (2004) again, it appears reasonable to conclude that members of different caste groups did not ever consider themselves as existing in a vertically defined hierarchical relation with one another, rather they inhabited horizontally defined politically competitive relations.

3.4.The everyday state

Although I noted earlier that the hermeneutics of the political subject cannot be state-centric, given the manner in which the state is imbricated in the lives of the inhabitants of the study localities, it would be misleading to abstract it out altogether. Furthermore, as I will show in the subsequent chapters, many contentions in the

³⁹ It is tempting to invoke the notion of the ‘faction’ (Carter, 1974; Davies, 1983) in Indian village politics. But Ruud (2003) alerts us to the continued construction, blurring and reinvention of lines of dispute and cooperation.

localities are spawned as a result of state interventions. Therefore, a brief overview of what has sometimes been called the ‘everyday state’ is appropriate. The everyday state refers to the panoply of structures, institutions and apparatuses that citizens encounter during their routine and one-off interaction with different agencies of the government. There are usually two parts to studying the ‘everyday state’. On the one hand, reference may be made to what Abrams (Abrams, 1988) calls an ‘ideological unity’, which is manifested through informal rules and behaviours inscribed into the relationships between citizens and the functionaries of the government. On the other hand, Migdal (Migdal, 2001) persuades analysts to scrutinise the spaces between the ‘textbook’ and the ‘trench’. Studying these dissonances has been the theme of such stimulating works as Hansen and Stepputat (2001) and Fuller and Venei (2001). For India, Harriss-White (2003) suggests that the official state has been so hollowed out by intermediate classes appropriating it for the purpose of accumulation that it becomes essential to study the “shadow state”, rather than the formalistic or statutory version that comes across from a reading of government policy documents, financial outlays and bureaucratic records. Pointing to the ways in which poor people view the everyday state Corbridge and his colleagues draw attention to the ‘empowerment’, ‘developmental’ and ‘coercive’ *functions* performed by the polity (Corbridge, et al, 2005).

3.4.1. Local government

An important starting point to understanding the ‘everyday state’ lies in examining the institutional framework provided by the devolution of authority and responsibility over funds, functions and functionaries to elected local governments. Indeed, West Bengal’s Left Front Government may be considered a pioneer in this

regard: soon after acceding to power, it formalised elected local governments and transformed them into lynchpins for the implementation of its ambitious land reform program (Gazdar and Sengupta, 1999 and Ghatak and Ghatak, 2002).

The State was well-prepared to conform with the requirement of the 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution introduced fifteen years later. The Amendment extends constitutional legitimacy to three-tier Panchayati Raj Institutions as institutions of “economic planning and social justice” at the micro-level. It provides for the legislatures of India’s States to endow elected three-tier sub-State structures (comprising district, block and village/Gram Panchayat-levels), collectively known as Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), with the powers and authority necessary to function as “institutions of self-governance” for economic development and social justice⁴⁰. This legislation also provides for the devolution of twenty-nine subjects- for instance, provisioning basic services, agricultural extension, poverty reduction and food security- to these structures. Finally, it provides for the constitution of Gram Sabhas, village-level popular assemblies comprising the electorate of a given village, whose decisions the Gram Panchayats are supposed to execute, and to whom these institutions are accountable.

Following the lead provided by the 73rd Amendment, Bihar’s State Government legislated the Bihar Panchayat Raj Act, 2006. Like West Bengal, these reforms have preceded substantive socio-economic redistributive programs. Unlike West Bengal, however, the State Government has no plans yet to institute far-reaching reforms in the agrarian economy, having comprehensively rejected the

⁴⁰ As a consequence of these reforms, rural India today boasts of nearly 240,000 elected bodies, and 2.82 million elected representatives- 37% of whom are women, 19% Scheduled Caste (ex- “untouchable” castes) and 12% Scheduled Tribe(indigenous communities) (IRMA, 2008: Annexure 1, no pagination). Given Indian society’s record of treating these groups, this certainly appears to be an achievement.

recommendations for the same made by the Bihar Land Reforms Commission (Bandopahyay, 2009: 12). Bihar's local government reforms appear to have a different aim and scope than the reforms initiated by West Bengal: while the West Bengal Government clearly stated its intent to use local governments as an instrument of social and institutional change, and as a tool to entrench its presence in the local polity, the Bihar Government is content with improving local governments as efficient and equity-oriented agents of development. In addition, it has also formally tasked local governments with resolving village disputes. Section 90 of the Bihar Panchayat Raj Act establishes Village Courts (Gram Kachehri). Village Courts are authorised to mediate in disputes and conflict between different parties in the locality: they have a distinct, but parallel structure (called the Nyay Panchayat) vis-à-vis the village-level Panchayats. West Bengal's local government reforms do not have any such provisions.

3.4.2. Elections, representation, subsidiarity

A key difference between the local government institutions in West Bengal and Bihar lies in the method through which representatives are elected. This difference determines the extent to which politicians, who are elected to represent the ward, collaborate with Panchayat presidents or compete with them. Despite similarities in the way representatives are selected at each of the three tiers, the core difference lies at the level of the Panchayat, and constituent wards. In West Bengal, the Act provides for the direct election of the Ward Members, who in turn elect the Pradhan, or the president of the Gram Panchayat. The Pradhan is thus indirectly elected, and depends on the support of the Ward Members for his/ her very survival in office. The Ward Members are unequivocally recognised as the representatives of

their constituencies, with clearly allocated budgets. Thus, at the time of this research, Ditya's Ward Member, Shyamoli Hasda and Rahimpur's Ward Member, Babar Hossain were far more relevant to the inhabitants of their respective wards than the Pradhans, Joba Mardi and Gopal Sarkar.

The Pradhan performs a coordinating role in endorsing administrative decisions, and confers with party leaders, elected representatives and officials at the higher levels. S/he is subjected to an extensive system of checks and balances both from below (the Ward Member) and above (from party leaders). Indeed, West Bengal is unique in the country for promoting electoral contests at the level of the local government along party lines. This policy has been critiqued for introducing political divisiveness in local communities, thereby causing disharmony. However, its potential advantage in providing a feedback loop from the local level to the State level cannot be undermined. Moreover, by institutionalising electoral contests, the party system can potentially tame conflict rather than letting it go out of hand. In both the Study localities, as elsewhere in the State, as Table 2 shows, the previous two elections have seen a dent in the electoral power of the reigning CPI(M) which was compelled to relinquish power at the State level earlier in 2011.

TABLE 2: PANCHAYAT ELECTIONS RESULTS WEST BENGAL, 2003 & 2008						
Name of Ward/ Panchayat	Left Front		INC+		BJP+	
	2003	2008	2003	2008	2003	2008
Maldah Zila Parishad	16	15	16	18	2	1
Old Maldah Block Samiti	6	6	5	7	6	4
Rohingya Gram Panchayat	11	4	5	9	0	0
Ditya Ward	X	X				
Rampur Ward	X	X				
Jalun Ward	X	X				
Joshumati Gram Panchayat	11	8	1	9	9	1
Dakshin Bhabhuk Ward	X			X		
Rahimpur Ward	X			X		
Sindhugram Ward	X			X		

Source: <http://wbsec.gov.in/West%20Bengal%20Election%20Results%20-%202008.htm> for 2008 results and West Bengal State Election Commission Results, notified in 2004

On the other hand, the Bihar Act makes provision for the direct election of *both* the Ward member and the Mukhya, as the President of the Gram Panchayat is known. The Mukhya is recognised as the chief representative of all the inhabitants of the Panchayat, and can overrule the Ward Member on any matter as s/he deems fit. In fact, the Ward Member is officially christened ‘Gram Panchayat Member’ in order to emphasise that they are members of the Mukhya’s cabinet- “ministers without portfolio”, as one Member wryly remarked. This overlap dilutes the Ward Member’s link with their ward. Gram Panchayat Members have no separately allocated budgets and are obliged to approach the Mukhya for each project they would like to implement. The Mukhya’s authority in the Gram Panchayat is virtually unchallenged. Needless to say, the subordinate position of the Gram Panchayat member in Bihar proves far less facilitative of participatory planning and subsidiarity in decision-

making than the enhanced role of the Ward Member in West Bengal. During the study, Sarvesh Mandal, Sargana's Mukhya and Divya Mandal, Roshanar's Mukhya were far more central in the lives of the inhabitants of Sargana Ward 1 and Roshanar Ward 5 than were their respective Gram Panchayat Members, Shyamdev Rishidev and Sadiqa Bibi.

Both States have designed institutional mechanisms to counter authoritarianism among local elected members. The West Bengal government has sought to further strengthen the deliberative aspect of rural decision-making by instituting Gram Unnayan Samitis (Village Development Councils). These bodies are convened at the ward-level. They comprise not only the Ward Member and the nearest defeated contestant, but also members of community-based organisations, service-providers and school teachers. Their constitution had been critiqued by Bandopadhyay (2003) for the institutional proliferation that has followed, and because of the perception that these are designed as a tool of accumulating popular resources for the state (Chatterjee, 2003). At the time of the study, Gram Unnayan Samitis were constituted and functional in Ditya, but not in Rahimpur. In Bihar, the Act provides for the constitution of Gram Panchayat-level Nigrani Samitis (Monitoring Committees) comprising the Mukhya, Gram Panchayat members, and the nearest defeated candidates. Nigrani Samitis had not yet been constituted in either Sargana or in Roshanar at the time the study was conducted.

3.4.3. Sighting the state: The panchayat office

The institutional presence of the Panchayats is embodied in the Panchayat office in West Bengal, unlike in Bihar, where such sites did not yet exist. The Panchayat Office provides the most immediate opportunity for the rural poor to

‘sight’ the state, to borrow the imagery used by Corbridge et al (Corbridge et al, 2005: 108). Thus, in both Rohingya and Jashumati, the Panchayat Office is a familiar landmark to all segments of the rural population. Women and men, belonging to different social and economic backgrounds, come to the Panchayat Office for various functions, such as registration of births and deaths, payment of *chowkidari* tax (house tax), and application for the NREGS job card. At the same time, access to the Panchayat Office, while open to all, is differential to the extent that not everyone who approaches it does so with equal social confidence. While economically better off males among Sheikh Muslims, Namasudras and Desiyas are likely to walk in unhindered and approach any official they need to, women from among the Saotals, Moholis and Binds are more likely to approach it in groups, usually accompanied by a younger man from the locality, though not necessarily the same community. *Dalals* (middle-men/ brokers) are a common sight in Panchayat offices.

Despite being constructed as the arena for participatory governance, the Panchayat office continues to represent the “domain of the state, whose conceptual separation from society is perhaps most ubiquitously symbolised by all its special-purpose buildings with their painted notice-boards outside.” (Fuller and Harriss, 2001: 23). During my study in Rohingya, the Panchayat office was a two-storeyed building, which key elected representatives and local bureaucrats attached to them. One room, on the first floor, was dedicated to seating the Pradhan, Upa-pradhan and Panchayat Secretary. All the financial records pertaining to the Panchayat were stored in three locked steel cupboards located in that room. The keys were ‘secure’ with the Upa-pradhan, Noor Haq, politically the most influential person in the Panchayat, who virtually controlled the Pradhan, an ST woman, and who kept tabs on all the goings-on in the Panchayat. This was the room where residents from across the Panchayat

converged to make applications, enquiries and appeals. It was common to see both ordinary people and their *dalals* to walk in and out wearing *lungis* (loin-cloth), rather than always being dressed in shirts and trousers. According to most accounts, crossing into this “domain of the state” (to borrow from Corbridge, et al, 2005: 108) is remarkably more common now for poorer people than it was a few years ago.

The office timings were from 9 am to 5 pm. But it was not before 12 noon that it sprang to life, usually the Upa-pradhan being the first person to arrive. Unlike bureaucratic offices in the towns, the Rohingya Panchayat office remained open till late at night- with no formal lunch or *chai*- breaks (lunch and *chai* being served in the rooms, while business was transacted)- when papers continued to be processed, but also when deals with contractors were struck. Ward members were not expected to be present on a regular basis, though they did come during monthly meetings of the Gram Panchayat representatives as well as meetings of the Gram Unnayan Samitis. Two other rooms on the same floor housed other bureaucrats, along with computers where data pertaining to financial records, poverty profiles, housing applications, and employment generated under the centrally-sponsored National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. The bureaucrats and the ward members had very little official interaction. Not a file moved in that office from bureaucrat to ward member without the Panchayat Secretary’s permission, who in turn routinely checked with Noor Haq if he thought it relevant for the ward member to see.

The rooms were crowded, not only because they were small but because there were emerging and established leaders ‘hanging on’ to know about the latest development schemes, or to introduce co-villagers who sought help to resolve administrative problems. Surprisingly, and in contrast with established images of such buildings (for instance, portrayed by Gupta, 1995), there were no pictures of national

or State-level ‘icons’ such as Subhas Bose (reputed for his escapades during India’s freedom struggle), Jawaharlal Nehru (India’s first Prime Minister) or Jyoti Basu (the first Left Front Government Chief Minister) adorning any of these buildings. Notices detailing achievements of the NREGS and allotments under Indira Awas (free housing for households living under the poverty line) were displayed prominently, as were names of women’s rotating savings and credit organisations that had received loans under the Government’s self-employment program for poor women.

Jashumati’s two-storeyed Panchayat Office was bigger, more spacious, well-ventilated and newer compared with its counterpart in Rohingya. It contained several rooms, of which the meeting room on the first floor was the largest and most spacious. The bureaucrats’ room was the hub of the office, though, and it was here that appellants came with their representations. Although the Pradhan had his own room, a chair was reserved for him in the bureaucrats’ room for him to come in and sign the papers. Unlike in Rohingya, where the Upa-pradhan’s presence was ubiquitous, interactions between state and society were far more impersonal, with bureaucrats screening applications, making payments as required, and filing papers with their file notes for the Pradhan’s perusal as relevant.

Shahapur’s Panchayat Office began to ‘function’ by about 10 am, an hour after it was supposed to start, and continued till about 6 pm, an hour after it was supposed to close, with an hour-long break for lunch, when very little business was transacted. Notices instructing visitors about timings and requirements for registration documents abounded. Notice-boards displaying NREGS progress were put up in prominent places. However, important information about poverty profiles, housing applications, etc. were either not displayed or were outdated. People who came to make requests, and they were often accompanied by *dalals*, were dressed in shirts and

jeans/ trousers, given the peri-urban constituency which the Panchayat Office catered to. Like in Rohingya, the office rooms bore no photographs of any national or State-level icon.

Ward members were expected to attend office, meet with the Pradhan on a routine basis and discuss matters related to their respective wards. A separate room was allocated for them, where they could discuss official matters with bureaucrats and other members as necessary. At the same time, they would ‘circulate’ around the office introducing their visitors and other co-villagers to the bureaucrats and advising them on how to get things done. The ward members appeared to enjoy a cordial and informal relationship with the bureaucracy. The bureaucrats shared “relevant” documents with them without necessarily involving the Pradhan. Remarkably for West Bengal, this applied to all Ward Members, including those who held political party affiliations different from the Pradhan. Keys to the cupboards which held these documents and resources were available with the Panchayat Secretary, who ensured the orderly management of office matters.

In Bihar, sub-block office infrastructure had yet to be allocated at the time of the study. Therefore, the Ward Members and Mukhyas operated from their homes, while official records were housed in the Block-level headquarters. Corbridge et al (2005) provide a thick description of the block-level offices in Bihar, a description that aptly describes the case in Bhargama block, of which both Sargana and Roshanar are a part. At this office, the arrangement and display of motifs and photographs is clearly designed to articulate its linkage with the larger Indian state. At the open space just outside the office is a platform on which the Indian tricolour flutters, which the BDO unfurls on national occasions such as the Republic Day and Independence Day. Inside the office, in addition to the lists of past and present BDOs, there were several

rooms to staff the variety of programs that was the BDO's responsibility to implement.

The Panchayat Secretary was the link between the Mukhya and the BDO. His office was at the BDO. If the Mukhya needed to meet him to collect some documents, or to sign off papers, he would depute his '*aadmi*' (subordinate official in this case) to the Secretary at his office in the block to act on his behalf. It was common for records to be at the Mukhya's residence, and not at the block, but these were "managed" during audits and other scrutinises so that neither party got into trouble.

Residents of in both Sargana and Roshanar went to meet the Mukhya at his home. These trips were usually to request for inclusion in proposed poverty lists or amendments to existing ones, housing allocations or installation of handpumps. Their interaction was usually facilitated by *bichaulias* (middlemen) who claimed some knowledge about both the plaintiff and the Mukhya. In Sargana, the front room of Sarvesh Mandal's house doubled up as his office, where he met different types of people with varying complaints. It was a huge room with high ceiling. Two wooden tables, a few rickety chairs, and a large *dewan* (bed with mattress) allowed him to conduct business while meeting with several people at the same time. Iron shelves by the side of the walls housed various reports, lists and other files, the official home for which were the Block office with the Panchayat Secretary. *Machans* (elevated and covered bamboo platforms) outside his home provided a lounge where people could 'wait' while he transacted business with others.

Jayaram Mandal, the husband of Roshanar's Mukhya, also operated from his house. His room too was located at the front of his home. This office was smaller than Sarvesh Mandal's, but had been more recently built. There was a table and a few plastic chairs, along with a narrow wooden *charpai* (unfurnished bed). A porch

allowed visitors to wait as required. Indeed, the non-availability of “office space” for Panchayats appears to have institutionalised, to borrow from Akhil Gupta (1995), the performance, by elected representatives such as these two and thousands across Bihar, as traditional patrons to whose personal domain their electorate must approach to request for favours. However, this argument has its limits: both the Mukhyas took care to construct office rooms “outside” their homes, separated from the rest of the house. These rooms were accessed from the outside rather than by connecting with other rooms. They were mostly out of bounds for non-political members of the family, including- ironically in Roshanar- Hareram Mandal’s wife, the *de jure* Mukhya. Even if snacks and food was served to guests in these rooms, both the Mukhyas themselves went into the house to partake of their own meals.

4. CONCLUSION

The contested terrains around which decisions are taken and agendas are set in (and around) the study localities underscore the need to develop what Sen has called a comprehensive account of how individuals, citizens and populations enhance their well-being and agency freedoms. I argued earlier that this account had necessarily to be affective, given the varied ways in which people perceive well-being and agency. However, these perceptions are necessarily contextual in that they are shaped not only by individual choice and reflection, but also opportunities thought to be available, socialisation, social cogitation and argumentation. The textured profiles of the four localities will better enable me to explain how the poor seek to enhance their substantive opportunities in the four different localities, what factors inhibit or enable them, and the role of transforming subjectivities. The socio-economic profiles pointed to deep-rooted inequalities in all four localities, but also to differences in economic

opportunities that were available to residents. Likewise, the institutional, leadership and polity profiles pointed to similarities as well as differences across the four localities. Finally, the section on political contentions intended to draw attention to the complex relationship of the contests and negotiations with the economic, institutional and polity of the four localities. This urges me to explore other explanatory variables, an exercise to which I will turn in the forthcoming chapters.

I began this chapter by drawing attention to electoral politics and other contentious forms of politics, particularly in relation to the struggle for land. I noted the different, often contrasted, ways in which these struggles were interpreted. Contrasted with the usual way of interpreting these struggles, I noted the voices of those who argued that the contentions expressed their quest for *izzat/ samman* and freedom from *anyay* and *atchayar*. Relating this to the analytical discussions in Chapter 1, I suggest that these contentions are seen by the inhabitants as being important to their sense of ‘identity’ and of having found their ‘voice’, which they could do only by resorting to agonistic forms of democratic exchange. However, I also outlined my own interest in pursuing the on-going everyday contentions that men and women in the study localities were engaged in to enhance their substantive freedoms.

Thereafter, I drew attention to the contemporary incidence of landlessness and poverty, emphasising that the correlation between the two was far from certain as well as to the uneven availability of state-provisioned services and infrastructure. I noted the high degree of reliance on non-agricultural livelihoods but also highlighted the structural inequalities that accentuated caste-based exclusion. I then sketched a brief profile of the localities and the communities inhabiting them, all the while desisting from drawing essentialised caricatures of either the whole or its fragment. These

accounts were complemented by a discussion on the role of the everyday state and how its institutions enmeshed with the lives of the people inhabiting these wards. Given this background, I will now turn to addressing the analytical themes that emerged in Chapter 1.

CHAPTER 3

COOPERATIVE CONFLICT: GUARANTEEING EMPLOYMENT, INTERROGATING SUBORDINATION

1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I develop an analytical account of the relational dimension of capabilities. The lack of attention to this dimension in the existing literature had provided the starting point for my theoretical and analytical claims, as I outlined in Chapter 1. An emphasis on this aspect would enable researchers to analyse how the structures of domination and subordination are exercised and challenged. In this chapter, I examine how the augmentation of capabilities is inextricably linked with contingent struggles, seeking to interrogate, contest and reconfigure relations of domination. I do this through an examination of the political contentions spawned by the Indian Government's National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) and examine, through it, how the contenders engaged in cooperative conflict with formal and informal political leaders.

Legislated in 2005, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) provides the constitutional basis to and holds the Indian Government responsible for providing one hundred days of employment to any member of a rural household that demands work. Since 2008, the program has been operational in all the districts of the country. The daily wage (for an eight-hour workday) is fixed by States, and presently ranges from ₹120 in Bihar to ₹179 in Haryana (GoI, 2011a). Its implementation has devolved on Panchayats, enhancing the profile of that institution. This feature has contributed to making the program amenable to a variety of different claims. Through a discussion of these claims, I argue that these have contributed to enhancing

capabilities, albeit in unexpected ways. Based on official, ethnographic as well as survey data, I contend that the implementation of the program has provided the space for certain subjects to rupture socio-economic relations deemed by them to be iniquitous and exploitative. At the same time, they find themselves subjected to new patronage relations which, while sub-optimal, deepen the space for political contentions.

In this chapter, then, I first scrutinise the seductive proposition that the NREGS is but an arsenal of the Indian state's neoliberal 'technology of rule'. I suggest that, while there is some merit in this perspective, the program has spawned a far more complex set of dynamics than what this approach would suggest. I then discuss the methodology through which I have reached my own conclusions, followed by a brief discussion of the profile of the NREGS in the study localities. Thereafter, I draw attention to how the program has contributed to subjects contesting what they perceive to be relations of domination. I analyse the manner in which claims staged by workers vis-à-vis the state effectively target the rural elite. I then draw attention to the paradoxical ways in which these claims are supported and opposed. I conclude by sketching an account of the contentious conversations that workers engage in with those exercising authority seeking to make their presence felt and voices heard and understood, a topic I will take up for detailed examination in the following chapter.

2. ADVANCED LIBERAL SUBJECT, EXERCISING CHOICE?

Some elements of the NREGS tend to map neatly onto what Nikolas Rose has called the 'new specification of the subject of government' (Rose, 1999), or neoliberal technologies of government. In this reading, the subjects of neoliberal government are those who "maximise their quality of life through acts of *choice*, according their life a

meaning and value to the extent that it can be rationalised as the outcome of choices made or choices to be made” (Rose, 1996: 56-57). The NREGS is hailed by its proponents as a program that provides rural populations an alternative away from migrating to urban areas- the chance to earn a livelihood within the locality of their residence. Indeed, the “the exercise of choice to demand employment” lies at its heart (GoI, 2008: 6). This emphasis on autonomous realisation of choice acts appears to map neatly on to neoliberal technologies as well as enhancing capabilities and securing freedoms.

2.1.Choice and capabilities

However, the two concepts- choices and capabilities- should not be conflated. Drawing attention to this common misunderstanding, Alkire and Deneulin (2008) remind us that the term ‘choice’ obscures the issue of ‘value’ that is central to the notion of capabilities. Augmenting the quality of human life, not expanding the number of choices, is central to the Capability Approach. As Sen writes, “sometimes more freedom of choice can bemuse and befuddle, and make one’s life more wretched.” (Sen, 1992: 59).

Workers on NREGS projects appear to have a choice, but it is a choice between leading a life of drudgery in urban areas and a life of drudgery in rural localities. There is no *a priori* reason to believe that the former is necessarily the worse option, as sympathisers of the program are wont to. It becomes pertinent to ask whether the NREGS wage-seekers should not actually benefit from fundamental restructuring of economic organisation based on the equitable redistribution of economic and social resources. The wages earned by the workers appear indeed a poor substitute for substantive ownership over productive assets. Furthermore.

making payments in cash is conducive to the strengthening of the market economy, and provides the illusion of choice to the worker-now-turned-consumer: the choice is illusory because inflationary pressures adversely affect the wage-seeker's ability to purchase food in the open market. Insights from the work of scholars have shown how sharecroppers who tend to be paid in grain are usually better equipped to cope with famine than day labourers paid in cash (see among others Sen, 1981). Clearly, in such situations, workers are far more likely to value effective food transfers rather than the 'option' to purchase these in the open market. In this light, the success of the NREGS campaigners appears to be pyrrhic.

2.2. Reversing the effects of neoliberal accumulation

Despite the obvious temptations of the argument locating the NREGS within the Indian state's neoliberal technology of rule, critics of various hues appear to concur that the NREGS does indeed go against the grain of India's 'neoliberal turn'. The volume of expenditure incurred on the implementation of this program has incurred brickbats and accolades alike⁴¹, but point to it in fact being a thorn on the side of those policy-makers and advisors who believe the ideal state is a lean one. Several high-profile critics on the Right have derided it as an 'expensive gravy train', a 'costly joke' and a 'money-guzzler'. Indeed, the Government presently allocates approximately ` 40,000 *crores* (US\$ 8.8 billion) for the project (GoI, 2011b). By the end of the 2010-11 fiscal year, with the program extended throughout the country, the government reportedly spent nearly 70% of the total expenditure on the wage

⁴¹ Here I summarise the insightful discussions by Jean Drèze (2008).

component⁴². Staunch defenders of the program claim that the program was a “forced concession” (Shah, 2008: 881) from the Indian government, won on the dint of struggle and mobilisation outside the formal party structure. Other protagonists, like Jean Drèze⁴³ and Aruna Roy⁴⁴ recognise that the present piece of legislation was the result of a compromise reached between the popular-activists and the Ministries of rural development, and the Ministry of Finance. Chatterjee (2008: 55) asks more searching questions, asking why the program is being launched with such fanfare at this point in time. He avers that the NREGS should be seen in terms of the attempt by the state as attempting to mitigate the effects of primary accumulation under neo-liberal conditions, as well as a rare example of ‘reverse accumulation’, given the exigencies of electoral democracy.

The subject forged by the NREGS is far removed from the ideal neo-liberal subject. The ideal neoliberal subjects do not look up to the state for entitlements or rights. Rather, they are “actively responsible individuals” who seek to “*fulfil themselves* within a variety of micro-moral domains” (Rose, 2006: 158). However, the design of the NREGS ensures that the state is even more firmly entrenched in the livelihoods of the poor than ever before. Workers apply to the Panchayat for ‘job cards’. These cards are issued by the Block-level secretariat of the NREGS. The Panchayat delivers the cards to the applicants. To secure employment, applicants have to apply to the Panchayat again, which allocates work depending on what projects may be available. The works are managed by government-appointed Rozgar Sevaks, who are responsible for financial and technical reporting. Government-appointed

⁴²http://164.100.12.7/Netnrega/mpr_ht/nregampr_dmu.aspx?fin_year=2010-2011&month=Latest&flag=3&page1=S

⁴³ See Drèze and Khera (2009)

⁴⁴ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WqOsRlo0rkk>

engineers are tasked with measuring earthworks on the basis of which wage payments are released. At the time of this study, workers were required to collect their wages from the state-run Post Offices, though there have now been plans to transfer these into their bank accounts via electronic transfer.

2.3. Employment guarantee in practice

The NREGS builds on templates available from the relatively successful experience of the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme⁴⁵. However, while the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Act provided employment to all adults throughout the year, the NREGA, as noted earlier, limits it to 100 days a year per household. Once a ‘jobseeker’ applies for employment, the Panchayat is obliged to provide work within fifteen days. If it is unable to, the applicant is entitled to receiving an unemployment allowance (*berozgaari bhatta*) The employment provided must be for a minimum of fourteen days. Unlike in the case of the Maharashtra Act, the government is required to provide employment in the locality, irrespective of the number of jobseekers who apply. Wage payments are to be made within seven days of the execution of the works. In a politically astute move, the wage component of the program is met by the Central Government’s funds, but the unemployment allowance component needs to be borne by the State Government. This incentivises the State Government to ensure that job applications are fulfilled within the prescribed time limit.

The rules regarding the selection of works are flexible, but clearly favouring smaller-scale local-level labour-intensive projects. Unlike the Maharashtra Act which

⁴⁵ I base the discussion around the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Act on Moore and Jadhav (2006). I base the discussions around the NREGS on NREGA (2008).

stipulated a 51:49 ratio of labour to materials, the NREGA provides for a 60:40 ratio, thereby favouring investments on labour over materials. Indeed, the unskilled wage component of the program's annual expenditure has hovered around 66%. However, where the Maharashtra Act had clearly banned the use of machines, the NREGA allows the deployment of capital where it might be required and feasible, leaving the way open for contractors to crowd out labour-intensive projects. The operational guidelines commit the Panchayats to finalise projects in consultation with Gram Sabhas. Although formal Gram Sabhas are rare, the Panchayats allocate works in consultation with at least a few of the local notables. Unlike the Maharashtra Act, where district and block-level bureaucrats had the final word on the kinds of projects to be undertaken, under the NREGA, those decisions have been localised.

Employment on an NREGA project usually entails teams of ten-to-twenty workers carrying out earthworks towards the construction of small dams, 'excavating' ponds, afforestation activities, laying non-tarred laterite roads, and the like. These works are usually carried out on public land, but limited works on privately owned agricultural land of small and marginal farmers as well as of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are also permissible. The program's operational guidelines do not impose any seasonal conditions for the development and execution of projects, unlike the Maharashtra Scheme, which explicitly stipulated that employment projects were to be aligned with the cropping pattern so as that local agricultural labour markets would not be disrupted. Earthworks carried out under the program usually last no more than eight- to-ten days, assuming a team of ten workers. Thus, on average, a worker may expect to be employed on ten such earthworks projects. The application and payment cycles are repeated for each earthwork project that the worker is employed with.

The NREGS' potential in enhancing opportunities for the poor is most evident in terms of its continuance of work during agricultural seasons. By not restricting projects even during these seasons, the program allows wage-seekers the option to work for the NREGS project at higher wage rates instead of for local farmers for much lesser wages. Where backed by effective protections for wage-seekers who opt to work for the projects rather than for local farmers, the program does offer an effective set of valued alternatives to wage-seekers. Further, by apportioning a 40% investment for government contractors whose stakes in and aspirations for the agrarian economy were limited, the project has created an unlikely alliance between workers and private sector contractors. This serves as a bulwark against farmers' potential attempts to restrict the execution of projects to non-agricultural seasons. Drawing on these insights, I argue that the NREGS' contribution to enhancing people's capabilities does not necessarily stem from merely the choices it seems to offer. Rather, its value is seen to lie in the manner in which it has provided wage-seekers the opportunity to interrogate what they perceive to be unjust social relations. In at least some localities, workers engaged in relations of 'cooperative conflict' to make the program an effective instrument in this regard.

3. METHODOLOGY

In the rest of this chapter, I will focus on how the spaces opened up by the NREGS have been appropriated by political and politicised subjects in different ways. To support my argument, I will report my ethnographic observations, especially conversations with local leaders, group discussions with men and women, as well as in-depth interviews with workers on NREGS schemes. I will also draw on official data pertaining to workdays and employment trends, as well as survey data of

randomly sampled households. I will thereafter take up a discussion on the way the program is being *actually* implemented, as reported by different stakeholders and others. In particular, I will focus on how workers are selected, how works are approved, and what happens when wages are to be paid. I believe it is pertinent to recall Evans-Pritchard's complaint that "anthropologists have tended to be uncritical in the use of documentary sources" (Evans-Pritchard, 1961: 5). I take seriously Amin's (1992) warning about the juridical archive being the 'state's emissary', and therefore transpose it with the perspectives gleaned from inhabitants of the study localities.

Accordingly, I rely more on verbal sources of data. Oral accounts, especially of politicians, are valuable not so much from the point of view of whether they were speaking the truth, but in terms of their 'performance' and the reasons they offered for taking (or not taking) certain decisions. Corroborated with testimonies of workers and other people, a clearer picture emerged, illustrating the perils of examining non-decisions (Lukes, 2005). NREGS' program design requires the coordination of very different sets of individuals, who are sometimes at cross-purposes with one another. This feature, designed to be advantageous to the program, was certainly useful to me, since there was a plethora of accounts about different motivations and mechanisms. It provided me a textured account of how the NREGS was actualised in the study localities.

The hermeneutic lens I inherited permitted me to grasp (if incompletely) my respondents' perceptions about the leakages, the negotiations, the contentions and the mobilisations around the NREGS in the study localities. In-depth interviews with local politicians, fixers and brokers provide insights into their conceptions of power, justice and politics. Counterposed with these narratives are those of the workers who

found employment under the program, whose cognitive world was shaped by the notion of a leader as one who would get the ‘job done’. In this world, the leader too deserved to be remunerated for the services he provided (and it was usually a ‘he’), but only if he proved himself to be effective and worthy. Nonetheless, the workers were not beholden to this or that politician and were flexible about approaching different ones at different times with different problems.

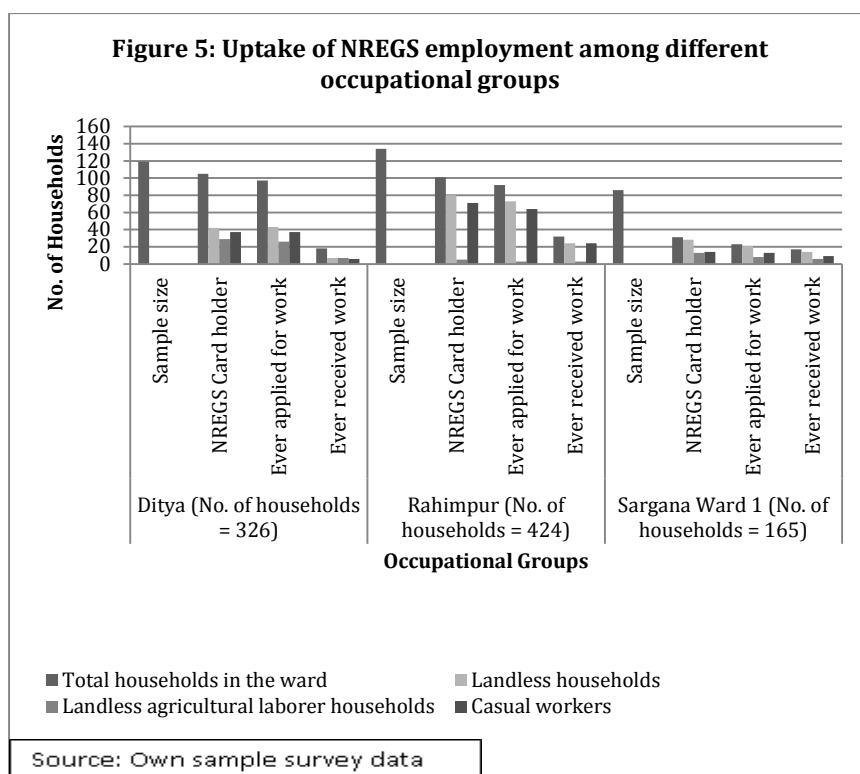
4. NREGS PROFILES

Table 3 reports, based on sample survey data, the ‘breadth’ and the ‘depth’ of the NREGS in the four localities. No NREGS job-cards were distributed in Roshanar Ward 5. This was despite the fact that more persons during the period 2008-9 had been employed in the Panchayat of which this ward is part, in comparison with all the other study Panchayats (See Annex 1). Therefore, Figure 5 below presents data from three wards. It is clear from a scrutiny of the data that the proportion of the sampled population which reported *possessing* NREGS job-cards was higher in Ditya than in the other two localities. However, Rahimpur saw a higher proportion of job-card holders *applying* for employment. In Sargana Ward 1, comparatively fewer households possessed job-cards or applied for work. However, the proportion of households that reported *receiving* employment in response to their applications was higher in this ward than in the other two. Furthermore, a higher proportion of landless agriculture labour households applying for employment received employment in Sargana Ward 1 than in the other two localities.

TABLE 3: AVERAGE NUMBER OF NREGGS WORKDAYS GENERATED IN PANCHAYATS WHERE STUDY SITES ARE LOCATED 2008-9

	Ditya	Rahimpur	Sargana Ward 1	Roshanar Ward 5
Average work days in Panchayat of which the Ward is part (1)	15.91	11.72	14.92	17.22
Average work days in Ward (2)	14	22	30	NA

Source: (1)- www.nrega.nic.in
(2)- Rozgar Sevak Records.



A caveat about the official data is in order. One contribution of the NREGS has been to create in rural areas what Michael Power has called an important element of ‘advanced liberal governmentality’: the inauguration of an audit society (Power, 1999). Consequently, the key role of the Rozgar Sevaks and, indeed, the entire data management team dedicated to the NREGS, has been to ‘manage’ accounts and figures related to outcomes, and to make it legible to auditors for scrutiny. While this is undoubtedly laudable, it is not difficult to imagine the motivations that might exist among functionaries to ‘doctor’ records. Hence, although I take official figures as

merely a comparative ‘starting point’, I would not like to overemphasise their salience.

Signboards announcing the nature of works, costs and wage rates were markers of the presence of these programs in Ditya. However, the program’s physical presence did not translate into substantive employment for its inhabitants either in terms of breadth (total number/ proportion of households receiving employment) or in terms of depth (average number of days that each household received work). In terms of both breadth and depth, the ward’s “underperformance” relative to the Panchayat which it was part of is glaring. The contrast with Rahimpur made it even more striking. It is a difference made starker by the fact that both villages have strong traditions of political mobilisation, activism and organisation.

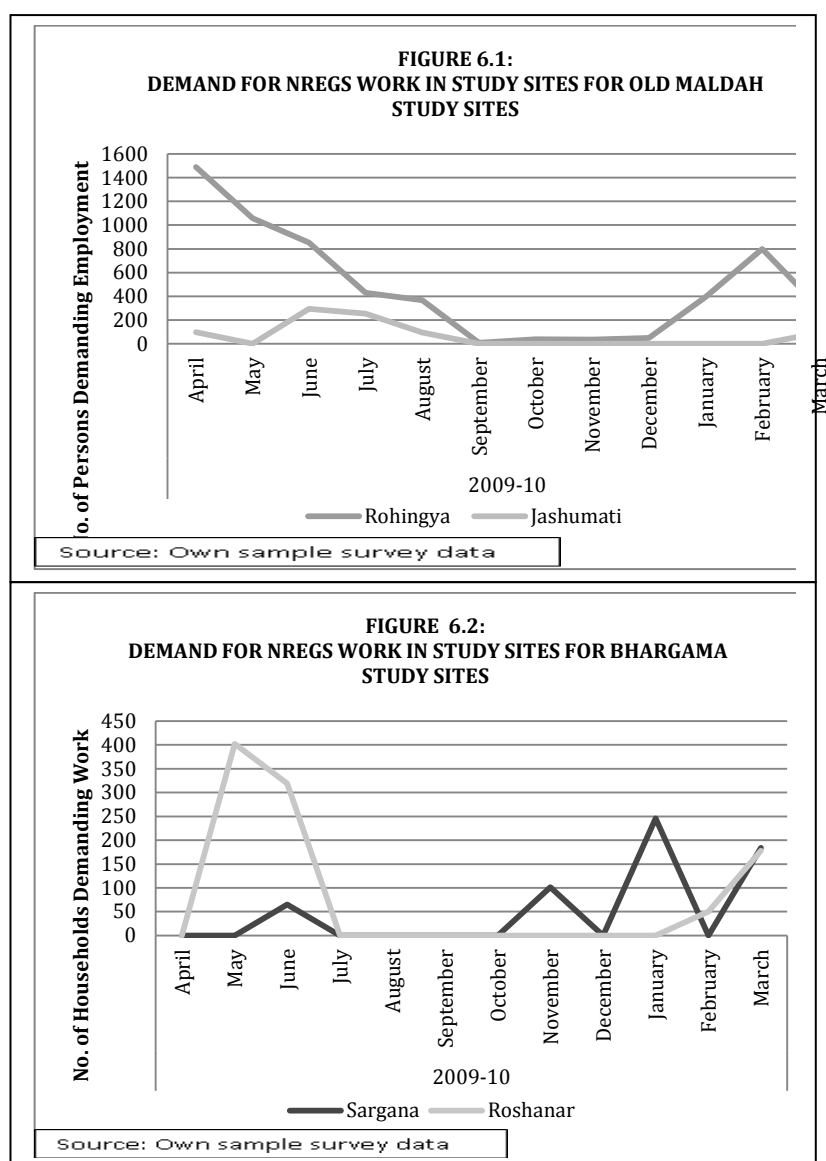
A similar gap in NREGS was apparent in Bihar. As in Ditya and Rahimpur, the difference in NREGS outcomes is made even more glaring by the similarities in patterns of recent political organisation and mobilisation. The gap is even more puzzling given that Sargana Ward 1’s landless labourers were far more dependent on local farmers for employment than their counterparts in Roshanar Ward 5. Despite this, wage-seekers in Sargana Ward 1 were able to successfully assert their demands for work under the program. Not only that, as I will show, official records show that demand for work in Sargana persisted during the sowing season for Rabi and the harvest season for kharief: not only were wage-seekers in Sargana Ward 1 successfully asserting their claims, it seems they did so- at the cost of the local farmers and potential employers. While I will resist the temptation of trying to provide an explanation for the variance, the striking contrasts between the two sets of localities do provide an interesting starting point to examine different forms of political contentions around the program.

5. RECONSTITUTING SOCIAL RELATIONS

One way in which we may interpret these differences is to draw attention to the specificities of the local agrarian structure in the study localities. The significance of this structure becomes more important when we examine the pattern on the NREGS demands. Per official data from Old Maldah's Panchayats presented in Figure 6.1 below, the demand for employment on NREGS earthworks coincided with the *aman* harvesting season and the *boro* sowing cycle. Some workers justified the timing of their demands by referring to the need to earn extra income. One of them, 50-year old Gonesh Moholi, said, "Every opportunity to earn some extra cash makes a substantial difference in our lives."⁴⁶ Others, such as 46-year old Sevanti Moholi, argued, "It is our right, isn't it, to work when we want to. We want to deal with the *sarkar*, not with a petty *mahajan* who is so poor he keeps negotiating with us to reduce our wages." Vaman Tudu, 29, said the program allowed him to "show the *mahajan* we have other work, and are not waiting for his benevolence." Landless households like those of Gonesh, Sevanti and Vaman usually returned from the town once their fifty-day *dadon* contracts expired. Such timing of demands for employment appears to indicate that the NREGS was used as a bargaining counter to push up wages. By and large, the claims in this locality were couched in terms of gaining better remuneration, even if remuneration was somewhat delayed. This timing allowed households the option to choose between NREGS work which pays higher, but where the actual payments were received only after one week; and agricultural work which paid much lower but more immediately. In practice, households tended to

⁴⁶ Group discussion, Tuduatiya hamlet, Neechupada, Ditya, February 25, 2010. All cited matter till the next footnote from this source

choose NREGS work. The similarities in demand patterns for NREGS were discernible in both Ditya and Rahimpur.



However, the implications for the involvement of actors in what Partha Chatterjee calls ‘political society’ are very different. Political society refers to the panoply of actors, institutions and norms that facilitate the making of decisions, the assertion of claims and the articulation of subject-positions. As Chatterjee (2011) clarifies, the analytical category of brokers and fixers does not do adequate justice to the tasks performed by these actors, for they do not simply mediate between the

preferences of their clients and the state. They also play a key role in shaping those preferences, by bringing information, and often the requisite forms, related to the program to the very doorstep of the populations. It is to people who were expected to play these roles that potential workers in the study localities turned to.

In localities such as Ditya, it is these actors who, as the men and women in Neechupada I spoke with earlier allege, let them down. Gonesh Moholi's son, Setu Moholi raged, "We went to them repeatedly, asking what was to be done. They kept saying the rules had changed. But we saw so many people working- did the rules change only for Saotals?"⁴⁷ Sevanti Moholi, who spoke earlier, recalled how "when it came to distributing job cards they were very enthusiastic. They personally came to our doorstep to give these to us. We hadn't even asked for them." Her daughter-in-law, 20 year-old Anita wondered why everyone was so angry, for was it "not obvious that you [meaning the other wage-seekers] were asking for government work when you should working on their fields."

Ditya's politicians, men such as Arjun Sarkar, Paresh Sarkar, Suhas Sarkar and Sarasram Sarkar⁴⁸, most of who were of the Desiya community competed for the same political, especially electoral, space in Ditya. Indeed, they were under scrutiny from the landowning constituency in their hamlet- families with whom they also shared kinship and other social ties, which in turn acted as a disincentive for them backing NREGS applicants. Small-holders and medium-sized landholding families made up a quarter of the ward's population. Given that they sourced agricultural labour from within the village, these leaders were attributed by my interlocutors- not

⁴⁷ Group discussion, Tududiva hamlet, Neechupada, Ditya, February 25, 2010. All cited matter till next foot note from this source

⁴⁸ The first two were luminaries of the local CPI(M), the latter two were affiliated with the Congress Party. Arjun Sarkar's daughter was married to Paresh Sarkar.

only in Neechupada but in other hamlets as well- with a vested interest in preventing potential workers on their farms from employment on the NREGS projects. Arjun Sarkar, the chief electoral strategist of the CPI(M), locally referred to as Tota *kaka* (uncle), minced no words, “See, I have to manage my votes. I have to keep everyone happy. I got the *adibasis* (referring to all the Scheduled Tribes in the locality, including the individuals just mentioned) the job cards but I possibly couldn’t upset my own folk.”⁴⁹

Congress Party strategist, Sarasram Sarkar, made it clear that it was because of the threat they posed that “Tota had no option but to rebuff the *adibasis*’ claims. Think of the cheek (*Ki ashporda*). If they took to digging ditches [reference to the earthworks promoted under the NREGS, and deemed to be unproductive], who would work on the fields.”⁵⁰ Suhas Sarkar, another Congress strategist, was more nuanced. He called the “NREGS a plot by the industrialists to destroy agriculture. Moreover, for a farmer (*krishak*), there is no greater honour than farming.”⁵¹ Suhas Sarkar’s argument found few takers in the Saotal and other Scheduled Tribe-inhabited hamlets. Shyamoli Hasda, the CPI(M)-affiliated ward member asked me rhetorically when I reported this conversation to her, “If it was such a conspiracy, why did he not leave the Congress Party? After all it was they who initiated the program. It’s a pack of lies.”⁵² Her husband, Madan Hembrom clarified, “I told Tota *kaka* many times that the program was extremely popular, and therefore we should respond to wage-seekers’ demands. But he kept putting it off. Our own people [referring to the Saotals]

⁴⁹ Interview, Arjun Sarkar, March 1, 2010, emphasis his. Tota *kaka* and Babul *babu*, it will be recalled from Chapter 2, were old ‘comrades’ in the CPI(M).

⁵⁰ Interview, Sarasram Sarkar, February 26, 2010. Sarasram Sarkar was Babul *babu*’s half-brother and began public life as a CPI(M) member. He fell out with his brother because he refused to give him any of the plum postings in the government while he was in power.

⁵¹ Interview Suhas Sarkar, February 19, 2010.

⁵² Interview, Shyamoli Hasda and Madan Hembrom, February 21, 2010.

on the other hand, think we are just stooges. As a result, we have become unpopular on both sides. We should never have got involved in this trouble of politics (*rajneetir jhamela*).⁵³”

It appears from these accounts that the actors in political society inverted Scott’s (1985) ‘weapons of the weak’: they ‘foot-dragged’, feigned ignorance, incapability and a lack of understanding of what they called a “complicated process”⁵⁴. They did not think the workers were doing what they should have been doing, and registered their displeasure. Working on fields was recrafted as honourable, and those who would rather seek work with the NREGS were thought of as undertaking dishonourable acts.

On the few occasions that wage-seekers sought to apply for work directly to the Congress-dominated Panchayat without going through the intermediaries they generally drew a blank. It appears that the Congress-dominated Panchayat tried as best as they could to not provide any work to applicants from Ditya with any work. Ditya’s ward member was effectively under the control of the Congress-dominated Gram Unnayan Samiti. However, Shyamoli Hasda and Madan Hembrom’s formal roles as CPI(M)- affiliated Ward Members was highlighted when referring to the failure of applicants to receive employment. The rare occasions when applicants from the ward did receive employment appeared nightmarish for the young couple. As Madan recalled a particularly harrowing event from about September 2009,

⁵³ Interview, Shyamoli Hasda and Madan Hembrom, February 21, 2010. As per the Indian Constitution’s principle of affirmative action and in keeping with the West Bengal Government’s regulations, Ditya ward was ‘reserved’ for a Scheduled Tribe woman. Tota *kaka*, as CPI(M) strategist persuaded 25-year old Shyamoli Hasda through her 30-year old Madan Hembrom to contest the elections. She won, but with a far more slender margin than the CPI(M) had won on earlier occasions.

⁵⁴ The ‘complexity’ in the NREGS was invoked for me by almost every politician I spoke to in the ward.

“A project to lay gravel along a fairly long stretch of the road was sanctioned and ten applications were approved, to work for eight days. We were thrilled. But once the work was complete, the workers naturally demanded to be paid. They waited patiently enough for a week, and then another. So did I- hoping that the money to make the payments would come through quickly. I made daily trips to the Panchayat, only to be told that no money had come. However, when I enquired from other ward members, they all said their respective monies had come. Then it struck me- I was being made a fool of. I should have known- the Panchayat and the Gram Unnayan Samiti were after all being run by the same people. When I tried to explain that to the applicants, they said I was covering up and began thrashing me. To them, I was clearly a thief (broke down into sobs) ...anyway, the Panchayat office called me next week to tell me the monies had come. The workers were paid, but I had lost all my credibility. No one stood by us, neither my party, nor my community. That day, an idol was broken⁵⁵”

As expected, none of the workers involved in that incident (all of who lived in hamlets at least three to four kilometres away from Shyamoli and Madan’s, although they shared affiliation to the same tribal community and lineage as Madan did) believed what they thought was a story made up by Madan to save himself⁵⁶. However, my interlocutors in Neechupada, thought it plausible that Madan was being manipulated as a pawn by the local leadership. In animated discussions that resonated with Ruud’s (2001) account about politics being a ‘dirty business’, they said politics was also a reflection of society. As Sevanti Moholi reminded everyone participating in that discussion, *“jaar maathaye joto tel shey aaru tel paaye.”*⁵⁷ Loosely translated, this means- those who have more, get more. How then, they asked rhetorically again, could Shyamoli and Madan expect to get anywhere since that had nothing to begin with. According to them, the elites (not only in Ditya, but anywhere in the world) were quite capable of manipulating a poor couple like Madan and Shyamoli to their own ends. Incidentally, the inhabitants of Neechupada were socially further away from Madan and Shyamoli than those who had thrashed Madan earlier. Therefore, the

⁵⁵ Interview, Madan Hembrom, February 25, 2010. He was particularly aggrieved that Tota kaka had not stood by him. He said he worshipped Tota kaka (that perhaps explains the reference to the idol).

⁵⁶ Group discussion, NREGS workers, Saotal pada, March 1, 2010.

⁵⁷ A literal translation would be- if you have oil on your head, you will attract more oil.

sympathy that Neechupada's inhabitants had for Madan's predicament could not be attributed to ascriptive affinity alone.

Ditya's elites appear clearly to respond to pressures from the small and medium farmers in that locality to prevent labour shortages during the agricultural seasons. Such pressures appear to be relatively non-existent there. For one thing, only a tenth of Rahimpur's population depended upon agricultural labour. As many as 75% owned no land: the bulk of actors in political society comprised people from this socio-economic background. The need for sourcing labour, where it did arise (as for the 5% that owned substantial plots of land, including leaders such as Akbar, Abdur Rehman and Joynal Ali) was met from neighbouring wards or blocks such as Habibpur.

Rahimpur's leaders realised that, more than *creating* opportunities for work, what would endear them to the populace was the extent to which they get people employed under the rubric of the program. As the data demonstrates, the NREGS was less popular among the populace here than in Ditya: comparatively fewer people either received job cards or applied for work. And yet, nearly twice as many applicants for NREGS works got jobs under the scheme. Actors in Rahimpur's political society recognised the pulse of the ward's inhabitants. They realised that while NREGS was not the best thing, it was "good enough", in Joynalda's words, since it allowed workers to supplement whatever income they earned from casual work in the village and outside.

At the same time, Rahimpur's Congress leaders were eager to demonstrate that they could get the job done as well, given that 'their' party was in power at the Panchayat level. From the accounts of applicants (who eventually received job cards and work), these leaders promised jobseekers that they would "see to it" that their

names were included in the muster rolls. When I asked them how they managed to keep their word, Congress leaders told me that they kept a constant pressure on the Pradhan and block-level leaders to ensure that applicants from Rahimpur were included in proposed works. Babar Hossein, the Ward Member had numerous arguments with Gopal Sarkar, the Pradhan, each time he suggested that at least a few workers from Rahimpur should get a chance to work on an NREGS project. Akbar Ali, influential Congress leader conferred with block-level Congress leaders to emphasise the importance of the project to the general population, and how critical it was in their attempts to keep the CPI(M) out of power. He would always remind the party leaders that Rahimpur's vast electorate was an asset. On the other hand, Alauddin Ali used his personal friendship with Sindhugram's Chandra Mahato to accommodate a few labourers from the village in NREGS works implemented in his ward. Alauddin reasoned with him, "It will help us enormously and you will win tremendous goodwill in Rahimpur. This will help you in any future electoral contest in the area," alluding to the post of the Secretary of the Panchayat-level Village Education Committee that Chandrada was contesting.

At the same time, Babar, Akbar and Alauddin did not want to be seen to be too pushy: as it is, Congress in Maldah had acquired the reputation of being a "Muslim party", and they in turn were instructed not to be seen as contributing to that image. To that end, these leaders had to walk a tightrope. On the one hand, they had to advocate for the inclusion of applicants from their ward, the bulk of who happened to be Muslim. On the other, doing that too much would upset the religious group-based calculation of the Congress Party in Old Maldah. Among the earliest names of potential workers in Rahimpur were Binds and Saotals. Gradually, names of Muslim

workers were endorsed. Data from the sample survey revealed that nearly one-fifth of all applicants who eventually received employment were non-Muslims.

Clearly, Ditya's 'structures of living together' are witnessing significant rupture. The intersubjective meanings attributed to rural life, far from influencing the ward's inhabitants to act in a certain way, are themselves being subjected to scrutiny: indeed, these meanings, insofar as they existed at all, are increasingly becoming irrelevant. In demanding work during the cropping season, wage-seekers appeared to prioritise their incomes from work over the fate of the agrarian society with which they had been so inextricably engaged with all these years. Following Taylor (1987), inter-subjective meanings in Ditya were obviously strong, which explains why the attempted rupture with them was so strongly contested and grieved over. At the same time, the interpretation of society's rules offered by Neechupada's inhabitants revealed the extent to which such behaviour was, after all, to be expected from elites. In Rahimpur, such inter-subjective meanings attributed to society and social structures appeared to have dissolved.

An intriguing contrast emerges when the Bihar sites are introduced. As in Ditya, Sargana Ward 1's agrarian structure was dominated by the agrarian economy. Compared with both these localities, however, far more households in Sargana Ward 1 depended on incomes from agricultural production on their own farms, on which they used their own household labour as well as sourced labour from landless households in the locality. As in Ditya and Rahimpur, official records (see Figure 3.2) show that wage-seekers in Sargana Ward 1 continued to demand employment during the sowing season for *rabi* and the harvest season for *kharief*. Were NREGS wage-seekers aiming to perform the same role as in Ditya? Were they also using the

program as a bargaining chip to increase local agricultural wages. As I will show below, their motivations appeared somewhat different.

As in Ditya, there was a great deal of opposition to the demands by wage-seekers for NREGS employment. Even more than in Ditya, landlords in Sargana Ward 1 were well-connected with the local bureaucracy. For instance, Sargana's Post-Master Gajen Singh, responsible for timely payment to wage-seekers, was the scion of Rajput family owning considerable agricultural property. His mother was elected to the Block Panchayat. He was correspondent for a leading Hindi daily. Although his family did not need as much as labour on their lands as did some of the others, he openly sympathised with the demands raised by agriculturalists from time to time for suspending NREGS works during the agricultural seasons⁵⁸. Indeed, in one of his more unguarded moments, he cursed the block-level NREGS implementation officials for not heeding his advice and indeed for not respecting their own affiliations with the landowning castes.

5.2. "Damn the economy"

Simultaneously, support to the endeavours of wage-seekers comes from aspiring and actual politicians, brokers and fixers who see NREGS as an appropriate opportunity to build or deepen their relationships with the workers. It is these actors who publicise the NREGS among the populace in the first instance. In Ward 1, Manoj Srivastav and his colleagues in the CPI(ML) party saw this as a perfect opportunity to recruit members to his party. For Shyamdev Rishidev, Sargana Ward 5's elected

⁵⁸ These demands have had national-level resonance, as witnessed in the recent spat between Minister of Rural Development Jairam Ramesh and Minister of Agriculture Sharad Pawar. See <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/NREGA--Jairam-rejects-Pawar-claim--says-no-impact-on-farms/890514/>.

representative, this was an opportunity to register his presence as a leader who could get “work” for his followers. Dharmesh Srivastav, in keeping with his own political ambitions for the BJP, of which his brother’s wife was the local Secretary, sought to provide job cards as well as employment to as many households as possible. Once the program was announced, it was clear that the largely illiterate applicants would need help filling the forms, submitting them to the appropriate authority, receiving employment, going to the allocated area to work, and then to receive wages. Indeed, many families of wage-seekers, who had heard about the scheme on radio or from other co-villagers, and wanted to know more about it, were looking for someone who could provide that information. Since the Rozgar Sevaks were usually city-bred young men who were ‘culturally different’, the wage-seekers hesitated to approach them. Rather, they sought out local leaders who might know a little more about the program than they did themselves.

The inter-subjective meanings binding Sargana’s population were clearly not as influential in shaping individual preferences and values, as Ricoeur’s analysis might have us believe. This is not to suggest that wage-seekers are voluntaristic agents either. But the persistent demands for employment with NREGS projects despite the familiar and perhaps habitual work in the farms of local *jamindars* conveys the sense that, as in Ditya, such meanings are being contested and renegotiated. The wage-seekers justified these demands not so much in terms of enhanced outcomes, but as a means to “teach *jamindars* a lesson”, as Kadi Rishi, a 40-year-old landless agricultural labourer from the Musahar calmly told me⁵⁹. His 76-year old uncle, Shanichar Rishi, also a landless labourer, added, “We earn more by going to Punjab. Besides, the payments there are made timely, and without

⁵⁹ Discussion, NREGS workers, April 9, 2010. All citations till next footnote from this source

cheating...NREGS is a mess, but it is invaluable. We can now desist from working on the *jamindar's* land even if we stay in the village.” 51 year-old Bhukhan Rishi, another landless labourer, reiterated, “Before this program, we were either Musahars or *khetmajoors*: subservient to the *jamindar*, and to the ‘high’ caste. With the NREGS, we can live in the village without having to adhere to the village rules, of working the *jamindar's* land. By seeing us in the village, without us begging him for work, he understands that we are human beings too, capable of a dignified life.” 26-year old Nandan Rishi added, “His [the landlord's] economy be damned.” In another instance, recalled by the Rozgar Sevak and corroborated in these discussions, the Panchayat had sanctioned the laying of an inter-village road in October 2009. However, a wealthy farmer had encroached upon a part of the public land designated for this purpose. When the Rozgar Sevak approached the agriculturalist (who happened to be Yadav by caste), the latter challenged him to remove the encroachment. Given the farmer's social and economic background, the Rozgar Sevak was hesitant. But the applicants, most of who were Musahar or Kevat by caste, would have none of it: according to their accounts as well as the Rozgar Sevak's, the workers began their work by smashing the illegal structure using the implements provided to them under the program. According to the Rozgar Sevak the workers did so gleefully since they had past scores to settle. However, the workers I spoke to were more circumspect, “The *sarkar* should have done it themselves. But, since it didn't, we came in. We had nothing against him, but the Yadavs have become very *dabang*. They were our friends in our past struggles, but having tasted power, they have used it put us down”⁶⁰. In the light of the symbolic value that the NREGS holds, especially

⁶⁰ Interview with Rozgar Sevak, March 31, 2010. My discussion with the said agriculturalist on April 3, 2010 gave me the impression that there was indeed not personal score he had with any of the

in terms of the blatant disregard for the well-being of the local agrarian economy, it is particularly striking that there exists substantial political support for a project, which is justified in such explicit terms.

The situation in Roshanar Ward 5 was very different. Here, despite the fact that- like Rahimpur- only 5% of the population derived their income from self-owned land, the program was a non-starter. Publicity about the program has been limited. Villagers were overwhelmed by the number of steps that had to be taken before the job card could be possessed. When this was demystified, they thought it was deceptively simple- and that there certainly was a catch somewhere. Underlying these feelings, at least among the majority Muslim populace, was a fear of being discriminated against. “We know there’s no point applying for these things. Nothing will ever get done. Had it not been for the ‘M’ factor, things would certainly have been simple. But given our religion, it won’t be.”⁶¹ Sohrab, a landless householder who works in Gurgaon as a mason eight months in a year, recalled how he and five of his neighbours were refused a loan from the nearby branch of the Central Bank of India, despite all their papers being in order, and despite willing to pay a bribe. “The moment they saw our names, they threw us out. And we were willing to pay them anything they would ask for. How do you expect us to think they will give us these job cards when there is so little scope for bribes?” Sohrab, once a good friend of the Mukhya when they were in the CPI(ML) together, joked, “Everything that is said about *narega* maybe true in a perfect world. We live in the world of Hareram

NREGS workers who had pulled his encroachment down. Accepting that his structure was illegal, he kept saying, “I don’t understand why they did it, I had never done them any harm.” However, there had been a dispute between a Yadav agriculturalist and local Musahars when a Musahar child was caught stealing some corn from the former’s field. In anger, it was alleged, the agriculturalist had slashed his wrists. The Musahars tried to move the police, but were persuaded not to by local Yadav politicians, led by the Upasarpnach AmareshYadav who we will encounter in Chapter 5.

⁶¹ Group discussion, Roshanar Muslim Tola, April 6, 2010. All citations till next footnote from this source.

Mukhya. If this will need his ultimate endorsement, we may as well not get involved at all. At least, that way we'll be spared the humiliation of being rejected."

Roshanar Ward 5's principle communities have traditionally been supporters of the Congress Party (even though individuals such as Sohrab Ali and Javed Ali have enjoyed personal friendships with the present Mukhya⁶²). They did make some overtures to important local functionaries of Congress Party, but they were even more brutally rebuffed. The local Congress Party chief 75- year old Pritam Singh, popularly known as Pritam *babu*, owned 20 *bighas* (Eight hectares⁶³) of land. His hostility to the program was unremitting: according to him, "NREGS is dangerous because it will destroy India's economic spine [referring to its agriculture]." Unlike Hareram Mandal, Pritam Singh's opposition to the program was on grounds of principle, and thus unremitting, making him a very unlikely ally of the ward's inhabitants.

5.3. Targeting the profane state

The contentions recalled above and the symbolic value that the NREGS derives from there are important contributors to subjects challenging the relations of domination that they perceive themselves to be subjected to. Authors suggesting that the state in India has been thoroughly governmentalised (Chatterjee, 2004; Gupta, 2005; Gupta, 1998) have been subjected to searing critique (Shah, 2008; Lerche, 2001), among others. In particular they have been accused of romanticising the domain of non-state governance and imputing upon societal actors an ethical content

⁶² The present Mukhya Hareram Mandal had been elected on a so-called 'wave of social justice' comprising social support from the most deprived caste groups in the area, chiefly the Musahars and Kevats. His rise to power had been legendary since his supporters had braved Pritam babu's threats 'to have every hand that votes in Hareram Mandal's favour cut off'. Unfortunately, for them, Roshanar Ward 5's electorate, both Gangot and Kunjra, had publicly displayed their support to the Congress and Pritam babu and were now viewed by Hareram Mandal as antagonists.

⁶³ 2.5 *bighas* = 1 *hectare* in Dharampur *pargana* in which historical administrative region, these villages were located

that does not always obtain. A program such as the NREGA clearly establishes the state as the object of claims, calling attention to shifting the contours of the debate. By establishing potential workers as the bearer of rights, the legislation effectively pits them against the state which provides the bases of these rights. The expected role of the state in the reconstituting existing relations of domination sits uneasily with the fact that payments are not made in time, the state's functionaries siphon off a part of the wages, and work plans are often finalised by technicians rather than in consultation with local people. In important ways, the state and rural labour are now pitted against one another. The debate is not, therefore, about whether the state ought to be more governmentalised or less (it already has been). Rather, one of the issues emerging from the shift is whether and how the poor (rural labour in our case) can manipulate this governmentalisation in order to reconstitute social relations. In areas such as Sargana Ward 1, this conflict was interpreted on account of the perceived occupation of the domain of the state by local elites, as I will show.

A constant focus of political action around the program was the timeliness and accuracy of payments. It was common for payments to be delayed and sometimes reduced because the bureaucrats responsible for routing them would siphon 20-50% of it. In Sargana, the role of Gajen Singh as Post Master should be recalled. As a result of his antipathy, if not hostility, to the program, it widely believed (corroborated by his subordinate, the Rozgar Sevaks) that he would desist from making timely payments of wages. He was widely reviled for being shamelessly corrupt: he was often spoken of as possessing a particularly 'thick skin' (*moti chamdi*) and hence, immune from feelings of guilt and shame. The workers, most of who were of the Musahar community, persuaded CPI(ML) leaders to 'lead them' to the block

and to draw attention of the Block Development Officer to the corrupt practices of his functionaries.

One particularly nasty episode involved a protest against an alleged assault by him on two workers. This was in November 2009, just before I began fieldwork. These events were recalled for me by the Secretary of the CPI(ML)-affiliated Agricultural Labour Association 32-year old Parsvnath Jha. In a public display of anger, about 50 workers, all Musahar, stormed into the Block Office where he had come for a meeting, and began to hurl abuse, each more “filthy than the previous”. The provocation was such that he abused them back “with all the filth at his command, and do this in public. According to Parsvnath Jha, this was common occurrence. However, it also undermined his social superiority and elite status By abusing women in public, it was suggested “he was destroying the exalted status of his Rajput caste, by spewing venom against a woman of a ‘lower’ caste. Who would take seriously a *raja* who spoke so vindictively against a woman?”⁶⁴

Although local politicians were at pains to keep the protests within rational limits, the Musahar agitators would perform the stereotypes attributed to them of being ill-tempered, unreasonable and mercurial: they would deploy idioms that are unreasonable, bordering on lewd, rude remarks and a blatant disregard for the norms of politeness and civility that the ‘leaders’ aim to cultivate. While never violent, they would often take to name-calling and using ‘filthy language and idioms’ while arguing⁶⁵. On one occasion, recalls Parsvnath Jha, they were protesting non-payment of wages to ten women, again from the Musahar community. The Rozgar Sevak allegedly demanded ₹32 each from them. When narrating this incident to the middle-

⁶⁴ Interview with Parsvnath Jha, Sargana Block Secretary All India Agricultural Labour Association. January 20, 2010.

⁶⁵ As recalled by the Asif Sheikh, BDO Head Clerk (locally known as *bada babu*)

aged male caste Hindu BDO, one of the Musahar women apparently screamed, ‘If he wants to take the money, let him. But let him take us also, look after us and feed us. We can offer him the money provided he allows us to offer ourselves to him.’ Another woman added, in a lower voice, but audible enough for everyone to hear, ‘But what’s the point, he’s only a boy.’ The errant Rozgar Sevak, who was present, was embarrassed, as was the BDO. The stinging taunts went home. The BDO publicly admonished the Rozgar Sevak, and made him return the money of all those women he had taken money from⁶⁶.

It was common for bureaucrats and other members of local society to suggest that the Musahars were being used as cannon fodder by the CPI(ML). Kadi Rishi laughed at the proposition. “It is like saying that the Rajput is being used by the BJP, or the Yadav by the RJD. We Musahars also support different parties- the RJD, the JD(U) and the CPI(ML). When we vote for the CPI(ML), we know that the party will support us. It is foolish to suggest that Manoj *cha* [uncle] is using us. if anything, it is we who are using him.”⁶⁷ Clearly, irrespective of how party leaders and others in rural society view the Musahars vis-à-vis the CPI(ML), they see themselves as determining the agenda of the party at the local level.

Ditya’s NREGS workers were also well aware of their entitlements under the NREGS. In Kajhlikhopa hamlet, eighteen Saotals had worked in 2007 (when Paresh Sarkar was ward member, prior to the elections of 2008 when Shyamoli Hasda was elected as such) on a road construction project for ten days. However, according to Shayamoli Hasda, one of the workers, they were paid less than what was due to them. News of this spread rapidly. The entire village, comprising both Saotals and Binds,

⁶⁶ As recalled by Parsvnath Jha, Hanging Out at Manoj Srivastav’s residence, January 15, 2010.

⁶⁷ Hanging out, Sargana Ward 1 (West) Musahar tola *machan*.

gheraoed the Gram Unnayan Samiti members (including Arjun Sarkar and Paresh Sarkar, then the Ward Member). They demanded that full payments be made. As Mithilesh Hembrom, a landless labourer, who had worked on that project, recalled, “The rascals [*haaramjada*] refused to relent. They refused to concede that they had done wrong. That was when we began to thrash them. With our bare hands, the women did too. Paresh managed to flee, but we held the old man [referring to Arjun] hostage.” According to Tulasi Tudu, another landless labourer who had worked on that project, “We stopped when they begged for mercy, and when they confessed that they had indeed swindled us out of our savings. Within a few hours, the payments were released.”⁶⁸

In all the localities where it has been implemented- though more in some than in others, the NREGS has provided the material basis on which poor people can assert their presence, and act against what they perceive to be unjust. By making demands for employment at a season when they are expected to contribute to the local economy, they are articulating demands they are thought to have no business articulating. By speaking in the presence of senior public officials about issues and themes that are thought to be the subject of private banter (“he is only a boy”), they are clearly speaking a language not thought to be sensible. By thrashing elected representatives for dereliction of duty, they do what they should not be doing. In these engagements, politicians seek to make themselves as relevant as possible, as I will show, though-as I have shown those that are inexperienced fall behind.

⁶⁸ Group discussion, NREGS workers, Kajhlikhopa hamlet, Ditya ward. The situational difference between this incident and the one previously mentioned was that the Gram Unnayan Samitis in the above account were controlled by the same party to which the Ward Member was affiliated (both CPI-M), whereas in the case discussed earlier, they belonged to different parties.

6. COOPERATIVE CONFLICT

An important insight that Amartya Sen offers from a less-celebrated work on how intra-household gender inequities are institutionalised, but also continuously negotiated, is the notion of ‘cooperative conflict’. Despite the existence of substantial conflicts, both real and perceived, different parties to a conflict have much to gain from cooperating, or at least from being overtly cooperative. In particular, Sen urges us to be attentive to how the cooperative format takes as its focus “perception problems about respective interests, contributions and claims” (Sen, 1990: 147). Applied to family situations, as Sen reminds us, cooperation provides the general format with conflicts treated as aberrations. In the public realm, as we have seen, conflicts are not as exceptional, and politicians seek to suture the ruptures that appear. In cases such as Ditya’s, the way the politicians have responded has resulted in the maintenance of an elite consensus against implementing the program. In Sargana Ward 1, there is evidence that the opposition to the program is being successfully undermined. In Rahimpur, there does not appear to be any conflict on this issue at all. In this section, I will explore the myriad of enmeshed cooperative and conflicting ways in which actors in political society engage with their constituencies.

6.1.The tasks of political society

Despite the efforts of the state to establish its ‘developmental’ presence in the lives of its citizens (Corbridge et al, 2003) in practice, there remains a gap between promise and reality. The rules that envisage that the state will make information available to putative citizens are not always respected. The functionaries of the state simply refuse to share the information that they have with those who they should. As the Roshanar Rozgar Sevak says, in apparent good humour, “After all, it is their

responsibility to apply for job cards. I am a government servant. I possibly can't be mobilising them to make my own life more tedious.⁶⁹”

The state's janus face is evident to NREGS workers. On the one hand, they experience the profane state when they encounter delays in payments, arbitrary deductions in wages, and the brutality of the civil police when they protest. Sometimes, the local state's functionaries simply do not publicise the program, as they should. On the other hand, local social activists constantly urge them to put their trust in the procedures of the sublime state, which has conceived of the program in the first place, and to which protestations can be submitted, in order to improve the implementation of the program.

It is to bridge this gap that actors in political society step in. Unlike the fixers described by Manor (2000) and the 'street-level' politicians discussed Berenschot (2010), the *bichaulias* and *dalals* in the study sites are instrumental in bringing the necessary information and documentation to the doorstep of the population: they approach the population, rather than merely being approached. (Roshanar Ward 5 is an exception, for the reasons that we have explored). Without their efforts, the populations would in all likelihood have very little knowledge of what the project has to offer, and how they might benefit. Even the Rozgar Sevaks recognised the worth of these agents in reaching out to population groups that they would not always be able to, thereby “making our lives easier”⁷⁰.

⁶⁹ Interview, Roshanar Rozgar Sevak, April 12, 2010.

⁷⁰ Interview, Sargana Rozgar Sevak, April 9, 2010. This last comment was made partly out of frustration with local politicians who were seen as instigating demands for job cards and work.

For the workers, the contradiction between the sublime state and the profane state is often abated by the interventions of actors in political society⁷¹. To begin with, these actors ‘publicise’ the program to the potential applicants and encourage them to apply for job cards and, thereafter, for employment. Where poorer people would know a little about the program, or hear about it on the radio (where the sublime state speaks to them), they would be unsure of engaging with it- given their past experiences with the profane state. When local politicians, *bichaulias* and *dalals* approach poor households and encourage them to apply, they effectively ‘mediate’ between the populations and the state, a function similar to the ones performed by the politicians described by Berenschot (2010) in Ahmedabad. Without this mediated interface, the program would have very little ‘uptake’.

Local politicians also step in to mitigate against the potential adverse effects of the gap between the completion of the earthworks and the payment of wages: workers require cash payments immediately, to enable them purchase household items, especially food. Local politicians, especially the elected representative responsible for the payment of wages, extend limited support to the workers to tide over these immediate difficulties. When the formal payments arrive, they keep the entire sum to cover up their ‘management costs’. For example, if a worker were employed on a project for ten days, s/he would be entitled to a payment of ₹ 100/- . The Mukhya or Ward Member would make a ‘spot-payment’ of ₹ 80/- (which would be made immediately, commonly at the worksite), but pocket the entire ₹ 100/- when it would eventually arrive at the Post Office. On the face of it, this appears to be an outright case of syphoning of resources. But it needs to be appreciated that without

⁷¹ It is possible to argue that, for Sargana, both Sarvesh Mandal and Gajen Singh embodied different aspects of the profane state. But Sarvesh Mukhya explicitly claimed to bridge the gap between state and society.

the local politicians' 'support', the worker would have little incentive to seek employment with the project in the first place. Given workers' 'liquidity preference', the support extended by the Mukhya comes particularly handy. The part of the formal wage which the Mukhya keeps is seen as compensation for his initial investment, and for having come to their aid when required. It is important to bear in mind that such transactions are borne out of regard for the leader's ability to 'get the job done' successfully. For the wage-seekers, it appears only fair that the entire transaction is worthwhile for the leaders, who would otherwise have no interest in the process. On his part, the transaction allows him to make his position relevant, and carve out a niche under these circumstances.

6.2.Populist corruption

In Sargana Ward 1, alerted to the prospects of different opportunities for rent-seeking, the Mukhya Sarvesh Mandal sanctioned numerous projects and approved the applications of many of them. Like the Post Master, he too is an agriculturalist, with modest land holdings, on which he employs local labour. He admits, "I know I will earn fewer profits from agriculture, but at least my image will not be tarnished. Besides, there are ways of making up the losses here."⁷² When early in 2009 some workers brought the Post Master's corruption stories to his notice, he threatened to take legal action against the latter. The matter was eventually resolved, when the Post Master agreed to pay Sarvesh Mandal a bribe.

⁷² Interview, Sarvesh Mandal, April 10, 2010.

Realising that these processes of accumulation were crucially dependent on them, NREGS workers in Sargana too demonstrated their entrepreneurial acumen⁷³. In Sargana Ward 1 (West), as we chatted about the implementation of the program over what was called ‘lemon tea’ (black tea- without the lemon, I was told!), I was told stories about how workers were “also learning.”⁷⁴ One particular kind of case was recounted time and again. My co-conversationalists refused to admit to being party to this, but recalled the events about “a case they had heard about,” as they put it. Perhaps they were involved in it. I am certain they knew the individuals involved, but –quite likely- refused to divulge either the location or the names of those supposedly involved as they probably did not trust me adequately yet.

Accordingly, and this was a general pattern in the case being described, workers would arrive at the worksites, but excavate only half the allocated volume of earth. More labourers than were registered would turn up. In turn, they would collude with the Rozgar Sevak to get *their* names registered as well. The Rozgar Sevak would have to be paid, but the workers did not mind, as “something was better than nothing,” Supuri Rishi suggested. When it was time to make payments, the measurement by the engineers would show that less earth than what was allocated had been excavated. These measurements were cited by the Post Master Gajen Singh to justify lower wages. The first time this happened, sometime in January 2009, workers appealed to the Mukhya, to intervene. The Mukhya took the side of the labourers and advised them, in Gajen Singh’s presence as a threat to him, to file a charge of rape against the official. Gajen Singh was alarmed, since such a charge would ruin his

⁷³ This has been an extremely contentious issue which has been used by the district administration to withhold payments and for local and national critics to call for the abandonment of the program.

⁷⁴ Hanging out, Sargana Ward 1 (West), Musahar tola *machan*, March 23, 2010. All material till next footnote from this source.

family life and his career with the newspaper he was with (he was not so worried about the job of the Post Master, which he had secured through other channels). His mother's political stance would also be compromised. Gajen Singh backed off. When the Rozgar Sevak tried to remind the workers of his agreement with them, they laughed at him, and warned him that they could level the same accusations as they had threatened his superior with if he didn't back off. When the wages were released, the workers paid the Mukhya ₹ 10 in what they called a 'goodwill gesture' - "that would ensure he keeps helping them"- my interlocutors said.

These relations of cooperative conflict were justified by several discussants in *moral* terms. During the group discussions in Sargana Ward 1, discussants commented on the justification of this practice, even when they knew that in the eyes of the law, their justification would not be tenable. The recurring justification was provided in terms of the populist claim that workers were claiming what was '*legitimately*' theirs. Pointing to the widespread corruption scandals and stories involving politicians, bureaucrats, media persons and corporations, they wondered why their taking a few *rupees* should matter to the higher-ups. Everyone was minting money, so why should they not be allowed to. The angst among Sargana Ward 1's respondents seemed to point towards what Rancière has called the assumption of the 'fact' of equality (Rancière, 1992: 59): in their eyes, the workers were no less (or more) than the elected leaders, bureaucrats and businessmen. If these sectors could do something as rampantly as they were, nothing should, in the words of my respondents, prevent *them* from doing the same.

Gajen Singh claimed these accounts of corruption were true for each case, understandable given his own unbridled hostility to both the program and to the local

protagonists⁷⁵. The Rozgar Sevaks⁷⁶ chimed their agreement, but assured me that Gajen Singh was not as ‘holy’ as his account made him sound: that some of the accusations of molestation and assault were not entirely fabricated. The local functionaries of the CPI(ML) steadfastly refused to entertain such stories⁷⁷, and in my presence, told my co-conversationalists not to “mislead” me⁷⁸. They were, understandably, worried that such accounts would strengthen the hands of those who would like to see the program “burned and buried”⁷⁹. With their exception, nobody denied that such a thing did not happen. The apparently ubiquitous complicity of NREGS workers might appear jarring to torchbearers of insurgent and revolutionary activities. Nonetheless, the contingent relations of cooperative conflict that attended to these processes should alert analysts to the different ways in which workers used their relations with emerging and existing politicians.

In the eyes of other workers who narrated similar stories from Sargana Ward 1, both the Mukhya and the workers found the arrangement mutually beneficial and were willing to cooperate⁸⁰. According to their reading, the workers shared ₹ 10 so that the Mukhya continued to be interested in providing them employment which, was at its worst, providing them at least ₹ 70 per day. This work was less strenuous than agricultural work, for which they could not expect to be paid more than ₹ 50. For them it was alright for the Mukhya to pocket his share (₹10 from the voluntary contribution and ₹ 20 that he would claim in any from the Post Office). The cash was less valuable than the humbling of traditional antagonists and the ability to stay in the village without having to depend on the farmers for work. (The workers did not

⁷⁵ Hanging out, BDO Head Clerk’s desk, Sargana, April 6, 2010.

⁷⁶ Interview, Sargana Rozgar Sevak, April 2, 2010. Interview, Roshanar Rozgar Sevak, April 5, 2010.

⁷⁷ Interview, Manoj Srivastav, March 26, 2010.

⁷⁸ Hanging out, Sargana Ward 1 (West), Musahar tola *machan*, March 28, 2010.

⁷⁹ Interview, Parsvnath Jha, March 31, 2010.

⁸⁰ Group discussions, Sargana Ward 1, Yadav *tola*, April 10, 2010.

necessarily want to stay in the villages, but at least the program provided them the freedom to stay if they chose to, and the freedom to stay in the village and not have to work for the farmer). Some discussants did suggest that the cash wages made life more difficult during times of inflation, and that sharecropping did protect them from food price fluctuations. But that did not detract from the overall sense of satisfaction derived from not having to work for someone else.

However, despite the assumption of equality, my discussants were certain that their relationships with politicians were fundamentally unequal. For many such individuals, the relationship was really one of conflict. The Mukhya and the workers realised this antagonism. The Mukhya needed the workers to make claims for work, just as the workers needed the Mukhya to oil the machinery. Nonetheless, the shares were by no means fixed, and depended on the ability of the workers to bargain with the Mukhya. Where the Mukhya had to take into account electoral considerations, or situations where groups of workers aligned with others to stage simultaneous demands, she or he would have to consider the workers' interests more favourably. Where this was not the case, the workers' shares were likely to be less.

Professionals, entrepreneurs, politicians and bureaucrats were not uniformly against the program or the aspirations of landless labourers. In Ditya, the program had an unlikely proponent in Gajendra Sarkar, Paresh Sarkar's elder brother, was the pre-eminent government contractor in the district. He was known for his shrewd acumen and for his networks in the district administration. As a supplier of materials for NREGS earthworks, he was clearly in favour of the NREGS and opposed his own clansmen who, under pressure from local agriculturists, were reticent about implementing the program. He had built around him a network of contractors- large and small- who provided a competitive façade for what was essentially a tightly-knit

clique. Nonetheless, they earned enough profits from supplying materials to the project that they supported its continued implementation.

Likewise, other bureaucrats in Ditya found in the program vast opportunities for accumulation, less legitimate than Gajen *da*'s. Shadow works, ghost workers were a key part of the story. In Ditya, for instance, a five-kilometre stretch of road was laid on paper, and the allocations pocketed by bureaucrats, Panchayat leaders, and the NREGS workers who were supposed to have worked on that project. As one of the lesser bureaucrats said, "We had to pay them something, otherwise they would raise hell. And rightly so, after all, we owe it to them. So, we came to a consensus. 10-12% of the minimum wage to each worker, for doing- well- nothing⁸¹".

In Rahimpur, one of the locality's pre-eminent social elite families, a member of the Congress Party's local committee, used the program to renovate two of his personal fish tanks⁸². The owner of ponds paid a nominal amount to the Ward Member responsible for administering the project. The program's day-to-day coordinator was the younger brother of the pond's owner and 'managed' the records appropriately. The workers on the project were, understandably, unwilling to talk about anyone having done any wrong. During group discussions with some of the workers, they said, "At least they paid us. But at least we ensured that they paid us [not the full amount] on time. In the eyes of the law, they were doing something wrong. So, we told them they'd better pay us immediately after the job is done. Ahmed [the pond's owner] is any way a bit scared of us- the ill-gotten fish in his pond have made him so- and paid us straight away. If we had been a little tougher, he would have paid us the full amount. But he's an uncle."

⁸¹ Hanging out, Rohingya Gram Panchayat, March 1, 2010.

⁸² Group discussion, NREGS workers, February 14, 2010.

Thus, it is not that such instances of ‘corruption’ did not occur in Ditya or Rahimpur. However, in these areas, those complicit spoke of their involvement in hushed tones, in fact often claiming they did not receive their share. In Sargana, those complicit appeared to be more defiant about this instance of reverse accumulation, even though they pocketed much less than what their counterparts in Ditya did. For these workers, they were only taking back what was due to them anyway. Realising that cooperation with corrupt leaders was mutually beneficial to both, it appears from the accounts that at least some of them engaged with leaders on terms that were continually contested. An important aspect of the relations of cooperative conflict in Sargana Ward 1 was that these were public transcripts of contentions, justified by their protagonists in terms of taking what was rightfully theirs. The proclamation that the claim being made was morally justified (even if not legally tenable) was most clearly evident in Sargana Ward 1 than in the other localities.

6.3.Contentious performances

Charles Tilly, in drawing attention to the ways in which modes of oral communication are used to register protest and highlight grievances, refers to the notion of contentious conversations (Tilly, 2008). Though episodic and collective, such conversations are spontaneous and forceful acts, not always planned in advance. They speak to the category of ‘open collective defiance’ invoked by scholars such as Andrew Turton (1986: 44): a category somewhere in-between the notion of ‘everyday resistance’ on the one hand (Scott, 1985) and of ‘insurgencies’ (Guha, 1983) and ‘social revolution’ (Skocpol, 1979). I have drawn attention to the ways in which the wage-seekers in three localities engage in these collective and contentious conversations with the functionaries of the state in order to make it work in their

favour. In all three localities, the program is seen as a means of supplementing income. In Ditya and Sargana Ward 1, it is used as a tool to convey to local elites that other alternatives were available. In Sargana, it appears that it is seen as a decisive in the ongoing contingent struggles to reconstitute social relations. Here, the contestations both among subjects and between the state and its subjects are characterised by the assumption by those contesting domination of the fact of equality. They do so because of the substantive freedoms the program offers them.

It is to defend these freedoms that workers engage in a series of contentions in the localities where work is made available. I have drawn attention to the contentious conversations that wage-seekers have with their leaders in Sargana Ward 1 and their leaders have with supra-local politicians in Rahimpur. These conversations enrich the repertoires of contentions, and introduce the element of surprise. The example of the women workers confronting the government officer responsible for timely payment of wages bears this out. This contrasts with Ditya where the contentions were more violent, and where actors in political society did not follow up on the episodes of contention. In Rahimpur, the contentions were anchored in electoral considerations. Conversely, I have also drawn attention to the contexts in which these contentions are absent altogether, as in Roshanar Ward 5. This is attributable to the near-complete rupture in political conversations between the inhabitants of the ward and the Mukhya.

The salience of performativity in these engagements cannot be overlooked. As in the previous case, politicians' effectiveness was measured in terms of whether they were able to extricate job cards and wages. However, in Roshanar Ward 5, politicians and fixers were themselves sceptical of their abilities to be able to do so. Elsewhere, I noted the differential results of local politicians' attempts at resolving NREGS-related

problems. In Ditya, these actors feigned ignorance about the intricacies of the program, because it would have hurt their material interests. The material interests outweighed electoral considerations: the leaders obtained job cards for applicants, but were remarkably reticent about securing employment. Rahimpur offered a stark contrast. Individual households applied for job cards without taking recourse to the *netas* and *dalals*, but depended on them for actual employment and timely payment. The pendulum swung the other end in Sargana, where local *netas* and *bichaulias* not only brought the job cards to the doorstep of potential applicants but also tried to facilitate employment opportunities and timely payments. It was only in this locality that the poor appropriated for the program a symbolic value that anchored it in their ongoing contestations against relations of domination and subordination.

7. INSTITUTING EQUALITY: SOME REFLECTIONS

Politics, Rancière reminds us, is about the coming into being of the subject that dissents from wrongs against equality. These wrongs are perceived to have been committed by those exercising authority (as he puts it, the ‘police’). Equality is believed to possess an essentially universal quality by those deprived from exercising it (Rancière, 1992: 59). To different degrees, the politics spawned by the NREGS has contributed to the substantial reconfiguration of local social relations in at least a few areas. I began by outlining the specific kind of contentions that have been spawned by the program, examining how in different localities, actors in political society pursued various approaches and interacted with diverse sets of social demands. Workers too try to shape local politics in their favour. As they do so, they find entering into relations of cooperative conflict with actors in political society. While workers cannot escape engaging with the formal institutions that have been tasked with administering

the program, the connection between the workers and the Panchayat is bridged by actors in political society, in ways that cannot be analytically subsumed, as we have seen, under the extant framework of 'brokerage'. Where the barriers to direct engagement with these institutions are high- notwithstanding the 'rights' language deployed by the legislation on NREGS- the role of these actors becomes crucial in overcoming those barriers. This was most evident in Roshanar Ward 5, where access to the institutions was almost proscribed. Here and also in Ditya, despite formal access, the institutions were substantively removed from the populations at least in regard to this project.

Access to the institutions was not more open to poor people in Sargana Ward 1: however, here they were able to rally support from specific actors in political society as well as assemble their own performances in order to make claims and assert their voices, assuming the essentially universal 'fact' of equality. This is not to deny that bribes were not demanded, and given. They were, but more populist forms of corruption were also engaged in. Instances of workers claiming wages on the basis of incomplete works abound, with the result that the program has begun to resemble a direct unconditional transfer rather than the conditional cash transfer it was originally intended as. Nonetheless, the structure of interests created by the program has contributed to the interrogation and contestation of extant relations of domination, even as a realisation dawns that workers are being sought to be subjected to new relations of political mediation.

To achieve these, leaders as well as workers tapped available repertoires of contention. The leaders were not always able to regulate these 'performances', and it was common for workers to converse contentiously and initiate acts that had not been scripted, as in Sargana and Ditya. Sometimes, as in Ditya, more violent means were

also sometimes deployed to claim, and secure, overdue payments. Protestations around the NREGS were sometimes even more vociferous, since the state was clearly the single object of claims.

Analytically, the discussion in this chapter leads us to specify the conditions under which cooperative conflict leads to enhanced capabilities, understood- as we have argued- as the opportunity to interrogate relations of domination and subordination. This question can usefully be made to ride on the back of a related one: what circumstances are favourable to the emergence of a situation of cooperative conflict? To answer both sets of questions requires an analysis of the manner in which five groups of stakeholders interact with one another: NREGS workers; actors in political society, including elected representatives; local farmers and hirers of labour, who may be adversely affected by rising wages; private sector contractors of materials; and bureaucrats/ professionals associated with the program's implementation. Of these, understandably, the two key players are the workers and the actors in political society. It is their interaction with one another and with other stakeholders that crucially determines the outcomes of the program.

Relations of cooperative conflict have been spawned by the program's institutional architecture. Workers need to apply for job cards. If thereafter, they seek employment, they need to make an application for the same. Despite the relative simplicity of the two, information is not adequately provided by the government. It remains for actors in political society to publicise the program, and instigate populations to apply. In exchange, these actors hope to benefit from the workers' political support (not secure votes, but also to demonstrate their popularity, reputation and legitimacy). Furthermore, by mandating the payment of wages as late as two weeks following the completion of the work, the program delinks the work from the

wage: the gap makes it difficult for workers to meet their immediate day-to-day requirements. Actors in political society are willing to support the worker by making 'spot-payments' contribute to bridging this gap: in exchange, they pocket a share of the total wages. Informal practices also structure the relations of cooperative conflict. These practices range from fabricating muster rolls, manipulating reports of completed earthworks, and carrying out works that are not sanctioned under the rubric of the program. Again, the negotiations around payments embody the relations of cooperative conflict. As we have seen, these sorts of negotiations are characteristic of all three locations where the program is implemented.

However, the extent to which the workers can influence these relations in their own favour differs. Furthermore, the manner in which these negotiations and illegalities are perceived, interpreted and justified also differs. From the foregoing account, it appears that in localities where actors in political society view the program as a means of building and consolidating their fluid political constituencies, there the workers have better chances of manipulating the relations in their favour. In Ditya, as we have seen, actors in political society are rather reluctant to alienate those perceived to be their core constituency. As a result, NREGS workers, where there are any, are barely able to make their presence felt. In Rahimpur and Sargana Ward 1, they are far more assertive. Particularly in Sargana Ward 1, we noted the way in which the workers seek to remove some kinds of intermediaries (the Rozgar Sevak and the Post Master). Moreover, in this locality, the workers explicitly see the program as a means of seeking- and acquiring- resources from the state, an account which resonates, admittedly imperfectly, with Chatterjee's: while Chatterjee interprets the program as one motivated by a desire to mitigate the effects of primary accumulation, the workers identify it as a means of reversing accumulation plain and simple.

The political conditions that allow for support to a program like the NREGS may also be clarified. This will enable us to explain the relative lack of support for the program in some areas, contrasted with the enthusiastic support elsewhere. The numerical preponderance and political salience of small and medium farmers (local elites, it should be reiterated) appears to be a direct threat to the program's implementation. As a program hiring unskilled labour, the NREGS provides direct competition to local small and medium farmers, the group corresponding with the analytic (not necessarily the empirical) category of bullock capitalists (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1987): farming households whose production is geared towards the market (not subsistence), but whose production needs cannot be met with labour from within the household. Therefore, these farmers are compelled to hire labour from within the neighbourhood. Where small and medium farmers control and influence the political levers, opposition to the program is strongest. The program's relative acceptance in Rahimpur and Sargana Ward 1, compared with Ditya bears this out.

Another layer of explanation is provided by the pluralist polities of the localities where the program has found widespread support. Localities with competing elites and loci of power provided the program with multiple support points. The need in these localities for politicians to continually renew their legitimacy and to cultivate newer and broader-based constituencies compelled them be seen as undertaking actions that would be favourable to the poor. However, while a horizontally pluralist polity appears to provide a favourable climate for the program's implementation, a vertically pluralist polity does not, as we noted in Ditya and even in Roshanar Ward 5. The problems for Roshanar Ward 5's workers were compounded by the fact that the only other possible supporter for their demands was unremittingly hostile to the programme. This relates to the bigger question: under what circumstances does the

NREGS contribute to augmented capabilities? How does the NREGS contribute to interrogation of relations of subordination and domination? In analysing this issue, the subjective dimension of the program becomes even more salient, and can be unpacked by reflecting on two further issues. One is, how is the program interpreted among the workers? The second issue is, what kind of political subjectivity is forged by the contentions spawned by the program.

Where the program is interpreted by workers as one which allows them to stay on in the localities without having to rent their labour to social elites, we can conclude that it augments capabilities much more deeply than it does elsewhere. As we have seen, the symbolic value that workers appear to imbue the program with differs across the localities. Whereas in Ditya, it is seen as a bargaining counter to demand the increase in agricultural wages, Rahimpur's workers appeared to be relatively unconcerned, primarily because very few of them work as agricultural labourers in the locality. In Sargana Ward 1, on the other hand, the program was perceived not only as a means of demanding better remuneration for agricultural labour, but- perhaps more importantly for our purpose- as a means of challenging the social dominance of farmers claiming superior caste status vis-à-vis members from groups stigmatised as 'backward' and 'untouchable. Examining the symbolic value that the program held for the workers in this ward compels us to conclude that it provides them with the opportunity to renegotiate their imposed social position against elites.

Political subjectivities forged through the experience of engaging with the program- applying for and procuring job cards, gaining employment, negotiating with actors in political society over bribes and cuts, receiving wages, protesting delays, etc.- have taken on several hues. In Rahimpur, although the workers have not faced any obvious or hostile barriers in accessing the program, it has not provided them

with any opportunity to interrogate locally prevailing relations of domination and subordination. In Ditya and Roshanar Ward 5, as we have seen, the program's uptake was limited (non-existent in the case of the latter), so we have little to say by way of political subjectivity. In Sargana Ward 1, given the symbolic value attached to the program by the workers, it afforded workers with far greater opportunities to review and interrogate the inequitable social relations. If we take into account the relational dimension of capabilities, and agree that central to an understanding of capabilities is the opportunity to challenge unequal social relations, then it appears that capabilities were most fundamentally enhanced in Sargana Ward 1, despite the fact that its implementation appears to have been 'smoother' in Rahimpur. This argument makes greater sense when we recall that resources are far more concentrated in a few hands in Rahimpur than they are in Sargana Ward 1.

Our understanding could be further enhanced, and more insights made available, from more research that could be based on locations with a greater range of variables. The better-performing locality (in terms of person-days per family generated) in this study is also the one characterised by more contentious politics, especially around the NREGS. A potentially more interesting study will emerge from a comparison between a 'well-performing' locality with lesser contentions, and a 'poorly-performing' locality with greater contentions.

In this chapter, I have explored in some detail what a 'relational' approach to the study of capabilities could look like. Our capabilities are enhanced when we are able to enforce egalitarian relations vis-à-vis those who have hitherto claimed superior social status. Inegalitarian relations often do not change at all, but are modified to some extent. To clarify, I am not only suggesting that challenging inegalitarian relations is *a method* of enhancing capabilities. What I am arguing is that enhanced

capabilities *is* about questioning unequal relations. In the following chapters, I explore how people do this. Central to understanding how poor people continually contest these relations of domination and subordination is the concept of ‘voice’. To this, I turn in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

OVERCOMING VOICELESSNESS, ENHANCING CAPABILITIES: POVERTY CARDS, POPULAR DEMANDS AND POPULIST RESPONSES

1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I focus on the different ways in which the ‘voices’ of those who consider themselves poor and entitled to specific services are articulated. I referred in Chapter 1 to the relative lack of analytical acknowledgement in the literature to how people might assert their voice in order to make claims, communicate with others the meanings they attach to life, and to register their public presence. To that end, I seek to understand these contentious ‘voices’ and how they contribute to the forging of political subjectivities. I do this through an exploration of how the inhabitants of the study localities make claims and counter-claims on the allocation of the ‘below-poverty line’ (BPL) cards. I build on insights gleaned from Chapter 3 where I examined the ways in which inhabitants of some of the study wards sought to appropriate the possibilities opened up by the NREGS to interrogate and reconstitute social relations deemed to be inequitable. Here, I found Sen’s insights on ‘cooperative conflict’ useful to build on in order to advance my own arguments about the manner in which actors in political society contribute to or inhibit challenging extant relations of domination. In this chapter, I explore the manner in which people assert their voice in staging demands around the BPL cards.

Since 2002, Panchayats have been closely involved with identifying BPL households⁸³, thereby adding to the demands to which this body was subjected. Given the social and spatial proximity of Panchayats to the local population, the contentions spawned by the exercise was not only limited to the implementation of a technical survey, but involved these bodies resolving competing claims from potential beneficiaries. Classification as BPL entitled households to claim subsidised food at Fair Price Shops, to subsidise housing, maternal and child benefits, old age pensions and other similar schemes. Thus, this exercise was a significant event in the collective life of the study localities and a matter of animated discussion during occasions as diverse as drinking *chai* at the neighbourhood kiosk, participating in a political rally or attending a funeral.

In this chapter, I first situate the BPL enumeration in the context of India's changing welfare regime: this will help to understand the conditions that allow for actors in political society to perform the role that they do. Thereafter, I discuss the methodology on the basis of which I make the arguments in this chapter, followed by a presentation of the different categories of the 'poor'. I then elaborate my analytical themes. First, I examine the manner in which actors in political society influence the BPL card-allocation process. In some areas, their interventions open the spaces for poor people to assert their voices and stage demands. Third, I examine the performative ways in which those who consider themselves poor seek to influence local decision-makers. Finally, I synthesise how these trajectories provide the occasion for capabilities to be enhanced.

⁸³ It should be clarified that Panchayats are responsible for providing assistance to the survey through which BPL households are identified. The surveyors are expected to brief the Panchayats on the results of their survey, which is further mandated to be verified by the Gram Sabha. Although Panchayats do more than providing assistance, the verification of lists by formal Gram Sabhas is relatively rare, especially in West Bengal and Bihar. Caps on numbers and scoring mechanisms for the survey, as we shall see, are done at the State level.

2. THE STATE AND THE SURVEY

The exercise of enumerating BPL households embodies the tensions between a social welfare state and a neoliberal one. As a program initiated by a state that projects a ‘social welfarist’ image, it enables the state to survey the characteristics of the population within its jurisdiction, as any census operation would be expected to. As a program of a state with increasingly neoliberal characteristics, it symbolises the rolling back of the state from universal provisioning of services. These contrasts demand further exploration. As I will show, an analysis of the survey tools, methodology and coverage reveals much about the transforming nature of the Indian state as well as the capabilities of the populations within its jurisdiction.

2.1. Social ? and welfarist ?

The BPL survey appears to provide an example of what Foucault has called ‘biopolitical strategies’. Using such strategies, states seek to “render intelligible the domains whose laws liberal government⁸⁴ must know and respect.” (Rose, 2006: 149). For the purpose of identifying the BPL population, the Indian Government, through its State-level counterparts, collates (or at least is expected to collate) data on every individual living within its frontiers, irrespective of caste, creed and even citizenship. Thereafter, it is stored on devices wherefrom it could be intelligently retrieved, analysed, amended and presented as required. This data allows the Government to grasp the poverty of the populations inhabiting the territory over

⁸⁴ ‘Government here, following Foucault, refers to “relatively calculated practices to direct categories of social agent (sic) in a particular manner and to specific ends” (Dean, 1991: 12). The term “liberal” here contextualises the dichotomy between private autonomy and public intervention.

which it exercised jurisdiction. Based on these ‘sightings’ (to borrow from Scott, 1998), the Government directs resources to those deemed as BPL. Poverty, thus, emerges as ‘specialised’ field, to be defined by ‘experts’ (albeit corroborated by beneficiaries) and addressed through a series of technical interventions, contributing to the entire exercise donning the appearance of a ‘social’ program.

In answering the question ‘Who is poor?’, the Planning Commission’s overarching role seems to reinforce the BPL survey as a welfarist exercise. This is borne out most given the experts’ concern with the ‘utilitarian calculus’ of fulfilment of ‘functionings’ thought- by them- to be valuable. Exponents of the several poverty measures promoted by this body have each critiqued the preceding measures on the grounds of its welfarism. By 2002, the consensus among policy-makers was that the measures of poverty could no longer be confined to income and/ or expenditure alone. The methodology developed by the experts now included dimensions pertaining to literacy, sanitation, food security, status of women and children vis-à-vis work, and ownership of consumable and productive assets. Additionally, there were questions on migration, indebtedness and ways in which the respondents wanted to be assisted. A subsequent workshop organised by the Planning Commission explicitly recognised a view of poverty as being about multiple deprivations (GoI, 2006).

However, a closer inspection of at least some of the thirteen questions compels us to recognise that the welfarist charge remains valid. While there is no doubt that the BPL 2002 Methodology was more multi-dimensional relative to its predecessors, the questions barely reflect a concern for opportunity freedoms, and engage even less with Sen’s larger concerns with ‘agency freedoms’. The utilitarian character of the survey is revealed through questions relating to items of type of residential dwellings, clothing, ownership of consumer durables, type of indebtedness, reason for migration

of households, and preference for assistance, reflect narrow concerns pertaining to ‘well-being freedoms’ only. Some of the questions might map onto opportunity freedoms, such as those pertaining to educational attainments of the highest-educated member of the household, or the question around the status of child labour or means of livelihood. However, questions pertaining to proximity and access to public health facilities, safe sources of drinking water, and dignified productive and employment opportunities are conspicuous by their absence in the survey schedule⁸⁵.

2.2. A neoliberal agenda?

At the same time, the influence of neoliberal ‘modes’ of government appear unmistakable. Nikolas Rose identifies fiscal prudentialism as a key marker of ‘advanced liberal’ governance, with economic fates of the states and its populations no longer being seen as interdependent (Rose, 1999: 142). For the Indian state, the enumeration exercise is seen as the basis for targeting resources to a technically-defined population. Targeting is justified on the basis of the ‘scarce economic resources’ at its disposal, and a concurring opinion among policy-makers that resources only be directed towards ‘the poor’. Accordingly, India’s Planning Commission sets a cap on the total number of ‘below poverty line’ households using what it calls a reference ‘poverty line basket’, whereby it assesses the monthly expenditure of households on food, consumer durables, education and health. It then

⁸⁵ In August 2009, the Indian Government made public the ‘Report of the Expert Group that was advising the Ministry of Rural Development on the Methodology for conducting the new BPL Census for Eleventh Five Year Plan’ (often referred to as the Saxena Committee, after its chairperson NC Saxena), which outlined the contours of the revised scheme for identifying those eligible for social assistance (GoI, 2009). Perhaps its strongest argument was that it suggested a way to identify the most vulnerable households without necessarily enhancing the overall resource outlay. Indeed, it was designed to make the task of identifying the poor more efficient, its proponents arguing that the indicators proposed had “the best chance of being *accurately* executed by government staff” (GoI, 2009: 26, emphasis added).

establishes the 'poverty line' at a level of expenditure "found to be adequate" (GoI, 2009: 2) to meet those costs⁸⁶. At an all-India level, the notional 'poverty line' is currently set at ₹ 673 for rural areas and ₹ 860 for urban areas⁸⁷, although there are widespread variations across States, based on living costs.

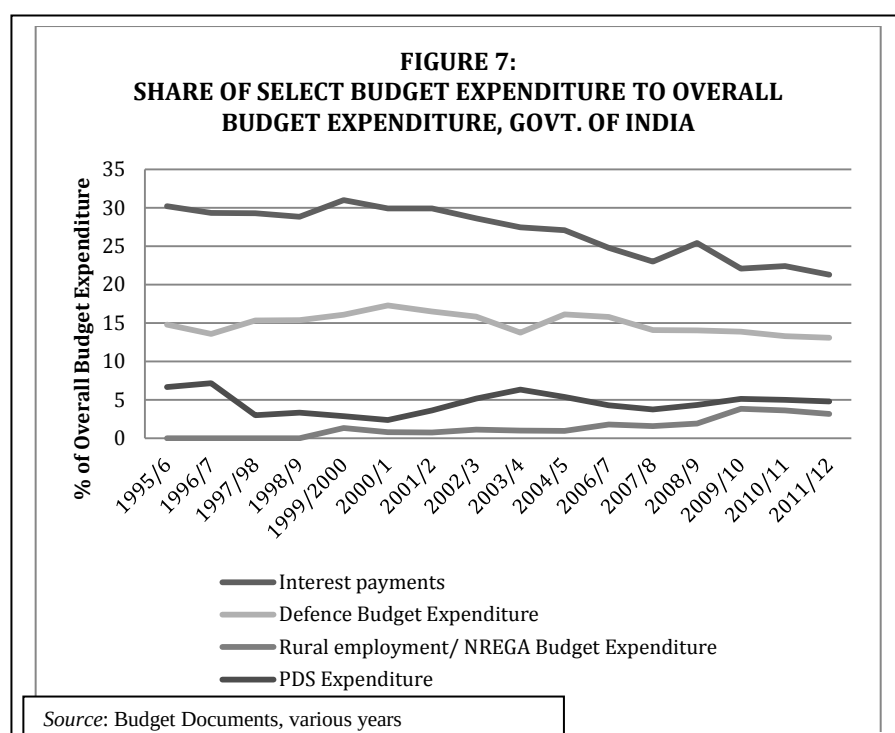
Read together with the decline in public expenditure on social services during the latter half of the 1990s (see, for example, Mooij, 2007; Patnaik, 2003; Roy, 2005), this targeting of resources appears to support the contention that the enumeration exercise is underpinned by concerns with streamlining budget expenditures. However, a glance at recent shares of the budget expenditures (See Figure 7) on selected items to the overall budget expenditure since 1995/6 calls this contention somewhat into question. Although lower than 1995/6 levels, shares of PDS Expenditure to total budget expenditure have certainly increased since 2000/1. Likewise, rural employment/ NREGS to total budget expenditures have registered a definite increase.

A different way of looking at the problem is advanced by Ashish Nandy. Nandy argues that, no matter which way poverty is defined or calculated, there appears to be a neoliberal consensus to demonstrate that the numbers of the poor, not only in India, but worldwide, are declining. He presents evidence from India, where the elite are "trying to get socialised into a new style of poverty management" (Nandy, 2004: 96). Indeed, that brings me to the second feature of neo-liberal governance: the state no longer accepts the responsibility to answer *all* its constituents' protective needs (Rose, 1999: 142). It also appears that the state is

⁸⁶ Unlike earlier surveys the Planning Commission does not only canvass information about household expenditure on food items, but also other items as mentioned, explicitly (but in a limited way) recognising the multi-dimensional nature of poverty. The sample survey on which the 'line' is based uses the 'Mixed-Recall-Period' method (GoI, 2009). Using this method, 42% of the Indian population was poor in 2004-5, a number that the Planning Commission claims has gone down to 30% in 2009-10 (GoI, 2012).

⁸⁷ 1 US\$ = ₹ 18 in PPP terms.

hereby encouraging populations to become ‘actively responsible’ in fulfilling their needs (Rose, 2006) and not depend upon it for social protection.



Indeed, by setting the poverty line as the so-called social assistance base, the Indian state explicitly states its intent to ‘target’ only those below it for protection- the ‘social’ is now a fragmented entity, split into categories such as ‘destitute’, ‘BPL’ and ‘APL’. The state delivers different sets of social protection services to different categories of the population, not as a right but as an entitlement. As an entitlement, the populations’ access to a service is conditional upon them being ‘eligible’, or ‘deserving’. Not all population groups are eligible for all the services, rendering them without any incentive to wage a comprehensive struggle for the realisation of these entitlements, in the event that they are poorly administered. The ability and the

willingness of the Indian state to reach out *equally* to all its constituents is severely compromised, even though government expenditures continue to show an increase.

It is this situation of differential entitlements of governmental programs for different segments of the population that provides the space for what Partha Chatterjee calls political society. Indeed, irrespective of the state expenses as such, the state's presence was inexorably deepened in the countryside, allowing for new forms of negotiations between populations and governmental schemes such as the identification of the BPL population (Chatterjee, 2011: 307). As an ensemble of agents, institutions and norms that mediated between the state and the populations within its jurisdiction, actors in the domain of political society saw it as their role to 'connect' potential beneficiaries with the specific benefits they were entitled to. Furthermore, the introduction of targeted schemes coincided with the deepening of electoral democracy, especially in the countryside (Yadav, 1999). Given heightened electoral competition, and the need for leaders elected and otherwise to demonstrate their winnability, targeted schemes provided these actors with an opportunity to perform their perceived role with even greater alacrity. Actors in political society can be analytically distinguished from both patrons who inhabit the top end of patron-client relations as well brokers who mediate between pre-defined communities or neighbourhoods and the state. Actors in political society are transient political entrepreneurs who, according to Chatterjee, encourage the informal association of people to instigate specific demands, which they then help them to realise. These actors are, thus, not representative of residual power hierarchies but creatures of the fragmented social welfare landscape.

2.3.The BPL 2002 methodology

The centrepiece of the 2002 Methodology was the Score-Based Ranking methodology that quantified, measured and scored the deprivation faced by each household on the basis of thirteen socio-economic parameters. The Planning Commission developed a census schedule comprising 13 questions, each to be scored on a 0-4 scale. The census survey canvassed information on household ownership of assets and durables, occupation, literacy, sanitation, food security, and status of women and children. Each response was scored on the approved scale. States were left free to amend the questions and the scoring scale to suit local conditions. The Government of the State of Bihar adopted the Planning Commission's 13-question schedule and scoring scale. Thus, the total scores obtained by a household in Bihar was '52'. On the other hand, in West Bengal, the Government dropped two of the questions and introduced one of its own. Instead of the scoring scale developed by the Federal Government, the West Bengal Government devised a '1-5' scoring scale: a household in West Bengal could obtain a total score of '60'. State Governments also determined the 'cut-off' aggregate scores which would distinguish BPL households from the others. This they were instructed to in a manner that would align the numbers of the BPL households with the estimates provided by the Planning Commission and the caps established by it⁸⁸. Bihar set the 'cut-off' aggregate score at '13'. On the other hand, West Bengal was far more liberal, and set it at '33'. These aspects and the criticisms underlying them have been elaborately discussed in Roy (2011).

⁸⁸ The Planning Commission allowed States a 10% upward revision of the estimates it provided to account for what it called 'the transient poor' (GoI, 2009b: 20).

Even as I write, the technical and managerial issues related to defining poverty and enumerating the poor continues to be a hotly contested political issue in India. The Government is presently conducting a fresh census of BPL households, and has linked it with an even more hotly contested caste census. The National Food Security Bill, recently tabled in India's Parliament, continues to advocate a targeted approach, even though States can augment the Centre's PDS budget to provide universal coverage should they want, as in Tamil Nadu. The shifts and turns in policy, the continuous negotiations of different policies with the supposed beneficiaries, and the ways in which the different segments of the populations have tried to influence the process, are among the various factors that define its contours. If the BPL survey intended to produce a trimmed list of the poor, the populations, especially those who considered themselves poor, actively contested this objective. Indeed, Corbridge and his colleagues (Corbridge et al, 2005) have suggested that it is useful to focus analysis on the manner in which poor people 'sight' the state, thereby engaging with it actively rather than merely waiting for it to deliver its promise. In the cases I am about to present, I show how poor people influence attempts at making the list. In many cases, they question the legitimacy of the enumeration exercise, of elected representatives in speaking on their behalf and even of the survey schedule. On other occasions, they challenge the authority of the state and its local representatives in taking those decisions: in localities such as Sargana Ward 1 and Rahimpur, these voices were raised to interrogate attempts by the state to rupture a putative equality of all inhabitants to access social protection. Some respondents tried to pre-guess what they thought the enumerators wanted to hear. Others responded to queries put by the state and its enumerators but also tried to manipulate the scores so that they could be classified as BPL. When enterprising respondents figured out the benefits they might

corner, they simply faked answers to be eligible. Each time they did this, the ability of the 'sublime state' (following Hansen, 2001) to conduct ordered, systematic and rational administration, showed up to shallow and easy to subvert.

Its legitimacy was salvaged precisely by those much-maligned local fixers, bureaucrats, politicians and other actors in political society, who are typically blamed, in the literature on good governance, for interrupting the professional management of technical surveys. These actors did make some attempts to favour segments of the population who would have been left out of the neoliberal technologies of government embodied in the BPL survey. Chatterjee (2004) refers to the primary role of these actors in seeking exceptions to universal laws (such as legalising illegal settlements on public land) among informal associations of the urban poor. However, it appears, as I will show, that they perform a critical role in rural areas as well, where they make information about the BPL schedule (especially the scoring methodology) available to the population. Furthermore, they try and mobilise some segments to informally bring pressure upon elected representatives for a favourable consideration, when adherence to formal regulations would exclude them. Not all actors in political society take up these roles, however, and not all are equally effective. In examining how the voices of the poor are articulated, and how they are heard and understood, the differential abilities and interests of actors in political society need to be kept in mind.

3. METHODOLOGY OF THIS CHAPTER

In the rest of the chapter, I will report on my ethnographic observations, perspectives from group discussions and insights from life stories of key informants. I base my analytical discussions primarily on reconstructing narratives strung together from different informants about how the BPL list for the different localities was

drawn up. This method, common among students of violence, movements and social exclusion, has been surprisingly underutilised in researching how poor people interact with the state and government programs. My use of the oral history method was motivated by my need to understand how decisions on the BPL were taken in the localities, how agendas were sought to be set and disrupted, and how in fact the entire exercise was a terrain where different interests sought to flex their (political) muscle, even as they invoked diverse sets of idioms, which will become clearer as the chapter progresses.

The key to appreciating the hermeneutics of these processes was to comprehend from different actors how the BPL list was created, and how- for many of these informants- it was sought to be crafted. While there was broad agreement among different informants about the chronology of events, respondents did not always agree on relative importance or emphasis. It is these diverging perceptions that I seek to unearth. Read together with the analysis of the group discussions, life stories and participant observation, I will argue that the enumeration of the BPL list is, for actors in political society, a decisive series of events in their quest for legitimacy. Therefore, it is common for rules, themselves formulated in suboptimal ways, to be renegotiated by these actors. As in the previous chapter, I use data on the differential access of poor people to BPL cards as a starting point to base my analysis of the divergent perceptions and interpretations.

The use of such methods might appear slightly incongruous in a chapter that is expected to present empirical ‘facts’ around the inclusion and exclusion of eligible households from the BPL lists. After all, there was a cut-off, determined by experts that took into account the specificity of poverty in each State. Therefore, it might be argued that politicians who facilitated the inclusion of ineligible households were

clearly violating the regulations in order to reward supporters and cronies. These explanations have been advanced very often in the literature on poverty-line based allocations. However, my qualitative and quantitative analyses compel me to look somewhat askance at these assertions. Analysis of data from conversations shows that it was often the case that it was not uncommon for local politicians to violate rules and regulations to explicitly *favour* the poor. This in turn had, as I understood from my interlocutors, less to do with any inherent kindness or magnanimity that they might have had, but because they were responding to a political calculus that served to bolster their position as members of political society. Such perspectives- of what motivates leaders to bend or break the rules in certain ways in some contexts and in other ways elsewhere- necessitate the use of qualitative methods of data analysis.

4. BPL PROFILES

In this section, I provide a brief overview of the poverty profiles of those classified as BPL. The quantitative analysis of census survey data provides the starting point for my comparative discussion. My survey schedule collected information on various aspects of social, economic and associational life of my respondents. I took special care to ensure that questions from the Planning Commission's BPL Survey Schedule and the OPHI-designed Multidimensional Poverty Index were both included. In addition I asked questions about the availability of BPL cards and NREGS job cards⁸⁹. Each response was scored, using the BPL Survey Schedule Scoring Guidance outlined by the Planning Commission. The scores were generated using the appropriate commands in the STATA package. Based on these scores as well as the State-mandated 'cut-offs', I classified the households as

⁸⁹ See Appendix 1 for census data collection methodology, including caveats.

‘BPL Schedule Poor’ or otherwise. Thus, if a household in the Bihar households obtained a score less than 13 (of a total possible score of 52), they were categorised as ‘BPL Schedule Poor’, whereas if they scored 13 and over, they were categorised as ‘Non-BPL Schedule Poor’. Likewise for West Bengal, with a cut-off score of 33. I call the households classified as ‘BPL Schedule Poor’ as those *eligible* for BPL cards. These households were often distinct from households that reported *possessing* BPL cards.

The next and final step in the categorisation of the households was to classify the households as multi-dimensionally poor (MPI Poor) and non-MPI Poor. The rationale for following this classification was discussed in Chapter 2, where their profiles have already been presented. The MPI poor formed a completely distinct category of households. In this thesis, I refer to them as the ones who *deserve* BPL cards (and social protection in general). By doing so, I do not necessarily endorse this particular conception of poverty or the principle of targeted assistance. Rather, I use the notion of MPI poverty as a device against which to compare who the state would consider eligible and who actually possess the BPL cards.

In Table 4.1, I present data from the four study localities, and from a few contiguous localities. The first column reports the proportion of eligible (E) households that actually possess (P) BPL cards (P/E). The second column reports the proportion of households possessing (P) BPL cards that is actually eligible (E) for those cards (E/P). An important anomaly in the figures pertaining to the enumeration of poor households is evident. For all localities, relatively few of the eligible households possessed BPL cards and, conversely, few of the households possessing BPL cards were eligible for it. Two specific observations are pertinent:

- 1). $P/E > E/P$ in all Bihar localities and in West Bengal's Rahimpur locality.
- 2). $E/P > P/E$ in all West Bengal localities, except Rahimpur

TABLE 4.1. ANOMALIES IN THE COUNTS OF THE 'BPL SCHEDULE' POOR AND BPL CARDHOLDING POPULATIONS		
	% of Eligible Households Possessing BPL Cards	% of Households Possessing BPL Cards that are Eligible
Ditiya⁹⁰	35	43.29
Rampur	27.69	62.06
Jalun	58.37	68.49
<i>Rohingya Gram</i>	<i>48.01</i>	<i>62.8</i>
<i>Panchayat</i>		
Rahimpur	37.87	32.05
Dakkhin Bhabhuk	25.26	55.81
Sindhugram	34.48	40
<i>Jashumati Gram</i>	<i>42.26</i>	<i>52.45</i>
<i>Panchayat</i>		
Sargana Ward 1	71.42	18.07
Sargana Ward 4	59.37	27.94
Sargana Ward 5	62.53	35.08
Sargana Ward 6	47.3	22.5
Sargana Ward 7	38.09	20.68
Sargana Ward 8	46.05	31.81
<i>Sargarana Gram</i>	<i>52.27</i>	<i>26.87</i>
<i>Panchayat</i>		
Roshanar Ward	27.27	24.32
5		
Roshanar Ward 7	80	7.01
Roshanar Ward 8	30.55	10.47
Roshanar Ward 9	60	20.93
Roshanar Ward 10	38.09	11.59
Roshanar Ward 12	29.16	21.87
<i>Roshanar Gram</i>	<i>34.81</i>	<i>14.66</i>
<i>Panchayat</i>		
Source: Own census data, December 2009-January 2010		

⁹⁰ Sites selected for field observations in bold text

Table 4.2 introduces data on deserving households. In the first column, it presents data on the proportion of deserving households that possess BPL cards. In the second column, it presents data on the proportion of deserving households that are eligible for BPL cards. A significant distinction between the Bihar localities and the West Bengal localities emerges. In each of the Bihar localities, many more deserving households possess BPL cards than they would have, had the ‘eligibility criteria’ been rationally applied. For instance, taking the Bihar sites together, only 27% of the MPI Poor were ‘eligible’, having been classified as ‘BPL Schedule Poor’. However, nearly 57% of the MPI Poor in the all the study sites in this State actually received BPL Cards. In West Bengal, the converse held true. 56% of the deserving households were eligible for the BPL Cards, while 45% possessed it.

TABLE 4.2. BPL Card-holding and BPL Schedule Poor households among the MPI Poor		
	% BPL Cardholding households/ MPI Poor	% BPL Schedule Poor/ MPI Poor
Ditiya	32.60	41.76
Rampur	24.75	60.40
Jalun	51.62	66.06
<i>Rohingya Gram Panchayat</i>	48.69	63.75
Rahimpur	22.70	58.28
Dakkhin Bhabhuk	36.29	37.43
Sindhugram	38.95	48.87
<i>Jashumati Gram Panchayat</i>	41.37	47.56
Sargana Ward 1	50	19.44
Sargana Ward 4	69.23	34.62
Sargana Ward 5	62.35	40.12
Sargana Ward 6	31.76	21.18
Sargana Ward 7	57.06	34.46
Sargana Ward 8	38.55	30.12

TABLE 4.2. BPL Card-holding and BPL Schedule Poor households among the MPI Poor		
	% BPL Cardholding households/ MPI Poor	% BPL Schedule Poor/ MPI Poor
<i>Sargana Gram Panchayat</i>	62.20	31.98
Roshanar Ward 5	24.06	24.06
Roshanar Ward 7	56.45	6.45
Roshanar Ward 8	40.11	19.25
Roshanar Ward 9	36.84	14.74
Roshanar Ward 10	34.04	18.42
Roshanar Ward 12	31.90	28.22
<i>Roshanar Gram Panchayat</i>	49.73	20.95
Source: Own census data, December 2009-January 2010		

5. BROKERED CONTENTIONS?

Having gleaned from the tables data on those *eligible* for BPL cards, those who actually *possessed* them, and the ones who, as multi-dimensionally poor, might have been most *deserving*, we are in a position to turn our attention to the manner in which BPL cards were claimed and allocated in the study localities. A starting point for this analysis is provided by Cornia and Stewart (1995) who lament the inordinate attention paid to reducing and avoiding what are commonly called ‘errors of inclusion’ or Type 1 errors, errors which refer to the inaccurate inclusion of non-deserving households in the targeted program. They emphasise the need to analyse and reduce ‘errors of exclusion’ or Type 2 errors, the inaccurate exclusion of deserving households from the targeted program, and to reduce these. This chapter borrows heavily from this insight. Table 5 presents the relevant data gleaned from a quantitative analysis of survey data. Column 2 presents ‘pseudo-Type 1 Errors’- i.e. errors of inclusion of non-deserving (non-MPI Poor) households in the BPL lists. Column 3 presents ‘pseudo-Type 2 Errors’- i.e. errors of exclusion of deserving (MPI Poor) households from the BPL lists. Column 4 presents ‘pseudo-Accurate

Inclusions’- i.e. proportion of deserving (MPI Poor) households accurately included in the BPL lists.

TABLE 5: ERRORS AND ACCURATE INCLUSIONS				
Name of the locality	Total Households N (1)	Type 1 Errors (2)	Type 2 Errors (3)	Accurate Inclusions (4)
<i>Sargana Ward 1</i>	165	18%	33%	33%
<i>Roshanar Ward 5</i>	161	3%	63%	20%
BIHAR	2210	9%	43%	35%
<i>Ditya</i>	326	2%	56%	27%
<i>Rahimpur</i>	424	8%	51%	29%
WEST BENGAL	2310	6%	52%	32%
<i>Source: Own Data</i>				

It is clear from the Table that Type 2 Errors are lesser in Bihar than in West Bengal, although one of the Bihar sites witnesses a much higher incidence of Type 2 Errors than the others. Nonetheless, the following discussion is organised along States because of the differing institutional architecture in the two States. However, as we shall see, this difference does not necessarily determine the outcomes for poor people in terms of them possessing BPL cards.

5.1. West Bengal

Formally, the Gram Unnayan Samiti was tasked with coordinating the BPL survey in West Bengal (GoWB, 2006). In practice, as I observed in Ditya (February 5, 2010), and discussed with local politicians in neighbouring localities, the decision to classify households as BPL by the Gram Unnayan Samiti preceded the assignment of a score by the Samiti members (or rather those Samiti members who appropriated an active role for themselves on the council). A register was maintained, usually by the

Samiti Secretary, where the ‘surveyed’ households and the scores they obtained against each question of the survey schedule were recorded. Where these councils were absent, as in Rahimpur, this function was performed by the local committee of the party whose representative was elected ward member.

As elsewhere in the country, the BPL 2002 survey schedule was implemented in 2006-7. However, several irregularities were reported in the local media. Consequently, the State Government tasked the Panchayats elected in 2008 with re-assessing the surveyed populations- a process that had not taken place till the time my survey was implemented. The present discussion is based on respondents recalling the events, posturing and arguments made by different groups and individuals from 2007. Local leaders and ordinary people were animated in their opinions on the matter and kept going back to the manner in which decisions on the BPL question had been taken then. I benefitted enormously from both the forthright conversations with respondents as well as being an observer-participant in numerous discussions on the subject at residences and offices of local politicians, *chai* kiosks and street corners. The timing of my survey was fortuitous. It was conducted prior to the revision exercise, and the data was less likely to be corrupted by respondents’ expectations.

5.1.1. Hustling brokers?

My survey census data from Rahimpur and Ditya reveal that in both localities fewer ‘deserving’ casual labour households ‘possessed’ BPL cards than they had been ‘eligible’. However, the difference was marginal in Rahimpur compared with Ditya, where far fewer deserving casual labour households benefited. Likewise, the situation was slightly more favourable for deserving agricultural labour households in Rahimpur than in Ditya. A higher number (albeit marginal) of deserving agricultural

labourers in Rahimpur received BPL cards despite not being eligible for these (acts of commission in favour of the deserving poor), compared with deserving agricultural labourers excluded from receiving BPL cards despite being eligible for them (acts of omission against the deserving poor). In Ditya, *fewer* ineligible but deserving agricultural labourers received BPL cards (acts of commission in favour of the poor) than eligible deserving households being deprived of these cards (acts of omission against the deserving poor).

TABLE 6.1. SELECT OCCUPATIONAL PROFILE OF CARDHOLDING AND ELIGIBLE HOUSEHOLDS FROM AMONG THE DESERVING HOUSEHOLDS: WEST BENGAL			
		Ditya (MPI N= 273)	Rahimpur (MPI N= 342)
<i>Agricultural Labourer</i>	<i>Deserving Households</i>	125	44
	Cardholding Households	22%	14%
	Eligible Households	30%	14%
<i>Non- agricultural</i>	<i>Deserving Households</i>	119	240
	Cardholding Households	40%	37%
	Eligible Households	60%	41%
Source: Own census data, December 2009-January 2010			

In examining the possible factors for this divergence, I will draw attention to the different ways in which the BPL cards provided the focus for political contentions, and in turn spawned contests. These decisions provide us with useful insights on the manner in which the political subject in these localities if forged and how they assert their voice. From the data on election results presented in Chapter 2, one gets a sense of this keen contest over the previous two electoral cycles in Rahimpur. Both the Congress and the CPI(M) attempted to use the BPL exercise-conducted in 2007- as a means of advancing their electoral fortunes in forthcoming

elections. Given the explosive political configuration of that time and recognising their own precarious majority, CPI(M) leaders in Rahimpur were especially careful to at least be seen as responsive to the concerns of those who perceived themselves as poor. A study in contrast was Ditya. Here, successive electoral victories secured by the CPI(M) seemed to have lulled its leaders to believe that there was no immediate threat to their position here. Clearly, in 2007, the party was much less anxious about its electoral position in Ditya than it was in Rahimpur. The results of 2008 proved how misplaced this complacency was: as was indicated in the previous chapter, although the CPI(M) candidate managed to retain the seat, she barely managed to scrape through.

Based on the testimonies of different groups of ordinary citizens, local politicians and block-level leaders gathered during focused interviews, it appears that the differential ability of actors in political society to connect with Panchayat-level and block-level party bosses accounts for the crucial difference in the extent to which the BPL lists incorporate the poor. By any reckoning, an important set of actors are the *dalals*, who appear to parallel the *pyraveekars* so eloquently described by Reddy and Hargopal (1975). These *dalals* correspond best with the analytic category of political entrepreneurs that they introduce. Like Reddy and Hargopal's *pyraveekars*, the category of fixers described in Manor (1990) appear essentially as individuals brokering a deal with higher-level individuals or agencies, and resonate with the emerging evidence of *dalals*. However, in fact, the *dalals* in the study localities facilitated more 'bulky' transactions as mediators between populations and higher-level leaders: in return, these supra-local leaders are promised the delivery of votes (a promise which is increasingly difficult to honour). Moreover, unlike the categories described above, they often instigated the populations to make those demands.

It is common to hear references to “*CPMer dalal*” or “*Congresser dalal*” to refer to formal and informal leaders of the parties to which the brokers might be (loosely) affiliated with. Their extensive presence and influence undermines Manor’s argument that such actors are rare in regions where cadre-based parties operate (Manor, 2000: 833). Indeed, in these localities, the CPI(M) cadres double up as *dalals*, facilitating the access of poorer co-villagers to higher-level authorities in the government. Indeed, thanks to the networks of these party-affiliated *dalals*, the everyday state in Rahimpur, Ditya and neighbouring localities begins to resemble the ‘mediated state’ described by Bhattacharya (2006: 117), and noted by Berenschot in the context of Gujarat’s Ahmedabad city (Berenschot, 2010: 885).

Rahimpur’s *dalals* tried to exert pressure on these higher-level leaders⁹¹, emphasising how crucial the BPL cards were to prevent the collapse of the CPI(M) organisation in this ward. The *dalals* were drawn from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, including from the Bind, Napit and Shershabadiya castes. There were constant channels of communication between the Ward leaders and superordinate levels urging higher-level politicians to take note of the situation: both formal and informal fora were used. Local Committee meetings provided another opportunity: here Rahimpur’s politicians were more circumspect, as they did not want to be seen as putting too much pressure that would encourage CPI(M) leaders in neighbouring villages to do the same, thereby making it politically awkward for Panchayat-level politicians. Chance meetings were ‘arranged’ so that the same point could be made by different mouths: during these Rahimpur’s leaders spoke out more frankly. One

⁹¹ Reconstructed from interviews with Joyanal Ali (December 17, 2010; December 20, 2010; February 1, 2010), Mohammed Musa (February 1, 2010; February 5, 2010) and Chandra Mahato (February 2, 2010)

conversation between Joynal Ali and the block-level functionary was recounted time and again, and I repeat it here:

“How can you say that, in this village so-and-so is rich and so- and- so is poor? How do you expect us to sieve off our own neighbours, people we have lived with and have to interact with socially for the rest of our lives? They will laugh at us for being so powerless and shun us if they think we deliberately kept them out.”⁹²

I was told that negotiations with supra-local political leaders were far from polite. Often, these were punctuated by downright rude comments about how the block-level politicians themselves lived in their ‘ivory towers’ and were not sensitive enough to the needs of the local politicians, about how they had ‘fattened’ on bribes and were now not bothered. Joynal Ali told me how his frequent refrain to his block contact was, “Come to the villages and see for yourselves. Spend at least one night with us and then you will know.”⁹³ Musabhai said he would often challenge them, “Don’t come to us begging to deliver the votes to the party if you can’t get this done. The villagers will have no faith on either us or you.”⁹⁴

In Ditya, when the consequences of their lack of interest in the entire matter were revealed, and the party leaders realised that they would receive fewer BPL card allotments than what they had asked for, they scrambled to save the situation⁹⁵. Politicians, contractors and *dalals* in Ditya, were concentrated among Desiyas, and that too, drawn from two clans. Leaders of both parties, as well as *dalals* tended to be from the same social, indeed, familial base. Perhaps, this brings into sharp contrast the political society of Ditya with that of Rahimpur, where this space was occupied by individuals drawn from diverse backgrounds. While in Ditya, no effort was made by the predominantly Desiya leadership to engage leaders from other social and

⁹² Recalled by group discussants, Gandhi’s *chai* kiosk, February 9, 2010.

⁹³ Interview, Joynal Ali, February 5, 2010.

⁹⁴ Interview, Mohammed Musa, February 8, 2010.

⁹⁵ Interview, Paresh Sarkar, March 2 2010. Group discussants in both Neechupada (literally Lower Hamlet, group discussions March 14, 2010) and Unchupada (literally Upper Hamlet, group discussions, March 17, 2010)

economic groups, actors in Rahimpur's political society actively sought out leaders of local minority groups, as well as the considerations of co-villagers belonging to different economic classes.

5.1.2. *Contentious articulations*

Villagers in Rahimpur recalled there were heated discussions during the run-up to the exercise. Group discussants described the atmosphere that prevailed during those weeks as tense and palpable: "anything could have happened"⁹⁶. Fatema Bewa, a 40-year-old landless labourer, remembers, "The mood during these discussions was usually belligerent, with villagers wanting to know from CPI(M) leaders who happened to be present as to what criterion would be used to identify households as 'poor'. When these leaders responded, somewhat blandly that there would be a scoring scheme, we would probe further. We said we knew what the official mechanism was, but wanted to know who actually would be classified as 'poor'. We asked why it was that the locality was being artificially divided into 'BPL' and 'non-BPL' households."⁹⁷

Ditya's citizens were no less critical than Rahimpur's of the attempts to classify them as 'BPL' and 'APL'. Male participants of group discussions recalled how, during those weeks, they too raised questions about why the social protection was not being universalised. In the Saotal neighbourhoods, female participants reminded one another of how many times they approached local leaders to ask them what was happening. Nonetheless, they were consistently ignored. Participants of group discussions in Unchupada were emphatic about how their representations were

⁹⁶ Group discussion, Unnati Self-Help Group, February 3, 2010

⁹⁷ Hanging out, Gandhi's chai kiosk, February 2, 2010.

not even taken seriously. “Those fellows [the leaders] kept telling us not to worry too much and not to teach them politics.”⁹⁸ It appears from this narrative that ‘politics’ was a domain thought by local leaders to be *their* expertise: when poor people sought to force attention to their concerns, these leaders seemed to be threatened that their domain, a domain of specialist expertise, was being infringed upon. In turn, they sought to exclude the poor from this domain, and refused to countenance doing anything that might provide their voices with any legitimacy.

TABLE 6.2. SELECT SOCIAL GROUP PROFILE OF CARDHOLDING AND ELIGIBLE HOUSEHOLDS FROM AMONG THE DESERVING HOUSEHOLDS: WEST BENGAL			
		Ditya (MPI N= 273)	Rahimpur (MPI N= 342)
<i>Agricultural Labourer</i>	<i>Deserving Households</i>	83	259
	Cardholding Households	30%	37%
	Eligible Households	29%	39%
<i>Non- agricultural</i>	<i>Deserving Households</i>	192	83
	Cardholding Households	33%	33%
	Eligible Households	47%	31%
<i>Source: Own census data, December 2009-January 2010</i>			

Indeed, from Table 5.2., it is clear that the different social groups, even when they shared the ‘multidimensional attributes’ of poverty, were differentially targeted. In Ditya, the deserving among the locally dominant group, the Desiyas, managed to appropriate one additional BPL card for one of their own community. By contrast, the deserving among the local minorities, were relatively unsuccessful in claiming and accessing BPL cards. Far more eligible poor from among these minority groups were excluded from the BPL cards (acts of omission against the poor) compared to ineligible poor who received these cards (acts of commission in favour of the poor). In Rahimpur, the deserving from among local minorities are far better represented in

⁹⁸ Group discussions, Unchupada, March 17, 2010.

the latter category than in the former, indicating an overall an attempt by the dispensers of the cards to forge a relatively more inclusive governance mechanism.

In summary then, the intersection of several political processes seem to make the targeting process in Rahimpur more favourable to the deserving poor in that locality, relative to Ditya. First, effective electoral competition was higher in Rahimpur. The polity in this locality was more pluralistic, and actors in political society were drawn from diverse social and occupational segments of the locality. These actors were far more outspoken in their dealings with supra-local leaders, yet at the same time recognised the need to be responsive to their constituencies: they recognised the ‘floating’ nature of these constituencies, and affirmed the need to demonstrate their relevance to ensure continued support. Furthermore, the poor appear to have been far more assertive in pressing for their entitlements in Rahimpur than in Ditya, although I noted that Ditya was not entirely free of contentious articulations. However, the key difference between the two localities appears to be in the responsiveness of actors in political society- in fact, in Ditya, it appears to be relatively incipient, unlike in Rahimpur, where it is relatively more vibrant, with *dalals* often instigating populations to make specific demands- to these articulations. In the conclusion, I will elaborate on what this means for capabilities, but suffice it to say at this stage that a politicised reading of capabilities is not only about the assertion of voice, but also about it being heard, understood and responded to by those on whom claims are being made.

5.2. Bihar

The Bihar Panchayati Raj Act tasks the Gram Sabha with identifying the “beneficiaries of poverty-alleviation programs” as outlined by the State Government

(GoB, 2009: 12). At the same time, it limits the effectiveness of this clause by recommending that the Gram Panchayat perform this task if the Gram Sabha is “unable to do this within the stipulated time-frame” (GoB, 2009: 4). In both cases, the ‘beneficiary’-identification process is expected to be at least consultative. In practice, consultations are limited to the Mukhya and the Gram Panchayat members who are able to forge working relations with him/ her. However, it tends to remain the Mukhya’s prerogative as to whether s/he chooses to consult the Gram Panchayat members and if so, which one of them. In terms of the enumeration exercise, the Mukhya’s role is pre-eminent. S/he is responsible for convening the meeting of the surveyors, for instructing Gram Panchayat members to accompany them into the field, and to vet and sign off the final recommendations. In practice, decision-making on which households are to be included in the BPL lists and which ones to be excluded are far more decoupled from political party affiliation than they are in West Bengal.

TABLE 6.3. SELECT SOCIAL GROUP PROFILE OF CARDHOLDING AND ELIGIBLE HOUSEHOLDS FROM AMONG THE DESERVING HOUSEHOLDS: BIHAR			
		Ditya (MPI N= 273)	Rahimpur (MPI N= 342)
<i>Agricultural Labourer</i>	<i>Deserving Households</i>	37	26
	Cardholding Households	41%	38%
	Eligible Households	19%	15%
<i>Non- agricultural</i>	<i>Deserving Households</i>	71	107
	Cardholding Households	55%	21%
	Eligible Households	20%	26%
<i>Source:</i> Own census data, December 2009-January 2010			

From Table 5.3., the differences in the manner in which the local minorities in the two localities enjoy enhanced formal social protection coverage are evident. MPI Poor households among local minorities in Sargana Ward 1 would have received less

than half the number of BPL cards that they eventually did had the BPL cards been rationally distributed. Moreover, more ineligible MPI Poor households from among these communities were able to claim BPL cards (acts of commission) than eligible MPI Poor households were excluded (acts of omission). Exactly the converse situation obtained in Roshanar Ward 5.

5.2.1. *Democratising brokerage*

Fixers, known in Bihar as *bichaulias*, constitute an important part of the political landscape. Like in West Bengal, they are drawn from diverse economic and social groups. Unlike in West Bengal, and in line with Hargopal and Reddy's observations, they are more dependent on the income from brokerage. Paradoxically, this has enabled some of the poorer individuals from the more marginalised groups to take on the roles of the *bichaulia*. Given Bihar's recent history, they perform a crucial task in making the state an empirical category in localities where it has hitherto been only abstractly conceived: they do not only mediate between citizens and the state, but in important ways construct the state as well.

An indicator of the effectiveness of the *bichaulia* is the diverse population segment they 'get jobs done' for. In terms of the BPL lists, the *bichaulias* find themselves representing concerns that are articulated to them by individual householders, often- but not always- from their own caste and clan. It is not uncommon for women to approach *bichaulias* directly for favours, or along with their husbands. Like *dalals*, *bichaulias* are also expected to function in networks of friendship and business. They often help unknown persons as well, who they help in return for a fixed commission. This last group adds to the diversity and complexity with which the *bichaulia* operates.

As aspiring or actual (social or political) leaders, *bichaulias* portray themselves as practitioners of *samaj seva*, or as social workers. They shun the epithet *netaji*, although often they do have political aspirations. Like in West Bengal, they derive their legitimacy as ‘leaders’ from their ability to ‘get the job done’ (as noted by, among others, Ruud, 2001: 130). Thus, in Sarghana Ward 1, Subodh Srivastava, Kayasth by caste and a leader of the JD(U) actively cultivated the Musahar community, and represented their interests to the survey team and to the Mukhya, Sarvesh Mandal. In Ward 5 of the same block, Krishna Poddar, who belonged to the OBC category, also competed for the affection of the Musahars of that ward in trying to influence the surveyors and the Mukhya to try and get as many BPL cards for Musahars as possible. With growing levels of literacy among Musahars, many from within this community have also come to perform this role, thereby democratising the social base of *bichaulias*.

Bichaulias in Roshanar’s Ward 5 too are increasingly being vocal about how their community members are being discriminated against, including when it comes to allotments of BPL cards. Till a few years ago, they were content with working through the existing power structures, represented by Pritam *babu*, the Rajput *jamindar* and Mukhya for nearly three decades. This strategy had served them well. But it had also meant that only a handful of local politicians, those who kowtowed to Pritam *babu*, had access to him. Pritam *babu*’s electoral rout in 2006 meant that these leaders now fell into disfavour with the new dispensation.

The work of the *bichaulia* is not always collaborative, especially not when it comes to BPL lists. They often have to resort to ‘unreasonable’ methods, such as protest rallies, sit-ins, and milder protestations such as petitioning. Manoj Srivastava, CPI(ML) leader and often described as *bichaulia*, convenes many such assemblies at

the block headquarters demanding the names of Musahars excluded from the BPL list to be included therein⁹⁹. In Roshanar's Ward 5, Gajdeo Mandal, widely respected for his shrewdly acquired wealth but rarely referred to as *bichaulia*, advised his co-villagers to stage a *dharna* (sit-in protest) at the block when it came to light that only a handful of the villagers in that ward were to be given BPL cards¹⁰⁰. The *dharna* was organised by Javed Alam, the ward's then representative to the Gram Panchayat. The protests were framed in terms of how injustice had been done to the "hapless and weak"¹⁰¹ population of Roshanar Ward 5. Clearly, as in West Bengal's Rahimpur Ward, the *bichaulias* and other politicians aimed to incite sympathy among the powers-that-be in favour of the localities' poor. However, as I will illustrate, in Sargana, these appeals were backed up with other threats of physical and oral violence.

5.2.2. *Contentions and the lack thereof*

Despite these similarities, there remained significant differences in the way the BPL lists included all those households they should have (or not have). These differences are even more puzzling given the extent to which the poor in Sargana Ward 1 were incorporated into the rural economy as landless agricultural labourers, with the attendant social and cultural inequities this inhered. Census survey data presented in Table 5.4 from this ward shows that more deserving households from socially and economically insecure categories possess BPL cards than they would have, had the BPL list had been prepared as the technocrats recommended. In

⁹⁹ Interview, Manoj Srivastav, March 26, 2010.

¹⁰⁰ Interview, Javed Alam, April 5, 2010.

¹⁰¹ Interview, Javed Alam, April 6, 2010.

Sargana Ward 1, a higher number of deserving agricultural labourer and casual worker households claimed BPL cards than they were eligible for. The stark contrast with Roshanar Ward 5 is also obvious.

TABLE 6.4. SELECT OCCUPATIONAL PROFILE OF HOUSEHOLDS EXPERIENCING ACTS OF COMMISSION AND OMISSION: BIHAR			
		Ditya (MPI N= 273)	Rahimpur (MPI N= 342)
<i>Agricultural Labourer</i>	<i>Deserving Households</i>	46	35
	Cardholding Households	56%	20%
	Eligible Households	22%	31%
<i>Non- agricultural</i>	<i>Deserving Households</i>	31	90
	Cardholding Households	65%	24%
	Eligible Households	32%	24%
<i>Source: Own census data, December 2009-January 2010</i>			

Indeed, the formal survey conducted by the enumerators showed up precisely these gaps. Not that Sargana's Mukhya had conducted an MPI survey of his own, but he realised, once the enumerators presented their results, only a handful of the poor would be classified as BPL. Clearly, he was concerned that the implementation of the survey would leave in its wake scores of disgruntled people, many of which might even join one another in alliance. Such a scenario would pit him against a political combination that could demolish his credibility as a leader. As he said, "I would not be able to show my face to people". Following discussions with his advisers, he said they came to the conclusion that "The survey schedule was bad enough. But what was really problematic was setting the cutoff at 13. It seems that the Bihar Government does not want to designate anyone as poor! I had to instruct the surveyors to make many concessions, and they specifically tampered with responses on the questions pertaining of children's education, migration, preference for assistance and

indebtedness. After all, it is a poor village, where nearly all households are insecure about their livelihoods. I did what I could to include as many households as I thought deserved to be.¹⁰² In the event, as my survey revealed, 63% of casual labour households, 83% of Mahadalit households and 61% of landless households received BPL cards. According to my survey, had the BPL schedule been rationally applied, only 15%, 21% and 14% respectively of these population groups would have received cards.

By contrast, Roshanar's Hareram Mandal appeared to better manage the plethora of demands originating in this ward. Roshanar Ward 5 was the only ward from among those surveyed where the numbers of the BPL card-holders were perfectly rationalised with the numbers eligible for the BPL card. Shouldn't that be considered symbolic of Hareram Mandal's attempt to rationalise demand with supply, a strategy of managing proliferating demands within the constraints set by a neoliberal regime? Indeed, during my interview with him, he spoke incessantly about the need for "harmonising the numbers of the poor"¹⁰³ with what was being suggested by the BDO. He claimed he was trying his best to manage the demands of the poorest groups and target them in such a way that he could satisfy the bureaucrats of the block HQ as well as the constant pressure of *bichaulias*.

A crucial difference between the two localities lies in the ways in which actors in political society organise, negotiate with and on behalf of and ensure the response to the demands of potential beneficiaries. In Sargana, beneficiaries do not only influence established actors in political society. Rather, they seek to increase their own representation among these actors. The way in which different actors in political

¹⁰² Interview, Sarvesh Mandal, April 10, 2010.

¹⁰³ Interview, Hareram Mandal, March 20, 2010.

society negotiate with one another and with popular demands is an integral component of the unfolding story.

For instance, when the enumerators began to implement the survey schedule, the question on ‘indebtedness’ only inflamed the ward’s Musahar inhabitants, especially when they understood the scoring scheme. Summarising their discussions on this subject, Badri Rishi told me, “No bank gives us any loan for the simple reason that we have no collateral. We only help one another out, by giving food, or clothes, or money, but we can hardly call it a ‘loan’, which has to be repaid within a finite pre-determined period and with interest. Here, people give us money (or we give money to others) and it is returned only after the recipients are able to make some money. There is a feeling that money has changed hands, but it is not understood as a loan. Rather, it is understood as ‘help’, which will be reciprocated as soon as circumstances are favourable again. There is a difference between *madad* (help) and *rin* (loan).¹⁰⁴” They felt the survey design discriminated against them. Several of them decided to meet the Mukhya directly to express their discontent, and asked their ‘leaders’ in the CPI(ML) to accompany them¹⁰⁵.

The Mukhya agreed immediately with the legitimacy of their grievances. He admitted to me later, “Having had an unpleasant confrontation earlier [over the NREGS and other issues, which we will turn to in subsequent chapters], I thought it best not to argue again. Moreover, they did have a point. We knew that if we had to show ourselves to be relevant and have influence, we’d have to bend the rules- quite a bit as it turned out.” Eventually, the Mukhya instructed the surveyors to “assign as many zeroes as possible, not only to Musahar households but to all other Scheduled

¹⁰⁴ Hanging out, March 21, 2010, Sargana Ward 1 (West), Musahar tola *machan*.

¹⁰⁵ Interview, Parsvnath Jha, March 19, 2010.

Caste households, and even Koeri, Kevat and Yadav households where the houses looked dilapidated.¹⁰⁶”

In Roshanar, discretionary action by Hareram Mandal, if it existed, did not benefit the citizens of Ward 5. This despite repeated representations and discussions between the leaders of this and the adjacent Ward 12- Kunjra, Dusadh and Gangot- and the Mukhya. As we have insinuated already, what distinguished their style from that of their counterparts in Sargana was their supplicating behaviour and couching their demands as requests, almost entreaties. They would make weekly trips to the Mukhya’s house, with gifts for the family members, but to no avail. When the survey was announced, they only made informal enquiries about its progress, but kept it at that.

When the BPL results were made public, the inhabitants of Ward 5 were shocked. Only a handful of households were classified as BPL. The Gangot families met with Gajdeo Mandal and urged him to “speak with and persuade” the Mukhya of the genuineness of their case. He spoke with the Mukhya, but failed to persuade him. He then spoke with the block-level leaders of different parties, who advised him to convene a *dharna* at the block office. Deepnanrayan Mandal, a 75-year old agriculturist recalls, “We weren’t very keen to go and protest. It’s not something that appeals to me personally. But Gajdeo *babu* said we should. So, we went.”¹⁰⁷ In the meantime, both Sadiqa and Javed Alam kept up formal and informal channels of communication with the Mukhya. The Mukhya merely responded by swearing by the survey schedule and the cut-off of ‘13’, which he blamed for the low number of households that were eligible for the BPL cards. However, despite all the well-

¹⁰⁶ Interview, Sarvesh Mandal, April 10, 2010.

¹⁰⁷ Interview, Surendranarayan Mandal, April 11, 2010.

mannered deliberations, when the revised BPL list was announced, not one Muslim name was added. All the six additions were Gangots¹⁰⁸. The Mukhya had successfully split the inhabitants along community affiliations, presuming- correctly- that the Gangot families excluded from the BPL cards were too few and uninfluential to form an effective coalition with numerically preponderant but relatively uninfluential Kujra Muslims.

In summary, the successful targeting of deserving poor households in Sargana Ward 1 was determined by a unique combination of political factors, similar in many respects to those in West Bengal. Keener political contests in Sargana Ward 1, reflecting- and shaping- a pluralist polity was one important factor. This influenced the electoral process in the two wards, although the salience of these contests cannot be limited to these processes alone, since electoral contests were relatively deinstitutionalised in the State. Rather, the emergence and strengthening of a pluralist polity in Sargana Ward 1 relative to Roshanar Ward 5 meant that new and established leaders had to jostle with one another to demonstrate their relevance and their ability to 'get the job done'. Even more so than in West Bengal's Rahimpur, we see in Sargana Ward 1 the development of a political society which comprised political entrepreneurs that did not only meet the preferences articulated by members of the community, but sought to-like Manoj Srivastav and Javed Alam- to organise (even in informally and transiently) potential BPL cardholders to protest against what they identified as weaknesses in the survey schedule. However, actors in Sargana Ward 5's political society were far more appreciative of what the BPL cards meant for the deserving poor in the locality, especially among the Musahar community. Consequently, these actors were willing to negotiate forcefully and, as was more

¹⁰⁸ As recounted by Javed Alam, April 8, 2010 and Gajdeo Mandal, April 5, 2010.

common, willing to lend their presence even when the actual negotiation was done by the potential BPL cardholders.

6. ASSERTING VOICES

What do these narratives tell us about the manner in which the voices of the poor are asserted, heard and understood so that they are not merely considered inchoate noise, but as the staging of specific demands? Rancière's well-known reading of the 'secession of plebs' on Aventine Hill (Rancière, 1992) suggests that the inability to understand the language of the plebs resulted in the complete rupture of the conversation between them and the patricians. It is uncertain if Sarvesh Mandal and the block-level leaders who responded favourably to Joynal Ali's demands understood precisely what their interlocutors meant when they asked for BPL card allocation. But in giving in to these demands, they demonstrated what Aletta Norval calls a 'response-ability' towards their constituencies. They did not do so, as I have argued elsewhere, out of magnanimity, but because they acknowledged the 'sense of wrong' that lay at the basis of these demands, which necessitated- as we have seen- the violation of specific rules and regulations.

6.1. Extending the boundaries of political society

In an important respect, our narratives turn on its head Chatterjee's claim that "marginalised groups represent an outside beyond the boundaries of political society" (Chatterjee, 2008: 61). Sections of the rural poor, differentiated as they are from more privileged ones on account of caste, class or both, try and develop contextually relevant tactics through which they try and access what they perceive to be 'valuable' entitlements. In their efforts, it is not always professional politicians or well-meaning

development professionals who help them, but a ‘complex’ of ‘political practitioners’ who know procedures and people at higher levels, and how to get around them. On the one hand, this appears to make bearable and manageable the effects of neoliberal governmental technologies such as ‘targeting’. At the same time, however, these actors constantly contest the boundaries that the state draws around their efforts to access what they claim as entitlements.

But who or what exactly comprises the state in the context of the enumeration of the BPL population? At the risk of stepping on ground already covered by Corbridge et al (Corbridge et al, 2005), I should point that the state appears as a hydra-headed entity: it refers to many things simultaneously. On the one hand, for some of the better-educated persons with supra-local connections, ‘the state’ represents an abstraction (Hansen’s ‘sublime state’) in the national or State capital, whose functionaries conceive of plans and programs to support the rural poor. According to them, the BPL survey is designed to ensure that the net of social protection be extended to these poor households. It is the *other* face of the state (the ‘profane’ state)- the local officials (teachers, gram sachivs, patwaris) and intermediaries (fixers, brokers, politicians), all members of what has been referred to as political society- who interfere with the process, and seek to distort the benefits that the ‘abstract state’ was trying to provide.

For poorer people, on the other hand, the state sometime appears *less* hydra-headed. It was sometimes described as a ‘funnel’, which appropriated bribes from different individuals according to their social standing and economic capacity. It is represented in the block and Panchayat-level bureaucrat and local politicians, who demand their ‘cut’ before making available the schemes and programs that are due to the poor. It is also represented by the harassment meted out by ticket-collectors and

railway police on the trains that carry them to and from their places of work, pilgrimage and social observances. In more sedentary locations, the civil police plays much the same role.

They are less willing to consider the benevolence of the sublime state either, whose functionaries are so remote that they are unwilling and unable to rein in the excesses of the bureaucrats and the politicians. These excesses are well-known, especially to higher-level emissaries of the state who arrive for routine monitoring visits. To many poor people, then, *contra* what proponents of the ‘everyday state’ would have us believe, the sublime state was as culpable in these ‘crimes’ as its local functionaries, perhaps even more so: after all, they reasoned, the local official is corrupt not only because of personal greed, rather he is only the cog in a well-oiled extractive machine that, nonetheless, requires regular greasing.

And yet, it would be wise to take a sober view, especially after considering data presented in Table 6 below. The table presents information on the extent to which households that reported themselves to be ‘food-insecure’ (the survey question analysed here was- “Do you know in the morning if you will have food to eat in the evening?”) were excluded from receiving BPL cards despite being eligible for them (acts of omission on part of the local state) and, conversely, received BPL cards despite scoring higher than the State-sanctioned cut-offs, and not eligible as ‘BPL Schedule Poor’. For each of the survey localities, it was evident that the subversion of the rational instruments of information-collection on poverty does not always benefit such households. Such households, it seems, faced acts of omission against them more than they benefited from acts of commission in favour.

TABLE 7: Food Security Profile in both States			
Name of ward	Proportion of households that reported not knowing in the morning whether they would have food to eat the evening to:		
	<i>Total Population</i>	<i>Population of BPL Schedule households that do not have BPL Cards</i>	<i>Population of BPL cardholders that are not BPL Schedule Poor</i>
Ditya	76.07	89.7	72.73
Rampur	75.86	87.2	59.09
Jalaun	69.64	87.0	58.72
Dakhnin Bhabhuk	65.38	84.5	31.58
Rahimpur	51.18	73.2	44.34
Sindhugram	54.23	64.7	41.90
Sargana Ward 1	29.09	33.3	33.82
Sargana Ward 4	45.54	65.4	40.82
Sargana Ward 5	48.02	88.0	36.49
Sargana Ward 6	37.50	60.0	35.48
Sargana Ward 7	63.41	64.1	61.96
Sargana Ward 8	65.58	78.0	57.33
Roshanar Ward 5	21.12	33.3	14.29
Roshanar Ward 7	6.42	0.0	7.55
Roshanar Ward 8	20.65	44.0	15.96
Roshanar Ward 9	20.15	66.7	8.82
Roshanar Ward 10	19.77	61.5	14.75
Roshanar Ward 12	29.79	47.1	24.00
<i>Source: Own census data, December 2009-January 2010</i>			

6.2. Subjects of populist reason

Targeted schemes induce a rupture in local society by instigating households to compete against one another in order to be declared ‘poorer’. It appears that actors in political society attempt to heal this rupture to the best extent they can, some more than others. Subverting the formal schedule, they attempt to count as ‘poor’ as many persons as they can. We met earlier members from among Sargana Ward 5’s Musahars who were given scored of ‘0’ despite the fact that they had obtained no

loans. Had the guidelines been followed, they would have received a '3', which would have increased their scores and potentially deprived them from being classified as poor. Similarly, those landless labourers who had not migrated at all were scored '0' by the leaders, whereas if the schedule had been implemented as it should have, they would have obtained '4'. Often, it was the same people who received '0's on both queries. They would have received '7' additional points had the survey schedule been implemented according to the survey guidelines, effectively disqualifying them from the BPL list¹⁰⁹.

Where some of these localities at least are unique is *the populist manner in which these claims are articulated by actors in political society* in relation to other political actors. Claims are articulated in different ways by actors in political society. In Rahimpur, these actors are in fierce competition to score electoral victories in forthcoming elections. They appreciate the arguments made by their constituencies and presented the same to the meso-level leaders of their respective political parties, often parroting the threats that they had received. Invoking the fear of electoral rout, they argue for *the widest possible coverage* without explicitly arguing for universalisation. These claims can be seen as part of the repertoire of methods deployed by actors in political society to reinvent themselves, to retain legitimacy and succeed in forthcoming electoral contests. The vigorous articulation of demands by these broker-politicians who are in competition with one another, and yet are bound by expectations of helping the poor and the needy, reflect the deeply contentious nature of politics in Rahimpur. In Sargana Ward 1, where politics is even more fragmented, actors in political society were all the more hard-pressed to forge a following across wider social and economic groups. As in Rahimpur, groups of poor

¹⁰⁹ Panchayat BPL List, 2008

people, led by their chosen leaders, made contact with the Mukhya and tried to pressurise him to allow for some ‘irregularities that would help the poor.’ In Ditya, this is a lesson that actors in political society ignored at their own peril. In Roshanar Ward 5, actors in political society sought desperately to influence the Mukhya in their favour, but failed due to the Mukhya’s deep-rooted animosity against them. In both these localities, brokerage was tightly controlled in a few hands, disabling a substantive competition among local politicians.

Recent analytical literature suggests that devolution may have positive outcomes for the poor. Corbridge and his colleagues have, in their path-breaking study on Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal, drawn attention to the role of political mobilisation (through political parties as well as extra-institutional left wing activism) in making people more aware of the state’s obligations in some parts of the three States more than in others. Chaudhuri and Heller (2002) point to members of subaltern communities engaging with the planning process in Kerala, especially when bolstered by sustained political activism. They are less clear about whether this engagement necessarily led to redistribution of resources in their favour or even to improved service delivery. Evidence from West Bengal and Rajasthan, presented by Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004) suggests that the provision of local public goods such as roads and drinking water improved with the election of women to positions of authority in Gram Panchayats: in their view, women leaders invest more in infrastructure that is seen to be directly relevant to their family well-being (including children). This contention has also been advanced by Agarwal in the context of forest governance in Gujarat and Nepal (Agarwal, 2010). Besley and his colleagues (2007) point to other explanatory factors, such as quality of elected politicians, particularly their educational qualifications. They also argue that political opportunism in

resource-allocation decisions reduces with greater information flows between the electorate and their representatives. If these arguments hold, then we are compelled to draw attention to the identity of those controlling resources to explain variations in public provisioning. Following Harriss and Corbridge (2010), we may extend the rubric of ‘representatives’ beyond the elected members of the Gram Panchayat to actors in political society as well. It is important to specify actors in political society rather than brokers and fixers more generally, because the former are embedded in the circuit of periodic elections which, after all is the *sine qua non* of democracy, although not sufficient to ensure its continuation.

We have seen how actors in political society are crucial in determining how the voices of the poor are asserted, heard, interpreted and responded to. Where these actors seek to create popular pressure by extending, or even promising to extend, the net of benefits to the population at large, they contribute to the forging of a populist project, whereby ‘the people’ are sought to be created as an undifferentiated mass seeking demands from those wielding authority and influence. They speak a language of empathy, of solidarity and acknowledge the ‘wrongs’ that those making demands have historically been subjected to. Importantly, they do not seek to divide any section of the population against itself (such as those possessing BPL cards and those not so), thereby endorsing majoritarianism. What their promises appear to be doing, at least in Rahimpur and Sargana Ward 1, are to contribute to the coalescence of solidarities among the populations of these wards. They provide a crucial forum for the articulation of the assertions of the poor, although try as they might, they can neither control these nor manipulate these. It is also important to remember that these actors are neither social activists (though some of them see their tasks as ‘social work’) nor revolutionaries: they do not intend to threaten the system or its

functionaries. In practice, however, some of their actions, especially when in conjunction with popular assertions as well as discerning elected representatives, may result in subverting formal rules and regulations in favour of the poor.

7. ASSERTING VOICES: SOME REFLECTIONS

Rancière (1999) conceptualises politics as being the possibility of staging demands, of making those demands visible that have no business being made or heard. Is there a common stage where such demands can be articulated by those who are dominated to those who dominate? If we follow Rancière's account, we can suggest that the rhetoric and practice of the BPL enumeration exercise have led to an unprecedented politicisation of the poverty question in the countryside. While the 'neoliberal' character of such targeting is not in doubt, these practices have not gone uncontested by the representatives of the Panchayat and by other leaders and fixers in the localities. Poor people have experienced these contests in different ways. In Roshanar Ward 5, they have been largely excluded from any meaningful engagement, and the survey has been used as a means of driving a wedge between the two principal social groups. In Ditya, as we have seen, the poor have been excluded from participating in the enumeration process and from the BPL lists in more subtle ways. In Rahimpur, on the other hand, the actions of the politicians have clearly benefited them. A conceptually distinct form of engagement is evident in Sargana Ward 1, where the poor have directly influenced the enumeration process in their own favour through negotiations, representation and unrelenting agitation. But more than anything else, what populations in Sargana Ward 1 appear to interrogate, and interrogate successfully, is their own exclusion from the processes of governance, and being able to have a say in how the cards are to be disbursed. These engagements, as

interactions between the set of activities practiced by the poor and other citizens and the institutions of governance, are necessarily 'political' (Rancière, 1992: 58).

Despite the centrality accorded to the Panchayat in the entire process of classifying the poor, it is impossible to ignore the role of actors inhabiting the spaces outside of the institutions, the space that has often been described as 'political society'. Many of these leaders are affiliated to political parties, but it is common for them to shift allegiances: hence, the reality of the political party is conveyed to the populace through the specific leaders who are not immutably incorporated into a given party structure. This dynamic reduces the usefulness of the political party as a device through which 'the political' might be understood. Indubitably, the boundaries between political society and the institutions are blurred, and interpenetrated by elected representatives, *dalals*, *bichaulias*, leaders of political parties, and activists. Actors constituting this extended political society sometimes act to bridge the gap between the institutions and the population: they make the state meaningful by (for their own vested interests) increasing its accessibility to the populace. In Ditya and Roshanar, actors in political society are not drawn from as widely dispersed social backgrounds as they are in Rahimpur and Sargana, with the result that they are not as contextually sensitive as their counterparts in the latter localities. In Sargana, actors in political society are riven by seemingly irrevocable rivalries and antagonisms, despite which (or perhaps because of this) the poor in the locality made some of the most successful claims. The latter's demands are more fully vocalised in Sargana than elsewhere.

These practices challenge the assumptions and intentions not only of distant technocrats (which is obvious enough), but also of local-level politicians and party leaders who perceive the enumeration exercise as an opportunity to bolster their

position and prestige. The knowledge that the core leadership of Roshanar is suspicious or that Ditya's politicians are indifferent do not prevent the respective groups of these localities to claim the BPL card as a matter of entitlement. In Rahimpur and Sargana, the claims are made far more forcefully and effectively. Indeed, the fact that the Panchayat is the focal point of the enumeration exercise makes it possible for these groups to at least directly address the decision-makers. This is not only a formal opportunity available to the inhabitants of the localities. Rather, it is a substantive one to advance their opinions, grievances and agonies.

This discussion enables us to specify how we might conceptualise the link between capabilities and voice. Amartya Sen has referred to the lack of voice- 'voicelessness'- as an important dimension of persistent inequalities. Gaining voice, finding it, and asserting it is, consequently, an important pillar of democracy, according to him (Drèze and Sen, 2002). In his work on voice, Sen draws on Hirschman's (1970: 30) succinct definition of voice, as

“any attempt at all to change, rather than escape from, an objectionable state of affairs, whether through individual or collective petition to the management directly in charge, through appeal to a higher authority with the intention of forcing a change in the management, or through various types of actions and protests, including those that are meant to mobilise public opinion.”.

While Hirschman's approach to voice is influenced by a stable, and relatively static, understanding of 'political interests' (following, by his own admission, Almond and Verba, 1965), it provides nonetheless a useful starting point to think analytically about the manner in which voice and capabilities are intertwined. First, to recount a point made in Drèze and Sen (2002), overcoming voicelessness performs a central role in enhancing human capabilities whether understood in terms of improved substantive opportunities more generally or as overcoming inequalitarian relations more specifically (the two not being mutually exclusive). Second, to take the point

further, understood in relational terms, overcoming voicelessness emerges as an integral component of capabilities. Thus, asserting voice not only leads to enhanced substantive opportunities because one protests, complains, petitions, etc. One's ability to assert their voice, both assenting and dissenting, is itself an indication of enhanced substantive opportunities. Further, there are sub-parts to the second point: the ability to assert voice is not limited to acts of speaking, but is also- borrowing from post-structuralist authors- about being heard and understood as well. Viewed along these dimensions then, the analytical contribution of voice to enhanced capabilities becomes clearer, though it also opens up further questions for exploration.

The extent of pluralism in the polities of the wards, and- concomitantly, the levels of intra-elite competition provide one analytical lens to examine the circumstances under which the *assertion of voice leads to enhanced capabilities*. Following on the case investigated in this chapter, we may suggest that existence of effectively pluralist polities and high degree of intra-elite competition are two interlocked factors for increased assertions leading to enhanced capabilities. The examples of Sargana Ward 1 and Rahimpur- both localities marked by pluralist polities and jostling political actors- bear this out. Authority and influence were more closely controlled by elites in Ditya and Roshanar Ward 5. This despite the relative success of land reforms in Ditya compared with in Rahimpur: it appears that the benefits of the land reforms, while certainly breaking the power of the erstwhile landed gentry, creates new elites, who zealously guarded their newly acquired privileges. On the other hand, Rahimpur's social elites, even though controlling more resources than Ditya's, could not contain the ineluctable proliferation of political entrepreneurs.

This begs the further question: under what circumstances do assertions emerge? The answer to that has necessarily to take cognisance of the deeper histories of the study localities and on-going contentions therein. Especially given the inexorable “leaching” of power (to borrow from Corbridge, et al, 2005: 83) to those who were not thought, till only a few decades ago, fit to rule, it should be patently clear that all four localities are characterised by different kinds of contentions: there is nothing unique about the fact that the poor in the localities raise their voices to stage certain demands. What is interesting about a few of these localities is the emergence of a political society (or perhaps we should of political societies) whose agents are sympathetic to these assertions. In some respects, this can be read off from the register of plural polities recounted above. If formal political leaders have emerged in these localities, informal leaders- brokers, fixers, political entrepreneurs- from different communities and social classes have also proliferated. The need among politicians of all hues to demonstrate their relevance and ability provides the competitive context in which they seek to appreciate (even if superficially) the underlying bases of the population’s claims. Unsurprisingly, then, in localities where they are subjected to greater competition, they turn to challenge their political superiors more aggressively (as Joynal Ali does in Rahimpur), or they actually provide critical pieces of information and lend their support to their (very fluid) constituencies (as Manoj Srivastav does in Sargana Ward 5). These politicians are neither simply brokers and fixers mediating pre-determined interests and communities, nor are they revolutionaries igniting the flames of insurrection: as actors in political society, they try and bridge the hiatus between the state and its population. Their presence is an important factor for the enhanced ability of poor people to raise their voice and for this voice to be heard, understood and responded to at the

institutional level. Following on from this, then, we may suggest that the emergence and flourishing of a vibrant political society is an important contributor of capabilities.

Three further considerations should also be borne in mind. First, about the overarching political context, which assumes an electoral democracy with the broad respect for civil and political rights. It is possible that in areas where these are imperfect or non-existent, assertions will be met with brutal violence or not allowed at all. Political society in the way it has been described would neither emerge nor flourish. Second, the government policy context. Targeting of resources in an electoral democracy provides a unique opportunity for political society to merge as a quasi-institutionalised space, since the governmental programs are accessible to the population as compartmentalised entitlements, and not as universal rights. Third, the nature of demands is an important consideration: BPL cards are relatively 'low-value' (for relatively wealthy elites interested in contracts and opportunities for businesses in urban areas), with non-transferable benefits. Their direction towards poorer populations has to be seen in the context of cornering of non-developmental resources, such as governmental contracts, bureaucratic appointments and the like.

The data and analysis in the present chapter provides us with some illuminations about the conditions under which the capable subject comes into being, through the assertion of voice, and understood as the assertion of voice. The analytical discussion considers a limited number of scenarios, which can provide the basis for suggestive conclusions and hypotheses for further research. In my study localities, the localities with plural polities, flourishing political society, multiple social cleavages, and pro-poor BPL identification outcomes are all identical. Further research needs to be conducted in order to identify the relative salience of these variables, and how

these might interact in the absence of one or more of these or the presence of others. Leaving that question to future scholars, we turn in Chapter 5 to specify analytically and empirically how the assertion of voice might be communicated in order to enhance substantive opportunities.

CHAPTER 5

AGONISTIC EXCHANGES AND CAPABILITIES: DISPUTING DEVELOPMENT, CONTESTING CONSENSUS

1. INTRODUCTION

I have so far highlighted the need to focus on the relational dimension of capabilities, and the concomitant role of the self-assertion of those who consider themselves voiceless. I have drawn attention to the need to examine how people augment their capabilities by attempting to reconstitute social relations which they perceive to be inequitable. In Chapter 4, I analysed the contentions around the allocation of BPL cards, in particular, the extent to which people who considered themselves poor staged demands to claim them. The repertoires deployed by people comprised appeals to be sympathetic and to show pity, to reverse historic injustices and to argue against dichotomies such as poor/ non-poor perceived to be artificial. In this chapter, I build on these insights to examine how ‘agonistic communications’ contribute to promote greater relations of equality among different actors. Furthermore, I suggest that, where agonistic communications are directed towards inequalitarian social practices and principles, they constitute capabilities: in other words, their expression itself is a measure of capabilities.

Through a discussion of the material presented in this chapter, I underscore the ways in which subjects prevent the establishment of or seek to rupture elite-based consensus perceived by them as perpetuating relations of domination and subordination. The purpose of this chapter, then, is to comprehend the kinds of ‘quarrels’ and ‘disagreements’ that occupied the collective imagination of the inhabitants of two of the study localities. I focus on disagreements, following

Rancière's suggestion that "egalitarian effects occur only through a forcing, that is, the instituting of a quarrel that challenges the incorporated, perceptible evidence of an inegalitarian logic" (Rancière, 2004: 5). For each locality, I analyse a recent dispute, how it originated, and the trajectories it took, or was taking at the time of the survey. Each instance of disagreement studied is thus a heuristic device through which I uncover the ways in which people negotiate, deliberate and agonise vis-à-vis one other, and vis-à-vis other significant individual and institutional actors. I focus on two specific cases: one from Rahimpur (West Bengal) and the other from Sargana Ward 1 (Bihar). The case from Rahimpur centres on a series of disagreements provoked by the Ward Member's unilateral decision to install electric poles allotted to his ward at locations of his choice. The case from Sargana Ward 1 is about a dispute between a casual worker couple and their richer neighbour, who attempted to grab their hard-earned plot of homestead land, and how the couple successfully fended off his attempts.

It needs to be borne in mind that the emphasis on dissent and disagreement should not be confounded with the valorisation of all difference and dissent, such as those intolerant of emancipation and egalitarianism. Rancière captures this spirit when he identifies democracy as the rule by those who have (or hitherto thought to have) no qualification to rule, by which he specifically refers to the logic through which the rule of those privileged by birth or wealth is subverted (Rancière, 2004: 6)). Similarly, Laclau is emphatic that democratic demands are those that are "formulated *to* the system *by* an underdog of sorts....[and] their very emergence presupposes some kind of exclusion or deprivation" (Laclau, 2005: 125). And finally, Mouffe (2000: 20) clarifies almost immediately after her argument for pluralism, noted above, that an extreme pluralism that conceives politics as only about negotiations among a

multiplicity of interest groups, undermines the salience of power that marks all struggles against subordination and domination.

In pursuing these disputes, I take cognisance of von Benda-Beckmann et al (2006) who view property as about relationships among social actors in regard to what they value. Scholars such as Ribot and Peluso (2003) and Sikor and Nguyen (2007) find that access to property does not in itself secure well-being of those who hold property rights. Nonetheless, I find the notion relevant to developing an understanding of the perspectives of those involved in the disputes. MacPherson (1978) reminds us that property relations are political. Building on this insight, scholars have now accepted that the negotiations around property rights and the manner in which disputes arising out of these are resolved provide important insights into the scope and constitution of authority (Sikor and Lund, 2009). Such authority is of course not monopolised by the state alone. Moreover, as we have seen, the state is not a monolithic entity. Resolution of disputes provides the terrain for actors in political society to assert their role and presence, as well as gain social legitimacy for themselves.

2. METHODLOGY

In this chapter, I rely almost entirely on the qualitative analysis of ethnographic data. This is motivated by the nature of the data, which comprises of physical observation and the recollections among respondents of past and present (at the time of the data collection) events. The data is based on oral reconstruction of events, as well as participant-observation of events or reactions to events as they unfolded before me. (I will specify the participation-observation tools for the different cases when I begin to describe them). I elicited as many different shades of opinions

as I could. I used the rapport I had developed with the different individuals to ask provocative questions, all the while demonstrating my sympathy and understanding for the respective points of view. However, I make no claims, contrary to the advice of the founders of the ‘participant-observation’ method (Malinowski, 1967) to rescue objective knowledge from the screen of subjective experience. In this, I follow Rabinow (1977) and Clifford (1986) who elaborate and incorporate the blurred distinction between the objective and the subjective dimensions of ethnographic work.

Indeed, I have tried to ensure that a reflexive approach to data collection informs my analysis of the disputes that I report. Not only was my positionality as clearly conveyed as possible, but I actively sought out the “contestations and competitions of socially lodged and leveraged discourses” (Marcus and Fisher, 1999: xxx), recognising that at any given time, what I had access to was the partial truth. As in the other chapters, I will highlight the differences in interpretations, following Alexander et al do in their fascinating discussion of what violence in southern Africa meant and did to those affected by it (Alexander et al, 2000).

3. ELECTRIFICATION IN RAHIMPUR

An important political spark in the recent life of Rahimpur village was generated by the announcement that electric poles had been allocated to this ward under the Centrally-Sponsored Rajiv Gandhi Grameen Vidyutikaran Yojana, the rural electrification scheme named in the memory of India’s former Prime Minister somewhat disingenuously credited with ushering India into the 21st century. Nonetheless, for Congress leaders across West Bengal, this was an excellent opportunity to drive home their argument that the Congress Party was indeed the party of the future. For Congressmen in Rahimpur, the arrival of the poles represented

one of the successes of electing a Congress Government- at any level. For me, this proved to be a fortuitous occasion to observe the ways in which people in Rahimpur negotiated on matters of public interest and, indeed, how they reinterpreted policy decisions. By the time the poles arrived, my presence in the locality as a harmless student from faraway Oxford had been somewhat taken for granted and I could 'sit in' during the numerous conversations on the topic without the worry that my presence would distort people's interactions with each other and with their elected representative.

The scheme envisaged that the electrification of rural households would be completed by 2010. Furthermore, rural electricity infrastructure would be modernised, and households living below the poverty line would be provided free connections. Although electricity tariffs would increase, they would not affect the BPL population. Rahimpur already had a distribution transformer which routed power to hundred-odd houses, especially those located around the main village square. Five electric poles catered to the needs of these households, and consequently suffered from high load on existing infrastructure. Several households sourced electric connections illegally, further increasing the load. Besides, there were entire hamlets that had no access to electricity, such as Dargahpada, Thakurpada and Intar Rahimpur.

Under the scheme, Rahimpur would receive 35 electric poles. These poles would be installed in consultation with a technical team of electrical engineers, with specific inputs from villagers. The poles would then be connected with the transformer. A group of technicians had already completed their survey of where exactly it would be feasible to erect the poles. A map (Annex 7) had been generated and shared with the Ward Member, who ensured that only his closest associates knew of its existence. But recognising that this was as much a political issue as a technical

one, Rahimpur's Congress leaders were divided on the extent to which the public should be consulted. Some leaders feared that consultations would lead to so much discussion and conflict that "it would be impossible to take decisions."¹¹⁰ However, Akbar Ali insisted that "discussions be made public, and if there are any objections they should be made right away. Who is afraid of conflict? There is an issue, which has to be resolved. If we hide from it today, it will come back to haunt us later." Babar Hossein, the Ward Member, gave in to Akbar Ali's argument and agreed to admit the public in the discussions about the location of the poles. However, he remained convinced that, consultations notwithstanding, villagers would acquiesce even if they were not entirely convinced.

While there was disagreement about whether villagers should be consulted, there was unanimity about not convening a formal meeting for this purpose. Most of the leaders felt that the discussions ought to be kept practical and manageable, as there were time-bound decisions to be taken. There was no point, they felt, in organising large-scale meetings that would come to nought. This distrust of public meetings stemmed from the experience recalled by Congress Committee member Abdur Rehman that "It is only the CPI(M) leaders who tend to speak at these meetings. They are eloquent and we are not." On the other hand, when the CPI(M) leaders came to know of these plans, they were keen to ensure that all shades of opinions were accurately reflected in the positioning of the poles. Their stance was that "Congress leaders should not be allowed to dictate the position of the poles, which should be as dispersed as possible, so as to benefit the village population as a

¹¹⁰ Hanging out, Nani's Chai Kiosk, Rahimpur, February 13, 2010 (c. 6:30 p.m.- 8:00 p.m.). All cited matter till next footnote from this source.

whole.¹¹¹” However, they were also clear that it “was pointless to obstruct for the sake of obstructing alone, as that would make us look like trouble-makers in the public eye- trouble-makers who are jealous of the Congress coming to power.”

Actors in Rahimpur’s political society were on their toes the moment the electric poles designated for neighbouring Sindhugram arrived in that village. Tension rippled across Rahimpur: villagers such as Ijaz Ahmed, a landless labourer who had completed his primary schooling, thought their ward was going to be passed over as it had so many times in the past¹¹². In Thakurpada, Shobha Shil, another landless, and illiterate, labourer confronted Akbar and asked him what was going on:

“Why have the poles come to Sindhugram but not arrived here? Look, we really need electricity. We had a hand pump, but that is dysfunctional now. Please do something to reduce our problems. As it is, our Hindupada is literally Nothingpara, a hamlet where nothing ever happens. Are you going to disappoint us yet again?”

It is clear from her complaint that the locality’s inhabitants struggled with a variety of deficits in service-provision: hand pumps, as in the above quote; BPL cards, as in the previous chapter; and now, electric poles. The frustration was palpable in the different hamlets that made up the ward. The question was repeated in Dargahpada. Both *padas* were traditional CPI(M) supporters, and the anxiety was tinged with taunts, as Sirajul Islam, another landless and illiterate labourer, asked sardonically, “Is this all the Rahimpur Congress can do? Ask for poles to be sent to Sindhugram?” Realising that they needed to salvage the situation, because indeed they had been lackadaisical in demanding that the electric poles be dispatched speedily to their village, Akbar cooked up a story, as he confessed to me later. The poles they saw in Sindhupada were intended for Rahimpur, but had been offloaded by enthusiasts in

¹¹¹ Hanging out, Nani’s chai kiosk, Rahimpur, February 14, 2010 (c. 5:30 a.m.-7:30 a.m.). All cited matter til next footnote from this source.

¹¹² Hanging out, Rahimpur Fair Price Shop and Grocery Store, February 6, 2010. All cited matter till next footnote from this source.

Sindhugram, who did not know their true destination. Action would be taken, and the poles would be “rescued within two days”.

That very night, the Congress leaders held council. I was not present there, but from my conversations the next morning with several participants in that meeting, it appears that Akbar Ali asked Babar Hossein to immediately clarify with Karan Haldar, the president of the Block Congress, as to what was happening. Apparently, following a conversation over mobile phone that lasted nearly an hour, Babar Hossein assured his colleagues in the ward that Rahimpur’s poles would be on their way in a week. The yarn spun by Akbar in Thakurpada continued to be the ‘official’ version till the poles designated for their ward arrived, as had been promised, a week later. In the meantime, the CPI(M) leaders were also preparing their colleagues to “ask difficult questions, raise problems, don’t get taken in by appeals to be ‘reasonable’. But refrain from being merely obstructionist, else the party will become a joke in front of the populace.”¹¹³

Babar and his colleagues proposed to stop at each of the 35 proposed locations, meeting all the households that were to be affected by each pole. At each location, they aimed to meet with the local householders and sought their agreement on the exact spot where the pole catering to specific households could be erected. Alongwith the technicians, they would mark out spots where the poles could be erected. These spots were to be identified such that each pole would be within 25 feet of the houses it serviced. Where these houses had been classified as BPL, they would be able to avail free electrification (but this was only possible if the BPL household was located within a 25 ft- radius. They recognised that they might meet with some objections of a specific nature and hoped that their strategy of meeting individual or

¹¹³ As recalled by Joyanal Ali, interview February 8, 2010

small groups of householders would reduce prospects of having to deal with demands from a united populace. While they expressed concerns that acceptable solutions be found to each problem, they also ruled out the possibility of being able to satisfy everyone. They were, however, extremely wary of their political opponents who might “fuel opposition for the sake of it, and act like ‘ghosts’ in the background. Solutions will have to be found so that the particularly ‘malevolent’ ghosts could be isolated.”¹¹⁴

As soon as the poles arrived, the Congress leaders, accompanied by technicians, set out in batches to Rahimpur’s different localities. Between them, they had rehearsed their performance. Babar Hossein and the local President of the Party would discuss with local householders the locations where the poles were to be erected by marking the area out: they would enquire if the householders were in agreement with the specific spots that had been marked out for the installation of the poles. Thereafter, Shamsur Rehman and Alauddin Ali would follow closely behind, sensing the mood, dispelling any doubts and reiterate the decision that had just been taken. Akbar, conscious of the need to continuously affirm the party’s link with existing and potential constituencies, would amble in last, partly reiterating what had already been discussed, partly encouraging people to air any lingering grievances and questions, and partly to thereby to reaffirm contact and identify what other problems people faced. CPI(M) leaders were not invited to be a part of this team, and did not ask to be allowed to join either.

On the whole, the Congress team expected a grateful village to broadly agree with most of their propositions. They thought that disagreements could be easily

¹¹⁴ Hanging out, Ward Member’s residence, February 13, 2010. References to “*kharab bhoot*” (malevolent ghosts) abounded during this meeting between the Ward member and his core supporters.

dispensed with and that the reconnaissance would be over in a matter of “one hour”¹¹⁵. They had a plan to meet any substantial dissent. Alauddin summarised what the leaders would say: “This operation is for the benefit of the entire village. We should just threaten those who disagree that we will return all the poles to the Block. That way they will be responsible for the loss to the entire village, and other villagers will hold them to task. If we make this argument, everyone will shut up and we can get the job done very quickly.”¹¹⁶

3.1. Dissenting subjects of a generous *raja*

Alauddin was wrong. At every stop, there was disagreement and discord. The rest of this chapter is based on a first-hand account of the events of those three days when Rahimpur’s politicians hopelessly tried to impose their plans on the population and different groups of individuals just as assiduously sought to appropriate these plans in their own favour. What was expected to be a walkover, took three days, and seemingly endless discussions. More than once, Babar fumed and threatened “to let the poles be taken away, never to be seen again.”¹¹⁷ Akbar’s pleas that “this was a lifetime opportunity that should not be wasted”¹¹⁸ fell on deaf ears at every stage. Not only did the villagers refuse to be grateful for the good that Babar thought he was doing for them, they grumbled about issues such as the timing of the discussions, and frustrated his attempts at isolating demands.

When Babar and his colleagues tried to highlight how much of an “*upakaar*” (favour) they were doing on the people by bringing in the poles, they met with a range

¹¹⁵ As asserted by Abdur Rehman, Ward Member’s residence, February 13, 2010

¹¹⁶ Hanging out, Ward Member’s residence, February 12, 2010

¹¹⁷ Hanging out, Rahimpur Ward, locations L11, L25 and L2, February 13-15, 2010

¹¹⁸ Hanging out, Rahimpur Ward, locations L5, February 13-15, 2010

of responses- from stony silence to counter-argument that “if the poles returned, *they* were the ones who would be in trouble since it would reflect poorly on them.” Many argued that, with elections just a year away, local leaders of all parties were being instructed by the top leadership to show results. Murshid Hossein was downright dismissive, “There is no *upakaar*. You are only doing your duty. You *ought* to do it.” When Babar tried to counter-argue saying this was more than what they got in 32 years of CPI(M) rule, Murshid Hossein retorted, “That is why they are being kicked out.”¹¹⁹ Other families who benefited from the electrification exercise also refused to be impressed: they said they knew that this was in the offing, and that, now that the scheme had reached the ground, it would only be a matter of time before the village would be completely electrified. Babar’s demonstrations were seen as the local leadership of a national party carrying out instructions from party bosses, not as a favour.

Residents expressed unhappiness that these discussions were taking place mid-morning. Shefali bibi remonstrated that the “men, who take such decisions, are away at work. What is the point of taking the buy-in of us women, who don’t understand these things anyway?”¹²⁰ Shefali and other women who Babar and his team met expressed their inability and unwillingness to commit to agreeing on the installation of the poles. They were unsure about the nuances of such an agreement and steadfastly refused to make any decision that might turn out to be ill-considered, “for which our husbands will yell at us.”¹²¹ Some of the more vocal women accused Babar of conspiring to time his visit in such a way that none of the real decision-makers

¹¹⁹ Hanging out, Rahimpur Ward, Location L33, February 14, 2010

¹²⁰ Hanging out, Rahimpur Ward, Location L26, February 13, 2010

¹²¹ Hanging out, Rahimpur Ward, Location L20, February 13, 2010

would be available. Babar protested that he had to keep in mind the technicians' availability- and they could possibly not be expected to come in the evening. Moreover, it would be dark in the evenings, which would inhibit accurate marking of most of the locations. He even invoked the notion of women's empowerment, suggesting that they were, after all, "equal to men in all respects, and more so in household decision-making"¹²². Nonetheless, most of the women refused to be talked into agreement: the leaders realised the futility of continuing the persuasions, and decided to revisit the sites the following day.

The villagers rejected Babar's self-proclaimed attempts at ameliorating their situation and therefore to focus on problem-solving. They refused to raise their specific problems quietly and privately. Arguing that he was trying to do *shahajyo* (help) for them, he tried to impress upon them the need to be "practical and to aim to solve problems in private, not raise issues in public and ask questions to which I have no answers. I have so many dreams for you. How will I be able to realise them if you are constantly bickering?"¹²³ But Rahimpur's inhabitants refused to be either practical or make it easier for him to solve problems. At each of the thirty-five locations, they raised their problems there and then, neither calling for a formal meeting nor seeking to meet him separately to press their issues privately. They freely moved with Babar and his contingent from one locality to another, offering their opinions, and supporting one another when there was a broader disagreement with the leaders' plans.

¹²² Hanging out, Rahimpur Ward, Location L26, February 13, 2010

¹²³ Hanging out, Rahimpur Ward, Location L15, February 13, 2010

3.2. Unreasonable objections

In the event, four types of criticisms were raised. The most commonly articulated objection was that the technical survey and the map it generated did not respect and recognise the boundaries of individual private homestead land: the locations identified for the poles encroached onto the private property of individuals. The second set of challenges was to the overhead route of the transmission wires that connected the poles to the houses they serviced: these wires passed over the roofs of existing houses, or too close to them. The third set of objections was to the installation of poles in spots where they would block the egress of households. Contrasted with these three types of ‘private’ objections was the fourth, more public, one. This related to the opposition to the placement of poles at street corners, where they would obstruct the passage of vehicles. Each of these objections was advanced, supported by an appeal to the leaders to be *shotheek* (correct, fair in this case). The leaders responded, by requesting plaintiffs to be *juktipurna* (reasonable). The plaintiffs responded by arguing that the leaders should not bully them just because they lack *khomota* (ability/ power). And so, the arguments went back and forth.

Controversies over possible encroachment of the government onto private property arose in nearly 25 of all the cases. Basically, in these locations, home-owners complained that the positions outlined for the poles encroached into a part of their property, and feared that such encroachment would devalue it. They were all “thinking ahead”¹²⁴, they said, when the village would be inexorably sucked into Maldah town, leading to an increase in the price of land. As Siraj ul-Islam, a marginal landowner with four years of primary education, suggested while contesting the installation of the pole on the spot marked L22 (Refer Annex 8), “So what if it is a

¹²⁴ Hanging Out, Rahimpur Ward, Several locations, February 13-15, 2010

sleepy village today. So what if the Government is a lethargic one. The town will certainly grow and engulf us one day, maybe in ten years, twenty years, or even fifty years!”¹²⁵

At the spot marked L33, the issue brought into sharp relief the tension between Babar’s calls to his co-villagers to be *juktipurna* (reasonable) and the villagers’ demands to him to do what was *nyajyo* (just). In this contest between reason and justice, local leaders had no choice but to express their agreement with the latter, though privately they admitted they would have liked the former to have happened. Here, the proposed location of the pole encroached onto Murshid Hossein’s plot, there was a heated exchange on this same issue. Murshid Hossein, who owned two acres of land, was well-educated and owned a motorbike, was vehement that he would not give permission for the pole to stand on his plot, since that would make his property worthless. He argued that the pole should be located on the boundary of his property with Joynal Ali’s, the local CPI(M) leader. However, the boundaries were at the edge of a pond, where it would be technically impossible to erect anything, especially something that might be potentially dangerous such as an electric pole. Murshid Hossein then suggested that the pole be erected on Joynal Ali’s plot. Joynal Ali, despite being uneducated, owned over five acres of agricultural land: besides, his daughter was a salaried teacher in the government school entitled to pensions.

Congress leaders of all hues requested Murshid Hossein, their ex-colleague, to give up his obstinacy, not to be “unreasonable” (*ajuktipurna kotha bolo na*), and to think of the greater common good. After all, he was an important leader and opinion-maker, even if, as they chuckled afterwards, “no one took him very seriously any

¹²⁵ Hanging Out, Rahimpur Ward, Location L22, February 13, 2010

more!”¹²⁶ If Murshid did not demonstrate a commitment to the welfare of the villagers, how would anyone else be expected to do so, especially if they had less *khomota* than he has? Murshid Hossein retorted that they ought to have this expectation from Joynal Ali, who was after all, *samaj sardar* and leader of an important political party. Why should Murshid be expected to make that sacrifice, especially since he had less ‘*khomota*’ than Joynal Ali, whose daughter- he reiterated- had a salaried job in the government school “and was entitled to a pension”¹²⁷. Eventually, Joynal Ali, “in the interest of the village’s development” offered permission for the pole to be located entirely on his plot.

A focus on the relational aspect of capabilities alerts us to the way in which Murshid Hossein negotiated with those purported to be socially superior and politically more powerful. His substantive freedom to defend his property from what appeared to him to be the infringement by the state was certainly augmented by the putatively unreasonable stance he asserted. Joynal Ali’s concession also augmented his ability to keep the peace in his locality. His decision contributed, more than the Ward Member’s persuasions, to solving what threatened to become an intractable problem: his ability as a leader was reaffirmed. Furthermore, his action attracts attention for his pursuit of aggregate social welfare, making him a ‘maximiser’ in the sense that Sen envisages (2002: 37): Joynal Ali’s values clearly do not pertain to maximising material welfare. Rather, he is one who wishes pursue other-regarding goals. In bringing the matter to a speedy conclusion by heeding the claims advanced by someone who considered himself and was considered by others to be less

¹²⁶ Hanging out, Rahimpur Ward Member’s residence, February 13, 2011

¹²⁷ Hanging out, Rahimpur Ward, Location L33, February 14, 2010. All further cited material from this source.

khomotashali (powerful) than he, he contributed to the augmentation of both their capabilities.

At the same time, capabilities are not always a zero-sum transaction. Joynal Ali's giving in was not seen as his loss either- rather, through his actions, he contributed to a goal he valued and, as *samaj sardar*, had reason to value- viz. the electrification of the households serviced by the pole to be installed as L33. Gautam Ram, a CPI(M) veteran, resident of Thakurpada, and principal of the primary school, thought about the goings-on thus, "Remember, it was not a duel between Joynal and Murshid as individuals, but between those with more *khomota* and those with less. By giving in without a fight, our communist Joynal, represented those with more *khomota*, and has thus set a precedent for justice to be achieved."

3.3. In the name of the powerless

As *samaj sardar*, and possibly as a peaceable human being, Joynal Ali conceded Murshid Hossein's demands. In cases where tensions are sharper, and the two contesting parties less willing to, or unable to, compromise, in what terms may we envisage the enhancement of capabilities? The case I will now turn to should help shed some light on this issue. At the spot marked L1, the plot owner's *neighbour*, Sarfaraz Islam argued that installing the pole at this location would mean that the wires would be routed too close to his house. Sarfaraz Islam was landless, had never been to school and worked as a rickshaw puller in Maldah town. They would most likely pass too close to his window, making it impossible to open outwards. Else, they would cross over his roof, making it impossible for him to increase the height of his property in the future. Incidentally, Sarfaraz's house had encroached into what was a public path, which is why in the first place the wires would potentially intrude. This

illegality notwithstanding, he argued that the pole could be placed a little afar, which would mean its placement deep into the plot of his neighbour Ziaur Rehman.

Ziaur Rehman, who owned about one acre of land and also held primary membership of the Congress Party, had already agreed to relocate the pole's position from the boundary line into his plot. Following Sarfaraz's suggestion would have meant shifting it further in a way that would block his egress. He retorted, "No, this is the only place I can allow. As it is, the pole should have been placed on the boundary, not here, on my plot. But this man whined, so I agreed to allow it to be placed here. If I place it where he suggests, it will inconvenience me. I am not very happy with the present arrangement myself, and could insist that the pole be placed on the boundary, where it should reasonably be placed but where it will inconvenience him even more."¹²⁸ The heated argument continued into the wee hours of the morning.

Contrary to these claims, I found the tone and language used by Sarfaraz Islam to border on being downright rude. He acknowledged that the 'correct' placement of the pole would inconvenience him very much, and Ziaur's concession was indeed helpful. But he refused to accept that "Ziaur is doing *me* any favour. I know his calculations: he wants to enhance his reputation by showing the world how much he cares for a poor man like me." He continued, "Just because I have less *khomota* does not mean I will take it lying down. I will not allow the wires to go over my house or outside my windows."¹²⁹ After which he directly accused Babar "of not saying anything because you need him [Ziaur] to contest the elections. I have less *khomota*, he has more. This is why he is oppressing me (*aamar shoshan korchhe*), and you are

¹²⁸ Hanging out, Rahimpur Ward, Location L1, February 13, 2010. All cited matter until the next footnote from this source.

¹²⁹ Hanging out, Rahimpur Ward, Location L1, February 14, 2010. All cited matter until the next footnote from this source.

helping him.” Turning to Akbar, he spoke, less aggressively, “You, Akbar, at least you would not forget us *gorib manush* just because you have tasted power? Remember, your party is in power due to the support you have got from people like us. We chased Musa [CPI-M leader and husband of the ex-Ward Member] away to vote for your candidate. And this is how he treats us! The CPI(M)’s doors are still open to us.”

In this case, claims to reason and justice were both invoked by the same party, contrasted with ‘unreasonableness’ and ‘unfairness’. Ziaur appealed to Akbar, asking him to do “justice” and do what was “*shotheek*” and “*uchit*”. “Is Sarfaraz not being unreasonable? (*O toh ajuktipurna kotha bolchhe*). How can he expect me to make so many concessions? I am also a *gorib manush*, nearly as poor as him.” Akbar calmly reminded him, “*Nearly* as poor, but he is poorer. Agree with what he is saying, in the interest of tranquility in this locality. As the person with more *khomota*, you will not lose much by accepting his terms. Be magnanimous.” Eventually, Ziaur relented and gave permission for the pole to be installed on his plot where the wires from it to the other pole would not interfere with Sarfaraz’s present or future habitation structure. Incidentally, neither Ziaur nor Akbar or Babar invoked the palpable truth that the chief source of the dispute was Sarfaraz’s illegal occupation of public land. The claims of reason in this case would have necessitated the relocation of Sarfaraz’s house, an expensive proposition for a landless worker, and therefore one which was not even contemplated that morning.

The manner in which the dispute between the two neighbours was resolved draws attention to the possibility that the augmentation of capabilities for one disputant could certainly in the contraction of capabilities for the other. Focussing on relationships, however, I would examine the way in which the relationship is

reconstituted, and whether the subordinate party can raise his voice and assert the values and meanings held by them to their antagonists. In this dispute, it appears that the agonistic exchange between the two neighbours, mediated by Akbar in favour of the one considered *khomotaheen* (powerless), points to a possible augmentation of the capabilities for the latter. I suggest that weighing in on the side of the ‘underdog’, especially when it subverts established, but unequal, relations, enhances capabilities in general. Indeed, I would like to push the argument further: in the situation of a conflict between a social superior and someone not so, capabilities in general are enhanced if the specific substantive opportunities available to the latter are enhanced.

In the resolution of these disputes, the authority of the state in demarcating the boundaries between private property and public land was severely constrained by varied interpretations of the law and justice. Claims were formulated on the basis of poverty, helplessness and suffering: nonetheless, those advancing these claims saw themselves as equals. The claims were grounded with a view to enforce that assumed equality. Equality was seen as the ‘starting point’. These claims were often mediated in favour of those deemed to be *khomota heen*. Actors in political society played an important role in ensuring that the disputes did not create animosity or bitterness, especially in the minds of these groups. They also saw in their actions a chance to build on their social and political legitimacy: by accepting Sarfaraz Islam’s demands, by convincing his *khomotashali* antagonist to give way and by ensuring Babar’s agreement to a situation that the latter had not favoured in the first place Akbar reiterated his position as a pivot of the economy’s political life.

Indeed, appeals and requests by the Congress leaders in Rahimpur to the general population to be reasonable and understanding continued to fall on deaf ears. They tried to emphasise that this was an important moment, requiring *sahajogita* and

tyaag at times. But, most villagers refused to bother. Daulat *bibi*, a destitute widow living with her teenaged daughter, was another home-owner, in front of whose house a pole was to be erected (L 16). She objected to the location of the pole, and asked them to “take it away someplace else, because it blocked the egress.”¹³⁰ Akbar and Abdur Rehman tried to convince her that this was the best place to locate the pole. But Daulat *bibi* would have none of that, and started screaming at them. They frowned and asked her to say “*juktipurna kotha*” and not lose her temper. They assured her that they were trying to “*bujhiye bolchhi*” (explain things to everyone so they would all agree). She retorted, “I understand all that, but you have to listen to me. If the pole blocks my egress, how will I move about? I cannot build a new gate since I am a poor woman.” Her neighbours came to her defence and told Akbar and his companions “to stop behaving like *babus*. You are *chengras* (lads) of this locality. Lets see how you instal a pole here against her wishes.” Stung by the taunt, they decided that the pole would be located elsewhere so it would not inconvenience Daulat *bibi*.

Daulat *bibi*’s angst points to the performances through which those whom we might think of as voiceless assert their presence in public. She interspersed her outburst with annoyance, taunts and jibes, eliciting sympathy and an account of what was in her interest. She was assured of her neighbours’ support even though they were in no way affected by the decision they helped her to protest: they enabled her to present her perspective even more forcefully. Her self-assertion was unremarkable for its invocation of poverty. But she was nonetheless conscious that her voice ought to be counted Her diatribe enabled the power-holders to be more sensitive to her

¹³⁰ Hanging out, Rahimpur Ward, Location L16, February 15, 2010. All cited matter until the next footnote from this source.

needs and, indeed, eventually to shifting the pole away to a location that would bother her less, or not at all.

At Nani's *chai* kiosk later that evening, the CPI(M) leaders, in an apparent show of solidarity, said "Babar and Akbar have done the correct thing, it is after all the duty of every leader to side with the weak against the strong. They have indeed learnt from us and imbibed our principles."¹³¹ Akbar thanked them for their "kind words." However, he begged to differ in terms of the lessons learned. "One of the lessons we learned from the CPI(M) was never to hold large-scale meetings unless absolutely necessary. They are a waste of time, only the wealthy or the party leaders turn up, and no business gets transacted. Especially when it comes to resolving specific disputes, these meetings achieve nothing. Do you think yesterday's dispute could have been resolved through meetings. It needs skilled negotiators."

CPI(M) leaders challenged this assertion: "It was *not* skilful arbitration that worked. You had no role to play, but just watch. You knew that if you took the side of the more powerful, the entire village would be against you." Joynal Ali pressed the point further: "It is not as if yesterday's discussions were done in secret. Everyone knew what was going on... it was a discussion that took place in public and which the public was witness to." Musa was even more blunt, "We all know what would have happened if your discussions were held privately. You would have thrashed them. Moreover, you knew that if you didn't hear them out, they always had *us* to turn to, and we would have made your life difficult."

Political elites found that, given the contentious nature of politics in the Ward within the overarching context of competitive electoral processes, it was impossible to

¹³¹ Hanging out, Rahimpur Ward, Nani's *chai* kiosk, February 14, 2010. All cited matter until the next footnote from this source.

impose an elite-based consensus, no matter how technically robust it was. It appears that “the moral passion of entitlement and outrage is on the side of those who have little.” (Chatterjee, 2008: 92). These passions are clearly on display in Rahimpur, as evidenced from the numerous contentions on the installation of electric poles. The assertions by those who perceive themselves and are perceived by others as powerless and subordinated do receive support from actors in political society, often against the exhortations of more powerful individuals. Chatterjee has worried that those without the “strategic leverage of electoral mobilisation” (Chatterjee, 2008: 61) lie beyond the pale of political society. Such people inhabit, according to John and Deshpande a “proto-political zone, where the struggles that secured the informal negotiations operative in political society are yet to begin or have not yet succeeded” (John and Deshpande, 2008: 86). From the discussions that we see around electrical poles in Rahimpur, it appears that someone as destitute as Daulat *bibi* has access to political society and articulates her angst without any hesitation. The exertions of actors in political society enable assertions of several individuals such as her to be publicised and taken seriously by political decision-makers.

At the same time, we do need to take seriously the inability of specific segments of the poor to access the resources accumulated in political society. The treatment to Intar Rahimpur hamlet, inhabited by the Shershabadiya caste, is a case in point. Fixers from this hamlet were unable to convince Babar or any other leader in the ward for the need to allocate even one electric pole to their hamlet. Sirajul Islam considered himself an important leader of the Intar Rahimpur hamlet. He was widely considered to be the architect of the Congress support from that ward. His feeble entreaties were met with taunts, such as the one levelled by Abdur Rehman, “Hey Badiya, what do you need electricity for? So, your cows can sleep under the fan?”

The caste factor overwhelmed Siraj and he could barely mumble a few pleas. Babar told him coldly, “If I can spare a couple, I can gift them to you. But I have to fulfil the needs here.” Siraj tried to score points by flattery, “You are our *raja*, if you don’t look after us, who will?” Nonetheless, Babar and his colleagues refused to countenance any electric poles for Siraj’s hamlet.

Sirajul Islam’s ineffectiveness in terms of securing electric poles for his hamlet is a stark reminder of how substantive freedoms continue to be constrained despite the exhortations made by local politicians. As a supplicant for services, Siraj could hardly make as forceful claims or hurl taunts the way in which inhabitants of the main village and Thakurpada and Dargahpada hamlets did. If capabilities are about substantive freedoms of people to assert their voice and the reconstitution of inequalitarian social relations, the fate of Siraj’s efforts and the manner in which he articulated his demands revealed the constrained nature of capabilities inhered in him and his Shershabadiya co-villagers. Clearly, the 30-household Shershabadiya hamlet lay outside the pale of political society to matter to any of the established political leaders. The inability of any leader from this group to mount a challenge to blatantly discriminatory allocation procedure and the unwillingness of any of Rahimpur’s ‘mainstream’ leaders to support their cause brings to our attention the analytical and empirical limitations of relying on the *autonomous* domain of political society to secure and sustain enhanced capabilities, a point to which our attention has been drawn, as we saw above, by Partha Chatterjee himself. As Drèze and Sen remind us, solidarity is no substitute for self-assertion, for those who seek solidarity need to depend on the good-will and motivation of those who would eventually offer it (Drèze and Sen, 2002). Actors in Rahimpur’s political society appear wont to extend support to those who begin to assert it by themselves, such as Daulat *bibi*, Sarfaraz Islam and

Murshid Hossain. Sirajul Islam is clearly not able or willing to speak up in the presence of Rahimpur's leaders, despite the fact that he is their childhood friend. The social distance between him as belonging to the Badiya caste and the others of the Sheikh caste appears to provide some clues to apparent diffidence with which Siraj broached on the subject of the electric poles- unsuccessfully- to his childhood friends¹³².

4. DISPUTE-RESOLUTION IN SARGANA

In Rahimpur, I noted that actors in political society were attempting to construct an informal consensus in favour of the poor. This consensus is far from perfect, as was observed in the way in which the Shershabadiya hamlet was excluded from the allocation of electric poles. However, it would be futile to deny that hitherto recognised privileges no longer commanded the respect of the population, nor could they structure a consensus. Similarly, in Sargana, actors in political society were willing and able to challenge the hitherto prevailing elite-favouring consensus. In the rest of this chapter, I will analyse the confrontation between two neighbours, one belonging to the ritually 'higher' Rajput caste and the other to ritually 'lower' Yadav caste. The dispute between the two was the focal point of the neighbourhood's social life during most of my stay in that locality. In the analysis that follows, I draw upon my hanging out and participant observations. In reconstructing the events of the past, I draw on interviews with neighbours and friends of both Narendra Yadav and Ram Singh and rely on their memory. The rhetoric of their claims is of interest, even if not

¹³² One obvious explanation could be personal characteristics, to examine whether Siraj did not speak up because he was naturally shy and unwilling to confront *anybody*, not just his social superiors. However, a trip with Siraj (Hanging out, Intar Rahimpur, February 21, 2010) around his hamlet revealed him to be anything but a shy or non-confrontational person.

always accurate. Where claims made by one or the other party were disputed by others, I have reported so in my account.

I am aware that my positionality in this case may be influenced by the fact that I lived in Narendra's residence, although I took care to maintain the distinction between 'participant-observation' and 'observer participation', except at the very end of my stay when I accompanied Narendra's well-wishers to make claims on his behalf. Despite making evident to my hosts my sympathies with them, with this exception, I steadfastly remained an observer, much to their irritation. Admittedly, I unmasked the façade of neutrality in my notes, due to which my account might appear at times to be biased in favour of Narendra Yadav. This in no way detracts from the validity of my claims, which is based on the analysis of dissenting subjectivities that were constructed as the contentions intensified.

Like disputes over agricultural land, disputes over homestead land are acrimonious and involve the interest of inhabitants from over a widespread region, not only because they invoke supra-local actors, but also because they break the peace of the locality. These disputes are often joined in by others in the locality, not so much in self-interest, but also to show solidarity. The dispute between Narendra and Gunavati Yadav and Lachman Singh was one such case that evoked a range of emotions from their neighbours, friends and inhabitants of the vicinity in general. On the face of it, the property involved was tiny. But it nearly plunged the village into a caste war, since both communities were evenly matched, and could easily mobilise support in the vicinity. The dispute was the talking point of the locality for many months, including at the *bazaar*, in social functions and among local politicians. The involvement of several mercurial leaders of the area added to the interest among locals.

4.1.A humble Yadav

In 1997, Narendra Yadav had purchased a modest plot of land measuring nine *dismil* (less than one-tenth of a hectare) from Saroj Srivastav, a scion of the jaded Kayasth landed gentry. Narendra Yadav's origins are extremely humble. According to both well-wishers and antagonists, his father was a sharecropper, attached to a Yadav farmer with many *bighas* of land in Ward 5. He moved here from Darbhanga after his wife was condemned as a witch by the Rajput landlords of their native village and burnt to death. Narendra grew up in the village, but is not 'of' it. Gunavati was orphaned at an early age, and was raised by a Kayasth family in the village. Gunavati and Narendra married in the early 1990s. They have one son and a daughter. Both are married. As is customary, the daughter lives with her husband at his home, and their son, Ranjit, and his wife live with them here in Sargana. Ranjit has a reputation for being a *budbak* (simpleton): he suffers from minor night-blindness. Elderly well-wishers of the family suspect his mental ability might have stunted on account of having been a malnourished child. Since 2002, Narendra had begun working in Punjab, first as an agricultural labourer and then as a mason to support the family. He would live and earn there for about seven months (usually May to December) and return during the local harvest so that he could earn some extra money while spending some time with his family. By all accounts, the family's economic and social position was now much improved compared to before Narendra had begun working in Punjab. Early in 2003, they purchased the property that is presently under dispute. His neighbour to the east is the college-educated Ram Singh, a fifty-year old agriculturist owning nearly a hundred acres of land. Lacchman Singh owns two tractors, one of which he rents to farmers owning small land-holdings. He has two children. His son

works with an IT firm in Delhi, while his unmarried daughter lives with him and his wife in their palatial mansion in Sargana. Narendra shares his western boundary with Pradeep Srivastav, owner of the local fair price shop. To the north of his plot lies a clump of bamboo woods, owned in part by Dharmesh Srivastav, owner of a photocopy shop, and the younger brother of the local chief of the Bharatiya Janata Party. An unpaved road connecting Sargana with the main business town called Raipur abuts his plot on the south. Although he purchased the plot at a throwaway price of less than ₹ 15,000/-, it is expected that its value will increase exponentially once the road connecting the two market towns of Sargana and Raipur is paved: this is widely expected to happen within a few years.

When Gunavati and Narendra had purchased the plot, recall friends like Amaresh Yadav and Rajendra Poddar, jealousy was rampant among the neighbours, most of who were *unchi jaati* (upper caste): the locality was inhabited mostly by Rajputs such as Ram Singh and by Kayasths such as Pradeep and Dharmesh Srivastav. Gunavati Yadav remembers being called *maatbars* (upstarts), and addressed as “people who had nothing to cover their bottom with, but aspiring to wear a turban on their heads”¹³³. It was not only their low ritual status that lay at the root of the discrimination. Unlike the other Yadav families in the village, they owned no land, nor did any family member enjoy a salaried job. In other words, it appears from their accounts and that of their friends, that their presence was an eyesore to their neighbours. By buying the property that they did, they had breached the citadel of the elite families of the ward and staged a presence in a locality where they were clearly unwelcome.

¹³³ Interview, Gunavati Yadav, April 1, 2010.

The source of the dispute between Narendra Yadav and Ram Singh lies in the former's accusation that Ram Singh encroached into and claimed nearly a tenth of his property. Ram Singh counters this charge accusing Narendra Yadav of illegally constructing on *his* territory. A review of the documents showed that Narendra did not indeed possess the legal evidence to claim that the entire plot was his. The copy of the 'partition suite',¹³⁴ available with him was a provisional one (*kachhi pratilipi*), unlike the formal copy (*pakki pratilipi*) of the same document which Ram Singh was able to produce as evidence. Nonetheless, it was widely believed that Ram Singh had forged these documents using his clout with the influential men of the locality. Several respondents, belonging to different socio-economic groups, testified to Ram Singh's appropriation of the law (*kanoon ke saath khilwaad ki*): not all of those who testified thus were Narendra's friends. Individuals like Chhedi Mehta and Sheikh Mobin, with whom he had a long-running dispute over the repayment of some loans, supported Narendra's claim that his land had been illegally encroached upon by his more powerful neighbour.

Interviews with different neighbours and with Narendra and his family seemed to point to the fact that the dispute began sometime in the summer of 2005. Taking advantage of his absence, Ram Singh surreptitiously shifted the bamboo fence on the boundary between the two plots by a few feet into Narendra's plot. The neighbour Malini Bhagat, a thirty-seven year-old uneducated agriculturist whose family owned less than one acre of arable land recalled how Gunavati raised a furore over Ram Singh's actions. Ram Singh and his family retaliated by heaping abuse on her. Ram Singh's wife and daughter in particular cursed her and raised doubts about her

¹³⁴ A legal document indicating the precise boundaries that a plot had, in relation to neighboring plots. Recall that all four plots belonged to Saroj Srivastav, who sold it at the same time to the four parties.

parentage. They made matters worse by commenting on Narendra's mother and how "she deserved the fate she met."¹³⁵ Gunavati's riposte to Ram Singh's wife was as acerbic as it was swift,

"Don't talk like that about a dead woman, and about my parents who are also dead. What about your character? Your daughter does not even look like she is her father's child. She looks more like your father's child."

Gunavati's repartee transformed her more than it did anyone else. Four years on, she recalled how she realised after she had made those utterances the full import of what she had said. "I wasn't thinking, I was just extremely angry," she told me, rage flashing across her face as she did. With that remark, indeed, Gunavati had established herself as an agonist. She paid no heed to reasonable discourse, and was not worried about possible repercussions. Much like the subjects of oppression referred to by Gail Omvedt in her work on Dalits in Bihar (Omvedt, 1993: 58-61), Gunavati reminisces thinking how she "asserted that she too was human, and unwilling to take nonsense lying down."¹³⁶ Her anger provided the first spark for the transformation in Gunavati.

4.2. Foes and friends

Gunavati's comment appeared to trigger a caste war. Stunned by her diatribe, Ram Singh gathered his co-caste men together and barged into their plot. Gunavati recalled, "They did not dare to touch me or anything else in their house. Those were Lalu Yadav's days. They knew that if they did anything to me, they would not be spared. My son ran to inform our friends at the Yadav *tolā*, and Amaresh in Ward 5. Within an hour, all the Yadavs in the neighbourhood turned up in their own and hired vans and bikes. Others came on foot, some on cycles. The Rajputs were very scared

¹³⁵ Interview, Gunavati Yadav, January 25, 2010. All cited material till next footnote from this source.

¹³⁶ Interview, Gunavati Yadav, January 21, 2010

(*mare dar ke mut rahi*). I hadn't realised I could assert myself so strongly..."¹³⁷ Sneha Bhagat, a neighbour, remembers, "... it was nice to see the look on the Rajput faces. They were terrified. Gunavati stood transformed- from the demure bride of many years ago to the goddess Chandi herself."¹³⁸

The timely intervention from the Sarpanch of the Panchayat, saved the village from a general conflict. As soon as he arrived on the scene, he advocated for a peaceful resolution of the argument. Amaresh, his deputy and Narendra's friend, recalled, "I told Sarpanch it would be cowardly. But he said it would be fitting. The snake scares its opponents because it hisses, not because it bites. What was the point of bloodshed? We had made the point- 'don't mess with a Yadav'. He said in a war, one must not only know when to advance. One must also know when to back off, even if winning. Sarpanch is a wise man."¹³⁹ Gunavati had the last word. She remembered telling her co-castemen: "They know not to mess with a Yadav woman now. If they had only argued with me, I would never have called you. I called you only when their hordes came. Now I don't want blood on my hands. I implore you. Listen to Sarpanch and go home."¹⁴⁰ The Yadavs dispersed, as did the Rajputs. Everyone was relieved that there was not going to be a riot. But the bickering between the neighbours would last too. Moreover, Ram Singh continued to claim the entire plot as his, and refused to push the bamboo fence back to its original position.

That Gunavati's 'effective freedom' in her attempt to stave off threats to her property was enhanced through this instance of confrontation can hardly be denied.

¹³⁷ Interview, Gunavati Yadav, January 23, 2010

¹³⁸ Hanging out, Gunavati Yadav's residence, January 25, 2010

¹³⁹ Interview, Amaresh Yadav, March 15, 2010

¹⁴⁰ Interview, Gunavati Yadav, January 23, 2010

Her actions (as well as those of her female antagonists) challenged gender-based stereotypes: she had communicated that she was no pushover, and could protect herself and her property on her own steam. She also reinforced the stereotype of the Yadav caste group which she was affiliated with. Some of these ‘performative’ stereotypes have been analysed in Michelutti (2008): these included muscular shows of strength and delivering on threats to mobilise support at short notice, and to physically engage in violence if even one member of the putative community was harmed. Gunavati had asserted her voice, defiantly challenging a male affiliated with a caste ‘higher’ than hers on a supposed *jati* hierarchy, and had done so, using imagery and metaphors that challenged established norms of what was considered decent public behaviour.

If *jati* boundaries appeared to harden following Gunavati’s comments, subsequent events revealed their fluidity. Narendra returned within a few days of being informed over the phone. The following account is based on my conversations with AmareshYadav, Dharmesh Srivastav and Narendra Yadav. AmareshYadav, Narendra’s long-term friend and well-wisher, consulted Dharmesh Srivastava on the legality of their case. There was an enduring friendship that spanned caste and class backgrounds (Amaresh was Yadav and Dharmesh a Kayasth). Upon reviewing the documents available with Narendra, Dharmesh advised caution in dealing with Ram Singh, since “the partition suit Narendra possessed was only provisional.”¹⁴¹ Amaresh and Dharmesh advised Narendra to approach the *amin*, the local official responsible for endorsing provisional documents to final ones. With that Narendra began making

¹⁴¹ Interview, Dharmesh Srivastav, March 19, 2010

several appeals to the *amin* to make the endorsements. The *amin*, Kevat¹⁴² by caste, but not known to be particularly caste-conscious in his dealings, said he would inspect the documents and supervise the measurement of the plot areas himself, but he needed a team of two privately-hired *amins* (preferably, representing each of the parties concerned) to be associated with him. Based on consultations with his two friends, he hired a fellow caste man to represent him. However, Ram Singh refused to hire one, with the result that Narendra and his friends grew ever more suspicious that he was out to scuttle the entire case even before it had started.

Dharmesh and Amaresh approached the Sarpanch, who had earlier distinguished himself by calling for restraint when the Yadavs had been baying for the Rajputs' blood. Would the Sarpanch talk with Amin sahib, and have the need for the second *amin* waived off? The Sarpanch initially hesitated, but relented when Dharmesh argued persistently on Narendra's behalf. According to Amaresh, Dharmesh said, "He is a poor man, but he is willing to pay for the second *amin*, if only he can be allowed to hire one. That Rajput is a petty man. He will do anything to make Narendra's life difficult. And if something is not done soon, he will take over Narendra's entire property. Think of the humiliation- a Rajput taking over a Yadav's land!"¹⁴³ Dharmesh appeared to have hit the nail on the head. This line of argument, Amaresh believes (and said as much in our conversations) persuaded the Sarpanch to approach the *amin* and request for the waiver. The Sarpanch met the *amin* and put forward Narendra's case. Reflecting on his approach during his interview with me, Amaresh admitted that, "It was not the best argument to make, and perhaps not fair

¹⁴² Classified as Most Backward Class in Bihar. This locality had been characterised by a history of Kevat-Yadav alliance against the Rajput landlords, but that history did not seem to influence the *amin* in either direction.

¹⁴³ Interview, AmareshYadav, March 20, 2010

because we reduced him to the role of a partisan. At the same time, it was the most *vajeb* [appropriate] thing to do. After all, it helped a poor man. If Narendra had not been Yadav, we would have used some other argument!”¹⁴⁴

Indeed, this episode should guard against essentialising caste identities. It underscores how individuals are constantly negotiating multiple identities, and it would be puerile to attribute an immutable status on any of them, or to expect to be able to predict on the basis of these putative identities their political solidarities. Not all Yadavs, certainly not the most influential ones, supported Narendra. Paltu Yadav supported Ram Singh and his Kayasth and Rajput friends. His wife manages the *anganwadi*, so he needs their support. The Yadav community chief (*modal*) favoured a compromise, effectively endorsing Ram Singh’s position. The most important Yadav politician of the locality, a member of the district Panchayat and close social and political connections with the State and national-level leadership of the RJD, continued to entertain Ram Singh: the slight to a Yadav woman by a Rajput man did not appear to serve as an irritant at all¹⁴⁵.

4.3.Deliberative failures

Dharmesh also sought to invoke popular pressure on Ram Singh so that he might be shamed into letting go of the land he occupied. Alongwith Amaresh, he organised a *panchayati*, a public deliberative assembly, to discuss the land-grab. He had hoped that by appealing to a sense of being “*nyaysangat*” (just), he could make Ram Singh back down from his position. In this he was unsuccessful. As was his usual demeanor, Dharmesh narrated the events of that day to me in great detail:

¹⁴⁴ Interview, Dharmesh Srivastav, March 23, 2010

¹⁴⁵ Lacchman Singh was a regular invite at poetry-reading sessions organised by this gentleman, a session which was restricted to individuals considered to be personally ‘close’ (*kareeb*) to the host.

“We started out in good faith, using a time-tested strategy to solve our problems- the panchayati. But from the start, the Kayasth and Yadav landlords and the Rajputs had teamed up. They started saying that since Narendra’s papers were not in order, he had a weak case any way, and he would lose if he went to the court. Most of the others, the Brahmans, landless Yadavs, Kayasths like me (shopkeepers), Musahars and Muslims said that was morally and legally wrong. Narendra was a poor man. He did not know the legal requirements. He was happy holding on to his land. What did he know of a scrap of paper? The Rajputs were trying to make it a legal issue alone. They were the ones who did the robbery. Now, they were trying to justify it. Ek toh chori, upar se seena jodi!

“Raju (a garment- retailer and lower OBC) and GayKulanand (an agriculturalist and Yadav modal) suggested a compromise. But, there can never be a compromise. We were not there for a samjhota (compromise), we were there for a faisla (decision). Compromise was unacceptable, a Yadav does not let go even an inch of his land, even if he has to pay for it with his life. Of course, they (meaning Ram Singh’s supporters) cheered these two idiots. We walked out of the meeting.”¹⁴⁶

Dharmesh’s efforts to convene a deliberative assembly were aimed at building a consensus among the villagers in favour of Narendra. In this respect, he had hoped that the *panchayati* would enable him to secure universal support for Narendra and shame Ram Singh into acknowledging his error and restore the status quo. In doing so, they blurred the putative distinction drawn between property and community by Partha Chatterjee (Chatterjee, 2004): they sought to legitimate individual property rights through community deliberations. Dharmesh and his friends adhered to the four principles of deliberative activism outlined by Fung (Fung, 2005: 402-3). From their accounts, it appears they reposed great faith in the consultative features of the *panchayati*, given that this institution had contributed to resolving disputes in the past. They were clearly not revolutionaries and hoped to secure justice from the *panchayati*, rather than through violence. They were willing to engage with their interlocutors in good faith, and refrained from using other methods such as currying favour, or trying to drum up support before the meeting began¹⁴⁷. Nonetheless, given the cold reception to their overtures, they were compelled to take up more contentious

¹⁴⁶ This description as well as the entire section is based on conversations with Dharmesh Srivastav (Hanging out, Dharmesh Srivastav’s residence, January 14, 2010; January 17, 2010; Hanging out, Narendra Yadav’s residence, January 27, 2010, March 20, 2010; Hanging out, Sargana Ward 1-West-Musahar tola machan, March 21, 2010)

¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, post the failure of the deliberative exercise, it appears that they did not intend to use any methods that might be considered disproportionately harmful to their antagonists.

methods, including the aid of the law. The failure of the deliberative mechanism represented, as a reading of property relations and institutional authority would suggest (Sikor and Lund, 2009) a loss for the legitimating authority of the *panchayati* as well. For, with its failure, Narendra decided to take recourse to the legal bureaucracy, thereby signaling his disagreement with their judgment and indicating the rupture in intersubjective meanings attributed to the forum of the *panchayati*.

The Sarpanch had introduced the chief *amin* to Narendra. From April 2007 till December 2009, the chief *amin* made what were evidently empty assurances to Narendra. For nearly two and a half years, he gave an appointment eighteen times, but did not keep it. This only increased the financial pressure on Narendra, who was unable to time his trips to Punjab properly, thereby impacting his livelihoods adversely. Finally, when the *amin* arrived in March 2010, it made news. I was fortunate, as I had been in Rahimpur, that these events materialised before me. Nearly fifty people descended that morning on Narendra's plot, to "see" what course the events took. Amareshand Dharmesh stood by Narendra's side as he explained the contents of the papers. While Narendra was describing the contents of the documents, the duo presented the strength of his case by articulating the contents with decisions and signatures of the *amin*'s predecessor. "The measurements are as they appear in the document, and as Narendra tells you. They would not have appeared out of nowhere."¹⁴⁸ The *amin* then went to Ram Singh's house. Dharmesh insisted on accompanying him, "just to enquire about his well-being."¹⁴⁹ The *amin* inspected the documents in his possession also, which contradicted Narendra's position and

¹⁴⁸ Hanging out observations, Narendra Yadav's residence, March 17, 2010

¹⁴⁹ Hanging out observations, Sargana-Raipur (East) unpaved road, March 17, 2010

strengthened his own. But the *amin* appeared convinced that new measurements were needed to corroborate the formal measurements shown on paper.

According to an onlooker, Madho Bhagat, an uneducated landless labourer and a neighbour, after the *amin* came out of Ram Singh's house to coordinate the measurements, the latter begged Dharmesh to "save me. I'll give you whatever you want. Dharmesh's response showed what a man should be like. He told Ram Singh bluntly that he could do nothing, that he was only interested to see that the *vajeb faisla* is taken, and that no man should be troubled simply because he is poor. He said- no one is depriving you...You should not have claimed what was not yours. Ram Singh tried again, but Dharmesh was getting angry- he told the Rajput he should be grateful for still being alive and have his wife and daughter alive too."¹⁵⁰

Narendra's worries were not about to be resolved. The *amin* refused to finalise the measurement that day. Despite numerous requests to do so, he asked for another day, assuring Narendra that he would come back the following day. However, that was not to be. Gunavati heard from a basket vendor living in the Dom *tola*, where one of the inhabitants worked as a sweeper at the Block Office that Kartik Singh and Shaligram Singh tried to coax the *amin* not to get involved. Narendra, who had planned his travel for the following day, now had to postpone his plans by at least a month: "It means a loss of ` 3000 for me, which is what I would have earned if I had been able to leave as scheduled." Narendra went to enquire every alternate day, but the *amin* offered some excuse or the other not to come. Over the next few weeks, the story circulated that Kartik Singh had bribed him in a bid to save his son-in-law.

After waiting nearly a month, Dharmesh, Amaresh, and Narendra, trooped down together to the Block office to meet the Circle Officer, who the *amin* reported

¹⁵⁰ Hanging out observations, Sargana-Raipur (East) unpaved road, March 17, 2010.

to. I accompanied them. Dharmesh congratulated him and emphasised that, like him (the CO), he too was Kayasth. He complained about the *amin*'s lackadaisical approach and how they were impacting Narendra and his family's entire livelihood. The CO said he had little effective control over the *amin*, as he had a mind of his own, but that he would nevertheless speak with him. On their way out, these three men happened to meet the *amin*, and began to address¹⁵¹ him thus.

Amaresh: Whats going on? We demand to know. Why is a task which should not take more than ten minutes taking more than three years?

Another well-wisher of Narendra's: Narendra is a poor man. Why are you deliberately making life difficult for him? If he just hangs around here, waiting for you to take the measurements, he will starve.

Dharmesh (continuing his confrontationist tone): What exactly do you want, man? Why don't you name your price, if you want a bribe, and we'll pay it?

Amin (looked at Narendra threateningly): How dare you people talk to me like that? Am I not trying to help you? If you persist this way, I will not do anything.

The *amin* appeared to be trying to play on Narendra's fears, hoping that he would ask Dharmesh and the others to back off. Narendra didn't. In fact, for the first time in their interaction, he engaged in an uncharacteristically contentious conversation with the *amin*: "I have nothing to lose anyway. If I kill you, they'll throw me in jail at the most-I won't get to earn. In any case, I am unable to earn." Dharmesh continued, "Look, here is a poor man, all he wants is for you as a representative of the state to endorse the boundaries of his plot. He wouldn't have come to you had it not been for the fact that Ram Singh is encroaching into his property. Why are you harassing him? Should he have carried a gun with him, and only then would you have listened to him? Don't make a Naxalite out of him."

The inter-subjectivity of the term 'Naxalite' traces its roots to the Naxalite movements in the vicinity to which I drew attention in Chapter 2. The use of the term forces a rupture not only in the specific administrative implementation of policies,

¹⁵¹ Hanging out, Sargana BDO Office Lawns, April 16, 2010. The rest of the account is based on the same source.

rather in the *principle* of governance itself. Used by the police, it refers to activities deemed to infringe upon law and order. In the manner in which Dharmesh used it, this meaning appears to imbibe this usage even by those who may not see (and Dharmesh certainly did not) see themselves as insurgents or revolutionaries. When I asked Dharmesh whether he was turning into one, Narendra, who was walking with us, suggested that his use of the term was a metaphor to convey “that we too are human beings and need to be treated as such.” The figure of the ‘Naxalite’ is often associated with the destruction of an inequalitarian moral order: in journalist Arun Sinha’s words, “the new man who arose from the flames [of Naxalism] was neither a Harijan nor a Koeri, but a man.” (Sinha, 1977).

Although its specific uses differ, the meaning conveyed is one of lawlessness, anarchy and violation of established legal and social order. In the manner in which Dharmesh Srivastav used it, its use has evidently percolated to use even by those who may not see (and Dharmesh certainly did not) see themselves as insurgents or revolutionaries. When I jocularly asked Dharmesh whether he was turning into one, Narendra, who was walking with us, suggested that his use of the term was an effective metaphor to convey a situation where “the law and justice were not talking to one another, which leads men and women to take to the guns. If the state’s functionaries merely implement the law without paying heed to justice, they are inviting people to become Naxalite- to take to the gun, not to establish its rule but the rule of justice.” It was Amaresh’s turn to calm the frayed tempers. He took the *amin* aside and requested him to consider them as his own sons, and not to take offence. The *amin* assured him that he would resolve the matter as soon as he could. Indeed, the very next day, he formally completed the measurement, nearly three years after Narendra first approached him. To give him credit, he did not take a single rupee as

bribe. Whether it was the influence wielded by actors in Sargana Ward 1's political society (men like Dharmesh Srivastav and Amaresh Yadav), or the fear invoked by the use of the term Naxalite, or a sense of duty or pity remains a speculation. But at least one part of Narendra's and Gunavati's efforts at recognising and enforcing their prior assumption of equality were realised through their struggle to get their land deed formalised.

5. AGONISTIC EXCHANGES

In an insightful paper defending the deliberative conception of democracy, Joshua Cohen argues that the criticisms of deliberative democracy on the grounds of its impossibility in conditions of background inequality are in fact criticism of its *application in specific situations* and not a criticism of the model as such. He also frees the deliberative account from the mandate to generate a rational consensus. Rather, he suggests, deliberations are valuable because of the opportunities they provide for deliberators to express their views and opinions, with a view to convince others of the reasonableness of their propositions (Cohen, 1997a: 75), as well as to amend their own proposals in recognition of the reasonableness of others' claims. The focus of deliberation, thus, is to ensure that "political decisions are decided according to the exchange of reasons and arguments (broadly conceived and defined) that appeal to shared objectives... or values" (Fung, 2005: 401). In making these concessions, Cohen supports the 'communicative rationality' framework enunciated by Habermas, who advocates the establishment of the ideal procedures to secure rational forms of argumentation (Habermas, 1996: 24). It might be suggested that the quasi-formal dispute-resolution processes recounted above provide some, admittedly imperfect,

procedural basis for what Habermas has called the “input of a rational political will-formation” (Habermas, 1996: 27).

Theorists of deliberative democracy have grappled with this problem for long, with different observations about what might be done: Cohen argues that the process of deliberation may in fact be a trigger to reduce some of those background inequalities (Cohen, 2003: 245). The problem of actually-existing background inequalities inhibits reason-giving and justification. Both authors have hoped that, conceptualised such, deliberative practices will transform the background inequalities and contribute to the achievement of a more egalitarian society. It is possible, as Cohen reminds us (Cohen, 1997a: 75) that consensus eludes deliberators, in which they resort to more conventional ways of aggregating preferences, but this does not undermine the value of reason-giving and justification in the decision-making process. Furthermore, deliberation need not be guided by a substantive idea of the good life (Cohen, 1997a: 81).

Fung goes even further by conceding that “deliberation is not a tenable goal” where powerful actors are actively hostile to deliberators (Fung, 2005: 404). If these responses were any indication of preferences, clearly, neither the wealthier nor the poorer inhabitants of the localities were ‘spoiling for a fight’ as it were. So, while individuals and households did possess self-serving as well as other-regarding preferences, they were willing to amend or change these preferences in the light of newer or richer information. However, their intent to deliberate was not always matched by the intents of decision-makers, powerful politicians and other leaders, making what Fung calls ‘deliberative failure’ (Fung, 2005) inevitable.

As we have seen, this deliberative ideal is called into question by proponents of agonistic democracy such as Chantal Mouffe. Mouffe’s account of democratic

politics is realistic. She avers that democratic politics should not aim to *overcome* differences, since hoping for that is chimerical. Rather, the challenge for democratic politics is to reconstitute difference in such a way as to make the extant relations of domination and subordination more equitable. Relations of power cannot be eliminated, Mouffe concedes, but they can be reconfigured so that they can be made compatible with democratic values. In her words,

For democracy to exist, no social agent should be able to claim any mastery of the foundation of society. This signifies that the relation between the social agents becomes more democratic only insofar as they accept the particularity and the limitation of their claims; that is only insofar as they recognise their mutual relations as one from which power is ineradicable. The democratic society cannot be conceived any more as a society that would have realised the dream of a perfect harmony in social relations. Its democratic character can be given only by the fact that no limited social actor can attribute to herself the representation of the totality. (Mouffe,1996: 247-8).

6. RUPTURES IN THE LOGIC OF RULE: SOME REFLECTIONS

Rancière describes democracy as a situation when the logic of *arche* (rule) is ruptured. This logic could be based on birth, property or charisma. In Rahimpur, the series of protestations that Babar was faced with reveal the extent to which his interlocutors felt they should be consulted on the specific locations of the electric poles. They felt he, and by extension the state, were encroaching into a domain it should seek their consultation on before extending its presence into. In Sargana Ward 1, Gunavati and Narendra Yadav not only resented the way in which Ram Singh sought to encroach onto their property, but also the manner in which the *panchayati* supported the latter on the basis of him wielding more power, authority and influence. The disputes were surely over resolutions over specific problems. But the problem itself appears to have been anchored in an exclusivist principle of governance and decision-making, from which poorer individuals and groups felt marginalised. The resultant disputes appear to be as much about resisting the influence of those with more power as it is about subjects seeking to author their own futures.

From the accounts, it appears that agonistic communication provided the framework within which the disputes were articulated and sought to be resolved by those perceived to be less powerful. The disputants based their claims on passionate appeals, which were not always well-reasoned or well-thought out. Nonetheless, they did derive from inter-subjective meanings attributed to poverty, powerlessness and a sense of what was considered to be just. A variety of emotions were articulated, with the intention to draw attention to specific problems, but also raising questions about the very principle on which decisions perceived to be unjust were being taken.

The ‘performativity’ of these expressions is unmistakable. On the one hand, those who consider themselves poor deploy the stereotypes associated with them, as for example, Gunavati did when she referred to herself as a “Yadav woman”. In Rahimpur, the assertions by Murshid Hossein and Sarfaraz Islam possessed a similar quality- they each referred to themselves as ‘poor’, but went on to make that the basis of eliciting support. It would be a mistake to think that they were only eliciting sympathy. Rather, what emerged clearly was an exhortation towards recognising the innate ways in which they had been ‘wronged’ and a demand on social elites to right that wrong. Through such conversations the ‘underdog’ among these participants expressed rudeness, insolence and open defiance of the putative superiority of the more powerful party. The use of terms and phrases intended to shame, taunt and threaten were indicative of the more ‘surprising’ elements in the repertoires at the disposal of the poor.

Perhaps the most important conclusion to draw from the cases has been the ways in which the subjects of politics in the localities have expressed dissent with the logic of governance in these localities. In Rahimpur, the disagreement registered by the population with the Ward Member’s “dreams” was not so much a disagreement

with Babar's policies (the villagers were emphatic that they wanted the electrification of the locality) as with the way in which he intended to realise these. The populace resented his unilateral ways. They were emphatic about the primacy of *their* preferences over purely technical considerations. And when it came to specific disputes, the leaders themselves supported those with less *khomota* over those with more.

A more fundamental reconfiguration of the subject position was apparent in the case I described from Sargana Ward 1. Here, the transformation in Gunavati Yadav has already been recounted. Clearly, the contentious conversations that she engaged in with her neighbours had a 'performative' role as well. Not only was the compact between social power and legal power ruptured, the transformation in all the disputants was significant to note as well. Given the activism of Narendra and his friends, Ram Singh was unable to translate his social clout into wilful manipulation of the legal system. Narendra not only refused to compromise, but along with his friends, he successfully interrogated the presumption of rule that his adversary had assumed.

In this chapter, I have drawn attention to the different ways in which disputants in the two localities asserted their claims, and mediated with local structures of power and authority. I highlighted the pre-eminent role of actors in political society in enabling these claims to be formulated, and eventually succeed in serving the interests of the 'underdog'. In Rahimpur, this came up at different points in time during the negotiations over the installation of electric poles. In Sargana Ward 1, this was the leitmotif of the single case that I highlighted. In both localities, I noted the agonistic ways in which different people who felt aggrieved asserted their voices. Not all were successful, and some- like Narendra- only after a prolonged and

protracted struggle. Nonetheless, the use of such ‘agonistic’ modes of communication does provide the opportunity to pursue courses of action they value and, arguably have reason to value. In Rahimpur, Babar and his colleagues frequently appealed to villagers to be reasonable and think in terms of what he called the ‘common good’. In Sargana Ward 1, the antagonists sought to resolve their differences through extant deliberative templates. Both attempts failed, compelling us to revisit Amartya Sen’s arguments in favour of deliberative modes of reasoning being required to augment capabilities.

We have traced the ways in which agonistic modes of communication contribute to the augmentation of capabilities. If capabilities are about interrogating social relations based on domination and subordination, then agonistic exchanges are key to enhancing them. As we have seen, agonistic exchanges are characterised by the emotional and passionate conduct of politics. These consist of making frequent appeals to elicit the sympathy of social elites and superiors, although not thereby compromising on the prior assumption of equality by those making such claims. Sarfaraz Islam and Narendra Yadav both made such appeals for sympathy to actors in political society, but they do not, for that reason, believe they are in any way of lesser moral worth than those they seek to make claims on or against. Understood as interrogation of relations based on subordination and domination then, capabilities are clearly enhanced through agonistic exchanges. The manner in which Sarfaraz Islam, Daulat bibi and Gunavati Yadav engage in such exchanges and succeed, eventually, in having their claims met, appears to support this contention.

But the above discussion compels me to take the argument a step further. Even if the agonistic exchanges had not directly led to the resolution of the disputes in their favor, the ability to engage in such itself should be understood as a measure of

enhanced capabilities. Such engagements reflect ways of stating claims in ways that are clearly unwelcome by social elites. Babar's repeated attempts to 'isolate' demands advanced by groups of claimants, and the *amin*'s irritation, and subsequent anger, with the way in which Narendra staged his demands indicate how unwelcome these engagements were. Nonetheless, different individuals and groups of individuals, often with the support of actors in political society, persistently made such claims. Contrast this with the claims staged by Sirajul Islam, who also appeals for sympathy, but appears to have imbibed his putative 'lowliness' to such an extent that he is unable to converse on equal political terms with his own childhood friends. His demands remain couched as requests made to a social superior, recalling the imagery of typical patron-client relationships. There are flashes of that in Narendra's appeals to AmareshYadav as well, but Narendra clearly comes into his own, and provokes the *amin* to give him a ear. The ability to engage in agonistic exchanges, particularly when confronted with unequal social relations predicated on domination and subordination, clearly constitutes enhanced capabilities.

Does this holds true even if the agonistic exchanges in question were not to result in a resolution of disputes favourable to agonists. Indeed, it remains crucial to examine the act of agonistic exchange from its effects. One of the limitations of the cases described above is precisely that the agonistic exchanges resulted in favourable decisions. That need not always be so, and I would argue that the ability to enter into these exchanges itself indicates the deepening of substantive opportunities. In this vein, it is pertinent to ask how we might characterise Sirajul Islam's capabilities were his pleas for electric poles to have been granted. The results would have been beneficial for him and members of his hamlet, but could we say that his/ their capabilities, in the sense we have discussed above, would be enhanced? I am inclined

to answer in the negative, and will return to this discussion in the conclusion. For now, let us investigate in-depth a case from Sargana Ward 1, where the ‘results’ are yet indeterminate.

CHAPTER 6

DISIDENTIFICATIONS AND CAPABILITIES

1. INTRODUCTION

I have thus far argued that a focus on capabilities needs to consider seriously the relational dimension of human life. In particular, I drew attention to how capabilities are enhanced when those who perceive themselves to inhabit subordinate positions assert their voice to interrogate and challenge relations of domination. I specified that such subjects' capabilities are enhanced through agonistic exchanges in the public spaces. In this chapter, I build on these insights further to examine how the construction of political identities augments capabilities. Furthermore, I argue that the opportunity to construct dissenting political identities could be considered a measure of enhanced capabilities.

The focus on identities in this chapter is intended to speak to a major gap in the existing literature that I pointed to in Chapter 1. This gap arises out of the manner in which politics has been analytically treated by scholars of the Capability Approach: either little attention has been paid to it, or it has been viewed from a formal-institutional lens alone. I contend that any discussion on advancing capabilities and securing freedoms has to take cognisance of the struggles through which subjects are forged, and related political identities are constructed. These political identities may draw on pre-existing group or community affiliations, but are, side by side, also being negotiated and sometimes repudiated. The forging of these identities do not always lead to improvements in material well-being, as the cases discussed in this chapter will illustrate. As I will argue, the opportunity to forge dissenting political subjectivities that interrogate relations of domination and subordination in themselves

should be viewed as strengthening capabilities. To me, therefore, my specific analytical interests pointed examining ongoing contentions in Bihar's Sargana Ward 1, and the neighbouring localities Sargana Ward 4 and Sargana Ward 5. In so doing, I will engage with the manner in which political subjectivities are built around the template provided by existing caste identities.

2. CASTING CASTE

Recent debates on caste (for example, in Fuller, 1996; Rao, 2008) have explored the extent to which it might be possible to speak of 'caste identities', more appropriately called *jatis* (the specific social entities that provides the basis on which the caste 'system' is constructed). The widespread intellectual disaffection with a Dumontian¹⁵² notion of caste has contributed to these discussions (See Beteille, 1991, for a searing critique). The earliest criticisms accepted Dumont's conception that each *jati* could be identified by 'specific coded substances', but emphasised the fact that no *jati* accepted the position designated to them in the caste system as such: in this reading, 'caste' groups are similar to status groups that assume ethnic-like features due to restrictions on commensality and connubiality (Berreman, 1975). *Jatis* were, thus, inherently competitive, but had been forced into relations of domination and servitude vis-à-vis one another to meet the requirements of a feudal economy (Deliege, 1994). Although there remains a dispute as to whether the modernisation of the Indian economy has dented those relations or strengthened them, the fact that electoral politics and democratic institutions and practices more generally have unleashed the competitive genie out of the caste bottle is widely acknowledged

¹⁵² Drawing on Louis Dumont (1966), who famously argued that Indian society was quintessentially a hierarchical one, bound by rules of pollution and purity that was internalised by everyone in the system. This hierarchy provided the foundation for understanding Indian society.

(Gupta, 2005; Weiner, 2002). As has been aptly summarised by Fuller, “castes are being historically constructed, or perhaps more aptly being ‘deconstructed’, as a vertically integrated hierarchy decays into a horizontally disconnected ethnic array” (Fuller, 1996: 26). It could be justifiably argued that caste groups have always comprised such horizontally disconnected ethnic arrays, but that members of the so-called ‘lower’ castes were prevented from asserting their prior claims of equality through the use of coercion.

Two conceptual clarifications may be made at this stage. One, accepting that different *jatis* may draw on distinct cultural substances, contributing to castes appearing ethnic-like, should not be confused with a communitarian interpretation of caste. Although in the accounts I present below, I often refer to different caste groups as communities, I do that more in recognition of the perception among my interlocutors that they do not consider themselves to be members of a stratified society into which the *jatis* they are born into are force-fitted. As I will show, members of these caste groups share values and partake of inter-subjective meanings, but these values and meanings can hardly be said to *define* them. Thus, although caste groups such as the Musahars are forcefully asserting aspects of a culture that is associated with them, this ‘culture’ is not immutable (following Sen’s notes of caution in his work on culture- Sen, 2004- and identity -Sen, 2006).

The second clarification I would like to make is that acknowledging the ritual, social and electoral competitiveness, and hence equality, of different *jatis* should not detract attention from the economic and social deprivation that so-called ‘backward’ and ‘untouchable’ caste groups continue to suffer from. Analysis of official data indicate the prevalence of abysmally poor social, economic and human development indicators, especially among the ‘untouchables’, now officially categorised Scheduled

Caste (Desai and Dube, 2011; Gaiha et al, 2007; Yalonetzky, 2010). That such inequalities despite the formal abolition of untouchability and a transforming material culture indicates the persistence of what have been called ‘horizontal inequalities’ (Stewart, 2005).

Although categorised as Scheduled Caste in the official terminology, several political and social leaders of the country prefer to use the term ‘dalit’ to describe the social and economic oppression endured by the so-called ‘untouchables’. The term was politically deployed by civil rights leader BR Ambedkar, whose story we encountered in Chapter 1, to describe the “exploitation, suppression and marginalisation” of the caste system, which crushed the ‘untouchables’ under its weight (Guru and Chakrabarty, 2005: 69-70). Recent attention has focused on internal disparities of access within the Scheduled Castes, with State Governments such as the one in Bihar exploring special economic, developmental and educational schemes for groups categorised as ‘Mahadalit’ (literally the ‘dalitest among the dalits’)¹⁵³. The Musahar community, members of which we have met through the previous chapters in this thesis, is one such. Inhabiting large swathes of eastern Uttar Pradesh and northern Bihar, they have often been referred to as “Dalits among Dalits” (*daliton mein dalit*). It has been suggested (Narayan, 2009; Joshi and Kumar, 2010; Kumar, 2006; and Mukul, 1999) that they are indeed at the bottom of the social heap in Bihar. Indeed, the term ‘Musahar’ is said to have derived from their diet (*aahaar* in Sanskrit), which was supposed to be chiefly comprised of rats (*musa* in Sanskrit), testifying to their poverty as well as to their ‘impure’ ritual status. An amended interpretation of their caste name is that they were so poor that they were compelled

¹⁵³ The Bihar Mahadalit Vikas Mission (<http://www.Mahadalitmission.org/BMVVM-Introduction.php>) was instituted by the State Government in 2007 with this mandate.

to dig into the burrows of rodents to scavenge on grains and other foodstuff that may have been stored therein.

TABLE 8: COMPARATIVE OCCUPATIONAL DATA FOR SOCIAL GROUPS IN BIHAR, 2001

Attribute	<i>Scheduled Caste</i>	<i>Musahar</i>
MAIN WORKERS¹⁵⁴		
Main workers as% total workers	71	72
Cultivators as % of main workers	8.73	2.82
Agricultural labour as% of main workers	75.37	92.92
Women as % of agricultural labour	29.03	34.3
MARGINAL WORKERS¹⁵⁵		
Marginal workers as % of total workers	29	28
Cultivators as % of marginal workers	6.01	2.39
Agricultural labour as % of main workers	83.08	91.4
Women as % of agricultural labour	60	65
Source: Government of India, Bihar Primary Census Abstract, Table A-10, accessed from http://censusindia.gov.in/Tables_Published?SCST/SCCRC_10.pdf		

3. METHODOLOGY

I will primarily use the case study method to illustrate my specific arguments in this paper. The material is based on qualitative analysis of ethnographic data that I gathered from the aforementioned localities in Sargana Gram Panchayat. Laclau

¹⁵⁴ Per the Indian Government's definition, main workers refer to those workers who worked for the major part of the reference period (i.e. six months or more)

¹⁵⁵ Per the Indian Government's definition, main workers refer to those workers who HAD NOT worked for the major part of the reference period (i.e. who worked for less than six months)

(2005) makes the case that the minimal unit of social analysis is the category of the 'demand'. The processes through which demands are articulated or presented to those exercising authority or wielding influence constitutes the identity of the claimants (as well as those on whom the claims are made). Following this insight, I elaborate on a major dispute that attracted much attention throughout the Panchayat, especially the localities concerned, a dispute that involved the encroachment on public land by a group of homeless households, all of the Musahar caste. This dispute is rather typical (Yugandhar and Iyer, 1993), and I focus on it because of the manner in which multiple local actors as well as social groups were involved. Furthermore, it has yet to be formally resolved, so I can effectively isolate the process from the effect, which was difficult to do with the previous cases. This single dispute also enmeshed with two other local disputes, in a manner that provided the opportunity for the forging of alliances across different social groups, even as it threatened to disrupt putative *jati*-based solidarities. The focus in this chapter will be to examine how these disputes were interpreted by those involved, what meanings were attached to them, and how these emerged as platforms to make further claims.

Crudely put, each of the disputes pit one social group, usually comprising members of socially subordinate *jatis* against a legitimate and powerful local institution. The overarching dispute resulted in Sargana's Village Education Committee trying to evict 95 Musahar households from their allegedly illegal occupation of the Secondary School. These Musahar families found close and willing allies in 31 Santhal families, all of who had been sharecroppers for an influential Kayasth *jamindar*, Kulanand Prasad. These families were accused by the *jamindar* of illegally cultivating 90 acres of his agricultural land. These families in turn provided moral and logistical support to the third on-going dispute in the area between the

Rajput trustees of the local temple and their one-time tenants who disputed their control of the temple and its resources.

The accounts I develop in this chapter are based on the oral narratives of the disputes. Given my interest in the manner in which identities are constructed, I find that the distinction between true and false, as between hearsay and historic fact, is neither necessary nor useful. A form of truth may be the appreciation of evidence in contemporary terms, evidence that contemporaries hear as reasonable and reliable may be taken as locally true. Indeed, “(i)f we treat all versions of false stories as if they were true, we get a glimpse into the world our informants described to us” (White, 2001: 295). In some ways, these accounts may reflect a science of crisis since they legitimate one version of the moral dilemma (Hacking, 1995). I have also benefitted from Alexander and McGregor’s (2004) work on ethnicity, violence and household-level allocations during war.

In discussing these contentions, I make frequent use of ‘caste’ names of the disputants. This is not to suggest that I (or my interlocutors) endorse the stance that these individuals possessed only one identity. On the contrary, this is to draw attention to the contingent manner in which they and their antagonists fore-grounded their ‘jati’ identity in order to stake and resist their demands. Given these contingencies, I find it useful to speak of “invocations” of caste, following Searle-Chatterjee and Sharma (2004: 8). One can speak of castes not only as something that ‘exists’, but which is ‘performed’ (Rao, 2008). Different caste groups do not simply exist, their members perform different social and political roles that insert these identities into the public domain. This line may be further pursued by speaking of caste as being ‘something that is done to you’ (Shukra, 1994). As Sen reminds us, Dalit landless labourers in Bihar, when faced with a lynch mob comprising ‘high-

caste' landlords are rarely likely to have much of a say in clarifying who they are (Sen, 2006: 31). And indeed, it is this oppression that indeed *produces* the Dalit (literally 'broken people'), who are defined as being outside the pale of 'clean-caste' society (see contributions in Zelliott, 2001). By referring 'invocations', I hope to be able to incorporate both performative and linguistic connotations of caste.

4. REDISTRIBUTION OR RECOGNITION?

The widespread prevalence of economic inequities and its obvious concentration among specific caste groups compels political parties such as the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), or CPI(ML) to recognise that "eliminating caste is one of the major questions of New Democratic Revolution because the process of elimination of caste facilitates class formation, accentuates class polarisation and makes class struggle more open, broad and direct, and brings out the (sic) class in a purer form" (CPI-ML, 2001). In 1997, the CPI(ML) welcomed what it called "the heightened consciousness of the broad Dalit masses" (Mishra, 1999: 193) and included within its rubric the struggle for social dignity and political emancipation. This was in sharp contrast with its conventional view that assumed a relative silence around issues of caste, presuming its automatic disappearance with the advent of a classless society (Jaoul, 2009). Thus, although its political work is addressed to its constituency of agricultural labourers, it recognises that Dalits comprise the bulk of these.

TABLE 9: ATTRIBUTES OF DEPRIVATION AMONG MARGINALISED SOCIAL GROUPS IN STUDY LOCATIONS, 2009

Attributes	<i>Sargana Ward 1</i>	<i>Sargana Ward 4</i>	<i>Sargana Ward 5</i>
LANDLESSNESS			
Total Population	69.7	90.59	85.15
Musahar	91.89	97.39	98.95
Kevat	100	100	100
Santhal	-	70.97	-
ANY MEMBER OF HOUSEHOLD > 30 YEARS OLD NEVER BEEN TO SCHOOL			
Total Population	52.72	74.75	71.78
Musahar	64.86	75.81	83.42
Kevat	60	100	64.58
Santhal	-	74.19	64.58
<i>Source: Own census data</i>			

The party began its activities in this region during the mid-1980s as the Indian People's Front. With the elections of 1989, the party shed its underground character and assumed its present incarnation, with the explicit goal of militant parliamentary communism, backed up by popular mobilisation. Among the more important 'land occupation' movements the party organised in Sargana was that of the property of the most influential landlord in the Panchayat, Jagdish Singh. Owner of many thousands of acres of land, he represented the classic case of concentration of social, economic and political power at the local level. Rajput by caste, he was 'elected' Mukhya three times, and held the position for nearly four decades till his death in 1990. The CPI(ML), under its charismatic leader Deokinandan Chauhan, a Rajput himself, organised its cadre of activists to 'squat' on his property, occupy it and harvest the crop. Before making the final move, they sent an ultimatum to the Jagdish *babu*, which was rejected. Anticipating trouble, Jagdish babu called the police, which

arrived promptly and fired into the motley crowd which had gathered for the occupation.

What followed was mayhem. Savri Rishi, landless, illiterate, one of Deokinandan *babu*'s lieutenants and presently fifty-five years old, recalls, "Once police firing started, we realised it was a 'do or die' situation. We knew that if we retreated, they would not only pursue and kill us, but wipe our *bustees*, ravage our women, and put our children to the sword. With nothing more than sticks and stones, we fell upon the police. The Santhals were better prepared. Armed with bows and arrows dipped in poison. Their presence tipped the scales in our favour. Seeing them, Jagdish *babu*'s Santhal *pehredaars* defected to our side. The policemen fled....Jagdish *babu*'s son was killed. That was sad, he was a good man. But it was war."¹⁵⁶ Jagdish *babu* sued for peace. 1400 acres of Jagdish Singh's property was occupied and redistributed among 200 households that included Yadavs, Santhals, Musahars and Kevats. The events of that day, over 15 years ago, appear to be vividly etched on the minds of those who were aged 30 and above. Younger people from among these castes talked about it with pride, as they recalled the 'heroics' of their elders¹⁵⁷.

Alongside these assertions, the Musahar sharecroppers began to reclaim their cultural spaces as well. To that end, they affiliated with organisations such as the Musahar Sevak Sangh (MSS), formed- local functionaries told me- in the early 1990s¹⁵⁸. With their support, the settlers- all of whom shared affiliation with the Musahar caste- began to convene the annual festival to commemorate the legendary

¹⁵⁶ Interview, Savri Rishi, March 25, 2010.

¹⁵⁷ Interview, Sadi Rishi (March 26, 2010), Khiladi Rishi (March 27, 2010) and Sukhan Rishi (March 31, 2010). Also hanging out, Sargana Ward 5 School Tola *machan*, March 29, 2010.

¹⁵⁸ Interview, Sadi Rishi, March 26, 2010.

valour of Dina and Bhadri, two key figures of Musahar folk history. The festival is observed during the months of Fagun-Chaitra (March-April)¹⁵⁹, in memory of the battle between two landless brothers, Dina and Bhadri, and a rapacious landlord (variously called Dhamiya Raja or Nonia Singh) and his several feudatories. To many Musahars, the brothers are heroes to be emulated, because of their valiance in battle and principled stand against an oppressor. Some believe they possess supernatural powers of healing and aid the destruction of enemies. As Yankah reminds us, folk tales play an important role in the repertoire of struggle, articulation of injustice and transmit what James Scott has called 'hidden transcripts' (Yankah, 2001: 230). The teller weaves the plot and characterisation to reflect society's values, but also ridicules social excesses and foibles within the political hierarchy. As with so many folk tales, there is no one plot that the narrators of this ballad adhere to. Not only do the names of the landlords vary, but also his specific indulgences and atrocities as well as the stories of what happen to the two brothers at the end. The apparent absence of a coherent plot is marginal to the symbolic value of the tale, which provides an opportunity for recalling deeds of valour, pay regards to one's ancestors and have an entertaining time.

This is not to suggest that the MSS invented the organisation of the festival in Sargana. But whereas in the past the organisation of the festival was a small-scale affair, restricted to Musahar hamlets, and with minimal use of audio technology, the MSS contributed to the more public assertion of this aspect of Musahar culture. Elderly members of the community recall the stiff opposition they faced from not only the self-styled 'high castes' but also from Other Backward Classes such as

¹⁵⁹ However, some observers have suggested that this is held in June (Mukul, 1999: 3470).

Yadavs and Kurmis when they first began to, under the auspices of the MSS, use microphones during the festivities. As Tilya Devi and Jamuni Devi recall,

“Today, it is commonplace to use microphones, but when we first began to use it, they objected. They first said it would disturb everyone. What did they mean by ‘everyone’, we asked? There were over a thousand of ‘us’ here, compared to less than a couple of hundred of them. Then they said we could use the microphone during the day but not the night, as the children needed to sleep. That was unfair, since their pravachans held on for six days without a break. But we agreed, but in a few years, we began flouting the ‘curfew’. Whatever else Lalu Yadav may have done, at least the police would not come harassing us. Some Yadavs made some noise, but we think the higher-ups reined them in. Today, no one would dare tell us not to celebrate the festival.”¹⁶⁰

Today, it appears that all the Hindu communities attend the festivities. Each hamlet inhabited by Musahars organises its own Dina Bhadri festival. The festival attracts more crowds than the Saraswati Puja, an observance in honour of the hindu goddess of learning, does. During my fieldwork in Sargana, there were three Dina Bhadri festivals organised in the vicinity of where I lived. Each festival lasted four to five days. From my observations and snatches of conversation with organisers and spectators, I gathered that the core of the festival comprises of the narration and performance of the ballad of the story of the two brothers’ lives, struggle and eventual victory. A square piece of land is allocated for the performance. Within it, a sanctum sanctorum is enclosed: it houses the idols of the two brothers as well as other locally worshipped gods and goddesses. Narrators are invited from nearby towns: the ones who narrated the story during my stay came from Raniganj town and had been shortlisted on the basis of their past performances in the locality. Young men enact the story that is being narrated: as is common in north Indian folk performances, men play the roles of women.

Although local contributions are raised, they are never adequate to meet the costs. The MSS is known to meet the shortfalls, as well as to organise the logistics. It

¹⁶⁰ Hanging out, Sargana Ward 5 School Tola *machan*, March 25, 2010.

has been sometimes suggested in the literature (Narayan, 2005 provides the most nuanced account) that the organisations of festivals such as this among the Musahars represent the skilful manipulation of the Hindu right. Indeed, many observers sought to insinuate that Dina and Bhadri were incarnations of Ram's sons Luv and Kush, with some even suggesting that the landlord they killed was Muslim. Political scientists and sociologists studying caste-disaggregated voting behaviour have argued that the 'lower' OBCs and 'lower' Dalits do tend to vote for the BJP and its allies (Yadav, 1999; Gupta, 2005). This might be the case in these areas as well. However, the evidence to support this contention appears to be rather thin, as very few functionaries owned up to being supported by or sympathetic towards the Hindu nationalists.

Unsurprisingly, the CPI(ML) and the MSS share a complicated relationship with each other. Although they are not in direct competition with one another (the MSS does not contest elections), the CPI(ML) perceives the MSS as the frontline organisation of the JD(U)¹⁶¹, facilitating its overtures to the Musahars. Although CPI(ML) local functionaries recognise the MSS' role in publicising and, if we might say so, normalising the Dina Bhadri festival, it alleges that the MSS poaches its rank and file and seeks to wean them away from the party. The block-level secretary of the MSS, Gayanand Rishi, counters this charge. He denies that the MSS has any political role at all. But he does spew venom against what he calls the corrupt practices of the CPI(ML) local leadership, especially that of its leader and secretary Manoj Srivastav. Referring to him as a *bichaulia* out to swindle those who Gayanand Rishi refers to as "poor, gullible Musahars", he prefers to highlight his organisation's role in increasing

¹⁶¹ It is tempting to infer from this that the MSS does indeed act as a front for the Hindu right, which is a member of the ruling coalition in the State. However, although the JD(U) and the BJP are close allies, they are two separate political entities with very different histories and ideologies.

awareness among Musahars. He himself tends to downplay his organisation's role in organising the Dina Bhadri festival. Rather, he emphasises the “developmental” role his organisation plays in disseminating information about governmental schemes and programs that Musahars could benefit from.

From my conversations, it appeared that this included publicising the slew of welfare schemes targeted to a new sub-category within the Scheduled Caste category called the Mahadalits, of which Musahars form an important category. He does not deny that this role allows him and his functionaries to act as brokers and fixers as well. Indeed, most of the times I met him he was either going to the Block Office or returning from it. Sadi Rishi was another quasi-permanent fixture at the Block Office as well as the Mukhya's residence¹⁶². He follows up his claims by suggesting that “as Musahars, we know the plight of our brethren and will be better positioned to help them than these *lalas* (reference to the Kayasth origin of Manoj Srivastav). After all, we have lived in similar conditions, often in the same hamlets, so we can *feel* for our people in a way they never can¹⁶³”.

The struggle over the interpretation of the social situation faced by the inhabitants of Sargana Ward 5 by the CPI(ML) and the MSS recalls the recent ‘recognition/ redistribution’ debate between Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth (Fraser and Honneth, 2003). They explore the perspective that discourses which seek to (re-) negotiate identities often have as their focus the reconfiguration of economic relations. Fraser's argument is that the “politics of recognition” (at the heart of which is what is often called politics of identity) is an epiphenomenon of the “politics of redistribution” (which is primarily a politics of class): that the politics of

¹⁶² Own observations and accounts of co-villagers.

¹⁶³ Interview, GayKulanand Rishi, April 5, 2010.

redistribution provides the basis for other kinds of politics, such as politics based on identities. Furthermore, she suggests that these identity politics, or politics of recognition can be read off from the more material politics. Against this, Honneth conceives the problem in terms of the phenomenology of consciousness, where social relations exist prior to individuals (though identities are not essentialised) and intersubjectivity precede subjectivity. In other words, according to Honneth, individuals are born into specific social relations, whose circumscriptions are impossible for them to overcome.

Fraser argues that the problem is one of achieving class-centred socio-economic transformation. She theorises political struggle as a political economic one at the intersection of class, caste and gender, while Honneth conceptualises it as a struggle among (Weberian) status groups and intersecting cultural codes. He understands group differences in two ways. The first is as benign, pre-existing, cultural variations, which has been unjustly interpreted as a hierarchy: applied to our discussions of caste, this would map onto Berreman's (1972) account of ethnicisation of caste identities. The second is to see group differences as being constructed contemporaneously with hierarchical values: this view resonates with Dumont's own understanding of caste in his classic work *Homo Hierarchicus* (Dumont, 1970). By contrast, Fraser understands group differences in terms of unjust differentials, socially constructed *results* of an unjust political economy and seeks to abolish, not recognise, group differences: this comes closest to Beteille's (1991) approach to caste. Where Dumont's and Beteille's arguments converge is in the assumption that equality between is a state that is yet to be achieved, and caste politics as a means of achieving that equality. Berreman's account, on the other hand, encourages us to think about the

fundamental equality that is assumed by members of different castes, and ‘caste politics’ as a means of asserting this assumption of equality.

Although Sen has never explicitly analysed caste-based mobilisation, except to make an empirical argument about discrimination and exploitation, the ethical individualism inhered in the Capability Approach enables scholars using this approach to study caste identities as important because of their ultimate importance for members. Thus, caste-based mobilisation would be justified on the basis of the argument that it brings material benefits to its members in terms of access to specific schemes as well as protection from exploitation and discrimination. Furthermore, given the scenario of pervasive discrimination, assertions on the basis of caste are *in themselves* empowering for those making such claims. Celebrating these assertions is distinct from calling for making caste the normative principle of social and political life.

5. POLITICAL INVENTIVENESS

The vicissitudes faced by the inhabitants of the colonies compelled the Musahar squatters, Santhal tenants and Kevat sharecroppers to consider novel ways to respond to the problems at hand. Following the use of ‘inventiveness’ in politics as the “index of the degree through which an object or practice is associated with opening up possibilities,...the novelty of the arrangements with other objects and activities within which artefacts and instruments are situated and might be situated in the future” (Barry, 2001: 212), it is pertinent to draw attention to the atypical format of their subjectivisations. The most important of these was the manner in which these different social groups sought to build alliances with one another, and the ‘grounds’ on which they sought to cement these alliances. In this section, I will first summarise

the overarching dispute and its associated contentions, before turning to a broader discussion.

5.1.Squatters on public land

The most widely-talked about ‘dispute’, one to which a “satisfactory solution” (in the words of some of the inhabitants of the ward) had yet to be found, was the case of alleged illegal encroachment by 98 Musahar families on 200 decimals (two acres) of government land abutting the southern end of the Sargana Senior Secondary School in Sargana Panchayat Ward 5 (hereafter Sargana Ward 5). The squalid living conditions of the inhabitants of the settlement may be gauged from the fact that each family (averaging five members) was able to occupy about 2 decimals of land (the huts were built on a smaller space), or less than a quarter of the modest plot of land that Narendra owned and on which he had built his house.

The Sargana Senior Secondary school was constructed on 5.5 acres of land donated by the afore-mentioned *jamindar* Jagdish Singh in the aftermath of the land ceiling initiatives of the 1970s. The Village Education Committee members alleged that the Musahars had illegally occupied the land in about 1995¹⁶⁴. They backed their claims by taking recourse to land records in possession of the school authorities. The Musahars on the other hand claimed that they had “always”¹⁶⁵ inhabited that land, and showed copies of the land revenue survey, which- *they argued* -supported that claim. The Gram Panchayat Mukhya Sarvesh Mandal supported their case by asserting that

¹⁶⁴ Interview, Brahmadev Yadav, VEC Member, Sargana Middle School, March 24, 2010; Interview, Manoj Srivastav, VEC Secretary, Sargana Block, March 19, 2010

¹⁶⁵ Group discussions, March 19, 2010; Group discussions, March 27, 2010; Interview with Kapeswari Rishi, Community elder, April 4, 2010; Hanging out, Musahar tola, March 25, 2010; Hanging out, Musahar tola, April 5, 2010

the Musahars had occupied the land since “at least 1954”¹⁶⁶, when independent India’s first revenue survey was conducted in the region. However, he admitted that they had no papers to prove their ownership of the property. The copy of the revenue survey he possessed noted that the settlers were occupying the land without possessing any legal titles (*jabran dakhil kiya hai*). In the block office’s records, the entire land belonged to the school. However, the huts built by the Musahars had all been constructed out of grants under the subsidised rural housing scheme of the government.

According to local historian and ex-trade union activist Durgeshwar Prasad, Sargana’s Musahars, including the Musahars who now occupied the contentious property, may have migrated into the region as late as 1917, brought in by the *jamindars* (including his own family, as Durgeshwar Prasad admitted) as cheap source of agricultural labour. Along with other castes, such as the Kevats and the Santhals, they cultivated the fields of the local *jamindars*, who were mostly of the Kayasth and Rajput caste as sharecroppers, locally called *bataidars*. *Bataidars* were compelled to share upto two-thirds of the harvest with the landlord, without him having to invest anything in the agricultural process. As a means of ensuring the fidelity of his *bataidars*, as well as to be able to maintain his surveillance over them, he allowed them to build homesteads on a small tract of land further to the east of the Sargana-Raipur road. Nearly all the local accounts I gathered referred to this aspect of their origins. The community was, thus, recognised both by own members as well as others to be distinct from the so-called ‘service castes’ such as Dhobhis (washer-folk), Yadavs (milk-vendors), Chamars (leather-workers), Doms (basket-weavers) and Kevats (boat-men). Unlike these communities, the accounts recall, Musahars were

¹⁶⁶ Interview, Sarvesh Mandal, Mukhya, Sargana, April 10, 2010

incorporated into the local economy by force with expropriation of the surplus value of coerced labour buttressed by brutal violence, including beatings, rape and, not uncommonly, killings.

The limited land reforms of the 1950s combined with the political support in favour of the *bataidars*, unleashed two distinct, but related dynamics between the landlord and his sharecropper. On the one hand, the *jamindar* was gradually but inexorably losing his economic clout: men like Jagdish Singh astutely got rid of unarable tracts by *donating* these to the government. On the other hand, the *bataidars* began to organise through political parties, movements and other networks, demanding land and market-rate remuneration from the landlords, often leading to brutal repression especially during the early 1990s. The locality was awash with stories of pitched battles between the *bataidars*, a motley combination of castes, mostly the underclass on the one hand, and the *jamindar* and his *lathaits* (henchmen) on the other. By the early 1990s, the physical and ideological controls over the *bataidars* were certainly loosened (this resonates with observations made by authors such as Mendelsohn, 1993).

Ward 5's *bataidars* were no longer beholden to Jagdish Singh. Neither did they need to or want to stay "under his surveillance"¹⁶⁷. They settled on a vacant plot of land- their present location. There were two versions of how the Musahars chose this location. One version- that espoused by local politicians and sympathetic neighbours- was that they had nowhere else to go to, and therefore, they chose the nearest vacant stretch of land to settle down. Another version- voiced by inhabitants of neighbouring hamlets- claimed that the *jamindar* Jagdish Singh had developed a dispute with the School Management Committee (the precursor to the current Village

¹⁶⁷ Hanging out, School *tola*, April 5, 2010

Education Committee) sometime in the late 1980s. He had felt rebuffed by some of their actions and –in vengeance- had incited the Musahars to occupy this plot- which, incidentally, he had donated to the school in the first place. The Musahars themselves stood by the claim that they had “always” lived there¹⁶⁸.

To the school authorities and several residents inhabiting the locality, the Musahars were alleged to have encroached upon government property. The Musahars, while insisting that they had ‘always’ lived on the plot under dispute, did not deny that they had lived on property owned by Jagdish Singh, a few kilometres to the east of their current habitation, for a few decades. The ‘evidence’ they and those leading possessed only proved the status quo- that they were in occupation of the land without holding title deeds. Sympathetic neighbours suggested that the Musahars were homeless, especially after they ceased to do *begari* for the *jamindar*, and it was natural for them to occupy a vacant plot, settle there and build their houses. This appears to be consistent with the evidence presented in other parts of the State, which suggests that nearly 70% of the public area encroached for homestead purpose is occupied by Scheduled Caste groups (Iyer, 1993: 310).

The Village Education Committee responded to the “Musahar invasion” in several stages. In the first instance, sometime towards the latter half of the 1990s, they asked Jagdish Singh to intervene. But, according to the VEC’s version of the genesis of the problem as described by its Secretary Manoj Srivastav (the CPI(ML) functionary), his words cut no ice. Other informants suggested that the *jamindar* had increasingly marginal influence on his erstwhile *bataidars* and refused to get embroiled for fear of losing face. The VEC members changed tack, and tried to

¹⁶⁸ This was most forcefully argued by the patriarch of the School *tola* during all my interviews, March 20, 2010; March 25, 2010; March 26, 2010; and April 5, 2010. Also during Hanging Out, April 5, 2010 and April 13, 2010.

negotiate with the ‘settlers’. They appealed to the Musahar families “to think about their children’s future, about how cramped the environment in the school would be, and how little space there would be for children to play”¹⁶⁹. Recalling these appeals, Jhamiya Devi, a 58-year old Musahar woman, landless and uneducated, laughed,

“What were they talking about? Aye babu, even you know our children can’t afford schooling beyond class V and so don’t go here. It’s not our children they were worried about. It was their own....playground, can you imagine the cheek? Here, our children die of hunger, of being out in the cold because they have no roof over their heads, and of snake bites during the monsoons, and he was trying to tell us to leave our homes so our children could play! What a cruel joke!!!”¹⁷⁰

When even these appeals failed, the VEC members mobilised hired *goondas* (musclemen) from neighbouring localities to raze the settlement and forcibly evict the squatters: this was around the year 2000. But the Musahars were prepared. In the group discussions I conducted, they recalled how they had been tipped off by their ‘comrades’ in the CPI(ML), many of whom were of the same castes as the VEC members. The attackers were repulsed by the inhabitants of the colony. Aiding them were the activists of the CPI(ML). The successful defence of their ‘settlement’ afforded the Musahars the opportunity to demonstrate their ‘physical strength’ to their neighbours and other ‘tormentors’.

Having failed to physically evict the Musahars from the tract of land they had occupied, the VEC members now aimed at exerting pressure through the local government bodies, especially the ward-specific councillor and the Mukhya of the Gram Panchayat. The Mukhya happened to be a scion of Jagdish Singh’s family. Even as he sought to forge a compromise between the two parties, the Musahars refused his intercession, since- as they recalled, “he was historically our enemy, our

¹⁶⁹ Interview, Manoj Srivastav, VEC Secretary, March 24, 2010; interview, Baidyanath Baitha, Sargana Middle School Head Teacher, January 21, 2010.

¹⁷⁰ Hanging Out, School Tola *machan*, April 13, 2010.

oppressor and someone we could not trust”¹⁷¹. The Musahars vividly recalled the rare visit he made to their colony, when he was roughed up and heckled by the women. Mukhya Bharat Singh and his henchmen beat a hasty retreat. It was widely believed by the residents of Ward 5 I spoke with that he was prevented from pursuing the matter further by his deputy, Sarvesh Mandal, Kevat by *jati*. Furthermore, against Bharat Singh’s wishes, Sarvesh Mandal ensured that the squatter-settlers were all registered as electors in their ward. Thus, electoral democracy effectively came to these hamlets as late as 1995. This was a significant event for them, as they could now register their electoral presence. The formal right to vote represented for the settlers an important step forward, not so much for its electoral value, but in deploying it as evidence of the state recognising their existence and habitation. PDS cards followed soon thanks again to Sarvesh Mandal’s calculation, affirming to them the state’s recognition of their presence.

Although these developments are in concordance with the ways in which actors in ‘political society’ engage in actions that enable poor people claim at least some entitlements (Véron et al, 2003), they need not always be the result of the magnanimity or generosity on part of the leaders. This is clear from a discussion with beneficiaries of rural housing subsidies: they suggested that the motivations for politicians to support the poor, including the families of Ward 5, were not always altruistic. The scope for rent-seeking appears to have incentivised local politicians such as Akhlesh Mandal to expedite the process. According to scores of other inhabitants of the ward,

“Sarvesh Mukhya was very keen that I apply for Indira Awas. I received the cheque payment of ₹35,000 in no time. When I went to the bank to encash my cheque, I understood why. The Mukhya’s bichaulia (middleman) was waiting in the bank, like a wolf. As I got my cash, he accosted me and

¹⁷¹ Hanging out, Musahari School tola, April 5, 2010. Also, interview, Bharat Singh, ex-Mukhya, Rajput tola, Sargana Ward 6, April 10, 2010.

*pocketed `15,000/- ...Aye babu, I may be poor, but I'm not a fool. I know that `20,000 is more than having nothing at all. I got my money and the Mukhya also got his, and was able to show that his actions had benefitted the Musahars, which it did!*¹⁷²”

Others in the colony told me how they were certain that Sarvesh Mandal's motivations were driven by the calculation that he would be their preferred candidate in the forthcoming elections. If indeed that were the case, his actions produced the intended outcomes, for the settlers recognised the value of his actions and delivered on their promise to vote for him in the forthcoming Panchayat elections, held in 2006. We see clearly how, as actors in political society, Sarvesh Mandal and his colleagues seek to instigate, and then fulfil, demands made by their fluid constituencies. Indeed, following Chatterjee (2012), we can specify the manner in which these actors are distinct from the brokers and fixers that Reddy and Hargopal (1975) had referred to over three decades ago, and the patronage-clientelist relations that Bailey (1960) had drawn attention to. Sarvesh Mandal and his colleagues sought to build on the evident discontentment among the homeless inhabitants of the locality by making them aware of their entitlement to vote, and actually facilitating their exercise of it. This was a public act (not one done privately, and only involving specific individuals). Furthermore, he sought to extend the vote beyond his own community, to members of other communities, thereby differing from the model of the conventional patron who dispensed favours to his (or her) own established supporters. This format of constructing political identities was fairly novel in Bihar's context.

¹⁷² Hanging out, School *tola machan*, April 5, 2010.

5.2. Encroachers on private property

At this stage, it would be worthwhile to introduce the other contentions in the neighbouring localities into which the overarching dispute which is the subject of this chapter tied. The first of these contentions relates to 31 Santhal families, all inhabitants of Ward 4, who have forcibly cultivating 15 acres of arable land owned by the erstwhile Kayasth *jamindar* Kulanand Prasad. The specific dispute pertained to the legal entitlement of the occupying families over the land. The occupying families claimed that, given their status as de facto cultivators of the land in question for the last eight decades at least, they have the right to be recognised as *sikhmidars* (recorded sharecroppers). Contrariwise, the *jamindar* contested their rights as *sikhmidars*, claiming instead that they were merely *bataidars* (unrecorded sharecroppers), with no formal right to cultivate the land, and were illegally cultivating it. However, despite their claims of having being registered sharecroppers since the Land Revenue Survey of 1957, the occupying households possessed no legal titles that would as evidence (at least none they would share with me). Rather, the *jamindar* possessed documentary evidence that the land in dispute was actually owned and cultivated by him and his immediate family members. Furthermore, he also registered a case of theft and abetment of theft (sections 379 and 107 of the Indian Penal Code) against ten of the occupying families and a case of murder against one of their community elders, the uncle of the Santhal chief, known as the *majhi haraam*.

As with the aforementioned case of the homestead lands occupied by the Musahars, in this case the Mukhya staunchly defended the right of the Santhals to be registered as sharecroppers, but- again- conceded that they did not possess the appropriate legal documents. He too supported their claim to have been registered as

sikhmidars since the previous Land Revenue Survey. Most villagers asserted that the Santhals were indeed cultivating the land without being registered as sharecroppers, but added that they were well within their *legal* rights to do so, since they had cultivated the land for generations.

The different narratives call attention to the incompleteness of tenancy reforms in the State. The amendments to the Bihar Tenancy Act, introduced in 1970, were designed to favour sharecroppers who had been continuously cultivating the same plot of land for a period of 12 years. Section 48(e) provided for them to lodge complaints against landowners in the event that they had not yet received possession. This proved to be difficult to achieve in practice, since the *bataidar* usually possessed no evidence (such as a rent receipt) of having cultivated land or shared the produce from it with the landowner.

According to their own accounts the Santhals currently inhabiting Ward 4 migrated to the locality in the early part of the previous century. Like the Musahars, they worked the *jamindar's* land for him as *bataidar*, sharing half of the produce every year post-harvest. Unlike the Musahars, they built their hutments at the edge of the fields, and did not usually depend on the *jamindar* to provide them with housing. As with the Musahars, their socio-economic relations with the *jamindar* was fraught with tensions, as reflected in the vivid recollection of the conflict between the two parties dating back to a time prior to the advent of the CPI(ML) in the locality. On their part, the *jamindars* responded brutally to the slightest hint of resistance, and in an ironic way this repression further sharpened the socio-cultural distinctiveness of the Santhals. Like the Musahars, the Santhals had well-established internal hierarchies. Unlike with the Musahars, these hierarchies encompassed decision-making systems as well (These systems had apparently fallen into disuse among the

Musahars). For instance, the *majhi haraam* of the Santhals was far more influential within this community than the *madal* of the Musahars was in his. None of this is to say that these practices have remained fixed and unchanged down the centuries. Rather, what I am pointing to is the limited socio-cultural integration of the Santhals into the caste hierarchy compared with the manner in which the Musahars appear to have been assimilated¹⁷³.

As with the Musahars, the Santhals were subjected to a range of unflattering stereotypes. Jokes about the Santhals' putative thick-headedness and unreasonableness continued to abound. One went: "If a Santhal loses his hen to a road accident, he will refuse compensation. He will say- I want my hen back."¹⁷⁴ Although Musahars were feared for their physical and even sexual prowess, the Santhals were thought of as physically stronger and sexually more "virile". A major difference in the stereotypes of the two communities was the way in which the *jamindars* and other caste Hindus viewed the women of the two communities. While the innuendos which Musahar women were subjected to have already been discussed, instances and metaphors that might have hinted towards similar attitudes towards Santhal women were largely absent. This is not to say that Santhal women were not sexually assaulted. Perhaps they were: at any rate, elsewhere in Bihar, women from this community were not exceptionally well-treated by the *jamindars*. Nonetheless, the absence of derogatory stereotypes about Santhal women in and around Sargana is indicative of a perception that they were not as easily "available" as Musahar women were.

¹⁷³ Raghunathpur's *majhi haraam* frequently referred to the Santhals as distinct from both Hindus and Muslims, despite being an ardent votary of the BJP. In fact, at one point, while discussing the 'exploits' of his community during a communal conflict with Muslims in the neighboring village, he asserted, "Had the Hindus stood by us, we would have obliterated the Muslims." And went on to add, "They [meaning the Hindus] are usually cowards."

¹⁷⁴ Recounted to me often not only in Araria but also in Maldah.

Limited state-led reforms and the gradual erosion of the *jamindars*' clout were accompanied by increased radicalisation among the Santhal sharecroppers in and around Ward 4. Several of them became active members of the CPI(ML), which enabled them to network and build political alliances with others in similar structural positions. More often, however, leadership for specific transgressions, such as the one under discussion, came from within the community, individuals who were members of the party, but not acting on its instructions or in its name. Accounts of the increasing conflicts between *bataidars* and *jamindars*, dating back to the 1960s, indicate that the Santhals were less tolerant of the *jamindar*'s demands, refused to respect these, and in fact asserted their own claims, using the law where it was favourable to them, and transgressing it when it was not. The 'land occupation' that the Santhals enacted on the *jamindar*'s property enforced the spirit of the legal reforms which provided the Santhals (and other *bataidars*) occupancy rights over properties they had cultivated continuously for at least twelve years. However, its *legality* was open to question, since the *bataidars* were unable to furnish admissible evidence, meaning proof of rent receipts. Hence, as in hundreds of cases across Bihar, in 1978 Ward 4's Santhal *bataidars* were compelled to flout the letter of the law in order for it to be effective in spirit!

Predictably, the *jamindar* responded with force. He ordered his *lathaits* (musclemen), drawing from a range of 'backward' caste groups, to evict the intruders and to "teach them a lesson they would never forget."¹⁷⁵ However, the Santhals, both women and men, were better prepared and well-organised, with their bows and poison-tipped arrows¹⁷⁶. Recalls one of the *lathaits*, now in his eighties, with obvious

¹⁷⁵ Interview, Premchand Yadav, April 2, 2010.

¹⁷⁶ Interview, Hiranandan Hasda, March 31, 2010.

admiration for his one-time antagonists: “They just kept coming! We didn’t understand what came faster, they or their arrows!”¹⁷⁷ In a pitched battle fought over five hours, the Santhals decimated the army of *lathaits*, although they lost four men and one woman. The *lathaits* fled the scene, but not before many fell. The *jamindar*’s younger brother was also killed. Hiranandan Hasda remembers, “After it was all over, Deokinandan *babu* of the CPI(ML) came to inquire. They said they were proud of us. They asked us to join them, and help others in their battles with *jamindars*. We said we would.”¹⁷⁸

Many Santhals were often at the forefront of local conflicts, in alliances with groups such as Musahars and Kevats, even when their own interests were not directly affected. Musahars of the School tola, while recounting their conflicts with their *jamindar* Jagdish Singh, would never fail to refer to the Santhals’ role in tipping the scales in their favour. Not one woman, man or child that I spoke to about their trials and tribulations, about their friends and enemies failed to mention the Santhals as the “best friend a man can ever have.”¹⁷⁹ One specific skirmish was always recounted, which occurred nearly 30 years ago, in the open area to the east of the present School tola. It was a late summer afternoon. The Musahars had successfully harvested the *kharif* crop, despite prohibitions from the *jamindar*. The *jamindar*’s *lathaits* arrived and had the Musahar’s quarters surrounded. They began to issue threats and started molesting women. Soon enough, news reached the Santhal hamlets that the Musahars were being tormented.

¹⁷⁷ Interview, Premchand Yadav, April 2, 2010.

¹⁷⁸ Interview, Hiranandan Hasda, March 31, 2010.

¹⁷⁹ Too numerous to be recounted. But specifically, during hanging out, School tola, March 26, 2010. This was especially true for Musahars I met in the School tola (Ward 5) and Sargana Ward 1 (East) ward

On that occasion, Hiranandan Hasda led a small group with their ‘primitive’ weapons, while seeking help from the larger Santhal tola at Raghunathpur. The *majhi haraam* of that settlement, though socially conservative, could not turn down a request from a fellow Santhal. The Musahars remember that afternoon as “waves upon waves of the Santhals swept away Jagdish Mukhya’s men. They killed his eldest son, dragged his body to the Rajput tola and dumped it there. Only a Santhal could have done it.” In the Musahar *tolas*, the Santhals were veritably hero-worshipped. Stories about the Santhals’ valour and courage were narrated to children. When he recalled those events, Hiranandan smiled, “We knew we had to do something. The powerful (*dabang*) should not be allowed to prevail. We know what it’s like to be surrounded by a ruthless enemy. Every bit of help counts...The Musahars are our brothers. They are of the soil, not like the Rajput, Pathan and Kayasth. If we wouldn’t help them, who would? The *pandit*?¹⁸⁰”

Numerical ‘weakness’ notwithstanding, the apparent social coherence of the Santhals provided an attraction for many Musahars. It was increasingly common for Musahars to approach the *majhi haraam* or other influential people from among the Santhals for advice on intra-community disputes. To the Musahars, the internal decision-making norms that the Santhals adhered to appeared to be the source of their fearsome reputation. A constant refrain among the Musahars was “The Santhal is feared because he is well-organised. If even that tiny hamlet in Ward 4 were to sound an alarm, within an hour, every Santhal in the region will be ready to defend them. Their *panchayat*s are a model of how disciplined a community should be.¹⁸¹” At any rate, the Musahars found in the Santhal dispute-resolution mechanisms an alternative

¹⁸⁰ Interview, Shurbahadur Murmu, April 2, 2010.

¹⁸¹ Hanging out, Musahar tola, Sargana Ward 1 (West), March 27, 2010.

to having to submit to interference from the Kayasth, Rajput and Yadav communities: as they said repeatedly, “at least the Santhal does not convert his ability to mediate in our dispute to play one side against the other. They seek to genuinely reconcile us, unlike what the *jamindaris* classes do”.

Moreover, relations with the Santhals appeared to be conducted social equals, with the Musahar disputants free to accept or reject the *majhi haraam*’s advice. As the *majhi haraam* of Raghunathpur’s Santhal community remarked, “Their *panchayatis* are very chaotic and cacophonous. But I attend them because their *madals* ask me to, and I think it is my duty to help them in whatever way I can. It’s a different matter that the chances of my advice being followed are only 50:50.” And he added, for good measure, “What else would you expect when women talk in public without restraint¹⁸².” The elders in the Musahar hamlets appreciated the time that Santhal leaders provided for their conflict-resolution processes, without furthering any agenda of their own. “They come, they listen to the case, they talk to us like brothers- with no formalities. They tell us to shut up when they think we are digressing (chuckling: but no one listens to them), but the most important feature for us is that they have no vested interests. They are straight-forward people.¹⁸³”

From the above account, it appears that, community-based assertions notwithstanding, the locality’s different social groups sought to forge solidarities based on shared experiences of oppression, deprivation and discrimination. These solidarities were often founded on stereotypes about putative community strengths, disciplines and organisational capacities, in addition to actual experiences of

¹⁸² Interview, Shurbahadur Murmu, April 2, 2010.

¹⁸³ Hanging out, Musahar tola, Sargana Ward 1 (West), March 27, 2010.

struggles. Thus, those involved in staging demands on social elites, sought out and helped others facing similar circumstances. The novelty of these arrangements lay in the manner in which the different social groups, while not eschewing their respective community identities attempted to build on what they perceived to be complementary synergies with one another. As mentioned, there appeared to have been little rational basis in building these synergies, informed as they were by stereotypes and perceptions. Nonetheless, they allowed members of the different social groups to demonstrate to social elites that they were united in their struggle.

5.3.Miscreants in the temple

The next contention I want to draw attention to relates to the dispute over a local temple, called the *Chandithan* (Sanskrit: Chandi sthan= The place/ temple of Chandi, a Hindu goddess). This temple lay nearly five kilometres to the east of the Sargana bazaar. It was a small temple, dedicated to the goddess Chandi, and attracted pilgrims from as far as Purnea and Bhagalpur, over 200 kilometres away. In the 1940s, the Maharaja of Champanagar gifted 52 bighas of land to the temple, with the proviso that worship therein would be conducted by Brahmans from that estate. The income from that land was to maintain the temple and pay for its priests. Within a few years, the land was occupied by the family of Parshuram Singh, a Rajput *jamindar*, who had settled the area in the early part of the previous century. The family, especially the *dyads* (clans) led by Shaligram Singh, Balram Singh and Chhajju Sing claimed that they would manage the estate to the advantage of the temple, as otherwise the land would not return the yields that were necessary for this purpose. However, according to a wide spectrum of villagers, the family-members directed the income accruing from the cultivation of the donated land towards their own interests.

Moreover, there emerged the widespread perception that they appropriated the devotees' offerings and gifts to the temple and to the diety, including the annual gifts of gold, silver and jewels, amounting to 3-5 kilograms per annum. These were never publicly accounted for. It was alleged that the family sold the jewels in nearby towns such as Purnea and Katihar¹⁸⁴.

When the matter was uncovered in 1985, Vinay Vishwas, one of Parshuram Singh's hundreds of *bataidars*, and a cadre of the CPI(ML) since the 1970s, mobilised other local devotees to protest against this misappropriation. Vinay Vishwas was known to be a powerful orator, having shadowed Deokinandan Chauhan and Satyanarain Yadav, influential leaders of the CPI(ML). He is personally a very religious person, for whom- as he put it "the abuse of religion to further private interests is a bigger sin than not being religious at all." The Kevat families in the area I conducted fieldwork frequently sought affiliation with different *gurus* and swamis. Several have taken to vegetarianism in a bid to emulate what they perceive to be the practices of the 'clean-castes'. Vinay Vishwas himself was a staunch vegetarian. It is tempting to locate these dietary practices within the rubric of Sanskritisation. However, Vinay Vishwas himself was appalled at the suggestion that he or his caste-members were 'emulating' the so-called 'clean castes'. In his colourful language,

*"Aye babu, are you mad that you call the Thakur, Bhumihaar or the Lala clean? Where have you learnt all this? They are meat-eater [like the Muslims, he added for good measure]. Why should we try and be like them? We do this because our guru says it is healthy. And, is this not what the devidevta want?"*¹⁸⁵

The protests often took violent forms, with at least two occasions when the *jamindars* and their allies fought pitched battles with the protestors, who belonged to

¹⁸⁴ Recounted from accounts provided by Gunavati Yadav, March 29, 2010; Durgeshwar Prasad Prasad, March 24, 2010; and Tilaya Devi, March 28, 2010.

¹⁸⁵ Interview, Vinay Vishwas and Savri Rishi, *Chandithan*, April 11, 2010.

a medley of castes. The earliest confrontation over the matter was catalysed by an apparently unrelated matter. The *jamindars* refused to renew the lease to five sharecropper families (who were all unregistered, and hence, non-occupancy *ryots*)-three Kevat and two Musahar. The *bataidars* convened a meeting to discuss the best way to protest. They had initially planned to appeal to the innate good sense of the *jamindars*. Their appeals were met with severe repression in the forms of beatings and rape, galvanising opposition against the range of landlords inhabiting the locality. The following week, after the Tuesday ceremonies were conducted, the Kevats along with the Santhals of Ward 4, laid siege to the temple and prevented the *jamindars* from collecting the offerings. While the Kevats looted the offerings, the Santhals made off with the goat-heads. Smarting under the humiliation, the Rajputs turned their ire on hapless Kevat women by rounding them up in the fields and elsewhere outside of the Kevat hamlet. The Kevats and Santhals retaliated, pitched battles were fought and, although the Rajputs were better-armed, the poison-dipped arrows used by the Santhals carried the day once again. Ever since that day in 1989, there remains an uneasy quiet over the temple¹⁸⁶.

My first visit to the temple was surreal. It happened to be a doubly auspicious day, *Mangalwar* (Tuesday) and *Ashtami* (the eighth day of the lunar month). In the two hours that I was in the temple complex, an estimated three hundred people entered the sanctum sanctorum, nineteen goats and over fifty hens and pigeons were sacrificed. Each devotee made a gift of between five and fifty rupees. Members of the Rajput *jamindars* stood at the entrance to the temples and in the sanctum sanctorum, keeping an eye on who was coming in, and also how much money was being donated.

¹⁸⁶ Recounted from accounts provided by Gunavati Yadav, March 29, 2010; Kameshwar Prasad, March 24, 2010; and Tilaya Devi, March 28, 2010.

Interspersed with the crowd were Vinay Vishvas, and his dear friend and “partner”¹⁸⁷ Savri Rishi from the Sargana Ward 5 School *tola*. They were present at the temple too, and scrutinised the gifts that were being offered to the temple/ diety. When the temple complex closed for the day, the two antagonistic parties calculated the value of the cash and the valuables, with Vinay Vishvas making detailed notes on the description of items. As always, the *jamindar* indicated his agreement with the figures and signed on a loose sheet of paper as asked. After this, he carted the ‘offerings away. Vinay Vishvas called after him, “Don’t gloat....The struggle is still on. Chandi is on our side.”¹⁸⁸

The next morning, I met Vinay Vishwas and Savri Rishi, puffing on their *ganja* (cannabis), as I saw them do as a matter of routine. They showed me copies of the district administration’s directives to the temple management committee (which comprised entirely of the *jamindar* family), enjoining upon them to ensure that resources being granted to the temple be used for the upkeep of the infrastructure or carrying out charity works. Most of these dated to the 1990s. They also showed me copies of monthly records of receipts and expenditures incurred on the temple. The earliest of these dated back to 2005. If all of these papers were in order and the district administration had issued its orders, I wondered aloud what the struggle that Vinay Vishwas referred to the previous night was over. They replied that the real struggle began after the *guidelines* had been passed. Now that the two gentlemen were on the temple management committee, it was all the more necessary to ensure that *accounts were transparently maintained and details made available to the public*. Indeed, from my conversations with a few of the Rajput trustees, this appeared to be the

¹⁸⁷ As they referred to each other, to refer to their five-decade long camaraderie.

¹⁸⁸ Hanging out, Chandithan, March 23, 2010.

fundamental point of discord. They complained of the two friends' unhelpful attitude in management matters, stemming from what they described the "backward brains"¹⁸⁹ of the two friends. Their attitude, it was alleged, made it very difficult to transact any business.

Vinay Vishwas and Savri Rishi initially tried to make copies of the records of temple-related transactions. They tried, unsuccessfully, to have these records pasted up on prominent places in the locality. In attempting to do this, they were undoubtedly borrowing from technologies of sighting the state that have been applied, more successfully, elsewhere in India (Goetz and Jenkins, 1999). Costs of photocopying these records turned out to be prohibitive, and the two men could not mobilise more than sympathy, moral support and oral accolades for their effort from their respective localities. Nonetheless, the very idea in what is considered to be a deeply religious society that those managing a temple could be held to account appears to be rather novel.

5.4.From recognition to disidentification: the exertions of political society

The processes through which demands are articulated or presented to those exercising authority constitutes the identity of the claimants (as well as those on whom the claims are made). Following their display of determined action, vociferous exchanges and show of strength, the presence of the homeless Musahars in the locality began to be normalised. With them receiving the vote, they began to be recognised as settlers/ residents (*rehne wale/ nivasi/ bashinda*) rather than squatters

¹⁸⁹ Interview, anonymous temple trustee, Chandithan, April 10, 2010. The comment referred to Vinay Vishwas' "backward" caste origin. Under Indian law, making such a comment is a legal offence and, if brought to light, is sure to invite punitive action. See Rao, 2007, for a discussion on its implications for caste relations, democracy and the state.

(*jabran dakhla karne wale*). The colony began to be recognised locally as a hamlet, and began to be referred to interchangeably as School *tola* (the hamlet in or near the school) or Musahari *tola* (the hamlet of the Musahars). In this manner, an important demand of the inhabitants of this colony moved towards fruition. In the process, they further re-affirmed their identity with the ‘lower’ caste *and* landless households of their neighbourhood. Although their habitation was far from legalised, their presence was no longer deemed illegitimate.

The elections to the local councils, held in 2006, marked an important milestone. In those elections, the inhabitants of the colony sought out aspiring and actual political leaders from their ward and elsewhere in order to explore who were likely to be sensitive to the cause of legalising their settlement or at least those who would not upset the status quo. They vividly recalled the discussions and consultations of that period. Based on my conversations I could gather that, whereas till 2005, they had willingly followed established politicians, in that year, they concluded it would be worthwhile to field someone who could be counted on to protect their housing interests. Recall that the Nitish Kumar-led NDA had just gained political control of the State legislatures and had committed to redress the historic marginalisation of the ‘lower OBCs’ (to which caste cluster the present Mukhya of Sargana and the Kevats belonged) and the ‘lower’ dalits (to which caste cluster the Musahars belonged).

Sargana Ward 5’s Musahar voters were cognisant of the fact that, as a community, their members wielded a clear numerical majority in the ward. Most of the established politicians in the ward happened to be Yadav or Rajput, who refused to countenance supporting anyone from that colony. Parties such as the CPI(ML) contested the elections on the basis of securing the interests of agricultural labour, but

refrained from committing to protecting their interests. The MSS assiduously tried to convince community elders for the need to field a ‘Musahar’ candidate. But residents refused to follow any of these positions. As Kapeshwari Rishi, whose daughter-in-law successfully contested the position of the Ward Member, recalled,

“CPI(ML) was out of the question- their sardar Manoj Srivastav wanted to throw us out. What justice could we expect from them? The Sangh sang only one tune- that of caste. I agree that the Yadavs and Rajputs treat us badly due to our caste. But the Kevats did not. They were our friends. Yes- a Musahar did contest the elections and win- but not because of being Musahar, but because they represent the poor and insecure people in this ward.”¹⁹⁰

The consultations leading up to the elections of 2005 were based on deep political solidarities forged through years of collaborative struggle against common opponents and for shared values: this resonates with Smith’s analysis of how contingent struggles contribute to subject-formation (Smith, 1996). These struggles point to the emergence and consolidation of social groups formulating and articulating different kinds of demands. Although the three different communities occupied very different ‘status’ positions, they shared similar experiences of political exclusion and socio-economic subordination, as we noted at the beginning of this chapter. These deprivations converged to forge a subject of ‘lack’ among the ward’s inhabitants. The lack of a secure tenure over their homestead plots, combined with squalid living conditions, lack of access to potable drinking water facilities, and discrimination within institutions of primary and secondary education on account of their caste origins made their livelihoods particularly precarious. Similarly, the lack of ownership of landholdings and the lack of ability to ascertain how the offerings being made to their place of worship was being utilised made their sense of themselves even more unstable. Added to these ‘lacks’ was the fact, clearly articulated by political commentators and activists in 2004/5 that the fifteen-year regime of Laloo Prasad

¹⁹⁰ Interview, Kapeshwari Rishi, School tola, April 9, 2010.

Yadav, which had claimed to herald an era of social justice for those considered downtrodden, had continued to exclude communities such as the 'lower OBCs' and the 'lower Dalits', from which the contending communities in these localities were drawn.

Sarvesh Mandal's electoral victory in 2006 was celebrated by the bulk of the ritually subordinated (variously called, as we have seen, 'scheduled' and 'backward') communities as ending what was perceived to be "centuries¹⁹¹" of elite rule in the Panchayat. The results of these elections seemed to signal that the forging of Rancière's political subject- the one who interrupts the regime led by those who thought themselves destined (Rancière, 2001: 7) to do so (on account of caste, class or similarly accrued privileges)- was on the anvil, even as several politicians from underprivileged social and economic backgrounds took oath of office as councillors and presidents and secretaries of Gram Panchayats.

The Musahar inhabitants of Ward 5 could now count on Kapeshwari Rishi- not only because he was of their caste, but also because his access to homestead land was as insecure as theirs- to defend their case at the highest echelons. Through Kapeshwari Rishi, they also hoped to exercise some influence over Sarvesh Mandal and persuade him to support their case, and not commit any actions that might be detrimental to their housing situation. In Ward 4, the Santhals, a hopeless minority locally, looked to other landless groups in their ward and neighbouring ones for legislative support in their conflict with the *jamindar*: Sargana Ward 5's Musahars and Kevats, mostly landless, were only too happy to reciprocate. The GP member from Ward 4, along with Kapeshwari Rishi lobbied consistently with the Mukhya and

¹⁹¹ Though as Susan Bayly reminds us, such a reign is not likely to have dated back to beyond the eighteenth century (Bayly, 2001).

the Sarpanch to prevent an inquiry into the cases registered against Hiranandan Hasda. Furthermore, their joint alliance with the Kevat sharecroppers made it impossible for the Mukhya to ignore their demands that the harassment by landlords should stop. Admittedly, the Mukhya was unable to legalise the homestead plots of the Musahar inhabitants of the 'illegal' colony in Ward 5, or secure legal access to the Santhal sharecroppers to the harvests in Ward 4, or formalise the transparency mechanisms that the Kevat devotees sought to institutionalise in Ward 6. But, at least he could ensure that the landlords did not get away with harassments, as they were able to in the past.

Indeed, as I suggested in Chapter 1, Tully's notion of 'overlapping aspectival identity' (Tully, 1995) is a useful one in this regard. For him, identities inhere a network of overlapping, criss-crossing networks that are open to negotiation, and yet constrained by dominant structures. Norval suggests that such a conception attracts attention to the diversity of voices and practices that make up apparently essentialist and unitary conceptions of political life (Norval, 2008: 167). The analysis of the manner in which the three social groups, namely the Kevats, Musahars and Santhals, negotiate and renegotiate their identities, reconstitute their social relations internally and vis-à-vis their social and political environment, and articulate their demands in synchronisation with one another points to the development among them of such overlapping aspectival identities.

6. DISCURSIVE PERFORMANCES

The central plank of the methods used by Ward 5's inhabitants was to deploy a variety of repertoires of performance. They were 'performative' in the sense that Honig expounds the term (Honig, 1991), meaning they brought into being that which

they ostensibly referred to (see also Kulynich, 1997). In Sargana, activists of the different social groups invoked certain aspects of their putatively essentialised identity and practiced these for good effect. Ward 5's Musahars used their cultural scripts to, ironically, transgress the norms of social discourse. They 'performed' as per some stereotypes, such as being hot-tempered, irrational, unreasonable and outspoken. At the same time, they suppressed other characteristics attributed to them, such as stupidity, drunkenness and laziness.

6.1. Shaming elites

One way in which this was achieved was by deploying the language of shame. The ways in which the Musahars, especially the women publicly ridiculed VEC members is a case in point. Their choicest target was Manoj Srivastav, who was on the VEC even as he was the block-level secretary of the CPI(ML). On one occasion, as I sat chatting with them on our location of choice, the machan in front of the Sargana High School, we saw him approach the hamlet. My co-conversationalists, most of them women, said, "Look at this Kayasth m---- f-----". His father was such a well-respected teacher. But he siphons off funds from the school to which children of his own caste go to. He is truly just: he doesn't only suck our blood, but also doesn't spare his own.¹⁹²" Here they were alluding to the cases of corruption against him that had been unearthed by a local activist organisation.

On another occasion, while I was interviewing the Ward Member of Sargana Ward 1 (East), Manoj Srivastav made an appearance to hire labour to work his tractor for a few days. The conversation, which unfolded before me¹⁹³, went somewhat thus:

¹⁹² Hanging out, Lala *tola*, April 11, 2010.

¹⁹³ Hanging out Sargana Ward 1 (East), April 3, 2010

Musahar from Ward 5: Oho, if it isn't the Great Srivastav ji himself. We are blessed to see you in these humble surroundings. What brings you to my friend's house? (Turning to his friend): You are keeping very august company. You've become a very powerful man. We should keep you happy, eh?

Musahar from Ward 1: Don't bother him, poor man. He's looking very harassed! (Turning to AS): Tell me, Manoj cha (uncle), what brings you here?

(AS explains his purpose and concludes): I'll be grateful if you could come later today.

Musahar from Ward 5: Oh, what a bloody hypocrite! He's grateful to you, but wants to evict your brother (bhai) from his house. (Turning to his friend again): But you should go, you'll earn a lot of money. (Winks)

Musahar from Ward 1: I have no time. I have to take my daughter for immunisation.

AS (non-plussed): Since when did you have a daughter? I thought t you had three sons, and they were all grown-up!

Musahar from Ward 1 (laughing loudly): Since just now!! Oh, my daughter did I say. I meant Gunar's (the neighbour) daughter....now, did you want anything else? We have lots of work to do. I'll try and come tomorrow.

Musahar from Ward 5 (also laughing): Arre bhai! How can you be so rude. He's our beloved uncle, and an upper caste one. You should treat him with more respect. You will go to hell if you say no to him.

Their language was rude, acerbic and designed to be provocative. In this case, they were not publicly questioning the caste hierarchy, but only appropriating its rhetoric to bolster a specific political argument. This resonates with Berreman's observations nearly four decades ago from a north Indian village (Berreman, 1979), when he describes how an ironsmith talks back to the high caste landlord who wants him to sharpen his axe immediately: in Berreman's account, the ironsmith tells the landlord to do it himself if he is such a hurry.

In the Santhal *tola*, the *jamindar* had, through his repeatedly unsuccessful attempts to evict his erstwhile tenants, made a laughing stock of himself and his family. One afternoon in April, as I arrived at the Santhal tola for a feast to which I had committed a while prior, the *jamindar*'s son (who usually lived in the town and did not know of my presence or recognise me), a small built balding gentleman, arrived to collect his family's share from the *rabi* crop that had just been harvested by the Santhals. soon as they saw him, Hiranandan Hasda and Tudu Hembrom called him aside, pointed towards me and joked, "Do you see this gentleman? He will

confirm our ownership of this land. We will soon evict you.¹⁹⁴” The *jamindar*’s son was appropriately alarmed, but saw through the humour soon enough, and mumbled that the land belonged to *de facto* to the Santhals anyway. He then asked the Santhal leaders for permission to take his share away, upon which Tudu Hembrom retorted, “We took months to prepare and cultivate this land. Leave the harvest here for a few days, let us at least imbibe its fragrance- the fragrance of our hard work.” When the *jamindar*’s son protested that the crop prices were likely to drop the longer to take it to the agricultural market, Hiranandan Hasda chortled, “Look at how poor our *jamindar* has become. He is worried about losing ` 20 in the market. Justice is being done.”

6.2.Disidentification’ and the performance of equality

If on the one hand, the Musahar settlers derived satisfaction from collective displays of their identity as adherents of shared cultural practices, they were paradoxically keen to discard the label of ‘Musahar’. As politics is about subjects asserting identities, so it is about them denying and displacing imposed identities as well (Rancière, 1992: 62). Rancière refers to the process of identification as one through which those in power impose certain identities upon the socially and politically subordinate. Although his writings appear to focus on the identifications by the bureaucratic apparatus of the state, in rural Bihar, such identifications have more effectively and brutally been enforced by local elites as the imposition of the name Musahar suggests (Kumar, 2006: 4283).

¹⁹⁴ Hanging out, Sargana Ward 4 Santhal *tola*, Hiranandan Hasda’s machan

Accordingly, across Bihar, Musahars want to “disidentify” with the label Musahar (Mukul, 1999: 3465). Some of my informants were vocal about not wanting their children to be called Musahar (although they reported themselves as ‘Musahar’ when asked what their caste affiliation was). As members of one women’s group said, “We are *bhuiyans*, children of the soil. To humiliate us, the local elite began to conjure stories about how unclean we were, and about our food habits. We never ate rats, nor stole grain from their burrows. That is a lie.¹⁹⁵” They did not disagree that they may have been an itinerant community rather than a sedentarised one (“Which community is not”, they quipped). But the point of associating with the label Bhuiyan, they contended, was that it asserted an identity with land, cultivation and agriculture, in short, an identity as productive members of society.

A somewhat paradoxical source of disidentification is provided by the governmental category called ‘Mahadalit’. As we have seen, the category was introduced by the Bihar State Government, following the example of Andhra Pradesh and Punjab to identify for special attention those ‘untouchable’ communities that were perceived to have been unable to access the benefits of affirmative action: in fact, the State Government has classified 21 of the State’s 22 ‘untouchable’ communities as Mahadalit- i.e. all except the Dusadh. The State Government has prioritised households categorised as Mahadalit to be eligible for development assistance and welfare provisioning schemes ostensibly in order to ameliorate their economic position. Although this move may be interpreted as a calculated ploy to divide the Dalit constituency (Teltumbe, 2009), its introduction has enabled leaders of the

¹⁹⁵ Hanging out, Sargana Ward 1 (East) Musahar tola, Shyamdev Rishidev’s courtyard, March 23, 2010. Hanging out, Sargana Ward 1 (West) Musahar tola *machan*, numerous occasions starting March 22, 2010. Hanging out, Sargana Ward 5 School tola *machan*, numerous occasions, starting March 25, 2010.

Musahar community (who comprise 16% of the entire 'untouchable' population and a quarter of the Mahadalit population) to mobilise their own members and also perform a leadership role vis-à-vis members of other communities categorised as Mahadalit. In areas such as Sargana, they do this on account of their numerical preponderance. Such an opportunity is of particular importance for members of a community that have historically been perceived as lacking the ability or qualifications required to formulate social decisions or more generally to lead. These opportunities are qualitatively different from what has hitherto presented themselves, even to Musahar members of the CPI(ML) who admit that while the party always spoke of and fought for their dignity (*izzat*), they themselves were rarely invited to take on leadership roles. The possibilities now opening up under the rubric of the 'Mahadalit' category allow some Musahar leaders the chance to negate the ontological association of being Musahar with being unqualified to lead, govern or forge a social vision.

It might be plausibly argued that the categorisation of select 'untouchable' communities as Mahadalit results in members of these communities being subjects of development intervention and state governmentality rather than the subject of dissensus. In particular, as Sarkar (2012) has argued for West Bengal, the rhetoric and practice of development could be seen to expedite the process. The institutionalisation of a 'Vikas Mitra' (Development Friend) recruited from among the Mahadalit households for each Mahadalit hamlet appears to confirm this view. However, such an approach views the relation between state intervention and political dissensus as a necessary dichotomy, a dichotomy that does not always obtain in regions where government presence is weakly experienced, and local elites have performed governmental roles for over two hundred years. Under the Mahadalit 'scheme', each one of Ward 5's Musahar households, which had earlier received subsidies under the

Indira Awas Yojana, now received corrugated asbestos sheets to be used as roofs in order to shelter their houses from the elements. District-level bureaucrats embarked on regular tours to Musahari *tolas* to physically verify that the asbestos sheets had indeed reached their destination. Ward 5's residents recalled at least two officials making a visit within a span of twenty days late in 2008. Understandably for a community which had hitherto struggled to make their voice heard and *understood*, the experience of being finally counted (not just as a government statistic, but as human beings with human needs) bears tremendous symbolic value.

Aletta Norval reminds us that identifications need to be situated in respect to relations of hegemonic power, which “delineate what is possible, what can be said and done, what positions can be legitimately taken, what actions may be engaged in, and so forth” (Norval, 1996: 4). For the so-called ‘untouchable’ communities in rural Bihar, historically subject to identifications by a governmentalised society, identification by the governmentalised state (whose legislative wing is elected by them) represents the incipient murmurings of a dissensual political subjectivity- a subjectivity that allows them to convey to self-styled social superiors the ‘fact’ of their equality. That said, we should remind ourselves of the scepticism voiced by many Musahar respondents about their ability to convey to bureaucratic elites, even though the ‘Vikas Mitrs’, the fact of their assumption of equality.

For some of Ward 5's Musahars, the experience of being leading members of a Mahadalit coalition, provided additional opportunities to lead and educate others. Given their long-standing association with the Sangh, they were sometimes called upon to lead educational teams that were deployed to other hamlets and villages. For instance, the Sangh often tasked Sadi Rishi, Nevi Rishi and Kanhi Devi to do ‘social work’ (*samaj seva*) for the Doms. As activists of the Sangh, they would emphasise the

need for solidarity, especially on matters related to wages and access to public schemes. They assured the Doms of every support as needed. “We usually concluded our meetings by reminding them that we were all Mahadalits, and it was our solemn duty to help each other out.¹⁹⁶” Nevi Rishi, who has been an active member of the CPI(ML) since the last four decades, enthused, “In all our days with the party, we were always expected to follow the leaders, who knew best. Of course, we did our thing when the need arose, but that was the exception. With the Sangh, its different- they only provide the money, we do the rest. We pass on what we learn, but we add our own stories, experiences and interpretations.¹⁹⁷”

It appears that the Mahadalit category provides Ward 5’s Musahars with the possibilities of recasting their social roles as leaders, not followers alone; as people who can lead, strategise and forge coalitions with others. Such possibilities allow the Musahars to negate the ontological association of being Musahar with being ‘weak’, helpless and incapable of social intercourse and political discourse. This should not be interpreted to mean that the Mahadalit category was designed to do so. Nor am I arguing the Musahars shared no socio-political spaces with other communities historically. As Gyan Prakash has shown with reference to the Chhota Nagpur Plateau, over the last few centuries they were steadily incorporated in the local political economy on terms unfavourable to them, and often registered their resistance and protest in alliance with other oppressed groups (Prakash, 2003). What I am arguing, however, is that the opportunity to assume leadership positions allows them to turn their back on the identities that have conventionally been imposed upon them.

¹⁹⁶ Interview, Kanhi Devi, March 30, 2010

¹⁹⁷ Interview, Nevi Rishi, March 31, 2010.

6.3. An unending saga? Political society and its exertions again

The story of the Musahars' settlement is, however, far from over. With Sarvesh Mandal assuming the position of the Mukhya, the local elites were appropriately alarmed. Their plans of appropriating the Panchayat as an instrument of their interest began to unravel. Post-2005, they sought to co-opt the newly elected Mukhya Sarvesh Mandal into their worldview. According to some inhabitants from Ward 5, but also according to other neighbours, VEC members planned to buy him out. However, the inhabitants of the colony also stepped up pressure on him to allow them to live unhindered. Sarvesh Mandal acknowledged, "The Musahars have tremendous nuisance value. They are stupid, but hot-tempered, and their women are like mares without reins (*belagaam ghodi*)- they just don't know when to stop talking". It is difficult to ascertain the degree to which Sarvesh Mandal had been influenced by the VEC members, but he fervently sought to assure the delegation that he was on their side and that they need not worry. He was clearly even less influenced by Kulanand Prasad and Subodh Srivastav, since he was emphatic about the justness of the Santhals' demands, without once having received a delegation from them.

The leaders of Ward 5 were often accompanied by educated Musahars from other wards, graduates like Sadi Rishi, who lived in Ward 1 and whose family had managed to educate their children, despite facing tremendous hardship. Sadi and his brothers Khiladi and Kadi were unemployed, but their household income was stable on account of the shrewd investments made by his father in agriculture. They 'hung around' at the block office or at the Mukhya's residence, working as fixers and brokers, enabling co-villagers, especially those of their own caste group, to demystify seemingly intricate bureaucratic procedures and difficult personnel. On the times that they accompanied their co-castemen from Ward 5, they too tended to be flabbergasted

with the rowdy behaviour of the contingent, especially the women. As Sadi rued, “The trouble with us is that women speak when men should. This is unhelpful. No one will take us seriously unless we can ask the women to shut up- and unless the women listen to us, their menfolk.” Sarvesh Mandal reported how he was usually at his wits end while dealing with the women. He complained to me, “After all, they just don’t listen or understand, but go on saying the same thing. They are plain stupid.” Nonetheless, he also said he would have no option but to publicly agree that he would not be party to any attempts to evict them.

Partha Chatterjee uses ‘political society’ as a heuristic device to elaborate his discussion of the ways in which rights-bearing citizens differ from populations who have, at the best, access to entitlements which can be starved of funding by states at their discretion (Chatterjee, 2004; Chatterjee, 2008). He posits this ‘device’ against a similarly constructed ‘civil society’ which is where the rights-bearing citizens dwell. In Chatterjee’s world, political and civil society appear as two almost mutually excluded spheres, which barely intersect or contaminate one another. The realm of civil society, inhabited by individuals and institutions such as the village education committee, directly impinges on the attempts of poor households to secure shelter for themselves and do one of the things that they value, as *they* have discussed among themselves so often. The realm of political society responds, albeit in a fragmented manner by and large assuring the poor settlers and occupants of protection, and by and large maintains this promise. This chimes in with more generalised findings on the topic, which testifies to the ways in which actors and institutions in political society bridge the gap between the state and its denizens and between citizens and populations. In the real world, as Corbridge (2007: 196-198) and Witsoe (2011: 174) reminds us, the two spaces often overlap. As exemplified by the conflict in Sargana’s

Ward 5, the two worlds- civil society and political society- are sometimes complementary to one another and sometimes they contradict.

Chatterjee's recent defence of his ideas provides a timely corrective to these overtly critical accounts. Locating political society as a "condition of un-heroic everyday politics" (Chatterjee, 2011: 310), he draws attention to the changing forms of these everyday politics in rural and urban India. Specifically, he argues, actors in political society do not merely seek to do favours for a pre-defined community or group in exchange for political support (which they may not always get). Rather, these actors seek to imbue new forms to existing community structures. These are most commonly articulated in response to announcement of governmental schemes and projects, which are targeted to specific groups of beneficiaries. Analytically and empirically, the organisation around these entitlements, instigated by people characterised as brokers and fixers, provides the claim-makers with a voice and identity they did not have under conventional clientelistic arrangements. Nonetheless, if political society 'protects' the poor from the onslaught of 'civil society', it does so at a price, the price of uncertainty and of continued negotiations with unpredictable outcomes. Normatively speaking, there is no reason why the burden of paying that price must fall on the poor. Indeed, costs and insecurities such as these reduce the substantive opportunities that might have accrued to households on account of securing protection from the elements. Chatterjee's otherwise elegant espousal of the term unanswered such questions: why must it be that poor people have to be 'helped' by anyone, especially such unpredictable actors as those in political society; why must the poor pay the price of having to constantly negotiate with them; and, furthermore, why can't realised agency successes of the poor be achieved without them having to struggle for it.

7. THE SUBSTANCE OF DISSENSUS: SOME REFLECTIONS

While specifying his disagreement with Habermas' communicative rationality schema, Rancière asserts that "[i]n order to enter into political exchange, it becomes necessary to invent the scene upon which spoken words may be audible, in which objects may be visible, and individuals themselves may be recognised." (Rancière, 2000: 116) An account of the three disputes, informed by detailing the affective histories of each, allows one to flesh out the substance of dissensus as it played out in Sargana's wards. It is through the expression of dissent with established interpretations, pretending to be truths, with principles of exclusionary governance, and by asserting their voice where they are not expected to speak that the 'underdogs' in the three disputes emphasised their presence and publicised their opinions and values. In short, it is by calling into question these interpretations, by introducing dissensus, that they inflect political discourse with their vision. Thus, as far the landless Musahars of Sargana Ward 5 were concerned, the problem was not only that their homesteads were insecure. For the Santhal sharecroppers, the struggle was not only about the redistribution of the share of the proceeds from the harvest. Similarly, the question before the Kevat devotees was not only about occupying the trust that governed the temple finances. The issue, from an analysis of agonies expressed through this chapter, appears to be of having a say in the manner in which they were to live their lives.

The three cases shed some light on the political subject borne out of contentious engagements. The agitations by members of the three social groups that have historically suffered discrimination and the negotiations spawned by these have contributed to augmenting their capabilities. Ward 5's homeless (Musahars) have

successfully posited the issue confronting themselves as a disjunction between justice and the law. For Ward 4's unregistered (Santhal) sharecroppers, the issue is voiced as a contradiction between the spirit of the law and the letter of the law. Ward 6's (Kevat) devotees view the dispute they are embroiled in as one related to the appropriation of their deity by local elite for the latter's personal aggrandisement.

Clearly, partakers of each of the three contentions that occupied the inhabitants of Sargana Panchayat raised ontological questions about democracy. This questioning was concomitant with the disidentification with, or repudiation of, imposed identities by the 'underdogs' in each of the cases. This they did by performing socio-political roles not usually ascribed to them. These disidentifications, performances and assertions, aiming to interrogate exclusionary bases of governance, represent the first moves towards the forging of a dissensual political subjectivity, a subjectivity that obtained even if it did not yet bring (nor was it likely to in the near future) material benefits.

The dispute over alleged encroachments has witnessed the construction of political subjectivities among the Musahar settlers for whom the opposition between justice (*nyaya*) and the law (*qanoon*) is striking. For them, a situation of *nyaya* entails that they lead lives of dignity and security. To them, their present situation represents the epitome of injustice (*anyaya*). Their habitat is insecure, as their occupation and settlement on the land is routinely labelled illegal by influential members of the locality. They own no land, and are dependent on income from agricultural labour from working on land. However, they are willing to put up with the cramped conditions, if only the law (*qanoon*) lets them be. But the *qanoon* does not recognise their perspective at all. Additionally, *nyaya* entails the provision of a secure habitat where their children are sheltered from the elements. It also involves arrangements

whereby they have access to productive assets such as cultivable land owned by the state and operated in common, a goal they hope to achieve during their lifetime through political struggle. They find it disquieting that the *qanoon* neither allows them to settle peacefully, nor does it hold to account a state that had failed to provide such basic services as shelter as well as to make equitable economic arrangements. What riles them even further was the way in which the VEC sought to take decisions on their behalf, without consulting with them, and as if they did not exist, except to be evicted.

For the sharecroppers in the Santhal *tola*, the sense of *nyaya* centred on the institutional arrangements that recognised those who cultivated the land as its legitimate owners. To them, the existing legislation, which provided for tenancy rights to sharecroppers who were continuously cultivating the plot for the last twelve years, was far short of the requirements of justice. This time-frame was inordinately lengthy, and justifiably fuelled discontent among the sharecroppers. Even this law was poorly implemented, and the administration made a mockery out of it by insisting on documentary evidence, impossible for the sharecroppers to furnish. Furthermore, the sharecroppers ask not only own property, but-perhaps more importantly- to access its produce which they have contributed to nurturing.

For the devotees of the goddess Kali, one of the ways in which *nyaya* was defined meant that all that “belonged” to the goddess be shared with “her children” equitably. However, they found it particularly troublesome that the deity they worshipped was in thrall of the landlords, who in turn appropriated what “rightfully” belonged to her. The offerings accruing to her were appropriated by the landlords and diverted towards private ends. For the Kevat devotees then, the principles of *nyaya* were violated when the board (trust) instituted to manage temple offerings was

peopled largely by very same landlords from whom they were attempting to protect their diety from. The devotees opposed this infiltration tooth and nail. Perhaps even more importantly, they opposed the very basis of clique-based governance to whose perpetuation the district administration turned a blind eye.

Identifications need to be situated in respect to relations of hegemonic power, which “delineate what is possible, what can be said and done, what positions can be legitimately taken, what actions may be engaged in, and so forth” (Norval, 1996: 4). The discursive interventions key to the crystallisation of identities draw upon already normalised commonsense ideologies and traditions of resistance and domination (Smith, 1998: 65). In each of the above cases, the relations between the dominant group(s) and the underclasses are recognised as antagonistic by the latter. Moreover, they see also realise that the actions of the dominant group block them from realising their potential, from achieving institutional arrangements that would be conducive to the establishment of an egalitarian social terrain. As a moral order, this terrain is not one which holds *them*, or anyone else, to be superior to others. It is a terrain animated by norms of equality.

The analyses of my cases persuade me to follow Fraser and Honneth (2003) in arguing that the politics of recognition are not merely derivative of the politics of redistribution. Against Fraser’s “perspective-dualist” approach, through which she argues that both kinds of politics must go hand in hand at all times, I contend that the politics of recognition does take precedence over the politics of redistribution and often forms an autonomous domain on which to base claims. This should come as no surprise, given the overlapping deprivations based on caste and class positions. The experience of these overlapping deprivations also compels me to disagree with the “normative monism” of recognition proposed by Honneth. Rather, I find that the

landless Musahars, sharecropping Santhals and landless Kevats, deploy repertoires of contention shaped by the crises they face. Subject-formation is contingent upon political interventions, an analytical position distinct from suggesting that there is a strategic appropriation of identities determined by individual preferences and rational calculations. What this account does compel us to recognise is the contingent manner in which the construction of political identities takes place, as an outcome of social negotiations. The solidarities forged between devotees, sharecroppers and landless people- all belonging to different caste groups (and located in different hierarchical positions vis-à-vis one another) provides the best illustrative example. That this is not conventional identity politics becomes further apparent from the manner in which the Musahar inhabitants of Sargana Ward 5 rejected the MSS' calls for a Musahar candidate to contest the Panchayat elections. The GP member was elected not because she was Musahar (she was), but because she shared a similar subject position with the majority of the voters in the ward. As I have suggested, Tully's framework of 'aspectival identities' provide a more instructive framework within which to locate the afore-mentioned developments.

In this chapter, I have drawn attention to the contingent struggles for 'disidentification' among members of three social groups in Sargana, groups that have been by all accounts historically marginalised. After clarifying my stance on 'caste', I presented the inventive ways (inventive for the partakers of these struggles) in which the different social groups staged their demands and defended their claims. I pointed to the role of political formations advocating radical redistribution of productive resources and advancing claims for emancipatory recognition. I then analysed the discursive performances through which the processes of 'disidentification' constructed the political subject, the subject of dissensus. These performances have

been partially facilitated by the classification of these groups as Mahadalit, but also by the interventions of different political actors as well as by transforming subjectivities among the Musahars themselves. Through both these themes, I drew attention to the ‘aspectival’ dimension of identity and emphasised the way in which different ‘aspects’ of the different social groups become salient at different points of time.

I have argued, following Rancière, that dissensus, the ability to interrogate prevailing interpretation of social situations, is a key constitutive element of democracy. Through an account of the contentions asserted by members of historically marginalised social groups in Sargana, I have illustrated the spaces that enhance their substantive opportunities to advance a vision of the world they value, one where the assumption of the universal fact of equality is respected. I have drawn attention to the manner in which they have sought to have a conversation with social superiors, to invent the stage where they might have an equal exchange, and communicate their interpretation of the problem. Thereby, it may be argued that the very ability to express dissensus in order to assert the prior assumption of equality should be seen as a capability, for it is a reflection of how subjects might attempt to enhance their substantive freedoms.

CHAPTER 7

IN LIEU OF CONCLUSIONS: POLITICS, POWER AND THE CAPABLE SUBJECT

"People in most of the world are devising new ways in which they can choose how they should be governed."

Partha Chatterjee, 2004: 77

In this thesis, I have aimed to contribute to developing a politicised account of capabilities. In this concluding chapter, I will summarise my analytical claims. I have used cases from rural eastern India to elaborate these claims: my fieldwork enabled me to present a textured understanding of the politicised processes through which subjects enhanced their capabilities. To do so, I have needed to take into account the contentious ways through which political subjectivities are forged. I will first restate the specific objectives of this project. Thereafter, I will crystallise my arguments about capabilities and politics, elaborating on the relational dimension which is the centrepiece of this work. Thereafter, I will emphasise the specifications of the dissensual subject, as these have emerged from the empirical material and point to some directions for further research.

1. RESTATING THE OBJECTIVES

This project was motivated by my theoretical and analytical engagement with Amartya Sen's Capability Approach. A particular factor for undertaking this study was my sense that the treatment of questions of power and politics in the existing literature was underdeveloped. Needless to say, in this pursuit, I built on directions for research outlined in this literature: these included the leads provided by Sen himself,

as well as scholars such as Sabina Alkire, Amiya Bagchi, Severine Deneulin, Stuart Corbridge and Frances Stewart.

In line with my aims and motivation, I was specifically interested in four analytical themes that were, to my mind, crucial to developing a ‘politicised’ account of capabilities. Together these themes drew attention to the conception of politics as the struggle to produce subjects who try to contest relations of power, domination and subordination. The first theme of interest pertained to the ‘relational’ aspect of human life and the need to examine capabilities with reference to social relations, especially in the context of relations of domination and subordination. Drawing on this, the second theme related to the processes through which those subjected to relations of subordination and domination asserted their ‘voice’ in public spaces. A focus on voice led to an investigation of the agonistic methods through which voices are asserted in public. The fourth theme drew on the ways in which these expressions contributed to the construction of political identities and repudiation of imposed identities.

My research questions were designed to illustrate my analytical claims. These focused on the manner in which the forging of political subjectivities contributed to the enhancement of substantive freedoms. Answering this question necessitated an examination of how these subjectivities were forged, especially a focus on the ‘performances’ and ‘discourses’ that attend to these processes. It also compelled me to explore how these subjectivities shaped social relations, especially those characterised by relations of domination and subordination.

In pursuit of my analytical interests, I engaged in a critical discussion of the theoretical literature. Following Sen’s advice to develop realisation-focused accounts of the lives of people led me to draw on analysis from my findings from ethnographic fieldwork in select rural localities in eastern India. These accounts, encapsulated in

the empirical chapters, enabled me to enrich the analytical treatment with ‘everyday’ experiences and perspectives of rural people in eastern India.

2. THE RELATIONAL DIMENSION OF CAPABILITIES

In a spirited exchange with political philosopher Philip Pettit, Sen defends the capability- based perspective on freedom by emphasising its contribution to discerning “whether a person is really able to do the things that she would choose to do and has reason to choose to do” (Sen, 2001: 55). The specific example he provides is insightful, and it will be useful to recall it in order to specify how the relational dimension adds value. The example pertains to the case of a disabled person A and three possible scenarios that arise when she wants to step out of her house. In the first scenario, she is not helped by anyone, and is thus unable to step out. Clearly, she is not free to go out of her house, even if there are no formal restrictions on her movement. In the second scenario, she is always supported by helpers whenever she wants to step out (helpers are either provided by the social security system, or are community volunteers). In the third scenario, she has well-remunerated servants who are at her command, and she is freely able to go about wherever she pleases. Pettit and Sen agree that her freedoms are attained in the third scenario and constrained in the first.

It is in terms of assessing her freedoms in the second scenario that the interesting discussion arises. In Pettit’s conception of freedom, which he calls republican in provenance, freedom refers to the ability of an individual to attain their preferences in a content-independent and context-independent way. In short, individuals ought to be able to attain their desired preferences without depending on the goodwill of others, and without having to modify their preferences in order to

make sure it is met (Pettit, 2001). It is prudent to conclude that he would argue that the second scenario represents a situation of ‘unfreedom’ for the disabled person A, since she has to depend on volunteers, or helpers as the case might be. Sen, on the other hand, argues that scenario 2 cannot be clubbed together with scenario 1 as representing situations of ‘unfreedom’ because there is a way in which it (scenario 2) points to the person being able to do what she wants to (in this case, to go out) thanks to institutional social security provisions and/ or a supportive society.

We can introduce two further variations under the rubric of Scenario 2 to explain the importance of emphasising the relational dimension of capabilities.

Variation 1: The volunteers/ helpers arrive at Person A’s residence at the designated time. Although she is almost ready, she would have liked to take a little more time to get dressed. However, she does not dare to ask the helpers/ volunteers to wait because she fears they may leave (they have rather stern demeanours). So, she leaves with them, in the process forgetting to take her box of snacks and bottle of water.

Variation 2: The volunteers arrive at Person A’s residence slightly later than agreed upon. She is almost ready, but tells the helpers off for their delay. The helpers respond that they knew she would be late, hence they arrived a little after the designated time. The argument goes on a while, though eventually they all leave with Person A taking with her all that she needs.

In which of these variations of Scenario 2 could we say that Person A’s freedom is better secured? I am inclined to argue that Variation 2 represents a situation of greater freedom for her, since she is able to articulate her voice (in this case, her irritation) to the helpers, without fear of losing the support they provide. This freedom represents a freedom from being subordinated or dominated: Person A can address her helpers/ supporters as equals, and can express her emotions/ anger without inhibitions. Much the same can be said about the volunteers/helpers in this Variation 2, who could also argue back, in a way that Person A’s servants could not in the third scenario mentioned earlier (which Sen does not elaborate on during his discussion). Person A and her helpers both inhabited a terrain where the equality of

one another was understood and respected. This is markedly different from Variation 1 where Person A was clearly in a subordinate position in her relation with the volunteers, or the third scenario where Person A commanded the loyalty of several servants who had no option but to obey her. Seen through a relational lens, then, it appears Person A would be most capable in the situation provided for in Variation 2 (as would, in a way, her servants, but that, as Sen cautions, is another discussion). It is this relational dimension that I have sought to draw attention to in this project.

This ‘relational’ approach to capabilities brings it very close to Pettit’s theory of republican freedoms (Pettit, 1997). Pettit rehearses the many debates around liberty and freedom and concludes that the non-interference precept of freedom provides a rather thin basis for it. Indeed, as we have seen in Chapter 1, Sen tells us the ways in which non-interference can have catastrophic impact on situations of famine, poverty and ill health. Pettit argues that freedom is most fruitfully analysed as freedom from domination. In ways reminiscent of Steven Lukes’ observations that we noted in Chapter 1, he suggests that domination occurs when someone subjugates another such that: 1). They have the capacity to interfere; 2). On an arbitrary basis; 3). In certain choices that the other is able to make (Pettit, 1997: 52)¹⁹⁸. Non-domination occurs, according to him, when the subjugated parties are no longer subjected to the capacity for arbitrary interference in choices that they are able to make. In other words, freedom is attained when parties achieve their preferences irrespective of content or context. We have seen, however, that in the discussion on augmenting capabilities, such an ‘all-or-none’ approach does not help us in capturing nuance. The relational approach to capabilities, despite its apparent proximity to insights gleaned from a

¹⁹⁸ Pettit adds that there is a fourth clause- that these three situations are commonly known, even if not assessed as negative- among the parties involved.

republican approach to freedom, takes into account precisely these contents and contexts, and how they are sought to be appropriated or manipulated in the search for equality, dignity and social justice.

An example recently narrated by Partha Chatterjee (2012) comes to mind. It is pertinent to recall it here. He recounts the case of a destitute woman in rural West Bengal, who would make her way to the nearest government office to pester and cajole local officials to allocate her some resources- food grain from the PDS, or cash to purchase food, or some other grant. She usually succeeds in getting something or the other. Chatterjee contrasts her present situation with those prevailing four-to-five decades ago, when destitute women would have no option but to beg at the main squares of bazaars or turn up at the footsteps of the *jamindar's* mansion begging for his kindness. Although it would be uncommon for him to turn her away, Chatterjee argues that the two situations (of the destitute woman pestering local officials, and begging the landlord) are very different, and certainly entail different levels of freedoms. In the latter instance, she makes an appeal to the landlord's kindness, and is grateful to him for his generosity. In the second instance, she appeals to the obligation of the government official to help someone as poor and destitute as her. While she is thankful to the official concerned, she attributes the kindness of the official not to his generosity, but to the perceived obligation of the state to help someone in distress. I agree with Chatterjee that both scenarios are far from utopian, but there is a greater degree of freedom entailed in the former scenario compared with the latter.

In this project, we noted how another destitute woman from West Bengal, Daulat *bibi* (perhaps not far from where Chatterjee derives his afore-mentioned example) staged her demands to actors in political society. She did not beg, or appeal, or even feign politeness. In short, she exhibited none of the "perpetual bowings and

cringings of an abject people” (John Milton, via Worden, 1991: 457) or “meanness of spirit, with its worst effect, flattery” (Sydney, 1990: 162), or even the “littleness” that Mary Wollstonecraft deplored about women who were subjected to domination (1982: 359). She made her claims on Akbar Ali as an equal, albeit more materially deprived, but a social equal nonetheless. We also noted how Siraj ul Islam could not. It is this nuance that a relational approach to capabilities captures, and I think this is the major contribution of introducing such an approach.

Indeed, Amartya Sen’s resolute consideration of supportive relationships while discussing capabilities, make it inevitable for us to discuss the role of actors in political society. As individuals interested in consolidating their political gains, these actors seek to respond to, and often instigate, demands for this or that entitlement. Nonetheless, their ability and willingness to engage with different constituencies and categories of populations differs, as we have seen, based on their own class/ caste positions, and the configuration of local polities. We have seen that in localities with pluralist polities, dispersed social backgrounds of political society actors and greater intra-elite competition, the relational dimension of capabilities is more clearly evidenced than it is elsewhere. These localities are pluralist not only in the sense of being ‘polyarchies’ (Dahl, 1972). They are pluralist in a deeper sense, as different demands and claims staged by different groups are recognised, accepted, instigated and followed up by actors in political society. Thus, we saw that in Rahimpur and Sargana Ward 5, actors in political society were exceptionally active in securing NREGS jobs and payments for their constituencies, unlike in Ditya and Roshanar Ward 5, demands for NREGS works were met with a lukewarm response. Likewise with BPL cards, where the continuous need to renew legitimacy compelled politicians in the former two localities to contain the exclusions of poor people from BPL cards.

2.1.Asserting equality

Let us restate how the relational approach adds value. We noted in Chapter 1 that an exclusively institutional approach to capabilities would not allow us to appreciate the nuanced ways in which people's substantive opportunities are being expanded (or constrained). Indeed, whereas an institutional comparison between West Bengal and Bihar would lead us to believe that capabilities were better nurtured in the former than in the latter, we have seen through the critical analysis of ethnographic material that this is not necessarily the case. Were we to restrict our analysis to indices pertaining to literacy, health services and livelihood opportunities, it is conceivable that people in Bihar would be seen as possessing 'lesser' capabilities than their counterparts in West Bengal. Similarly, were we to follow Pettit's republican notion of freedom, we would be unable to appreciate the different ways- within the same institutional frameworks- in which inhabitants of the different neighbourhoods sought to enhance their freedoms. A focus on the relational dimension cautions us, and compels us to, following Sen, view the actual goings-on in a society. The picture that then emerges is far more nuanced, with people in some Bihar localities being more capable than people inhabiting some West Bengal localities on account of the way in which they could assert their equality vis-à-vis social superiors. Read together with Rancière's account of democracy as representing a dissention from the wrongs that have been committed to the universal fact of equality, we are able to sketch a more nuanced picture of capabilities.

In Chapter 3, we pushed this primary argument through a discussion of how the NREGS works in the four localities, and explored possible reasons why it differed the way it did. We drew attention to the cooperative conflict between workers and

actors in political society spawned by the NREGS, and used that as a device to examine the augmentation of capabilities. In Sargana Ward 1, this cooperative conflict provided villagers the opportunity to work under NREGS works, and secure near-complete payments on a timely basis: in exchange, they had to forego a part of their wages. However, workers valued the program- warts and all- for the manner in which it allowed them to continue to stay in the village without having to cultivate the landlord's fields. Thus, not only were they using the program to bargain for higher agricultural wages (and even if they were, I have no evidence to support the contention that they were successful), but they appeared to use it as a means of asserting to their erstwhile employers (and perceived oppressors) that their only identity was not one of untouchable landless labourers, and that they could live in the village without having to undergo the humiliation of cultivating someone else's land. As we argued, the symbolic value attributed to the program by workers in this ward distinguishes the way the program operated here from the other localities. The new relationships forged with actors in political society were far from cordial or even 'equal'. But that did not prevent workers from asserting the assumed fact of their own equality and compelling different actors to take their claims seriously.

The issue can be fruitfully made to speak to two theoretical questions. One, under what circumstances does cooperative conflict enhance capabilities, understood as the interrogation of relations of domination and subordination? From our discussion, it is clear that one important background condition for cooperative conflict enhancing capabilities is provided by a pluralist polity (pluralist not only in terms of being a 'polyarchy', but also one where different values were appreciated and admitted). Another is provided by the symbolic value that is attributed by claimants to the demand: where the perception of what is being demanded is limited to being a

bargaining counter for higher wages, the claimants are unable to convert the demands into contentions over interrogating inegalitarian social relations. We see this even in Rahimpur, where the program is not imbued with the kind of meaning it is in Sargana Ward 5- i.e. it is not a tool to contest the putative superiority of social elites. In such circumstances, cooperative conflict certainly enhances the material benefits from the program, but does little to contribute to the reconstitution of social hierarchies.

The second question is, can we speak of cooperative conflict as a measure of capabilities- i.e. can we say that the existence of cooperative conflict points to enhanced capabilities? As we have seen, the response to this can be disquieting. The very existence of cooperative conflict, if it is consistent with emphasising and furthering the claims of equality, appears- based on my discussion so far- to be a measure of capabilities. It may not be a sufficient measure, but I do not think it can be denied that it is an important one nonetheless. As we have seen, conflict is not necessarily destructive. It reveals the rupture of intersubjective meanings that may not be conducive to values of equality. It points to the rupture of elite-based status quo, and to the articulation of visions contesting inegalitarian world-views. The very fact that such conflict can be entered into is, it appears, a significant advance, over scenarios where such conflict would be unthinkable. For instance, across all four field sites, the historic patterns of accessing the state, since at least the Permanent Settlement of 1793, had been through the landlord or his feudatories. Peasants, sharecroppers and agricultural labourers could appeal to one against another, but in the overwhelming majority of the cases, there was no question of asserting claims, but of making meek requests. Since the emergence and deepening of democracy, a number of political entrepreneurs have emerged, against whom- as we have noted- workers can make certain claims, which they could not have even thought about in the

earlier period. The old patterns have persisted, as we saw in the case of Roshanar Ward 5, where the *jamindar* refused to countenance any support to the demands for the NREGS. Here, there is barely any cooperative conflict to speak of. In Ditya, workers have staked their claims for work, but have primarily viewed their relation with actors in political society as one of conflict, and relatively little cooperation. Rahimpur's workers have engaged in cooperative conflict, but not articulated their demands with egalitarian claims, unlike in Sargana Ward 1, where they have.

Pettit's republican exposition of freedom, which we discussed earlier in this chapter, would be unable to draw a distinction between the freedoms enjoyed by villagers in the four wards. Given that workers' preferences (to work) were only achieved in a context-dependent way (thanks to the intervention of actors in political society), this account would lead us to believe that there are effectively no freedoms for workers in the four localities, and that they are uniformly deprived of their freedoms across the wards. Sen's analysis would be far more nuanced, as we can imagine. Given that workers in Sargana Ward 1, Rahimpur and Ditya were able to achieve their preferences whereas those in Roshanar Ward 5 were not, his analysis would lead us to club those three localities in one group and the fourth in another. A relational approach to capabilities would, however, introduce a greater deal of nuance, which- I believe- is of analytical interest to Sen's work. Relations of cooperative conflict were most clearly evident in Sargana Ward 1, anchored in claims for asserting the prior assumption of equality by workers. Workers in Sargana Ward 1 could, therefore be seen to enjoy a greater deal of capability than those in the other two localities, because of the way in which they had anchored their claims in terms of reconfiguring social relations and interrogating social hierarchies. This method of analysing capabilities is, in my view, an important contribution to the capability

literature, interested as it is in questions pertaining to deepening democracy, the pursuit of justice, and reflecting on the ways in which people lead their lives.

2.2.Voice, ruptures and dissensus

The relational approach to capabilities leads us, with Sen, to appreciate the role of asserting voice in the augmentation of capabilities. Again, the role of actors in political society appears to complicate the analysis of capabilities and freedoms. We have seen in Chapter 4 that these actors are crucially responsible for the manner in which poor people access their entitlements. We explored their role in securing BPL cards, and examined the factors that made possible the assertion of voice and their sympathetic interpretation by politicians. We also noted the manner in which popular contentions emerged, were articulated, and demands staged directly by poor people to elected representatives and other duty-bearers, with actors in political society actually coat-tailing the performances. As before, our analysis compels us to posit two theoretical questions. One, under what circumstances can we say the assertion of voice extends capabilities? Two, can we read the augmentation of capabilities as the assertion of voice?

To answer the first question, our attention was drawn to pluralist polities and intra-elite competitions as key explanatory variables. But, as we saw, that was not all. Demands were voiced by members of different social groups, uniquely aware of their having been historically oppressed. Where these groups have been mobilised in the name of social engineering efforts of supra-local political parties, demands staged by them appeared to have carried greater seriousness. The case of Musahars or Kevats being taken as seriously as they were in Sargana Ward 1 contrasted starkly with the manner in which claims voiced by Shershabadiya or Kunjra Muslims or Saotal tribals

elsewhere were summarily dismissed. Thus, in Sargana Ward 1, Musahar members of delegations demanding BPL cards were deemed a ‘nuisance’, but these claims were acceded to, nevertheless.

Can we understand the assertion of voice as the augmentation of capabilities? To be even more forthright: can we say the assertion of voice is itself a measure of expansion of capabilities, not just a means to achieve it. If we accept capabilities as about contesting relations of domination and subordination, then we can argue that the assertion of voice provides a measure of the extent to which such relations are challenged. To adapt a claim made above, that voices can be asserted in the first place is an important indicator of enhanced capabilities, and not only a means to achieve it. Given the painful and oppressive historical trajectories of the study localities and the surrounding regions, it may be argued that any assertion of voice during the reign of the landlords was dangerous and disallowed. Assertions of voice led to the destabilisation and eventual dismantling of the *ancien régime*, but it was also a consequence of it. The fact that poor, landless ‘untouchable’ communities could even begin to think of asking questions in public, or express their preferences, is quite commendable. The articulation of demands that have hitherto been categorised as inchoate noise is itself a gauge of enhanced capabilities. With Rancière, we can appreciate how challenges to the ‘deprivation of voice’ contribute to enhancing substantive freedoms. Again, from the four localities, we can see that such assertions were most forcefully articulated in Sargana Ward 1 and Rahimpur. They were relatively less anchored in the claims for equality in Ditya and Roshanar Ward 5. Understood as the forcing of prior claims of equality, then, one can make the case that the augmentation of capabilities is not only furthered by asserting voices. Rather, it is about asserting voices.

In Chapter 5, we explored one of the ways in which voices may be asserted—i.e. through agonistic exchanges. That chapter compels us to think of ways in which agonistic exchanges contribute to augmentation of capabilities and, indeed, constitute capabilities. This brings us in some tension with Sen’s espousal of deliberative versions of democracy, whereby he appears to favour the resolution of contentious issues through reasoned exchanges, rather than passionate and emotion-laden ones. However, as we have seen in Chapter 1, and as I have shown elsewhere, Sen’s approach does not completely foreclose an adherence to agonistic exchanges. Likewise, proponents of agonistic principles anchor their defence in the ethico-normative principles of liberal democracy, to which Sen is clearly committed. What Chapter 5 draws our particular attention to is the ruptures in the logic of exclusivist, elite-based rule, which, we can legitimately argue, based on our preceding discussions, is not only instrumental in augmenting capabilities, but an important measure of it.

These insights are carried further in Chapter 6, where we analyse how prevailing interpretations of social problems are interpreted by members of three historically marginalised communities. Through the narrative of demands that appear, in the first instance, as affirmations of identities, we are confronted with novel forms of claim-making that forge political subjectivities straddling the limits of conventional identity-based politics. Indeed, more than ‘identifications’, we are confronted with disidentifications, or repudiations of imposed identities. We argue that this dissensus, the manner in which the scene for the exchange of interpretations is set, and the very interpretation of problems is contested, is at the core of analysing capabilities. Not only does the practice of dissensus lead to the enhancement of capabilities, it also *constitutes* it. The ability of historically-marginalised caste groups to articulate their

interpretation of political problems in public forums and compel social elites to listen is in itself to be valued, as our discussion in Chapter 6 shows. Unlike the cases narrated in the other chapters, the disputes under consideration are far from settled. This characteristic makes these cases even more interesting to study, since we can make claims about capabilities without having to factor in the effects. This prevents us from being overtly consequentialist, while assessing whether members of the said communities are able to attain the preferences they have chosen and, arguably, have reason to choose.

A common theme that ties together the empirical chapters is the on-going negotiation of poor people with the state. We have noted that the state has myriad meanings for different segments of the population, and- indeed, the ‘everyday state’ which most of our interlocutors engaged with and described to us is often various different from what has been variously called the ‘state idea’ (Abrams, 1988) or the ‘sublime state’ (Hansen, 2001). In the study localities, the idea of the state was made most concrete through the working of the Panchayat, which not only made the government’s presence felt on the ground, but also allowed populations within their jurisdictions shape governance processes in different, and often contradictory, ways. The voices, agonies and dissenting practices of the population were often directed towards the state, either to hold its functionaries accountable or to complain against local elites. This came up most clearly through the cases we discussed from Rahimpur and Sargana Ward 1. But poor people were not always successful in achieving their objectives, as in Ditya. Nonetheless, they could derive satisfaction in at least having spoken up. In Roshanar Ward 5, even that option was closed to the poor, as we have seen.

2.3. Possible lines of criticism

Three possible criticisms may be anticipated. First, that the account of the capable subject I have sketched above, requires a hyperactive individual, one who is forever vigilant and alert, and- to borrow from Gerry Cohen's initial characterisation of capabilities- requiring a great deal of athleticism. The second, that by re-focussing attention on agency freedoms and the ability of people to engage in contentious politics, this account encourages a 'blame the victim' attitude towards those who might fail to be combative vis-à-vis unequal social relations. Third, is there a danger in this account of overlooking the contribution of strong institutions and supportive social structures to the enhancement of capabilities? These are important criticisms that I would like to address, before turning to conclude this thesis.

The charge that the account I sketch is that of a hyperactive individual is tempting, but does not hold, upon scrutiny. This critique can be made from a viewpoint that I have too many expectations of the capable subject: I envisage them to interrogate relations of domination and subordination when they might want to simply 'get on with their lives'; I ask them to combat aggressive social elites, where they would rather be left alone; in short, I expect them to put on heroic performances when they appear perfectly content with their situations. Is it the fate of the capable subject to be in perpetual contention, resistance and negotiation (for the purpose of the present argument, I overlook the important differences between these three acts)? My response to this query is to affirm that the capable subject is one who asserts their prior assumption of equality to those around them: these assertions do not always need to involve voluble protests, or manipulation of political leaders (even if, in all the

examples I have provided, they do). Their assertion of equality could take the form of non-active contentions such as looking self-styled social superiors in the eye, as well as refusals to do as they are told. We have seen evidence of the latter at work through our account in Sargana Ward 1, where Musahar villagers refuse to work for the landlord without having to- at that point- engage in any heroic rebellions. Being capable in this account is not about heroic acts of resistance, but of the performance of equality.

To turn the question around, am I blaming the victim for their not being capable enough? This might stem from my characterisation of Sirajul Islam as being 'less capable' than others in Rahimpur, or members of 'the Musahars' as being more capable than members of the other communities in Sargana Ward 1? After all, as citizens, they should all equally benefit from public services. Am I blaming Sirajul Islam and Sargana Ward 1's non-Musahar poor for being not assertive enough? Again, this question is important. Following Sen, this could be answered in two parts. First, it would appear that, following a 'realised agency' approach, Sirajul Islam and the other poor communities in Sargana Ward 1 should have received the services they were entitled to, without them having to 'fight' for it. This resonates with the example provided by Sen about how the agency of the inhabitants of a given neighbourhood is 'realised' even without them having to take any action when the government sprays malaria-containing medicines in their vicinity (Sen, 1992). Nonetheless, and this brings me to the second part, Sen clarifies in his later work (Sen, 2009: 288-9) that agency freedoms and well-being freedoms together characterise a person's capability: the manner in which a person advances what is of interest to their own sense of values in more important to

evaluating capabilities than the well-being achievements accruing from actions taken by the state. With this characterisation, it could be legitimately argued that our capabilities are more about ‘doing’ than being ‘done to’. I have sought to argue that capabilities are about ‘asserting equality’ than about expecting emancipation by institutions or activists. Such analysis leads me to conclude that Sirajul Islam’s capabilities would be more clearly articulated were he to assert his own prior assumption of equality. The use of the capability lens draws our attention to the spaces of freedoms. To that extent, it seeks to eschew a narrative of victimhood and seeks to examine subjects as trying to author their own destinies, even as they face structural and institutional constraints. The account I have drawn through this project remains faithful to this central objective of Sen’s theorisation.

This brings me to the third line of criticism: whatever happens to formal institutions, such as bureaucracies, political parties, and the like? Does the efficient provisioning of services not matter? Are the ability of citizens (subjects, in my conception) to enjoy the opportunities provided by the widespread reach of education, health services and livelihood security of no consequence? My response to these criticisms would be in two parts, again. For the first, following Sen, I would reiterate the point made earlier- the capability approach “shifts the focus away from seeing a person as just a vehicle of well-being, ignoring the importance of the person’s own judgements and priorities, with which the agency concerns are linked” (Sen, 2009: 288). As Corbridge (2002) has shown, inhabitants of countries such as China benefit from well-provisioned services, without them enjoying what might be legitimately called ‘freedoms’. Sen himself has drawn attention to

the lessons that can be learned from the Chinese experience in institutional reforms and the spread of literacy, but notes, as above, that the perusal of freedoms are central to the way in which capabilities are defined.

I would like to approach the question in another way, and this brings me to the second part of my response. Formal institutions, bureaucracies and political parties are important for capabilities, but not only because they provide efficient services or ensure law and order. They are important to the extent that they facilitate the assertion of equality in society. It might be pertinent to clarify with the example of Scandinavian countries that are often cited as the model of capability-enhancing polities. The relational reading of capabilities would compel us to look, not at literacy rates or health care provisions alone. A relational perspective would compel us to analyse the extent to which equality is asserted in society by those who may thought to have no business to speak in public. Thus, the ‘common school’ system that prevails in the Nordic countries may provide a good reason for suggesting that capabilities, understood as the interrogation of unequal social relations, are better achieved here than in countries without such provisions. However, an analysis of the relationship of parents and carers of young children with certain arms of the state, for instance the Child Welfare Services, which has often been characterised as marked by authoritarianism, may lead to far sober conclusions about capabilities in these countries. Fuelling these sobered conclusions would be reports of the ascendance in support for xenophobic political formations as well as acts of violence that compel analysts to take a politicised reading of capabilities more seriously than they have done so far.

3. THE MAKING OF THE CAPABLE SUBJECT

With Rancière, it is possible to argue that politics is about subjectivisation- the construction of subjects in relational terms. However, as I have shown, politics in the four described localities differs to the extent that it constructs different subjectivities and interrogates existing identities. Although in all four localities, politics is characterised by contentions over resources and decisions, it appears that in Sargana and Rahimpur its practice calls into question a configuration of power that negates the assumption of equality. In these two localities more than in others, the rupture in the logic of rule (Rancière, 2001: 5) is more clearly discernible. Within these two, it is in Sargana that this rupture most explicitly takes on the mantle of dissensus. It would be fallacious to suggest that such processes are entirely absent in the other localities or to propose that these are complete in Sargana. Rather, what I have argued, based on the analysis of the evidence, is that local governance in Sargana, more than in the other localities, is forced to negotiate with repertoires of contentions by the poor and by their allies in local political society. These contentions often appear unreasonable to their interlocutors, drawing as they do on rhetorical performativity, display of passion and anger, and evocation of apparently unrelated historical events. Nonetheless, these contribute in no small way to the enhancement of capabilities of the poor, both by enhancing their ‘well-being freedoms’ and ‘agency freedoms’.

In espousing the capability approach, I have sought to benefit from a perspective that emphasises an integrated approach to agency and well-being, conditions of being and substantive opportunities to achieve those conditions of being, to what individuals value and have reason to value, and the culmination outcomes of their activities as well as to the comprehensive processes through which they achieved those outcomes (Sen, 2009). Combining this approach with the analytic

lens of ‘dissensus’ has allowed me to develop an arguably more politicised reading of what it might mean to be ‘capable’ than what is presently available.

The affective accounts from the localities draw attention to the possibilities that agency freedoms do not and need not translate into well-being, at least not in the short run. At any rate, they were not calculated to. From reading Sen’s account of rationality (Sen, 2002) this should come as no surprise. When Gunavati launched her diatribe against her neighbours, there was a real danger of a reduction in her well-being, with the possibility of violence inflicted against her. When those claiming work under the NREGS or demanding ‘poverty cards’ under the BPL scheme engaged in rancorous exchanges with social and political superiors, there was no immediate benefit to them: indeed, if anything they were faced with the real danger of their limited well-beings further curtailed, because of the manner in which local elites threatened to be antagonised. These apparent divergences, and possible dichotomies, appear in Sargana Ward 1 as well, where despite all the resplendent exchanges and assertions, there appears no institutional solution in sight to the travails of the marginalised social groups. However, as Sen reminds us, agency freedoms are important in their own right, and not because they necessarily lead to improved well-being (Sen, 2009: 289).

It is the quest for effective freedoms that binds Amin-ul Islam, Kunal Moholi, Daulal bibi, Akbar Ali, Dharmesh Srivastav, Babul Sarkar, Gunavati Yadav, Sohrab Ali, Jhilmil Devi Rishi and Hiranandan Hasda with Sabina Alkire, Severine Deneulin, Wiebke Kuklys, Martha Nussbaum, Ingrid Robeyns, Amartya Sen, Frances Stewart, and all those theorists who have contributed to invigorating the Capability Approach and making it the influential perspective it is today. As an approach that has enabled policy-makers to think beyond utilities and welfare to things that individuals value

and have reason to value being and doing, the capabilities perspective has made a fundamental contribution to furthering the ethico-political principles of hard-won democratic struggles- vis. individual liberty, the promise of an egalitarian social order and the end of a single substantive idea of a good life. To do this even more meaningfully, the approach needs necessarily to engage with the kinds of political contentions that the afore-mentioned individuals and millions of subjects like them across the world have to engage with almost every day. Capability analysts cannot ignore the contentious ways in which political subjectivities are forged, as this thesis has shown.

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ANNEX 1: DECISION-MATRIX FOR FIELD STUDY SITES

POOL OF STATES WHERE I COULD SPEAK THE LANGUAGE (HINDI/ BANGLA)

1. Bihar 2. Haryana 3. Madhya Pradesh 4. Rajasthan 5. Uttar Pradesh 6. West Bengal

MEDIUM-PERFORMING STATE

Name	Rank	HDI Value
Haryana	5	0.509
Rajasthan	9	0.424
West Bengal	8	0.472
Source: India Human Development Report, Gol (2002): 25		

POOR PERFORMING STATE

Name	Rank	HDI Value
Bihar	15	0.367
Madhya Pradesh	12	0.394
Uttar Pradesh	13	0.388
Source: India Human Development Report, Gol (2002): 25		

CHARACTERISTICS OF POLITICS

(ONE STATE FROM ABOVE)

1. Better reputation for pro-poor governance
2. Lack of primordial identities/ discourse of redistribution
3. Cadre-based institutionalized politics

Source: Corbridge and Harriss, 2001

CHARACTERISTICS OF POLITICS

(ONE STATE FROM ABOVE)

1. Reputation for misgovernance
2. Pre-eminence of primordial identities in shaping political discourse/ discourse of recognition
3. De-institutionalized politics

Source: Corbridge and Harriss, 2001

SHARED FEATURES

1. Discourse of contestation [Source: Omvedt, 1993]
2. Substantive devolution to local governments [Source: NCAER, n.d.]
3. Shared legacy of land tenurial arrangements [Guha, 1977]

WEST BENGAL

MALDAH

MOST DEPRIVED DISTRICT

Source for West Bengal: GoWB, 2005

Source for Bihar: consultations with scholars and activists

BIHAR

ARARIA

BLOCK: OLD MALDAH

Name	# of NREGS workdays
Bhabhuk	18.64
Jatradanga	15.91
Mahishbhatani	40.44
Mangalbari	12.67
Muchia	4.43
Shahpur	11.72
Source: Gram Panchayat offices	

PANCHAYAT SELECTION

1. Familiarity of local contacts with block
2. Local history of participating in contentions
3. Located within ten kilometers of one another
4. Similarities in average No. OF NREGS workdays

BLOCK: BHARGAMA

Name	# of NREGS workdays
Kushmaul	27.44
Khajuri	12.67
Khuta Baijnathpur	17.24
Jaynagar	22.51
Dhaneshwari	16.09
Naya Bhargama	18.17
Paikpar	17.22
Birnagar (W)	25.60
Birnagar (E)	23.03
Bhargama	14.92
Manulhatti	13.23
Raghunathour (N)	11.19
Raghunathpur (S)	18.08
Ram Adi	6.33
Bishariya	17.96
Shankarpur	22.68
Sirasiya Kalan	26.57
Sirasiya Hanuman	40.45
Simarbani	13.11
Haripur Kala	11.95

Source: Gram Panchayat offices





BIHAR

To Mukaria

UTTAR DINAJPUR

To Raiganj
District Headquarter

MALDAH
West Bengal

DAKSHIN DINAJPUR

To Katihar

Tulsihata

Kharba

Harishchandrapur

Bhalukha Rd.

Bhaluka

Samsi

Ratua

Gajol

Bamangola

Pandua

Bijapur

Maldah

Habibpur

INGRAJ BAZAR

Panchanandapur

Kaliachak

Dilalpur

To Suti

To Bangladesh

To Baharampur
District Headquarter

Ganga

JHARKHAND

BANGLADESH

Map not to Scale

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	District Boundary
	Major Road
	Road
	Railway Track
	District Headquarter
	Taluk Headquarter
	Town
	Tourist Place
	Canal
	National Highway
	River
	International Boundry
	Airport

ANNEX 2: THE CENSUS SURVEY

The survey was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, census data was collected from nearly 4,500 households in eighteen wards of the two States. The survey response structure elicited nominal responses. However, the codes were treated ordinally. Based on the analysis of this data, in-depth interviews were conducted with 500 households in four purposively selected localities. Probability samples for West Bengal were generated at 7.3% error level and 90% confidence levels. Probability samples for Bihar were generated at 6% error level and 90% confidence levels. In the survey, the response structure elicited nominal as well as open-ended responses. The codes were treated nominally and categorically. The data was analyzed using the STATA software package.

The survey data

The survey instrument¹ included each of the thirteen questions (twelve in the case of West Bengal) mandated in the Planning Commission's survey schedule. It also included the multi-dimensional poverty indicators (MPI) that were at that time being developed by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative for the UNDP Human Development Report (Alkire and Santos, 2010). In addition, it also drew on the questions framed for the BPL survey proposed by Mehrotra and Mander (Mehrotra and Mander, 2009) and the Destitution Questionnaire developed by the Right to Food campaign in India (RTF, 2002). The survey schedule specifically asked whether the respondent household possessed a BPL card or not. The survey instrument was administered in the local dialect.

The survey response coding structure followed the cardinal response variables used by the Planning Commission's BPL survey. This harmonization facilitated the calculation and- subsequently- the assignment of a score to each surveyed household in accordance with the guidance issued by the Commission. The response variables for questions not corresponding with those on the official BPL survey, but drawing on the MPI were coded using the dichotomous variables (0/1) used by that index. Where the questions were such that they corresponded to both methodologies, the response format followed the cardinal treatment accorded to the data by the Planning Commission, since it was easier to dichotomize cardinal data.

Recruitment & training of investigators

The investigators were recruited from among a pool of NGO workers. In both States, my local NGO contacts recruited them on the basis of previous work experience, familiarity with local dialect, and ability and willingness to work in rural areas for extended periods of time. In West Bengal, the researchers were based out of Maldah town and commuted daily to the field localities using public transport or their own vehicles. In Bihar, they were residents of the neighboring Gram Panchayat.

The training imparted to the investigators emphasized not only the interview techniques but also the accurate coding of responses, since that would directly impact the scores obtained by the household during this exercise. The fact that each household

¹ See Appendix 2

would be 'scored' was not shared with the investigators, in order to prevent possible manipulations of the data. The training proceeded in two steps. I undertook a day-long training with 'senior surveyors' (two in Bihar and one in West Bengal) in Hindi/ Bangla. These 'senior surveyors', now trained the other surveyors (seventeen in West Bengal and twenty-four in Bihar) in the local dialect. I was present throughout the training period in order to monitor the training and, further, to respond to any concerns or requests for clarifications. The investigators undertook a limited number of 'mock interviews' with individuals in neighboring localities (not the ones identified for this study). The limited number of mock interviews reflected an important constraint (borne out by limitations of time and money).

Survey coverage

Following the standard sociological approach in India, individuals habitually partaking food cooked in the same *chulha* (stove) were considered to be members of a single household. On the survey response sheet, each household was assigned a unique alphanumeric code, based on the locality where the household was located, the code assigned to the investigator who carried out the interview, and the chronological order in which the household had been interviewed. This coding ensured subsequent anonymity and data protection. It was sometimes the case that a homestead was empty when the investigators approached it to collect data. In such circumstances, they asked the neighbors the whereabouts of the individuals dwelling in those homesteads. Such individuals were 'surveyed' during subsequent visits by the investigators.

It is possible that a few households were not covered in the survey on account of having migrated from the locality during the period when the survey was conducted. No information on these households could be collected. Furthermore, it was impossible to compare the household list (either of the census or the one conducted by the State Government for the BPL exercise) given the ongoing nuclearization of families in most localities, a trend they share with other rural and urban localities throughout the country.

Data quality

The survey was very closely monitored by the trainer-surveyors as well as by me. I was based out of the localities where the surveys were conducted. The localities in Bihar lay within a five kilometer radius of my base, so I could easily walk to or hitch a ride to the localities even as the surveys were being conducted. This enabled me to verify if the investigators were doing their job diligently and to meet with randomly selected individuals who had been interviewed in order to informally cross-verify what kind of questions were being asked. In West Bengal, too, I was based out of the localities where the survey was undertaken. These settlements were denser, but also scattered across a wider area. Hence I had to rely mostly on hitchhiking with villagers as they went about their daily business. In both States, monitoring was particularly intense the first two days, when the surveyors were unfamiliar with both the survey schedule and my monitoring techniques. I found several discrepancies in those two days. consequently, over fifty forms in both States had to be discarded. The survey in Bihar was completed in 16 days. In West Bengal it took 21 days to complete them.

Even as the importance of communicating in the local dialect was emphasized during the training, my monitoring visits were used as a mechanism to ensure that the

survey interviews were carried out in local dialects- Thaiti in Araria and Desiya and Santhali among the Desiyas and Santhals in Maldah. It is possible that a few discrepancies between the written language of the questionnaire and the local dialect in which it was administered crept in. This is a criticism that I am aware can be levelled against me.

The data collected was subjected to three different levels of checks. The first was a 'peer review', under which each completed survey form was randomly allocated among the investigators (with care taken to ensure that forms were not allocated to those who filled them). Basic logical errors were identified, and the interviews were redone where necessary. Priority was accorded to ensuring that the data collected was accurate, and logical inconsistencies arising out of investigators' negligence were reduced. Each checked form was then 'endorsed' by the senior surveyors, who 'back-checked' or cross-verified with the respondents 20% of the forms of each of the investigators. Post their endorsement, it was expected that there remained no logical inconsistencies. Finally, I picked up completed forms randomly to check for logical errors. If I noted that over 20% of the forms submitted by a given investigator suffered from logical inconsistencies, all the forms completed by them were subjected to my personal scrutiny. Each form for which errors were unearthed was re-administered.

I recognize, following Scott (1990), that no degree of surveillance is ever complete. The ways in which field investigators undermine the most rigorous monitoring techniques is an interesting ethnographic study by itself. It needs to be recognized that this exercise too is based on the extent to which logical inconsistencies could be exposed. For supervisors, it was easy to focus on ensuring that data collected on the response forms were amenable to data entry, rather than verifying its accuracy. Given the limited resources at my disposal (resources which would have enabled me to institutionalize supervisory arrangements), this is a possibility I cannot deny since I was unable to ensure that each form was cross-verified.

Data entry

Data collected from both districts was entered into 'excel' program by staff of an NGO contact in Maldah. I recognize that the use of the Access program would have considerably reduced errors. This choice was made given the constraints on available resources and capacities available with me. I recognize that this could be argued to be an important limitation, as the possibilities of errors increase. However, the possibilities for errors were reduced by organizing the data operators in pairs for this exercise. This composition was designed to reduce the possibilities of error likely to occur were individual data entry operators to work through the maze of questionnaires.

The data operators comprised three teams of young men and women who had received extensive formal education. The Maldah data was entered from December 21 to December 25, 2009. The men had also acted as investigators, and were thus intimately familiar with the survey instrument. This concentration of skills and expertise facilitated the relatively smooth data entry process in the State. The decision to deploy this team to enter the Araria data (from January 21 to January 27, 2010) was motivated by the following factors: the familiarity of the Maldah data operators with the questionnaire (recall that the Maldah data was collected prior to the Araria data), their understanding of

written Hindi and the use of the Arabic numeral (rather than the Devnagari numeral) for the response variables together made it easier for them to enter the data.

Given the limitations of data presentation and analysis in the 'excel' program, the data was transferred to the STATA package. This was a crucial phase, as it would determine the subsequent analysis of the data, which in turn would impact the arguments that I make. Following the transfer into stata, the data was cleaned using basic checks: observations with spurious data were abandoned. With this exercise, there remained 4,520 observations across the eighteen localities of the two States. These observations formed the basis for the analysis presented in the rest of this chapter.

Scoring of surveyed households

Each response was scored, using the scheme outlined by the Planning Commission. The scores were generated using the appropriate commands in the stata package. Based on these scores as well as the State-mandated 'cut-offs', I classified the households as 'BPL Schedule Poor' or otherwise. Thus, if a household in the Bihar households obtained a score less than 13 (of a total possible score of 52), they were categorized as 'BPL Schedule Poor', whereas if they scored 13 and over, they were categorized as 'Non-BPL Schedule Poor'. Likewise, for West Bengal, households were categorized as 'BPL Schedule Poor' if they obtained a score less than or equal to 33 (of a total possible score of 60), and as 'Non-BPL Schedule Poor' otherwise.

Household categories

The next and final step in the categorization of the households was to classify the households as MPI Poor and non-MPI Poor. The profiles of the MPI Poor have already been presented in Chapter 2. The MPI Poor households were then categorized into four groups, on the basis of the scores they obtained, and their actual possession of BPL cards. Table 9 presents a schematic representation of these four groups. Households located in Quadrant A were MPI Poor households that scored higher than the State-mandated cutoffs noted above but, at the same time, did not hold BPL cards. Households located in Quadrant C were those MPI Poor households that scored less than the State-mandated cutoffs and possessed BPL cards. Both these groups of households supported the contention that the rules of allocating BPL cards were indeed being followed. However, the households located in Quadrants B and D subverted this contention. Households located in Quadrant B were those MPI Poor households that obtained scores higher than the State-mandated cutoffs (and, therefore were not eligible for the BPL card), yet they reported possessing BPL cards. The converse situation held for the households located in Quadrant D. These MPI Poor households obtained scores less than the State-mandated cutoffs, yet they reported not possessing BPL cards. This classification was done for the general survey population as well.

TABLE 9:
Classification of households on the basis of BPL Scores
and BPL cardholding status

		<i>Household classification on the basis of scores obtained</i>	
		(Non- BPL Schedule Poor ²) (0)	(BPL Schedule Poor ³) (1)
<i>BPL cardholding status</i>	Non- BPL cardholder (0)	(A)	(D)
	BPL Cardholder (1)	(B)	(C)

² Households obtaining scores higher than State-mandated cut-offs

³ Households obtaining scores less than/ equal to State-mandated cut-offs

ANNEX 3: THE MULTIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY INDEX

Following Alkire and Foster (2011), I use the concept of the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) to encapsulate the diverse manifestations of poverty. The MPI uses ten indicators to measure three critical dimensions of poverty at the household level: education, health and living standard. The three dimensions are equally weighted, although the weightage assigned to the indicators varies. To elaborate:

1. The dimension of 'education' comprises the following indicators, each weighted equally at 1/6
 - a. Years of schooling: the household was considered deprived if no household member completed five years of schooling
 - b. School Attendance: the household was considered deprived if any child aged 6 -14 was not attending school
2. The dimension of 'health' comprises the following indicators, each weighted equally at 1/6
 - a. Child Mortality: the household was considered deprived if any child aged five years or less had died in the family within the last five years
 - b. Nutrition: the household was considered deprived if anyone in the household reported that there were times when they ate fewer meals than usual or when they reported not knowing in the morning whether they would be able to afford a meal in the evening.
3. The dimension of 'standard of living' comprises the following indicators, each weighted equally at 1/18
 - a. Electricity: the household was considered deprived if it had no legal access to electricity
 - b. Drinking water: the household was considered deprived if it did not have access to safe drinking water
 - c. Sanitation: the household was considered if it did not have their own improved sanitation
 - d. Flooring: the household was considered deprived if the house it inhabited had a dirt, sand or dung floor
 - e. Fuel: the household was considered deprived if it used wood, charcoal or dung for cooking
 - f. Assets: the household was considered deprived if it did not own more than one of: radio, TV, telephone, motorized vehicle, or refrigerator.

A household was identified as 'multi-dimensionally poor', or MPI Poor, if it was deprived in at least one dimension, or in a combination of indicators that added up to at least one dimension.

(see <http://www.ophi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/OPHI-MPI-Brief.pdf> for further details).

CENSUS INSTRUMENTS

TRACKING INFORMATION FOR HOUSEHOLD									
STATE:		GRAM PANCHAYAT:	NAME:						
DISTRICT:			CODE:						
BLOCK:		VILLAGE:	NAME						
HOUSEHOLD SERIAL NUMBER:			CODE :						
NAME OF HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD:									

Name of respondent:

House address:

House located in (Circle only one):

1. SC/ST Hamlet:	1
2. Muslim Hamlet:	2
3. SC/ST Colony in the main village:	3
4. Muslim colony in the main village:	4

Does the household have a BPL card? Yes 1/ No 2

Does the household have an NREGA job card? Yes 1/ No 2

Enumerator's name:

I. HOUSEHOLD ROSTER

1. ID CO D E	2. PLEASE TELL ME NAMES OF ALL PERSONS WHO USUALLY LIVE IN THIS HOUSE AND EAT MEALS FROM THE SAME KITCHEN. PLEASE INCLUDE FULL TIME RESIDENT SERVANTS. PLEASE START WITH HOUSEHOLD HEAD Record name. First complete all members of household vertically. Then start moving for each member horizontally from column 3 onwards	3. GE ND ER OF [NA ME] M a l e 1 F e m a l e 2	4. HOW OLD WAS [NAME] ON HIS/HER LAST BIRTHD AY? Record in complet ed years as two digit code	5. WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP OF [NAME] TO THE HEAD OF THE HOUSEHOLD? Self 1 Spouse of head 2 Child 3 Spouse of married child 4 Grandchild 5 Father/mother/father-in-law/mother-in-law 6 Brother/sister/ Brother-in-law/sister-in-law 7 Other relatives 8 Servants/employees/other non-relatives 9	6.1 For all persons aged 5 years and above HOW MANY YEARS OF EDUCATION HAS (NAME) COMPLETED? Record in completed years 6.2. THERAFTER, INDICATE LITERACY STATUS Illiterate- 0 Upto Class 5- 1 Completed Class 10- 2 Graduate/ Professional- 3 Post-graduate/ professional- 4						7. State primary occupation/ source of income Record verbatim and code using codebook	8. For all persons aged 14 or less, state if they are going to school and working/ not working			
					8.1.Going to school Yes 1 No 2		8.2.Working outside the home Yes 1 No 2								
01					1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9		0	1	2	3	4		1 2	1 2	
02					1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9		0	1	2	3	4		1 2	1 2	
03					1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9		0	1	2	3	4		1 2	1 2	
04					1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9		0	1	2	3	4		1 2	1 2	
05					1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9		0	1	2	3	4		1 2	1 2	
06					1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9		0	1	2	3	4		1 2	1 2	
07					1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9		0	1	2	3	4		1 2	1 2	
08					1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9		0	1	2	3	4		1 2	1 2	

1. ID CO D E	2. PLEASE TELL ME NAMES OF ALL PERSONS WHO USUALLY LIVE IN THIS HOUSE AND EAT MEALS FROM THE SAME KITCHEN. PLEASE INCLUDE FULL TIME RESIDENT SERVANTS. PLEASE START WITH HOUSEHOLD HEAD Record name. First complete all members of household vertically. Then start moving for each member horizontally from column 3 onwards	3. GE ND ER OF [NA ME] M a l e 1 F e m a l e 2	4. HOW OLD WAS [NAME] ON HIS/HER LAST BIRTHD AY? Record in completed years as two digit code	5. WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP OF [NAME] TO THE HEAD OF THE HOUSEHOLD? Self 1 Spouse of head 2 Child 3 Spouse of married child 4 Grandchild 5 Father/mother/father-in-law/mother-in-law 6 Brother/sister/ Brother-in-law/sister-in-law 7 Other relatives 8 Servants/employees/other non-relatives 9	6.1 For all persons aged 5 years and above HOW MANY YEARS OF EDUCATION HAS (NAME) COMPLETED? Record in completed years 6.2. THERAFTER, INDICATE LITERACY STATUS Illiterate- 0 Upto Class 5- 1 Completed Class 10- 2 Graduate/ Professional- 3 Post-graduate/ professional- 4						7. State primary occupation/ source of income Record verbatim and code using codebook	8. For all persons aged 14 or less, state if they are going to school and working/ not working			
					6.1	6.2.						8.1.Going to school Yes 1 No 2		8.2.Working outside the home Yes 1 No 2	
09					1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9		0	1	2	3	4		1 2	1 2	
10					1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9		0	1	2	3	4		1 2	1 2	
11					1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9		0	1	2	3	4		1 2	1 2	
12					1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9		0	1	2	3	4		1 2	1 2	
13					1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9		0	1	2	3	4		1 2	1 2	
14					1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9		0	1	2	3	4		1 2	1 2	
15					1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9		0	1	2	3	4				

9. So, to confirm, the primary source of income for your household is:	
Alms	1
Landless agricultural laborer	2
Agricultural labourer with some land	3
Casual Worker	4
Subsistence Cultivation	5
Self-employed artisans	6
Self-employed fisherfolk	7
Salaried employment→ Ask 9.1 & 9.2	8
Other→ Ask 9.1 & 9.2	9
Specify _____	
9.1. How much does the highest salaried member of this household earn? Record Verbatim & then code: _____ Less than or equal to Rs. 10,000 per month More than Rs. 10,000 per month	1 0
9.2. Do you pay income tax?	
Yes	1
No	2

10. .WHAT IS YOUR RELIGION? Record verbatim	11. .WHAT IS YOUR CASTE? Record verbatim

INVESTIGATOR CHECK:
Use SC / ST list provided to post-code household as follows

SC	1	Mahadalit	11
Muslim	2	Pasmanda	21
ST	5		
PTG	51	Denotified tribes	52
MBC	6	OBC	7
General Caste Hindus	0	Others	9

II. HOUSEHOLD SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE

Attributes	Question	Coding
House	1. Do you have a house to live in? Yes→ ask 1.1 No→ skip to Q. 2.	1 2
	1.1. What type of house do you live in?	
	Kutcha	1
	Semi-Pucca	2
	Pucca	3
	Urban type	4
	1.2. Investigator check (Do not ask): Note if roof is thatched Yes No	1 2
	1.3. Investigator check (Do not ask): Note if floor is mud Yes No	1 2
	1.4. Is the house provided by the Government Yes No	1 2
Household infrastructure and physical assets	2. Do you own the following:	
	2.1. Electric fan Yes No	1 2
	2.2. Color TV Yes No	1 2
	2.3. Kitchen appliances, such as pressure cooker Yes No	1 2
	2.4. Radio Yes No	1 2
	2.5. Refrigerator Yes No	1 2
	2.6. Motorized vehicle or equipment: Yes No If yes, specify (eg. Car, tuck, tractor, power tiller, harvester)	1 2

Attributes	Question	Coding
	2.7. Bicycle	
	Yes	1
	No	2
	2.8. Cellular/ mobile phone	
	Yes	1
	No	2
	2.9. Landline Phone	
	Yes	1
	No	2
	Investigator: Do not ask, Code on basis of above responses	
	No item owned	0
	Any one item owned	1
	Two items only owned	2
	Any three items owned	3
	More than three items owned	4
Land ownership	3. Do you own any land?	
	Yes→ Ask 3.1.	
	No→ Skip to 4	1
	If yes, how many hectares?	2

	3.1. Is any of your land irrigated?	
	Yes	1
	No	2
	If yes, how much?	

Drinking Water	Investigator: Do not ask, Code on basis of response to 3 & 3.1.	
	Nil Landholdings	0
	Less than one hectare unirrigated or 0.5 hectare irrigated	1
	More than one and less than 2 hectare unirrigated or 0.5 to 1 hectare irrigated	2
	More than 2 hectare and less than 5 hectare unirrigated or 1 to 2.5 hectare irrigated	3
	More than 5 hectare unirrigated or more than 2.5 hectare irrigated	4
	4. Where do you draw drinking water from? (Investigator: Use codes as prompts)	
	Unprotected well/ spring/ lake/ pond/ stream/ river	1
	Hand pump→ Ask:	2
	Is it provided by the Government	
	Yes	21
	No	22

Attributes	Question	Coding
	Tanker truck/ cart with small tank	3
	Electric pump	4
	Bottled water→ Specify where it is obtained from _____	5
	Other Specify _____	6
Sanitation	5. Where do you go for defecation?	
	Open defecation	0
	Group latrines with irregular water supply	1
	Group latrine with regular water supply	2
	Group latrine with regular water supply and sweeper	3
	Private latrine	4
Food security	6. How many meals in a day do your family members usually eat? (Record verbatim and code later): _____	
	Less than one meal per day in the major part of the year	0
	Normally one meal but sometimes less	1
	Normally one meal throughout the year	2
	Two meals per day and occasional shortage	3
	Enough food	4
	6.1. Are there any specific times of the year, when your family is compelled to eat less than these many meals? Yes→ Continue to 6.2 No → Skip to 6.3	1 2
	6.2. Which times/ seasons are these? (Record verbatim)	
	6.3. During the last twelve months, have there been days when you didn't know in the morning whether you would be able to feed your family in the evening? Yes No	1 2
	6.4. Approximately, how many such days were there in an average month? Record verbatim	
Health and nutrition	7. Does any member of your house have any of the following diseases?	
	7.1. Tuberculosis Yes	1

Attributes	Question	Coding
	No	2
	7.2. Leprosy	
	Yes	1
	No	2
	7.3. HIV/ AIDS	
	Yes	1
	No	2
	7.4. Does any member of your household have any 'special physical needs' (this includes all conditions usually described as physical disability and mental illnesses)?	1 2
	7.5. Does [name of the head of the household] suffer from any of these diseases?	
	Yes	1
	No	2
	8. In the last ten years, has any <u>male</u> child in the house died within five years of birth?	1 2
	8.1. In the last ten years, has any <u>female</u> child in the house died within five years of birth?	
	Yes	1
	No	2
Labor	9. Is any member of the household 'bonded' to another household in the village?	
	Yes	1
	No	2
Clothing	10. How many sets of clothes do you have available? Record verbatim and then code below:	
	Less than two pairs	0
	More than two pairs but less than four	1
	More than four pairs but less than six	2
	More than six pairs but less than ten	3
	More than ten pairs	4
Preference for assistance	11. How do you prefer the Government to assist you? Record verbatim and then code below:	
	Wage employment	0
	Self-employment	1
	Training and skill upgradation	2
	Housing	3
	Loan/subsidy more than Rs. 1 lakh or no assistance required	4

Agency	12. To what extent do you think that people like you can influence happenings in your neighbourhood/ community? Yes No	1 2
	13. Do you feel that people around you treat you with respect? Yes No	1 2
	14. There are many potential threats and dangers to people's security in today's world. Thinking about all the possible threats, what threat is of <u>most</u> concern to you? Record verbatim:	
Affiliation with associations	15. Are you or any member of your household members of any of the following associations?	
	15.1.NGO/ Government- sponsored/ facilitated SHG/ Farmer's club/ Cooperative/ other association Yes→ Specify No	1 2
	15.2.'Spontaneous' organization facilitated by villagers (eg. Library/ Youth group/ Festival committee) Yes→ Specify No	1 2
	15.3.Political party Yes No	1 2

16. Have any of your family members left home to go to another location?		
Yes→ Continue to 16.1	1	No→ Skip to 17 2
16.1.Where have they gone? (Record locations verbatim)		16.2.What kind of work do they do? (Record verbatim and then code as below)
		Casual Work 0
		Seasonal employment 1
		Other forms of livelihood 2
		Non-migrant 3
		Other purpose 4

17. Is your household in debt to anyone, or have you been in debt to anyone during the last five years?		
Yes →Continue to 17.1	1	No→ Thank and terminate the interview 2
	17.1.Who have you been in debt to? Record verbatim	17.2.For what purpose? Record verbatim
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
Type of indebtedness, investigator to code on basis of response to Q. 17.1 & 17.2		
	Daily consumption purposes from normal sources	0
	For production purposes from normal sources	1
	For other purposes from normal sources	2
	Borrowing from institutional assets	3
	No indebtedness	4

SCORING

A. According to BPL 2002 methodology

ATTRIBUTES/ Question reference	MARKING SCHEME	MARKS OBTAINED
1. Landholding Ref. Investigator coding after Q. 3.1.	As is	
2. Type of housing Ref. Coding for Q. 1/ 1.1	If '2' is coded in for Q.1, then marks = 0 Else, as coded in Q. 1.1.	
3. Availability of clothing Ref. Coding for Q. 10	As is	
4. Food security Ref. Coding for Q. 6	As is	
5. Sanitation Ref. Coding for Q. 5	As is	
6. Ownership of consumer durables Ref. Coding for Q. 2	As is	
7. Literacy status Ref. Household Roster, Q. 6 .1 & 6.2.	Identify household member with highest number of years of education (from 6.1.). Thereafter, mark as is (from corresponding code in Q. 6.2)	
8. Status of household labor Ref. Q. 9 Ref Household Roster, Q. 7 & 8.2	If '1' is coded, mark = 0 If women & children are both working, mark = 1 If only adult female(s) are working, mark = 2 If only adult male(s) are working, mark = 3 If any other permutation, then mark = 4	
9. Means of livelihood Ref. Household Roster, Q. 9	If '4' is coded, then mark = 0 If '5' is coded, then mark = 1 If '6' is coded, then mark = 2 If '8' is coded, then mark = 3 For all others coded, mark = 4	
10. Status of children Ref. Household Roster, Q. 8.1. & 8.2	If for even one household member, '2' is coded for Q. 8.1, but '1' is coded for Q. 8.2, then mark = 0 If for even one household member, '1' is coded for Q 8.1 and 8.2, then mark = 1 If for even one household member, '1' is coded for Q. 8.1., but '2' is coded for Q. 8.2, then mark = 4	
11. Type of indebtedness Ref. Investigator coding after Q. 17.1 & 17.2	As is	

ATTRIBUTES/ Question reference	MARKING SCHEME	MARKS OBTAINED
12. Reason for migration Refer coding for Q. 16.2	As is	
13. Preference for assistance Refer coding for Q. 11	As is	
TOTAL MARKS OBTAINED BY HOUSEHOLD		
IS THIS HOUSEHOLD 'BPL 2002- POOR'?		

B. According to BPL 2009 methodology

ATTRIBUTES/ Question reference	Identification Scheme	'Poverty-status' of household
<i>AUTOMATIC EXCLUSIONS</i>	<i>If the answer to any question from (1) through (5) below is 'Yes', then, the household is automatically considered as not 'below poverty line' according to the BPL 2009 methodology.</i>	
1. Does household own > [] hectares of partially or wholly unirrigated land? OR own > [] hectares of completely unirrigated land? Refer verbatim recording for Q. 3 & 3.1.		
2. Does the household own even one three or four-wheeled vehicle Ref. Q. 2.6		
3. Does the household own even one mechanized farm equipment, such as tractor, power tiller, thresher, harvester, etc? Ref. Q. 2.6.		
4. Does any member of the family earn over Rs. 10,000 per month? Ref Household Roster, Q. 9.1		
5. Does any member of the family qualify to pay income tax? Ref. Household roster, Q. 9.2.		
<i>AUTOMATIC INCLUSIONS</i>	<i>If the answer to any question from (6) through (12) is "Yes", then the household is automatically considered as being 'below the poverty line' according to the BPL 2009 methodology.</i>	
6. Does the household belong to a community categorized by the State/ Central Government as Primitive Tribal Group or Mahadalit? Ref. Investigator code for Q. 11		
7. Is the household headed by a single woman? Ref. Household Roster, Q. 2 & 3		
8. Is the head of the household disabled? Ref. Q. 7.5		

9. Is the household headed by a minor? Ref. Household roster, Q 2 & 4		
10. Is the household destitute, meaning, it is dependent predominantly on alms for survival? Ref. Household Roster, Q. 9		
11. Is the household homeless? Ref. Q.1.		
12. Is any member of the household a bonded labourer? Ref. Q.9		
ORDINAL SCORING		
13. Caste/ religion Ref. Investigator check for Household roster, Q. 10 & 11	If SC/ ST, mark = 3 If Denotified Tribe or Most Backward Caste, mark = 2 If Muslim or OBC, mark = 1	
14. Employment Ref. Household roster, Q. 9	If '2' is coded, then mark = 4 If '3' is coded, then mark = 3 If '4' is coded, then mark = 2 If '6' or '7' is coded, then mark = 2	
15. Literacy Ref. Household Roster, Q. 4 & 6.2.	If '0' or '1' is coded in Q 6.2, for any household member over 30 years old, then mark= 1	
16. Debilitating condition Ref. Q. 7.4	If '1' is coded, then mark = 1	
17. Household headed by person aged 60 + Ref. Household roster, Q 2 & 4	If household head is 60 +, then mark = 1	
TOTAL MARKS OBTAINED BY HOUSEHOLD		
IS HOUSEHOLD BPL- 2009 POOR?		

HOUSEHOLD CLASSIFICATION: WHICH QUADRANTS DOES THE HOUSEHOLD FALL UNDER (Please Tick)?

	BPL 2009 Poor	BPL 2009 Non-poor
BPL 2002 Poor	(1)	(2)
BPL 2002 Non-poor	(3)	(4)

HOUSEHOLD QUESTIONNAIRE

TRACKING INFORMATION FOR HOUSEHOLD			
STATE:	Bihar	GRAM PANCHAYAT:	NAME:
DISTRICT:	Araria		CODE:
BLOCK:	Bhargama	WARD:	NAME:
HOUSEHOLD SERIAL NUMBER:			CODE :

NAME OF HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD:	

HOUSEHOLD SURVEY CODE	Original Household	1	REASON FOR SUBSTITUTION OF HOUSEHOLD	Informant busy	1
	Substitute Household	2		Members away from home/ No adult at home	2
INTERVIEWER NAME:				Informant non-cooperative/ Refused	3
DATE:				Respondent not back until 1.5 - 2 hours before the last bus	4
TIME OF INTERVIEW	START TIME:	END :		Did not fulfil required quota (gender/SC/ST)	5
	:	:		Was Gram Pradhan/ ward member covered by lead researcher	6
				Others (Specify)	9

Respondent's Name:	Respondent's sex:	Respondent's age:	48-57	4	HOUSEHOLD SIZE:	Checked by TL:
	Male 1	18-27 1	58-67	5		Less than 5 1
	Female 2	28-37 2	68+	6		5- 8 2
		38-47 3				8+ 3

SECTION 0: INTRODUCTION

Notes to investigator: After introducing yourself, please explain the purpose of this interview. Explain that we would like to know a little about the respondents' perceptions on rural development and governance.

1. Please tell me about what is important to you, what you value, and why you value these? These can include, but are not limited to physical infrastructure such as roads, tubewells, electricity, hospitals and schools; employment opportunities; education and health; safety and security; freedom to worship and celebrate your festivals; expressing your views without fear; the ability to participate in decision-making forums and to influence the affairs of the community. [Probe and prompt, using above examples].

SECTION 1: PANCHAYATS

1. ARE YOU AWARE OF SOMETHING CALLED THE PANCHAYAT IN THIS AREA?	Yes No	1 2	If yes, proceed to Q. 2, else proceed to Section 2.					

2. WHAT SPECIFIC SECTORS DOES THE PANCHAYAT WORK ON?	(Code verbatim. Use the following as prompts, if necessary. Probe till respondent specifies eight sectors. If respondent mentions projects, code according to sector.)							
Drinking water	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Roads and physical communication infrastructure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Electrification	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Health and sanitation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Maintenance of community assets	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Rural housing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Non-conventional energy sources	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Poverty-alleviation program	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Technical and vocational education	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Adult and non-formal education	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Libraries	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Cultural activities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Family welfare	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Women & child development	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Social welfare	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Welfare of weaker sections	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
PDS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Agriculture, including agricultural extensions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Land improvement and land reforms	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Minor irrigation, etc.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Animal husbandry	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Fisheries	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Social forestry and farm forestry	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Minor forest produce	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Small-scale industry	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Cottage industry	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Fuels and fodder	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Markets and fairs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

3. Now, I would like to ask you about the following schemes, which I understand are made available to you through the Panchayat. Can you tell us something about the following schemes?

Name of the Scheme	3.1. Are you eligible for this scheme? Yes 1→ Ask Q. 3.2 No 2→ Skip to Q.4 DK/CS 9→ Skip to Q. 4	3.2. Do you avail of its benefits in a timely manner? Yes 1 No 2 DK/CS 9	Respondent's comments.
Indira Awas Yojana			
National Maternity Benefit Scheme			
Agricultural Worker's Pension Plan			
Antyodaya Anna Yojana			
National Old Age Pension Scheme			
National Family Benefit Scheme			
PDS (Ration)			
Anganwadi Center			
Identification of BPL families			
Health Services			
Education Services			

4. WE WOULD LIKE TO KNOW A LITTLE ABOUT THE MEMBERS OF THE PANCHAYAT. CAN YOU TELL US SOMETHING ABOUT THE FOLLOWING PEOPLE?

POSITION	4.1. Do you know of this position		4.2. CAN YOU TELL US THE NAME OF THE PERSON WHO HOLDS THE FOLLOWING [POSITION] Write name. Ask only if '1' is coded for this person in 4.1. If '2' or '9' coded, skip to Q.5.	INVESTIGATOR: Post-code name as		4.3. HAVE YOU EVER MET HIM/HER AFTER S/HE WAS ELECTED?		4.4. WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU MET HIM/HER FOR OFFICIAL MATTERS? If '2'/'9' coded in Q.4.3, then leave blank	4.5. WHAT DID YOU MEET HIM/HER FOR? If '2' coded in Q.4.3, then leave blank	4.6. WHERE DID YOU MEET HIM/HER? If '2' coded in Q.4.3, then leave blank
								Record Verbatim	Record Verbatim	Record Verbatim
WARD MEMBER	Yes	1		Correct	1	Yes→ Ask Q. 4.4	1			
	No	2		Incorrect	2	No→ Skip to Q. 5	2			
	Not sure	9		DK/CS	9	Not sure→ Skip to Q. 5	9			
GRAM PRADHAN	Yes	1		Correct	1	Yes→ Ask Q. 4.4	1			
	No	2		Incorrect	2	No→ Skip to Q. 5	2			
	Not sure	9		DK/CS	9	Not sure→ Skip to Q. 5	9			
STANDING COMMITTEE MEMBER	Yes	1		Mostly Correct	1	Yes→ Ask Q. 4.4	1			
	No	2		Mostly Incorrect	2	No→ Skip to Q. 5	2			
	Not sure	9		DK/CS	9	Not sure→ Skip to Q. 5	9			
VILLAGE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE	Yes	1		Mostly Correct	1	Yes→ Ask Q. 4.4	1			
	No	2		Mostly Incorrect	2	No→ Skip to Q. 5	2			
	Not sure	9		DK/CS	9	Not sure→ Skip to Q. 5	9			

5. PLEASE TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT THE PANCHAYAT INFRASTRUCTURE

5.1. INFRASTRUCTURE	5.2. WHERE IS IT?	INVESTIGATOR: Post-code name as		5.3. WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU SAW IT? If never visited, code '0'	5.4. WHAT DID YOU GO THERE FOR? Leave blank if '0' is coded in 4.3
PANCHAYAT BHAWAN		Correct	1		
		Incorrect	2		
		DK/CS	9		
PANCHAYAT NOTICE BOARD		Correct	1		
		Incorrect	2		
		DK/CS	9		

6. PLEASE TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT THE VILLAGE DEVELOPMENT PLANS.

6.1. HAVE YOU HEARD ABOUT VILLAGE DEVELOPMENT PLANS?			6.3. WHAT HAPPENS WITH THESE PLANS? Record verbatim.
	Yes	1	
	No	2	
	Not sure	9	
6.2. IF YES, HOW WERE THEY PREPARED?	Yes	1	
	No	2	
	Not sure	9	

7. HAS THE PANCHAYAT BENEFITTED YOU IN ANY WAY? Yes Q.8 1→ Continue to No 2 → skip to Q. 10 DK/CS 9→ skip to Q. 10	8. IF YES, HOW HAS IT BENEFITTED YOU? Prompt using some of the codes as examples. Multi-coding possible	Provided NREGA & other employment schemes (Specify _____) 1	Improved agriculture: Specify scheme _____ 2	Housing: Specify scheme _____ 3	Roads: Specify scheme _____ 4	Loans Specify scheme _____ 5	Provided drinking water: Specify scheme _____ 6	Provided drainage: Specify scheme _____ 7
		Provided health facility 8	Provided schooling facility 9	Organized cultural/ religious/ social program 10	Arbitrated in disputes 11	Helped negotiate better prices/ wages in market, including labor markets 12	Helped combat social discrimination 13	Other 14
		9. If (1) to (7) coded in Q.8 above, ask: HOW DID YOU COME TO KNOW ABOUT THESE SCHEMES? Else, skip to Q. 10.						
Notice board 1	Sarpanch 2	Gram Sachiv 3	Other local influential persons (named in Section 2 above) 4 Specify _____	CBO members 5	Other Community members 6	Other means 7 Specify _____		
10. AT THE BEGINNING OF THIS INTERVIEW, YOU IDENTIFIED A FEW VALUES THAT ARE IMPORTANT TO YOU. DO YOU THINK THE PANCHAYAT HAS ANY ROLE IN ATTAING THESE VALUES? PLEASE EXPLAIN.				12. DO YOU THINK THIS PANCHAYAT HAS BEEN A GOOD PANCHAYAT? Yes 1; No 2; DK/CS 9				
11. WHAT SHOULD A GOOD PANCHAYAT BE LIKE? Record verbatim				13. WHY? Enumerator, please note: this section is to be filled even if '9' is coded in Q. 10.				

SECTION 2: POLITICAL CAPABILITIES

1. DO YOU OR ANY MEMBERS OF YOUR FAMILY HOLD/HAVE HELD IN PAST, A POLITICAL POSITION OR POLITICAL PARTY POSITION? IF YES, WHICH POSITIONS DO THEY HOLD/HAVE HELD? Prompt by giving some of these categories as possible positions. Multicoding Possible. Please note that the 'family members' will include all those who are related by blood and may or may not be part of the same household. Please include only living members. If a particular family member has held numerous positions, please code the highest position that the person held.	Yes No DK/CS	1 2 9	Ward member / GP Vice Pradhan GP Pradhan Member of higher Panchayat (Taluka Panchayat / Zila Panchayat/ Ward Councilor) MP/MLA Youth party president District/ Block/ Panchayat- level posts in the affiliated party Ordinary member Other positions DK/CS	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9		
2. DO YOU OR ANYONE IN YOUR FAMILY PARTICIPATE IN ANY OF THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES? Prompt using some of the codes as examples. Multicoding possible			3. DID YOU VOTE IN THE LAST:	4. DID YOU CAMPAIGN FOR ANYONE IN THE LAST:		
Going outside the village to rallies or marches, or participating in movements, strikes, etc Specify the last such event in which you participated.	1	1. Panchayat elections	Yes No Refused response DK/CS	1 2 9 0	Yes No Refused response DK/CS	1 2 9 0
Protest within the village against cases of injustice, oppression and coercion, such as gherao, strikes, etc. Specify the last such event that you participated in	2	2. Block elections	Yes No Refused response DK/CS	1 2 9 0	Yes No Refused response DK/CS	1 2 9 0
Handing out leaflets / Door to door campaigning in elections / Motivating friends and relatives	3	3. Zilla Parishad elections	Yes No Refused response DK/CS	1 2 9 0	Yes No Refused response DK/CS	1 2 9 0
Give speeches	4					
Going to party meetings	5					
Writing pamphlets	6	4. Vidhan Sabha elections	Yes No Refused response DK/CS	1 2 9 0	Yes No Refused response DK/CS	1 2 9 0
Giving money or support in kind	7	5. Lok Sabha elections	Yes No Refused response DK/CS	1 2 9 0	Yes No Refused response DK/CS	1 2 9 0
Others	8					
None	0					

SECTION 3: POLITICAL SOCIETY

1. WHO ARE THE INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE IN THIS VILLAGE? (List verbatim. For every person listed, ask Q. 2 & 3). Please state position if the person holds one. Please include even if not someone living in the same village.	2. WHAT INFLUENCE DO THEY HOLD? Prompt- do people go to these leaders to resolve personal problems, ask them for political help, or when they face a crisis, or for monetary help.	3. WHAT MAKES THEM INFLUENTIAL? Prompt- suggesting: money, political consciousness, <i>goonda</i> power, <i>kshamata/ khomota</i>
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		

6. HOW ARE DECISIONS TAKEN IN YOUR VILLAGE? (Prompt: These could relate to any decisions that the respondent thinks is important, such as economic, social, developmental or political matters). Enumerator, please note: If individuals are named, please probe if they take decisions personally without reference to others, or in consultation with others. Please code '7' even if only two persons take decisions. Please record verbatim below and, based on the response, code <u>one</u> response. Single code	<table> <tr> <td>GP Pradhan personally</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Pradhan's spouse or other member of Pradhan's family</td> <td>2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Ward member personally</td> <td>3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>GP secretary/ Other bureaucrat/ government-appointed official/ Higher-level Panchayat/ State-level minister</td> <td>4</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Other influential persons in the village, on their own, without any discussions. Specify</td> <td>5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>General body meetings/ Public meetings/ Gram Sabhas/Gram Sansad meetings</td> <td>6</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Some people meet and take decisions</td> <td>7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Others (Specify)</td> <td>8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>DK/CS</td> <td>9</td> </tr> </table>	GP Pradhan personally	1	Pradhan's spouse or other member of Pradhan's family	2	Ward member personally	3	GP secretary/ Other bureaucrat/ government-appointed official/ Higher-level Panchayat/ State-level minister	4	Other influential persons in the village, on their own, without any discussions. Specify	5	General body meetings/ Public meetings/ Gram Sabhas/Gram Sansad meetings	6	Some people meet and take decisions	7	Others (Specify)	8	DK/CS	9
	GP Pradhan personally	1																	
Pradhan's spouse or other member of Pradhan's family	2																		
Ward member personally	3																		
GP secretary/ Other bureaucrat/ government-appointed official/ Higher-level Panchayat/ State-level minister	4																		
Other influential persons in the village, on their own, without any discussions. Specify	5																		
General body meetings/ Public meetings/ Gram Sabhas/Gram Sansad meetings	6																		
Some people meet and take decisions	7																		
Others (Specify)	8																		
DK/CS	9																		
7. ARE YOU SATISFIED WITH THE WAY DECISIONS ARE TAKEN IN THE VILLAGE? <table> <tr> <td>Yes</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>No</td> <td>2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>DK/ CS</td> <td>9</td> </tr> </table>	Yes	1	No	2	DK/ CS	9	8. WHY? (Enumerator, please probe, even if '9' is coded).												
Yes	1																		
No	2																		
DK/ CS	9																		

1. DO YOU KNOW WHEN MEETINGS TO TAKE DECISIONS TAKE PLACE? (Prompt: The Pradhan/ Mukhya/ Ward member may call for a meeting. The local party may convene meetings, or other influential leaders may organize them.)			
Yes	1	No	2 → Skip to Q. 10
2. HOW DO YOU GET TO KNOW WHEN THESE MEETINGS ARE ORGANISED? Multicoding upto 3			
Village / Ward notice board	01	Party worker	08
Public announcement (e.g. via megaphone or tom tom)	02	NGO staff	09
Pamphlet	03	Community Leader	10
Newspaper / Magazine	04	Friend / relative / neighbour	11
Radio / Television	05	Did not hear about it	12
Government Official/ GP secy	06	Others	13
Gram Pradhan / Vice Pradhan/ Ward member	07	DK/CS	99
3. HAVE YOU EVER ATTENDED SUCH A MEETING?		Yes	1→ Continue to Q.4 and then skip to Section 4.2.
		No	2 → Skip to Q5 and then skip to Section 5

4. CAN YOU TELL ME WHY YOU ATTENDED SUCH A MEETING?			
Rank the options 1, 2, 3 and so on as respondent expresses reasons, where 1 is the first reason mentioned.			
After asking Q4, please skip to Section 4.2			
RANK	1	2	3
Because I am a member	01	01	01
Spouse/friends/ relatives/ neighbors encouraged /asked me to go	02	02	02
I am an important person without whom such decisions cannot be taken	03	03	03
Ward member / Pradhan encouraged me/asked me to go	04	04	04
Members of my caste community encouraged me/asked me to go	05	05	05
NGO staff / self help group encouraged me	06	06	06
Issues being discussed were important	07	07	07
To keep check on work and budgets	08	08	08
Enjoy social aspect of meeting	10	10	10
To observe	11	11	11
To protest	12	12	12
I was forced	13	13	13
Others (Specify)	14	14	14
DK/CS	99	99	99

5. CAN YOU TELL ME WHY YOU HAVE NOT ATTENDED ANY GRAM SABHA MEETINGS?			
Rank the options 1, 2, 3 and so on as respondent expresses reasons, where 1 is the first reason mentioned.			
After asking Q5, please skip to Section 5			
RANK	1	2	3
Because I am not a member	01	01	01
Spouse discouraged / did not allow me	02	02	02
Ward member / Pradhan discouraged/did not allow me	03	03	03
Members of my caste community discouraged/did not allow me	04	04	04
Didn't have the time / had to look after children	05	05	05
Issues being discussed do not interest me	06	06	06
I am unable to affect discussion in meeting	07	07	07
Nothing important is decided at meeting	08	08	08
Meeting was too far away	09	09	09
Family was already represented	10	10	10
Did not know about dates / place / timing	11	11	11
Others(Specify)	12	12	12
DK/CS	99	99	99

SECTION 4.2 : PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING FORUMS

CHECK Q3 of Section 4.1 : Ask this section only if respondent has coded “ Yes” in Q3 of Section 4.1

1. IN THE LAST ONE YEAR, HAVE YOU PARTICIPATED IN ANY SUCH MEETING? Yes, often 1 Yes, sometimes 2 No 3→ Skip to Q.5 DK/CS 9	2. HOW DID YOU PARTICIPATE IN THE LAST MEETING YOU ATTENDED? Multicoding Prompted response	<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%;">Voting by show of hands</td> <td style="width: 10%; text-align: center;">1</td> <td style="width: 30%;">Only sat through</td> <td style="width: 10%; text-align: center;">4→ Go to Q4</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Speaking</td> <td style="text-align: center;">2</td> <td>Others</td> <td style="text-align: center;">5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Disruptive Protest</td> <td style="text-align: center;">3</td> <td>DK/CS</td> <td style="text-align: center;">9</td> </tr> </table>	Voting by show of hands	1	Only sat through	4→ Go to Q4	Speaking	2	Others	5	Disruptive Protest	3	DK/CS	9
Voting by show of hands	1	Only sat through	4→ Go to Q4											
Speaking	2	Others	5											
Disruptive Protest	3	DK/CS	9											

3. CAN YOU TELL US THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES ON WHICH YOU PARTICIPATED? Rank the options 1, 2, 3 where one is the most important. If less than 3 reasons, code remaining ranks as 17	<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <th style="text-align: left;">RANK</th> <th style="text-align: center;">1</th> <th style="text-align: center;">2</th> <th style="text-align: center;">3</th> </tr> <tr><td>Beneficiary selection</td><td style="text-align: center;">01</td><td style="text-align: center;">01</td><td style="text-align: center;">01</td></tr> <tr><td>Village Development Plan</td><td style="text-align: center;">02</td><td style="text-align: center;">02</td><td style="text-align: center;">02</td></tr> <tr><td>Setting of GP Budget</td><td style="text-align: center;">03</td><td style="text-align: center;">03</td><td style="text-align: center;">03</td></tr> <tr><td>Misuse/Bad use of GP funds</td><td style="text-align: center;">04</td><td style="text-align: center;">04</td><td style="text-align: center;">04</td></tr> <tr><td>Ongoing village works</td><td style="text-align: center;">05</td><td style="text-align: center;">05</td><td style="text-align: center;">05</td></tr> <tr><td>In-village disputes</td><td style="text-align: center;">06</td><td style="text-align: center;">06</td><td style="text-align: center;">06</td></tr> <tr><td>Political disputes</td><td style="text-align: center;">07</td><td style="text-align: center;">07</td><td style="text-align: center;">07</td></tr> <tr><td>Crime</td><td style="text-align: center;">08</td><td style="text-align: center;">08</td><td style="text-align: center;">08</td></tr> <tr><td>Streetlights</td><td style="text-align: center;">09</td><td style="text-align: center;">09</td><td style="text-align: center;">09</td></tr> <tr><td>Water supply</td><td style="text-align: center;">10</td><td style="text-align: center;">10</td><td style="text-align: center;">10</td></tr> <tr><td>Irrigation</td><td style="text-align: center;">11</td><td style="text-align: center;">11</td><td style="text-align: center;">11</td></tr> <tr><td>Drainage/sanitation</td><td style="text-align: center;">12</td><td style="text-align: center;">12</td><td style="text-align: center;">12</td></tr> <tr><td>Roads</td><td style="text-align: center;">13</td><td style="text-align: center;">13</td><td style="text-align: center;">13</td></tr> <tr><td>Health facilities</td><td style="text-align: center;">14</td><td style="text-align: center;">14</td><td style="text-align: center;">14</td></tr> <tr><td>Education</td><td style="text-align: center;">15</td><td style="text-align: center;">15</td><td style="text-align: center;">15</td></tr> <tr><td>Organisation of festivals/celebrations</td><td style="text-align: center;">16</td><td style="text-align: center;">16</td><td style="text-align: center;">16</td></tr> <tr><td>No other reason</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">17</td><td style="text-align: center;">17</td></tr> <tr><td>Other reasons</td><td style="text-align: center;">18</td><td style="text-align: center;">18</td><td style="text-align: center;">18</td></tr> <tr><td>DK/CS</td><td style="text-align: center;">99</td><td></td><td></td></tr> </table>	RANK	1	2	3	Beneficiary selection	01	01	01	Village Development Plan	02	02	02	Setting of GP Budget	03	03	03	Misuse/Bad use of GP funds	04	04	04	Ongoing village works	05	05	05	In-village disputes	06	06	06	Political disputes	07	07	07	Crime	08	08	08	Streetlights	09	09	09	Water supply	10	10	10	Irrigation	11	11	11	Drainage/sanitation	12	12	12	Roads	13	13	13	Health facilities	14	14	14	Education	15	15	15	Organisation of festivals/celebrations	16	16	16	No other reason		17	17	Other reasons	18	18	18	DK/CS	99		
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10. CAN YOU TELL US ONE IMPORTANT DECISION TAKEN IN THE VILLAGE IN THE RECENT PAST?

11. HOW WAS THIS DECISION TAKEN?

12. DID THIS DECISION AFFECT YOU IN ANY WAY? HOW DID IT AFFECT YOU?

13. WERE YOU SATISFIED WITH THE WAY THIS DECISION WAS TAKEN? WHY OR WHY NOT?

14. IS THERE ONE IMPORTANT ISSUE THAT YOU WANT TO BE TAKEN UP IN THE NEXT MEETING?

15.

SECTION 5: NREGA

1. DOES YOUR HOUSEHOLD HAVE A JOB CARD? This can also be verified from the census questionnaire	4.DO YOU HAVE THE JOB CARD WITH YOU AT THE MOMENT?		6. HAVE YOU APPLIED FOR WORK?	9. CAN YOU EXPLAIN THE CONTENTS OF THE JOB CARD TO ME?
Yes 1→ Go to Q. 2	Yes 1→ Skip to Q.6.		Yes 1	Demand for work record: Column on 'date from which employment is needed' Yes 1 Correct 1 No 2 Incorrect 2
No 2→ Skip to Q. 7	No 2→ Ask Q.5 and continue		No 2	Details of employment provided: Column on 'No. of days for which employment is provided' Yes 1 Correct 1 No 2 Incorrect 2
DK/CS 9→ Skip to Q. 7	DK/CS 9→ Skip to Q.6.		DK/CS 9	Details of unemployment allowance: column on 'Rate at which unemployment allowance is given' Yes 1 Correct 1 No 2 Incorrect 2
2. HOW DID YOU GET IT?	5. WHERE IS YOUR JOB CARD?		7. HAVE YOU RECEIVED WORK?	10. Investigator to physically verify
Applied for it 1	Panchayat Office 1		Yes 1→ skip to Q. 9.	Multicoding possible: No entries are made, though the respondent claims to have worked on NREGA jobs 1
Ward Member/ Pradhan gave it to me 2	Ward Member 2		No 2→Ask Q. 8.	Some entries were incomplete or missing 2
Other influential person got it for me 3	Party leader 3		DK/CS 9→ Ask Q. 8	Some entries were over-written 3
Other way (Specify) 4	Supervisor/ Dafadar 4		8. ARE YOU RECEIVING UNEMPLYMENT ALLOWANCE?	Signature column was blank in all cases 4
DK/CS 9	Others (Specify) 0		Yes 1 → ask Q. 8.1	
			No 2→ code, thank and terminate the interview	
3. HOW MUCH DID YOU HAVE TO PAY FOR IT? (Record verbatim). After asking this question, request to see the job card, skip Q. 4 and ask Q.5	DK/CS	9	DK/CS 9→ code, thank and terminate the interview	Signature column was blank in some cases 5
			8.1. HOW MUCH? Record verbatim, thank and terminate the interview	All entries made neatly and clearly 6

11. HOW MANY DAYS AFTER APPLYING FOR WORK DID YOU GET A JOB? Record in days. Skip this question if '2' '9' is coded in Q.6. 11.1. investigator, to code as appropriate (do not ask): Within the stipulated time 1 After the stipulated time 2	12. FOR MANY HOW DAYS DID YOU WORK LAST? Record in days 13. WHAT WAGES DID YOU RECEIVE? Record in INR.	14. INVESTIGATOR TO CALCULATE: AVERAGE WAGE RECEIVED BY RESPONDENT HOUSEHOLD PER DAY. 14.1. Investigator, to code: Less than stipulated wage rate 1 Stipulated wage rate 2 More than the stipulated wage rate 3	15. WHAT, ACCORDING TO YOU, IS THE CURRENT WAGE RATE? 15.1. Investigator, code as appropriate (do not ask): Correct 1 Incorrect 2 Respondent didn't know 9	16. HOW MANY DAYS AFTER COMPLETION OF THE WORK ARE YOU PAID? 16.1. Investigator, to code as appropriate (do not ask): Within the stipulated time 1 After the stipulated time 2	17. HOW IS PAYMENT MADE TO YOU? Through the Post Office Account 1 In cash, even though respondent has P.O. account 2 In cash, because respondent does not have a P.O. account 3 Other way (specify) 4 DK/CS 9
18. HOW WAS THE WORK YOU ARE DOING/ YOU DID DECIDED? (Enumerator, please probe and ask if it was decided in a general meeting, by supervisor, or directed by the Ward Member)					
19. WHAT DO YOU THINK OF NREGA AS A PROGRAM? Record verbatim. (Enumerator, please probe: explore if respondent thinks NREGA has helped her/him/ the neighbourhood, or if it has NOT helped her/him. There may be several points of view voiced by the same respondent. Kindly record all.)					

END OF QUESTIONNAIRE

GROUP DISCUSSION CHECKLIST (n = 4)

PURPOSE:

1. Introduction and spell out why I am in the village
2. Get a general sense of life in the village
3. Gain a preliminary sense of what is important to villagers in terms of livelihoods, institutions and values

Location:

Two each in two different hamlets- with women and men separately.

Participants:

Open public meetings- subject to gender segregation.

Expected time: 4 hours

Introduction: This is my first meeting with the community members. Has to spell out why I am here, and what I intend to do.

1. I want to understand a little about you, your lives and your village. I would like to know how you all live, what do you all do, what do you think are important, where do you work, what are the different institutions (*samsthas*) that affect your lives, etc. First, please tell me a little about yourselves? What do people in this village do for a living? What groups of people live here?
2. What things are important to you? What do you like to do? What do you like to be? What would you like to do, which you are not able to do now? What would you like to be able to continue to do? What do you not like to do? What *would* (emphasize future tense) you not want to do? What would make your life better? What are the 'good' (*achha/bhalo*) and 'fair' (*sahi/ theek*) things of/in life? **Why** for each.
3. What important events have happened during the collective life of your village? When, approximately, did these events take place??
4. Tell me more about the changes around you. What have been the more important changes over the last few years? Why are they important? What do you think of these changes? Would you call them 'good', or 'bad'? Which of these changes do you think have been important and beneficial to people? Who have these changes benefitted in particular? Have some changes benefitted a few people, but not benefitted the others? Have some changes not benefitted anyone?
5. Who are the 'important people' (*naami log*) in the village? Say, if an outsider like me comes and wants to stay with all of you for sometime, who all would you suggest I meet? Why are they 'important'?
6. If I ask about the poorer groups in the village, who would you call poor (*garib*)? (They may give some names, if so ask- what makes [XXXX] and [YYYYY] poor?). What causes poverty (*garibi*)? Can anything be done about it? Who is responsible for removing/eliminating poverty? [Answers will give a clue to 'conduct of conduct']
7. Could you tell me a little about different institutions in the village? (List...). What role do they have in your lives? [Do an institutional mapping, with pictures/ papers, etc. if necessary].

8. You talked earlier about the different things that are important to you? [Recall from previous discussions]. You talked about poverty, what is good (and bad), and what is fair (and unfair). Now, tell me, have the different institutions you mentioned above (recall from list) contributed in any way to you having a 'more' good (*behtar/bhalo*)/fair (*sahi/ theek*) life?
9. What kinds of problems do you face in your lives? Do you know of people who suffer from injustice (anyay), exploitation (shoshan), oppression (atyachar) and coercion?
10. What do you think about the Panchayat here? What does it do? Has it helped you in any way? How? [List.....]. Has the Panchayat helped you to become what you are (positive or negative change)? Do you feel that you can be or do things that you could not have done five years or ten years earlier? Prompts: Do you feel you can go to places you could not have gone earlier? (water from the well, temple, community hall, Gram Sabha)?
11. I have heard people talk about something called the Gram Sabha? Do you know what it is? Who comes for it? Who organizes it? What does it do? Have any of you ever attended it? Did any of you attend the last Gram Sabha? Do you remember what was discussed during the last Gram Sabha? What happens during these meetings? Does any of you talk, or do you prefer to listen to what the 'big men' say? Who does most of the talking?
12. Can you tell me any major decisions the Gram Sabha has taken in the recent past? How *are* decisions taken at the Gram Sabhas? What happens when many people talk? What happens when people argue? How do they come to an agreement about things?
13. Are there any other important decisions that have affected your lives? How were these taken? Were you party to these decisions? Are there any decisions that you feel you cannot take? Do you think there should be decisions you should not be allowed to take, and it is better that someone else takes them?
14. I have heard about the NREGA? What is it? [After hearing them a bit...] How are decisions regarding the works/ jobs taken? Who takes them? Are you generally satisfied with the decisions on NREGA that have been taken?
15. [After checking with local contacts] Are you aware of the recent listing of households for enumeration of the BPL categories? What happened during that time? Did the Gram Sabhas have any role? Did you have any role?
16. What attributes/ things about yourself, your neighbourhood and your village would you like to change- for instance- be healthy/ know more/ earn more/ be more integrated with the community/ have a healthy relationship within the household/ with others in the community/ appear in the public sphere, work in a more respectable/ safer environment/ live a life free from fear? Why?
17. What attributes/ things about yourself, your neighbourhood and your village would you like to remain the same? Why?

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW: PANCHAYAT OFFICE-BEARERS

(n= N; Sarpanch + 2 Ward members + one member from each Standing Committee)

PURPOSE:

Understand how Panchayat office-bearers see themselves vis-à-vis their constitutional responsibilities and their social and political roles and relations with co-villagers

VENUE:

Interview office-bearers in their place of work preferably, or anywhere else as convenient to them.

Profile by: Sex, caste, landholding, occupation data for ALL Panchayat and Standing Committee members (as in the KII excel matrix).

Understand: Who nominates Sarpanch/ Ward Member/ Standing Committee members to stand? How are they (s)elected?

Social and personal role

1. What is your vision for this village? What would you like to do for this village?
2. What are your general aims behind engaging in 'political' or Panchayat-related activity?
3. What do you see yourself as in relation to others in the village? What are your current responsibilities? What subjects fall under your jurisdiction? (Link with subjects devolved by given State to the PRI).

Institutional roles

4. What are your major sources of support? Major constraints? Who are the people who support your efforts? Who comes in your way? What support do you get from the Sachiv?
5. Who are your key contacts? Persons you need to keep happy? (talk about line department functionaries, Gram Sachiv, BDO, local elite, etc.). Who reports to you? Have they been reporting to you? How do you supervise them?
6. What are the sources of the Panchayat's revenues? What are the major expenditure heads? (examine records if permitted: look for tied/ untied grants; etc.). How do you raise revenues? Sanction expenditures? What taxes do you raise (list: property tax/ profession tax/ land tax or cess/ taxes or tolls / entertainment fees/license fees/ others? What expenditures can you incur without having to seek prior permission? How do you collect the revenue?
7. How are Standing Committee members appointed? What do they do?
8. Could you tell me the different schemes you implement? What challenges do you face while implementing them? (talk specifically about NREGA- its potential, its achievements, the challenges- use the "Panchayat office" checklist for NREGA audit issued by the Ministry). How do you allocate resources for localities and projects? Are there any 'decision rules' for allocating resources/ public works?
9. For Ward members: how do you receive money? What are your major sources of revenue? How do you decide what to spend it on? How do you account for it?
10. For Standing Committee members: How do you manage your budget? What do you spend it on? What have you done to improve things in your sector? How do you arrive at decisions? Who do you report to/work closely with?

Perspectives on politics

11. Could you comment a bit on the role of 'politics' (rajniti/ lokniti) and what it can achieve? [Try to understand: Does KII feel constrained by too much 'politics' in their decision-making? Does the KII feel that the Gram Sabha is full of 'politics'? Does KII think it is necessary to insulate development from 'politics'?]. Does politics have any role at all to play in the development/efficiency concerns of your villages?
12. What role do political parties perform, in Panchayats? Is it a helpful or an obstructive role?
13. We earlier spoke to people who spoke about continued oppression, exploitation and unjust policies and practices. How do people negotiate/ contest/ oppose these. What role do Panchayats have in this regard?
14. What have been the most important decisions taken in the last few months? How were they taken? Who takes these decisions? For example, if some materials need to be hired/bought, who takes these decisions? How are decisions in the Panchayats made? How often do

meetings take place? What was the last meeting about? What did you talk about? How were you informed about it? Are there any minutes of meetings?

OBSERVE

Panchayat Office and surroundings. Messages and pictures on the outer and inner walls. Logistical arrangements for staff, officers and citizens. General immediate surroundings.

A typical day. How many people come to the Panchayat Office? What are they doing? An ethnography of the Panchayat office. Talk to the different people who come to the Panchayat Office. Ask them what brings them there. Ask them how far they came from. Observe as they go in, how they sit- how different people sit/ talk. How are people treated? Observe how much time each one spends in the Panchayat office, waiting, then inside with the officers, and thereafter 'hanging around'. What do people do while they are waiting.

NREGA- use the "Panchayat office" checklist for NREGA audit issued by the Ministry

REVIEW VILLAGE DEVELOPMENT PLANS

1. Note the names of the participants.
2. Ask how the plan was formulated.
3. Note the key components of the plan.
4. Note who is responsible for implementation, funding, potential outcomes.

Use in subsequent discussions during survey and hanging out.

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW:

(n = 3)

School teacher + displaced elite + village/ community elder

PURPOSE: Get a glimpse of the village polity.

Estimated time: 60-90 minutes

1. I would like to know a little about the history of the village/ Panchayat? When did it emerge? How was it settled? What are the key events in its history?
2. What are the different institutions that have historically been important? Historically, how were decisions taken? By whom? How old is the Panchayat system? What changes has it brought about? How did people live before? How have they become so popular? Tell us about Gram Sabhas: how did people first react to Gram Sabhas? How have they become so popular? [Check before asking: Did the GS have any role to perform in the BPL listing exercise].
3. What changes have you seen in the village in the last few years/ Decades? Changes in values? Norms? Political aspects? The economy?
4. I want to talk a little more about the changes that we've seen. What kinds of continuities with the past are there? What is desirable to keep? What limits on social interactions still exist? What kind of limits should never be crossed? How have people reacted to these changes?
5. Who are the important people in the village? Why would you call them important? What makes them so important? Would you say they are powerful (*dabang/shaktishaali*)? Or, merely resourceful (*jugaadu*) and capable (full of *kshamata/khomata*)?
6. What kinds of movements have people participated in? Have there been any movements by the poorest groups in the past to improve their position? What was the issue(s)? What were the results?
7. Could you tell me a little more about politics (*rajniti*) in this locality? I mean two things: I mean the different political parties and what they do, but also how decisions are taken on important local issues?
8. Coming on to the decision making: what has been among the most important decisions that have been taken in the last few months? How were these decisions made? By whom? Who have they benefitted? Who have they left out? (explore).
9. What are your opinions on the Gram Sabha? On the way the Gram Sabha is organized in this village? How has the character of the Gram Sabha changed since it was first initiated? What makes a good Gram Sabha? Are there any rules attending to how a Gram Sabha should be conducted? Are these followed? Or violated? Who violates them?
10. In what other ways do people make themselves heard? If they are upset/ not happy?

LIFE HISTORY CHECKLIST: LOCAL POLITICIANS **(n = 4)**

PURPOSE: Get a glimpse into the life of a member of the village's 'political society'- could be a fixer, a *dalaal*, a 'mobilizer', party activist:

Participants

From among Sarpanch/ward member/Standing Committee Representative, other local elite- e.g. political fixers/ dalals/ local party boss/ activists/ 'social entrepreneurs'

AND

Satisfying following conditions

		Type of leadership	
		Formal	Informal
Age	Less than 40	n= 1	n= 1
	Over 40	n= 1	n= 1

Note: Accompany them to their work, see what they do, and how they relate to other people

Estimated time: Eight hours

1. Preliminary introductions
2. Please tell me something about yourself. Where were you born? Did you go to school? Till which class did you study? Where? Till what class?
3. What do you do for a living? Where do you work? How much do you earn?
4. Could you tell me about your family? Your friends? Who did you admire as a child? What were your aspirations as a child? What did you want to be? What do you like to do? What do you not like? What would you like to be, if given a chance? Do you have family and friends outside the village?
5. What would you describe as a major influence in your life? Why? Let's talk about other things that influenced you? Did you ever experience anything that you would say "changed my life"? What was it? Why is it so important for you? What would you consider the three most significant events of your life? Why do you say so?
6. Tell me more about what you do? I have heard people say many 'nice' things about you, about how you have helped those in need. [This is the meat of the discussion] **Tell me more about it.** What did you do exactly? How did you do it? Because you knew people in important places? Did you have to bribe anyone? Threaten anyone? Fight with anyone? What did the Panchayat do? What did the other members of the village do? What did the police do? The bureaucracy? What did you get out of it? What makes you want to help people?
7. Do you find you get into fights often? With whom? Why? What happens then?
8. Would you say you are a politician- **PLAY THIS BY THE EAR-** Tell me something about your journey into local politics. How did you enter politics? [Depending on her/his post: Will you ever contest elections?/Why did you want to contest Panchayat elections?]
9. What is the Panchayat like? What does it do the best/ the worst? What is the Gram Sabha like? (Depending on above:)Would you like to stay on in your post? Would you like to contest again? Would you encourage others?

LIFE HISTORY CHECKLIST: ORDINARY PEOPLE
(n = 4 ordinary people)

Who will you recruit? Individuals who report (or others report) *frequently* (may be defined, based on local attendance rates) attend Gram Sabhas

AND

Satisfy the following conditions

		Style of speaking	
		Consensual/Deliberative/ Rational	Confrontational/Agonistic Unreasonable
Frequency of speaking	Often	n= 1	n= 1
	Less	n= 1	n= 1

PURPOSE: Understand the lives of people who regularly attend Gram Sabhas, speak (if somewhat less), but have different discursive styles

Time: Eight hours

Note: Accompany them to their place of work, see what they do, how they relate to others.

1. Preliminary introductions
2. Please tell me something about yourself. Where were you born? Did you go to school? Where? Till what class?
3. Could you tell me about your family? Your friends? Who did you admire as a child? What were your aspirations as a child? What did you want to be? What do you like to do? What do you not like? What would you like to be, if given a chance?
4. What would you describe as a major influence in your life? Why? What about other things that influenced you?
5. What do you do for a living? Where do you work? How much do you earn?
6. Tell me about your neighbourhood. A lot of people here say they are very poor. Why do you think this is? What makes people poor? Can anything be done about it? Who is responsible? [Look out for 'counter-conduct'].
7. So, tell me more- about your aspirations, have you been able to realize any of your dreams. What has helped you? What has constrained you? What have you had to face? What obstacles? What struggles have you had to face?
8. Lets talk about the Gram Sabha. What do you think about it? You told me that you have attended quite a few of these. What do you do there? Why is it so important for you to go? Why do you ask so many questions? Does it help? Who does it help? What do other people have to say about your role? Do they feel threatened? Have you been threatened? What difference, if any, has the Gram Sabha/ Panchayats made in your life?

KII WITH SERVICE-PROVIDERS
(n = 3)
AWW + ANM + (one other- either JE or AEO, etc.)

PURPOSE:

To understand how different service-providers perceive the Panchayats and the Gram Sabhas

Time: 30-45 minutes

Personal backgrounds:

1. Preliminary
2. What are your primary responsibilities? Who do you report to? Who supervises your work? How often? How? Who else do you work closely with?
3. What records do you maintain? Who do you show it to?
4. What do you consider the key responsibilities of the Panchayat? Does it have any role in the sectors that you oversee?
5. Do you have any business with the Panchayat/ Sarpanch/ Health or other sub-committee?
6. How often have you met the Sarpanch? For what? Did you go, or did he come to meet you?
7. Have you ever been asked to present anything to the Gram Sabha? When?
8. How do you think the Panchayat in this village functions? Why do you think so?

KII WITH GRAM SACHIV

(n= 1 in each village)

PURPOSE:

Understand the working relationship between the executive and the legislature at the local level

Time: 30-45 minutes

Personal Background

1. How many years have you been in this position?
2. What are your chief roles and responsibilities? Who all are you supposed to work closely with? Who do you report to? Who supervises your work (appraisals/ leave, etc.)?
3. Do you need to work often with the Sarpanch? What work do you with him?
4. How do you think the Panchayat is run?
5. How do you think the Gram Sabha is organized?
6. How do you think the NREGA functions here?
7. What challenges does the Sarpanch face? What challenges do you face?

OBSERVATION OF PANCHAYAT RECORDS

1. Panchayat finances
2. Per capita financial resources (calculate)
3. Tied/ untied transfers
4. Revenues earned, from different sources- [Indian classification: own revenues, shared revenues, assigned revenues]
5. Expenditure autonomy
6. Expenditure on the poorest households, disaggregated by caste & land holding

CBO CHECKLIST (n = 2)

Note: ask for members' names, castes, land holdings, and if any member of the family is working outside the village, what do they do? Also request for financial records, or at least how much money the institution manages. Ask- I've heard a lot about the good work you do. Can you tell me more about it? How do you manage to raise funds for this? How much do you have?

PURPOSE:

To understand how social/ development organizations interface with the political society/ structure at the local level

Time: 45-60 minutes

1. What kind of work do you do? (is it a youth group/ credit and savings group/ forest protection group, education committee, VDC, etc.)
2. Are members from this on other committees as well?
3. Who do you think have a role in the development of your village? Why?
4. How often do you meet Panchayat representatives? For what?
5. Would you know the roles and responsibilities of the Panchayats?
6. What are Gram Sabhas like? What is discussed there?
7. What is your vision for the community? What is your vision for your organization?
8. What have been key decisions taken in the village recently? Who took it? How do you think these decisions benefit people?

OBSERVATION CHECKLIST FOR GRAM SABHAS (n= 3) + follow-up (physical observations, taping and analysis of transcripts)

PURPOSE: Ethnography of the Gram Sabha. What happens? Who comes? Ritualization and routinization of power.

1. Time that GS lasted? Did it start on time? Did people come late? Who came late? Who came on time? Who came earlier? earliest?
2. Categories of persons that spoke- bureaucracy/elected reps/other villagers- and for how long?
3. Key motions that were raised/for which decisions were taken/ for which decisions were taken in favor/decisions taken against?
4. Who sits where? (a seating map)
5. Who raises which issues? (which group, by caste, by landed category, by occupation, by education, by local minority, by sex).
6. What kind of apparently 'irrelevant' issues are raised? Who raises them?
7. When subordinate groups do talk, what do they say? How do they say it? (Do they lower their eyes, fold their hands?) Are they more likely to talk when bureaucrats are present?
8. Are there small group discussions when the larger group is talking?
9. Who listens when subordinate groups talk? Who listens when elites talk?
10. Which elites are taken seriously? Who are listened to, but not taken seriously?
11. Norms of deliberation? Do they silence or devalue speech of the subalterns (Young), and undermine their 'linguistic and epistemic authority' (Chandhoke)? Have there been any training/ capacity-building of people from marginalized groups? What have they focussed on? Style of speech? Techniques? Or substance/content? How do people articulate themselves? Are they confrontational/ when are they confrontational? When are they more consensual/ using 'rational' modes of argumentation?

Follow-up:

1. What issues from the previous time were carried forward? What issues were referred to?

Repeat as above.

REVIEW MINUTES OF GRAM SABHA MEETINGS

1. Note the key topics discussed
2. Do a quick check of the numbers- are the correct numbers recorded?
3. Profile of participants?

Not much can be read off these formal records because these could be fudged or doctored. Refer the Gram Sabha recordings instead.

CHECKLIST FOR HANGING OUT AND TRACING HOW KEY DECISIONS ARE MADE

(These could be in small groups- but avoid forming groups where more than five people are talking!)

PURPOSE:

1. Understand the discursive construction of reality by people in the villages; and
2. How power, dominance and hegemony operate through village life and the polity (Panchayat)

VENUE:

Anywhere in the village or its outskirts in a relaxed atmosphere. The checklist below will not be 'administered' during a single meeting, but needs to inform general conversations throughout the duration of the fieldwork. During each conversation with informants, record discussants and remember their socio-economic profile. No recording or note-taking in their presence. The clusters below are only indicative, as discussions will be extremely unstructured. However, they do represent the order in which issues will be taken up. The less threatening points of conversation precede the more threatening ones.

Preliminaries:

Let them know that I am studying about Panchayat and Gram Sabha issues, and am interested to know how these things function here.

1. Ask people around generally what they think are 'important' things in their lives and significant affairs in the village? What do people 'value' being or doing? Why? What are the important things that have happened in the village during the last few years? What changes have people seen? How do they relate to these changes? How do they feel about these changes? How does the Panchayat figure in these changes?
2. What does 'freedom' mean? Freedom to do what? Freedom over what? Freedom to consume? Freedom to buy? Freedom to plan? Freedom to meet/ be the government? Freedom to move? Have the panchayats/ Gram Sabhas/ NREGA contributed to a sense of freedom?

Gram Sabhas:

3. So, what happens in Gram Sabhas here? What are your opinions on the Gram Sabha? On the way the Gram Sabha is organized in this village? When are they organized? How many times a year? Who organizes them? What is the primary purpose of these forums? What makes a good Gram Sabha? Are there any rules attending to how a Gram Sabha should be conducted? Are these followed? Or violated? Who violates them? How has the character of the Gram Sabha changed since it was first initiated?
4. We talked about poverty and injustice- I have heard many things about it here. Do people raise these issues at the Gram Sabhas? How? What happens after that?
5. How useful or relevant are Gram Sabhas? Can you tell me what important decisions they have taken? Why are they important? (Record this decision, and ask-) why do you think this was taken? Who took it? Who benefitted from it? Who did not? Why do you think this decision was taken? Did it serve any one/few people's interests?
6. What has been the role of the Gram Sabha in the selection of BPL families?

NREGA:

7. *Hang out with the NREGA Monitoring Committee at worksites.* What do people think about the NREGA? Is it as important as it appears? Why? What do they feel it does not do? Visit worksites, and use worksite checklist provided by the Ministry as appropriate. Check about general perceptions of corruption in the program, how it benefits (or not) the poorest communities? Do they feel it degrades these communities further? What are its limits?

Decisions:

8. Tell me about other important decisions. What are these? I understand that XXXXXXX (take decision 1 from FGD, or component from the village development plans) was an important decision taken a few weeks ago? Would you consider it important? Why? Why not?

9. How was this decision taken? Who all did? Why do you think this decision was taken? What were the alternatives? How would it have been if one of the alternative decisions were taken?
10. Anyway, now coming back to this decision, who benefited, and how? Was anyone upset? Did anyone not benefit? What did they do?
11. Why do you think such a decision was made?
12. Ask about other decisions that were mentioned in the FGD....
13. What about the NREGA? How were decisions about what work to be done under the program taken?

Social resources:

14. What are the other ways in which people get together to discuss and talk about different matters? Are there other forums?
15. When people are not happy with some decisions, how do they make themselves heard?
16. Friendships- are there cross-caste friendships?
17. Social resources- how do people relate to one another, who do they share meals with? Invite to their functions? Where would they go? Where would they not go?
18. What clubs/ associations/ groups do people form? Why? How do these help members? Others? Or are these just a waste of time?

State and surrogates:

19. What are the different markers of state presence in the village? Post Office? Police? Railway Station? Revenue office? Fair Price shop? What happens there? Just hang around there on a typical day. What does 'sarkar' mean to people?
20. How is the state perceived? As protector? As arbitrator? As revenue-extractor (unlikely)? As coercer? Is it important/ irrelevant? What are the expectations from the state? (speaks to: neoliberal art of government & the state's project to create 'free' citizens, but citizens do expect the state to be there- perhaps there's a contradiction in expectations....to explore)
21. Look out for the 'shadow state'- presence of private sector providers.
22. Stories about bribes/ corruption.
23. Perception of the coercive apparatus- the police? the Border Police?
24. Electricity- who uses? Do they pay? Who got it for them?
25. What are the views on the Panchayat? Are they representatives of the 'people' or are they rather arms of the state? Or is there no difference?
26. How does the Sarpanch/ other Ward members relate to the rest of the village/ their co-villagers [Sarpanch as representative of the state or of the village]
27. Infra-law (which coexists with egalitarian principles)- appropriation of the coercive arm of the state by local elites.

Culture and perceptions of community:

28. Explore the extent to which the notion of 'karma' & 'kismet' prevail. What buttresses the caste ideology? Or is there no ideological buttress, only brute force? Or incentives/ reward-systems? Or the fact that everyone has a stake in the pie, this being a 'graded' system? Do lower castes share/ believe the myths about their inferiority? How do they play out their position vis-à-vis other groups?
29. Do people marry outside their jatis? What marriage rules do people follow? Rules for commensality and connubiality?
30. Caste histories & local legends
31. Cultural/ religious activities/ Differences between different castes. Different caste norms related to worship and marriage, who are their patron-deities & saints, notions of 'after-life'/ rebirth among dalits.
32. How do dalits see the village? What is the general model of the 'community'? Who would they share utensils with, how do they address each other, people from other castes, people in other villages from their own castes and from others groups?
33. Title, rank, corporate honor. Flattering self-image of the elites.

34. Dialectical identities, especially among the higher OBCs and higher SCs. How do 'lower' castes feel about the low status they have been attributed? Ask with reference to existing relationships. What, according to people, is good conduct?

Nature of politics:

35. Village elites/ their alliances/ shifting alliances/ factions.
36. Political capabilities- experience with political struggle. Political learning + political networks + language of political claims and compitn among different groups. Movements for social transformation?
37. Village polity- different political coalitions within the village, reform-oriented actors *within* the village, what forms of political alliances have benefitted the subaltern groups and how? Politics of the unorganized sector and the politics in particular of the agricultural laborers.
38. Local media. What kinds of news do they cover? Who are the stringers? Where do they get the 'news' from? Read newspapers available locally, and record how news is produced and absorbed. What are the 'pressing' issues that appear to emerge?
39. Political parties and decision-making
40. *Baithak-khana/ adda/ bichar* (especially in West Bengal)
41. Ask/ observe the 'informal rules' and norms when Panchayat members, and other leaders talk/ move gesticulate. Norms of deliberation? Do they silence or devalue speech of the subalterns (Young), and undermine their 'linguistic and epistemic authority' (Chandhoke)? Have there been any training/ capacity-building of people from marginalized groups? What have they focussed on? Style of speech? Techniques? Or substance/content? How do people articulate themselves? Are they confrontational/ when are they confrontational? When are they more consensual/ using 'rational' modes of argumentation?
42. Are Panchayats an instrument of local elite/ ruling class hegemony? Is there a ruling class? [Lukes' three dimensions/ Gaventa's methodology (have still to read the latter) and Panchayats] OR, are the Panchayats autonomous (following Bardhan) of vested interests and not embedded:
- Do elites try to take decisions on behalf of others in the Panchayats?
 - Do they set the agenda in the Panchayats?
 - Do they try to influence/ or- more sophisticatedly- manufacture the consent of rivals and subordinates? How do they do that?

Economy and the livelihoods:

43. STRUCTURE of domination- village economic data/ correlate land holdings with caste/ education/ irrigated land.
44. Cropping? What crops are typically grown? How much does this earn in the markets? Which are the closest markets? How do they transport their crops? Who transports? Whose vehicles? Are these cash crops? Subsistence?
45. Concentration of land holdings- important, as land is the primary means of production. Ownership of other economic resources- mills, small industries, etc.
46. What do women and men do during the day? Where do they go to work? What kind of work do they do, respectively? Do they do similar things? Or, do they do different things? Are women more vocal in some contexts? With some people?
47. What are the prevailing wages and work conditions? Where do people go to earn their livelihoods? Where do women in particular go? How much do they earn, compared with men? Do children work? How is children's work remunerated?
48. In times of scarcity, how do people cope? How do women cope?
49. What forms of accumulation take place? What kinds of rents, levies, interests, bribes, grants and sale price accrue to different people?
50. Minimum support price for crops.
51. How people are exploited- made to work for less, deprived of access to public goods, made to do things that are degrading, discriminated, use of force
52. Structure of surveillance, reward and punishment:

Political society:

53. Time spent by village leaders doing different things/ meeting different people

54. How is conflict/ dissent managed or understood?
55. Ideal of village polity/ village leader- who are the leaders and what their constituencies are
56. How leaders respond to their constituencies? Do you see “contextual sensitivity” that Ruud sees in West Bengal?
57. Political society in the villages- the juridical-administrative society, comprising formal and informal leaders- who are they? What do they do? What makes them leaders? How did they become so?

Discipline and Resistance:

58. Dissonant political culture- ‘infrapolitics’ of the poor- low-profile resistance- rumor, gossip, folklore, jokes, songs, rituals, codes, euphemisms; deference & back-stage talk; acting; refusal to understand; dissident sub-cultures: “subversive popular heresies”; counter-theater; “rituals of reversal”- the grotesquerie, profanity, ridicule, aggression and character assassination possible in the carnival (but critique that these are allowed “to prevent such inversions from occurring in real life”); evasion; symbolic defiance; resistance, disobedience and oppositional groupings; surveillance from below.
59. How have groups perpetuated/ contested structures/ status quo? Have the poor engaged in movements/ riots? Are there memories of these movements/ violence? How were these quelled?
60. Disciplining citizens- Panchayats/ Gram Sabhas the new ritual of power- “conduct of conduct”- thru the neoliberal art of government. Gram Sabhas represent the invention and assemblage of particular apparatuses for exercising power (Rose)? Is there a certain behaviour being expected on citizens, a certain ‘regime of truth’ that is being imbibed? To look after themselves? To ‘participate’, to ‘formulate plans’, to ‘attend meetings’ and to ‘take responsibility’, (to ‘audit’) for resources/ ‘powers of freedom’. An expectation that citizens will fashion themselves/ behave in a certain way? The language used by common people- “meeting”, planning, project, scheme etc. which makes the state the centre of their lives, one that they look upto as supplicants. As a (meaningless) ritualization and routinization of power, the poorest do not show up, precisely to contest the meaninglessness of the whole thing. The ill-treatment at the hands of the officials. In my data, I might find that they do know when the Gram Sabha happened, they do know what is discussed, but they don’t bother to attend because they know everything’s been managed, and because the officials and the elected reps try and monopolize everything. Or, if they participate in Gram Sabhas, it is to contest that power [In the larger context of the centralizing political economy, the privatization of resources, the liberalization of the state in India, what does this mean?]

ANNEX 5: THE DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Ditya	
Kunal Moholi	Majhi Haram (community elder) of one of the Moholi communities in Ditya. Resident of Neechupada hamlet. Close personal friend of Babul Sarkar (see below). He had participated in the land occupation movement alongside the CPI(M) cadre. 63 years old. Male. Illiterate. Owned some land on which he used his and his family's labor. Moholi
Sevanti Moholi	Kunal Moholi's daughter-in-law. She was particularly outspoken about the problems in the ward and the discrimination faced by Saotal children in the local schools and health center. She was born in Gajol, a few kilometers north of the present location. 46 years old. Female. Has completed primary education. Owns no land in her name. Moholi.
Madan Hembrom	Husband of the formally-elected Ward Member (See Shyamoli Hasda) of the village and member of the local CPI(M) cadre. 32 years old. Male. Has completed primary education. Owns some land on which he uses his and his family's labor. Saotal.
Tularam Sarkar	Clerk in the Circle Office (office dealing with land revenues) as Adina, some fifteen kilometers north-west of the field work location. Was among the first people in the village to have completed School education. Had a difficult childhood, been brought up by his uncles after his parents died. Reared his younger brothers Gajendranath Sarkar and Paresh Sarkar. Long-term supporter of the CPI(M). Extremely religious and has been at the forefront of suggesting that a temple be built in the village. At the same time, believes that religion is the personal matter of every human being and should be kept distinct from the state. So, for example, the temple should be constructed from personal contributions rather than finances from the Panchayat. 47 years old. Male. Has completed secondary education. Owns a large plot of land, on which he hires labor from nearby localities. Desiya.
Babul Sarkar	The "Grand Old Man" of the village. The first 'convert' in the locality to the CPI(M) cause. Known for his passionate commitment to the movement and to the cause of the poor. Was elected to the post of the Upa-Pradhan in 1978, and has held various offices at the Panchayat, Block and District levels till his stroke in 2002. Revered by friends, supporters and opponents alike, including Congress strong man Abdul Qadir. He ascribes to the philosophy propagated by the guru Anukool Chandra that all prophets are to be equally revered. A reluctant supporter of the cause of building a temple in Ditya. 67 years old. Male. Has completed primary education. Owns some land. Managed to get his son a public sector job in the local school, following which he earned some disrepute. Desiya.
Shyamoli Hasda	Elected Ward Member since 2008. An activist of the CPI(M). Is outspoken, but allows her husband to represent her at meetings in the Gram Panchayat and the Block Office, since, as she says, it's an all-male affair anyway. However, is not ignorant about the goings-on in the locality. The couple live in a small home, which- like other dwellings in the Saotal localities- have no electricity. 30 years old. Female. Illiterate. Owns no land in her name. Saotal.
Vaman Tudu	29 years old. Male. Landless laborer. Saotal
Abdul Qadir	Elected Upa-Pradhan of the Panchayat which Ditya is part of. Exercises an inordinate degree of influence on the politics of Ditya locality through local Congressman

Sarasram Sarkar and the Congress-dominated Gram Unnayan Samiti. Sarasram is a relative novice in politics, which explains Abdul Qadir's influence. 45 years old. Male. Completed Senior Secondary School. Owns large plots of land, on which he hires labor and deploys machinery. Sheikh Muslim

Sarasram Sarkar	Congress boss in Ditya. Babul Sarkar's half-brother (their father married twice). Sense that Babul Sarkar cornered everything in the family and locality, from affections to resources, runs deep. Began life in the CPI(M). Fell out with his brother over his stance on the temple as well as the appointment of the former's son to a position he had coveted. Joined the Congress Party, and responsible for laying the ground-work for its unprecedented performance in the recent elections. Extremely religious and believes that the local Panchayat ought to support any religious activity. Claims to have Abdul Qadir's support for this proposal.
Paresh Sarkar	58 years old. Male. Illiterate. Owns some land, which he cultivates himself. Desiya. Elected Ward Member of Ditya from 2003 to 2008. Affiliated with the CPI(M). Youngest brother of Tularam Sarkar. Has been in the political wilderness due to several personal indiscretions. Despite his personal connections (younger brother of Tularam Sarkar and Gajendranath Sarkar- see below and son-in-law of Arjun Sarkar- see below), he has been yet unsuccessful in rehabilitating himself with the local CPI(M) leadership.
Gajendranath Sarkar	41 years old. Male. Completed Senior Secondary School. Owns some land, which he cultivates using hired labor. Desiya. Ditya's best-known contractor. Extremely shrewd and is known to have local politicians eat out of his hands. Is an ardent supporter of the NREGS for what he calls its boundless opportunities for money-making, which at the same time helps the poor. 'Gold with God' as he puts it (in English). Called "British" by his adversaries for his perceived ability to make the best use of people and situations around him. Was a CPI(M) sympathizer, supporter and beneficiary of contracts. Switched allegiances after the CPI(M) lost power. Known as one of Abdul Qadir's most trusted friends. Younger brother of Kanshiram Sarkar, elder to Paresh Sarkar. Lives in the same house as Tularam Sarkar and has taken responsibility for educating his nephews in what he calls the 'best English-speaking institutions in Maldah'.
Arjun Sarkar	45 years old. Male. Completed primary school. Owns land in Ditya as well as a plot in Maldah town, where he maintains his second wife. Desiya. CPI(M) strategist and activist since 1969. His father was the <i>modol</i> (community headman) of the Desiya community in Ditya. Was Secretary of the Gram Unnayan Samiti in the previous dispensation (2003-08), when his son-in-law was Ward Member.
	61 years old. Male. Completed primary school. Owns land in Ditya, which he cultivates using own and hired labor. Desiya.

Rahimpur

Sarfaraz Islam	Landless laborer, rickshaw puller in Maldah town.
Madan Haldar	Block-level Congress Chief. I have never met him, but only heard about him in relation with the disputes reported in my accounts.
Ziaur Rehman	Congress functionary in Rahimpur. Owned some land and widely regarded as influential.
Gautam Ram	Head Teacher, Rahimpur Senior Secondary School. Affiliated with the CPI(M).
	51 years old. Male. Completed University education. Lives in Maldah town. Namasudra.

Daulat bibi	A destitute woman, 64 years old.
Akbar Ali	Congress strategist, showman and organizer- all rolled into one. Friends and foes alike credit him with revitalizing the party in the locality from a moribund organization that used to be run by so-called criminal elements. Engineered the Congress victory despite stiff competition from one of the <i>shamaj</i> sardars. Is extremely mild-mannered, seeks to resolve conflicts through deliberations and consensus (but does not avoid conflictual discussions). Is easily the most influential Congress politician in the locality. Despite his influence, he holds no formal position in the party machinery and has been struggling to get the full-time public sector job of the Night Watchman in the local School. Widely travelled across India. Has worked in the construction industry as labor supervisor and labor contractor. But suffered huge losses when the laborers he committed to a project absconded. 40 years old. Male. Completed Secondary education. Owns considerable amount of land and several ponds. Hires labor to cultivate them. Deploys machinery which he borrows from Abdur Rehman and Alauddin Ali (see below). Sheikh Muslim.
Babar Hossein	Elected Ward Member. Eloquent speaker and very well-cultivated persona. Akbar's first cousin (their fathers are brothers). In addition to his duties as elected representative, Babar sells mutual funds to customers in Maldah town and practices medicine, much to Akbar's chagrin who believes he should devote more time to his responsibilities as an elected representative. Avoids conflict and delegates their resolution to Akbar. 38 years old. Male. Completed Secondary education. Owns land, though not as much as his cousin. Sheikh Muslim.
Joynal Ali	The CPI(M) strategist and chief organizer in the locality. Widely regarded for his role in the development of the party's mass base in the locality (perceived to be a remarkable feat, given the party's puzzling association with the Hindu community). One of the locality's four <i>Shamaj sardars</i>. As <i>sardar</i>, he has to transcend his party affiliations. Generally seeks a consensual resolution to problems, but does not shy away from facing conflict where it arises. 54 years old. Male. Illiterate (and regrets it deeply. Was aghast when I told him my wife left her job as a University Lecturer to live with me after marriage). Owns land and cultivates it using hired labor. Sheikh Muslim.
Sirajul Islam	Congress organizer in Intar Rahimpur. The sole contact of the party in the village. Childhood friends with Akbar, Alauddin and Babar. Frank and brutally honest, and known for his mercurial temperament. 41 years old. Male. Illiterate. Owns land and cultivates it using hired labor. Shershabadiya Muslim.
Murshid Hossein	Erstwhile leader of the Congress Party. Currently, leading a life of self-imposed exile. Owns some land. Studied upto secondary school.
Abdur Rehman	Congress Secretary at the Panchayat level. His first cousin is Akbar's mother. Akbar's best friend in the locality. Humyun openly makes fun of Abdur Rehman's appetite and privately wishes he was more sophisticated about taking favors from those he helped. His father is one of the locality's four <i>Shamaj sardars</i>. Abdur practices medicine in his spare time. 47 years old. Male. Completed Secondary education. Owns land, which he cultivates using hired labor and machinery. Hires machinery out when not using it. Sheikh Muslim.
Alauddin Ali	Member of the Village Education Committee. His father, Akbar's father and Babar's father are all brothers. Alauddin was closer to Babar than he was to Akbar, and shared a deep friendship with Chandra Mahato (a Hindu Saotal) from neighboring Sindhugram, who was the Secretary of the VEC. Akbar felt that both Chandra and

Alauddin were conspiring to keep him out of the job of the Night Watchman, since they wanted that job for one of Chandra's own cousins. Like Abdur, Alauddin is a private medical practitioner as well.

45 years old. Male. Completed primary education. Owns land, which he cultivates using hired labor and machinery. Hires machinery out when not using it. Sheikh Muslim.

Roshanar Ward 5

Divya Mandal	Elected Mukhya of Roshanar Panchayat in 2005. Although most of the decisions are taken and representations made by her husband Hareram Mandal (See below), she is not entirely unaware of events around her.
	48 years old. Illiterate. Owns no land in her name. Kevat.
Gajdeo Mandal	Widely acclaimed as the <i>mahant/ madal</i> (community headman) of his Gangot community. A shrewd politician, who was affiliated with the Congress closely till the electoral rout of Congress strongman Pritam Singh (see below). He is currently courted by the RJD and the BJP. Recognized as a mentor by many upcoming politicians. Personal antagonism towards elected Mukhya runs very deep. Was known to be sympathetic to the insecurities of local Muslims. His role in saving Muslims in the aftermath of communal violence through the 1980s and 1990s is hailed by Muslims in the locality. However, he says he is beginning to 'hate them' increasingly because of their dietary practices.
	58 years old. Completed primary education. Owns land and hires labor to cultivate it. Gangot.
Surendranarayan Mandal	75 years old. Male. Landless. Works as casual laborer in nearby town. Gangot.
Deokinandan Chauhan	The erstwhile leader of the CPI (ML) L-affiliated Indian People's Front who organized and instigated land occupation movements in the locality. Although the specific role of the organization in insinuating these movements is debated, locals agree that his stance and personal intervention with the police prevented many more arbitrary arrests, beatings and killings than what happened. Has been hard of hearing since 2007.
	79 years old. Completed primary education. Owns some land, which his family members cultivate. Rajput.
Hareram Mandal	Husband of the elected Mukhya. Given the institutional arrangements, he exercises a great deal of influence in the Ward's politics and allocations than the Ward Member does. Was affiliated with the CPI(ML) since 1978 till he decided to contest elections independently, defeating Congress Party strongman Pritam Singh. Prior to that election, Pritam Singh had allegedly declared that every hand that rose in favor of Hareram Mandal would be slashed. With their victory, naturally, the couple were elated. Hareram Mukhya reciprocates Basdeo Mandal's hatred and considers him Pritam Singh's stooge. He has also turned against long-time friends Mansur Alam and Rustom Ali (see below) for their continued support to the Congress Party.
	54 years old. Illiterate. Owns some land which he cultivates with his family labor. Kevat.
Sadiqa Bibi	Elected the Ward Member in 2005. Although politically active, the institutional arrangements do not facilitate her decisions to be enforced. A protégé of Basdeo Mandal, who, it is said by locals, propped her up to rally the locality's Muslims against Hareram Mandal, she was very articulate (at least to me) about her roles and responsibilities. However, she was unable to put any of her plans for her ward into action given Hareram Mandal's obstructive role.

39 years old. Illiterate. Landless. Husband works as a mason in Punjab. Kunjra Muslim.

Javed Alam	Local fixer affiliated with the Congress. Another protégé of BASdeo Mandal's, but fell out recently with him over the latter's insistence on not initiating and reconciliation with Hareram Mandal. His wife contested the election against Kureisha, but lost. Although both men spoke of each other fondly in the past tense, the little interaction I saw was cool and professional.
	36 years old. Completed primary education. Own some land, which he cultivates with his own labor. Kunjra Muslim.
Pritam Singh	Roshanar's Mukhya since his father Parmeshri Singh's death in 1985. Congress politician who claims to be in the 'inner circle' with rising star and scion of the Nehru-Gandhi clan Rahul Gandhi. However, events in the locality have passed him by, and he is not quite taken seriously any more. Staunch opponent of the NREGS in the locality.
	75 years old. Completed secondary education. Own considerable amount of land, which he cultivates with machinery and hired labor. Rajput
Sohrab Ali	38 years old. Male. Works as mason in Gurgaon for eight months a year. Was affiliated with the CPI(ML) and considers himself a disciple of Satnarain Yadav (See below). Once a good friend of Hareram Mandal. Fell out with him because the latter perceived him to be Pritam Singh's stooge. Illiterate. Owns no land. Kunjra Muslim
Satyendra Yadav	CPI(ML) leader, widely regarded for his organizational and oratorical skills.

Sargana Ward 1

Sarvesh Mandal	Mukhya of Sargana Panchayat since 2005. Affiliated with the JD(U). Sympathetic to the demands staged by members of different marginalized communities for fear of alienating them all at once.
	62 years old. Male. Illiterate. Owns some land and hired labor to work on it. Kevat.
Kulanand Prasad	Landlord owning several acres of land. Alleges that his Santhal sharecroppers have been illegally cultivating his land and harvesting the produce. Filed a legal case against their leader Shivrindan Hasda (See below) for criminal activity, including murder.
Manoj Srivastav	Scion of the oldest and well established landlord family in the locality. Block-level Secretary of the CPI(ML). Member of the VEC. Alleged to have swindled the VEC of contributions and grants. On the whole, CPI(ML) activists were ambivalent about his role in their movements. He was favorable to securing NREGS cards for wage-seekers, and agreed to provide leadership to those who considered themselves poor when they made claims on the BPL cards. He sided with Ram Singh, another member of the VEC, in the latter's conflict with Gunavati and Narendra Yadav (See below). He was hostile to the Musahars squatting on school property.
	53 years old. Completed Secondary education. Owns considerable amount of land. Hires labor to work on it. Kayasth.
Kapeshwari Rishi	Madal of the Musahar community in the School tola. Sargana Ward 5. His daughter-in-law is the elected Ward Member for this ward. But effective power is exercised by him. Has been a key player in the negotiations over the future of the Musahar families that have allegedly encroached upon public property.
	70 years old. Landless. Illiterate. Musahar.
Vinay Vishwas	One of the members of the 'temple management committee'. Contested the opaque transactions that erstwhile temple authorities were engaged in, and has been fighting a continuous battle to ensure that the financial transactions are known to the public.

	58 years old. Landless, illiterate. Kevat.
Gajen Singh	Post Master of Sargana. Responsible for disbursing NREGS wages, which he frequently reneged on. His mother is a block-level functionary of the BJP.
	40 years old. Owns considerable land. Hires labor and machines. Rajput.
Savri Rishi	Veteran of the CPI(ML) and the land occupation movements of the 1970s and the 1980s. Continues to be well respected, and at the center of several local contentions. However, is wary of cultural organizations such as the MSS. After all, he says, Dina Bahadri won't fill their stomachs. Lives in Sargana Ward 5.
	75 years old. Male. Illiterate. Owns marginal land holdings. Musahar.
Kartik Singh	Ram Singh's father-in-law. One of the established landholding families in the area.
	67 years old. Male. Completed primary education. Owns considerable amount of land, which he cultivates with the help of hired labor. Rajput.
Sadi Rishi	One of the first University graduates from among the Musahars. Resident of Sargana Ward 1 (West) hamlet. He is a broker/ fixer of deals at the Government offices and Panchayat. Member of the Musahar Sevak Sangh and believes, like some of the others from his community, that to be taken seriously the Musahars must be assertive about their culture. He also believes that they must take to speaking 'properly' in Maithili/ Hindi. Suspicious of CPI(ML) leadership as well as local leadership of the JD(U). Hopes that the MSS will transform into a political party soon.
	30 years old. Male. Owns some land, which he cultivates with his own and family labor. Musahar.
Dharmesh Srivastav	A political fixer. Affiliated with the BJP. His friendship with Amaresh Yadav (See below) is legendary, despite differences in caste and political party affiliation. Predictably, is vitriolic about the role of the CPI(ML). Plays an important role in local affairs. Has a reputation for taking issues relating to poor families and individuals, in doing which he has to often go against the interests of individuals from his own caste/ economic background. Is no altruist though, as he harbors political ambitions.
	39 years old. Male. Owns some land, which he cultivates with hired labor. Owns a photocopy machine, which is his chief sources of income. Kayasth, but unrelated to the established Kayasth families in Sargana.
Ram Singh	A local landlord. He lives in a huge mansion abutting Gunavati and Narendra Yadav's house. Allegedly occupied a portion of that homestead, and tried to use his influence with Ganesh Singh and Asok Srivastav to get that legalized. However, the landless couple, Dharmesh Srivastav and Amaresh Yadav (see below) foiled his plans.
	53 years old. Male. Completed University education. Owns considerable amount of land, which he cultivates with the help of hired labor. Owns two tractors. Rajput.
Bharat Singh	Mukhya of Sargana Panchayat from 2000 to 2005. Was unsympathetic to the cause of the Musahar families who allegedly occupied the School property in Sargana Ward 5.
	35 years old. Male. Owns considerable amount of land, which he cultivates with the help of hired labor. Rajput.
Kadi Rishi	Sadi Rishi's younger brother. Also a graduate.
	28 years old. Male. Owns some land, which he cultivates with his own and family labor. Musahar.
Shyamdev Rishidev	Elected Ward Member of Sargana Ward 1. Resides in Sargana Ward 1 (East) hamlet. Is perceived to be a stooge of the landowning families in the locality. Different people I happened to speak with, among other Musahar families as well as others referred to him as 'khachhar' (dull). Is widely travelled across northern and western India.

	40 years old. Male. Illiterate. Landless. Casual worker, worked as a mason or brick-layer in Rajasthan, Haryana and Delhi till he was elected Ward Member.
Gunavati Yadav	Owner, along with her husband Narendra Yadav (See below), of a small plot of homestead land in Sargana Ward 1(East). Defended the piece of property spiritedly against encroachment by her more powerful neighbor Ram Singh. The initial support provided her by her community couldn't sustain, and key members of the community actually supported Ram Singh.
	40 years old. Female. Studied upto Primary School. Stays in the village and works in people's homes to supplement her husband's earnings. Yadav.
Khiladi Rishi	Sadi Rishi's youngest brother. Also a graduate.
	25 years old. Male. Owns some land, which he cultivates with his own and family labor. Musahar.
Jhilmil Devi	CPI(ML) activist, resident of Sargana Ward 5. Also affiliated with the MSS, for whom she does samaj seva.
	50 year old. Female. Owns no land in her name. She and her family members work as agricultural laborers for other farmers in the locality.
Parsvnath Jha	CPI(ML) activist and Secretary of the Agricultural Laborers Association. Has a reputation for his organizational skills. Is trusted by several Musahar affiliates of the CPI(ML).
	25 years old. Male. Landless. Brahman.
Hiranandan Hasda	Uncle of the Majhi Haram of Sargana Ward 4 Santhal community. CPI(ML) activist and leader of the sharecroppers who forcibly cultivate and harvest Anand Prasad's land. Was part of the skirmish in which Anand Prasad's son was killed, though it was difficult to ascertain whether he had any role in the actual killing.
	58 years old. Male. Landless. Saotal.
Amaresh Yadav	Upasarpnch of Sargana Panchaya. Resident of Sargana Ward 5, but is influential throughout the Panchayat for his deliberative skills and shrewd political acumen. Supported Narendra and Gunavati Yadav steadfastly throughout their struggle, although as times Narendra accused him, unfairly it seems, of capitulating to Ram Singh. However, in a dispute between a local Yadav landlord and his Musahar tenants, he brought about a 'compromise' by successfully persuading (coercing through non-violent means?) the latter to withdraw their case.
	39 years old. Male. Owns considerable amount of land, which he cultivates with hired labor and machinery. Illiterate. Yadav.
Narendra Yadav	Owns a small plot of land in Sargana Ward 1 (East), where he lives with his family. Social superiors have called them 'upstarts' for this purchase. With help from friends Dharmesh Srivastav and Narendra Yadav, they successfully defended the property from encroachment by more powerful neighbor Ram Singh.
	43 years old. Illiterate. Works as a farm hand in Punjab for most parts of the year.

3.20 Schedule for BPL Census 2002

Name of Head of Household:
House Number and Name, if any:
Name of Village:
Name of Gram Panchayat:
Name of Block:
Name of District:

Total Score :

Sub-category:

A. Profile of the household:

(a) Educational status

Sl. No.	Name	Age (in years)	Sex: Male(M)/ Female(F)	Relation to head of household	Educational status * (use code 5)

5 - Illiterate - 1 Passed Class V - 2 Passed Class VIII - 3
Passed Class X - 4 Passed Class XII - 5 Graduate and above - 6

(b) Average Monthly Income of the household in Rupees * (Only one column, which is the most appropriate, to be ticked (✓))

Less than 250	250-499	500-1499	1500-2500	More than 2500

(c) Type of operational holding of land * (Only one column, which is the most appropriate, to be ticked (✓))

Owner	tenant	Both owner and tenant	None

Whether owns land for construction of TAY house (Yes/No)?

(d) Drinking Water Facility * (Only one column, which is the most appropriate, to be ticked (✓)) Only one row (either 'for plain areas' or 'for hilly areas') to be used.

(for plain areas)	No source of drinking water within distance of 1.6 kilometre	source of drinking water at a distance of 1.00 - 1.59 kilometre	source of drinking water at a distance of 0.50 - .99 kilometre	source of drinking water within a distance of less than 0.50 kilometre	source available within the house
(for hilly areas)	no source of drinking water within elevation of 100 metres	source of drinking water within elevation of 50 - 100 metres	source of drinking water at elevation of less than 50 metres	source available within the house	

(e) Social Group of the household * (Only one column to be ticked (✓))

ST	SC	OBC	Others

* Not to be included in the Total Score

B. Identification and Sub-categorisation of Poor

(Only one column, which is the most appropriate, to be ticked (✓) against items at Sl. Nos. 1 to 5)

Sl. No.	Characteristic	Scores				
		0	1	2	3	4
1.	Size group of operational holding of land.	Nil	Less than 1 ha. of un-irrigated land (or less than 0.5 ha. of irrigated land)	1 ha. - 2 ha. of un-irrigated land (or 0.5-1.0 ha. of irrigated land)	2 ha. - 5 ha. of un-irrigated land (or 1.0-2.5 ha. of irrigated land)	More than 5 ha. of un-irrigated land (or 2.5 ha. of irrigated land)
2.	Type of house	Houseless	Kutcha	Semi-pucca	Pucca	Urban type
3.	Average Availability of normal wear clothing (per person in pieces)	Less than 2	2 or more, but less than 4	4 or more, but less than 6	6 or more, but less than 10	10 or more
4.	Food Security	Less than one square meal per day for major part of the year	Normally, one square meal per day, but less than one square meal occasionally	One square meal per day throughout the year	Two square meals per day, with occasional shortage	Enough food throughout the year
5.	Sanitation	Open defecation	Group latrine with irregular water supply	Group latrine with regular water supply	Clean group latrine with regular water supply and regular sweeper	Private latrine

6.	Ownership of consumer durables: Do you own (tick (✓)) -TV -electric fan -kitchen appliances like pressure cooker -radio	Nil	Any one	Two items only	Any three or all items	All items and/or Ownership of any one of the following: -Computer -Telephone -Refrigerator -Colour TV -electric kitchen appliances -expensive furniture -LMV* / LCV* -Tractor -mechanized two-wheeler/ three-wheeler -Power Tiller -Combined thresher/ harvester [@ 4-wheeled mechanized vehicle]
7.	Literacy status of the highest literate adult	Illiterate	Upto primary (Class V)	Completed secondary (Passed Class X)	Graduate/ Professional Diploma	Post Graduate/ Professional Graduate
8.	Status of the Household Labour Force	Bonded Labour	Female & Child Labour	Only adult females & no child labour	Adult males only	Others
9.	Means of livelihood	Casual labour	Subsistence cultivation	Artisan	Salary	Others
10.	Status of children (5-14 years) [any child]	Not going to School* and working	Going to School* and working			Going to School* and NOT working

11.	Type of indebtedness	For daily consumption purposes from informal sources	For production purpose from informal sources	For other purpose from informal sources	Borrowing only from Institutional Agencies	No indebtedness and possess assets
12.	Reason for migration from household	Casual work	Seasonal employment	Other forms of livelihood	Non-migrant	Other purposes
13.	Preference of Assistance	Wage Employment/ Targeted Public Distribution System)	Self Employment	Training and Skill Upgradation	Housing	Loan/ Subsidy more than Rs. one lakh or No assistance needed

(@ including Non Formal Education

Note: The Total Score for a household will vary between 0 and 52

বিশেষ সংসদ সভা

ইলাই আগষ্ট মাস ব্যাপী প্রত্যেক গ্রাম সংসদে বিশেষ সভা অনুষ্ঠিত হবে। উক্ত গ্রাম সংসদ সভায় সংশ্লিষ্ট বি.পি.এল তালিকা নিয়ে আলোচনা হবে। সংসদ সভায় সম্পূর্ণ সার্ভে তালিকা, ৩৩ নম্বর পাতিয়া পর্যন্ত বি.পি.এল. তালিকা সংসদ ভিত্তিক এর প্রস্তাবিত IAY তালিকা এবং ৬৫ বৎসরের উর্ধ্বে বি.পি.এল অন্তর্ভুক্ত বয়স্ক বয়স্কদের তালিকা সামাজিক সুরক্ষা প্রকল্পে উপকারভোগী চিহ্নিত করার জন্য পেশ করা হবে। সংসদ সভায় আলোচনা সাপেক্ষ যে তালিকাগুলি প্রস্তুত করতে হবে :-

(১) IAY এর সম্ভাব্য তালিকা (Suggested list) থেকে স্থায়ী অপেক্ষমান তালিকা : (Permanent waiting list)

(ক) তপশীলী জাতি ও উপজাতিভুক্ত পরিবার

তপশীলী জাতি/উপজাতিভুক্ত পরিবারের তালিকা

পরিবারের ক্রমিক	পরিবারের প্রধানের নাম	পরিবারের পূর্ণাবয়স্ক মহিলা নাম যার নামে ইন্দিরা আবাস যোজনার সুবিধা দেওয়া যেতে পারে	সামাজিক অবস্থান (তপশীলী জাতি/ উপজাতি)	মোট প্রাপ্ত নম্বর (ক্রমবর্ধমান মান অনুসারে)

(খ) সংখ্যালঘু সম্প্রদায়ভুক্ত পরিবার

সংখ্যালঘু সম্প্রদায়ভুক্ত পরিবারের তালিকা

পরিবারের ক্রমিক	পরিবারের প্রধানের নাম	পরিবারের পূর্ণাবয়স্ক মহিলা নাম যার নামে ইন্দিরা আবাস যোজনার সুবিধা দেওয়া যেতে পারে	মোট প্রাপ্ত নম্বর (ক্রমবর্ধমান মান অনুসারে)

(গ) অন্যান্য ও সাধারণ পরিবার

অন্যান্য পরিবারের তালিকা

পরিবারের ক্রমিক	পরিবারের প্রধানের নাম	পরিবারের পূর্ণাবয়স্ক মহিলা নাম যার নামে ইন্দিরা আবাস যোজনার সুবিধা দেওয়া যেতে পারে	মোট প্রাপ্ত নম্বর (ক্রমবর্ধমান মান অনুসারে)

IAY সম্ভাব্য তালিকার মধ্যে যারা অযোগ্য বলে সংসদ সভায় বিবেচিত হবেন তাদের জন্য পৃথক তালিকা প্রস্তুত করতে হবে।

(২) সামাজিক সুরক্ষার জন্য বি.পি.এল. তালিকাভুক্ত পরিবারের ৬৫ বা তদুর্ধ্ব বৃদ্ধ / বৃদ্ধাদের তালিকা :

(ক) বর্তমানে বার্কক্যাতা বা অনুপূর্ণ যোজনায় উপভোগ নন

(খ) বর্তমানে উপভোক্তা কিন্তু বি.পি.এল. তালিকার অন্তর্ভুক্ত নন।

(গ) বর্তমানে উপভোক্তা এবং বি.পি.এল. তালিকার অন্তর্ভুক্ত।

উক্ত তালিকার মধ্যে যারা সামাজিক সুরক্ষা প্রকল্পের যোগ্য নন এমন ব্যক্তিদের তালিকা প্রস্তুত করতে হবে।

বিশেষভাবে উল্লেখযোগ্য যে কোন দরিদ্র পরিবার যদি কোন কারণে ৩৩ এর বেশী নম্বরের ভিত্তিতে বি.পি.এল তালিকার বাইরে থাকেন সেক্ষেত্রে নিম্নোক্ত তালিকার কোন কোন নির্দিষ্ট পয়েন্টে তার নম্বর বেশী (ভুল) আছে তা উল্লেখ করে সাদা কাগজে আবেদন করতে পারেন। কারও নাম যদি সাউন্ড লিস্টে না থাকে তবে তিনি নতুনভাবে সার্ভে জমা আবেদন করতে পারেন। অনুরূপভাবে যদি কোন পরিবার ৩৩ এর নীচে নম্বর থাকার সত্ত্বেও বি.পি.এল এর সুবিধা পাবার যোগ্য নন বলে মনে হয় সেক্ষেত্রে সেই ব্যক্তি নিজে বা অন্য কেই আবেদন করে তার নাম কোন কোন পয়েন্টে বেশী হবে তা জানাতে পারেন।

* বিশেষভাবে মনে রাখতে হবে, নির্দিষ্ট করে আবেদন করলেই এবিষয়ে সঠিক তদন্ত করা সম্ভব হবে।

* সমস্ত আবেদনেই সংসদের নং / নাম এবং -র উল্লেখ থাকতে হবে।

আবেদনগুলি গ্রাম পঞ্চায়েতে জমা দিতে হবে। জমা নেওয়ার সময় গ্রাম পঞ্চায়েতের নির্দিষ্ট কর্মী আবেদনগুলি পরীক্ষা করে জমা নেবেন।

* উর্দ্ধতন কর্তৃপক্ষের নির্দেশ অনুযায়ী আবেদনগুলি তদান্ত সাপেক্ষ বি.পি.এল. তালিকা সংশোধিত হবে।

সে বিষয়গুলির ভিত্তিতে ১ থেকে ৫ নম্বর দেওয়া হয়েছে তা নিম্নরূপ :-

P (1) পরিবারের মোট জমির পরিমাণ (নথীভুক্ত বর্ণাদার হিসাবে চাষ করা জমির পরিমাণ সহ)

১। জমি নাই

২। ১ একরের কম (সেচসেচিত) অথবা ২ একরের কম (অসেচ)

৩। ১ একর থেকে ২ একর (সেচসেচিত) অথবা ২ একর থেকে ৪ একর (অসেচ)

৪। ২ একর থেকে ৪ একর (সেচসেচিত) অথবা ৪ একর থেকে ৮ একর (অসেচ)

৫। ৪ একরের বেশী (সেচসেচিত) অথবা ৮ একরের বেশী (অসেচ)

P (2) বাসগৃহের প্রকৃতি ও গঠন

১। নিজস্ব বাস নেই, অন্যের আশ্রয়ে বা অনুমতি ছাড়া থাকেন

২। একটিমাত্র বাসযোগ্য ঘর সহ কাঁচা বাড়ী

৩। দুই বা তার বেশী বাসযোগ্য ঘর সহ কাঁচা বাড়ী

৪। আংশিক পাকা

৫। পাকা

P (3) গড় পড়তা পরিচ্ছদের সংখ্যা (প্রতি সদস্য পিছু সংখ্যা)

১। ২ এর কম

২। ২ থেকে ৪ কিন্তু কোন শীত বস্ত্র নাই

৩। ২ থেকে ৪ শীতবস্ত্র সহ

৪। ৪ বা তার বেশী কিন্তু ৬ এর কম

৫। ৬ এর বেশী

P (4) খাদ্যের জোগান

১। বছরের অধিকাংশ সময়ে দিতে একবারের কম পেট ভরে খেতে পান

২। সাধারণত দিনে একবার পেট ভরে খেতে পান কিন্তু কখনো কখনো পাননা।

৩। দিনে দুবার পেট ভরে খেতে পান কিন্তু বছরের কোন কোন সময় পাননা

৪। সারা বৎসর দিনে দুবার পেট ভরে খেতে পান

P (5) ভোগ্য পণ্যের মালিকানা : পরিবারে কি আছে; সাইকেল, রেডিও, সাদা কাপো টিভি, বৈদ্যুতিক পাখা, প্রেসার কুকার

- ১। কিছু নাই
- ২। যে কোন একটি
- ৩। যে কোন দুটি
- ৪। যে কোন তিনটি
- ৫। উপরিস্থিত সব কটি পন্থ বা নীচের যে কোন একটি কম্পিউটার, টেলিফোন, ফ্রিজ, রঙিন টিভি, রাগার বৈদ্যুতিক সরঞ্জাম দামী সরাবপত্র, ভারী ট্রাক, হাল্কা ট্রাক, ভারী বা হাল্কা মোটরগাড়ী ট্রাক্টর, মোটরসাইকেল, স্কুটার, অটো রিক্সা, টেম্পো, পাওয়ার টিলার, পেয়াই মেশিন, গার গ্যাসের সংযোগ, পাম্প সেট, অন্যান্য।

P (6) শিক্ষার মান (পরিবারের সর্বাধিক শিক্ষিত ব্যক্তির)

- ১। নিরক্ষর
- ২। সাক্ষর স্তর থেকে পঞ্চম শ্রেণী (শুধুমাত্র নাম সই করলেই তাকে সাক্ষর বলা হবে না, পড়তে ও লিখতে পারেন এমন ব্যক্তিকেই সাক্ষর বলা হবে।)
- ৩। পঞ্চম শ্রেণীর উর্ধ্ব দশম শ্রেণী পর্যন্ত
- ৪। দশম শ্রেণীর উর্ধ্ব স্নাতক স্তর পর্যন্ত
- ৫। স্নাতকোত্তর

P (7) পরিবারের শ্রমভিত্তিক অবস্থান

- ১। সদস্যরা সবাই অক্ষম / বৃদ্ধ বৃদ্ধা, শিশু পরিশ্রম করে নিয়মিত উপার্জন করার কেউ নেই।
- ২। শিশু শ্রমিক আছে
- ৩। প্রাপ্ত বয়স্ক মহিলা শ্রমিক আছে। কিন্তু প্রাপ্ত বয়স্ক পুরুষ শ্রমিক নাই।
- ৪। প্রাপ্ত বয়স্ক পুরুষ শ্রমিক আছে
- ৫। অন্যান্য (টেবিলে বসে কাজ, ব্যবসা, পড়ানো নার্স বা অন্যান্য (পেশাগত কাজ)

P (8) জীবনধারণের উপায়

- ১। দিনমজুর / কৃষি শ্রমিক / অন্যান্য শ্রমিক যারা কায়িক শ্রম করেন / উপার্জন নানি
- ২। কৃষি এবং নিজের মাঠে কাজ করেন
- ৩। স্বনিয়োজিত / গ্রামীণ কারুশিল্পী (আর্টিসান) / হকার/হুত্যাতি যারা অন্য কাউকে নিয়োজিত করেন না।
- ৪। অসংগঠিত ক্ষেত্রে নিয়মিত মজুরীভিত্তিক চাকরী
- ৫। অন্যান্য, যথা সংগঠিত ক্ষেত্রে চাকরী, ডাক্তার, উকিল, নিজস্ব ব্যবসা ইত্যাদি।

(9) ৯-১৪ বৎসরের সন্তানদের শিক্ষার অবস্থান (সন্তানদের মধ্যে সবচেয়ে খারাপ অবস্থানে সে আছে তার মান দিতে হবে)

- ১। কোনদিন স্কুলে যায় না।
- ২। স্কুলছুট এবং নিজ বাড়ীর বাইরে অন্য বাড়ী কাজ করে।
- ৩। স্কুল ছুট এবং নিজ বাড়ীতে কাজ করে।
- ৪। স্কুলছুট এবং কোন বিশেষ কাজে যুক্ত নয়।
- ৫। কেউ স্কুল ছুট নয়।

-১৪ বৎসরের মধ্যে কোন সন্তান না থাকলে পরিবারের সর্বকনিষ্ঠ সদস্যের ১৪ বৎসর বয়সে যে অবস্থান ছিল সেই মান দিতে হবে।)

P (10) ঋণের ধরণ

- ১। দৈনন্দিন জীবন ধারণের প্রয়োজনে কোন পরিচিত ব্যক্তির কাছে ঋণ।
- ২। উৎপাদন ভিত্তিক প্রয়োজনে পরিচিত ব্যক্তির কাছে ঋণ।
- ৩। উৎপাদন বা অন্য কোন প্রয়োজন কোন প্রতিষ্ঠান বা পরিচিত ব্যক্তির কাছে ঋণ।
- ৪। শুধুমাত্র কোন প্রতিষ্ঠান থেকে নেওয়া ঋণ।
- ৫। কোন ঋণ।

P (11) পরিবারের প্রধান উপার্জনকারীর উপার্জনের জন্য গ্রামের বাইরে গমনের কারণ -

- ১। মরসুমী কায়িক পরিশ্রমের কাজ
- ২। অস্থায়ী কায়িক পরিশ্রমের কাজ
- ৩। অসংগঠিত ক্ষেত্রে কাজের জন্য
- ৪। সংগঠিত ক্ষেত্রে কাজের জন্য
- ৫। কোনটিই নয়

P (12) বিশেষ ধরনের দুঃস্থতা / পরিবার

- ১। সহায় সম্বলহীন বৃদ্ধ/বৃদ্ধা (পরিবারে উপার্জনক্ষম কেউ নাই)
- ২। কোন সামাজিক বা সরকারী সাহায্য পান না এরকম স্থায়ী প্রতিবন্ধী
- ৩। পরিবারের প্রধান উপার্জনকারী মহিলা
- ৪। পরিবারের কোন একজন সদস্য দুরারোগ্য বাধিতে আক্রান্ত হওয়ায় চিকিৎসা সংক্রান্ত ব্যয় পারিবারিক আয়ের থেকে বেশী
- ৫। কোনটিই নয়।

সংসদ সভায় বি.পি.এল. তালিকা সহ সম্পূর্ণ সার্ভে লিষ্ট প্রকাশিত হচ্ছে। আপনি দেখে নিল আপনার নম্বরগুলো সঠিক দেওয়া হয়েছে কিনা?

Government of West Bengal
Panchayats and Rural Development Department
Jessop Building, 63 Netaji Subhash Road, 1st Floor, Kolkata 700001

Memo No: 3070-RD (SGSY)/ 20M-6/2005 (Pt-I)

Date :03/05/2007

From : Dr. M.N.Roy, IAS
Principal Secretary to the Government of West Bengal

To : The District Magistrates – All.

Subject: Publication of BPL list (Guideline -3)

Ref : This Department No. 76/JS(DG)/007/SGSY/20-M-6/2005 dated 2nd April, 2007 and No 079/JS(DG)/2007/ SGSY/20-M-6/2005 datd 4th April, 2007

Sir / Madam,

In continuation of this department's guidelines quoted under reference I am directed to state hereunder the procedures to be adopted for identifying actual beneficiaries, who will come under the purview of different programmes targeted towards the B.P.L families. It has been decided in consultation with the Food and Supplies Department, Government of West Bengal that the cut off score for ascertaining the BPL families will be 33. In tea garden areas, the cut-off score will be 37 and in closed Tea gardens, all worker families will be treated as BPL families. It has further been decided that in respect of those Mouzas which have been totally washed away due to erosion of river the cut off marks for determining the BPL families of those areas will be reviewed after receiving relevant information from the districts.

2. In respect of IAY, the list of eligible families will be generated by running pre-defined queries (Total Score $\leq$ 33 and P2=1). The permanent wait list for IAY beneficiaries will be generated from this list of eligible families after consideration of the Gram Sansad as per the following guidelines. The list will be taken up for consideration family-wise starting from the lowest score. Those whose names appear in the list but the Gram Sansad considers that the family is not eligible because (i) it has already received benefit under IAY/ PMGY (GA)/ SGRY (IBS) for construction of new house, (ii) there is factual mistake in the scores under one or more categories which will make the family ineligible (iii) the condition of the family has changed for the better, (iv) the family has left the area permanently etc., those should be clearly mentioned and a list of such persons showing the reasons for not considering their case for each family to be separately prepared & sent to the Gram Panchayat. The list of other eligible persons, i.e., those excluding the ineligible families, will form the Permanent Wait List. This list should be segregated in three categories: - i) those belonging to SC or ST, ii) those belonging to Minorities, iii) the rest belonging to general categories. The Gram Panchayat will compile the data for each category and will forward the same to the BDO concerned. The complete data-base with names of the head of the family appearing in the Permanent Wait List along with the name of one adult female members of those families, who will be the recipient of the fund under IAY, have to be maintained at the Block-level (in case there is no adult women member in a family that should be clearly mentioned). The BDO will be the custodian of the data-base, which will have Gram Panchayat and Samsad-wise priority list of families under each category who will get benefit under IAY. In case some of them do not have any homestead land of their own the same

information may also be compiled in due course. The BDO should forward the numbers of eligible families category-wise (their names should be readily available if demanded) to the Zilla Parishad. A format for preparation of the lists is enclosed herewith. The names of the head of the households, which will be included in the Permanent Wait List of IAY should be written in the external walls of the Gram Panchayat so that every one knows which families will get the benefit of IAY in due course.

There could be some families whose scores are higher than 33 but the condition of the house is of category P2=1 or there is gross mistake in scores of the family. They cannot be considered directly for inclusion in the Permanent Wait List. They may submit any factual mistake in their objective status in respect of the twelve indicators, which may be considered, not immediately, but in due course depending on numbers of such application received. The list of families whose houses have to be shifted within the current year for construction of roads under PMGSY or the houses which have been totally destroyed by any natural calamity after the survey and the loss of the family will be such that its status will come down to BPL category their list and scores are to be separately forwarded to the Zilla Parishad via the Gram Panchayat and the Panchayat Samiti. The Gram Samsad will be required to endorse this list-also. Such families may be separately considered for extending benefit under IAY only as a special case and they will not be considered for getting benefit under other schemes targeted to the BPL families. However, such families, like any one else, may always submit application to the Gram Panchayat to report their change of objective status for verification in due course.

The entire process should be completed by the middle of June so that the Zilla Parishad may fix the Gram Panchayat-wise quota of IAY for each category based on certain objective criteria and release fund to the Gram Panchayats by the end of June 2007. Also, the Zilla Parishad will not release fund to the Gram Panchayats till the Permanent Wait Lists are published and information on category-wise numbers of families in the said list is received from the Gram Panchayats.

3. The Gram Samsad should also identify all persons with age 65 years or more and belonging to BPL families for giving coverage under suitable social security scheme. For that purpose the list of all such persons from BPL families are to be prepared starting from the lowest to the highest score (33). Most of them are already covered under any pension scheme. (such as NOAPS, old age pension scheme of Women & Child Development & Social Welfare or other departments, pension scheme for tribal people etc) or under Annapurna Yojana (AY). The list of all aged persons mentioning who are already covered (the name of the scheme to be specifically mentioned in each case) should be prepared by the Gram Panchayat with feedback from the Gram Samsad / Gram Unnayan Samity (GUS). The second list of all eligible persons not covered under any scheme has to be prepared in order of their scores (lowest score to be at the top). A third list of aged persons who are not in the BPL category as per present survey but getting benefit under any of the said social security schemes should also be prepared by the Gram Panchayat with feedback from the Gram Samsad / GUS. They will continue to receive the existing benefit until instruction is issued otherwise by the State Government. Formats for the said lists are enclosed herewith. In case there are persons in BPL families who are considered ineligible for receiving social assistance because of certain reasons, the same should also be compiled by the Gram Panchayat and communicated to the Block Office. In all the lists social categories (SC/ST/Minority/others) of the persons are to be mentioned. All the lists, prepared for each Samsad, are to be forwarded to the Block Office by the Gram Panchayat for entering the details in the data-base. A list of persons who are eligible to receive social assistance in the form of pension or free rice under AY and yet not covered should be prepared by the BDO and forwarded to the District Panchayats and Rural Development Officer for compiling district figures. The list of existing AY beneficiaries and their scores should also be

forwarded by the BDO to the District Panchayats and Rural Development Officer for consideration if some of them could be covered under pension scheme, which provides higher quantum of benefit, in lieu of coverage under AY.

For municipal areas the task of the Gram Panchayat will be performed by the Municipality concerned. In respect of Kolkata Corporation the list will be directly submitted to the Commissioner Panchayats and Rural Development. In respect of other Corporations the list will be submitted directly to the District Panchayats and Rural Development Officer concerned. This exercise should be completed by the middle of June so that coverage under NOAPS and AY may be increased immediately thereafter. Before forwarding the list by the Gram Panchayat/ Municipality to the authority concerned it must be ensured that the total no. of existing beneficiaries, now classified as those belonging to BPL and those not under that category taken together matches the existing no of beneficiaries. Those who appeared in the list of existing beneficiaries and are dead by now should also be reconciled in this opportunity.

The Panchayat bodies will be required to incur expenditure for acquisition and compiling several data as mentioned. Such expenditure may be incurred out of fund made available as grants from the 12th Finance Commission. The District Magistrates may work out the rates for various activities related to acquisition and compilation of data. Support of Gram Unnayan Samiti may be obtained for that purpose.

All concerned are requested to give utmost-importance to early compilation of the list as correctly as possible for both the categories of programmes so that there is no unnecessary delay in extending benefit of the said programmes to the deserving persons. A format showing the synoptic information to be compiled is also enclosed herewith for better monitoring. District Magistrates are also requested to closely monitor the progress for both timely completion of the task and maintaining quality of the data.

Yours faithfully,

Sd/-
(M. N. Roy)
Principal Secretary to the
Govt. of West Bengal.

No: 3070/1(32)-RD(SGSY)/20M-6/2005 (Pt-I) Date :03/05/2007

Copy forwarded for information and necessary action to :

1. The Sabhadhipati, Zilla Parishad / Mahakuma Parishad – All.
2. The Additional Chief Secretary, Food & Supplies Department, Govt. of West Bengal, Khadya Bhavan, 11A Mirza Ghalib Street, Kolkata – 700 087.
3. The Principal Secretary, Municipal Affairs Department, Govt. of West Bengal, Writers' Buildings, Kolkata – 700 001.
4. The Commissioner, Presidency / Burdwan / Jalpaiguri Division.
5. The Principal Secretary, Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council, Darjeeling.
6. The Director, State Institute of Panchayat & Rural Development, Kalyani, Nadia.

7. The Principal, Extension Training Centre, Burdwan / Coochbehar / Raiganj / Paschim Medinipur.
8. Private Secretary to the Minister-in-Charge, Panchayat & Rural Development Department, Govt. of West Bengal, Writers' Buildings, Kolkata – 700 001.
9. Private Secretary to the Minister-of-State, Panchayat & Rural Development Department, Govt. of West Bengal, Jessop Building, 63 N.S. Road, Kolkata – 700 001.

Principal Secretary to the
Govt. of West Bengal.

Permanent wait list of IAY based on Rural Household Survey, 2005

District Name

Block Name

Gram Panchayat Name

Gram Sansad

Gramer Naam (Village Name)

List for SC/ST

House Hold ID	Name of head of household	Name of the adult Woman Member of the Household in whose name IAY benefit may be given	Social Status (SC/ST/)	Total Score (In ascending order)
A	B	C	D	E

List for Minorities

House Hold ID	Name of head of household	Name of the adult Woman Member of the Household in whose name IAY benefit may be given	Total Score (In ascending order)
A	B	C	E

List for others

House Hold ID	Name of head of household	Name of the adult Woman Member of the Household in whose name IAY benefit may be given	Total Score (In ascending order)
A	B	C	E

Schedule of Existing beneficiaries of Social Security Schemes (Pension or Annapurna Yojana) who are covered under BPL list prepared on the basis of Rural Household Survey, 2005

(List-I as mentioned in para 3 of Guideline-3)

District Name

Block Name

Gram Panchayat Name

Gram Sansad

Gramer Naam (Village Name)

House Hold ID	Name of head of household	Total Score (In ascending order)	Social Status (SC/ST/Minority)	Name of the person exceeding 65 years of age	A G E	Relationship with head of the Household	Name of the social security scheme under which the family is presently covered
A	B	C	D	E	F		G

- column A, B and C will have to be adopted from the BPL list prepared on the basis of Rural Household Survey, 2005

- Column D is to be filled up on the basis of local information

Schedule of Eligible beneficiaries of Social Security Schemes who are not covered under any Pension Scheme or Annapurna Yojana
(List-II as mentioned in para 3 of Guideline-3)

District Name

Block Name

Gram Panchayat Name

Gram Sansad

Gramer Naam (Village Name)

Name of the person exceeding 65 years of age	Name of head of household	Social Status (SC/ST/Minority)	Age	Relationship with head of Household	Household ID	Score
A	B	C	D	E	F	G

- column A to E is to be prepared by the Gram Panchayat and to be sent to BDO;
- At the Block level Column F and G is to be identified from the databased by running query on name of head of the household;
- The member information is to be entered to capture all information on old age persons

Schedule of beneficiaries of Social Security Schemes who are not included in BPL list prepared on the basis of Rural Household Survey, 2005
(List-III as mentioned in para 3 of Guideline-3)

District Name

Block Name

Gram Panchayat Name

Gram Sansad

Gramer Naam (Village Name)

Name of the person exceeding 65 years of age	Name of head of household	Social Status (SC/ST/Min ority)	Age	Relationship with head of the Household	Name of the pension scheme or AY under which the member is covered	Score
A	B	D	E	F	G	H

* to be filled in at Block level

Synoptic Information

TABLE – A

[illegible]



बिहार सरकार

बिहार महादलित विकास मिशन
(महादलितों के विकास हेतु किए जा रहे कार्य)

1. विकास मित्र

सरकार के सभी योजनाओं को महादलितों के विकास हेतु प्रभावी ढंग से कार्यान्वयन के लिए प्रत्येक पंचायत(ग्रामीण) एवं वार्ड/वार्ड समुह (शहरी) से बहुलता वाले महादलित समुदाय के एक-एक विकास मित्र का चयन किया जा रहा है। विकास मित्रों के चयन में 50 प्रतिशत महिलाओं के लिए आरक्षित किया गया है। किसी भी परिस्थिति में विकास मित्र का चयन उसी रिक्ति के पंचायत से ही किया जाएगा, तथा किसी भी परिस्थिति में पंचायत के बाहर के आवेदक का चयन नहीं किया जाएगा। प्रतिमाह 3000/- रु० मानदेय निश्चित किया गया है। अनुमण्डल पदाधिकारी की अध्यक्षता में गठित समिति के माध्यम से तीन चरणों में चयन किया गया है।

विकास मित्र सरकार एवं महादलित परिवारों के बीच एक कड़ी के रूप में एवं महादलित समुदाय में एक Change Agent के रूप में कार्य कर रहे हैं। विकास मित्र नियोजन से संबंधित प्रक्रिया के तीन चरणों के उपरांत 9875 रिक्तियों में 8930 विकास मित्रों का चयन कर लिया गया है 945 विकास मित्रों का चयन करना शेष है:-

चरणवार स्थिति:

चरण	आवेदन की तिथि	शैक्षणिक योग्यता	कुल नियोजन की संख्या	योगदान की तिथि	प्रशिक्षण
प्रथम चरण	22/02/2010	मैट्रिक या समकक्ष	6426	14/04/2010	2 राज्य स्तरीय 11 प्रमंडल स्तरीय
द्वितीय चरण	01/06/2010	पुरुष- मैट्रिक या समकक्ष महिला- आठवीं पास	1753	15/07/2010	
तृतीय चरण	14/07/2010	पुरुष- पाँचवीं तक महिला- साक्षर तक	751	01/09/2010	
कुल			8930		

रिक्तियों को भरने के लिए शीघ्र ही चतुर्थ चरण की शुरुआत की जायेगी ।

विकास मित्रों को साईकिल देने के लिए जिलों को कुल 163 लाख रुपए विमुक्त की गई है। साईकिल की राशि का वितरण शीघ्र कर लिया जाना है।

विकास मित्रों को मानदेय देने के लिए दिसम्बर 2010 तक के लिए 22.48 करोड़ रु० की राशि विमुक्त कर दी गई है। जिसमें अक्टूबर माह तक सभी जिलों में मानदेय का भुगतान कर दिया गया है।

चतुर्थ चरण में रिक्त स्थानों पर नियोजन हेतु कार्ययोजना तैयार की गई है। दिनांक 20/12/2010 से 31/01/2011 तक नियोजन कार्य पुरा किया जायेगा।

2. मुख्यमंत्री महादलित पोशाक योजना

वित्तीय वर्ष 2009-10 में सरकारी विद्यालयों के 1 से 5 वर्ग तक के सभी महादलित छात्र-छात्राओं को 500/- रु० पोशाक, जूता आदि क्रय करने हेतु नगद राशि उपलब्ध करायी गयी। यह कार्रवाई सभी जिलों में दिनांक 11 जुलाई 2009 को पंचायत स्तरीय शिविर लगाकर जन प्रतिनिधियों की उपस्थिति में लाभार्थियों को राशि का भुगतान किया गया। सभी जिलों में वितरण समारोह का फोटोग्राफी/विडियोग्राफी भी किया गया। अब तक लगभग 842537 छात्र-छात्राएँ लाभान्वित हो चुके हैं। कुल 44 करोड़ 8 लाख व्यय किया गया।

वित्तीय वर्ष 2010-11 में इस योजना के अंतर्गत पहले और दूसरे वर्ग के छात्र-छात्राओं को आच्छादित किया जा रहा है जिसमें लगभग 38 करोड़ रुपये व्यय होने की संभावना है। तृतीय से पंचम वर्ग के छात्र-छात्राओं को मानव संसाधन विकास विभाग द्वारा आच्छादित किया जाएगा। वित्तीय वर्ष 2010-11 में कुल 36 करोड़ 90 लाख रुपये विमुक्त किए गये हैं जिसमें प्रथम किस्त के रूप में विभिन्न जिलों को 14 करोड़ 3 लाख रुपये एवं द्वितीय किस्त के रूप में 22 करोड़ 64 लाख रुपये की राशि उपलब्ध करवायी गई है। कुल लाभार्थियों की संख्या लगभग 7 लाख 20 हजार होगी। 26 जनवरी 2011 तक पोशाक की राशि के वितरण का लक्ष्य रखा गया है। आवश्यकतानुसार जिला से माँग के आधार पर शेष राशि विमुक्त की जाएगी।

3. दशरथ मांझी कौशल विकास योजना

महादलित परिवार के युवक एवं युवतियों के कौशल विकास हेतु प्रशिक्षण देने एवं प्रशिक्षित लोगों को रोजगार उपलब्ध कराने के लिए पाँच प्रतिष्ठित संस्था/ गैर सरकारी संगठनों का चयन किया गया है।

व्यवसाय एवं प्रशिक्षण क्षेत्र का विवरण निम्नवत है:-

क्रम	कोर्स का नाम	अवधि	योग्यता	प्रस्तावित जिला	संस्था का नाम
1	कम्प्यूटर प्रशिक्षण (डी0 टी0 पी0 एवं इंटरनेट)	3 माह	दसवीं पास	सभी जिला	ECIL
2	ईलेक्ट्रीकल वायरिंग	3 माह	आठवीं पास	पटना, गया, नालंदा, भागलपुर, मुजफ्फरपुर	ECIL
3	कम्प्यूटर एकाउंटिंग (टैली)	4 माह	इंटरमिडिएट पास	सभी जिला	Tally
4	भवन निर्माण (ड्राफ्ट्समैन)	8 सप्ताह	इंटरमिडिएट पास	पटना एवं गया	IIIM Ltd.

5	भवन निर्माण (साईट सपोर्ट)	8 सप्ताह	आठवीं पास	पटना, गया, नालंदा, दरभंगा, पूर्णिया, भागलपुर, मुजफ्फरपुर, मधुबनी, नवादा	IIIM Ltd.
6	सिक्युरिटी गार्ड्स प्रशिक्षण	4 सप्ताह	आठवीं पास	पटना, गया, नालंदा, भागलपुर, मुजफ्फरपुर	IIIM Ltd
7	मोबाईल रिपेयरिंग	8 सप्ताह	इंटरमिडिएट पास	पटना	IIIM Ltd
8	ब्यूटीसियन कोर्स	6 माह	आठवीं पास	पटना, गया, मुजफ्फरपुर	DORD
9	हॉस्पीटलिटी एवं सॉलिड वेस्ट मैनेजमेंट	15 दिन	पांचवीं पास	पटना	NIDAN
कुल लक्षित संख्या - 13,530					

इस योजना की मुख्य विशेषताएँ

- 1- पूर्णतः निःशुल्क
- 2- सफलतापूर्वक प्रशिक्षण के बाद नियोजन की व्यवस्था
- 3- प्रशिक्षण के दौरान मिशन के द्वारा स्टार्डपेंड (75 रुपये प्रति दिन के दर से पुरी प्रशिक्षण अवधि में)
- 4- प्रशिक्षण के दौरान प्रशिक्षण पाठ्य-सामग्री/प्रशिक्षण टूल-किट निःशुल्क
- 5- व्यक्तित्व विकास के लिए कोर्स मॉड्युल का समावेश
- 6- बेहतर कैरियर एवं उज्जवल भविष्य
- 7- आत्म-विश्वास का विकास

योजनान्तर्गत कुल 13530 युवक/युवतियों को लाभान्वित किया जायेगा। प्रथम बैच में 3370 प्रशिक्षणार्थियों को प्रशिक्षण दी जा चुकी है। सिक्युरिटी गार्ड्स प्रशिक्षण की सफलता को देखते हुए द्वितीय बैच के रूप में सिक्युरिटी गार्ड्स प्रशिक्षण को बिहार के सभी 38 जिलों में विस्तारित किया गया है। सिक्युरिटी गार्ड अरवल एवं मधेपुरा को छोड़ कर बिहार के सभी जिलों में प्रशिक्षण पुरी कर ली गयी है। द्वितीय बैच में 1155 प्रशिक्षणार्थियों को प्रशिक्षण दी जा चुकी है।

शैक्षणिक योग्यता एवं आय के आधार पर की गई।

- कुल ट्रेड - 9
- कुल चयनित एजेंसी - 5
- कुल लक्षित संख्या - 13530
- कुल प्रशिक्षित - 4525
- कुल प्लेसमेंट - 1810
- छात्रवृत्ति वितरित - 2.10 करोड़
- कुल प्रशिक्षण व्यय - 5.30 करोड़

दशरथ माँझी कौशल विकास योजना के तहत दूसरा चरण शीघ्र आरंभ किया जाना है। दशरथ माँझी कौशल विकास योजना 2010-11 के लिए 23 विभिन्न ट्रेडों में अभिरूचि प्रस्ताव आमंत्रित किये गये हैं। अभिरूचि 2010 तक थी। अभिरूचि प्रस्ताव संसाधित किये जा रहे हैं।

4. सामुदायिक भवन-सह-वर्कशेड का निर्माण

योजना अन्तर्गत महादलित टोला में सामुदायिक भवन का निर्माण महादलितों के समाजिक, आर्थिक एवं सांस्कृतिक गतिविधियों के केन्द्र के रूप में किया जा रहा है। भवन का डिजाईन चबुतरा आधारित चारों तरफ पाईप वाला कॉलम एवं उपर शेड बना होगा। इस तरह की संरचना पर कम लागत आयेगी और अधिक संख्या में समुदायिक भवनों का निर्माण कराया जा सकेगा। इसके निर्माण में लगभग 4 लाख 50 हजार रुपया व्यय होगी। समुदायिक भवन सह-वर्कशेड का निर्माण जिला-पदाधिकारी की अध्यक्षता वाली समिति के माध्यम से विकास मित्र (अभिकर्ता) के द्वारा करवाया जा रहा है।

समुदायिक भवन सह-वर्कशेड की मार्गदर्शिका विकसित की गयी है जिसमें विकास मित्र के माध्यम से निर्माण किया जायेगा।

अब तक 12 जिलों से जमीन उपलब्धता का प्रतिवेदन बिहार महादलित विकास मिशन को प्राप्त हुआ है।
500 रु० की राशि विमुक्त की गयी है।

वित्तीय वर्ष 2010-11 में कुल 650 सामुदायिक भवन निर्माण का लक्ष्य रखा गया है। विभाग से राशि प्राप्त होते ही शीघ्र जिलों को राशि उपलब्ध करा दी जाएगी।

30 करोड़ रु० वर्ष 2010-11 व्यय किया जायेगा।

5. सहायता (कॉल सेंटर)

‘सहायता’ बिहार महादलित विकास मिशन द्वारा स्थापित पूर्णतः कम्प्यूटरीकृत आधुनिक सुविधाओं से युक्त कॉल सेंटर है। इस कॉल सेंटर की स्थापना मुख्य रूप से अनु० जाति एवं अनु० जनजाति (अत्याचार निवारण) अधिनियम 1989 एवं नियम 1995 के अन्तर्गत की गई है। ‘सहायता’ अनु० जाति एवं अनु० जनजाति अत्याचार निवारण अधिनियम के अन्तर्गत आने वाले शिकायतों को प्राप्त करेगा और उसका समुचित निराकरण करने में अभिवंचित वर्ग की सहायता करेगा। इस कार्य के अतिरिक्त ‘सहायता’ बिहार महादलित विकास मिशन एवं अनु० जाति एवं अनु० जनजाति कल्याण विभाग की योजनाओं से संबंधित जानकारी मांगकर्ता तक पहुँचाएगी साथ ही मिशन एवं विभाग से जुड़ी समस्याओं को भी लाभुकों, जो अभिवंचित वर्ग के सदस्य हैं, से प्राप्त कर समाधान के लिए संबंधित अधिकारी एवं विभाग को प्रेषित करेगी।

‘सहायता’ कॉल सेंटर की तरह कार्य कर रहा है इस हेतु एक टॉल फ्री नं०—18003456345 बी०एस०एन०एल० से लिया गया है जिस पर एक साथ 30 कॉल आने जाने

की सुविधा है। वर्तमान में एक शिफ्ट में छः 'सहायता' प्रतिनिधि (कॉल एजेंट) के एक साथ कार्य करने की व्यवस्था की गई है।

वर्तमान समय में सहायता 10 बजे से 5 बजे तक 3 ऑपरेटरों द्वारा इन्दिरा भवन, बिहार महादलित आयोग के कार्यालय में संचालित करवाया जा रहा है।

कुशल निष्पादन हेतु नोडल पदाधिकारी की प्रतिनियुक्ति।

Total- Call – 1576 (31/11/10 तक)

अत्याचार – 52

सूचना – 706

समस्या – 817

6. विशेष विद्यालय -सह- छात्रावास

दानापुर में (पायलट प्रोजेक्ट के रूप में) मुसहर बालिकाओं के लिए नारी-गुंजन गैर सरकारी स्वयं सेवी संस्था के माध्यम से चलवाया जा रहा है। मुसहर बालिकाओं के छात्रावास के प्रस्ताव को विशेष विद्यालय-सह-छात्रावास कार्यक्रम से आच्छादित किया गया है। बिहार में मुसहर महिलाओं में साक्षरता दर 0.9% होने के कारण विशेष बल के रूप में यह कार्यक्रम शुरू किया जा रहा है। छात्रावास में विभिन्न कक्षाओं की 125 मुसहर साथ ही उन्हें कम्प्यूटर का भी पूर्ण ज्ञान दिया जा रहा है। उपयोगिता के आधार पर चार किस्तों में 30 लाख 80 हजार रुपये उक्त संस्था को प्रदान की जाएगी। प्रथम किस्त के रूप में 11 लाख 41 हजार रुपये उक्त संस्था को प्रदान की गयी है।

कम्प्यूटर शिक्षा शुरू कर दी गई है।

7. महादलित शौचालय निर्माण योजना

सम्पूर्ण स्वच्छता अभियान के तहत व्यक्तिगत शौचालय निर्माण हेतु महादलित परिवार (लाभार्थी) के सहांश (Contribution) 300/- रु0 प्रति परिवार को बिहार महादलित विकास मिशन की ओर से देकर निःशुल्क शौचालय निर्माण की कार्रवाई की जा रही है। इस योजना के तहत 7.00 करोड़ रु0 की राशि मिशन के द्वारा जिला परियोजना पदाधिकारी सह जिला कल्याण पदाधिकारी को उपलब्ध कराकर जिला जल एवं स्वच्छता समिति के माध्यम से कार्यावित किया जा रहा है। सभी जिले में योजना कार्यान्वित की जा रही है। अब तक

प्राप्त आंकड़ा के अनुसार 1,04,550 शौचालय निर्माण कार्य पूर्ण करा दी गयी है जिसमें कुल 3 करोड़ 13 लाख रु० राशि व्यय किया गया है।

शहरी क्षेत्र में भी महादलित शौचालय निर्माण के लिए योजना तैयार की जा रही है। महादलित शहरी शौचालय निर्माण योजना के लिए अभिसंधि प्रस्ताव आमंत्रित किये गये थे जिसमें पचास एजेंसियों ने भाग लिया 6 एवं 8 जुलाई 2010 को प्रस्तुतिकरण दिया गया। एजेंसियों द्वारा शहरी शौचालय के संख्या का आकलन तदोपरांत निर्णय लिया जाएगा।

8. मुख्यमंत्री नारी ज्योति कार्यक्रम

इस योजना के अन्तर्गत महादलित महिलाओं का स्वयं सहायता समूह गठित कर उनका आर्थिक मधुबनी एवं खगड़िया के स्वयं सहायता समूह के सदस्यों को दशरथ माँझी कौशल विकास योजना में प्राथमिकता से चयन करने संबंधी निर्देश दिये गये हैं ।

भोजपुर एवं वैशाली में रुरल बैकयार्ड पॉल्ट्री डेवलेपमेंट योजना (मुर्गी ग्राम योजना) का संचालन किया जा रहा है । इस योजना के तहत कुल 1 मिशन द्वारा योजना कार्यावयन हेतु पशुपालन विभाग को 215(दो सौ 2010 को किया गया । इस योजना के अंतर्गत 48 मदर यूनिट स्थापित हो चुके हैं । उपरोक्त छः जिलों में गया में 9360 एवं जहानाबाद में 12493 चुजे मदर यूनिट में पहुँचाये जा चुके हैं ।

9. महादलित आवास भूमि योजना

राजस्व एवं भूमि सुधार विभाग के द्वारा महादलित परिवारों का सर्वेक्षण करा कर भूमिहीन/ आवासहीन परिवारों को चिन्हित कर लिया गया है। ऐसे परिवारों को प्रति परिवार 3 डेसिमल भूमि उपलब्ध कराने की कार्रवाई चल रही है। 1,157 एकड़ गैर मजूरआ आम जमीन 41,293 परिवारों के बीच बंदोबस्त करने एवं 1,462 एकड़ गैर मजूरआ खास जमीन 49,378 परिवारों के बीच बन्दोबस्त करने की कार्रवाई किया जा रहा है। शेष बचे 1,11,428 महादलित परिवारों के लिए 9,040 एकड़ रैयती जमीन के क्रय कर उपलब्ध कराया जाएगा। रैयती जमीन क्रय के लिए राजस्व एवं भूमि सुधार विभाग द्वारा 67 करोड़ रुपये बिहार के विभिन्न जिलों को आवंटित किये गये हैं । राजस्व एवं भूमि सुधार विभाग द्वारा इस हेतु एक House site Scheme तैयार कर कार्यावित किया जा रहा है।

10. मुख्यमंत्री जीवन दृष्टि योजना

महादलितों को मुख्य धारा पर जोड़ने एवं प्रभावी जीवन दृष्टि बनाने हेतु इस योजना के तहत प्रत्येक महादलित परिवार को ट्रान्जिस्टर क्रय करने के लिए 400/- रु. दिया जाना है। पटना जिले के फुलवारीशरीफ प्रखंड के 739 परिवारों को इस योजना का लाभ दिया गया है। इसे शीघ्र ही सभी जिलों में कार्यावित किया जाएगा

11. महादलित आंगनबाड़ी

महादलित बस्तियों में 500 परिवार पर कम-से-कम एक मिनि आंगनबाड़ी खोलने की योजना है। समेकित बाल-विकास सेवा (आई०सी०डी०एस) के माध्यम से कार्यावयन किया जाएगा । समेकित बाल-विकास सेवा (आई०सी०डी०एस) से प्रस्ताव प्राप्त होते ही 7 करोड़ तक की राशि विमुक्त कर दी जाएगी।

12. सामुदायिक रेडियो

महादलित वर्ग के कलाकारों को सम्मिलित कर रेडियो कार्यक्रम तैयार किया जायेगा एवं लोकगीत, लोककथाएं, लोकनृत्य आदि को प्रसारित किया जाएगा। अतः विभिन्न भाषायी केन्द्रों पर सामुदायिक रेडियो खोलने का प्रस्ताव है। इसमें प्राथमिकता के आधार पर उनके लोकज्ञान को तो प्रदर्शित किया जाएगा साथ ही

साथ सरकारी कार्यक्रमों की भी जानकारी दी जाएगी। सामुदायिक रेडियो के लिए समाचार पत्रों में शीघ्र अभिसूचि अभिसूचि प्रस्ताव प्रकशित की जाएगी।

मुख्यमंत्री जीवन दृष्टि एवं सामुदायिक रेडियो योजना को प्रथम चरण में जोड़कर गया जिले के दो महादलित टोलों में स्थित सामुदायिक भवन में रेडियो लगाकर कार्यक्रम का आकलन किया जाएगा एवं तदोपरांत इसका विस्तार पूरे राज्य में किया जाएगा। विकास मित्र को इसके रखरखाव की जिम्मेवारी दी जाएगी 000 रुपये हैं। महादलित समुदाय से संबंधित विषयों पर कार्यक्रम के लिए रेडियो प्रोग्राम निर्मित कर रेडियो पर प्रसारित किया जाएगा। इसके लिए अभिसूचि प्रस्ताव आमंत्रित किये गये हैं। अभिसूचि प्रस्ताव दाताओं की 2010 को किया गया। शीघ्र ही एजेन्सी का चयन कर योजना की शुरुआत किया जाएगा।

13. मैला प्रथा उन्मूलन

मैला प्रथा के उन्मूलन के लिए बिहार महादलित विकास मिशन के पदाधिकारियों द्वारा SRMS योजना के तहत मेगा कैम्प के सफल आयोजन हेतु राज्य के 38 जिलों में सघन अनुश्रवण कार्य किए गए। इस योजनांतर्गत कुल लाभान्वित 10000 व्यक्ति थे।

14. महादलित जलापूर्ति योजना

इस योजना के कार्यान्वयन हेतु महादलित बस्तियों में 125 परिवार पर कम-से-कम एक स्वच्छ पेयजल का स्रोत उपलब्ध कराने के लिए मिशन द्वारा एक योजना की विस्तृत रूपरेखा बनाई गयी है। योजना का कार्यान्वयन मिशन के द्वारा लोक स्वास्थ्य अभियंत्रण विभाग के सहयोग एवं सहभागिता से जिला स्तर पर उप विकास आयुक्त की अध्यक्षता में गठित एक स्थल चयन एवं अनुश्रवण समिति के माध्यम से किया जायेगा।

15. महादलित आवास योजना

ग्रामीण विकास विभाग के द्वारा इंदिरा आवास योजना अन्तर्गत महादलित परिवार को प्राथमिकता देकर लाभान्वित किया जा रहा है। भूमिहीन महादलित परिवार को राजस्व एवं भूमि सुधार विभाग के द्वारा भूमि उपलब्ध कराने के उपरान्त महादलित आवास योजना अन्तर्गत ग्रामीण विकास विभाग के द्वारा लाभान्वित किया जायेगा।

16. महादलित क्रेष

महादलित बस्तियों के आँगनबाड़ी के साथ एक-एक क्रेस खोलने का भी प्रस्ताव है। इसमें तीन वर्ष तक के बच्चों की देख रेख करने की व्यवस्था होगी। क्रेष खोलने से वे बच्चियाँ विद्यालय जा सकेंगी जिन्हें घर में बच्चों की देखभाल के लिए रुक जाना पड़ता है। इस योजना की शुरुआत पॉयलट स्तर पर शीघ्र की जायेगी तत्पश्चात समीक्षा के उपरान्त इसका विस्तार किया जायेगा।

17. धनवंतरी मोबाईल चिकित्सा योजना

महादलितों की बस्ती में स्वास्थ्य के परीक्षण के लिए विशेष मोबाईल आयुर्वेदिक वैन चलाया जायेगा। योजना के कार्यावयन के संबंध में विचार-विमर्श कर एक कार्ययोजना का निर्माण किया गया है जिसके तहत राज्य को 10 जोन में बांट कर चिकित्सक, औषधि एवं जांच किट सहित वैन निश्चित स्थान एवं समय पर महादलित टोलों में उपलब्ध कराया जायेगा। इस योजना का कार्यान्वयन स्वास्थ्य विभाग द्वारा किया जायेगा।

दस मेडिकल मोबाईल यूनिट शिघ्र ही बिहार राज्य स्वास्थ्य समिति द्वारा महादलितों के लिए प्रारंभ किये जा रहे रहे हैं जिसमें एक मोबाईल यूनिट प्रति प्रमंडल अवस्थित किये जाएंगे एवं शेष एक का आवश्यकता अनुसार उपयोग किया जाएगा। मेडिकल मोबाईल यूनिट की खरीद करने के पश्चात उसकी साज सज्जा एवं सजावट का कार्य हो रहा है और शीघ्र ही अनुमंडल स्तर पर अवस्थित किया जाएगा।

18. महादलित स्वास्थ्य-कार्ड योजना

महादलित बस्ती में स्वास्थ्य परीक्षण के लिए विशेष अभियान चलाने हेतु प्रत्येक परिवार को एक स्वास्थ्य कार्ड दिये जाने की योजना है। इस योजना का कार्यावयन स्वास्थ्य विभाग द्वारा किया जाएगा। स्वास्थ्य कार्ड का प्रारूप राज्य के सभी सिविल सर्जनों को बिहार राज्य स्वास्थ्य समिति के द्वारा प्रेषित कर दिये गये हैं जिसे शिघ्र ही छपवा कर महादलित परिवारों में वितरित किये जायेंगे।

19. अनुसूचित आवासीय विद्यालय

जिले के सभी अनुसूचित जाति आवासीय विद्यालय में केन्द्रीयकृत प्रवेश परीक्षा प्रणाली को लागू करा कर 60 प्रतिशत स्थान को महादलित समुदाय के लिए आरक्षित किया गया है।

इसके अतिरिक्त महादलित वर्ग के छात्र/छात्राओं के लिए शिक्षण संबंधी कई योजनाओं को अंतिम रूप दिया जा रहा है। इसे शीघ्र ही कार्यान्वित किया जाएगा, तथा इन आवासीय विद्यालय के छात्र/छात्राओं के पोषण स्तर का अध्ययन किया जाने वाला है।

20. महादलित बस्ती सम्पर्क योजना

महादलित बस्तियों को ग्रामीण पथ से जोड़ने के लिए एक महादलित बस्ती सम्पर्क पथ योजना तैयार की जायेगी। इस योजना का कार्यान्वयन ग्रामीण कार्य विभाग द्वारा किया जायेगा। महादलित मिशन द्वारा इस योजना का अनुश्रवण किया जायेगा।

21. अन्य

आम आदमी बीमा योजना एवं राष्ट्रीय स्वास्थ्य बीमा योजना का लाभ महादलित समुदाय तक पहुंचाने के लिए श्रम विभाग से समन्वय किया गया है एवं विकास मित्र एवं जिला कल्याण पदाधिकारी को इसके लिए संवेदित किया गया है। इस कार्य में प्रगति का निरंतर समन्वय किया जा रहा है।

मनरेगा का लाभ सभी महादलितों तक विकास मित्रों के माध्यम से अक्टूबर 2010 तक पहुँचाने हेतु जिला ग्रामीण विकास अभिकरण के साथ समन्वय की जा रही है।