

2010

Sathi All For Partnerships

Emmanuelle Paris Cohen,
Harriet Winfrey
Chitra Khanna

Edited By Shivani
Bhardwaj



[CASE STUDIES OF WOMEN AND RESOURCE RIGHTS IN MADHYA PRADESH AND DELHI]

[State government needs to intervene through affirmative action to increase the resource base for women. Women active in the national land right movement got very little in return for investing their energies. State policies for women don't translate either into active programmes to create gender equality. Therefore, resource gaps between men and women have yet to decrease. Area development plans in which spaces would be demarcated for women to manage and access collectively for care services and livelihoods could be a remedy. Each case story resonates with the need for developing skills in women to help them manage productive resources. This case study compilation is a part of a wider study that compiles evidence on the gender resource data gap. Each development plan must have a women resource zone built within it for women to access both built and natural infrastructure, as women have been historically denied equal access to resources.)

How I came to work for Sathi All For Partnerships(SAFP)

Harriet Winfrey

I impulsively booked returned flights to Delhi in October 2009 after sitting through a series of lectures on the socio-economic conditions affecting Karnataka. Shortly after booking these tickets I started to consider firstly whether I had been a bit brash, booking tickets without really thinking about what I was doing; and realising that it was too late to take the decision back, I started to think about what I hoped to achieve during my time in India.

On this basis I decided to consult my university adviser, Nitya Rao, to discuss what opportunities there may be for me to volunteer with an NGO during my time in India.

Soon after our initial discussion Nitya got in touch with me to tell me of an opportunity that had arisen to work with SAFP, an organisation based in Delhi which promotes the establishment of partnerships between different NGOs working to increase the rights and resources of women. Continuing the work initiated by the Consult for Women and Land Rights (CWLR) Shivani Bhardwaj, the director of SAFP, sought to build upon her existing research into the circumstances of women from different minority groups and therein to provide evidence to support project proposals that sought to both redress the gender imbalances, and to tackle the problems that such women face.

Having in the past studied English literature, and accordingly having written more essays that I care to mention, I was assigned the task of helping to write case studies on behalf of SAFP. It was thus arranged that I would spend three weeks working alongside Shivani in Delhi.

In line with this work I got to speak with the women in question and got to experience firsthand the nature of the problems they face which I sincerely hope I managed to accurately convey within the case studies I produced.

Prior to coming to India I had a general overview of the problems faced by the lower classes of Indian society so in many respects I was prepared for some of what I witnessed, however looking back on my experiences of talking to individual women and trying to immerse myself into the culture I think that the reality of their circumstances was quite difficult to accept let alone write about.

I felt at times a lot of pressure to do justice to the situation of the women which, from my own perspective as a young western woman, was not only unacceptable but also much removed from the social norms I am accustomed to living in England.

Whilst I have been brought up to believe that women are equal to men in all walks of life (social, professional and educational) and to perceive prejudicial attitudes as being outdated and wrong, entering into a culture where women and minority groups are powerless, undervalued and ostracised came as quite a shock.

Lack of awareness regarding their social and constitutional rights seemed often to inhibit the women's ability to exact change within their own lives and even when this awareness was present the women were still often powerless to do anything.

So for a first year International Development student I think whilst I tried to remain objective at all times and portray the difficulties encountered by my subjects from the rural context of two women who worked on land rights issues in Madhya Pradesh as close to reality as possible, I felt it was at time quite difficult to mask my own feelings on the matter. On my return I documented two case stories in Delhi.

On this basis I sincerely hope that the work I have produced does justice to the feelings and experiences of the women in question, moreover enables the reader to understand the complexity of the situation faced by these women and the groups they represent.

An Introduction to the case studies of Hira and Ranjini and the context of SAFP's interest in the circumstances encountered by scheduled tribe women

At the core of Sathi All For Partnership's (SAFP) work is a desire to address the circumstantial problems and hardships encountered by India's most vulnerable women, which of course encompasses the full range of different minority groups. This section reflects the struggles of those working with indigenous women.

Within the first week of my arrival in India I witnessed no less than three newspaper articles¹ discussing the alarmingly high levels of poverty found to affect 165 million people throughout the Indian subcontinent. These articles came on the back of research carried out by the Oxford Poverty and Development Initiative adopting a newly developed strategy for assessing global poverty, the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI, 2010).

In the process of conducting these assessments comparative measurements were taken in order to track the discrepancies between the different Indian states, and also the different minority groups. From this it was found that in the states of Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Chhattisgarh the proportion of the population considered to be in abject poverty was in excess of 69% of the total. Furthermore this poverty assessment found that scheduled tribes were particularly vulnerable, with 81.9% of scheduled tribe members considered as being severely poor, compared to the general population average of 33.3%.

This demonstrated that a high proportion of the people living in either one of these five 'poor' states are living in, or at increased risk of falling victim to, poverty. The reports also suggested that out of all the different minority groups (including scheduled tribes, castes and other backward classes) scheduled tribes in particular, are highly vulnerable to poverty.

Irrespective of and oblivious to these poverty assessments my work had me speaking with representatives of an NGO set up to address the issues encountered by the forest dwelling communities and scheduled tribes.

In light of the aforementioned newspaper articles, which I read upon my return to Delhi, I felt that the study's findings exemplified just a few of the circumstantial problems faced by the residents of India's poorest states. Moreover in relation to the case studies I was asked to produce (which are printed in the following pages) these reports provide statistical evidence showing the social and economic context in which scheduled tribes live.

¹ The Times of India, 2010

Of course the implications of these harsh realities for female members of scheduled tribes, who already have a subordinate status within the community on the basis of their gender, are far reaching.

SAFP, whose central focus is the issues and rights of women throughout India, is particularly interested in the condition of these scheduled tribe females. On this basis we travelled to a village with a group of such women and interview a tribal woman called Hira, in order to get a clear picture of the problems that characterise their daily lives. The findings of this trip are discussed at length in the following case studies.

As members of society these women were found to have virtually no rights whatsoever, and within their own communities the situation was not much better. When the women had come together in the past to make legitimate demands of the government, they had not been listened to. In order to move forward these women perceptibly need guidance, so that they know how to get their needs acknowledged. Thus in our conversations with the villagers we encouraged the men and women to think about what resources they need and how they are to go about demanding such resources from the government.

Take for instance the current situation with the ration shop; as the situation stands at present the women are required to walk 15km or more to access the nearest ration shop which is unacceptable and unfair.

Whilst the women of the village had made an application to the government asking for a ration shop to be opened nearby they had not proven to be very efficient in following the status of their application.

In light of this we (representatives of both SAFP and the local NGO with whom we met) argued it was simply not enough for them to make an application; in order for the desired result to materialise we argued that the women needed to go back week after week and track the status of their claim, reinforcing the need for their case to be acknowledged.

Of course another important matter to address is the government's reluctance to correctly implement the Forest Rights Act, and allocate land to indigenous tribes, so maybe the villagers need to raise concerns here also. Although it seems likely that for demands of this kind to be realised they will need to obtain support from NGO's as well as support from other tribal communities.

In terms of the interviews we conducted, Ranjini's case study (Ranjini being the joint director of the NGO, and the latter case study in this section) illustrates how in spite of struggling against adversity Ranjini has been able to obtain numerous resources that she did not possess in the past.

Conversely for women like Hira (the former case study in this section), women from scheduled tribes, the progress she has been able to make is completely different, in as

much that she has obtained just the bare minimum of what she is entitled to according to government legislations. On this basis it may be pertinent to question whether social conditioning and identity, for instance as being a member of a scheduled tribe, can inhibit an individual woman's ability to access resources. And, if this is the case, what sort of mass movement or mobility strategy is required in order to get the voices of the scheduled tribe women listened to and heard?

These are just some of many questions that SAFF and other acting organisations need to consider in order to make meaningful conclusions and develop effective strategies to address these issues.

Combined, the case studies seek to show how two women within the same geographical locality can experience very different forms of progress and gain access to different forms of resources.

In many respects, Hira can be viewed as being in a similar position now to Ranjini's situation when she was at the onset of her personal and professional development. Therefore is it possible that Hira can experience continued growth and further increase her resource base? Or is her position as a scheduled tribe female likely to limit her ability to acquire both government and private resources?

So what can be done??

Judging from our trip to a rural village (where we saw how men and women were able sit together and collectively consider and discuss their resource needs when given the opportunity to do so) there is evidently scope for participatory approaches to bring about social change. Such changes may be in the form of male-female relations at community level, or changes to the ability of communities to unite on a particular matter and make collective demands of the government on the basis of what they, the residents of these villages, decide is needed.

Such discussions also enable the scheduled tribe members think about the resources they already possess and consider how best to preserve them, preserve their cultural and economic past, and in doing so, preserve their own livelihoods.

Of course in order for this participation to occur the process needs to be both encouraged and facilitated, which is where intervention (from NGOs and other charitable organisations) may prove necessary.

The section features two case studies:

- A. Hira's story: Fighting for her constitutional rights as a widow and acquiring skills both as a teacher and as a leader of local women.**
- B. Ranjini's story: An forerunning activist within the land rights movements and more importantly, an exemplary example of women's ability to be treated as equals.**

SECTION 1

Case Study A: Hira's Story

The struggles of the scheduled tribes: fighting for forest rights, preserving tribal customs and maximising collective productivity

Harriet Winfrey

Hira, like many Indian women, got married at a very young age. Following the premature death of her husband she was forced to move back to her family home in the village we visited, after her father in law evicted her from the house in which she and her husband lived, taking custody of her two children. Upon her arrival back to her family village, Hira found herself stigmatized within the local community on account of her return to the area as a widow (an act deplored by Indian culture).

In spite of such adversity, Hira is an example of how a single woman from a tribal community has been able to assert her own rights, obtain the welfare benefits rightfully hers according to government legislation and re-establish her status and sense of identity within the local community. It is hoped that Hira's example will pave the way for others to make such demands from the government in the future.

Having received appropriate training material from a local NGO which we prefer not to name, Hira has been able to obtain employment as a teacher within one of two tribal schools in the area. This training also imparted her with the necessary skills to organize, mobilise and educate women within the neighbouring community as part of her work within the village self help group (SHG).

She has further legitimised her position within society through her persistent battles against the national government in order to obtain both an NREGA card (which

entitles the holder to 100 days of paid labour per annum) and to the state provided widows pension. Information about such entitlements were again provided by an NGO, although to date Hira is one of only a few cases in which appeals to the government have been successful.

In the future Hira aims to challenge her marital family for the rights to her late husband's share of the family property as well as to win back the custody of her children, whom she has been forbidden access to since she was forced to leave her in laws home.

Hira is an isolated case, for others of the tribe that reside in this area the story is not so optimistic.

Composed of some of the nation's poorest individuals, all of whom depend on the forest for their survival needs, these tribal communities have faced numerous struggles against the national government and the forest department with their entitlements to land and forest produce. As the co head of the NGO we spoke with, Indrajit², argues 'community forests have not existed since the implementation of the Forest Conservation Act in 1980' (2008).

Whilst claiming to preserve the forest in the name of environmental interests and demands, the Forest Conservation Act in practice sought to undermine the tribal ownership of forest land and appropriate these high resource areas as state property.

Prohibiting human settlement and farming in forest reserves, and assuming control over forest resources, the state government dispossessed tribal communities throughout India.

For a community that traditionally practiced slash and burn agriculture these restrictions had vast implications for their way of life and their cultural survival.

Measures have been taken in the attempt to increase the rights and resources of forest dwellers, as is demonstrated by the introduction and legislation of the Forest Rights act in 2006. However whilst this act claims to allocate property rights and resource access to forest dwellers, in some states, there is yet to be a single instance in which an application to claim land rights has proved successful.

The evidence suggests that the implementation of these rules has had very little application within the communities which it claims to target. Furthermore the access to forest produce that is warranted by this act has led to further atrocities against the scheduled tribes.

² Name was changed. Indrajit and Ranjini are married stay with their 10 year old boy in a city not far away from Hira's village.

Women frequently report incidences of sexual assault when trying to gather produce from forest department land belonging to the forest department whilst men face more brutal and violent punishments. Under such circumstances it has become normal for women to carry out produce gathering activities.

As Indrajit, the manager of the local NGO suggests, the result of these struggles is a growing trend of both permanent and seasonal migration as traditional livelihoods are becoming increasingly unviable for forest tribes.

In the past 2-3 years this region has witnessed dramatic changes as more and more residents have, owing to their desperate circumstances, been forced to seek work in brick kilns and other out of state industrial labour activities.

In short it can be surmised that with the limitations, constraints and adversity forest communities currently face their industrious and isolated ways of life are greatly under threat and at risk of being lost entirely. It is on this basis that the NGO operates as a means of trying to increase the viability and maintaining the existence of the tribal practices, increasing their collective rights and imparting them with the knowledge and training to better their circumstances.

In the field: Consultations with the residents of a rural village

The following is an account of a field trip which Shivani Bhardwaj from Sathi For All Partnerships, Indrajit and Ranjini (manager and secretary of the NGO), Ruben Cruz (photographer), a very patient taxi driver and myself attended.

The drive to the village can only be described as a bumpy one. Dilapidated tarmac roads with plenty of ruts kept our team on the edge of their seats for the duration of the two hour drive.

Whizzing past the forest department offices, its ground amass with piles of timber, put into perspective the colossal scale of deforestation still ongoing throughout this region.

Fortunately the monsoon rains kept the dust at bay so we had fairly clear visibility upon arrival. We were beckoned into a covered patio area outside a mud brick house backing onto a small plot of agricultural land and a courtyard, around which more of the same cow dung buildings were arranged. Due to a lack of school building the patio of this family home was said to be one of two sites in the village where the children would come for schooling.

Greeted by around thirty or more school children, ranging in age from 3 to around 11 years we very quickly began to appreciate the rarity of such a visit as we were regarded

and treated like royalty, encouraged to sit down on chairs which were hastily brought out from the house and offered mugs of chai tea.

After some initial shyness on part of the younger children and a couple of traditional songs from the braver individuals, we too were asked to repay the favour which consisted of a rather quick lesson in how to dance the Spanish 'Macarena' and a rendition of 'Do ray me', a song from the well known musical *The Sound Of Music*. Very flushed and embarrassed Ruben and I hastily took our seats and listened as Shivani translated a conversation between herself and one of the village children Kanti.

Kanti, a 10 year old female attending the school described the allocation of roles within her household. She spoke of how she had gained responsibility for the preparation of food within her household.

Although she admitted that she had some assistance from her mother, at times she was left solely responsible for catering for the entire family: her father, brother, mother and herself. She said that she also helped her mother with the collection of water and other domestic duties.

Her brother on the other hand was responsible for looking after the goats.

When asked about the duties her mother and father undertook she described how her mother worked on the field, planting and caring for the families crops whilst her father's was responsible for the seasonal ploughing of the field and the sale of produce within the local markets.

Although Kanti's mother would commence her day's work at 3am, her father she reported woke at around 8am. Despite this discrepancy her perception was that her father worked harder than her mother on the basis that his duties required him to spend more time away from the homestead.

On consultation it seemed that the majority of the congregated school children shared this conviction.

Such perceptions amongst the younger generation may be seen to imply that reproductive roles, namely domestic work and other activities carried out by women, are seen within the community to be less labour intensive than the work carried out by men.

Although domestic duties and tending for the fields appeared to demand significantly more hours (per day) than other forms of work it seems that such reproductive roles are perhaps overlooked and underappreciated within such communities.

Our time with the school children was brought to a close by the arrival of a number of the adult villagers, and upon instruction from Indrajit, a hand drawn map was pinned up underneath the patio, against the outer wall of the building.

These village plans had been drawn up in order to cite the location and composition of the different households, specifying the caste as well as the age group and gender of each individual household member.

These plans also indicated the position of both privately owned and government provided wells, in addition to the location of tarmac roads and dirt tracks and the surrounding land.

The objective of such plans was to create a visual image detailing the present allocation of resources and to use this plan as a basis for collectively (villagers and NGO workers) identifying patches of land and the necessary infrastructure that could be incorporated within future project proposals for the development of the village.

It became apparent during discussions with a small group of male and female adults from the village community that in terms of decision making power men had a greater say in local development. For instance when asked who hypothetically would decide where additional government well's would be built a local man was quite adamant that this kind of decision was to be discussed solely amongst the male members of the community.

Paradoxically we found that the women and female children in the community were responsible for the collection of water from the existing wells, as a part of the numerous daily domestic duties women in this community were expected to carry out. It therefore seemed absurd that women, who have the greatest knowledge about the whereabouts and supply of water, should not be included in such discussions.

Within the group discussion Hira's case was deliberately discussed as a means of integrating and explaining the ideas that the interview sought to address and explore. This was done in front of the community firstly so that others were aware of our motivations for speaking with Hira about her experiences, thus pacifying any suspicions that may be harboured by others within the village, and secondly so that Hira's example could be used as a starting point for talking about wider gender issues, SHG activity, resource allocation and entitlements within the village

The nature of the visit was not merely to talk to Hira alone, rather our small team sought also to contribute information and ideas to the community: motivating them into taking collective action to demand more resources from the government and getting them to think collectively about aspects of their livelihoods namely the division of decision making power and resources, access and control, between males and females. The learning from this meeting was later shared with two authorities from the State's capital, to suggest a plan of action.

It became clear as the community meeting progressed that this was the first instance in which gender roles and imbalances in terms of control over resources had been openly addressed.

Practical questioning regarding the location of, and decisions surrounding, government water supplies and choice of seed varieties revealed that the vast majority of decision making power lay in the hands of men. On the basis that women were seen to carry out most of the activities pertaining to these two resources it was possible to argue that women within the village should have a more prominent role within decision making.

As Shivani explained ‘we can deduce from conversations like this that not only tribal’s are getting less resources (as a result of government imposed restrictions), but that women are getting less’ and thus argue a case that demands increased resources and infrastructure that specifically target the women living in this area.

Due to the growing concerns about climate change and its detrimental impact on this area, and in line with the work and research being carried out by NGOs who actively supports this community, we encouraged the villagers to identify and think about possible climate change mitigation projects that could be collectively implemented in the nearby area, providing the village with more secure and sustainable ways of producing food and extra funds from the government.

As this meeting disbanded, the villagers left talking amongst themselves, Ranjini, Shivani and I moved out to the courtyard to talk with Hira about her personal experiences and involvement in the village SHG, in which she played a leading role.

Hira’s story

Hira explained the widow pension was the only governmental resource that any women in this community had as yet been able to access. Out of five applications, pensions had been allocated to just two women.

As she said *‘besides these two I don’t think anybody has been able to access anything else.’*

The process of obtaining the pension Hira explained, required her to purchase and fill out a widow’s pension application form, which she gave to the government. Her case, and others, was brought before the Gram Sabha and after some deliberation the pension was awarded.

She said that she encountered numerous difficulties in getting her name put on the village voting register, the registrar arguing that she could not have her name on a list in both her marital and her family village.

She disputed against this saying *‘if I am here I will vote here, if I am there I will vote there’* to which he argued that because she would be visiting her children in her

marital village she should also go and vote there, and therefore what need or reasoning could she have to be put on her family village voting list.

This decision was made with no regard for her personal circumstances, the fact that she had been banished from her marital village and not permitted any access to her son and daughter.

When Hira returned to her family village (where we met her) she obtained SHG training however she felt that even before this she had some experience of community meetings through her experiences in attending the Gram Sabha. She said that although she had some involvement in community based work she has gathered more information and training since joining the NGO and hence she felt that her role has become more organized and established.

In terms of the resources women within the village had been able to access through the SHG she said that five women were granted old age pensions and one woman obtained a deserted woman's allowance. The SHG also put forward an application to get a children's feeding centre and a school for the village. Hira believed that it was likely that they would be granted a school building from the government. At present she said that the children were being divided and studied in two different houses, one owned by the village head and another by a yarder. Hira teaches at both of these schools.

The women had also tried to incorporate a savings scheme within their SHG, however progress of this project had been impeded partly by the government's reluctance (after three years of being established) to supply the counterpart money owed to them, and also by a loan taken out by a teacher.

The teacher failed to repay the money he borrowed for over three years and only after pressure from the Gram Swaraj government programme (which reviews the implementation of government programmes at village level) did he return the money, failing to pay any interest on the amount borrowed.

As Hira explained obtaining the repayment of this loan was one of the notable resources that women have, through collective action, managed to recover.

As the interest on the loan was not paid the women's saving group failed to make a profit and accordingly the process of repayment was not as they had initially hoped.

Another problem they encountered surrounded the provision of the midday school meal. The women were under the impression that the officer of the school would provide money for this meal however for four months the women supplied the midday meal without any payments being made.

They took collective action to try and remedy this problem.

Hira said that the government officials gave them some resources to overcome the loans that had been taken from the shop supplying the food for the school meals, in an attempt to remedy the situation.

The SHG submitted an application and started to put pressure on the school officer to ensure that this money was repaid.

When asked about the impact of her SHG on her family life she said that she had over time gained support from her natal family members.

Whilst in the early days they used to monitor her activity asking whether she would come back from the meeting in time and so on, overall things had changed: ***‘They no longer ask me where am I going and what am I doing. They have a sense of respect; so much so that other women in my family are going out to seek a job like I have to get some income and be a woman of substance.’***

On the other hand Hira’s in laws, as far as she knew, were not aware of the work she was involved in: ***‘They really want nothing to do with me. When I have gone there my father in law has simply shut the house door on my face.’***

Naturally Hira felt somewhat helpless about her situation with her in laws and it pained her to talk about them, as she pointed out ***‘I do not want to think or talk about them much now, I want to establish myself first. The main thing is that I have lost is my relationship with my children and I think about them all the time.’***

Trying to unveil the rationale underlying the behaviour of her husband’s family we asked Hira what was their motivation for treating her so badly and whether this had happened immediately preceding her husband’s death or after some time had passed.

Hira said that she was locked out of the house immediately. Her husband’s family perceived her to be ***‘a witch’*** and held her responsible for his death. At this time Hira was understandably quite distressed and she recalls being somewhat unable to ***‘present herself as a collected person or deal with her pressures.’***

Hira’s husband died in 2005 and she has not been permitted any access to her son or daughter since.

Following our individual meeting with Hira we were joined by the remaining members of the village’s SHG as well as another two groups from neighbouring villages. Although some of the men present in the initial meeting were in attendance they took a back seat in discussions about the activity of the women’s groups.

We learnt that the village’s SHG, in April, had applied to obtain a ration shop on the premise that the nearest ration shop to the village was over 15km away. Whilst the

forms had been completed and sent off, on enquiring, it transpired that the SHG had failed to chase up the relevant authorities on the status of their application.

Furthermore the village SHG's action in terms of initiating and organizing a woman's enterprise was deemed to be somewhat lacking.

In amidst our discussions the women spoke of a small business they had making brooms wherein they would buy the required material for 4 rupees and sell the finished product for 6 thereby making a small profit.

A spokeswoman from the SHG admitted that whilst they had started collecting money from group members they did not at present have the capital to create a lucrative business.

The women from a neighbouring SHG on the other hand had collected 5000 rupees from each of its individual members, and with it created a bank. This initiative had enabled the group to collect somewhere in the region of 20-30 thousand rupees which they said they had invested in about 4 or 5 new businesses. With some of the money they had collected they employed a cashier and an accountant to assist them with managing the group's finances.

Another SHG which started up ten years ago (2000) ran a primary school and a shelter home. They financed the provision of midday meals for the primary school children by setting up an account, into which each woman deposited 2 rupees per month. At present they estimated the balance of this account to be in or around 9000 rupees.

Whilst neither of these groups had registered their existence with the government they appeared to be independently running successful enterprises and, as Indrajit said, had no need for the group loans the government offered to registered SHGs.

As part of their role in supporting the village community both Ranjini and Indrajit challenged the members of the village SHG asking why they had not been more proactive in their attempt to obtain a ration shop. As Ranjini pointed out in order to get their request acknowledged they should have checked up on the progress on a weekly basis rather than leaving it for months.

Indeed, as witnessed through Hira's experience of dealing with the government, it has been proved that only with a great deal of persistence can results be achieved. Ranjini thus argued that the village group should have been more assertive and resolute in its requests.

Returning to the matter of collective enterprises which other village groups had evidently had some success with, Indrajit encouraged the women and men to think realistically about their individual capabilities and identify what productive activities they could do in order to generate profit. He implored them to think of an activity that

they could participate in all year round rather than just seasonally as that would ensure a more reliable flow of income for the village.

What the villagers needed, Indrajit argued, was a change of both attitude and behaviour so that they could amend their role from that of a watchdog (which appeared to be the case at present) to that of a resource developer. His suggestion was that they look into collectively purchasing 20 or so goats and asking the government for more land on which to let them graze. With these twenty goats it would be possible to breed, multiply the size of the herd, and thus gain further resources for the collective.

It was no use expecting one or two individuals to take part in this, in order for anything to work it must be a community effort.

As our day in the village drew to a close it was evident (judging by the heated conversations ongoing between the different village SHG's as we left) that the questions posed by Ranjini, Indrajit and Shivani had given the villagers something to think about.

As Ranjini earlier pointed out it was pointless for the NGO to keep giving the villagers assistance unless they were willing and able to also start helping themselves. Putting some pressure on the villagers to increase their efforts by means of some tactical reverse psychology was hoped to inspire more concerted action.

Having initiated perhaps one of the first conversations about the relative access and control of males and females over resources it was hoped that the community would now start to redress just a few of the imbalances that existed between men and women. Encouraging them to start working together to try and establish some new initiatives that would increase their productivity, the overall aim is to start building upon the resources that the villagers have access to, thereby increasing the viability and regeneration of their traditional way of life.

Hira's role as an active member of the village SHG remains to monitor and incite the action of the group. With her existing knowledge about how to access government resources in addition to some encouragement to ensure the demands of the SHG are heard, the hope is that the women in this community will take collective action and start putting pressure on the government so that their entitlements may be realized.

Whilst the FRA has as yet failed to bring about the land entitlements it promised, community efforts are undoubtedly central to ensuring that individual and collective needs are met and that claims are granted.

The Indian government needs to account for its evident failure to live up to its promises and only with pressure from village communities like those we met with, is it likely that the government will begin to fulfil its role in the allocation of resources to

forest dwellers. It is only through increased knowledge about rights, entitlements and the means of obtaining such resources that change will occur and women must participate in this process



SECTION 1

Case Study B: Ranjini's Story

Ranjini's Personal and Professional Development

Harriet Winfrey in association with SAFF

For the past twenty years Ranjini has played an active, and often leading, role within rural and urban social development programmes and a land right movement.

Whilst her primary work at present is with the NGO we visited, which she and her husband Indrajit established in 2000 and currently manage her professional and intellectual growth as both a woman and a facilitator of development has involved numerous struggles. As she suggests 'although now I am my own boss, recognised and respected both as an individual and as a development practitioner in my own right, this has not always been the case.'

Indeed the reverence with which Ranjini is treated by such respected members of the community as the Mayor of the state capital, and the numerous others that specifically seek her knowledge and advice, has come on the back of a lifetime of hardship.

In the past Ranjini has been unlawfully crammed in a cell with 51 male prisoners, receiving death threats from the arresting police officials and she has been subject to frequent gender discriminations within the workplace.

Struggling against the norms and expectations of a society that promotes early marriage and female subordination, her unrelenting determination in her attempts to obtain justice, both for herself and for the sake of others, is a testament to her unwavering strength as an advocate for the rights of women.

This article seeks to divulge the nature of circumstances that have contributed to Ranjini's individual growth and acquisition of resources, revealing the significant role of both personal and professional experience in the development of such an exemplary leader of women's and tribal rights.

Since 1987 Ranjini has worked in NGOs, particularly in organisations that target forest dwellers and tribal communities.

From 1989 until 2000 she played a pivotal role in the land rights movement active in the nation with its head quarter in Bhopal.

During this period she sought to understand and address the situational struggles faced by the Dalit women (the majority of which are landless and impoverished) populating the areas in which she worked.

Over time Ranjini came to appreciate the disparity between the way in which she, as a woman accustomed to the dominant ways of thinking inherent in Indian society, perceived tribal issues and the way in which the tribal communities themselves understood and managed them. As she says 'there is a huge gap between the issues that we face and the way we deal with them and the problems and experiences faced by tribal women.'

At this time Ranjini also became aware of the difference between the way in which the policies she worked with framed forest resources, in terms of the lives and livelihoods of forest dwellers, and the way in which the tribal's themselves viewed them. As she suggests for tribal communities the forest was far more than just a livelihood resource, 'it was their way of life'.

In recognising this, Ranjini and accordingly the land right movement began to amend the way in which they conceived the problems that tribal communities face and thus reviewed and adapted the approaches they used to assist them.

As she says 'I significantly added to my own skill base during this time as the knowledge and approaches that I derived from my experiences in the field were quite different from the understanding I had previously.'

As part of her work at that time Ranjini sought to mobilise the women from tribal villages, trying to enable and encourage them to actively take part in land rights movements. Her ability to generate action and awareness was, however, impeded by the sheer fact that almost all of the women she worked with were uneducated, and therefore they did not have the intellectual capacity to immediately understand the premises of her suggestions.

Her hard work however did eventually pay off when in 1999 the land rights organisation successfully orchestrated a demonstration involving around 200 people, who blocked off the roads in a protest against the fact that they had not received payment for work that they had done and also to demand increased access to forest resources.

Bearing in mind the feudal environment in which this demonstration took place this mass mobilisation came as a total surprise to local authorities and was, for Ranjini, indicative that her own work was progressing.

Alongside such protests and in light of the research reports and petitions of the land right NGO had given the government with regards to the World Bank's forestry programme (which they, and others, had linked to the widespread deforestation that had been witnessed in the south) an extensive review of the World Bank project was also carried out in this year (1999).

The review, conducted by the bank's Operations Evaluation Department (OED), highlighted the failure of the World Bank in its implementation of the 1991 Forest Policy, claiming that there was 'a lack of synergy between conservation and development' (WRM 2002) and admitting that its own efforts, to adapt its methodological approach so as to contain the rate of tropical deforestation, had up until now been vastly inadequate (ibid).

For Ranjini, recognising the impact of multinational agencies upon forest resources (and thus forest dwellers) further contributed to her intellectual grounding, enabling her to appreciate the complex and interrelated factors underlying the political, social and economic conditions prevalent within forested areas.

Competing interests in forest resources took numerous different forms: from the feudal lords, who were concerned about their ownership and management of both land and labour, and the forest department who sought to monopolise the extraction of timber and other forest produce, to the more conservative interests of environmentalists and proponents of eco-tourism. In each case, Ranjini reports that the work of the land right NGO was treated with suspicion and contempt. As she says 'for the first ten years of our work we were perceived as a threat by all of these different actors (the environmentalists, eco tourists, feudal lords, and the forest department) as our work was considered to undermine and oppose both their economic and their political interests. This was also

because the World Bank review hit them hard, and our involvement in initiating this review was known.’

It was not just Ranjini’s work as part of the land right NGO that was treated contemptuously, she spent a lot of her time working on her own in the field and as she suggests the forest was not an easy place, particularly for women, to negotiate. She was frequently subject to such suspicious inquisitions, and she felt that this was certainly in part due to the fact that she was female.

Whilst other women of her age had already been married off and were sitting under pardha, Ranjini was going around, with her head uncovered, with absolutely no wish to enter into ‘the patriarchal marriage system’ until such time as she had achieved her wider goals of initiating a social transformation.

In spite of the admonishments she received from her peers and within wider society, she described being proud to be ‘actively standing up for her values’.

In many ways, Ranjini detached herself from her identity as a woman, and when men indicated that they were attracted to her or asked for her hand she says she would resolutely reject them.

Furthermore she was greatly dissatisfied by the gender relations, and inequality, that existed even in the organisation in which she worked, which paradoxically claimed to be gender equal.

In spite of the fact that she was more qualified and experienced than many of her male counterparts she felt undervalued and underpaid on the basis that she was female: ‘men were paid higher wages in spite of the fact I knew more than the majority of them, and had different capabilities. I therefore did not feel that men and women were valued equally.’

In her own mind Ranjini prioritised her identity as a human being over her identity as a woman, which perhaps enabled her to better deal with the situation at hand. By negating the cultural labels, of weakness and subordinate status, attached to women, viewing herself instead as a human being (with every right to be and act as she pleased) Ranjini was able to proactively fight for her own rights and the rights of other women.

Given the social and political milieu she had grown up with in her own village, wherein she said ‘women were treated like dust’, her personal identity was seen to manifest itself as the complete reverse of the social conditioning she had grown up with.

This inexplicable courage ‘to show a totally different role model and be perhaps more courageous than I actually was at this time’ enabled Ranjini to make progressive steps within her professional development.

Ranjini was thrice selected to be the secretary for a particular group and asked to coordinate its activity. She was allocated the most difficult assignments because as she said she 'was ready and willing to take the bull by the horns'.

Often she would end up in a situation where she would have to rectify cases of financial misappropriation which she overcame by not taking much money for herself.

Ranjini would travel long distances on minimal budgets to straighten out problematic situations, and she would hold to account those responsible for such issues, as she says 'rectifying the stakes'.

By the time she turned 24, Ranjini had become an angry and disillusioned with her work. Whilst she continued to invest all of her time and effort into the land rights NGO she noted that others around her did not contribute at all. This angered her to the point that she would often argue, 'shout and scream', with anyone who dared to challenge or undermine her.

She gained a professional reputation for being a 'masculine woman' on account of this anger and was duly advised, by her mentor at the land rights NGO, to perhaps take a more passive and relaxed approach towards her work, 'try to smile a bit more often' she reported him as saying.

This anger was however of some use within her capacity as an activist. She reports how at the 1999 demonstration, the district magistrate of the area had referred to her as a prostitute. Outraged by this remark Ranjini describes how she launched herself at the magistrate, grabbing him by his collar and hurling abuse at him, disregarding the fact that there were police in attendance. She laughed saying that 'the police were so aghast and transfixed by my sudden outbreak that they failed to intercept. Stunned into numbness they were'.

On another occasion she was arrested and thrown into a small cell with 51 male prisoners (which, just to clarify, is in violation of the law which stipulates that on no account must men and women be detained in the same cell). Having been arrested by a nurse (there were no female officers within this particular police battalion) who had been called away from her work and shoved into a police uniform to perform the task, Ranjini was thrown into a cell no larger than your average bathroom with 51 men. An exchange of verbal abuse passed between the guard and Ranjini, "'I'll get her hanged, get her killed, just stuff her inside between all the men and I'll see to it that she doesn't live anymore," he kept shouting. And I kept on abusing him from inside the bars saying that I would see to it that I survived. All of the other fellows in the cell with me told me to shut up saying "the more abuse you give him, the more he beats us, so will you stop abusing him." But I wouldn't stop; so long as he continued to verbally abuse me I would continue abusing him.'

Whilst Ranjini's anger may have had a spectacular effect in the field, she began to appreciate that it inhibited her ability to work: 'I wanted to understand what is the appropriate to manage operations, to ensure proceedings run smoothly and efficiently. I

knew things had to be managed in a different manner to the uncoordinated, selfish and lazy manner which I had witnessed with my own managers in the past. But I did at least appreciate that my own anger was not a useful alternative.'

In 1998-1999 Ranjini attended the Beijing conference and the National Conferences for Women in India where she became better acquainted with the issues of gender and patriarchy posited by different development and political debates.

She realised that the way in which she mobilised women, selecting them for leadership roles, needed to change. By picking on women from distressed backgrounds and helping to transform them into leaders, Ranjini saw how she could enable widows and victims of domestic violence (amongst others) to overcome the problems associated with their situation and become role models for other women, who would be driven to do the same.

As she said the two conferences enabled her to exchange and develop such ideas with other women (from across the globe) that were working to develop gender sensitive projects and policies.

Also around this time, she came to realise the process she herself had encountered, and the nature of the circumstances that had caused her so much frustration:

'When I achieved a position of strength and power, the ability to coordinate operations, I started to experience opposition from my colleagues. Rather than receiving support from the people around me I felt that my peers would rather I was demoted and that they sought only to highlight my shortcomings. I realised that this is part of the process of competition. When you are one amongst many, you are seen to be of little threat, however when you are competing for spaces of leadership people's attitudes towards you change. So often I was told that I was getting promoted only because I was a woman. I realise now that these accusations provided the way in which men were able to justify my progression into leadership roles. I realised how important it was to recognise this rather than react as I had in the past.'

Evidently a very determined and impassioned woman, as an outsider conducting an interview with Ranjini, I could but wonder where such confidence and resolve came from. Was it from her marriage to Indrajit, or was there something in her childhood that made her into the strong willed figure which she is today?

On the question of whether her marriage with Indrajit facilitate her leadership. She could not respond directly as like she said, he had never prohibited her from doing anything. Ranjini had not experienced what it is to experience working in a situation where there are restrictions within the family.

In that respect Ranjini is very fortunate to have married a man so attuned to her own goals for social transformation, as for many other women working in this field their marriages and other personal relationships can serve as a source of inhibition.

Ranjini was however prepared to admit how her leadership strategies had changed subsequent to her marriage:

'My change in perspective from NGO ideology to vision of mass mobilisation came from the exposure I got when working with Indrajit and his co-workers.

When working for forest dwellers in a national park I experienced firsthand the kind of left oriented thinking of mass mobilisation, the organisation of labour workers within unions, and the ability to initiate collective resistance within the unorganised sector. Most importantly I started to differentiate between forest people and forest workers which resulted in a complete change in my perspective.

With this new perspective I was able to very quickly gain the information, knowledge and strategic expertise which were fundamental to the mass mobilisation the land rights NGO managed to achieve in 1999.

So within a year of my marriage I had certainly shifted strategies, and I also shifted base.'

In terms of Ranjini's self confidence and self image, she said that it had developed a lot earlier.

'When I was in the 6th standard my father had died. My mother at the age of four had got married. It was an inter-caste marriage so my father's family never really related to him after that, and so my mother got no support after my father died. My mother's father however gave us a little bit of support.

From that time, from when I was six years old, I witnessed my mother having to work very hard both at home and outside so I chose to take on the responsibility of looking after my three siblings, my two brothers and sister.

So, I guess unconsciously my circumstances imparted me with the confidence to be a person who could keep things under control and work efficiently.

I don't think I ever had much of a childhood; I was more or less born into maturity as I was the eldest there and I had to take responsibility for my family. As my mother had gone out to fend for us then I should be expected to concentrate my own efforts on my studies and looking after my siblings.

So in many ways I took on many male as well as female responsibilities even as a small child.

The self confidence had to be there because I simply couldn't do without it.

And later in my life I became involved with an NGO, both of which involved the social analysis of equality and development, so my personality went on developing in a particular manner.

I guess also the thirteen days I spent in jail were another building block in my life.

My role model however has always been my mother. Even though she was widowed at a very early age she didn't remarry, nor did she force us (her children) to get married just because we were in a state of dispossession. Instead she encouraged us to study, she encouraged us to get jobs, and she encouraged me to get into social development work instead of entering into the seemingly inevitable social pattern of marrying and making families.

It was my mother's confidence, the confidence she had to provide for us and rebuild her own life and the life of her four children. She felt that she had to cook in an NGO's working workshop, and because she had not studied she accepted that she was unable to advance into a higher position. Instead she invested her efforts in making sure her children worked hard at their academies so that they had a chance of breaking out of this cycle of poverty that she had found herself in after my father's death.

So it was her willingness to go through the grind and to let her children progress and be different from her, that I feel gave me courage. My mother's confidence multiplied into us, her children, so I feel my confidence comes from her.

I guess I feel that there are two ways in which your self confidence develops, one is when you struggle with a situation and overcome it and the other, comes when you intellectualise your experiences and prepare yourself for life, the ability to be academically sound and to comprehend your surroundings. With such understanding you are able to focus your efforts into creating confidence within yourself; so, it's either derived from experiential learning or it can be generated on the basis of knowledge.'

The story of how Ranjini had overcome the difficulties she encountered as a child and used it to her advantage made me start to consider the role that social relations and personal experience have in developing an individual's capacity to make demands and increase their resource base.

If for instance a woman, who is a victim of domestic violence, has a strong support base either from within her extended marital family, her natal family or from the women in the local community, is it not possible that she would feel able to call upon one or more of these social resources in order to overcome, or at least appease, her afflictions. It may be that the women in her local community, or her in laws feel able to challenge the woman's husband on her behalf; they may offer her a place of respite; or as is often the case with SHG's they may at least be able to offer some form of productive distraction, involvement within a business perhaps.

If, like Ranjini, a female child is brought up to believe in her own self worth and to perceive herself not as subordinate to men, but as their equal, then would it not be possible, if not

probable, that this young girl may develop into a leading figure and advocate of women's rights when she reaches adulthood?

If social relations are in some way key to this development of this determination to bring about positive change, providing a supportive base for individuals to act, then what is it that NGO's need to provide to nurture these social resources?

Certainly self help groups, if implemented appropriately can help strengthen ties between women. And of course knowledge for women who are not yet aware of their legitimate rights and what social resources they may be able to gain access to, through joining a group of other women, through getting involved with training provided by an NGO like the .

How to strengthen social resources and give women the base from which to act seems, in my mind, to be one of the most important questions that policy makers should address.

How then, are we to make more women feel as confident and resolute in their convictions as Ranjini is?

So, what other more tangible resources has Ranjini been able to access?

Using the case study questions we asked Ranjini to identify what resources she has been able to gain...

Do you own and property?

'My mother created a small property from the pay up from my father's death, my grandfather brought this land on behalf of my mother.

This plot has been divided into two small plots, one plot is divided between me and my sister, and we have our individual control over that, and the other plot is meant for my two brothers and my mother.

In spite of the fact that my mother's neighbours have expressed surprise in the way Ranjini's mother has allocated the land remarking that Ranjini is earning money whilst her brother has very little income (basically implying that he should be given some of my share in the family plot) my mother is resolute in the fact that I have my quarter of the land, saying that "Ranjini has given everything to this family and thus deserves that which I have given her".

My mother resides there so she manages my part of the property. My bothers, who live there also, assist her with this. I of course go there from time to time to oversee it.'

Are you employed? What income do you receive and do you have control over it?

'Yeah actually between Indrajit and me we earn and spend kind of together but I tell him, I do more housework so you should be paying me more for that.

My mother is dependent on my father's pension so we really are not responsible for extended family. So all expenses are shared between me, my husband and my son

When we brought this house in 2000, we just had no money between the both of us. Neither of us had ever earned any money, we just did work for our respective organisations and we didn't receive a salary for the work that we did; what we did receive was to cover our expenses alone. So when I left the land right NGO, and Indrajit left his previous organisation, we didn't even have the money to rent a property. For nearly two or three years Indrajit took up documentation tasks, did extra work apart from our organising work, as a means of earning money. He was the sole money earner and we continued to do our work with our NGO.

In 2006 we obtained a fellowship from the national forest forum. It was a very small fellowship.

We would give money to volunteers, 100 rupees to go and travel to the field, conduct research and documentation, live and work with us. So it was from the very meagre fellowship that we built upon our organisation.

In 2008 we were able to make a small deposit out of our savings. We put 70000 rupees into a post office account here and we obtained a guarantee from our funder that attested to the fact that both I and Indrajit were doing credible work. On the basis of these savings and this guarantee we were able to get this house which we bought in instalments.'

And is the house in your name?

'No, although we wanted this house to be in my name I had no income to show that I could own a property. Only Indrajit was known to the funder who wrote our guarantee so the letter of guarantee he gave to us mentioned Indrajit's name only. This letter was given to the builder who accordingly put Indrajit's name down as being the property owner. So on paper it is technically Indrajit's house. I am very sure that the next property we make will simply be in my name only.'

What household assets do you personally own?

'Well I have a bed in my name, I certainly own the fridge and the television; all of these items I purchased myself.'

What forms of communication do you have in your household, and who primarily uses it?

'We have a telephone, we each have mobiles and we have internet connection. Indrajit uses more internet as most of the work that our organisation does using the internet is done by Indrajit.'

Have you ever taken out a loan?

'No I have never taken out a loan. If however I was ever in a position to take out a loan I would take it from a woman bank not from any normal bank'.

Do you have any future business plans?

'I have always dreamed of buying an agricultural plot and farming it. I would like to practise natural and sustainable farming. So, in the future, I want some land of my own as a business plan, that's my dream. The problem that we face is that the only land currently available is tribal land and we as non tribals do not want to take tribal land. But I guess if somebody was to give our organisation a grant to us for this experimentation we would probably take it.'

Frustrations between the leader of the land right NGO and Ranjini eventually resulted in the mutual decision that Ranjini would leave the organisation in 2000. As she says this departure in many ways came as a relief as the land right NGO had, under this leader, started to change its strategic approach, and she could not agree with many of these alterations. So, upon leaving her position with at the land right NGO, Ranjini, together with her husband Indrajit, started up their NGO.

Over her time spent working with the land rights movement Ranjini describes how she had cultivated many of her own dreams and strategies for how she wanted to operate. Whilst the land rights movement looked specifically at rights pertaining to agricultural land, Ranjini's interests were much more akin to the forest rights movement Indrajit was involved with.

As it transpired the kind of work that had evolved from the way Ranjini had developed leadership amongst vulnerable women, were actually more relevant to the forest workers movement.

Agricultural land issues such as having a title, not having a title, having a title but not having access to land, were in practice far removed from the issues faced by forest dwellers (the rights to forest land and work, the right to gather forest produce, the rights of the indigenous forest communities versus the rights of outsiders wanting to access forest resources). Furthermore as the land rights movement was at this time unwilling to incorporate forest rights, her transition to this new area of work could not have come at a better time.

The benefits of being her own boss and having to answer only to herself has enabled Ranjini to focus her efforts on gender relations, and other issues in which she has vested personal interest.

Their NGO currently works with forest workers so much of the progress that has been witnessed so far pertains to wage; firstly that it is of an adequate amount, and that it is received on time, and secondly that forest dwellers are able to access livelihoods in order to obtain such a wage.

Much of her work so far has been in training local women in how to teach children, how to participate in community meetings and SHG's, and how to fill out forms and demand resources from the government.

As most of the people she has worked with are non propertied she says that she has not yet had much dealing with property issues, although she hopes that through the correct implementation of the FRA (2006) her work may take her down that route in the future. Indeed she hopes that in the next few years at least some of the 20 tribal villages they work with will obtain entitlement to forest land with her help.

Section two: the struggle of Dalit women for

Land and Resource rights

Case study: Subhadra Kharparde,

activist and social worker, Indore

Case study by Emmanuelle Paris-Cohen

In association with SAFP and Shivani
Bhardwaj



BACKGROUND:

JAMEEN HAMARA HAQ ABHIYAAAN (name changed), WOMEN AND THE LAND RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Subhadra³ was working for Jameen Hamara Haq Abhiyaaan, is a land rights movement based on a Gandhian philosophy. This organisation organized walks from one village to the other, to talk to villagers about their land rights, and to record the local situation (i.e. who is being evicted? Displaced? Who has land records but no possession, who has access but no land titles) This program to gather actual data on land rights organises foot marches for mass awareness to encourage self-sufficiency with one's own land: "our village, our rule".

The movement used women as foot soldiers, but most decisions were made by male leaders. Women like Subhadra or Ranjini were conscious that this should change. They got women organized towards the struggle for land, to increase their confidence, etc. Then, a change in leadership occurred. During this time, the wife of the leader brought about visible changes within the organisations ranks and developed a women's visibility at public events and rallies. But she also alienated people like Ranjini and Subhadra who has demanded that women have their own front in the movement with federated units organising their women and resources agenda with independent funds from village to national level. These women were instead encouraged be available to groups outside the ambit of Jameen Hamara Haq Abhiyaaan. So activists like Subhadra Kharparde took on work with other smaller NGO to create alternate leadership. Today, after yet another leadership change in Jameen Hamara Haq Abhiyaaan, men have gotten control of the position once again, even though it gained international credibility as a women's rights movement.

We asked Subhadra how she had managed to acquire ownership rights over land of her own, and the struggle she went through to get it: *"My father had died, and although he supported me when he was alive, he wasn't there to support me against my eldest brother who didn't want to give me my share of inheritance. The local Panchayat was also denying my right. No one else from the family could help me. In the family, we are 3 brothers and 3 sisters. But my 2 sisters didn't want to fight for their share of the land"*. As her husband describes in his book, the legal battle that ensued between her brothers and herself was

³ See her blog : www.worldpulse.com/user/3230 .

won, not with the help of officers whom they knew: “the moot point is how many poor rural women will be able to muster the same kind of contacts within the IAS as Subhadra to be able to get this law implemented⁴”.

JAMEEN HAMARA HAQ ABHIYAAAN, A movement based on non-violent means of action for the empowerment of communities by encouraging local self-governance and land, water and forest rights. Its mandate is to hold governments, local and national, accountable for the well being of the marginalized, to implement appropriate policy changes and land reforms.

The principles that guide Jameen Hamara Haq Abhiyaaan’s actions are:

- Working within the framework of truth and non-violence at all levels of action.
- Ensuring that women and traditional tribal and Dalit leaders head the campaign for land reform.
- Inspiring equitable social, economic and political changes for the benefit of the masses.
- Supporting and strengthening traditional and local leadership.
- Promoting peaceful mass mobilization at the grass roots level.
- Promoting community based governance, local self reliance and responsible governance at the local, state and central levels.
- Promoting the integration of land, water and forest rights and equitable natural resource management in the regional, national and international development agendas⁵.

In her younger years, Subhadra participated in the Sarvodaya movement which encouraged the reconstruction and empowerment of the rural sector through increased participation at the grassroots level and more devolution of power to local authorities⁶. Its ultimate goal is to ensure that self-determination and equality is achieved by all strata of Indian society. She was an active defender of the rights of India’s tribal people, like Ranjini from the previous case study.

After being arrested several times on false charges along with other activists, as well as waging her own personal battle with the Madhya Pradesh government over her ancestral land, she has moved on from the land rights movement.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

DALIT WOMEN, LAND AND RESOURCE RIGHTS

Of the total women population of India, Dalit women constitute 16.3% of which 18% women live in rural areas⁷. Although they comprise a major part of India's agricultural workforce, few of them own land or other forms of livelihood resources. This means that should their husbands desert them or die, Dalit women are left to fend for themselves and their families. Without any ownership of resources, this can prove to be next to impossible.

Allocating land in the names of Dalit women is crucial, not only for their own survival, but for the entire country's wellbeing, as it will help eradicate hunger. Women as the traditional care givers are more likely to utilize resources they are given for the survival of the family and community.

"As the first law Minister of Independent India, Babasaheb Ambedkar tried to pilot a law to give equal inheritance rights to women and came up against stiff opposition. After four years of fruitless effort, he resigned in disgust in 1951. However, later such laws did get enacted in some states. In Madhya Pradesh, the law regarding inheritance of agricultural land clearly states that daughters as well as sons will have to be given an equal share of their parent's ancestral plot. However, in practice, this is never implemented⁸."

Today, people like Subhadra don't want to talk of women's land rights anymore. She now works on gender and reproductive health rights. After participating in such movements as Jameen Hamara Haq Abhiyaaan, she went on to work for the Katsurba Gandhi National Memorial Trust in a mobile health clinic in the mid 1990s⁹, their activities focusing mostly on women's reproductive health.

We need to understand the psychological aspect behind this change, and behind the struggle for power and negotiation. Land rights are still very much a contentious area of modern Indian law, and much work still needs to be done. So why this reluctance?

"Power within, power to and power over": this is the basis for negotiations for resource increases. The resource increase aspect lends and marks their self-confidence. In Subhadra Kharparde's life, acquiring rights over land had a notional value, but it didn't make an economic difference for her. This was an ideological victory, albeit with its share of

⁷ Tamil Nadu Women's Forum. *"Unheard Voices -DALIT WOMEN. An alternative report"*. For the 15th – 19th periodic report on India, submitted by the Government of Republic of India for the 70th session of Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Geneva, Switzerland (2007), p. 3.

⁸ Banerjee, Rahul. *Recovering the Lost Tongue, The Saga of Environmental Struggles in Central India*. Prachee Publications (2008), p. 243.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

emotional cost brought on by family strife. *“Everyone sees me differently when I go back to my village. Inspiration happened, but relationships back home have gotten so strained, the inspirational factor was therefore diminished”*. Today, she still shares this land with her siblings.

But what about her community’s support? *“Some people in the community silently supported me, but no one helped. My neighbour (next to my father’s house) also decided afterwards to fight for her share of the land. Her name is Purnina. She lived in her own home, but also obtained part of her parents’ land from her brother. She got it easily because her mother was supportive. She wanted to give her daughter land anyway”*.

So how would land ownership benefit other Dalit women? *“I was and still am a social worker. Simple women can get land. The problem is they have no knowledge about their rights. I have tried to give them this knowledge. They also need to take this knowledge from local NGOs, their friends, etc. As social workers, there is no lack of awareness! So NGOs have the responsibility to help others. But awareness alone doesn’t motivate women to take action. It also takes a lot of courage. Not many people want to take on the risks involved in fighting for their rights”*.

Women’s Land Rights in Madhya Pradesh

Amongst other arguments, research has found that people who are against giving women their fair share of land inheritance often claim that doing so would result in the fragmentation of family land, or its loss when the woman gets married. In fact, when villagers in Madhya Pradesh were interviewed, the majority were aware of women’s right to inherit land under the law, but also that they didn’t do so in reality¹⁰. This means that lack awareness of rights and laws isn’t the reason women in this state don’t have access to land ownership.

More important for women like Subhadra who do decide to claim their share even when it isn’t freely given to them, most people in the villages interviewed felt that a woman should not go to court to claim her rights. *“The opinions of the rest of the community appear very important to individuals and most do not wish to act in such a way as to have the community think badly of them”¹¹*. So changing attitudes may be of more value than changing the law... As Subhadra herself admits, *“going against your society’s framework is looked badly upon. If I was staying in my village I couldn’t have taken up this fight. If I stay there even for one month in my father’s home, people will draw attention to the fact that it is wrong. They say it was a mistake to give me my share”*.

¹⁰ Grace. J. A study of people’s perceptions of women’s right to land: two villages in Madhya Pradesh, central India. University of East Anglia, (2002). Online. <http://www.ektaparishad.com/pdf/asppowr.htm>.

¹¹

Subhadra came from a village background and got ousted for her work. After, she started working for women and health rights; she felt her husband's work overshadowed her own. She felt like she couldn't think in her own words. This is why getting an education and her Ph.D. is so important to her, to work on her own terms, completely independently. She is linking her current work to the slums in Indore (she went from a village context to this). *"I am thinking of other things for now, like doing my Ph.D. Right now, I just want to focus on getting more knowledge. I had joined a government help center to give relief to other women (in the sphere of health and reproductive rights)"*.

So is there a link between this work and land rights? *"Yes. For example, they asked and got a new watering well. Health rights are connected to the right to water. A healthy person is more capable of raising their voices, of demanding things from their Panchayat. I currently work with Dalits and Tribals. As for Dalit women, there is a community center for them in the slum area. I also worked with these women and the local governments to get infrastructure like drains, soak pits, community centers, through their self help groups. The local political party also supports them. There are 200 NGOs that help them"*.

Gender, Water and Sanitation in Madhya Pradesh

"Water and sanitation is not only a basic need but a provision of these services with consultation and participation of women will enable them to earn better livelihood and to take further initiatives for improvement¹²".

The right to proper sanitation and safe water is closely linked to land rights. Due to the time spent fetching water, girls cannot go to school, and women don't have time to work for wages. Therefore, the cycle of lacking education and resources impedes these women's capacity of standing up for their rights, just as Subhadra Kharparde was explaining.

"There is also erosion of dignity and embarrassment to women and to the girls who have to go to defecate in open grounds. Even more critical is the new factor of even these open grounds shrinking due to shifting of other slum dwellers there or the areas been taken for other development/construction work". Land and housing rights, as stated in the MDGs, are closely linked to water and sanitation, as the definition of adequate housing is supposed to guarantee both security of tenure, and adequacy of the lodging space (including safe water and sanitation). Therefore one cannot consider any of these aspects in isolation, and when civil engineers in India claim that there is no link between the provision of water and gender, they must be shown how faulty this belief really is.

¹² UN-HABITAT. *Navigating Gender in development of water and sanitation in urban areas: A rapid gender assessment of the cities of Bhopal, Gwalior, Indore and Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh, India*. P. 94.

The WRZ concept for which SAFP has been lobbying would take into consideration gender specific needs into account when planning new infrastructure and neighbourhoods. The right to water and sanitation is closely linked to this. *“The need of construction of joint washrooms for women which the women’s groups can construct, maintain and use as the houses do not have space for separate bathrooms. These are possibilities with dialogue and participation of women with an external catalyst and facilitator whom the women can trust”*¹³. This claim, made in a UN-Habitat report, is exactly the kind of project ideas that would make up women resource zones in Madhya Pradesh.

Subhadra herself has worked with groups that link the right to basic amenities and health care of women to urban planning: *“World vision, Cecoedecon and Indore Diocesan Social Service Society,(IDSSS) gave these women training and awareness about their rights. One example is a Deep Nagar group of women who work with a big hospital on their reproductive health issues. These they try to link with aspects of urbanization and services”*.

In any case, her own experience with big organisations and NGOs have led her to rely much more on her own strength, and she encourages other women to do so as well, to be self-reliant in every way, including in their fight for their rights. *“I’ve encouraged these women not to depend on larger organisations like IDSSS or the big hospital, but to register their own NGO and plan their own vision themselves. IDSSS should give them a certain funding and help them participate on the women’s self-defined needs and rights goals. They are having a salary as NGO workers, but their own transformation agenda has to come from themselves. Money has nothing to do with it. The funding influences what work is done, but the core issues remain. But the situation of these women is better now, as it is still an additional resource”*.

“Another problem I see is that speaking English is a requirement for getting a job, which these Dalit women don’t have”.

“One of the cheerful things happening in India is the quiet democratising of English. Dalits are today its biggest advocates because English allows them to work in call centres and other modern jobs where there are fewer caste barriers. A recent survey in Mumbai shows that Dalit women who knew English rose economically by marrying outside their caste--31% of Dalit women who knew English had inter-caste marriages compared to 9% who did not know the language¹⁴”. Perhaps Subhadra is on to something...

¹³ *Ibid.*, P. 95

¹⁴ Das, Gurcharan. *Stranger At Home* (2010). Online. <http://gurcharandas.blogspot.com/2010/08/stranger-at-home.html>.

So how does she use her income and resources now that she has achieved a certain level of material comfort? *“I had decided to buy an A/C, but I don’t have my own money. At the same time, I don’t want to use my husband’s earnings. We do have a trust (joint resource) which we both manage. But I have never taken a loan in my name. If I had to, I would probably ask a bank. I wish I could develop my own land, but I live too far (Indore), so I want to buy land here”*.

We then asked Subhadra how she thought she could increase her own, and other women’s negotiating power: *“I feel like I want to do my work without anyone disturbing me. So I am trying to get more knowledge to work without disturbances later on. This is the kind of power I seek. As for the Dalit women in slums that I work with, they are registered as an NGO, but they have no more money to operate it. The leader of this NGO and I think differently. Neither have I done any political work as of yet, with these dalit women”*.

What about the women in your constituency? *“Women came to work in our city. They aren’t going to fight for their land rights from here, for something they left in their villages back home”*.

It is clear that in absence of support either from their communities or from larger land and housing rights civil society efforts, well intentioned activist see little reason to take on an area of work that can not give tangible results. However, what could change the tide is women’s own assertion and demands which could be supported both by state as well as supporters of people’s movements.

What these case studies show is that it is strong and determined women, almost singlehandedly, who take it upon themselves to bring change within their societies when state and civil institutions let them down. With their struggle comes an increased awareness within their community that women also have the power to take on leadership roles and become active, contributing members of their society. It can be inferred that such women and others currently waiting in the sidelines for some kind of support, would greatly benefit from a greater share of the resource cake. Control over resources gives women more power in negotiating their relationships, in actively participating in their country’s economic and democratic processes, and in avoiding situations which put them at risk.

The Need for Change: Increasing the rights and resources of Muslim Women in Okhla, Delhi

Case study documentation by Harriet Winfrey on behalf of SAFP (Sathi All For Partnerships)

This case study compilation is part of SAFP work supported by National Commission for Women. Through these case studies we want to understand

what kind of resource women have been able to access and when resources are secured by women what is the experience of its impact, for herself and her community.

In SAFF experience it is harder for women to access resources than men. This struggle is harsher when the negotiation to gain resources is done within family. The family however does support the women in accessing resources outside for her to gain greater equality. Two young women from the west learnt about women resource increase work by documenting lives of women for this studies. They present to you these case “stories” as they understood each person’s context.

Introduction

Having myself lived, a relatively sheltered and comfortable life, I was immediately struck by the varying degrees of poverty that characterised the narrow and sinuous streets of Jamia Nagar. Whilst as far as I am aware, all of the residents of this area are affected by financial and circumstantial difficulties, being Muslim and thus in the marginalised classes of Indian society, it is easy to see that some are better provided for than others.

Within the space of a few hundred yards you could walk from an area which, although far from modern, was a hive of renovation work and brick buildings; properties that could withstand the test of time and of accordingly the unpredictable flooding of the Yamuna river. Whereas just a short walk towards the river itself, really no distance at all, unveils a mass of slum housing growing like mushrooms out of the muddy debris, the ground strewn with litter.

Rather than bricks and concrete, these dwellings are haphazardly constructed from corrugated iron sheets, tarpaulin weighed down with rocks, and the odd wooden plank. Alas pretty much whatever material each family can get their hands on will find a place within the construction, as make shift insulation or as a means of resisting the impact of the heavy monsoonal rains.

Those who live in the dilapidated confines of the slum are vulnerable not only to the unpredictable weather conditions, as epitomised by the floods that periodically destroy their homes. I was informed that destruction of such

dwelling is also wrought by the land mafia who in cooption with the police appropriate land, a process referred to as 'land grabbing'.

In line with this process of forced eviction and the demolition of slum housing, as well as the danger of flooding, the inhabitants of these areas are at high risk of dispossession.

For most, if not all, of these slum households the nearest source of drinkable water is a 3 kilometre walk, and only available at set times in the day, for an hour in the morning and at night (although I was informed that the consistence of such water supplies was far from reliable). Whilst pumps were available in the near locality, these appeared to be used solely for domestic chores and for bathing.

As is often the case, domestic chores were reserved solely for women, whilst the men, I was told, try to earn a few rupees either through rag picking, construction work, or on the rickshaws.

From what I could gather the only benefit to their circumstances was that the rent they paid for their property was usually less than 500 rupees per month; indeed in some cases rental payments were not applicable.

Speaking with a group of men working on one of the construction sites slightly inland we were told about the government involvement in the area.

Deemed to be unauthorised land, and therefore not under the full jurisdiction of the government, the social services and welfare provisions in this area can only be described as abysmal.

Whilst the men were expected to pay taxes, as well extortionate bribes to government officials to secure the tenure of their house, or the building plot they were working on, they received in return very little state support.

Schools were few and far between, 3 miles away and without the capacity to educate even a small proportion of the local children, and the local police focus was on extracting money for tenure and building materials (the price of which they were said to inflate about 20%, this surplus serving as an extra source of income) rather than ensuring the safety and well being of the people.

For women in particular this area is renowned for being unsafe, particularly at night.

A young girl we spoke with reported how she had been mugged at knife point on her way home from college one evening. On another occasion she said was subject to crude and deeply offensive verbal abuse. Indeed when we asked her what changes she would like to see happen within her community, her first and foremost concern was that the women's safety should be addressed.

The implications of what this young girl said suggested that for women living in this area, tasks that required them to be out of doors once it fell dark, left them vulnerable to both physical and verbal attack. I could not help but wonder whether this had any bearing on the women and young girls who had to walk 3 kilometres or more to obtain safe drinking water for their families and started to think about what other dangers there may be for women in the fulfilment of their daily household routines.

Our vision: the proposed project

SAFP is currently working on a process proposal that seeks to address the needs of the women who are largely Muslim living in the district of Okhla. Taking into consideration cultural constraints and social conditioning where parents may not permit women from leaving their locality; some project ideas were discussed with women in the community to aims firstly to argue the need for more gender resource centres (GRC's) within the district of Okhla.

These centres provide a one window system which enables women to apply for any number of government schemes with the help and guidance of centre staff, and without the need to approach the relevant government departments. Furthermore it provides women with much needed education about their constitutional and marital rights, and gives appropriate training about how to fill out forms as well as developing the women's skills in other areas.

The second part of the proposal seeks to establish many livelihood resource centres near different neighborhoods which will provide the women in this area with independent sources of income as well as new occupational skills. This livelihood resource space would be managed by women and it is hoped, will serve both as a source of empowerment and as a means to bring women from the community together.

Using as an example the women's canteen in the government secretariat office (which is run by and employs women) as a basis, SAFP seeks to explore the avenue for replicating a similar project in the Okhla poll area. The case study of the stree shakti canteen is included in this documentation as an inspiration and an example of what could be done in the area with cooperation of the Delhi secretariat by learning from their experience.

SAFP has been in consultation with numerous women's groups and organisations that operate in the area, as well as seeking advice from academics that specialise in the study of Muslim women. The following is derived from an interview with Professor Sabiha Hussain, an associate Professor at Dr. K R Narayanan's Centre for Dalit and Minorities Studies at Jamia Millia Islamia University. She has associated with SAFP as a member of the Consult for Women and Land Rights (CWLR), that has provided her a platform to discuss and debate women and resource rights issues at local, to international level.

Interview with Dr. Sabiha Hussain

Sabiha Hussain has published numerous papers on the identity and circumstances of Muslim women in India and currently works as an associate professor at the Jamia Millia Islamia, one of three central universities in Delhi. Working with some of the young women living within the Jamia district and having herself conducted extensive social studies about the welfare of Muslim women, Sabiha has significant personal and academic insight into the prospective needs of the nearby communities.

☆ ☆ ☆

One of six Muslim daughters growing up in one of the small towns in the province of Bihar, Sabiha attributes her early interest in academia to her parents.

Sabiha and all five of her sisters attained PhDs and have employment, which as she said reflects the encouragement and inspiration they received from their parents throughout their childhood and adolescence.

Her mother, in particular, was incredibly supportive of her daughters' academic development. Being herself very highly educated, however occupied

in her role as a housewife, Sabiha's mother wanted her children to enjoy and progress within their academic pursuits rather than adhere to the customary practice of marrying at a young age.

Her mother played an active role within the community, working as '*a kind of social worker*', so Sabiha became aware from a very young age what it meant to work with women at community level.

Following the encouragement of her parents, Sabiha first came to Delhi in 1979 to study an MA in Sociology at the JNU (Jawahrial Nehru University). She later went on to complete her MPhil and PhD.

During her time spent studying at the JNU she met her husband and they married shortly after her postgraduation.

☆ ☆ ☆

Growing up in a conservative small-town community was at times rather difficult for Sabiha and her family.

Over fifty percent of the town's population was Muslim so there was a lot of pressure upon families to conform and adhere to Islamic customs, one of which regarded the expectation that women should spend the majority of their time within the homestead and should always keep their heads and bodies covered if and when out in public (purdah).

The fact that none of the females within Sabiha's family wore burkha's was one of the reasons, she felt, that they were ostracised within the Muslim community.

As Sabiha explained, her real interest in the issues of Muslim women developed when she was approaching the end of twelfth standard, and therein nearing her school graduation.

Barely eighteen years old at the time, Sabiha, and her family, was subject to relentless criticism from the Muslim community: '*People used to criticise us, especially me, because I was athletic, the best athlete in the town at that time. I was also an active participant in cultural events: singing solos and performing in dramas, that kind of thing. So, me especially, I was criticised very much by the community.*'

Trying to understand the rationale behind this hostility Sabiha began to question why she was criticised, why it was not deemed acceptable that a young Muslim woman should showcase her talents.

Whilst her parents assured her that she had every right to show her abilities within the community, in doing so she seemed to defy an unspoken Muslim mentality which limits the amount women are willing or able to excel in things they are good at.

As Sabiha's says 'even today the situation is the same, the story I am referring to was back in the late 1980's, and still things have not changed.

Okay, they now acknowledge that Muslim women have a right to be educated; but the moment a woman progresses into higher education, a job? The traditional in the community may not approve.'

So, it was on this basis, her personal experiences of being stigmatised within the Muslim community because of her excellence, that Sabiha really started to question the social conditioning, the Islamic '*backwardness*', that affects Muslim women and their rights to both resources (for instance land and property) and to expression.

The problem, this social backwardness, as Sabiha understands it, is multidimensional and thus '*cannot be seen in isolation*'.

Muslim women she explains '*suffer from multiple wounds*', firstly they are women and so fall victim to the same kind of problems that all Indian women may at some time experience: domestic violence, limited rights, subordinate status and restrictions around education and work.

And the second problem is that they are Muslim, and so are subject to certain limitations and issues pertaining to their religion.

The result of which Sabiha explained is that under Indian jurisdiction Muslim women do not have the same legal rights as Hindu women

Sabiha referred to the Shahbano controversy, a case in which a Muslim woman following the divorce from her husband, tried to obtain maintenance payments from her ex-husband under Indian law:

The Shah Bano case took place in 1985.

At that time Shah Bano was 65 years old, the mother of five.

She was divorced by her husband in 1978 and was evicted from the house in which she and her husband had lived.

Denied alimony Shah Bano decided to stand for her rights as an Indian woman and attempted to claim maintenance payments, from her ex-husband, under secular law.

She argued that she was a citizen of India and therefore had the same constitutional rights, to claim alimony, as any Hindu woman.

This case received a lot of public and political attention.

The national parties of India, the BJP and the Congress party, as well as Islamic scholars, the personal law board (an organisation that was formed because of the Shah Bano case) and of course the Muslim community got involved.

Whilst the judgement had initially been given in Shah Bano's favour, under section 125 of Code of Criminal Procedure, pressure from the Muslim community, who opposed the ruling, led to a reassessment of the case.

The Muslim community were outraged that the Supreme Court had, as they saw it, intervened in their personal matters and had encroached upon the Muslim Personal Law.

Under this law a woman should only receive alimony payments over the iddat period (the initial 3 months after she is divorced) and not for any longer.

So for Shah Bano to receive payments for more than a three month period was prohibited by the Muslim faith, under the Muslim Personal Law, and thus in doing so she would be regarded as committing haraam (acts that are forbidden or undermine the premises of Islam).

So consequently Shah Bano was put under tremendous public pressure to take back her decision and as a result of this she revoked her claim.

In the immediate aftermath of this fiasco a law was passed (The Muslim Women Act, 1986) which stipulated that Muslim women were not permitted to claim for maintenance under secular law. This was the first act of its kind to be passed since India's independence in 1947.

Indeed the last act relating to Muslim conduct was the Muslim Marriage Dissolution Act, in 1939, and before that the Shariat Act, 1937.

As Sabiha pointed out, around this time India witnessed a mass women's movement. Although this movement started in 1975, following the Shah Bano case many Muslim women became involved on the premise that they were *'first and foremost Indian women, and although they were Muslim, there was no basis under which they should be denied the constitutional right (as citizens of India) to claim maintenance in the same way that Hindu women can.'*

Although Sabiha was still a child at the time this all took place, these events greatly influenced her academic career in later years as she sought to study the implications of divorce for Muslim women: *'I found that within the Muslim community, divorced women more often than not have a miserable existence as a result of the ruling of this Muslim Women Act.'*

In one of her own research projects Sabiha conducted a case study of 25 divorced Muslim women, all under the age of 35. What she found was that none of these 25 women had received their Mahr.

As she explained, unlike Hindu marriage, Islamic marriage is not a sacrament; rather it is a contract between the husband and wife.

Within this contract a wife is entitled and expected to receive Mahr from her husband: *'Mahr is an important component of Muslim marriage...a gift which may be in the form of cash or kind, or possibly both, whatever has been pre-negotiated by the couple'.*

So in the case of these 25 women, not a single one of them had received this component of the marriage contract.

Further investigations revealed that the maintenance payments that women were entitled to during the three month iddat period had also not been made. In one or two cases maintenance had been paid for one or two months but never for the full three.

As Sabiha said *'the tragic part is that there is no enforcement, no legal body that ensures that a woman receives all that she is entitled to. There is a Shariat code, which technically entitles the wife to anything that she and her husband possess, with the exception of his land and his source of income.'* However as she had already explained this code has been superseded by later laws which dramatically reduced such rights.

Although there was an avenue for the wife to assert her rightful claims, through the Shariat court, there were issues around implementing and enforcing any rulings made by the presiding Mufti (a scholar and the acting judge within these hearings).

As Sabiha said 'whilst they could rule that the Mahr was to be given to the bride, that she be paid a dowry and maintenance for the duration of iddat; they were unable to enforce these rulings, so effectively there is no guarantee that the woman will receive anything at all.

Enforcement of these payments can be sought only through the secular court.'

So why in that case, were more divorced women approaching the secular court to resolve their monetary disputes?

In response to my question Sabiha explained that firstly any woman who has been divorced by her husband is likely to fall subject to stigmatisation within the community.

Furthermore due to the nature of her problems, as a newly divorced woman, which falls under the jurisdiction of the Shariat codes, the natural progression would be to consult the Shariat court.

So under normal circumstances, the woman and her parents would usually approach the Shariat court as an initial point of judicial contact.

The Shariat court itself, I was told, is biased in favour of the husband. Whereas the wife may only be accompanied into the courtroom by her biological father and brother, her husband is, within reason, able to bring any number of relatives to the hearing.

Although the woman and her family do not stand to lose their prestige within the community, as their decision to take matters to the Shariat court would be respected by others in the neighbourhood, she is still at a significant risk of losing everything as (as already suggested) there are no means for enforcing the court's ruling.

The decision to take matters to the secular court, on the other hand, would automatically receive great disapproval from the Muslim community.

By definition the secular court is a very public arena in which to resolve matters of this kind, so what often happens is that numerous members of the community will come to watch. This of course exacerbates the public humiliation experienced by the woman and her family.

Whilst rulings of the secular court may be beneficial in as much that they can be legally enforced, the negative social implications for the woman and her family are vast and thus serve as an effective deterrent.

Sabiha's point, as she explained, was that the perceived 'backwardness' and problems she has observed over the years of her studies on Muslim women are unique to Muslim women, in as much that they are very much conditioned by Islamic ideology, *'in the name of Koran and in the name of identity politics'*.

As she said, **in her own work she had often been questioned as to why she talks about the issues of Muslim women as being separate from the issues of all Indian women.** Indeed she does not deny that in many respects both Hindu and Muslim women suffer from the same afflictions: *'backwardness, domestic violence, female foeticide...it is the same for women of both Hindu and Muslim communities. But what is very special to Muslim women is that in the name of Shariat, in the name of religion, in the name of Koran, and in the name of identity politics they have no choice but to accept the way they are treated by their husbands and within the wider community.'*

Whilst on first appearances these seem to be internal matters, the overriding issues are the identity politics played out by political parties and international bodies; and these identity politics are one of the major causes of the state of backwardness that affects Muslim communities.'

On the basis that Muslim women evidently do not have the same constitutional rights as Hindu women when it comes to marital disputes, what provisions, if any, do they receive from the government?

Surprisingly Sabiha reported that there were *'many provisions: government schemes for women's empowerment and the 15 Point programme, which addresses the welfare of minorities in areas like education, habitat and communal violence. Because Muslims represent the largest minority group in India (15% of the total population) they are the primary beneficiaries of this particular government programme. So, in answer to your question, yes there are special provisions for Muslims, moreover there are some provisions for*

Muslim women also: divorced women, widow's pension. Widow's pension is awarded irrespective of religious affiliation.'

In terms of divorce also, Sabiha said that developments had been made, as demonstrated by the implementation of a new government scheme in the state of Bihar. Although, to date, Sabiha has not been involved in this scheme she expressed a desire to work in this project, or something similar, in the future.

The important thing to remember, as Sabiha suggested, is that in order for such social transformations to occur, in the form of new intervention strategies and the evolution of state policies, *'research must be conducted and relevant data must be collected. You must bear in mind that prior to the 1990's there were very little empirical studies on the social condition of Muslim women. The only discourses about women in Islam that emerged around this time adopted a gender framework.*

Seeing the limitations of this approach I decided within my own work to adopt a style of research that looked at the backwardness of Muslim women from both gender and programmatic perspectives.

I have made a conscious effort to replicate this approach, of considering the two perspectives simultaneously, in all my subsequent research projects.'

So your academic work has a greater purpose? Is it your intention to use your work as a basis for demanding changes in policy?

Sabiha immediately responded, *'yes of course this is my aim, you need data in order to support your academic arguments, and thus to demand change.'*

Using her role within the CWLR (Consult for women and land rights) as an example, Sabiha explained how part of their work focussed on increasing the rights of Muslim women to landed property:

'The 1937 Shariat Application Act suggests that Muslim women do not have a right in landed property, in agricultural land. So part of my work within the CWLR has been to try and persuade the government to amend this act, and in doing so to increase the property rights of Muslim women.'

In order to change such social realities Sabiha noted a need to provide Muslim with information about their rights and what schemes they are entitled to, and

also basic training and help in certain skill areas, for instance in filling out application forms.

So, in line with her work as a member of the CWLR, and in agreement with the project proposal currently being endorsed by SAFF, Sabiha sites the need for information resource centres within Jamia.

In addition to a gender resource centre she concurs that, in the event that resources are provided for such a project, it would also be beneficial to look at also opening a livelihood resource centre which will not only provide women with employment, and thus a wage, but also will provide training that will improve their skill base. *'If we do get given land from the government or the community, I would like to see at least one information centre and one livelihood resource open in Okhla.'*

As Sabiha went on to explain, whatever resources are put into improving the livelihoods of Muslim women they must work in and around the religious and cultural constraints that they are subject to.

'For instance we have to consider purdah. The majority of Muslim women will be observing purdah by wearing some form of scarf or Nacab. So when considering what livelihood resources may be possible for women in this community it is important that we take into consideration what activities may be possible and accepted in and around existing cultural practices: like purdah; like prayer.'

About these resources of livelihood I would like to mention what I have mentioned in the meetings of the CWLR, with regards to the NREGA programme. Under NREGA, those who are below the poverty line are entitled to obtain 90 days of paid employment per annum. Looking at the data on Muslim communities below the poverty line, the percentage is much higher than the national average.

But the problem is that this kind of employment, this outside employment, is not accessible for Muslim women. Road construction, bridge construction, canal construction, building construction; firstly these all involve manual labour, which is generally unsuitable for women, and secondly it involves going out of the community.

Muslim women under purdah cannot go out so automatically they are deprived of that provision.

So we, in our planning, should think about a form of employment that we can provide which fits into the norms and expectations of the community.'

Furthermore in order for such a project to take hold Sabiha noted the importance of community involvement. As she argued it was not enough to expect the state to provide all the resources for such a project, the community *'needs to want to help themselves'*.

In order for the community to develop, the members of said community need to participate in the development process. So, as Sabiha argued, both the community and the state should play an active role in such a project.

It may be for instance, that the state is unable or unwilling to provide or identify space for such a venture, in which case the community should perhaps play a role in obtaining or indentifying plots of land.

As Sabiha also argued, 'once an organisation is recognised by the government, there is the potential that they will be given official land. Indeed organisations like Jamaat-e-Islami have been allocated land by the state.'

So it is therefore important that the community themselves work collaboratively with NGO's and other development practitioners, to get their needs and wishes recognised at both community and state level.

As Sabiha hopes, 'Once this space has been provided, by either the community, the government or by both, Muslim women will be able to benefit from better information and livelihood resources.'

Of course in addition to considerations of religious constraints and the necessity for community action, as part of the planning process one must also consider other obstacles that may inhibit the women's capacity to access such resources.

On this basis I asked Sabiha whether in her own personal and professional opinion she could envisage any potential problems in getting the Muslim

women of Okhla constituency involved in a livelihood resource, in encouraging them to seek advice from an information centre.

Did she think the women would have reservations about utilising these resources? Would there be any associated risks (of stigmatisation within the community for instance)? What sort of encouragement did she think would be necessary? And, most importantly what are the benefits and do they outweigh the constraints?

The following is a direct quote of Sabiha's response

'Okay first of all we should look into the constraints. Constraints are many, and at various levels. But we should look for the solutions; we should not dwell on the constraints. Constraints can be removed by educating these women. By themselves these women, they are not conservative. Let me tell you because I have worked a lot with women in the community.

They are very much in favour of change, in favour of getting education, in favour of getting employment, in favour of interacting with other women from other communities, in favour of moving forward with the times.

But the major obstacle is that the community as a whole is economically and educationally backward. And if the community as a whole is educationally and economically backward then it (the community) will not allow a woman to better her educational capacity. For example if her husband is less educated than she, would he realistically allow his wife to progress into higher education? No, never!

Say a wife is earning more than her husband....within the Asian mentality, the same mentality prevalent throughout developing countries, the mentality of men and patriarchy. So under this mentality if a wife was to earn more than her husband, the likely result is that there becomes some form of clash of interests, or friction, within the marital relationship. This is an example of one of the numerous causal factors leading to domestic violence, which of course is very common throughout India.

So if the community as a whole is economically, educationally, and politically backward the women, they struggle ten times more than women of communities who are economically and educationally better off. So class, caste,

community...these are just a few of numerous barriers that may inhibit progress.

Although there is no caste in Islam, an individual is either an Ashraf or a non-Ashraf; in India due to the influence of the Hindu community, the Muslims have divided themselves into a class like structure¹⁵.

So Muslim women, they have various obstacles. But let me tell you, they are willing to overcome all of those obstacles if they have support, from the government and community.

So if this centre is opened and it is run by women, only women; an information centre run by women, a livelihood resource centre run by women, I don't think that a lot of women would have any objection in coming to such centres.

The only thing I would recommend is that the government, or indeed we as development practitioners, devises a gender sensitive policy which accommodates the religious beliefs of the Muslim community, and simultaneously addresses their needs...having myself worked on the issues of Muslim women for over fifteen years, I feel that if it is a question of purdah or livelihood, the Muslim women would discard purdah in order to better their livelihood resources.'

In terms of Sabiha's role, as a highly regarded Professor at Jamia Millia Islamia, and an expert in the sociological study of Muslim women, what sort of role would she be willing to take in a project like this? And how would her contributions fit in around the efforts of other organisations and the community itself?

As a team of individuals (academics and NGO workers alike) all working to achieve same eventual goal, Sabiha felt that the primary concern should be to adopt language, behaviour and practices that was suited to the Muslim community.

On this basis she argued that it was necessary to use passages from the Koran, the religious text of Islam, as a means of educating the women and making them aware of their constitutional rights.

This '*Islamic tool*', as she called it, had the potential to have a deep and lasting impact on the women.

So, using verses of the Koran as a basis for talking about issues of land ownership, property and divorce rights, an Islamic approach works in and

¹⁵ This stratification is seen to date back to the 14th century as reflected by the writings of a Ziauddin Barani

around the dominant religious conditions and ideals at community level: *'we must use Islam as a tool to educate women, to expose them to the various developments taking place within the community and wider society.'*

As she insists, we as activists and proponents of this particular strategy (a strategy that endorses the provision of information centres and livelihood resources) within the community of Jamia have a responsibility to adopt an approach that is both sympathetic of and appropriate to the community in question.

Similarly, she argued, the government has its own responsibilities and role within this process which again, we as activists, need to make them aware of.

So, on the one hand this process of development and resource provision, requires an Islamic approach (certainly in terms of how it is applied within the community itself) and on the other it will require an adaptation of existing state policies, so that development can occur both the level of community and at the level of state.

So in order to get the state to listen to a proposal, to realise the need for such provisions within the Jamia community, and to take appropriate action; is it not necessary to gather a number of women, residents of Jamia, who are in support of this project? Perhaps those women who would be looking to get involved in some capacity once the information centre and livelihood resource provisions were established?

As Sabiha suggested, of course support from women in the community would benefit the argument that these services and resources need to be provided in Jamia.

However as she said what these women really need is to be represented within the government, and in other roles of leadership.

'If we are talking about the issues experienced by Muslim women, the leadership of such discussions, such movements should be in the hands of Muslim women.

If, for instance, I was to talk about opening up an information resource centre, what vision do I, as a Muslim woman, have?

I have a vision that okay, Muslim women are exporting, tailoring, cutting, doing embroidery, making beads; and thus they already have some capacity and skill in this area of expertise.

So, bearing this in mind, and thinking towards livelihood resources, if we were to be allocated physical space, by the government or whatever, we should look at trying to make a business that utilises the skills the women already have.

Indeed sewing would not require the women to go out of their community and therefore it would not undermine purdah or any of their other religious practices.

So long as we put in place a chain that will enable their product to go to the wider market they too can take part in a business that provides them with their own, independent source of income.'

So, as she above argues, the women need to take a leading role and identify amongst themselves what kind of livelihood strategy may be possible and beneficial for the women within their community. In other words the Muslim women of the area must make their opinions and wishes known. Indeed only they have the insight and experience to say what it is that they collectively need.

Until now, as I was informed, the representation of Muslim women at state level has been in the hands of only three individuals, all of whom *'come from elite classes within society and thus know nothing about the livelihoods and experiences of the lower classes, particularly in areas like Okhla.'*

As Sabiha argued, if there was a greater representation of Muslim women at state level around the time of the Shah Bano controversy, the case would possibly have not concluded as it did, and thus the Muslim Women Act may never have been passed.

Because Muslim women were not adequately represented at State level at this time (or indeed since) laws were passed that greatly reduced their constitutional rights.

So, In order for future decisions to be equitable, and take into consideration the needs of minority groups like Muslim women, surely it is necessary that more seats in all three tiers of the government (at panchayat, state and national levels) are reserved specifically for women.

As Sabiha explained, one of the main arguments of CWLR, supports this need for higher representation of women within local and national government.

There is an ongoing debate in India that they should reserve 33% of parliamentary seats for women, furthermore that within this 33% there should be a sub-quota of seats that are allocated specifically for Muslim women.

For more information on these debates Sabiha suggested that I look at an article she had written on the representation of Muslim women within national government, this article 'Doubly deprived' may be found in the March-April issue of India's Frontline Magazine (Volume 27, Issue 7: March 27th-April 9th, 2010).

So what is needed in order for Muslim women to participate in the development process, Sabiha argues, is a three step approach.

'Firstly Muslim women should be given full information about their rights, moreover they should be educated. Secondly, it is important that Muslim women receive support both from within their own communities, and from the state.

And finally Muslim women should be given the opportunity and encouragement to become leaders both within their own neighbourhood and within state and central government.'

So in terms of the resources Sabiha would be able to bring to a project like this, would she be willing or able to utilise her personal and academic experience to assist say in the design and implementation of an Islamic framework which could be used, as she said, to change the way in which Muslim men and women interpret the Koran? Serving as a basis also for changing the way they perceive themselves and their rights within the community.

In the response I was given to this line of questioning, it became immediately apparent that Sabiha had already been involved in the design of an Islamic framework, a '*fifteen step approach*' which, as she said, sought to address existing problems around the rights of Muslim women.

Within her professional capacity as a university professor both Sabiha and her colleagues had been trying to implement this approach within their own teaching practices. So, as Sabiha explained, within Jamia Millia Islamia there has been a concerted effort in recent years to educate male and female students, from an early age, as to what duties and rights they have as a member of the Muslim community and to encourage them to view themselves as having equal rights.

In the same way that Sabiha received encouragement from her parents during her formative years she now encourages the academic progression and self confidence within her students, and as she said currently acts as student mentor and counsellor in addition to her role as a lecturer.

The hope she has is that prevailing imbalances between the relative rights of men and women will in the future become less as the younger generation are taught to view the teachings of Islam as being gender equal and therein be encouraged to allocate more rights and resources to Muslim women.

As Sabiha explained 'of course there is a requirement that this framework is introduced, and Jamia, providing education from nursery right through to PhD programmes, is an ideal place to introduce this kind of information at school level.'

The fifteen step framework had also been implemented elsewhere, as Sabiha explained; attempts to implement the Islamic framework were also occurring in Rajasthan and Hyderabad.

A booklet detailing the legal rights of Muslim women, in terms of their rights to education and employment and also their role and rights within the family, had been printed and translated into *Urdu, Hindi* as well as *English*.

This leaflet examines verses of the Koran, looking specifically at sections that can be used as a basis for discussing the rights of Muslim women: *'the verses of the Koran which suggest that all human beings have an equal right to education, to livelihood resources and to marital property; and using them as a basis to consider the rights of women within their family role.*

The aim of this is to show that Muslim women have a right to property and resources, as she is a daughter, a wife, a mother, and as such, within each of these statuses, she has rights.'

On the basis that Sabiha within her role at Jamia Millia Islamia is using an Islamic framework within her own teaching practices, and in doing so is hopefully changing the way young women perceive their own rights; and given that, within Sabiha's capacity as a mentor, she oversees the development of many young Muslim women, is there an opportunity for some of these young women to work within the community?

If the support of the Muslim community is required to inaugurate a project that provides Muslim women with increased resources would perhaps Sabiha's students be able to have a role in implementing Islamic teaching tools within the community, in getting the women together and gaining their support?

Sabiha felt that this may well be possible, however there would need to be a platform, a basis, on which such a strategy could be implemented. As she said *'it is not viable for me to send my students to go out and address women within the community. Not even I can just go and address the women. The CWLR, for instance, provides a platform on which I have, in the past, raised many issues in the presence of Muslim women.*

The Muslim Womens Forum, also, they have invited me to speak about my research, again providing this platform which enables me to address the community. So, in short, we need either to locate a readymade platform or establish a platform ourselves on which such discussions can take place. Then I have no doubt that the girls I work with would be willing to go out and spread the word; without a moment's hesitation.'

As part of a wider research study SAFP is doing into the resource access and control of individual women, and on the basis of what Sabiha had already discussed, I was interested to see to what degree she had ownership and access over her own household's resources.

The support and encouragement Sabiha had received from her parents extended also into her subsequent relationships with both her husband and daughter who were both, she said, were very supportive of her in her work and within her role at home.

In terms of the negotiations she had made regarding the ownership of resources within her own household she said that she and her husband each officially had 50% ownership over the property itself, and likewise an equal share in its contents.

Whilst she had not initially been worried about drawing up a contract that asserted her rights to the property, she voiced a concern to her husband that should anything happen to him, *'you can never predict how or when these*

things may occur’, under Islamic law she would stand to lose everything: *‘the likelihood is that it would all go to his brother’s children’*.

Upon hearing this it was actually her husband who suggested that they go to the court and draw up a contract that gave them equal rights to everything that they together own.

So, as Sabiha said, *‘every article in our home is shared. My husband and I, we also have a flat, which is currently in my name; however, once our daughter turns eighteen we plan to transfer the ownership over to her.’*

Sabiha agreed that her husband’s support was very important to her and enabled her to do many things that other women could not: *‘everyone is not as lucky as I am. Indeed even my sisters, many of them do not have the privilege of receiving support from their husband’s.’*

In terms of balancing her reproductive role as mother and wife with her work commitments, Sabiha reflected how the university had been very amenable to her needs and her superior as well as her colleagues were more than willing to shift around her teaching slots, swapping times, so that she was able to fulfil her duties as a mother. She said that she had literally that morning changed one of her teaching slots to earlier in the day in order that she could be at home to prepare lunch for her daughter when she gets back from class at 1.30pm.

So as Sabiha suggested the power of negotiation plays a very important role within her own life, and likewise is very important to the wellbeing of Muslim women: *‘women must develop the power of negotiation, whether it is within the home or the workplace. If you don’t have this capability, the capacity of negotiation you are going to suffer. As a woman, as a professional, as an academic, as a mother, as a wife, this is my experience. You must have the power of negotiation.’*

So what can we derive from all of this?

Having met with Sabiha and discussed what provisions she, on the basis of her academic and experiential understanding, feels are necessary for women living in Okhla, we have come away with three things.

Firstly, like she says, SAFF is right in its assumptions that these women require both a livelihood resource and a GRC which will provide appropriate training and information about their resource rights.

Thus SAFF now has an academic basis (Sabiha's testimony) that lends support to the proposed project and acknowledged the necessity for these resources to be put in place.

Secondly as Sabiha said, in order for gender inequalities to significantly change Muslim communities (both men and women) need to alter the way in which they think and behave. The Islamic tools, Sabiha refers to, may provide a means by which this change in attitude can come about.

By teaching the Koran in a way that asserts the rights of females it may be possible to encourage Muslim communities to become more gender sensitive in both their everyday activities, and hopefully in time, within judicial proceedings (around marital rights for instance).

On this basis SAFF may also need to consider what aspects of the Islamic framework may need to be implemented in order for a project like this to be firmly established and utilised by women within a district.

The third, and perhaps the most important message to take away from this discussion is the fact that the Muslim women are ready and prepared to change. Referring back to Sabiha's earlier comment, *'if it is a question of purdah or livelihood, the Muslim women would discard purdah in order to better their livelihood resources'*, we have evidence, a take home message to suggest that change, within the lives of Muslim women, is possible.

Moreover if, as Sabiha says, the women are eager to change SAFF has a basis to argue that any provisions that are allocated by the government (or indeed by the community) can be utilised effectively. In other words, any efforts that are invested into a project that addresses the needs and rights of Muslim women are likely to yield favourable results.

**EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH RESOURCES:
THE CASE OF THE MISSION CONVERGENCE
STRI SHAKTI CANTEEN**

A Case Study
By Emmanuelle Paris Cohen

Introduction

Like many other young graduates before me, I came to India to intern at Sathi All for Partnerships in search of an experience which would give me the kind of 'grass-roots' work exposure which is so difficult to secure when one enters the job market.

Knowing what to expect on paper, however, in no way prepares for the shock one gets when working in India as a Canadian who has never been to this part of the world before. The abject poverty is overwhelming, yet it rubs shoulders with the kind of luxury and riches one would encounter in Dubai or Geneva; The effects the two major religions, Hinduism and Islam, have had on traditional and cultural practices, and the kind of patriarchy which permeates everyday encounters. The caste system, although officially discarded and combated, one can sense the grip it still has on modern Indian society: whether it is in the workplace, politics, friendships, etc. But especially relevant for the organization that I work with, and to me personally, is how women are unequally burdened by these factors, as opposed to men.

As introduced in the previous section and case study, Muslim women are particularly vulnerable to discriminatory practices and suffer disproportionately of poverty¹⁶. First, because the Muslim population of India as historically been discriminated against by the Hindu majority¹⁷, and second because they themselves are held as inferior to men by the traditional and uneducated Muslim society within which they live. And the cycle continues...

Instead of dwelling on obstacles, one might find it equally, if not more useful to focus on examples of initiatives which were successful in empowering Indian women, by giving them the opportunity to work outside of their homes, thereby increasing their visibility and legitimacy in the public sphere.

Indeed, one of the objectives SAFF is trying to achieve is to give women opportunities to take on productive roles in society, while gradually sharing their reproductive role amongst members and organizations of their immediate community, much like it was before market and migration broke down community care structures. In the west such planning was done. For instance, no one would think twice in Canada of a woman who entrusts her elderly neighbor or local daycare center with her children while she goes to work. In fact, she would be lauded for her bravery at taking on both the roles of mother and professional. In India, especially within traditional Muslim communities, however, this is simply not the case.

¹⁶ Government of India. *Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community of India: A report.* (2006). Prime Minister's High Level Committee, Cabinet Secretariat: P. 125.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, P. 22: the Muslims, the largest minority community in the country, constituting 13.4 per cent of the population, are seriously lagging behind in terms of most of the human development indicators.

The SAFP advocacy for Women Resource Zone seeks to make it acceptable for women to become earners and to take an active part in the economic development of their neighborhood/district, albeit taking small steps. The following case study looks at an initiative taken on by the Mission Convergence office of the Delhi Government, a canteen run by a women's NGO. Both the government and the organization are perceived to have legitimacy within the population. Therefore, when participating women inform their husbands and families that they are choosing to leave their home for work, the chance of them disapproving is lower.

The Mission Convergence Office, whose role it is to see that social welfare and other related programs are coherent, related and actually reach their intended targets, oversees the execution of Gender Resource Centers (GRCs) in the city's many localities. The predominantly Muslim area of Okhla has two.

For these reasons, which we will detail below, the initiative has been a big success. Therefore, we decided to take a closer look at it by doing a case study of the Director of Mission Convergence Ms. Rashmi Singh, and of its potential for replication, hoping that canteens could be implanted elsewhere in Okhla region with help of Jamia University , and by existing NGOs that run women training projects and run the GRCs.

Encouragingly, Ms. Singh as well as the canteen's management team (women, of course!) have agreed to host women's groups from Okhla within their facilities to train them in the art of canteen and catering services.



On August 6th 2009, the Stri Shakti Canteen was inaugurated at the Mission Convergence office in New Delhi. Stri Shakti, an NGO which has also been running a Gender Resource Center (GRC), is empowering women by giving them space in the Delhi Secretariat to manage the building's cafeteria, making quality food, and running a catering service. It has also been training the women to acquire skill sets which are necessary in management and administration of a business. The women are working solely for the social benefits of being associated with the organization: *they receive no income.*

Going out of the house, working, being part of a women's group is incentive enough for them, as we have learned through interviews and discussions. At home, they may be undervalued or mistreated. Here, their sense of self-esteem and empowerment is enhanced, and they feel active. Essentially, the canteen is a place for them to feel safe, to feel productive, and to interact with other like-minded women.

So what exactly is a GRC, and how does it contribute to the cause of women in India? An initiative of Ms. Sheila Dixit, Chief Minister of the National Capital Territory of Delhi and the Department of Social Welfare (DSW), Stree Shakti, or the Power of women was launched in 2002. It is meant to be a permanent tool that would cater to marginalized groups of women in the capital.

Its official mission is to “empower each and every woman in the community to achieve her fullest potential, protected from illness and injury-whether physical or emotional and to ably lead a healthy and respectful life by promoting sustainable use of available resources¹⁸”

The typical GRC conducts activities in the following areas:

1. Social Empowerment
2. Legal Rights
3. Health Aspects
4. Non-Formal functional Literacy
5. Economic initiatives-Skill building/Vocational Training in Conventional and Non Conventional trades. Micro enterprise and entrepreneurship Development through Self-Help Groups.
6. Information-Cum-Facilitation Center for information sharing and Networking Aspects.

Ms. Rashmi Singh who's case study is included in this section, has been instrumental in institutionalizing the GRCs' network (Stree Kosh, Gender Resource Centres-Suvidha Kendras). These centers act as a bridge between the government and the community. They are a one-stop facilitation centre for marginalized women and provide regular vocational training courses and assist in instituting SHGs. GRCs also help in building marketing linkages, they organize health clinics and provide access to counselling, legal services as well as access to various government schemes and programmes.

¹⁸Department of Women and Child Development, Government of NCT of Delhi. Online: <http://wcdde.in/streesakti.html>.

On the 8th of March 2010, the GRC structure was adopted by the Government of India's Ministry of Women & Child Development as a replicable model for other states.

The quality and ethics espoused by Stri Shakti in its other NGO work and in its presentation for Mission Convergence were a winning combination in terms of securing the canteen contract:

- The canteen establishment is like a pilot project, in which a government department relaxes financial norms to hire services for its establishment for women as a group.
- The canteen management was open for bidding to the 80 NGOs already running GRCs across Delhi.
- Stri Shakti had previously been part of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) program of the government. It was working to protect the quality of food and employing women in the framework of the ICDS program.
- So ultimately, the selection criteria for the managing organization were based not on price, but on quality and organizational ethos.
- The General Administrative Department is responsible for the Stri Shakti contract with the guarantee of Mission Convergence.

The interest of SAFF in this initiative lies in the fact that a women run canteen is an entrepreneurial project which can easily be replicated elsewhere. Food and catering services are required everywhere, and the training needed to operate such a business is relatively basic.

In fact, in Kerala, where SAFF has also been advocating for the implementation of women resource zones, the government associated women's group, Kudumbashree, has been very successful at launching the same sort of canteen services across the state. According to Ms. Cigi Mol, an employee of the organization, even in very poor areas, where many women run enterprises were tested and failed, canteens have been the only successful and self-sustainable initiatives.

So our question was: what about in Okhla? Could a canteen be run by women's group from the Batla House community center for example?

How would one go about replicating a women run canteen in other locations?

We asked this question to Ms. Suruchi Aggarwal, Volunteer Coordinator at the Mission Convergence. Based on her experience developing the menu changes and participating in management back-up support of the canteen, here were her suggestions:

"I would gather 2-3 Women's Self Help Groups (SHGs) and train their members on how to run a cafeteria. I would organise sessions on entrepreneurial skills, budgeting procedure, management of staff, arrangements of cutlery, tables, chairs, mats, cash register and basic accounting." Possibly, such training could be achieved with the help of Stri Shakti itself, as we would inquire later on... "On the basis of this training, some women would be shortlisted to manage the canteen. The rest would work as employees."

We then asked Suruchi whether she knew what kind of infrastructure and livelihood resources for running such a canteen would be necessary. We were hoping to also get a better idea of the manageability of such a project, and to evaluate the possibilities for our ideas in Okhla.

According to Suruchi, the infrastructure needs and start-up essentials for a canteen would be *"Ideally, a pre-existing structure where a canteen is running (government or corporate office, hostel, school, etc.), otherwise, the canteen could run out of a corporate house or rented space, close enough to its client*

base. A training space would also be required, as well as a start up budget for training of about 50 000 Rps. and capital assets of about 1-1.5 laks”.

We also had the occasion to speak with the canteen manager, Ms. Sonia Bedi. When initially asked what has she altered in her life after being empowered through Stree shakti , she was first reluctant to talk. She approached us later on, saying she had never given the idea any consideration, but after our questions, she pondered on the subject. The next time we met, with much emotion, she shared with us her own struggle in terms of securing assets: *“I was able to buy off my husband’s family’s house with money my father gave me and from my own savings, when his family’s assets were being negotiated. Today, the house is in my name. I never thought of it as something empowering, because it was always associated with the struggle I went through to retain a home for my family” Her husband had to give away his right over family business which went to his brother and they needed to buy the share of others in the house to be owners of the whole house. If not for her fathers help and her savings groups loan she could not have paid for the property. “ I now realize how life transforming owning a home in my name is for me, I thank you for this awareness. Ever since I have been asking all women working in the canteen that they must use their saving to gain assets in their name, if possible at all”*

Today, Ms. Bedi is has added income for her family by renting a portion of her house and thereby sent her son to good boarding school. She is very proud of her accomplishments, notably running the canteen. Empowering Ms. Bedi by giving her this awareness of just how important it is for a woman to be able to own something in her name, to run an enterprise, to be self-sufficient may have been just as important as any other activities SAFP conducts. From her new-found awareness, Ms. Bedi might then spread this knowledge to other women.

In India, as in the rest of South-East Asia, women have had great difficulties achieving security of tenure, even though their equal right to access, own and control land and adequate housing is established in international law¹⁹. One of the major obstacles to this has been a lack of awareness, from both women and men’s sides, as to what exactly are they entitled to under human rights laws.

¹⁹ Benschop, Marjolaine, *“Women’s Rights to Land and Property”*. Commission on Sustainable Development -, Women in Human Settlements Development - Challenges and Opportunities. UN-Habitat, (2004).

One of the strategies espoused by UN-Habitat and other institutions under the Millennium Development Goal of Gender Equality, has been awareness raising through the wide dissemination of international and regional human rights instruments recognizing women's equal land, housing and property rights²⁰.

Based on these discussions with Ms. Bedi, Ms. Aggarwal, and other canteen staff, we can make the following conclusion: including women managed enterprises in previously existing structures can be simple and beneficial for all:

- Women gain self-esteem and a support network
- Simple spatial changes can have a big impact on their comfort
- They can be trained to supply a quality product
- Promoting women-run enterprises can be done through existing infrastructure

Based on the observations we were able to make through several visits at Mission Convergence during which we spoke with and interviewed canteen workers, its manager, a volunteer coordinator, a communications specialist and the Mission Director, not only has the Stri Shakti canteen been highly successful, it is also replicable. Using the same approach which we summarized above, and adapting available spaces to women workers' needs, women run canteens could be operational in other government offices, schools, private organisations, etc.

Case Study of Ms. Rashmi Singh, Mission Director, Mission Convergence, Government of Delhi

Ms. Rashmi Singh, current Mission Director of the Mission Convergence of the Delhi Government, has a long history of going to great lengths to promote social services. Born in Bihar, one of India's poorest states, she started organizing health camps targeted to the very poor and marginalized women in the late 90s with the help of her late step father and since then, she hasn't

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

ceased in her efforts to promote social justice and empowerment of women. When asked whether she herself owns any property, she is quick to answer: *“My husband and I have a joint loan to pay for a joint house in Noida: Both me and my husband are title owners. But the house in itself is in my name. My husband is in the IAS and so he has his own house in Lucknow.*

And yet, when probed about her views on women and ownership of resources, her answer is somewhat of a paradox: *“In our society, individualism isn’t seen as a good thing, for both men and woman. Values like living for others and giving are more valued. If you ask for something for yourself, you might be perceived as being selfish. But of course, within this general societal norm, there is a patriarchal notion. Women have espoused this norm, but they must also show that they have complete faith in the husband.”*

Ms. Singh’s response exemplifies very well the ambiguity Indian women are feeling when faced with the traditional customs that would have them subordinate their own needs to that of their husbands and family: *“People here want to invest on others: the family, children, etc. My mother was a professor, and she would take pride in saying that she didn’t want to go shopping. All she wanted was to spend on the education of her children or her family. She never felt like she was being deprived. Traditionally, Indian women take pride in, rather than feel deprived by, taking care of their families. I am not necessarily an advocate for this kind of individualism where, in the name of authority, commanding your resources, you become totally self-seeking”.*

But what SAFF is promoting isn’t for women to blindly adopt western individualistic values. Instead, it is to change gender roles through town, city and economic planning to allow women to take on productive roles perhaps to take care more holistically.

In instances of desertion or widowhood, Indian women have been left to fend for themselves. This faith has been broken time and again in instances of desertion and widowhood. They are completely dependant in this sense. Owning their own resources guarantees them that peace of mind that they will be able to provide for themselves and their families when the unfortunate happens. *“In our own little way, what we do (i.e. at the Mission convergence canteen), we hold sensitization and awareness programs where issues of gender equality are addressed consciously. These issues, which were never before talked about, are now flagged. These forums provide a space for interactions. We also have special sessions, “legal camps”, where women are*

empowered by learning about their legal rights: property rights, protection against domestic violence.”

One contribution in this direction Ms Singh has done has been the to develop ‘broad based vulnerability indicators’ for the identification of the marginalised poor of Delhi and migrants from neighbouring states like Bihar and UP living in slums and unauthorised colonies without an identity or access to welfare measures of the government²¹, identifying each unaccounted poor through the administration of door to door survey, with the assistance of community based organizations (CBOs). The survey has laid special emphasis on the identification of widows, single deserted women, woman-headed households and homeless women staying in backward areas, slums, and unauthorized colonies under the vulnerable category²². Thanks to such initiatives, it is easier to assist and inform these women of their rights and how to go about claiming them. She adds: *“Of course women should be protected; they should be able to eat well. Taking care of one’s family shouldn’t be at the cost of the self, or of seeking treatment that may be badly needed. But having resources shouldn’t be at the cost of your traditions, where just because you have disposable income, you should go out and buy things for yourself. If there is plenty in the family, then of course, indulge. But if resources must be prioritized, I trust women much more to do so, to be productive for the growth of the family and of her support system. Women will spend family resources better. Women should be given that security”*.

Another initiative targeted at marginalized women’s group was her mobilization of such women into Self-Help groups (SHG) to give them a better chance at economical and social empowerment. Ms. Singh implemented a total of 200 SHGs, giving member women more confidence to collectively denounce exploitation and injustice. These SHGs were enlisted for running Mid-Day Meal Programme in NDMC schools replacing outsourced contractors. These kinds of women run programmes are very much in line with what SAFP has been promoting as part of WRZs.

Other welfare measures introduced by Ms. Singh have included mobile crèches for children of construction workers, new working women’s hostels and old age homes for women, while developing a new model of day care

²¹ I.A.S Officers’ Wives Association, Uttar Pradesh. Online. <http://iasowaup.org/Rashmi%20Singh.html>.

²² *Ibid.*

centre/recreation centre for senior citizens²³. *“The model that I have been trying to promote is an integrated development model, which also looks at women’s health and skill needs, their employability, income generating opportunities, putting women into collectives, promoting their legal rights. I feel all these dimensions are related, and one cannot be addressed without the other.”*

What we at SAFF wish to do is link such initiatives amongst each other in a broader network of women run enterprises and women friendly neighbourhoods, as the WRZ, and replicate similar initiatives in other parts of Delhi, such as Okhla, and all over India. We believe such initiatives have a better chance of being successful if not implemented in isolation. That community structures, surrounding infrastructure, links to other such enterprises, promotion within women’s groups and sensitization of the population to gender issues are also essential to achieve equality in terms of land and resource allocation as an overarching goal.

According to contemporary economic theorists, including the new “Growth Theory” Human capital is not the same as human development. The former is only an instrument (to achieve the goal of economic growth), while the latter is both instrument and goal in itself. Human capital is defined as including factors such as health care, education, social security, and gender²⁴.

Increasing Human Capital, whether it is through increased advocacy about women’s rights, linking women’s work stations to their caretaking roles, such as providing crèche services, or placing healthcare and family planning units in strategic locations, will also contribute to economic growth.

Therefore, the canteen at the Delhi Secretariat is just one example of Ms. Singh’s work towards enhancing the status of marginalized and poor women while creating new training opportunities through GO-NGO partnerships: *“It so happened that we had been concerned by starting models where the government becomes an employer for the kinds of services that also involve a lot of skills training. We wanted to command opportunities for women who are in the low income group.”* This is exactly the sort of partnerships we are seeking to achieve to implement WRZs: SAFF is in the process of forming a

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Elson, Diane. « Gender and economic development », *Rapport de l’OCDE*. En ligne. <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/31/11/2755277.pdf>.

consortium with other NGOs to seek out support from local, regional and national authorities, and engage different levels of government to develop such projects which are meant to ensure equal access for both men and women to livelihood resources.

Ms. Singh did add a caveat however: *“We had tried such a model successfully when I was engaged with the ICDS scheme (decentralized production and servicing of meals for children). This used to come from contractors who were generally coming from far, where the quality of food would either be poor or it wouldn’t even reach its destination. The government was paying for this kind of service, and the food wasn’t reaching the people. This was organised as a cartel, where the contractors would hold a monopoly.”*

As the Head of the Stree Shakti Programme and Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) in Delhi, Ms Singh was implementing systemic reforms to ensure better delivery of ICDS in Delhi. She set up a model through which SHGs were actively engaged in the running of the ICDS centres and its supplementary nutrition programme. On top of making sure the programme was properly implemented, this initiative provided employment and income generating opportunities to hundreds of poor women. But...

“I was told by a senior bureaucrat before starting not to go up against the cartels, and I would just fail. I did realize the risks and difficulties, and it was a big fight for me, as the lobby was very powerful. Going up against a system with a large number of vested interests was a big challenge. I was brought to the court and Supreme Court under all kinds of pretexts. But I ran from pillar to pillar, and engaged as many well wishers as I could (social sector experts, the Supreme Court committee on the right to food, etc). I went to see the Chief MCD at the time, Mr. Rakesh Metha. But there wasn’t any real threat to my security. I was warned, but I had the conviction that what I was doing had to be done.”

Once she overcame the many bureaucratic obstacles, including those linked to the patriarchal system which traditionally favours the status quo, she went about planning for the canteen of the Mission Convergence Office. *“When I tried to make changes to this scheme by involving women and self-help groups, I first inspected whether they had the capacity to run a kitchen, what had they already done, etc. After one year, these kitchens were running so well. Stri Shakti was one of the NGOs running an ICDS kitchen. So they had the skills to manage a large number of women and protect the quality of food.*

A committee was instituted, and the Delhi chief minister then gave us this huge opportunity by saying that if women's groups could run the canteen, we should ask the Mission Convergence. Going by the experience I had with the ICDS program, I approached organisations such as Stri Shakti to get their feedback, and we made a detailed plan on how the initiative could be implemented.

We then gave the opportunity to our 80 NGOs who were running GRCs at that time. A request for proposal was made and a technical committee was constituted. We had stakeholders from our finance department. We received a good and enthusiastic response from organisations. Some of them even united into consortiums. Initially, resources had to be pooled together, especially for small organisations.

Eventually, 5-7 partners officially applied, made presentations and technical proposals on what were there current strengths, etc. Once we entered into tendering, we could have really compromised on quality, but that wasn't the objective. We had to take a special approval to fix the rates for the different items to be provided in the canteen so there was no financial tendering. Selection was made solely on the basis of their technical scores. Stri Shakti had good infrastructure and experience, so they were the highest technical score. They also brought a lot of strength in terms of upgrading the kitchen, and making it as clean as possible. They changed the entire organisation's ethos. We then decided to use the place to spread positive messages. It is reflective of communications that the Mission convergence wants to make. So they really brought this change, and proved that it could be done."

Convincing people to change the way they run their business or to accept women as part of the public and economic space is not easy. Learned behaviours and cultural traditions hang tough. For women to become active participants in planning and independent citizens, it must be accepted by authorities and by the society at large. To do so, it is important to frame these societal changes as something that will benefit the country as a whole. The canteen is the perfect example of this, albeit at the micro-level: *"Before, the canteen was run as a business and people would cut corners on quality. (..) But still, people said we would miserably fail. The administration had even put up a board outside the canteen to apologize for the change in management and any inconvenience it may cause. The very next day, people had raving feedback, and didn't understand the regretted inconvenience message."*

Any changes or entrepreneurial initiatives SAFF and its associates want to implement in Okhla, or anywhere else, should be supplemented by awareness campaigns and advocacy. An economy in which women participate is a healthy economy, and a city plan which takes into account the specific needs of all its citizens, including women will be a well functioning city.

For such initiatives to be successful, the support of authorities at every level is essential. It is also a question of good governance. So how did Ms. Rashmi Singh, as a leader, organise it? *“The partnership, trust and confidence that it was a joint venture, all of this was essential. For any problems, such as issues related to pending payments, we got a lot of support from the Chief Secretary. We have taken up these kinds of bottlenecks with the appropriate administration; otherwise the system just wouldn’t work. We need to strengthen the system, and regular committee meetings to address new issues that always arise are needed continuously. It entails a regular engagement with the partner. The committee who has stakeholders from the general administration department, from the finance department, provides an institutional support. These structured institutional mechanisms need to be there”.*

But what about next time, when Stri Shaktee’s contract expires? Will the contract always be given to women? *“Of course, because we have set a new model. I also keep getting calls from other departments who also want to set up a canteen. You can choose the right partner; fix the rates, just as we went about it. To replicate such an example, you have to look at the segments you are advertising the bid to. There should be a healthy competition. What is the right target to invite for expressions of interest? You must set up an appropriate committee, set up the right norms, so maybe you could document those: What were our norms? How was the committee instituted? It should be taken as a model for the engagement of women’s groups in the running of other canteens. Even fixing the rates is very helpful. A lot of exercises went into this. The agreement we have with the General Administrative Department (GAD) and Stri Shakti made up two contracts. So we are accountable to the GAD, but it is a mutual accountability. The option of training is open to all other SHGs who would like to be trained at the Mission Convergence Canteen. So any NGO can send their women here. In fact, if you can help us making designs to meet requirements of various places, we can always allow women to use this space to get trained.”*

And this is just what SAFF, in collaboration with other organizations, has done. With the help of architecture students from Jamia Milia Islamia and from the Architecture School of Barcelona, designs and propositions were made for spaces to be used by women. Amongst other things, locations in Okhla were identified where women-run canteens would be successful.

What the study of the Stri Shakti Canteen and the interview of its founder, Ms. Rashmi Singh, has shown, is that there are possibilities for women to participate in income generating activities within their communities without losing their cultural identities.

**Dr Baran Farooqui, Professor of Literature and Former Head of the Nehru
Guest House of Jamia Milia Islamia University**

A Case Study
By Emmanuelle Paris Cohen

Introduction

The case studies carried out by SAFP staff and volunteers are meant to supplement a broader study which is investigating the gaps in resource allocation according to genders. In the interviews conducted as part of this study, we have mostly focused on lower and lower middle class women and men, within disadvantaged neighborhoods of Delhi, such as Vinod Nagar or Batla House in Okhla. Through these surveys, we were able to ask specific and targeted questions on what assets their family owns, what is in the woman's name, what resources the women manage in the household, etc.

The case studies we have administered mostly to upper class or upper middle class women, who, in one way or another, have taken control of their lives and acquired some form of independence through the control of resources. Through their stories, we want to share not only their struggles to reach where they have, but also their examples, in order to learn from them.



The following case study was administered to a Professor of English Literature in Jamia Milia Islamia University, who was also, at the time of the study, the Head of the Nehru Guest House of JMI. However, at the time of writing, she had given her resignation. She did not give us a detailed explanation as of why, but from our talks, it was clear that she was going up against certain vested interests within the University. She told us it was great pressure and too much stress.

Furthermore, she had also inherited the management of Armughan, Kidwai Memorial Girls' Inter College in Allahabad which her mother had founded. On top of her teaching career, Dr. Farooqui, a single, recently divorced mother, has invested most of her personal time in these two initiatives.

One of SAFP's great crusades has been to push leaders and government officials in India to collect gender disaggregated data on resource allocation, access and management. This knowledge is absolutely essential to get a true picture of the gendered nature of the country's economy. Of course, this will be a tedious and daunting task. It involves getting individual and not household measures.

But it is still crucial to do so, and staff at SAFP is not the only ones advocating

for this kind of research to be done.

Diane Elson, an Economics Professor at the University of Manchester, maintains that while improvements have been made in increasing women's access to education and jobs, it is crucial to start paying attention to the economy as a 'gendered structure'²⁵. According to her work, There are four ways to capture gender aspects in an economic structure: (1) making visible the unpaid care economy²⁶; (2) disaggregate structures and decisions by gender differences; (3) recognize gender-based distortions; and (4) recognize gender-based institutional biases.

Therefore, this approach not only requires information about the informal economy, but also, and most interesting in the context of SAFP's work, micro-level data. This refers to enterprises, communities, and households and would ask questions for example : How is the gender division of labor and ownership within firms and within households? Are expenditure decisions taken jointly, and is income pooled?

As the internal structure of household is a changeable variable individuals within their needs and capacities need to have options planned and available for state support .

So what kinds of resources does one get to manage when becoming the head of a business? In relation to her job as officer in charge of the Nehru Guest House and Welcome services, Ms. Farooqui had access and management rights over resources, including budget coordination. *"As manager of the purchase committee, I am given a budget which is coordinated with the purchase department of JMI. The committee also has other purchase officers (other senior officers who perform checks and balances). All the other committee members are men."*

In India, women who reach a certain position of power, as we have seen in the previous case studies, still have to face obstacles, especially when they have entered a milieu in which women have only recently begun participating. Often when we have approached authority figures or other stakeholders which could

²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 5.

²⁶ *Ibid.* p. 7: the economy can be subdivided into a 'commodity economy' (characterised by financial transactions), where output is sold on markets and as public goods, and a 'care economy' (characterised by non-financial activities), where output is not sold on markets, but remains in families or communities.

support SAFF initiatives such as the WRZ, one response we often hear is: *“Women have equal opportunities to men in India. Besides, we are one of the first and only countries to have had a woman Prime Minister (Indira Gandhi)”*. And while this much is true, the reality in most spheres of life is quite different from what is required on paper, in Indian law.

“The percentage of women in management in India is roughly 3% to 6%, with approximately 2% of Indian women managers in Indian corporations. However, almost 96% of women workers are in the unorganized sector, and most statistics focus on labor in the organized sectors, leaving out the many workers in the unorganized (informal), unstructured sectors of the economy.²⁷” So while women do attain high positions within the public services, it is very hard for them to climb the professional ladder in other domains, and when they do so, they must constantly be proving their efficiency and fighting to implement change.

This is what Baran experienced in her own professional career. *“I had had no serious brush with administration before because women are not welcome in that department.”* The sheer fact that women have remained absent for so long from the public sphere has meant that the Indian society just doesn't know how to deal with women in the work force. Let alone with women in management positions. *“I didn't know how the system worked when I started managing the guest house. When I asked, people would always be evasive. They didn't think a woman could understand. As a woman from an affluent family, I am not inhibited. So there have been 2 obstacles: women are seen as incompetent and aren't given resources. Or they think 'she is acting so smart, she must want to get ahead', and they will flirt”*.

Even once a woman has made it to a management position; she will face much more difficulties to remain in place, and will face differential treatment, thereby reinforcing the stereotypical view that they are inferior and less important. As a result, they are less often assigned challenging tasks and may be kept out of organizational decision making²⁸. *“Most of the time, I give in to other members (of the administrative committee). I don't usually know who, or where the approval for spending the budget came. I also have to keep to myself, because I have learned the hard way that if I say anything personal, men will try to take advantage. I also have to ask favors from accounts,*

²⁷ Society for Human Resource Management. *Perspectives for Women in India*. SHRM (2009), p. 3.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

building, etc, and always inquire why my bills aren't passed. In spite of this, I took all the opportunities that I could to favor women's groups within my work. For example, I have always tried to employ women. It made them bolder. I want to indoctrinate women who work under me. After, these women have tried to help other women, and so on so forth."

SAFP believes it is important not only to measure gaps in access to and management of resources, but also to find out what are the difficulties women face in retaining their hold over these resources once they get them. It is not enough for a woman to reach a management position. What does she have to do to stay there? Does she have the necessary skills to manage and keep control over her resources?

"I come from a family with a social entrepreneur mother and writer father. I was not an ambitious girl, but then following a bad marriage, I felt the need to become stronger and more independent. I took over the hospitality department at the school and was made Officer in charge. So I had no previous experience of administrating accounts or knowledge of how deeply corruption is entrenched in this hospitality planning community." This is the reality of much of the women to whom we spoke who were in similar situations. What they also all had in common was a good support network, a liberal-minded and educated family which encouraged girls to pursue a career.

"I have now the confidence to do things on my own (building her own property and getting a loan). I now have taken a loan to get a flat for myself and my family in Noida. I didn't struggle for anything more during my divorce, as I just wanted to get it over with. My plans are about empowering other women (when asked whether she had any business plans). Not as yet, in my mother's school, I find many students that have set up their own business and feel happy for them".

"My mother was always busy empowering other women (founded a school at 19 years old). But she wasn't as available to me as I would have liked. But she and my sister would always promote other women if they had resources in mind." This duality of roles faced by entrepreneurial women, between the care-taking role and the productive role (in income generating terms), is a common one. This is why the WRZ calls for more crèche services, perhaps even within the work place. Hopefully though, women becoming more and more

active in the work force will force Indian society to evolve and accept the sharing of a mother's care-taking role within her community.

Recommended HR Management Practices
to Create a "Women-Friendly" Organization²⁹

- ■ Senior management commitment to gender issues
- ■ Career development programs for women
- ■ Exposure of women to top management
- ■ Leadership development programs for women
- ■ Job rotation for women
- ■ Recruitment of women at senior-level positions
- ■ Regular survey of women to assess job satisfaction
- ■ Mentoring programs for women
- ■ Child care facilities at work

Source: Adapted from Saini, D. S. (2006). Labour law in India. In H. J. Davis, S. R. Chatterjee & M. Heur (Eds.) Management in India: Trends and Transition (pp. 60-94). New Delhi: Response Books.

In regards to this change of societal norms with increased exposure to women in management positions, *"My becoming the manager of the guest house hasn't really led to any changes in attitudes, but other people around me noticed (i.e: family and friends) that a woman can be a manager. The Vice Chancellor of the school had already decided to empower women and I was in the hospitality section, which people see as more appropriate for a woman, and they are more ready to accept this situation."*

In the end, we asked Dr. Farooqui what she thought of a WRZ, and whether she thought it possible to achieve in the JMI area: *"A lot of development has happened (in and around JMI), and there are new projects in these hostels which include building a crèche. Gender sensitization has happened, but everyone here should be made more aware of these issues, to allow access to women groups. Structurally, girls' toilets are few. And there should be more*

²⁹ Ibid., p. 6.

women toilet cleaners. As for common space, there are already coffee shops and the library. For workers, a crèche was really needed, but this is done now. There could be more housing for women faculty members. In a positive move, the government had said that it would make available more shelter for women from broken marriages, orphans, and other marginalized women. The whole administrative block is all men and we are given no information on how to access resources.”

Baran’s answers anticipate some of the observations SAEP and others have made about the Okhla district within which is found the JMI University, and about urban planning in India in general. Much of the policies and decision making is done by men in power, and urban planning is designed according to their plans³⁰. They don’t take into consideration women’s specific needs, such as safety, privacy, the possibility to regroup and assistance with their care-taking roles.

So what would her ideas be for building a WRZ within Okhla? *“I would be willing to help in any case. But I have little time as a single parent and working woman. But even more so, I want to see money distributed more evenly”*.

³⁰ Elson. *Gender and economic development*. On line, P. 7.

**Dr Azra Abidi, Secretary of the Muslim Women's and Professor of Sociology
in Jamia Millia Islamia**

A case study by
Emmanuelle Paris-Cohen

Dr. Azra Abidi, like Dr. Baran Farooqui from the previous case study, is also a professor at Jamia Millia Islamia, in the Sociology Department. As if her busy schedule and her family life wasn't enough, she is also the Secretary of the Muslim Women's Forum, an organisation which caters to the specific needs of this particular group of marginalized women in Delhi. It has access to several meeting spaces, offered by local Muslim women in Okhla predominantly poor and some in a position of power.

The Muslim Women's Forum (MWF): is involved in children, adult and legal literacy and skill training for Muslim women, voicing concerns of Muslim women to government and interfacing with Ulemas on matters concerning their rights. SAFP came into contact with the MWF in its formation and its early development phase. Its convener Dr. Azra Abidi coordinates four areas through field staff in Okhla. Because the forum has provided training opportunities for women in Okhla, it has an intimate knowledge of local women's daily lives, activities and needs.

She has also been very keen to associate with SAFP on the behalf of the MWF to implement the Women Resource Zone (WRZ) Pilot in Okhla, and the resulting consortium that we have formed has been working ever since on promoting the project to local leaders and MLAs. In her quality as an empowered Muslim woman, in charge of her own destiny, she was an ideal candidate for our case study, to exemplify the kind of success story SAFP is trying to replicate.

She has also been a very good spokesperson for the WRZ, because she represents the voice of the Muslim women's community, and has an intimate knowledge of their needs, culture, the obstacles they face, and how to go about implementing the changes we are seeking: women empowerment through the equal allocation of resources such as land, housing, income, etc.

Indeed, she has conducted extensive research on the subject of cultural Mapping in Okhla, to examine the lacking infrastructure and social amenities that the national government is supposed to provide all of its citizens, regardless of their gender or religion, and to establish the needs of this

In line with SAFF's work in the area, Dr. Abidi and her associates have compared, analysed and inferred the sociological aspirations of the residents living in the geographical limitations of Okhla. Her study looks at the gaps in the economic, educational, civic and cultural facilities being provided to its residences by the government agencies.

marginalized section of Indian Society³¹.



As an assistant professor at Jamia Millia Islamia, Dr. Abidi has full control over her earnings. She decides where and what to spend for: "*I am able to save*", she says. This fact is in itself a big accomplishment for an Indian woman:

Women in general have limited economic decision making authority: large numbers are excluded from even the most routine decisions, and few have the major say in any decision. There is a definite pattern to the kinds of decisions in which women participate: they are far more likely to be involved in decisions that are perceived as routine in the family economy, such as those relating to food purchases, than in decisions that involve major purchases. South Indian women exhibit far more decision making authority than Punjabi or north Indian women. In contrast, there is no evidence of differences in decision making authority among Hindus and Muslims³².

But, in the end, she says: "*I and my husband have joint ownership over our household items*". While she has decision making power over the spending of her income, she doesn't own anything in her name only. A common situation for women in India, Azra and most of the other women we spoke to didn't perceive this to be a handicap. But what about in cases where the husband passes or leaves? Women like Azra are protected as far as they

³¹ Abidi, Azra. *A study on mapping cultural mindscapes: aspiration as capacity for development community, gender and citizenship*. Department of Sociology, Jamia Millia Islamia and Muslim women's forum New Delhi.

³² Jejeebhoy Shireen J., Sathar Zeba A. "Women's Autonomy in India and Pakistan: The Influence of Religion and Region". *Population and Development Review*, 27(4):687-712 (December 2001), p. 699.

are educated, with good job situations, and will always find a way to provide for themselves and their families. But what about other marginalized women?

When asked about her access to resources, through her work with the MWF for example, she talks about the center in itself, and the small financial assistance she received from funders that she manages with her colleagues to promote the welfare of marginalized Muslim Women through education or vocational training. *“I would like to have better funds so that things could be done on a larger scale”*. This is in line with what SAFF is advocating for: increased resources, whether financial or through infrastructure, for women’s groups in the area.

Azra has also taken a loan in her name, in order to purchase a house: *“I pay it back with mine as well as my husband’s earnings, every month, to bank at an interest of 15% interest”*.

Almost all public sector banks run special schemes to fund women entrepreneurs; yet it proves to be difficult for women to acquire loans easily. This is partly because of the mindset of bank officials who believe that women will have to run that extra mile to market their products, making it hard to make decent sales. Low awareness about these schemes is another reason for their slow uptake¹.

In terms of access to resources owned by her or her husband, *“I have a car owned and managed by my husband. I can readily access it whenever I want and do not share it with others. I use the vehicle for domestic purposes”*. This is of course a huge advantage, especially for women living in the Capital. Because streets aren’t safe, having access to a vehicle helps women be more autonomous and mobile.

If women SHGs were given access to a vehicle, it would also become a business tool, to move easily between production and market sites. Ideally, of course, Azra would have owned her vehicle and had equal managerial rights over her car. *“I have access to a phone, the internet, a post office, etc. for official as well as personal purposes. The phone and internet are used by my family and it is jointly managed and paid by me and my husband”*. In addition to being mobile, having control over adequate means of communication is important for a woman, for her independence and professional growth. It is often the case in

India that each household will possess one cell phone, which the husband or sons use, and for which the wife must ask their permission to have access to.

According to Dr. Abidi's research on the Muslim community of Okhla, the inhabitants "want to be modern, want to avail services and facilities which are very contemporary in nature; nevertheless they want to retain their separate religious and cultural identity. The respondents are a healthy mix of traditional thinking and modern aspirations".

In terms of obstacles faced, Azra maintains that any resistances she may have faced from colleagues are not gender-based. When asked whether she faces any day-to-day challenges and what she would like to improve at work, she merely states that "*it would be better if there was improved coordination and transparency at work*". This, of course, seems to be a general concern of most people working in one form or another of administration in India...

Again, Azra remains evasive and non-committal when asked whether she has ever had a business plan: "*I never intended to go for it*", she says. Nor has she faced any obstacles, because she hasn't been interested in becoming an entrepreneur. When asked about resistance she may have faced in her life when she decided to provide for herself and reclaim her rights as a productive member of society, she is quick to answer that she has never faced any from her family members, nor government officials or corporate and market forces.

If she has ever faced any resistance from the community at least from her work educating and training Muslim women, she has addressed them through counselling. But a bigger challenge for her has been the lack of adequate funding and other logistical difficulties: "*managing a women's organisation is fraught with lack of infrastructure, funding and employment of a bigger staff for its functioning*".

"In India, Self Help Groups or SHGs represent a unique approach to financial intermediation. The approach combines access to low-cost financial services with a process of self management and development for the women who are SHG members. SHGs are formed and supported usually by NGOs or by Government agencies. Linked not only to banks but also to wider development programs, SHGs are seen to confer many benefits, both economic and social (...) SHGs can also be community platforms from which

women become active in village affairs, stand for local election or take action to address social or community issues³³". According to the findings of this study done by USAID and others, it was found that in the majority of groups, it is not the case that SHG earnings are high enough to maintain the value of SHG members' capital³⁴.

In spite of her organisation's lack of funding, her work has been a source of inspiration to other Muslim women in her community, as they felt empowered enough to get enrolled for vocational and other types of training like education and health. But, *"Sadly, in my community (Muslim community), women still earn less income, are subject to violence, insecurity and lack independence."* Politically, these women's situation has remained much the same. They have yet to acquire more decision making power or legitimacy as active members of the community.

At the state level, Dr. Abidi is slightly more optimistic: *"The Indian state is very responsible towards women; nonetheless still much improvement is desired"*. In terms of recognition of women's contributions as legitimate, support policies and special programmes targeted to them, as well as their involvement in decision making, advocacy or lobbying, work still needs to be done.

³³ EDA Rural Systems and Andhra Pradesh Mahila Abhivruddhi Society. *Self Help Groups in India: A study of the lights and shades*. CRS, USAID, CARE, GTZ/NABARD.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

**Associate Professor of Sociology and Honorary head of an all girls hostel in
Jamia, Ms. Arvinder Ansari**

A case study by
Emmanuelle Paris-Cohen

INTRODUCTION

In India, Purdah literally means screen, or veil. It is the practice by which women, most often Muslim, but also some parts of Hindu society, cover themselves from head to toe and remain behind screens and walls, separated from men even within their homes. Over the years, this custom which is said to have originated in Persia, and later adopted by Muslims in the 7th century, has lost in importance.

Most describe it as a way to keep women subjugated and inferior, as victims of a patriarchal system which conceals them from society and confines their role to simple breeding. Its proponents maintain that it gives women a higher status, by demonstrating men's respect for them, by removing them from the threat of objectification. Purdah, in their view, allows women to be valued for their mind instead of for their body.

In any case, today, observation of Purdah in India is inconsequential. Indian women have acquired the right to choose. The problem is that, many communities in India, such as the one we have studied in Okhla, remains unsafe for women: working outside of the home, walking alone isn't perceived in a good light. Therefore, many women we interviewed who participated in skill training chose to practice activities which could easily be done from home.

Keeping such cultural and safety constraints in mind, SAFFP has been advocating for women-run community centers which could be used by all members of the community, but which would cater to the specific needs of the female gender. It would also provide a safe haven for women to regroup during hours where the center would be reserved to them only, and where they could feel safe to conduct their activities. *"Won't this segregation of women in centers be*

reminiscent and encourage Purdah?”, expressed another case study respondent, Ms. Baran Farooqi (see earlier in the text).

Like her, SAFF believes that initiatives like having exclusive centers for women, or metro rails reserved to women only, are solutions to safety and resource needs, but that it is not enough. We don't encourage Purdah, or further secluding Indian women. And like Baran, we feel the key to women taking up productive roles in the economy will be for them to become more visible in all spheres of life, whether it is as bus drivers or health care workers. For this, supplementing women targeted infrastructure projects with sensitization and education of the community as a whole is essential.

Like Dr. Baran Farooqi, Dr. Arvinder Ansari, who's case study will follow, is the head of an all-girls hostel on the Jamia Millia Islamia campus. She also works tirelessly for their wellbeing. But is her vision different?



“I have been managing this hostel for the past 2 years. I manage all resources available, including the budget”. At the time of writing, we had had wind that Dr. Ansari might also be next in line to manage the Nehru Guest House, of which Dr. Farooqi had been the head. As an accomplished professor, consultant for various organizations on gender equality issues, Arvinder has the necessary experience to juggle so many different tasks and effectively manage 2 separate organizations.

“I have introduced a new management system also facilitated by women. The girls (both students and working women) now have access to a cyber café, snack machines, etc. within the hostel for them not to have to go out at night”. As far as protecting the girls from the security risks of roaming around their neighborhood, such measures are no doubt a step forward. But won't it encourage proponents of Purdah? Isn't the answer trying to find ways to make girls feels safe enough to venture outside instead of keeping them removed from the community?

“Despite the apparent visibility of women, even in urban India, women across class do not share equal access to public space with men. Research suggests that a concern with sexual safety for women constrains their movements and

reduces access to public space”³⁵.

Indeed, the structure and evolution of public spaces is known to influence the evolution and reproduction of social and gender roles.

Controlling women’s movements has been the central strategy of every patriarchal system to date. “So long as women reproduce the discourse of the hegemonic gender regime appropriately through their performance of femininity in public space, they can largely access it safely. (...) Whether legally or socially coded, women perform the restrictions set upon them in their daily movements through space.³⁶” Through the implementation of a WRZ, SAFP is seeking to change gender roles through urban planning and by enabling women to equally occupy public space.

When asked how these changes empower her female residents, Dr. Ansari gives the following answer: *“Every change is discussed with the girls to get feedback to identify their needs. Things need to be more systematic. This way, they get a chance to participate in the management of the hostel; for example, we follow-up with them after they go out, for their security. This way, we empower both management and the girls”*.

By giving her residents a say in changing the management practices of the hostel, has Arvinder experienced reluctance from other male staff? From the JMI administration? *“Of course we experience obstacles and pressure from outside, as we are trying to shake people out of their comfort zones and change the system. We are trying to find solutions through dialogue instead of resistance and fighting. For example, we engage in team work with the wardens. But problems are always part of the system. We also deal with pressure coming from the admissions people. To remedy this, we’ve developed some admissions criteria, so things become more transparent. Overall, however, the university is supportive of the changes we’ve put in place”*.

And what about her family’s support with all the work she has taken on on top of her family life? *“My family is supportive but there are also emotional*

³⁵ Partners for Urban Knowledge, action and research. Gender and Space. Online: <http://www.pukar.org.in/-project3.htm>.

³⁶ Ranade, Shilpa. “The Way She Moves: Mapping the Every-day Production of Gender-Space”. *Economic and Political Weekly*. April 28, 2007. P. 7.

pressures (perception of the neglect of the children) and the costs (working late nights)". This is a comment we have heard many times from our respondents with demanding carriers.

In the West, women have also had to juggle both their professional and family lives in a way men haven't had to do so. Everywhere in the world, albeit at a different time and pace, women have had to negotiate between their need or yearning for an active and productive role and their role as primary care-taker. In the West, however, it has become acceptable to share this care-taking role within the community, whether it is through child-care services or other members of the family. In India, however, this isn't yet the case. *"If the man of the family works late: he is a success. It is a sign of prosperity, it signals more income. If a woman works late, she is seen as neglecting her children. My family, relatives and friends have all been pointing this out. It is true; they also have their emotional and social needs"*. This response, which is slightly tinged with guilt, is typical of Indian women who choose to work outside the home.

But when asked which resources she manages, Arvinder is proud to say that she takes care of residents' fees, as well as grants for the building and infrastructure which have been provided by university staff that have been sensitive to gender requirements (canteen inside, café, etc). And her human resource management tasks are also quite significant: *"There are currently 500 hostel residents (students and staff)"*.

Finally, we asked Dr. Ansari what resources, monetary or otherwise she had access to: *"I manage my own income and make my own investment. The land, plots, everything is in my name. I own all my property and resources, so you could say that my husband is the legal hire!"* Clearly, her views on ownership are very progressive, even more so than the previous women interviewed, most of whom had joint ownership of resources.

"Ownership of resources empowers women (property, skills and knowledge). Why else would women stick to a suffocating marriage? You don't own people. Women who come from broken homes don't get enough support". When asked about what she perceives as being the most important for any woman to take towards ownership of livelihood resources, her answer is categorical: *"Management would eventually lead to ownership but this is what is most important: that a woman starts by owning her own body"*.

**Secretary Muslim Women's Welfare Organization,
Mrs. Mamdooha Majid**

Case Study by
Emmanuelle Paris-Cohen

INTRODUCTION

The Batla House area, from where Ms. Mamdooha Majid operates her Muslim Women's Welfare Organisation is, of course, predominantly Muslim. It is also, a very poor and marginalized neighbourhood, with no access to government social schemes and amenities. Within this traditional neighbourhood, women are overwhelmingly confined to their homes, and depend almost entirely on their husbands or elders in the family for sustenance.

When considering the low status of women within such a community, one must keep in mind that beyond their own marginalisation due to patriarchal traditions, the Muslim population in general is marginalized, not only in India, but in most places across the globe: "Categorised as 'Other', taunted as Pakistani if not vilified as terrorist, the Muslim in India today is an anonymous and frightening figure. Fear and anonymity are, of course, crucial to the maintenance of cultures of hostility and violence.³⁷" The growing danger associated to this trend for Muslim women is the increased withdrawal of the community on itself as well as growing religious conservatism.

³⁷ Khan, Sameera. Negotiating the Mohalla: "Exclusion, Identity and Muslim Women in Mumbai". *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 28, 2007. p. 2.

Apart from religion-related factors, low socio-economic status contributes considerably to low education and work levels among Muslim women as well³⁸. As a result of all these forces combined, Muslim women living in slums and poor neighbourhoods, who need to supplement their family income but who also are constrained in their movements outside the home end up working in low paying, exploiting jobs.



“Women in Batla House and Dhobi Ghats endure very difficult work conditions: their eyes and back are hurt from beading, embroidery, button tucking all day. In one room live 15-16 families. I am discouraged because we are doing all this work for them but they don’t come to us for help”. Such is the complaint of Ms. Mamdooha Majid, founder and head of the Muslim Women’s Organisation located in Batla House, of the Okhla District.

Ms. Majid has been running her organisation since 1989. Created as a trust, it was established to maintain and run vocational training centres, guidance and coaching bureaus for widows, orphan girls and destitute women of the community. Its primary objective focuses on the support of destitute Muslim women and girls through education and vocational training programs³⁹. We are a vocational training institute (design, sewing, adult education, computers,

The training programs offered by the Muslim Women’s Organization include:

- **Cutting and Tailoring**, 6 months course (2 months course in summer), at no fee charged. Training materials such as fabric and supplies are provided free of cost based on student's financial evaluation.
- **Fashion designing**, 1 year course, at a very nominal charge.
- **Adult Education** (for girls who live in slums). Curriculum includes teaching of Quran, Salat, reading and writing Hindi and English. The 1 year course also includes training in sewing necessary garments, with free fabric and material provided to all enrolled students. No fee charged.
- **Typewriting**, 3 months course, at a very nominal charge.
- **Computer Basics**, 3 months course, at a very nominal charge.
- **Beautician Course**, 1 month course, at a very nominal charge.

The staff comprises of 5 women teachers and a janitor, drawing very nominal salaries. Each of them is the sole bread-earner of her respective family, due to the husbands' death or inability to work. **All nominal fees collected are spent entirely on remunerating the teaching staff for their time and effort.**

Upon successful completion of the training, based on individual student's evaluation,

etc). *“Lectures on behaviour and family life are given twice a month. We also teach them the Koran and Arabic”*.

“My father and grandfather were landlords, but they lost everything in 1947. When I was young, my father put me in a French convent school, despite my mother’s protests. He was a Maulavi from Deoband and interpreted Islam in a progressive manner. Prophet has asked all to educate themselves and this is to gain knowledge beyond religious or academic learning. Even at the age 66 I continue to learn, these days I learn from my grandchildren. I got married, had 3 children but this phase came to end when marriage ended in a divorce in 1973. I had to come away from Orissa to Delhi to take on the Job under duress. I raised my children myself as my ex husband had his new family and children from that marriage to look after”. I was hired as a government official in All India Radio as I could read Arabic. My father’s progressive outlook has given me the strength to interpret the Shariat in a way that I have been a part of very different forums. “

Mamdooha is member of the Muslim Personal Law board where she determines cases of dispute in light of the Sharait. She has travelled different countries and stayed in Iraq for 20 years. Islamic framework offers equal space to women in practice as Mamdooha has seen in Iran where the newly married man hand over the “Meher” amount in a packet to his bride. But In India when a groom performed the same act, there was a gloom cloud at the wedding ceremony with shock, whispers and wails that the marriage has been followed by a divorce as Meher is only handed out to the bride when the couple breaks their marital contract. It was only when Mandooha intervened with her worldly wisdom did people understand that many world views exist but the words in the Quran are steady in the good for all.

As a community leader Mamdooha wanted to contribute to the soil that nurtured her as a child. *“ After gaining resources of my own I returned to Orrissa my fathers home that I inherited as a school for everyone in the community, not just Muslim, but religious people in my community disagreed and set up their own religious school. They didn’t accept that a woman would be more successful than men, as my school was”*.

The school runs in a village near by. Mamduhas children are now married and settled in their own homes. *“The father’s house in Orrissa is now inhabited by a relative who contest my ownership of the house. I will not go to the court but continue to ask him to return what belongs to me in my control. Allah is great*

and his ways are much better than any other court. I am still on talking terms with this relative and will call upon community ties to resolve this issue for me. I am sure my inheritance will belong to me again soon”.

Faith has a power and role in leadership and its call for a transformation of the present order. Even as many sceptics may be wary of religious frameworks, people like Mamdooha and Azra have made use of the given to steer change required by the vulnerable. They used the power of the words in Quran to get for their constituency what they could. Yet both the organisations that they lead lack infrastructure support. The struggle for both in gaining and maintaining resources has been similar, inspite of these women being in contact with highest authorities in their communities reach.

Considering the great achievement that has been the setting up of this trust, it is unfortunate that today, for the same reasons detailed in the above, women from local marginalized Muslim communities are reluctant to come and receive an education or skill training which their family and husbands might disapprove of. *“In this area, girls are never sent outside their house. When they are allowed here, however, it is because we’ve earned the community’s trust. We don’t accept bad behaviour from local men. The social design of this center is inclusive for the whole area”.*

But this isn’t Mamdooha’s only problem. Like other women’s SHG and organisations, *“we have no resources available. Everything comes from private donations. I’ve managed these funds for 20 years now. Now I pay the rent (for the Batla House center) from my own pocket. Initially, the private building we operate from was lent to us until we raised sufficient money and the work became self sustained.”*

With the stringent control of foreign funding and the growing demand for scarce national resources made available for NGO work, it is no wonder so many organisations, like Mamdooha’s are struggling to survive. *“I started doing this in 1989, when a 70 year old lady I knew had to beg to her husband for income. I and some people got together, set up a room, and began giving sewing and tailoring lessons. Like minded women were united and one man helped to get them settled financially (the Chairman of the institute on literary studies of JMI). At that time, I was a government official. Now I use my own money to finance the organisation. I haven’t been able to pay the teachers in 3 months. The community is helping us, but we are not linked to any business”.*

Such is the plight of the growing number of NGOs in India, and elsewhere. Getting a piece of the funding pie, is increasingly difficult, and the competition is growing fiercer, both between NGOs, but also between different causes. This is why more and more organisations have been seeking partnerships with businesses and the corporate sector. The latter have found that associating with social work has been beneficial to their profit margins, through a phenomenon coined 'green-wash', or 'corporate social responsibility'. Image is good for business and today, image is everything...

This is one thing SAFF is banking on, to implement gender equal development zones, where new entrepreneurial opportunities are given to women. Both local businesses and the corporate sector at large would participate through funding, allocating land and infrastructure as well as providing expertise. In return, these benefactors will bask in the glow of their social responsibility, and see their profits increase. Creating new jobs and opportunities for women's groups and marginalized communities in general will also generate additional income, which in turn will encourage household spending on new resources, increasing businesses' profits as well as the government tax revenue, etc.

"We had exhibited some of the girls' work at the beginning. But since we spent our own money on the material, we were only able to break even, so we dropped the initiative. We felt we needed to focus more on skill development, not developing marketable products. We also keep in touch with old students and sometimes find them jobs. We are now thinking again of doing another exhibition between the work of the teachers and best students. The GRC of Jamia managed by CEQUIN has offered to book the habitat centre for an exhibition of products from our center". Such initiatives which promote products made by local women can be marketed and sold as sustainable merchandise which helps disadvantaged communities. Many NGOs have tried and succeeded in such initiatives, so why not organisations in Batla House? Why not Mamdooha's Muslim Women Welfare Organisation?

Fair trade products made by women from marginal communities in India have been all the rage, both nationally and abroad. Creative Handicrafts, an ethical fashion label employing Dalit women has won international awards, and Free Set has given the opportunity to Indian women rescued from the sex trade business to make customizable jute bags for corporate events have inspired many more organisations to do the same. Such success stories prove that women run enterprises and selling products with a fair trade label are all highly replicable initiatives, and could be pursued by organisations such as Mamdooha's. Their success is also a matter of linking production spaces (her training center) with marketing spaces and businesses willing to donate such spaces as well as invest in women's work. This is all a part of SAFP's WRZ plan.

When asked how we could implement a WRZ in the Okhla District, and whether it would be possible for Batla House, Jamia Nagar and other areas to be piloted as such, here was Ms. Majid's encouraging response: *"We should use the community centre for women. The Batla House and ask for new ones. These centres can be used like a short stay for women in distress. Thus the centres can remain open for a small women team to stay within the campus (with security provided) and a running kitchen that doubles up as canteen and a cafe. The women's groups should be able to work in a multipurpose space at the roof of the community hall. My organisation can train women to run canteen services. All centres may be designed as per need of women and services they can provide to the community but these centres need to be linked. The women in the area must be taken into account in the planning and managing of new projects. If women get to think and impose their vision, they can do it"*. We at SAFP very much agree.



CASE STUDIES IN BHOPAL

By Chitra Khanna

Bhabhi ki dukaan

Krishna Soni wife of Nathu Ram Soni belonged to Gadarwara in Narsingpur district of Madhya Pradesh. She completed her graduation and after marriage came to Bhopal in 1969. Belonging to an affluent family of the village she did not had to work before her marriage.

A family dispute saw her moving out from the joint family where her husband was staying with his parents and brothers. The family had an established business of dry snacks. Krishna was pregnant at that time. At the time of separation from the family, her husband was not employed. The couple took a room on rent near the office of Madhya Pradesh Housing board. Within the same room she started a shop to sell bangles and other items of clips, bindi etc. This was an occupation that yielded low returns. The family could just manage their own food requirements. Gradually Krishna put up a tea stall and also started making snacks along with tea. Since there were offices nearby, they made good business. However on holidays, there were no customers.

Krishna also started stitching and doing embroidery work. On one Diwali, she made 'gujiya' and 'papdi' in her home. She offered the same to some of her regular customers from the offices. This created a new opportunity of business for her. The customers liked it so much that they placed order for their own homes. She added some more items in her snacks menu. The orders increased to a level that she had to hire women for completing the same. From then on, she could save some money. As her children grew, her daughter helped her with tiffin work. They woke up at four in the morning and worked late into the night to make 'chappattis' of 25kg of flour. Her husband too provided support including cleaning of utensils. For a family from an affluent background, those were trying times.

During the same time there was an advertisement in the newspaper that a shop is available for sale in the same premises as housing board office for Rs. 800. She did not have money. She took a tough decision of selling her gold 'mangalsutra' for Rs.1000. She purchased the shop for Rs. 800 and she bought items for Rs.200. She started tent house and catering work from this shop.

By this time her children were educated and she arranged for their marriages. The children supported their mother in all the work and now they all individually handle the different businesses initiated by their mother. Krishna and her husband have now given away all their assets to their children.

Krishna and her husband are now staying with their eldest son. The children sent their parents to Europe tour as a token of their respect to all the hard work they put in. The family is close knit and is happy in each other's company.

All what they could achieve was because of the determination of Krishna and her tireless efforts in all kinds of odd jobs they undertook.

Aman Cosmetics

Mumshaad Khan's mother passed away when she was young. She studied till Class II. Her father being a jagirdaar, Mumshaad was brought up with lot of affection and comfort. She never had to do any work before marriage. There were restrictions on her movement too. Whenever she went out, the shops always fascinated her. She felt that she should also have a shop and she should run it.

She came to Bhopal after her marriage in 1987. After her husband went away to work, she would have lot of free time. The income was just sufficient to manage their daily needs. So she started stitching work. She had to stop work after the birth of her first daughter. She had two more kids and all her time was used up caring for her children. But as the kids grew, the expenses increased.

From the savings what they had, she put up a "pepsi" (fruit flavoured ice in plastic packs and not the cold drink pepsi) making machine at her home. They made money but it was a seasonal business. The machine also broke down, so they had to discontinue the work. With whatever money they made, she took a shop on rent. The shop gave good income, but as the corporation works were undertaken, the shop was razed down. They had to keep all the material at home. People did come to their house to buy the items. They took a loan of Rs. 20000 and opened a shop in front of their house facing the road. The loan has now been repaid and savings are being made.

Mumshaad is waiting for an opportunity to get a "good" shop. She wants to run a shop on large scale. Reflecting back she says that she had great trouble in buying material on whole sale rates. She consulted neighbours and other shop owners to solve this problem of hers. She has her own bank account, the shop is in her name and she is content with her achievement.

Ravi Paan Palace

Rukmini Chaurasia has studied upto class 5. She hails from Nagpur and she worked as a domestic worker due to poor financial condition in Nagpur. Her father was a rickshaw driver. She was married in 1970 and came to Bhopal.

In the initial 5-6 years she did not work as she had no help to take care of her kids. Husband worked a labourer. She got some money as compensation from the Gas tragedy. She took some loan and opened a kirana shop at home itself. Her husband never had regular job and he indulged in regular drinking a habit that made them sell their house. They then shifted to a rental place and she started to do domestic work to meet her household needs.

But she was ageing and could no longer take the strains of domestic work. She then collected some money and took a shop cart. She operates the shop and takes help of her children to run the shop. She does not allow her husband to come to the shop, as he would launder away all the income.

She has educated her five children. One daughter has completed her graduation and is working in RTO office. Her son works with a local bus service. However Rukmani needs help. She is unable to save enough to buy stuff for the shop. Due to this she is unable to increase its operations. They are just able to meet their needs. The other problem is that the land where she puts up her cart is owned by Bhopal Development authority. Two times her shop has been taken away and she had to

pay the challan charges. It takes 7-8 days to free her shop and a payment of Rs.400-500. She says that, "I am not aware of the rules and the laws, so I don't know how to get out of this". She has to bribe them every time by Rs.100-Rs.200. She has no funds to buy a place.

Surabhi STD_PCO

Lakshmi Gorewar hails from Betul. She got married in 1990 and came to Bhopal. She worked with CASPLAN on issues of nutrition. She received about 3-4 thousand rupees with which she could do some savings. She opened a bank account and had some savings. Her husband did not like her working. During her work with CASPLAN she came in contact with many people. In 2006-07 the project came to a close and was wound up. Lakshmi however continued her association with the women's federation formed under the project. The BJP party saw her clout and made her president of the women's wing. But this work did not give her regular income. She could get some money only when there were seminars, gatherings or election.

She used her savings of Rs.18000 from her previous work to buy the kiosk. She put goods worth Rs.2000 in the shop. The land belonged to the corporation. Being a part of the political system comes handy and no one 'troubles' her on this issue. Her STD PCO with some other items is doing well.

She does not have electricity connection which hampers her work. But she has saved enough and is now planning to get a connection. She also wants to open a shop at a "good" place and make it big. She opens the shop at 7am after finishing all her home duties and stays up to evening.

Her husband does not like her working or operating the shop. But she does not agree with him on this count. She says that, "I like to help others. Whenever there is work in the settlement I close my shop and do the work. I also undertake survey work".

Gola Bai

Gola bai is a mother of 11 kids, 9 of whom are married. All these children undertake labour work. The eldest daughter with her also works as labour and the youngest son is studying. Before marriage she worked as an agriculture labour in a village in Sehore. She got married at the age of 14 and now she is 60.

Her husband worked as a labourer in Sehore. To meet the expenses she undertook labour worker and mahua collection from the nearby forest. Some people in the village were moving to Bhopal, so they too moved to Bhopal. They started staying at Shyam Nagar. Most people in the neighbourhood worked as daily labourers. She had to stay at home for kids. A colony was coming up nearby. She thought of an idea wherein she would collect broken bricks from the construction site and build 'pucca jhuggi' in the nearby empty space. She would sell these one room units at Rs. 5000 each. She

then purchased a cart and used it to transport the broken bricks. She also used the cart to transport other goods or give it on rent for Rs.20 per day.

As she became older she could not do much labour work. She takes up building jhuggi's but engages her son and daughter. She gives 160 days work to her son and 120 days work to her daughter. She charges Rs.10,000 to build one house. She has to buy bricks sometimes. Now she has put up a shop and runs it. As the settlements are being converted into buildings under the JNNURM project, so there no requirement for her work. She repairs some of the left over houses. She makes her children or husband sit on the shop and goes to collect wood. She collects wood from a park and sells it in the slums.

Gola bai does three kinds of work and also helps her children financially. She operates her bank account. She is saving to get her one daughter married and get her son educated. She rues that she could not become a contractor, else she would build beautiful houses. Her work as a little girl in the village building and repairing houses made it possible for her to survive in Bhopal. Her husband meanwhile took odd jobs including that of watchman.

Learning from Case Studies

- Women have shown the courage and the entrepreneurial skills to start commercial activities with or without the help of their husbands
- They have initiated activities despite having comfortable childhood
- The critical factor in all the case studies was their access to livelihood asset be it the shop or the cart of the raw material. As the access was converted in to ownership and control their ability to conduct successful business was put to test and they did succeed.
- They have faced obstacles and found way out of them. The women succeeded as business persons as well as mother to their children making investments in their education and other skills.
- They have a dream to make the initiatives bigger
- They have worked solely for the household
- Their prime requirement is information and resources