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INFORMAL LABOUR AND LIVELIHOOD DIVERSIFICATION: DIGNITY AND
AGENCY AMONG THE GONDS IN CENTRAL INDIA

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Summary

In India, the efforts by the welfare state to aid the poor and improve their lives focus on formal, quantifiable, and bureaucratic policies in the form of housing, education, and employment. Yet, little is known about the less formal and experiential aspects of their lives and livelihoods. The Gonds, living in a Central Indian district of Panna in the state of Madhya Pradesh, are one group that has rarely partaken of the above welfare state policies designed to aid them, yet are surviving in the face of continuous threats to their traditional ways of forest-based livelihoods. The Gonds are an indigenous group of people, also known as *adivasis*, that are categorized as a scheduled tribes (STs). They lack basic literacy and possess no material assets like land. How then are Gonds creating their own forms of social welfare and economic security? Having worked on the Gonds' lives in their labouring roles as *majdoors* (labourers), and having understood how they experienced hardships has lead me to reflect on how they aspire to live dignified lives and exercise agency within the informal economy.

A life-course perspective of Gonds' livelihood practices show that the informal economy works for Gonds because they exercise their agency in various ways, including by demanding desired wages and forms of work that are unavailable through formal welfare state schemes. The Gonds in fact experience dignity as they use the informal economy to stay debt-free, avoid starvation, and create formidable and reliable forms of care for their families. Thus, the thesis contributes to the literature on informal and precarious forms of work in India by showing, through the

example of the Gonds, how even though the poor may feel vulnerable and disconnected from formal welfare schemes, they may still experience dignity through livelihood diversification and their exercise of agency and access to social capital. The thesis also presents empirical findings on labour contracts, the informal economy, and poverty.

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This PhD journey would not have been possible without Zen, whom I met while still studying Physics in India, far away from the world of Anthropology. This thesis is an outcome of his confidence in me, that I could understand humans better than atoms and molecules. This day would not have been possible without him convincing me to discontinue physics and move to social sciences. Its due to him that I am transdisciplinary and always thinking if there can be a inclusive approach to explain social complexity.

I want to thank Kevin Avruch, my course advisor at George Mason University, Virginia, USA, who thought that I would make a good ethnographer and who introduced me to Katy Gardner and David Lewis's book *Anthropology and the Postmodern Challenge*. Their book uplifted my spirits and helped me understand the inequality and poverty that troubled me while growing up in Mumbai. It was a twist of destiny to be supervised by Katy Gardner.

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List of Figures

Figure 3. 1. India and Madhya Pradesh. Source: www.sehore.nic.in/sehore-maps-htm [accessed 7 December 2014].	97
Figure 2. 2. Map showing Madhya Pradesh and Panna District. Source: www.Indiavisitinformation.com [accessed 7 December 2014].	98
Figure 2. 3. A propaganda notice by the Forest department: two villagers, with one asking the other not to fell trees. Source: taken by the researcher.	103
Figure 2. 4 A Tiger. Source: www.wwfindia.org [accessed 12 December 2014]. .	104

Table of Contents

Summary	2
Acknowledgements	4
List of Figures	6
Table of Contents.....	7
List of Abbreviations	11
List of Tables.....	12
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION	13
1.1 'Informal' Economy and Rural India: From the Welfare State to Family	13
1.2 Objectives.....	25
1.3 Literature Review	26
1.3.1 Informal Economy, Debt, and Informal (Precarious) Work in India	27
1.3.2 Limits of Social Capital.....	40
1.3.3 Agency Through Livelihood Diversification	43
1.3.4 Embodying Precarity: Body Capital, Labour and Welfare	48
1.3.5 Agency Through Temporary Migration: Villagers as Migrants	50
1.3.6 Agency Through Withdrawal From the Welfare State	58
1.4 Research Questions	63
1.5 Significance	64
1.6 Brief Rationale for Project Design	67
1.6.1 Site Selection.....	68
1.6.2 Demographic Questionnaire	68
1.7 Outline of the Thesis	70
1.8 Conclusions.....	74
CHAPTER 2. REFLECTIONS ON THE FIELD: METHODOLOGY AND ETHICS 76	
2.1 Introduction.....	76
2.2 Settling in Panna	77
2.2.1 Decision To Go Alone	77
2.2.2 Selection of Bharatpur	78
2.2.3 Fieldwork Immersion.....	79
2.3 Introducing the Gonds	80
2.3.1 Sole Earners	81
2.3.2 Married Couples	82
2.3.3 Young Gond Families and Intergenerational Shift in Employment Options	83
2.4 Overview of Data Collection in Bharatpur.....	84
2.4.1 Demographic Questionnaire	84
2.4.2 Unstructured Interviews	86
2.5 Ethical Considerations and the Researcher's Role	87
2.5.1 Building Trust and Gaining Consent	87
2.5.2 Insider/Outsider Status as a Native Ethnographer.....	91

2.6 Conclusions.....	93
CHAPTER 3. CONTEXTUALISING THE RESEARCH	95
3.1 Introduction.....	95
3.2 Gonds' Marginalisation.....	96
3.3 History and Geography of the Gonds in Panna District.....	97
3.4 Household Livelihoods: ' <i>Majoori</i> ' (Labouring) and ' <i>Roji</i> ' (Livelihood).....	99
3.4.1 Multiplicity of Occupations	99
3.4.2 Subsistence Farming as Livelihood	100
3.4.3 Threats to Forest-Based Livelihoods	102
3.5 Oral Histories of the Past.....	106
3.5.1 Case 1: Positive Evaluation of the Past (Chotte Lal)	107
3.5.2 Case 2: Negative Evaluation of the Past (Haridas).....	110
3.5.3 Case 3: Negative Evaluation of the Past (Yamcharan).....	111
3.6 Conclusion.....	112
CHAPTER 4. GOND FAMILY STRUCTURE AND LIVELIHOOD PROFILE.....	113
4.1 Introduction.....	113
4.2 Family and Household as Site of Collective Agency and Dignity.....	115
4.2.1 Adaptability of Family (<i>Parivaar</i>) and Household Structure.....	117
4.2.2 Fluid Family Size, Structure, and Kinship Lines.....	118
4.3 (Re)defining Family Through Separation of the Cooking Hearth (<i>Nyaarpanna</i>)	120
4.3.1 Defining <i>Nyarpanna</i>	121
4.3.2 Case Study on <i>Nyarpanna</i> : Male-headed Household (Sukhram)	122
4.3.3 Case Study: Uxorilocal Families	124
4.3.4 Case Study: Intergenerational Caring Arrangements	125
4.4 Village Layout.....	125
4.4.1 Limited Space	127
4.4.2 Homes	127
4.4.3 Common Areas.....	128
4.5 Lack of Comforts, 'Precarious' and 'Informal' Work.....	129
4.6 The Economics of Weddings and Marriages.....	132
4.6.1 Wedding Ceremonies as Consumption.....	133
4.6.2 Dowries.....	136
4.7 Negotiating Gender-based Division of Labour.....	138
4.7.1 Wives and Widows.....	139
4.7.2 Women and Property Laws in India	149
4.7.3 Women's Role in Household Decision-Making	151
4.8 Negotiating Inter-Generational Participation in Work.....	156
4.8.1 Participation of the Elder Generation	157
4.8.2 Participation of Children.....	158
4.9 Conclusions.....	163
CHAPTER 5. LIVELIHOOD DIVERSIFICATION IN BHARATPUR: FARMS AND FORESTS.....	165
5.1 Introduction.....	165

5.2 Forest-Based Subsistence Activities	167
5.2.1 Impact of Forest Restrictions	169
5.2.2. Impact of Forest-Conservation Debate	170
5.3 Farming: Different Land Arrangements	174
5.4 Stone-quarry Work	176
5.5 Road Construction.....	177
5.6 Cycles and Seasons of Livelihoods.....	179
5.7 Case Studies of Livelihood Activities.....	182
5.7.1 Livelihood of Landless, Single-Earner Household: Tulsi Bai.....	185
5.7.2 Livelihoods of Multiple-Earner Households.....	188
5.7.3 Land-owning, Older-Female-Headed: Kesri Bai	190
5.7.4 Younger-Generation Households: Sawan, Usha, and Sita	193
5.7.5 Analysis of Case Studies	197
5.8 Conclusions.....	205
CHAPTER 6. GOND MIGRATION, INFORMAL WORK, AND AGENCY: LIFE BEYOND BHARAPTUR.....	208
6.1 Introduction.....	208
6.2 Who Migrates and Why?	210
6.3 History of Gonds' Migration	214
6.4 Benefits of Migration.....	214
6.5 <i>Pardes</i> : Migrating or Trekking to Work in Stone Quarries	216
6.5.1 Who Works in Stone Quarries?	218
6.5.2 Work Process, Conditions, and Products.....	219
6.5.3 Work Arrangements, Terms and Conditions	221
6.5.4 Precarity of Stone Quarry Work	225
6.6 Leaving for <i>Vides</i> : Contracts and Labour Contractors.....	228
6.6.1 Bondage Through Debt.....	231
6.6.2 Preference and Competition in Cooler-Weather Locations	232
6.6.3 <i>Vides</i> as Calculated Risk	233
6.7 Case Studies of Migrating Families	235
6.7.1 <i>Pardes</i> Migrants.....	236
6.7.2 <i>Vides</i> Migrants	239
6.7.3 Comparing and Contrasting the Case Studies.....	252
6.8: Conclusions.....	255
CHAPTER 7. GONDS' LIVELIHOOD DIVERSIFICATION INDEPENDENT OF WELFARE STATE	257
7.1 Introduction.....	257
7.2 Social Assistance by the Government in Bharatpur	259
7.2.2 Inadequate Government School System	262
7.2.3 Employment Through the Rural Employment Guarantee Programme.....	280
7.3 Other Examples of Ineffectiveness in State Programmes	294
7.3.1 Politicised Ration Cards.....	294
7.3.2 Flawed Welfare for Widows and Senior Citizens	297
7.3.3 No Vote, No Card?.....	298
7.3.4 Misuse of the 'Gond' Title for Accessing Social Benefits	300

7.4 Conclusions.....	301
CHAPTER 8. CONCLUSION.....	305
8.1 Summary of Findings	305
8.2 Contributions	307
8.3 Limitations	313
8.4 Recommendations For Future Research.....	314
Bibliography	317
Appendices.....	338
Glossary of Terms	339
List of Gond Characters	341

List of Abbreviations

BPL – Below Poverty Line card

NREGA – National Rural Employment Guarantee card

NMDC – National Mineral Diamond Corporation

Gol – Government of India

FHH – Female-Headed Household

List of Tables

Table 1 Bharatpur in numbers (total number of households = 77)	85
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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 'Informal' Economy and Rural India: From the Welfare State to Family

In India, 83.5% of the work force is employed in the informal sector (ILO, 2014). Industries in the informal sector, according to the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector, GoI¹ (NCUES, 2009), range from self-employment to restaurants, transportation, and agriculture, among others. India's high rate of informal employment is, according to the commission, attributable to India's higher number of unskilled wage workers than skilled workers. The figures are likely to swell even higher when unregulated rural industries are added, including work in salt pans, brick kilns, stone-quarries, wood collecting, and street vending. Thus, the informal sector is a significant employer in India, providing livelihoods for most of the population.

Social developmentalists (Corbridge & Shah, 2013; Drèze & Sen, 2013; Harriss-White, 2003, 2010; Gupta et al., 2002) have expressed concerns that such informal labourers, who perform gruelling and often dangerous labour, digging and hauling in fields and quarries with very little economic security, are vulnerable to exploitation and unable to enforce their rights and entitlements to welfare from their employers. For these reasons, social developmentalists call for greater transparency and accountability in the economy of India. However, for labourers in rural tribal India,

¹ GoI is Government of India.

who once depended for their livelihoods on open access to the forests for hunting and fishing, these traditional means of sustenance are diminishing. Government social assistance has been developed to alleviate the most extreme forms of poverty, but instead of partaking in these welfare state programmes, one group in particular, the Gonds, have primarily sought to build economic security and independence by working on a contingent, unpredictable basis in a highly unorganised rural industry. The Gonds, together with the other Scheduled Caste (SC) communities, are among the many populations of India that are poor in both land and income who perform irregular, insecure, and temporary jobs in the informal economy. According to NCEUS (2009), 85% of workers belong to the SC/ST category. This thesis investigates why the Gond people continue to be involved in precarious labour, and what risks and opportunities such work choice presents to them, their families, and their communities. The thesis also demonstrates how Gonds' experience of work, family, and the informal economy matters more broadly for studies of poverty, inequality, agency, vulnerability, and dignity.

The thesis addresses labour, the informal economy, and rural society in the lives of the Gond community who are managing livelihoods within the context of the following changes:

- 1) growing forest restrictions;
- 2) different economic opportunities that have occurred in the region over the last decade due to migration and basic road infrastructure connecting the region to main cities of India; and

- 3) the impact of the state-assigned minimum wage under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA).

The thesis discusses how these three changes differentially impact Gonds, depending upon their specific household circumstances. It describes Gonds' life course by giving a detailed account of their families and social networking, their experiences with the informal labour market, their experiences with the welfare state, and their precarious but preferred forms of informal work made possible by their strong labouring bodies. One of the intentions in this thesis is to study the social impact that the NREGA has had on the agency of informal workers such as the Gonds, as this legislation has allowed informal workers to engage with other forms of labour and demand higher wages than before. NREGA policy has positively impacted the poor's wages in the informal labour market (Carswell & De Neve, 2013), such that their labouring skills earn higher wages in the informal labour market than in state-assigned NREGA work.

The NREGA, the new economic opportunities in the informal economy, and the growing forest restrictions are the three main events affecting the life-courses of the Gonds. All these events are associated with a mutually beneficial arrangement between the Gonds (labourers) and employers/contractors. The contractors benefit from such arrangements because they can invest in the labour of the Gonds, who are the only community in the region to be regularly available to work in the quarries. This quarry work is the most lucrative form of economic activity in the region, although it is very labourious and is completely manual. This kind of labour

arrangement has replaced the past tradition of physically coerced labour as was prevalent in the this region as per the Gonds' oral narratives in chapter 3.

It is here that the thesis shows what has given an edge to labourers like the Gonds, who have etched a niche for themselves in the labour market by performing physically arduous tasks for which there is a labour shortage. This shortage gives the labourers an advantage over the capital owners, who are always chasing workers to get any work done so that they ensure profit in their enterprise. This profit is only possible if the labourer's needs are also met, and thus a mutually beneficial relationship is formed.

In the Indian context of work and economy, 'informal' labour has often been associated with precarity, pauperisation (Bremar, 1996), distressed wages, irregularity, temporariness, and insecurity (Gupta et al., 2002; Rogaly, 2003). Some studies have focused on the 'entitlement' such labourers should receive from formal institutions such as the Indian welfare state (Bénîè & Fuller, 2009; Shah, 2010), or have focused on the need for transparency and accountability in terms of wages and working conditions, arguing for a more organised labour market (Hariss-White & Gooptu, 2000; Guérin et al., 2009).

Some literature has critiqued the Indian state as being a weak formal institution, leaving the poor in desperate circumstances; these studies have certainly made invaluable contributions to the understanding of the lack of transparency and accountability from the welfare state for the poor in India (Drèze & Sen, 2013; Corbridge et al., 2005; Corbridge & Shah, 2013). The thesis shares these concerns,

but also maintains that such state-centric approaches to understanding poor people's livelihoods have told very little about the poor's own perceptions and subjective desires for a fuller life, dignity and autonomy, and their need for self-reliance as they pursue food security and meet their insecurities amidst growing economic uncertainties.

As this study will show through the example of the Gonds, the agency of the vulnerable is dependent on three interlinked factors: their able-bodiedness, their room to manoeuvre within social relationships, and their ability to represent their interests (Cleaver, 2005, p. 209). Vulnerability is a key dimension for poor families (Kanbur & Squire, 1999; cited in Ali, 2005, p. 51), who will diversify, save, and store food during leaner periods (Katone-Apte, 1988, cited in Ali, 2005, p. 204). Body capital (Waite 1995) refers to the physical, biological, social and cultural dimensions of the bodies of members of poor households, through which they perform work in conditions that may be precarious, harsh, and enduring. Social capital (Das 2004; Cleaver 2005) refers to the intangible social assets composed of informal relations and networks of family members, neighbours and labour contractors who are known through the poor people's various work experiences in the informal economy. Dignity is the self-respect that comes from performing labour and remaining debt-free.

These three sites of agency, as defined by Cleaver (2005), constitute the informal institutions, as contrasted to the formal institution, the state, which the Gonds find inaccessible. The Gonds choose to labour in the informal economy and demonstrate

agency by getting paid on time and earning twice NREGA wages. By focusing on family lives and using life-course perspectives the thesis will show how temporariness, insecurity, and irregular jobs hide the bargaining power of the labourers in specific geographies of labour shortage, and can instead lead to self-sufficiency in food and economic independence, as well as in dignity.

The use of the life-course perspective in the thesis is two-fold. First, it helps to understand peoples' lives experienced at various stages and life cycles in terms of birth, death, marriage, and other important events. Through her study on study on the elderly Bengali migrants in London, Gardner shows how the elderly Bengalis cannot recall their age but can express life lived in terms of what stage they were at a specific event in their life (2002, p. 19). She notes, "Life course brings to our attention the way in which roles and stages through which people pass are socially and culturally embedded. Life course depends on how life is lived." A second feature of a life-course perspective is that it elucidates a person's ability to deal with constraints, and thus one can measure the agency of the person (Handel 2000) experienced at different stages of their lives. For example, Handel's ethnography was based on his work on a working class man in Yorkville, in New York outside of Manhattan. His main concern in using the life course perspective was "with constraint and agency over a life course, as perceived and interpreted by a man who must make some kind of sense of his life as he has lived it now, and expects to live it" (p 16). In the case of the Gonds, this tension between constraints and agency is demonstrated by the following life changing events faced by the Gond households:

- 1) growing restrictions by the forest department, 2) death of Gond men and its

implications for Gond widows as becoming de jure female heads for their households, 3) limited to no impact for the welfare state schemes. The thesis shows how life events of birth, death, and migration, means of livelihood, as well as marriages are intertwined and inseparable for the Gonds. These will be discussed in detail in chapters 5-7.

The life course methodology is useful in the case of the Gonds' experience of lived lives and, their relations with the informal economy and the welfare state amidst growing constraints and uncertainties of the future of their families. The Gonds' lives are precarious as they are not able to access state schemes and thus remain 'undocumented'. Thus, their subjective experiences of coping with constraints remain unexplored as they are invisible from the state documentation system. The life course method is justified as it helps to bring voices to subjective experiences by measuring people's motivational goals for their families, and their abilities to cope with constraints and to conceive agency. It emphasises interconnection rather than the disjuncture (Arber and Evandrou, 1993). Further, it opens up “..important questions concerning the ways in which gendered roles, relationships and identities change over time, as well how these shifting roles are embodied”(Gardner, 2009, p. 4). Locke et al (2013) (expanding from Edler's life course paradigm) have also used the life-course to describe the precariousness that migrant families experience as they have to meet the 'care deficits' for their families. It is in the life course, expressed in the form of narratives, that one can get a sense of such families' ideologies and practices of living, their concerns of social care and security for themselves and their families, and their engagement in precarious and informal

forms of work. Further, Locke et al (2013) identify at least three main features to the life course perspective: 1) inter-linked lives of families, 2) the expressions of the changing historical times in their life times and; 3) "...the social, the emotional and of collective and individual subjectivities in the iterative renegotiation of gendered family relations... (ibid, p: 8)".

This study's focus on 'family' is significant because the family has historically been a continuous entity (Shah, 1964; Mandelbaum, 1970) especially in the lives of the poor, a feature that constantly responds to changes in the wider economy and society. We still do not fully understand the internal dynamics of social and interpersonal relationships that can offer relatively reliable support systems; nor do we fully understand how other such 'fall-back' strategies of solidarity amongst family and kin members can in particular cases create care, security, and a dignified means of living.

This research invites the consideration of micro-management or nano-level strategies (Hulme, 2004) that occur at the level of individual families; these strategies are revealed within the life-course perspective, household development cycle, and the working lives of the Gonds. The study, for all its global implications, is localised in its focus, examining the emergence and construction of the praxis of 'family' and 'kin support networks' as a locus of agency in situations where the welfare state fails to alleviate extreme poverty. Such social networks and solidarity can go a long way toward sustaining poor households while they are waiting for well-intentioned state welfare support.

At present, Gonds are undergoing sweeping economic, social, and cultural changes due to varied factors. These factors include the closure of stone quarries, increased legal restrictions on forest access, migration, and recent infrastructural developments such as expressways and bus routes that link their villages to adjacent cities and other Indian states. The thesis focuses on how these wider changes have opened up new economic opportunities that have significant impact on the Gonds' life experiences of living in poverty and inequality, as they strive to maintain dignity by remaining economically independent and debt-free despite being both income-poor and land-poor.

Later chapters discuss how the Gonds make the most of these opportunities, even though their jobs are irregular and temporary. These later chapters show how such work can be relatively well-paid due to labour shortages that lead to demand for such 'informal' work. As a result, there is a shift in favour of the labourers. This advantage is further enhanced in the wake of NREGA policy implementation, as labourers have become more aware of the maximum wage they are entitled to receive for their manual labour; that is, for their use of body capital to perform work in conditions that may be precarious, harsh, and enduring. This knowledge allows them more room for bargaining and negotiating their wage and working conditions in the unorganised labour market, thus making formal and organised institutions such as the welfare state less visible in the everyday lives of marginalised populations such as the Gonds.

Through all these changes, Gonds work toward modes of self-sufficiency. They can exercise agency in a number of ways, making choices about the conditions in which they will work, the wages they will demand, and the family needs they will prioritise as they work to achieve collective or individual goals. These modes of agency are a focal point of this thesis. Specifically, this thesis addresses how poor families exercise agency to acquire their own forms of care and security, meeting their own economic security and welfare instead of waiting for welfare state benefits to take effect. By diversifying their livelihoods, such families pursue economic independence by demanding higher than state-assigned minimum subsistence wages, and they experience dignity by drawing on social assistance from their closest kith and kin and labour market intermediaries. Such assistance is a form of social capital, that is, an intangible asset composed of informal relations and networks of not only family members but also labour contractors who are known through Gonds' various work experiences. Additionally, they endure harsh working conditions using their body capital, and they aspire towards upward mobility through new forms of consumption and wealth. Thus, the thesis revolves around family/social relationships, labour, and the 'precarious' lives of the Gonds.

The thesis describes the agency that land-poor and income-poor families experience in the pursuit of dignified forms of living. It investigates the agency of people such as the Gonds: the neutral and even positive side of precarious forms of work (such as stone quarry work and forest-wood collection discussed later in the thesis); the complexification of social networks; the fostering of entrepreneurship; the awakening

of new social aspirations (Appadurai, 2004); and the accommodation of changes in gender and patriarchal relationships

Further, the thesis calls for an acknowledgment of the role of solidarity networks and trustful negotiations that sustain verbal contractual arrangements between informal workers like the Gonds and labour suppliers, labour jobbers, and labour contractors. These labour contractors, who act as middlemen between the workers and their employers in the informal economy, constitute an essential feature of informal work that vulnerable people, such as the Gonds of central India, engage in for their livelihoods. The labour contractors are of the same social milieu as the informal workers and are familiar to each other due to familial, kin groups, or informal social networks. They often have close living arrangements with regular contact. Generally, the labouring arrangements are ad hoc, with no fixed pattern or type of work, nor is there a sense of time frame to complete the job. There is no formal commitment to complete work on time and no assurance that wages will be guaranteed. Agreements are essentially verbal in nature. These kinds of informal labour arrangements are thus different than those in the formal sector, where terms and conditions of work are discussed and formalised along issues of secured wages, regular jobs, and formal rights.

Focusing on the example of the Gonds, the thesis moves from the formal institution (the welfare state) to the informal institution (the family and the informal economy), taking into consideration how families integrate the informal economy in ways that are, in turn, both contesting and accommodating. It demonstrates how a study of

one community, the Gonds as *majdoors*, can shed light on how household conditions are negotiated by engaging in precarious forms of work in the informal economy.

Thus, the main aim of the thesis is to examine how the precarious nature of their informal work impacts both the land-poor and income-poor families in rural tribal India, particularly the Gonds, a tribal and forest-dependent community whose identity is highly varied by their differential interactions with the welfare state and by the unorganised and informal labour market. The thesis discusses various case studies that will illustrate that Gonds can become restructured and undergo a 'household life-changing' experience (Niehof & Pennartz, 1999, as cited in Ali, 2005, p. 42) as they draw on their body capital to perform informal types of work in the unorganised economy.

The thesis also shows how the impact of informal work, agency, and dignity are related to the type of household; there are many types of households, varying in terms of land ownership, family size, access to sources of income, marital status, and the gender of the family's primary earner. However, what is common is that households of all types make the most of their opportunities and seek to remain economically independent, debt-free, and food self-sufficient. Based on primary ethnography collected in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh, the study examines the complex role of the informal economy as a non-state actor or an agent of change so as to understand under what conditions this dependency between the Gonds as labourers and the informal economy can be mutually beneficial. The study also shows how this relationship is shaped by the specific demand for and supply of wage

work that favours such inter-dependency between the informal economy and the labourers (the Gonds in this thesis), rather than of reliance on the state as the main provider of welfare.

1.2 Objectives

Through a year-long fieldwork period in a village in Madhya Pradesh, central India, three objectives were pursued:

- an exploration of the impact of the informal economy and precarious work on the Gonds as a land-poor and income-poor population with limited ability to read and write;
- observations on how the Gonds variably managed their livelihoods through precarious labour in the informal economy, using body capital in ways that depended on their household type;
- an investigation into how the Gonds exercised agency and built dignity through livelihood diversification (Chapters 4, 5 and 6), particularly through temporary migration (Chapter 6) and through withdrawing from state aid programmes that were not aligned with their own perceptions of economic security and welfares for their households (Chapter 7).

This study concentrates on the family as a form of social capital and labour as a form of body capital. This approach enables the study to focus on gender relationships and patriarchy, and to show how intra-household power relationships are negotiated as families work to access the food, shelter, and water they need for sustenance. A family is a definite, and yet an expansive entity. It is unmeasurable and permanent, and can exist despite being landless or homeless. It remains indefinitely even as individual members are added and lost, as relationships are negotiated and renegotiated, and as Gond families organise and reorganise with respect to both local and wider political and economic changes. Thus, the thesis pays attention to this relatively permanent and continuous feature of the poor's lives – the families and solidarity networks and other informal support on which they draw. The poor, irrespective of household type, make the most of these resources in their efforts to influence the labour market in their favour.

This research has implications for our understanding of the informal economy, poverty, and the ways in which the poor construct agency and dignity through precarious work, a research area of emerging interest. The research also points to the ineffectiveness of welfare state benefits that have been targeted at India's rural poor in particular, a feature of the research that may have practical implications for policymakers.

1.3 Literature Review

The literature review begins by providing thematic overviews of each of the key topics mentioned above. Engagement with these themes not only describes them

but also discusses observations of the poor and marginalised community's experience with informal work and how it is different from observations of the Gonds. In so doing, there is a discussion of individual studies on informal and precarious work, debt bondage, and the informal economy (Bremar 1974, 1996, 2010; Prakash, 2009; Picherit, 2012; Vera-Sanso, 2012); social capital (Cleaver, 2005; Das, 2004); body capital (Talib, 2010; Waite, 2005); temporary migration (de Haan, 1999a; Rogaly, 1995) and withdrawal from the welfare state in the form of schooling and employment (Froerer, 2012; Jeffery et al., 2008).

In the proceeding discussion of literature on informal economies and the Indian welfare state, one important theme is the ways in which authors do or do not engage with the emergence of their subjects' agency. Another consideration is how these authors have documented the life histories of their workers with respect to the local economy and their relationships with employers. Finally, it is relevant to consider whether a given study took place, as this thesis does, in the post-NREGA context. All the studies are connected due to their comparative contextual experiences of formal and informal forms of security and care; the formalised institutions provided by the Indian state (for instance, education and employment) are contrasted with the informal economy that is experienced through family, kin support networks, and other social relationships. In this thesis, supported with evidence in Chapters 4 to 7, the informal economy is the non-state actor/informal institution, whereas the Indian welfare state is the formal institution.

1.3.1 Informal Economy, Debt, and Informal (Precarious) Work in India

The informal economy has been of increasing interest to researchers in recent years. Studying the growing informal labour economy in India, Maiti (2013) noted the mounting evidence of labourers taking up precarious work. This author refers to the following as precarious: putting-out arrangements, in-house contracted labour, irregular and casual employment, competitive work teams, and migrant labourers (Hewison & Kalleberg, 2013, as cited by Maiti, 2013, p. 510). Maiti points out that Indian scholars and policymakers do not refer to such work officially as precarious work, but instead label it as 'formal, informal, organised, unorganised, registered and unregistered' (ibid. p. 510). He notes from his in-depth study of labourers, occupations and the industries in India that 'formal and informal' equate to non-agricultural activities, and 'organised' covers manufacturing activities. The ambiguity between these categories is a risk factor as it leaves many questions regarding working conditions, wages, and hidden employee-employer power relationships unaddressed.

Throughout this section, what the literature and case studies say in terms of wages and conditions of work in the informal economy is highlighted, as well as the relationships between capital and labour. The section also discusses the growing disenchantment from the welfare state that seems to be at odds with the poor labouring people's own subjective goals of dignity, economic independence, and food security for their families.

Breman's (1974, 1996, 2010) work on the *Dublas* and *Dhodias* respectively is an important study on village labourers who belong to marginalised SC and ST

communities in western Gujarat. He has been concerned about such wage work and marginalised villagers as labourers, and has been writing consistently on their economic conditions for the last 30 years. Breman's interest in this group notably started with questions of the Indian experience of proletarianisation and class consciousness as India experienced a transition from farming to industrialisation. Breman firmly asserts that the benefits of industrialisation and formal employment have been restricted to upper-caste populations, whereas the majority of the landless and the lower-caste population remain poor, with low pay and oppression keeping them as paupers. This, for Breman, also had implications for the dignity of labourers (Breman, 2010), despite the fact that circulation of labour and *footloose* labourers provide flexibility for the worker to enter into various and numerous contracts in the informal sector. Breman's footloose labourer or *wage hunter and gatherers* circulate within a wide variety of workplaces in differing branches of industry (Breman, 1996, p. 222). Footloose labour, according to Breman (1996), refers to highly mobile labourers who do not have regular and permanent jobs, and who typically work in the informal economy and under conditions of often intense exploitation. Such labourers are footloose in that they move around hunting for jobs in order to make ends meet or cover debts incurred. In this thesis, the term *footloose* is used to refer to similar classes of labourer who move between different sources of employment in order to earn their livelihoods and secure the reproduction of their households.

Breman makes a distinction between traditional forms of bondedness and new forms of bondedness. According to him, agrarian labour relationships were coercive, and

the labourers were exploited physically. However, in the industrial (also informal) economy, he finds that the labourer himself willingly enters this type of bonded labour relationship. In his study of labourers in the city of Surat's textile industry during his fieldwork in 1996, Breman noted that there were several migrant labourers from outside of Gujarat, namely those from Orissa. He noted that these labourers were mostly landless and low-caste labourers forced to migrate for the purpose of improving their economic situation. In his ethnographies of the road construction at Bardoli's, or Surat's textile industry and Chikligam and Gandevigam, Breman seems to contend that the labourers are not really free and that there is labour exploitation by the industry owners.

For Breman, poverty and the availability of surplus labour are together considered to be two of the most significant factors that constrain the labourer's autonomy from capitalism, and that pauperises him. He notes that even with the introduction of a physical infrastructure that has increased the mobility of labourers throughout the country, it seems that mobility is a mere strategy on behalf of landless and marginalised peasants for survival (Breman, 1974, 1996).

Breman (2009, p. 201) described the labour-worker relationships among the *Dhodias* and the *Dublas* as relationships of 'depatronisation' or 'neobondage.' He says that such relationships are less personalised and more contractual and monetised, unlike in the past, when caste-based patron relationships were fractional patron-client relationships that provided some form of social subsistence guaranteed in poor regions. He studies a different impact of informalisation, namely

casualisation, which works more in favour of the employers than the labourers who cannot reap equal profits from the market, and increasingly takes on insecure and irregular forms of work just to get by.

Breman describes this kind of employment in the informal sector (economy) as an example of the 'lumpen' impact of capitalism (2003), where the labourers' dignity is stripped away and the worker is always 'unfree' because he cannot actively influence the labour market. Accordingly, this can lead to exploitative and insecure forms of work outside of the village, involving migration and living in filth and squalor on the fringes of urban slums (Breman, 2003). Breman adds that this is a peculiar feature of Indian society that is marred by caste and social identities; he applies the lens of social Darwinism to the poor and marginalised Dalit, concluding that they may never experience dignity or social mobility (2010). He argues that dignity and mobility are restricted to those in the formal sector who work for privileged elites and upper castes in rural and urban India. In addition, according to Breman, the Indian experience of proletariat empowerment is remarkably different from the Western one, where economic freedom and dignity of the proletariat are possible due to 'bringing the market under public control and leaving the care of the people to the state' (Breman, 2003, p. 215).

Like Breman, Prakash (2009) highlights the negative impacts of informal labour on India's poor. In his study of the brick kilns in two sites of Punjab-Gurdaspur and Amritsar, he showed how a majority of labourers also belonged to SC and ST communities and had to contend with land and income poverty. Such labourers

operated as a whole family unit, with wages divided amongst all the family members through the primary worker. Most of the brick kiln labourers were from the states of Bihar, Jharkhand, and Orissa. They migrated individually, accompanied by other migrant labourers or as family units. Prakash further shows that the contractual nature and the monetised aspect of debt bondage begins by borrowing money in advance so as to meet the labourer's consumption needs. The adult male is considered as the primary borrower, but indirectly, the labour of the entire family is also pledged (ibid. p. 209), irrespective of gender or age. Borrowing indicates the unending cycle of debt followed by 'survival migration,' as described by Breman (1985), to meet the principal debt as well as the interest. This kind of migration is a reflection of the lack of ownership of productive assets.

Another study on the Gonds' relationship with the informal economy and the welfare state in rural India is provided by Picherit (2012). Based on a 24-month study, Picherit finds that the Gollas, as an SC, have very little say in terms of employment when working as construction labourers in cities such as Laletpur. Development projects and resources to access various schemes of social change in rural India are highly contested by different caste groups such as the Reddys, the landed and traditional elites. However, the Gollas enjoy relative success in their political bargaining position by, for instance, determining who to vote for in local village elections and how to favourably influence development projects in their villages. Even though they do not have direct access to such resources of change, they are successful in limiting the absolute power of the landed communities that continue to control such resources of change. This demonstration of political clientelism at the

village level of politics demonstrates how labourers like the Gollas show solidarity to each other, which adds a collective sense of dignity with which to confront the political clout of the Reddys, who are the dominant caste (ibid).

Picherit defines this autonomy and the political bargaining positions of the Gollas as their ability to meander through micro-level hierarchies and to contest both spatial and temporal aspects that are inter-shifting. In the informal economy, the Gollas have created a niche for themselves in the road construction sector, and they have found a way to prevent labourers from ever missing work: if someone is sick, there is a system in place to replace the worker and to assure continuity of work. However, these political bargaining and oppositional strategies are still limited. The Gollas have acquired an awareness of how to change the balance of caste-based power in their village, precisely because the landed elites have kept them in that situation by not only controlling resources of development but also by prohibiting the Gollas from permanently moving out of the village or settling in Laletpur, the site of road construction (ibid).

Other dominant caste groups in the cities where Gollas reside and work during their periods of labour contract have been known to physically abuse and show violence to the Gollas if they do not leave after their contracts end. The Gollas receive very little support from city authorities to protect not only their labour rights, but also their rights in general as free citizens of India. Picherit says, 'political clientelism, migration and labour struggles and standards, or the relationships between labour, development and politics, should be analysed *in situ*, by taking into account the

multiple sites where migrant labourers live and work from urban to rural sites' (ibid, p. 145). The inter-relationships among migrant villagers (labourers), their aspirations for social change in their villages, and their occasionally successful influence in their village politics, are further taken up in Chapters 6 and 7 of this thesis, which explore the Gonds' awareness of how their labour is impacted by migration and NREGA. For the Gonds, like the Gollas in Laletpur in Andhra Pradesh (Picherit, 2012), migration is a livelihood strategy they can use to reinstate their social status in their villages.

The other major concern of this study is the entitlement of families and household earners for care and security in their old age. Current scholarship shows that the poor are constantly deprived of any entitlement to formal state social assistance such as education and social transformation (Sen, 1999), and instead find themselves being 'pushed' and 'pulled' (Gupta et al., 2002) into 'informal,' 'irregular,' 'temporary' (Biswas et al., 2002; Rafique & Rogaly, 2003; Rogaly, 2009), and unorganised forms of work, a situation that makes them more income-poor due to distressed wages and exploitative working conditions (Harriss-White & Gooptu, 2001). The studies discussed here also suggest that the benefits of state welfare programmes for the welfare of poor such as the Gonds get siphoned off, hijacked by rural elites and authorities before they reach their intended recipients (Jeffrey, 2002; Corbridge et al., 2005; Harriss-White, 2003). Researchers have rightly raised concerns about the impact of such practices on 'marginal livelihoods' (Staples, 2007).

A lesser-known group of poor who work to secure their livelihoods through the informal economy are older female labourers. These women's lives are grievously

neglected by the welfare state, and few studies have given attention to these workers. More research is needed to know how older women as labourers contribute to the overall income profile of their household by work participation, and why they do not receive comparable safety nets either from the welfare state or their families. This places them at greater risk of being neglected both by the welfare state and by their families in old age, and presents them with a real risk of living more impoverished lives due to morbidity, age discrimination, mortality, and incapability of accessing state benefits. They are highly dependent on their children for old-age support, and this support might not be always be available (Vera-Sanso, 2012, p. 333).

Penny Vera-Sanso's (ibid) age-based life course case study of urban street vendors who are older women from low-income families in Chennai, India, discusses how the Indian government, as well the families of such older labourers, have ignored the role of older people's contributions to their families' financial stability. Using a mixed-methods approach and informal, unstructured interviews, she shows that such women's contributions not only help their families to have improved financial stability, but they also improve India's global competitiveness. This is because these women help in the distribution and selling of agricultural products on the streets of cities like Chennai, which are global marketplaces. For their families, such women 'provide housing, money and collateral to their adult married children and take on domestic duties and childcare or "help out" in vending businesses to allow their daughters and daughters-in-law to juggle work and domestic responsibilities' (p. 334).

For the Indian economy, such women make a major contribution by working 'in the riskier end of street vending, by selling the more perishable items that require lower capital investment such as green leafy vegetables and tomatoes that provide the cheapest fresh food available for people to buy' (p. 334). The street vending of these older women 'sustains India's competitiveness in the global market by holding down wage costs and by increasing married women's labour force participation' (p. 334). Based on her findings, Vera-Sanso (ibid) concludes that, unlike the assumption that such older women as labourers are dependent on their families for old-age support, these women are not only self-supporting, but also supporting their children (both unemployed and employed), husbands, and other family members who take up irregular jobs. This kind of financial support, which goes a long way in stabilising their families' incomes, is in addition to the daily household chores these women might also perform.

Vera-Sanso's (ibid) findings also revealed that being old was not a chronological concept but a life-course phase, the perception of which was shaped by early marriage, becoming grandparents by the age of 35, and having to work daily long into their old age. The households that Vera-Sanso studied had male members financially contributing only until their early 40s, and being totally dependent on their wives' incomes as they could not find jobs 'under the conditions of poverty, low and irregular incomes, injury, chronic ill-health and age discrimination' (ibid. p. 332). As a result, such women are caring for and supporting husbands for almost all their married lives, with marriages taking place at a very early age. These women face prolonged lives of precarious labour and with none of the social protections of the

welfare state (ibid). In this thesis too, the Gond women have to work in order to secure their own social protection when they get old or are unable to work anymore.

Another concern Vera-Sanso's study raises is the lack of acknowledgment of such women as 'labourers,' a status that gets hidden behind the social status of being 'older women' in their families. She says, 'older women are much less likely to be classed as labourers: frequently they were classed as “helpers” in someone else's micro-business, even if that business was originally their own' (ibid. p. 331). This is because in the Indian context, 'worker' is normally socially constituted with the assumption that men are primary providers. This assumption has serious implications for 'age-related differentials in old-age work participation by underestimating the rates of decline in men's work and the rates of increase in women's work over the life course' (ibid. p. 331).

As Vera-Sanso observes in her study, both demographic and sociological concerns are in play (2012). The demographic concern is that 'age' is socially constructed, meaning that women have to face a long and insecure working life, both as workers and as supporters of their families. Sociologically, this construction of age means having to miss out on the adequate support that a person who has been constantly contributing both to the household and the national economy deserves in their later years.

The women that Vera-Sanso (ibid) studied lived much longer lives than their husbands, and, as a result, were deemed to have a lower desire and need for income, which would instead be consumed by their families. After the deaths of their

husbands, such women are automatically assumed to call on their children for support in their old age; as a result, they are deemed not to need the excess income that they earned as street vendors and had to defer support in their later lives. This is a characteristic of low-income families living in urban slums who struggle to meet their daily needs and live a hand-to-mouth existence without access to welfare state provisions of housing, employment, and education.

Similarly, this thesis will also demonstrate that Gond women, as lone earners, continue to work for their families and get their children married through labouring, in the hope that, in the future, it will entitle them to receive care from their children. The thesis demonstrates how social and economic security, in this case for the elderly, both men and women, is primarily located within their kin relationships due to the absence of the welfare state in the lives of the elderly. The thesis also explains why these women continue to work for their families, even though family support in old age is never guaranteed, as Vera-Sanso's work has shown.

Research on the income-poor who labour informally sometimes focusses on the constraints in which these people live and the nature of their economic hardships, especially material deprivations and the role of the weak welfare state in perpetuating those hardships. Less understood are the intangible aspects of their life experiences of economic hardship, particularly their potential for agency to make a self-initiated change in their living conditions. In this thesis, it will be seen that the poor not only meet their food security needs and remain debt-free, but they also strive for dignity and seek to remain independent of any state social assistance. It

will be shown how choosing informal work functions is a calculated risk, rather than opting for education and formal employment opportunities. Moreover, as this study will show, constraints have recently been placed on creditors and moneylenders in the context of labour shortages, which give labourers greater bargaining power.

Using the primary method of life course perspective, the thesis re-examines the relationship between capital and labour to show how labourers can have a degree of control over their wages and the type of work, and can, to some extent, challenge the previously assumed privileges of the capital-owning class. In the case-studies discussed above, we also see a broader structural understanding of the poor as labourers who underwent different types of contractual arrangements while away from their village. Also, as these case-studies show, these patterns of precarious work vary from state to state, depending on the regional ideologies of gender and kinship.

Indian labour market studies (Kar & Marjit, 2001) reveal how beneficial the informal labour economy is for both labour and capital in India's increasingly regulated labour market (ibid). Due to these new economic opportunities, the social networking, 'associations,'² organisations, and bondings of the 'income-poor' groups have become more complex. These changes have social and cultural implications for rural households, who for the first time are in a position to guarantee the best possible life

² See Mohmamad Talib (2010): *Writing Labour-Stone Quarry Labourers in Delhi*, OUP. For a full discussion of associations and dissociations amongst labourers in non-western contexts.

outcomes for their families in terms of debt and bondage-free lives (Camfield et al., 2009), as well as security and care in their old age. However, very little is known about how this occurs. This is still an emerging field of study, especially in the south Asian context on which this study focusses.

1.3.2 Limits of Social Capital

On the limits of social networks, through the example of the Gonds, the thesis is in agreement with Cleaver (2005), who shows that social networks are not equally available to everyone, especially not to single or widowed female household heads. These groups are vulnerable to the social taboo of seeking assistance from outside the kinship structure. We cannot generalise these networks and strategies because they are not the same for every household, as will be shown in observations from Bharatpur. Whether these networks are dense, sparse, homogenous, or heterogeneous also matters (Khan & Seeley, 2005) for the vulnerable households predisposed to adverse social capital (Wood, 2005), not least because informal support is born out of norms, customs, obligations, and expectations.

As these communities are deprived of physical and material assets, accessing and benefiting from welfare state benefits is still a distant dream. In this regard, the thesis corroborates Rogaly's (2009) assessment that the agency of such temporary unorganised labourers who are constantly mobile and work on piece-rate wages is temporal, low-key, and barely visible. However, this work is critical to the poor's efforts to make a viable life; Hulme (2004), in his study of the poor in Bangladesh, shows that despite the constraints on such an agency embedded in social ties and

networks, it can still deliver the desired outcome of debt-free living while formal civic society remains inaccessible for the poor. A study on the agency of garment labourers in Tiruppur (Carswell & De Neve, 2013) argues for a broader concept of agency that is embedded in reproductive and social relationships for studying employment practices and how they are valued in the lives of the labourers. However, Wood (2003) warns us not to over-emphasise social agency, as there are wider political economies that are marginalising the agrarian and forest-fringe communities.

On the other hand, social networks can also be limited in terms of how wide and intense (or dense) one's social capital is, and the strength of these networks depends on what poor households can offer in return. In their study of rural livelihoods in Bangladesh, Hossain et al. (2005) categorise these kinds of networks into horizontal (kinship, friends, homogeneous) and vertical ties (the poor and the influential, patron-client relationships). According to the authors, because these social networks are so diverse and uncertain, they present many problems for the rural poor that can put their livelihoods at risk. That is, social relationships and networks are not necessarily beneficial to the poor. Sometimes patrons are not available when they are truly needed, as in emergencies or where high transactional expenses may be involved for the maintenance of one's social network. In this study too, through the example of the Gonds, social relations – even if not the most reliable means of accessing livelihood – are still preferred over the formal welfare state, which is inaccessible to the Gonds and can still lead to experiences of agency and dignity even if at a micro-scale.

Female heads of households may be especially income-poor and restricted in their social networks, for cultural reasons, and so might consider seeking vertical networks or help from outside their kinship and family structures as taboo. However, these social networks are specific to each community and depend on the particular context of each household and embedded historical practice (Carswell, 2002), as will be shown in the case studies in Chapters 5, 6, and 7. Previous research has also found that households with limited social networks, such as the Gond women as lone earners, are the most income-poor and prone to being in debt and bondage-type relationships; and most vulnerable to poverty (Hulme, 2004).

Cleaver (2005) is critical of Putnam's (1995) understanding of social capital, who suggests that poor households can depend on bonding and networking to provide assistance in dire economic circumstances. In Cleaver's study on the Usungu Wetlands Project, in Tanzania, she found that poor households had less access and could not participate in the Wetlands Project when compared to more privileged households, with the result that they remained chronically poor. Among those households, 'help secured was minimal, intermittent, and obtained through constant and costly reinvestments in uneven exchanges' (2005, p. 899).

As shall be seen, for the Gonds, the accessibility to care, as well as social and economic security, largely depends on kinship, social networks, and social relationships within labour arrangements with other Gonds and influential people (Khan & Seeley, 2005). It is also shaped by socio-economic factors including, but not limited to, class, race, caste, ethnicity, migratory status, gender, age, marital

status, and physical ability (Vera-Sanso, 2012). However, this thesis will argue that the reasons for such constrained choices are contextual and specific to various cultural and community contexts, including to ideologies of gender and patriarchy. The thesis compares gender, kinship, power relationships, and decision-making in both male- and female-headed households to show in what way Gond families use such networks to meet their goals for full and dignified lives. It will be shown that the Gonds are aware about the risks of such informal network support, but prefer to participate in these rather than in the welfare state's schemes, as their life-goals are contingent upon their families' circumstances. How the Gonds construct agency and dignity through family ties, networks, and social capital will be the subject of Chapter 4.

1.3.3 Agency Through Livelihood Diversification

The following section shows how current conceptualisations of livelihood diversification among poor households are framed in terms of coping and surviving amidst constrained choices. This thesis counters current scholarship on Indian poverty, which is reluctant to accept precarious forms of work and informal labour markets as a way poor people may choose to diversify livelihoods and escape poverty. In this thesis, precarious forms of work constitute an important form of agency of the Gonds, who are materially poor and thus vulnerable to being in debt bondage or even suffering food starvation. This thesis begins to establish a link among livelihood diversification, dignity, and economic independence.

The thesis, in order to explain the idea of livelihood diversification amongst rural households, mainly draws from the works of Ellis (2000) and problematises the coping framework of Niehof and Price (2001). Diversification of livelihood is generally conceived amongst rural households as a coping strategy (Niehof, 2004) to deal with rapidly changing economic surroundings. However, in this thesis, diversification is not just a means of coping and surviving, but is actually a successful strategy within the Gonds' larger goal of pursuing fuller lives; this will be later shown in the case studies.

According to Hussein and Nelson (1998), and Scoones (1998), livelihood diversification has three aspects: (a) diversification of income sources, including, but not confined to, coping strategies; (b) agricultural intensification and extensification; and (c) migration, whether local, national, or international (Whitehead, 2002). Because these strategies or modalities of attaining household stability are employed in the interest of the family's welfare and care, this thesis argues that they can also be viewed as political projects related to the social status and aspirations of the poorest citizens. This will be shown in Chapter 4 where Gond families experience the impact of cash infusions.

Novel livelihoods and livelihood diversification constitute ways in which rural people may respond to changes in available resources. Breman (1996) has defined diversity of livelihoods, or 'occupational multiplicity,' as being characteristic of the rural economy. Such diversity troubles the supposedly fixed boundaries between rural and urban, formal and informal, market and non-market (Whitehead, 2002, p. 577),

and agriculture and industry and, as Ellis says, 'the way people are interpreted as making complete transitions from one type of activity to another as development proceeds' (Ellis, 1998, p. 1).

Within India, Breman and Mundle (1991) have argued that three important factors have affected rural economies and led to an increase in diverse and multiple forms of rural livelihoods: the decline of agriculture; the rise in non-agricultural rural and urban employment; and the increased flexibility and insecurity of labour markets. For most income-poor groups, such as tribal communities, livelihood diversification typically involves a multiplicity of poorly paid jobs in exploitative conditions; most non-farm work in rural areas is in the informal sector and lacks regulation. As Lanjouw and Shariff (2004) have demonstrated, lower castes are under-represented in better-paid non-farming work. In the post-colonial and liberalising economy of India, this thesis will argue that exploring the impact of livelihood diversification on households is critically important. Therefore, it makes use of the livelihood diversification framework without over-emphasising the agency of people such as the Gonds, recognising that, as other scholars have noted, broader factors within the wider political economy can limit these people's already constrained livelihoods (Wood, 2003; Staples, 2007).

According to de Haan and Zoomers (2005), before the late 1980s, the livelihood approach had been dominated by household studies, in particular by Schmink (1984). Although these scholars came to the pessimistic conclusion that households are marginalised by wider economic and political contexts, they also suggested that

households are not passive and atomistic in their livelihood strategies, but rather exercise agency through strategic acquisition, use, and management of assets and resources (Niehof, 2004). Thus, this research on the Gonds follows in the tradition initiated in earlier studies on livelihood diversity, which viewed households as being actively involved in the management of their livelihoods.

In Schmink's view (1984), the household is an economic unit in which decisions regarding livelihood generation in the form of labour force participation, migration, and consumption patterns are negotiated to cope with broader historical and structural processes. This approach was later replaced by livelihoods conceived in terms of capital, assets, resources, access, and capabilities, as in Chambers and Conway (1992), and inspired by Sen's (1981) explanation of poverty and famine in India in terms of entitlements (de Haan & Zoomers, 2005). Since then, the livelihood framework has moved beyond a household-based economic analysis of livelihoods to examine structural and institutional forces of intensification, extensification, and diversification (Swift & Hamilton, 2001, as cited in Ali, 2005, p. 54).

The most recent approach to the study of livelihoods is the network analysis approach, which illuminates how household members create both formal and informal networks in order to meet their livelihood needs. Such livelihood networks help us understand how a person makes a living given specific constraints, coping strategies, assets, resources, and capabilities (Seeley, 2009). In this thesis, focusing on the concepts of gender and patriarchy helps to explain why not everyone in the household has equal access to these resources and strategies, and how coping

strategies can be wielded by some household members to meet their own needs. The network analysis approach also helps to reveal the Gonds' concerns about how they will receive care when old, disabled, or unable to contribute towards household needs.

The study employs the livelihood diversification framework for three main reasons. First, the framework is flexible enough to capture the range, networks, and diversity of households' livelihood resources and assets and to accommodate the temporal perspective of the household life-course and household agency (Niehof, 2004). Second, it helps to explain how agro-ecological factors determine the types of employment available, and the costs of debt and credit relationships necessary to engage in precarious work for the Gond families. For example, a driving fact could be the need for meeting agricultural costs, such as seeds and water, in order to increase a household's food security for the whole year. This is in addition to the range of income-generating activities undertaken in order to meet these needs on a long-term and long-term basis to guarantee care, despite temporary and insecure forms of work. Third, it helps explain how a household transforms itself into a workforce by building on social interactions, networks, solidarity, and relationships both within and among itself. At the same time, unlike the above literature, which portrays the poor's livelihood strategies as 'coping' (Niehof, 2004), 'surviving', and 'constraining', this study reveals poor Gond families to be 'resilient', 'entrepreneurial', and seeking to 'live a dignified life'.

1.3.4 Embodying Precarity: Body Capital, Labour and Welfare

In addition to social capital – an important aspect of the poor’s subjective experience that was discussed above – another important asset is body capital, which is defined as the body’s ability to perform work in conditions that may be precarious, harsh, and enduring. This section asks, how much can the body be considered an asset in the performance of a dignified living? How can the labouring and working body be conceptualised as an insurance against economic risks and a source of agency for the poor? The broader political economy of livelihood sources is presented, and the importance of casualisation of their labouring lives in the form of irregular and temporary forms of work is discussed. According to Chambers (1989, drawing on Sen, 1981), the purpose of these strategies is survival (based on stable subsistence), security (based on assets and rights), and self-respect (based on independence and choice). The study conducted amongst the Gonds combines all three of the above strategies, but not necessarily in this particular order based on the evidence presented in Chapters 5, 6, and 7.

This section draws on two ethnographic studies on precarious work and body capital as able-bodies to contextualise social care and the social mobility of the poor. The first of these is Waite’s research on 22 households of manual labourers in Maharashtra (2005), in which she argues that for the rural poor and disadvantaged peoples like the Gonds, the physical capacity to labour is shaped not only by physical abilities but also by family experiences, food intake, habituated learning, psychological states, and cultural beliefs and practices. Her work thus contributes to

our understanding of how labourers are able to, can choose to, or are allowed to use their bodies at work. Waite not only looks at the calorific intake of bodies, but also portrays labouring as a reflection of social, cultural, environmental, and political contexts. In her work, the labouring body is the most complex location of all these enabling factors; even when malnourished, it can enable manual labourers to earn their livelihoods. Thus, Waite situated the labouring body in environmental and political contexts.

In that sense, Waite (2005) also emphasises the social and cultural dimensions of household strategies of the rural poor aimed at moving out of poverty and meeting their social aspirations for their families. In her study, Waite argues for a more holistic perspective to understand the embeddedness of the labouring body of the poor, combining the physical aspect of the body's nutritional and calorific value with the socially constructed aspect of the body.

Another study of agency of temporary and unorganised labourers was conducted by Mohammad Talib (2010): he studied stone quarry labourers on the outskirts of New Delhi. He found that, for the poorest, agency took the form of honesty, hard work, and dutifulness (Talib, 2010). Through this cultural script, the labourers normalised their everyday lives as stone miners and led stable lives despite working in harsh and labour-intensive conditions. However, there are also real physical constraints and trade-offs associated with the conditions in which they earn their livelihoods. These compromise the physical growth of the income-poor as their labour output is not matched with a nutritious diet, and children work instead of going to school

(Bhukuth, 2005; Da Costa, 2010; Self, 2011). The topic of how the 'performance of the working body' and embodying 'precarity' is linked with precarious forms of employment and a search for dignified forms of living is an emerging topic of research among scholars who study the working lives of the poor in India.

1.3.5 Agency Through Temporary Migration: Villagers as Migrants

Another way in which agency can be exercised by labourers in an informal economy is through temporary migration. By moving from place to place in order to diversify their livelihoods, labourers can seek to pursue higher wages, better working conditions, and greater subjective experiences of dignity and welfare. As we will see in the case of the Gonds, migration-based livelihoods can help the poor to meet their 'economic security and welfares'.

The current literature on the role of temporary migration as a livelihood strategy of the poor in India seems to be ambivalent. While many have found that temporary migration helps the poor escape poverty, studies from the Indian context have mostly dismissed this conclusion due to the unhygienic, badly paid, and often exploitative working conditions revealed in ethnographies (as discussed below). This section considers this ambivalent position by considering migration as an important means for poor families in their pursuit of a dignified and debt-free life. It will also explore how the ability to migrate forms a type of 'agency' that is less understood in the sociological and anthropological critique of migration-based livelihood studies in India. It will show how migration is a form of 'work' and a means of achieving subjective welfare.

Studies have viewed migration as a source of vulnerability because of the ineffective regulation of employment conditions, job insecurity, and a lack of powerful allies among the migrants. In their study of tribal migrants from the states of Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Rajasthan, Gupta et al. (2002) found both 'pull' and 'push' factors, as well as forced and voluntary patterns in the migration of the Bhil community. For some, labour migration is indeed a forced livelihood response, although it arises from a complex set of social relationships (including relationships of debt and dependency), rather than simply from ecological crisis and subsistence failure.

The above research has demonstrated the claims that migration frequently reproduces structures of oppression through exploitative working conditions (Deshingkar, 2006; Gupta et al., 2002; Olsen & Ramamurthy, 2000). As Gupta et al. (2002) also showed, the potential benefits of migration may already be squandered in advance, as a result of usurious money lending and labour contracting, neobondage, or other debt relationships. While these observations may hold for migration patterns that arise from a complex set of social relationships (including relationships of debt and dependency), mass migration is also a sign of rural poverty, low agricultural productivity, lack of non-farm employment, poor access to rural benefits, corruption, and lack of representation (Deshingkar & Farrington, 2009). This is especially true for tribal communities like the Gonds, who are illiterate and believe themselves unable to influence the state in a favourable way.

However, where migration contributes to an accumulative livelihood strategy, it can enable households to lift themselves significantly above the poverty line (Deb et al., 2001, p. 6). According to Rogaly and Thieme (2012, p. 2098), migration is a gruelling experience involving a:

difficult and dangerous journey, cramped temporary living quarters, anxiety over loved ones back home, deteriorating body capital, and low pay which often characterises the worker's experience. In spite of such conditions, the work provides much-valued cash earnings for a people with no alternative...

Over time, migrants might see an improvement in the returns from migration. However, these improvements are specific to each household's ability to pool their resources in their households. Coppard & Rogaly(2003, p. 431) observed that poor people realise that they cannot risk being unemployed for too long while migrating to places without any social security, which is usually provided by the accompanying family members.

Although the general tendency in the literature on labour migration is to portray this strategy as a consequence of distressful conditions in the village and a forced livelihood response, as shown above, others have found that migration provides a positive opportunity to save, accumulate capital, or invest in assets (Rogaly, 2003). Further, Shah (2006), for example, showed that migration by tribal people to brick kilns in the village of Jharkhand and Tapu was undertaken not just for economic reasons but to complement other social needs, and that it created relationships not possible in a home village setting. According to Shah, despite the hardships associated with short-term migration, tribal people still favoured it as a strategy 'to

explore and roam; to escape from a problem at home; or to live out a prohibited amorous relationship ... constraints and obligations of kinship, from domestic disputes and a narrow-minded and oppressive village environment' (2006, p. 106).

Rogaly and Thieme (2012) showed through a life-cycle analysis that migrants are preoccupied with more than 'material ways of life', and that as migrants, these labourers are able to stretch their life-world across time and space, and can experience multilocal subjectivities. Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan (2003) have also argued that migration allows poor people to use their agency in the pursuit of a livelihood, even if the working conditions in the migration destinations are questionable. This thesis will contribute to this line of findings by arguing that, despite its hardships and disadvantages, migration can also function as an attractive, preferable, and voluntary decision that provides labourers with maximum manoeuvrability and flexibility, and with the option to explore new possibilities.

Other literature has tried to analyse temporary and short-term migration. Scholars have investigated the precipitating causes of migration among poor people (Deshingkar & Start, 2003). An important factor that would seem to mitigate migration, and particularly long-term migration, is, as Siddiqui and Sikder (2005) pointed out, the unregulated nature of the informal labour market where migrants are exposed to social relationships that intervene to renegotiate unpaid or underpaid wages, or help when they experience violence, illness, or accidents on distant work-sites.

The importance of these cultural resources in their livelihood strategies undoubtedly helps to explain Massey's findings in her 2009 study of West Bengal. According to her, migration from the district was induced mostly by misfortune, and influenced not simply by opportunities offered elsewhere, but also by the local geography and the resources available. Therefore, livelihood in the form of temporary migration patterns are determined not simply by issues of productivity and demand for labour, but also by people's access to resources, their institutional, economic, and political environments, and their intra-household and wider social relationships, as will be seen in Chapter 6. This study on the Gonds aligns with de Haan's (1999b) argument that understanding migration as a livelihood strategy requires an examination not simply of the availability and attractiveness of employment, but of how and to what extent the type of migratory work allows the migrants and their families to improve their assets and human capital.

Among poor people, internal or domestic labour migration now seems to have become a more effective livelihood option to reduce poverty than it was earlier (Deshingkar & Start, 2003; Deshingkar, 2006). In his study on labour migration in Western Gujarat, Breman (1996) found that 'circular migration' across agriculture, construction, daily work in industry, brickyards, and other wage work, with regular returns to the native village, was typical among his subjects. Based on this evidence, Breman(ibid) argued that, although such migration among the poor is independent of traditional patron-client relationships, it replaces it with dependency on debt, brokers, and middlemen as the poor struggle to survive in a cash-based economy. As this study will show, however, this criticism does not take into consideration more

recent constraints placed on creditors and moneylenders in the context of labour shortages, which can give labourers greater bargaining power.

Rural-urban migration has been much studied but, in the context of work-related mobility, rural-rural 'internal' migration (de Haan & Rogaly, 2002), inter-village and inter-district migration has now gained more attention, together with circular migration back and forth from the city or other rural destinations. The cycle of movement is typically short, seasonal, and regularly repeated. Rogaly's studies on peasant migration and contractual arrangements in Purulia, which is marked by local contractual arrangements called *bandha* between rural employers and labourers, provide a much better clarification on the presence of an unequal economic exchange. He presents a more structural analysis of the local contractual arrangement. As he mentions, 'Most of the mainstream economic theories attempting to explain labour arrangements focus on employers' rationales' (1995, p. 169). He finds that labourers' rationales, if considered, have less to do with economic rationality than with year-long food security, even during the non-seasonal year.

This kind of contractual arrangement viewed from the labourers' point of view presents a case of the flexibility of labourers to stay away from bondedness and thus to remain free. Even though the contractual arrangement is such that they have to work until they clear their debt, Rogaly (1995., p. 168) further finds that in Purulia, the contractual arrangement secures them food, even during the lean season; most of them depend on a communitarian *santa*/ethnic group run food store. He finds this

even works well for the landless labourers, who are the most economically vulnerable section.

De Haan's (1999a) ethnography of circular migration in the jute industry in Calcutta provides more insight into the peasants' labouring conditions and their reasoning related to migration. As one of his informants notes, 'what to do? My house is there!'. Many said that they go when there is a 'need' or work, which could include a variety of things: marriage, an emergency, taking care of the land, education of the children. Further, de Haan (ibid) finds that sometimes labourers would leave the city for family visits more often than permitted and even be in a position to produce medical certificates for their absence.

Another motivation for the poor to maintain rural linkages is land. It appears that, after land reforms, many rural households have acquired small landholdings, so they have to return in order to ensure that everything is functioning as it should and that their families are secure. De Haan (1999a) notes that the *badli* system serves as a management strategy for the employer to guarantee labour supply throughout the year in the face of irregular circular migration patterns. However, De Haan (ibid) also notes that these patterns of migration should not be viewed in terms of existential circumstances but more so in the historical context of worker-employee relationships. De Haan (ibid) investigated the patterns of settlement and migration related to village origins, and how social and cultural values influence decisions of migration and mobility, and concluded that migration is not driven by economic necessity alone.

Further, Biswas et al. (2002, p. 85), in their research on Murshidabad's seasonal migrants in West Bengal, questioned whether security through such informal channels should be referred to as protection, especially as Wood (1998) pointed out that security often comes at the price of adverse incorporation. Instead, the West Bengal migrants preferred 'informal support' to 'informal social protection' (as cited in Khan & Seeley, 2005), because such support is embedded in traditional institutions like kinship, and it incorporates expectations and kinship obligations that disadvantaged households might not be able to fulfil.

Commenting on the failure of welfare state schemes such as guaranteeing rural employment and the Public Distribution Scheme (PDS) in West Bengal, Biswas et al. (2002) argued that migration has uneven and limited benefits for kin-based support networks, a reality that will be shown for the Gonds in Chapter 6. Biswas et al.'s (ibid) fieldwork showed that poor farmers, who were also seasonal migrants in West Bengal, wanted more structural equality in the wider regional economy of their village. Both Rogaly and De Haan (discussed above) offer a slightly more optimistic perspective on such engagements of employment in the informal economy than Breman, who wrote on 'survival migration' (Breman, 1976).

Picherit (2012), similarly, found that Golla migrant labourers in Laletpur, Andhra Pradesh, made demands for improved working and living conditions or salaries that were much more difficult to negotiate informally in the city than in their home villages. He also argued that the labourers were unable to take full advantage of important welfare state schemes targeting their overall welfare when they migrated for work.

These studies, therefore, show that for informal labourers, it is important to maintain their social status and their family ties back in the village, even if they migrate to cities to work. While the research undertaken for this study on the Gonds generally supports these critical perspectives on migration, it also argues that, among such groups, migration may in fact be preferred as a method for providing for the future security of their families.

Earlier research has shown that migration is a strategy that poor people employ to improve their living conditions, and that the success of the strategy is often contingent on social status, gender, and landholding status. This thesis corroborates Shah (2006), Gidwani & Sivaramakrishnan (2003), and Rogaly (2009) in holding that mobility is one way in which the rural poor assert their agency and experience emancipation and liberation from the social controls of their village and traditional lives, and through which they aspire to improve their living conditions and realise their desires for welfare and social security. How the Gonds construct agency and dignity through temporary migration will be the subject of Chapter 6.

1.3.6 Agency Through Withdrawal From the Welfare State

This section considers literature that illuminates how Indian State social assistance – which is meant to support development and social mobility – is misaligned with the reality of the Gonds. Chapter 7, which again looks at the subject of government aid programmes, will show how Gonds' withdrawal from these programmes constitutes an exercise of agency. This section, therefore, discusses research that suggests why waged labour in the informal economy is more desirable and attractive than

relying on the welfare state for poor families like the Gonds, and how such waged labour benefits them in the long run, even if it means very limited schooling for their children. This section will also show how the Gonds' subjective meanings of entitlement do not come from formal institutions like the welfare state, but rather from their families; this ensures care and security by working in the informal labour economy. The discussion begins with the social programme of education, and it goes on to discuss some recent ethnographical studies carried out on the failure of education to create non-farm work.

A growing number of ethnographic studies on marginalised groups have also revealed how challenging it can be to access employment in India without political and economic influence, even for those with a formal education. As Jeffery et al (2004) argue, this would require changing the caste-based hierarchy through a process of institutional change. In their study of young, unemployed, but able-bodied and literate Dalits in Bijnor district in Uttar Pradesh, the authors found that, through poverty and a lack of influential social contacts, educated Chamar young men in Nangal are forced to return to exploitative manual labour in the village'. As a result, they observe, 'an emerging culture of resentment amongst educated young men has caused some Chamar parents to rethink their educational strategies' (Jeffery et al, 2004, p. 982). They argue that institutional reform through land reform or improved agricultural taxation would be more effective than schooling in improving the lives of India's poor, even in a modern and liberal India.

Another important ethnographic study that examined the interrelationship among marginalisation, formal education, and social mobility is Froerer's (2008) research on tribal children in Chhattisgarh, which critiqued Sen's (1999) notion of education as a civilising mission that produces social good. Borrowing Bourdieu's idea of capital to understand the difficulty that marginalised groups face in successfully engaging with the benefits of education and social mobility, she demonstrates the role that social and cultural capital play 'in facilitating educational advantage, and providing an avenue for theorising how existing structures of inequality impact upon people's livelihood options' (Sen, 1999, p. 697). Ultimately, she argues, education is not an effective route to social mobility and entitlement unless people first attain some level of social equality.

This thesis supports Froerer's (2008) critique of Sen, but further connects its relevance to the lives of income-poor communities by showing how the poor actively reject the role of formal education and other welfare state aid programmes; this is because they rarely make any positive change to their lives. Although education is universally hailed as a powerful means for social transformation and the empowerment of the poor (Sen, 1999), as the above ethnographies show, research reminds us that concepts and experiences of the possibility of social transformation through education are contextual and subjective. Thus, one cannot necessarily conclude that education is enough to procure the independent and substantively enriched lives as envisioned by Sen (*ibid*) especially if previous generations have not had any opportunity to obtain formal education.

Furthermore, according to Shah (2010), widespread corruption in the form of misuse of funds intended to benefit income-poor populations diminishes the impact of social schemes aimed at improving access to employment and education, thereby further distancing the welfare state from the poor. Based on her ethnographic study on the Mundas' relationship with the Jharkhand State's social benefits, Shah (2010) describes why the Mundas shy away from the welfare state. She cites moral and ethical reasons, as well as the need for accountability and transparency in the implementation of various development programmes offered by the welfare state. The Mundas feared the 'dangerous' state for its potential to degrade their moral environment through the benefit programmes targeting them (ibid). Shah (2010) questions the morality of such officers who knowingly prevent such 'well-meaning' programmes for the doubly marginalised (marginalised both by the welfare state and then by the rural elites) and forest fringe communities, like the Mundas, from getting access to benefits.

Ferguson (1990), in his study on Lesotho, suggested to include rural social assistance for the poor more generally:

Development is a machine for reinforcing and expanding the exercise of bureaucratic State power, which incidentally takes 'poverty' as its point of entry and justification—launching an intervention that may have no effect on the poverty but does have other concrete effects. (1990, p. 178)

The findings of this thesis align with both Shah's and Ferguson's positions; however, the findings also show the difficult dilemma that the Gonds face in choosing between short-term financial security and long-term protection for their families (Kabeer, 2001). The latter could be achieved by sending their children to school, and the

former by sending them to work. The dilemma has been described as a 'Faustian Bargain' (Woods, 2003); however, Chapter 7 shows how the Gonds alter the Faustian Bargain, choosing economic security over schooling of their children as a strategy that fits with their desires for economic independence and dignity.

While this thesis benefits from and contributes to other scholars' insights on the impact of state social assistance on the poor, this study sheds new light on the withdrawal of India's income-poor from the state's social policies of welfare. This study explains that these policies run counter to the population's own ideas of long-term and reliable forms of welfare, care, and social security welfare. The poor often have their own collective aspirations for their families, which may or may not align with the marginal support from the welfare state that targets their welfare at an individual level.

In this way, this thesis departs from the dominant tradition of treating the poor as unable to escape poverty due to their historically and culturally constructed social labelling as a 'tribe'; instead, this thesis conceptualizes the poor as income-earning citizens. The thesis shows that poor people's non-engagement with the welfare state as a welfare provider is due to their ability to create their own stronger, long-term, more reliable and durable life-goals toward a fulfilled life (Veenhoven, 2006, as cited in Camfield & Copestake, 2009).

The case studies presented in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 also present the view that poor people's disengagement from the welfare state is not a political matter of collective/group identity, but constitutes an active strategy and exercise of agency

employed by the poor in order to gain maximum control over their ways of earning, and thereby build dignity into their ways of life. How the Gonds construct agency and dignity through withdrawing from welfare state aid programmes that do not align with their subjective goals will be the subject of Chapter 7.

1.4 Research Questions

This ethnography was guided by three main research questions regarding the Gonds' experiences in making a livelihood by performing informal, unorganised, irregular, and temporary work. The three main research questions were as follows:

- 1 How do the Gonds manage their livelihoods through precarious labour in the informal economy? What is the impact of precarious work (their use of body capital) in their lives?
- 2 How do the Gonds exercise agency and build dignity through their relationships with families and larger social networks, i.e., social capital (Chapter 4)?
- 3 How do the Gonds exercise agency and build dignity through livelihood diversification (Chapters 5 and 6)? Particularly, how do they do so through temporary migration (Chapter 6), and through withdrawing from the welfare state aid programmes that are misaligned with their subjective households goals (Chapter 7)?

In investigating these broad questions, other questions were considered, such as the following:

- How should we describe the dignity of income-poor people such as the Gonds, who are landless peasants, possess no material assets, and are largely illiterate?
- How is it possible for temporary, precarious, and insecure forms of work to ensure long-term forms of care for Gonds?
- How do Gond families balance the trade-off between their children's schooling and the apparent necessity of child labour in achieving their goals of life-satisfaction and their households' welfare and security? What risks do the Gonds assess in sending their children to school?
- How do Gonds use their able bodies (body capital) and social relationships (social capital) to pool their household members' resources to achieve experiences of life satisfaction?
- How do the life-course, the life cycle, and life-changing events in the Gonds' households impact the decisions that households take concerning making a living?
- How does migration help in achieving life-satisfaction goals, and how is it achieved?
- How do welfare state-led benefits compare with Gonds' mutually beneficial social assistance and informal social networks?
- What impacts do the Gonds experience from performing precarious forms of work? In particular, what are the Gonds' subjective experiences of precarity?

1.5 Significance

This study has significance for the anthropological understanding of income poverty, precarious labour, and subjective experiences of agency and construction of dignity, particularly in the South Asian context.

First, it describes and analyses ways in which income-poor families can experience agency and construct dignity in the context of diminished traditional livelihoods and limited assistance from governmental institutions. Specifically, by engaging in informal labour, the income-poor can reap both tangible and intangible benefits. Tangible benefits include higher wages and greater flexibility, while intangible benefits, a major theme of the chapters that follow, include self-sufficiency, a sense of dignity, and agency to determine the best life outcome for their families. Subjective experiences vary across and within households, as will be explored in later chapters.

Second, the thesis analyses how social capital in the form of individuals' families, households and social networks contribute to their subjective experiences of agency and dignity.

Third, it demonstrates that Gonds make calculated decisions about their work, drawing directly on their own body capital to perform precarious (informal) labour both in the home village and abroad rather than relying on other 'formal' options such as government-subsidised jobs. In so doing, the thesis questions the effectiveness of state social assistance for rural poor (i.e., National Rural Employment Guarantee or NREGA jobs), and re-examines how income-poor people sustain their lives through precarious forms of employment.

Finally, a theme running throughout all the chapters is the way in which one particular category of social change has been spurred by the informal labour movement: shifts in gender roles. The findings of this study suggest that, through participation in the informal labour economy, women may experience an increase in autonomy. As women begin to contribute to their households economically, changes may be observed in intra-household resource allocation. The thesis shows that Gonds' engagement with informal and precarious work has to be understood in the context where they have neither access to any form of formal government employment or welfare schemes, nor are they able to reinforce their earlier reliance on forest-based and mining-related livelihoods. In this context, informal labor markets offer the only and best opportunity available to them to construct viable, debt-free, and dignified livelihoods.

The research will show that remaining free and independent from debt is a critical aspect of Gonds' ethics and acts as a symbol of their resilience within the wider enterprise of livelihood management. An able-bodied worker who supports his or her family without assistance is a marker of a family's social prestige and signals the overall welfare and financial independence of the family. Thus, labour can be a direct route to dignity, resilience, and security.

Compared to previous studies, this thesis shows a broader intergenerational, temporal, and historical perspective on Gonds' agency formation, a perspective that is appropriate given the diversity of livelihood management practices of income-poor households. The study captures a dynamic and emerging picture of the socio-

economic transformation experienced by income-poor households. As the evidence in Chapters 5, 6, and 7 will show, the Gonds adopt multiple sources of income not only to reduce vulnerability, shocks, and risks, but also to create long-term forms of care and security for themselves and their families. How the Gonds construct agency and dignity through livelihood diversification will be the subject of Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

1.6 Brief Rationale for Project Design

Although a full discussion of the methodology is given in Chapter 2, this section discusses how interest in this topic began and offers a rationale for studying the Gonds' livelihood strategies. The author has been interested in inequality and poverty studies since growing up and witnessing poverty in urban India. The region where the investigation was carried out was chosen after discussion with thesis supervisors based at the University of Sussex, Department of Social Anthropology, who felt that the state of Madhya Pradesh was one of the less-studied states in India. After a few weeks of reviewing the available research on inequality and poverty in the state of Madhya Pradesh, it was clear that artisanal mining was the main economic means of sustenance for everybody in the region.

Later in the investigation, there were further introductions to the field by Kuntala Lahiri Dutt, a social geographer at the Australian National University, who has carried out extensive work on illegal and artisanal quarrying in India. She later put the researcher in touch with Aziz Qureshi, an NGO worker familiar with the region of Madhya Pradesh where extensive stone quarrying occurs. It was Aziz Qureshi who

then discussed the region's economic background and helped with the practicalities of organising the fieldwork described extensively in Chapter 3.

1.6.1 Site Selection

The fieldwork was based in Bharatpur, a village situated at the end of the same trail as the Panna Tiger Reserve. This Reserve has become the main context of the Gonds' economic hardships, as forest restrictions have increased to improve the tiger habitat. Bharatpur was chosen because its inhabitants were exclusively Gonds, unlike other villages inside the reserve, where Yadavs, Sahus, and Patels also lived. Bharatpur was only 10km from Panna town. The first months were spent within a 12-km radius around Panna. After studying both the social and economic aspects of the Gonds in the village of Bharatpur, it was realised that this was a very apt place for studying the topics of interest: landlessness, widow-headed households, migration, large family sizes, and school dropouts. Moving into the village and living with the Gonds was first considered, but it was later found to be more convenient to visit them on a daily basis. Chapter 2 discusses these decisions and rationales in greater detail.

1.6.2 Demographic Questionnaire

The research on which this dissertation is based involved a life-course narrative of the Gonds as *majdoors* (labourers) focussing on work and wages. This aspect of the methodology is described in detail in Chapter 2. However, before carrying out ethnographic and in-depth interviews with the Gonds, a micro-scale questionnaire of the village to get an idea of the Gonds' demographics and their work profile was conducted. In particular, the survey asked about marital status, the gender of the

household head, annual income, the education/schooling experience of the household, family size, material assets owned, access to sources of income, relationship with the welfare state, and relationship with the informal labour economy in terms of *majoori* (labouring) opportunities available. The survey revealed several findings:

- (a) most Gonds were landless and illiterate;
- (b) despite being surrounded by several welfare state programmes, the Gonds continued to be left out even when these programmes were targeting them;
- (c) the dwindling forest-based livelihood was compensated with an informal non-forest economy that allowed the Gonds to carry out hourly wage work valued at twice NREGA wages;
- (d) only 15% of Gonds were in debt (and this debt was largely due to medical emergencies or because they needed to pay for their children's marriage);
- (e) Gond widows increasingly played roles of *de jure*³ household heads as the Gonds accepted women's labour in the informal labour economy; and

³ According to Chant (1997), "*De Jure* FHH denotes households where women live without a male partner on a less permanent basis and receive no economic support from one except in the form of child maintenance (p. 15)": this includes widows. *De facto* FHH, according to Chant, are "...women whose partners are absent due to migration, but who have ongoing contact normally accompanied by sending home money (*ibid*)". These distinctions do not show the degrees of hardships faced by such households but is more based on the longevity and duration of females taking over their families. Sylvia Chant borrows these concepts from the works of Youssef and Hetlar (1983).

- (f) migrants returned with positive stories about their wages and their desire to combine migration-based work.

These demographic findings informed the rest of the study design, as described in Chapter 2.

1.7 Outline of the Thesis

This chapter has presented the aims and objectives, identified the main conceptual framework, key ethnographies, and significance of the study. Chapter 2 reflects on the methodology of ethnography, describing the process of settling in Panna and becoming immersed in the fieldwork. In addition, some initial observations on how household agency varied by type is presented (sole earners versus married couples). This is followed by an overview of how the data collection process began, including an initial demographic survey and unstructured interviews. Finally, there is a reflection on the ethical considerations that are inherent to ethnography, and efforts to build trust with the Gonds are described, including the acquiring of consent and the assurance of anonymity.

Chapter 3 contextualises the project by describing the Gonds, including their marginalised position, their history and geography, the influence of other cultures on theirs, and relation with the forests. Also, the chapter presents an overview of the various livelihoods available to Gonds, and describes the threats to the Gonds' traditional forest-based livelihoods. Finally, the chapter presents several brief case studies to illustrate the Gonds' perceptions of the past and the changes in their

livelihoods. The overall purpose of Chapter 3 is to present a fuller background for the case studies that are presented in later chapters. These first three chapters set the stage for Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7, where the findings gleaned from the year of fieldwork among the Gonds is presented.

Chapter 4 focusses on the Gond family, an ‘informal’ institution that is one of the Gonds’ major sites of agency and dignity. Based on the demographic survey, unstructured interviews, and observations, a detailed description of family structures and household economics is presented. *Parivaar* (family) and *nyarpanna* (separation of household hearth) are defined and contextualised. Following this, the village layout and spatial use, gender relationships (including marriage customs, division of labour, and intra-household decision-making), and inter-generational participation in work are all described. The picture that emerges is one in which social capital, defined as relationships within families, households, and social networks, is a key factor in the ability to access income, and to achieve food security and economic independence. The chapter also analyses the ways in which the Gonds adapt to wider economic changes by accepting widows and children into the economy of a traditionally patriarchal society. The chapter also engages with the implications of women as labour workforce and the trade-offs that are made with respect to their children’s completion of schooling versus helping to run the household. Running through this chapter is the Gonds’ experience of agency through the use of body capital, a theme that will also appear throughout the case studies in the next three chapters. Nearly all the Gonds’ work inside and outside the home is physically demanding, requiring a strong and energetic body.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 focus on various livelihoods available to the Gonds, presented mostly in the form of case studies. First, livelihoods that are available within Bharatpur are considered; then, there is a discussion of livelihoods that are migration-based; finally, how and why the Gonds ignore or reject government aid to supplement their livelihoods is considered. The case studies using Niehof's (2004) household life-course perspective (temporality and spatiality due to agrarian cycles), the individual household head's life-course perspective (Handel, 2000), family life-course perspective, and the theory of social capital (Moser, 1998, Adler & Kwon, 1999), are considered. Life-course perspective helps to focus on individual; family transitions (Locke et al, 2013).

Chapter 5 discusses livelihoods located in Bharatpur, especially those forms of informal labour that centre on farms, forests, stone quarries, and road construction sites; farm-based livelihoods are the most important. The chapter maps the cyclical, seasonal, and contingent nature of this work, and shows through case studies how several Gonds navigate the vicissitudes of the informal economy while pursuing their own life goals and subjective experiences of agency and dignity. The chapter shows how they employ the informal institutions of family, kinship, and extended relationships in the management of those livelihoods. Here dignity will be demonstrated as being produced by the collective agency of the household members to contribute to food self-sufficiency and meeting agricultural costs.

Chapter 6 discusses a second category of livelihood, those that the Gonds pursue by migrating to regions far from Bharatpur. Migration is an increasingly popular

strategy that offers work opportunities through the informal and unorganised labour market; the Gonds use it to meet both their urgent and long-term needs. Which groups tend to migrate are analysed, the history and benefits of migration are traced, and the details of two types of migration are described: *pardes* (local and intra-state) and *vides* (beyond the state of Madhya Pradesh). How various households use *pardes* and *vides* to pursue livelihoods in quarries and on construction sites are shown through case studies. In the process, these Gonds exercise agency by choosing when and where to work (to the extent possible), and by holding out for the best terms and conditions they can find. Thus, migration-based livelihoods can contribute to the Gonds' subjective experiences of agency and dignity while helping them to escape poverty. Agency is produced through mobility in seeking work outside the villages, and Gonds are seen to be, in turn, entrepreneurial, resilient, and adventurous.

The final case study chapter, Chapter 7, explores how the Gonds exercise agency and build dignity in a rather paradoxical way. They do this by withdrawing from welfare state programmes, thereby displaying a sense of independence from those programmes. Chapter 7 describes the flaws in, and ineffectiveness of, various social welfare programmes that are run by the welfare state, such as housing, schooling, and employment, and shows why the Gonds do not find these forms of aid as desirable or attractive as performing informal labour, even in precarious circumstances.

The chapter further shows that the Gonds are unable to take full advantage of state policies for various reasons, including their frequent absence from their village due to migration and the mishandling of welfare funds. In addition, the chapter explores how the Gonds take alternative measures, such as investing in their families, to ensure themselves of care in old age. Chapter 7 ties its findings back to Chapters 5 and 6, which detail various forms of precarious work that allow the Gonds to fulfil their social obligations in the pursuit of living dignified lives and escaping poverty. Here, agency is being produced through the politics of withdrawal from the welfare state benefits programmes, leading to self-reliance and security that the Gonds create for themselves.

Finally, Chapter 8, the conclusions, summarises the study's findings and contributions to current literature and ethnographies discussed in this chapter; it also makes recommendations for practice and for future research. As the results of this study show, each Gond family makes a living in a distinct way, depending on the economic challenges they face according to the life course of the household head, the household development cycle, the physical health and abilities of the household members, access to social relationships, and landholding status. Lastly, it will show how the thesis has combined the precarious lives of the Gonds with their exercise of agency.

1.8 Conclusions

This chapter has introduced the problem, research questions, purpose, significance, contributions, analytical framework, and outline of this thesis on the agency and

livelihood strategies adopted by the Gond families. It has also placed this study within the context of the related literature on the informal economy and precarious work in India, and on how poor families build dignity, exercise agency, and pursue welfare by diversifying their livelihoods. Agency is found through the use of body capital (demanding physical labour), through drawing on social capital (families, households, and social networks), through livelihood diversification, through temporary migration, and through resistance to welfare state programmes that do not align with their subjective life goals. The following Chapter, 2, will explain the ethnographic methods employed to answer the research questions of this study and further discuss the above themes as they relate to the distinctive culture, conditions, and life choices of the Gonds, and will discuss issues on anonymity and ethics. Then, Chapter 3 will further discuss the above themes as they relate to the distinctive culture, conditions, and life choices of the Gonds.

CHAPTER 2. REFLECTIONS ON THE FIELD: METHODOLOGY AND ETHICS

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I reflect on the ethnographic methodology and the ethical implications of my study design. First, I describe the process of settling in Panna and immersing myself in the fieldwork in the context of increasing threats to the Gonds' traditional sources of income. I present some initial observations on how the agency of Gond families varied by household type (sole earners versus married couples) and introduce the Gonds' inductive and empirical evidence, which led to the recognition of patterns across Gonds' households. I then give an overview of how I began the data collection process. Finally, I address ethical considerations associated with my project design, particularly the issues of building trust and gaining consent as I navigated my insider/outsider status as a native ethnographer. I reflect on how being a native anthropologist was challenging, in particular taking into account that, before beginning my fieldwork, I had perceived the Gonds as 'poor'.

Ethnographic writing typically involves 'thick description of how those who actively live in these worlds, make sense of their own lives, and those of others around them' (Atkinson & Hammersley, 2007, p. 6; Hoffmaster, 2001, pp. 4-5 as cited in Parker, 2007, p. 2249). Throughout this research report, I found it useful to use thick description (Geertz, 1973) to clarify the Gonds' lives and the lives of others living around them. Maletrud (2001) observed that in qualitative analysis, 'large amounts of information require abstraction, generalisation, recontextualisation, and decontextualisation' (p. 486).

2.2 Settling in Panna

I lived in Panna for twelve months, from May 2011 to May 2012, and during the first three months of fieldwork, travelled extensively to Gond villages up to 40 kilometres away from Panna, covering a total of twelve villages. Five of these villages were inside the Tiger Reserve where Bharatpur is located, as shown on the village map. The best way to reach these villages was by motorbike. With the assistance of my residential landlord, I had employed a local man with a bike to take me to these villages. Reports of mud slides, minor accidents due to slippery road conditions, and villagers being temporarily sheltered in schools due to flooding caught my attention, and forced me to choose a village closer to the town of Panna. My aim during these first three months, as I travelled among twelve different villages, was to obtain household profiles by using the following categories: age, gender, number of family members, landholding status, sources of income, and access to government welfare programmes in the form of various benefit cards. The results of this questionnaire are reported later in the chapter.

2.2.1 Decision To Go Alone

As mentioned in the introduction, Aziz Qureshi was my original gatekeeper to the Gonds; he would accompany me during my initial village visits. However, I noticed that the Gonds spoke up less hesitantly when he was not with me; because I was an outsider, they could open up to me easily once they came to the conclusion that I was harmless. Although Aziz was not known to them personally, they knew he was a local due to his familiarity with the local dialect. Aziz had never worked with an

ethnographer before; he would often lead my discussions and interactions in irrelevant directions. Moreover, I was troubled to learn that Aziz, as a development agent, charged a small commission every time he helped the marginalised, including the Gonds, to access social benefits from the welfare state; these benefits included silicosis-based compensation. Eventually, after finding many inconsistencies in his role in the welfare of the Gonds and their social advancement, I decided to be completely independent from him.

2.2.2 Selection of Bharatpur

I rented a room in a private residential house in Panna town, where I lived for the first six months. After August 2011, I faced the challenge of selecting a village where I could establish the centre of my fieldwork. The locals suggested many places in Panna where the Gonds were easier to make contact with. Most of them pointed toward the forest areas as places to study 'authentic', traditional Gonds, who seemed to be more tribal than the Gonds along the main highways, where Bharatpur is located. However, I found out much later that the forest villages had problems accessing potable water and electricity. Moreover, the villages were difficult to access using public transportation from the nearby towns. In addition, the household survey on Bharatpur (discussed later in this chapter) was done in the monsoon season. In late August, when I started to analyse these surveys, a broader picture of the Bharatpur village began to emerge. It was clear that the Gonds living in this area had access to more work opportunities than Gonds in other villages that I had covered in the beginning of the fieldwork. Thus was due to the privately owned, inter-state buses running every day to different parts of India from Panna bus station

which was only 20 minutes from Bharatpur village. These buses ran mainly between centers of economic growth, and these transportation networks brought work for the Gonds. In all, I covered 77 households in Bharatpur in a three-month period.

After the first three months, the Gonds in Bharatpur became used to my presence among them. Some asked me about the purpose of my stay and how my research would benefit them. During my initial days of surveying, I was surrounded by villagers who expected me to announce a government welfare programme or policy. They were used to outsiders in the form of labour contractors, school teachers, vendors, NGOs, government surveyors, and rural development workers, but not someone like me who wanted to have in-depth conversations about their lives, work, kinship, family, household livelihoods, and struggles, in the context of an extended, uninvited stay with them. Before me, nobody had come there to find out how their village lives were being transformed since the Gonds' access to the forests had been so severely restricted. It became clear that my research was more urgent than I had anticipated; the Gonds were quite distressed, although far from living a hand-to-mouth existence. Public media were more interested in covering the mining mafia and the doings of higher officials in the Forest department. Both more headline-catching than the everyday struggles of the poor.

2.2.3 Fieldwork Immersion

One advantage of being Indian was that my induction into the field was relatively smooth. However, they were somewhat concerned about who I was and why I was randomly entering houses, living with them, studying them, and talking to them. Their

questions were not sharp or pointed, as they had their own, more subtle ways of studying strangers.

The most challenging part of the fieldwork was to get any response from women, who exhibited a mild fear of speaking too much in front of male members of the household. Uma Bai and Kesri Bai, aged approximately 40, whom I introduce below, had never left Bharatpur, and our social worlds were so different in every possible way. Even though they were young to middle-aged, they appeared older, as Gond women usually did, because of their heavy daily work, like fetching wood from the forests. I realised how important it was for these women to practice this lifestyle; it was necessary to keep their households running. My everyday life as a participant observer became more and more challenging, both on a normative and a deeper personal level, as it caused me to reflect on my own relatively unencumbered and comfortable life.

My daily routine in Bharatpur was to observe the Gonds go about their lives. I conducted my interviews mostly in the evening because most Gonds would be in the village at that time and were available to interact with me, except for those who would return to Bharatpur after months of migration.

2.3 Introducing the Gonds

I quickly observed that each Gond family made a living in its own distinct way. Over the course of the fieldwork, I came to see that these variations depended on the economic challenges the family faced, which in turn corresponded to the life course of the household head, the household development cycle, the bodily capacity and

abilities of the household members, access to social relationships, and landholding status. The agricultural seasons and fluctuations also have a significant impact on the livelihood choices of those Gonds who keep one foot in their village while migrating for work.

As an example of the variation across families, the families of Sukhram and Uma Bai, Raja, Kesri Bai, Jagdish Adivasi, Raghu, and Kishore had all achieved food security and did not have to engage in more precarious and irregular forms of labour. Kesri Bai was a widowed head of household, but all her children were married, and thus her vulnerability was slightly different from that of the younger widows in the village, such as Tulsi Bai. The other households with female heads and lone earners, those of Radha Bai, and Kirat Bai were the most vulnerable; they are discussed in Chapter 6. Widows with married children, like Kesri Bai, were less vulnerable than lone earners like Tulsi Bai, who had very young children who depended on her. As we shall see, the sudden life-course change due to widowhood produced an agency different from that of the others. Hari Lal is of the same generation as Tulsi Bai, and like her, is a widower but with grown children. He raised their wedding expenses by migrating to Delhi and now is completely dependent on migration-based wages.

2.3.1 Sole Earners

Although the households covered in the survey were very diverse, what was clear was that the sole earners who were *de jure* female household heads were the most vulnerable, as they were also landless. The majority of these female sole earners, at the time of the fieldwork, had not yet started to migrate. As a consequence, their

permanent sources of income included wood collection and farm work, as well as labour-sharing arrangements with their families. These widows had not yet been allocated their dead husbands' farms (as the mothers-in-law were still alive); their situation was precarious because their entitlement to the land/farm depended on their relationship with their in-laws. This finding prompted me to explore more about their agency, as their vulnerabilities were more severe than other Gonds. Detailed descriptions of the vulnerability and resilience of these different types of Gond families and household are discussed in Chapter 5.

2.3.2 Married Couples

The households of married couples were less vulnerable because having both husband and wife working did improve their capability to escape poverty. The variations in such households depended on their ability to organise and re-organise their households, their family, and their gender ideologies. They used their able bodies as well as social relationships to seek livelihoods. For instance, the households of Sukhram and Uma Bai, Raja, Kesri Bai, Jagdish Adivasi, Raghu, and Kishore achieved food security through a different pattern from the sole-earner households. This resulted in a different form of agency that is less constrained, as they can depend on other adult members of the family. Some also have a small landholding, like Raghu and Kishore, as a result their food insecurities and vulnerabilities and thus their agency to remain self-sufficient in food and economic independence is less constrained than for the household of Tulsi Bai, who is not only a lone earner (due to widowhood) but also landless.

2.3.3 Young Gond Families and Intergenerational Shift in Employment Options

Younger Gonds like Keshav, Bhargav, Payal, Vikram, Nandu, Hetram, Hari Lal, and Rajesh have a different income profile, a fact that highlights the inter-generational shift in livelihood practices due to growing awareness of the dangers of working in stone quarries. Keshav is a young Gond who has lived outside of Bharatpur most of the time and has acquired a special title of an 'adventurer/ vagabond' in the village. He has worked in many different parts of India and only recently returned to local forms of work. His case study is discussed in Chapter 6. Bhargav and Payal are a young Gond couple who have made a successful living by migrating; their life course is discussed in Chapter 6. Hetram is a young, married Gond with an infant child who had only been migrating for a year and seemed to be experiencing some trouble with the labour contractor over wages. Although he made good amount of money, the couple had returned to Bharatpur and decided to do local forms of work. Nandu is also a young married Gond with two infants. He only migrates nearby for couple of weeks at a time. Unlike other Gonds of his generation, Nandu continues to work in stone quarries as he finds this type of work suitable to his financial condition. His case is discussed in Chapter 6. Usha and Sita, the uxorilocal households, are also members of this generation, but their gender significantly limited the income-generating options available to them. Usha is the daughter of Kesri Bai. Vikram is the son of both Sukhram and Uma Bai and resides with his parents, along with his sister Neelam, brother Rajesh, and niece. His family appears in all Chapters, and his experience with formal education and formal work is discussed in Chapter 7.

2.4 Overview of Data Collection in Bharatpur

2.4.1 Demographic Questionnaire

In addition to in-depth, unstructured, informal interviews, which will be discussed later, the other ethnographic component of the methodology for the life-course narrative was based on the demographic questionnaire. This covered the number of family members, their respective duties towards the household, landholding size, social assistance received from the welfare state, lineage and kinship relatedness with other Gonds (whether as a widow, nephew, niece, or *gharjamayee*), schooling of the children, and so forth. These questions helped establish some patterns on how much the Gonds did or did not depend on the welfare state, and how much they relied on social and family relationships.

I chose to conduct this survey in lieu of referring to local government household surveys to determine poverty levels amongst the Gonds of Bharatpur. The categories of the demographic surveys included the name of the head of the household, that person's gender, marital status, age, household assets, number of children, landholding size, voter card, job card (*panchayat* card), and Below Poverty Line Card (BPL).

The households were selected using a simple random sampling method. My initial survey had revealed that some of their members had migrated, and I had the opportunity to interview those who came back, as discussed in Chapter 7. Some were selected based on their willingness to share their experiences. The survey results are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Bharatpur in numbers (total number of households = 77)

Number of households that are landless	50
Number of households with debt	15
Size of the landholding per household	Average 2.5 acres
Number of households with more than 2.5 acres	Two households
Male-headed households	50
<i>De jure</i> Female-headed households (widows)	27
<i>Kuccha</i> (made out of cow dung and mud) houses	99%
<i>Pucca</i> (bricks) houses	1% (Semi)
Number of households with BPL card	12
Number of households with job card	52
Average number of children in each household	4
Number of forest-based livelihoods (only collecting wood and <i>Mahua</i> in March-April)	7
Number of stone quarry-based households	49
Number of only migration-based households (going out of Panna district to work in brick kilns, home construction)	15
Number of households that collect wood in addition to other forms of livelihoods	77
Average monthly expenditure per household	Rs. 2,500
Average annual saving	Rs. 10,000

Source: Researcher's own designed Bharatpur household data survey.

As shown in the table, all households reported that they engaged in wood collection and waged work. The latter is done on a temporary basis, and the former is done throughout the year.

Married women for whom Bharatpur is their natal home, who 'stay back' in Bharatpur with their husbands for financial reasons, belong to uxrilocal households. Their husbands are referred to as *gharjamayees*. The information on the *gharjamayees* (uxrilocal residents), which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4, was the most challenging to gather. However, the number of such uxrilocal households is increasing. In Chapter 5, I present two case studies of *gharjamayee* (husbands of Usha and Sita) households, and consider their livelihood activities in the context of the shifts in gender relations. The results of the demographic survey are addressed in more detail in Chapter 4.

2.4.2 Unstructured Interviews

To construct the main life-course narratives of Gonds as *majdoors* (workers/labourers), I used observation, casual conversations, group discussions, and oral histories, but my main methodology for data collection was in-depth, unstructured, informal interviews. The life-course interview encompasses a combination of ethnographic questions about the interviewees' household profile in terms of land-holding status and capabilities of securing employment, but also in terms of ethnographic 'work'/'labour contract' itself. These ethnographic questions on 'work' were specifically about the length of the labour contract, type of contract, type of labour, and wages.

Life-course histories and narratives reveal how vulnerable people's working lives are experienced (Handel, 2000). The act of telling their life history has some power of agency in situating their life in their society and in utilising the culture they have

acquired (ibid, p. 102). Further, it tells us how a person has constructed meaning in their life (ibid, p. 135), dealing with hardships and constructing their horizons (ibid, p. 134). My observations of the daily lives of the various households revealed their social aspirations, experiences with the welfare state, and the desire to be economically independent and debt-free.

I faced no objection to household visits as the Gonds became used to my presence. For example, seeing others talking freely with me about their loss of forest-dependent livelihoods encouraged the more hesitant Gonds to share their own experiences with me. In both interviews and informal interactions, this subject was relatively easy to broach as the Gonds were very proud about their labouring abilities and the wages they earned. The slightly difficult part was to know how they spent these earnings. Before they revealed such information to me, they wanted to make completely sure that I would not reveal the particulars to other Gonds. For example, consumption practices around marriages indicate social status, sometimes involving going into debt. As a result, I decided to avoid questions about wedding-related consumption, and I only took notes on these issues from those Gonds who were willing to share this information voluntarily as part of a general discussion on rising costs of marriages. This way, it did not look as if they were made to share their marriage budgets with me. I only needed estimated cost figure, which they understood, and were willing to share this information with me.

2.5 Ethical Considerations and the Researcher's Role

2.5.1 Building Trust and Gaining Consent

According to Atkinson and Hammersley (1994), ethnographers study a particular social phenomenon rather than testing particular hypotheses. During my fieldwork, I realised that asking direct questions about livelihoods was an intimate proposition for the Gonds, and so I had to be very patient and ask less direct and ethnographic questions in order to build a bigger picture. The questions on livelihoods were best collected through personal interviews and house visits.

During focus group conversations and in-depth household-head interviews, the first hurdle I faced was to convince the Gonds that I was not an informer from the Mining or the Forest departments in charge of reporting on their illegal activities. When they later saw me with Vikram, another Gond like them, they became convinced that I was not from the mining office, a spy, or a government insider, but rather that I was harmless.

Coming from Mumbai, Panna looked like a place where modernity had only recently arrived. This greatly affected my fieldwork, as my urban upbringing made me stand out easily, and I became conscious of being a figure of public curiosity. I, too, was being analysed and studied by the locals, so I had to make myself known if I wanted to gain their trust. Questioning the authority of the ethnographers writing about their subjects, especially in fields of unequal power relationships between themselves and the informants, is a crucial component of post-modern anthropology (Asad, 1973; Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Venkatesh, 2013). Ethnographic representation involves balancing both insider and outsider roles (Van Maanen, 1998; Schneider, 2002) whilst, at the same time, applying theory to understand the field (Lofland, 1976).

Before embarking on the fieldwork, I had already committed myself to follow the Association of Social Anthropologists (ASA) guides of anonymity and consent; consequently, all the Gond and non-Gond names are anonymised in the thesis to meet the University of Sussex's guidelines of ethics and permission from informants. The village name, Bharatpur, is also a pseudonym. I began by speaking with the Gond widows, from whom I faced no resistance or opposition. This allowed me to cover a range of livelihood profiles of Gond widows, as these varied based on their age and the marital status of their children. After a few meetings and visits with Tulsi, my presence became a routine. Thus, through word of mouth, my purpose of studying their livelihoods and experiences with the forest department and the state quickly spread, and those Gonds who were initially reluctant to participate in interviews with me, later agreed. Thus, consent to do fieldwork amongst the Gonds was sought throughout the duration of the fieldwork.

My regular visits to Vikram's household, which everyone in the village considered a role model household because Sukhram, the male household head, never drank and his son, Vikram, held a college degree, also helped in gaining the Gonds' confidence. At the beginning, I had thought I would need the permission of the *Panchayat* head to interact with the Gonds, but soon I found out that having a more direct and trustworthy relationship with the Gonds was even more important. I was lucky that Vikram was a willing gatekeeper and insider who showed me around and introduced me to every household (De Neve, 2006). I owe it to him that the Gonds were happy to interact with me.

It did take me a while to win the trust of some of the Gonds. The younger Gonds, who were not that suspicious about me, would talk with me. The elders, seeing that, would also start participating. After an hour or so of talking to me, they would come back to the previous questions that they felt I should have answered, especially on how I managed funded my visit to their village, what is my occupation, and what the practical benefit would be in studying them. I realised how illiteracy can be disempowering as the Gonds struggled to articulate their curiosity in a coherent way.

As I often spent long hours with each family, it was important to choose families that were happy to accommodate me and felt comfortable in sharing their livelihood practices with me. It was also crucial to maintain trust with the families due to the sensitivity of the subject matter. Many times, our discussions would be about the Gonds' increasing vulnerability, and how each household was carefully strategising to prepare for this. Regarding the Forest department, most were frustrated that nobody consulted them on matters pertaining to their rights, and that they were penalised even before fines were announced. Due to their illiteracy, the Gonds reported feeling trapped and cheated when they were penalised. Based on the initial survey results, I made my road map for the next six months, and sought oral permission from these families to carry out my research.

Throughout the fieldwork, I realised that not only is the ethnographer interpreting the native as an informant, but the informants are also interpreting the ethnographer. Sometimes, my conversations with the Gonds would turn to topics such as my life in the city, what I did for a living, and when I would get married. Welcoming this

reciprocity was one tool I used for maintaining the Gonds' trust. Another was engaging closely with the Gonds amidst their daily lives. Most of my fieldwork was spent observing personal relationships in the households, and I would often play with little children. I could walk in to any Gond family and ask for some food and in return reciprocate by sponsoring dinners for them.

2.5.2 Insider/Outsider Status as a Native Ethnographer

Using an ethnography approach involves a number of ethical considerations. For example, the potential for racism is a well-known danger of ethnography, and this danger threatens not only non-native anthropologists, but also native ones (Unnithan-Kumar, 1997). Unnithan-Kumar, in her research on the Girasia tribal women in rural Rajasthan, cautions that, as an ethnographer, one should avoid misrepresentation. In fact, Wolf (1992, as cited in Unnithan-Kumar, 1997) went so far as to challenge the degree to which even a native can lay a claim to being a native. On the other hand, Charmaz and Mitchell (1996) argued that there is a need to put ourselves in the text, thereby to be seen there as an active participant instead of merely providing silent authorship (Charmaz & Mitchell, 1996). The participating self is an explicit voice in such texts, and it becomes difficult to separate the personal narrative from the narrative of the field. As Agar observed, "the self and the field are seen as symbiotic, and the writing is seen as establishing the interconnectedness of the two" (Agar, 1986, p.xi). The various ethical considerations associated with ethnography were in my mind throughout my fieldwork among the Gonds.

I am aware that, to some extent, being a native anthropologist, writing objectively is more of a challenge for me than for a non-native anthropologist. Unnithan-Kumar (1997) describes this challenging experience as a disadvantage for native anthropologists who attempt to write objectively on the social aspects of their informants (Unnithan-Kumar, 1997). I was being judged and observed based on my gender, marital status, and education. My role as a 'native' ethnographer was shaped as I went about collecting data. This shaping occurred not only in a patriarchal context, but also in the 'strangeness' that I experienced in the field due to stereotypes attached to an Indian working women living alone. My own class, gender, education, and urban roots formed the context in which the Gonds related to me.

For me, Panna was both unfamiliar and familiar. It was familiar because of my academic interests in rural India and social change; my previous readings and exposure to rural India (through my professional visits in Varanasi, in Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar) also supplied insights that informed my perceptions of Panna. Yet Panna was also unfamiliar, and there was still much that I was unprepared for, both as an insider and an outsider. As an outsider, several things came to the forefront: accepting the barren existence (Shah, 2010) of the Gonds as they managed and juggled their lives in extreme scarcity, their laborious working lives, and their relationship to the corrupt state as well as the domination by the Forest department. The insider in me helped me to relate to what I witnessed amongst the Gond women and their everyday contestations of kinship and gender relations. This was due to my own identity as a north Indian woman, having been raised in Mumbai. In a certain

way, I was not pretending to take a neutral stance at all; I was aware that my academic side interpreted the field differently from my native side. Long-term immersion in the field made my native side stronger, and thus it was challenging to keep a critical distance from the Gonds. However, my academic side was driven by my interest in understanding poverty and social inequalities, and it helped me to keep that critical balance.

It took almost three months for the Gonds to accept me. According to Rabinow (2007), ethnography allows ethnographers to consider their own reflections in relation to their subjects (as cited in Venkatesh, 2013). While immersed in their culture and conducting my research, and conscious that I am an Indian like them, but still not like them, I found myself constantly questioning and reflecting on ethnographic representations of the Gonds and my relationships with them that had been part of my everyday life for 12 months. The historical situation of the Gonds within the wider dynamic of a changing economy in the region was too overpowering to be overlooked. Critical reflection as an ethnographer means taking responsibility and being aware of the historical and social context of the field (Clifford & Marcus, 1986). Atkinson and Hammersley (1994) have observed that the ethnographer does not carry out research autonomously, nor are they insulated from the broader society (cited in Parker, 2007).

2.6 Conclusions

In this chapter, I have described my immersion in the field and selection of Bharatpur as the research site; made observations on some of the variations in agency among

households; described my initial data collection; and discussed my role as ethnographer and the associated ethical considerations. I have hoped to show how conscious I was as an ethnographer and how carefully I identified a methodology to study Gond families. I have also striven to demonstrate that, during my fieldwork, I was aware of my own stereotypes and of what poverty and inequality are. I have also addressed how my perceptions of marginalisation were challenged when, among other things, I found out about the Gonds' wages (*dihadi*) and their bargaining power in the informal labour market.

As I settled in among the Gonds, my perspective shifted: instead of perceiving (and portraying) the Gonds as merely coping and surviving, I began to see them as an enterprising community pursuing care and social security, even though constrained by their marginalised lives of poverty. The life-course narratives revealed that the Gonds are only poor in terms of material poverty. They are richly endowed with their own notions of dignity and agency, which they construct while waging and labouring within the informal labour economy. Having discussed methodology and ethics in detail, I now move on to contextualize the research.

CHAPTER 3. CONTEXTUALISING THE RESEARCH

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the history of the Gonds, their region, and their livelihoods, sketching the major cultural and economic changes that the Sur Gonds have undergone, from their centuries-long dependence on the forests, through the growing threats to their forest access beginning in 1985, to their current status as hard workers of diverse livelihoods. Running themes in the history of the Gonds include their dependence on livelihoods that are increasingly threatened, from forest restrictions to mine closures; their distinction from the more affluent Raj Gond group; and their household/family structures and strong labouring bodies as the basis of their pursuit of food security, welfare, agency, and dignity.

The Gonds became integrated within the cash economy gradually from the 1940s. Fürer-Haimendorf showed how the practice of modern types of cultivation led to borrowing money for growing commercial crops, which in turn meant borrowing money from moneylenders to buy the seeds (1982, p. 98). The Gonds became enmeshed in the 'vicious circle of borrowing and repaying the debt' (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1982, p. 98). The integration with a cash economy ended the Gonds' self-sufficient livelihoods, and they were not equipped to deal with new threats such as crop failure and its effects on commercialised farming (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1982; 98). Before the penetration of moneylenders, the Gonds' limited needs were satisfied by weekly markets and fairs where communal exchanges took place (Sharma, 2005).

3.2 Gonds' Marginalisation

In India, as Drèze and Sen (2013) observe, although living conditions have improved overall in terms of a per capita increase in income, change has been slow or non-existent in the lives of the majority of its poor, marginalised, and rural populations like the Sur Gonds of Bharatpur. Although the Gonds are important for the local economy, to be a Gond in Panna is to be in an inferior position. They are associated with doing waged work, and there is jealousy of, and animosity towards, the Gonds because of their ability to sustain labour-intensive work. Thus, they are continually treated as people who are neither civilised elite nor one of the mainstream Hindu non-tribal populations (Beteille, 1998).

Three kinds of Gonds are found in Panna: Raj Gonds, Sur Gonds, and Nand Gonds. The Gonds of Bharatpur are all Sur Gonds. The Raj Gonds are wealthier, possess more land, and are economically better off than the Sur and Nand Gonds. They also identify themselves more with the dominant Hindu community because they want to assert that they have moved away from their 'forest' roots and are now 'civilised'. Yet the Raj Gonds share ST status and thus can access the various social benefits aimed at STs. In the process, the Sur Gonds are marginalised. The ST category does not capture the socio-economic differences between the Gond groups. Another way in which the Sur Gonds have been marginalised is that most historians have focussed only on Raj Gonds, leaving much unknown about the Sur Gonds' lives, politics, and history.

3.3 History and Geography of the Gonds in Panna District

Although the Gonds are spread all over the country and speak different regional dialects, they are predominantly a forest-based community. The Gonds are the largest tribal group in the district of Panna. Panna lies within the Bundelkhand region, which has been poverty-stricken since the time of British rule due to the colonisers' logging and taxation. The forest-based livelihoods of the Gonds in Panna have been under threat since 1985, when restricted access to the forest was imposed by the Panna Tiger Reserve.

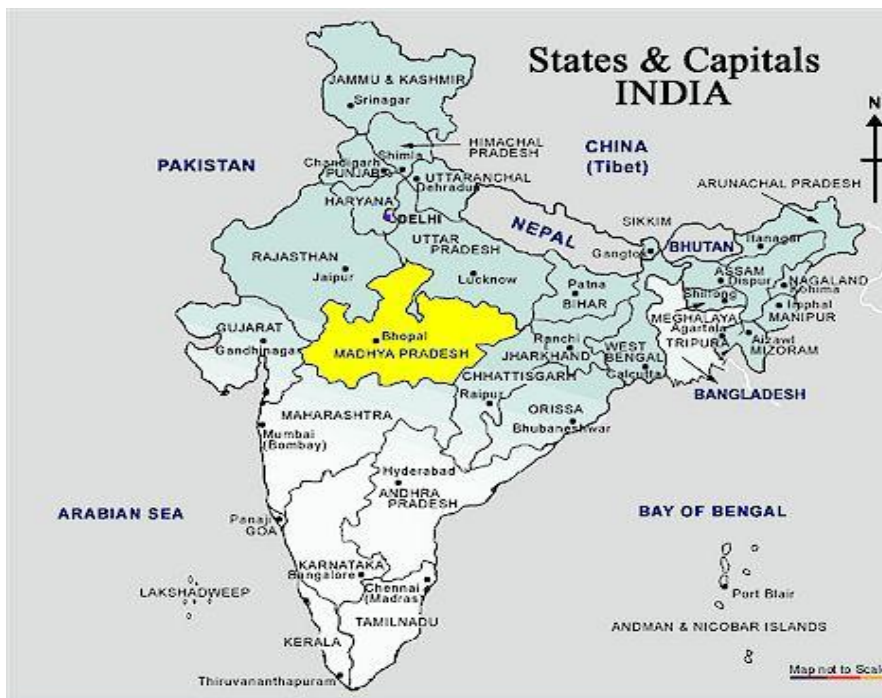


Figure 3. 1. India and Madhya Pradesh. Source: www.sehore.nic.in/sehore-maps-htm [accessed 7 December 2014].

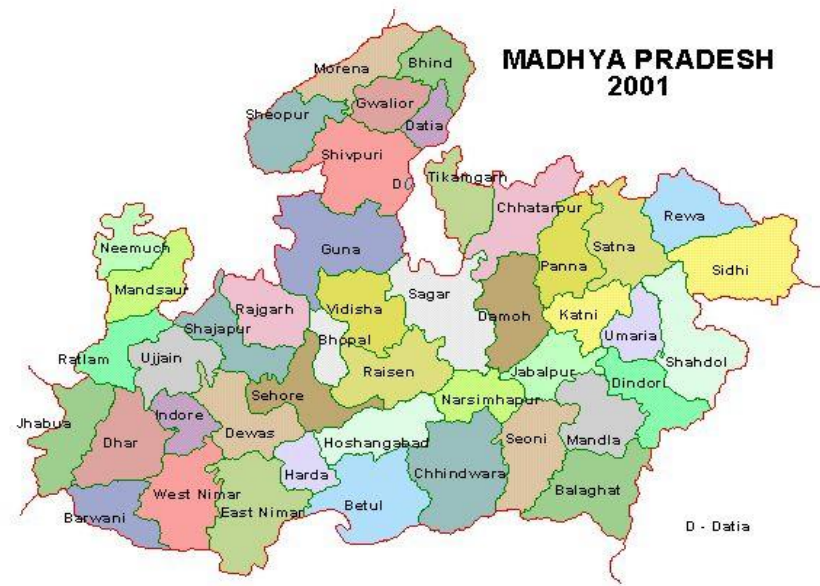


Figure 2. 2. Map showing Madhya Pradesh and Panna District. Source: www.Indiavisitinformation.com [accessed 7 December 2014].

Bundelkhand is a region dominated by Rajputs, the warrior caste that ranks just below the priestly Brahmins in the Hindu caste hierarchy, and a visible influence of Hinduism can be observed among the Gonds. Among the subtle social norms in Gond culture that can be interpreted as Hinduisation are the veiling of women, widowed or married, unless Bharatpur is their birthplace; the use of Hindu names for their children; and Hindu-style weddings. Their modern aspirations for certain styles of consumption are also similar to the surrounding Hindu community: for example, the expensive weddings with costly orchestras, which were absent a generation ago. The Gonds seem to find themselves gradually experiencing identity shifts as they

integrate with the dominant Hindu culture of the region. There is both accommodation of and resistance to the Hindu influence among the Gonds.

3.4 Household Livelihoods: ‘*Majoori*’ (Labouring) and ‘*Roji*’ (Livelihood)

When asked ‘What is your occupation? (*aap kya kaam karte hain*)’, ‘How do you run the household? (*app ghar kaise chelate hain*)’, or ‘How do you meet your expenses and other needs? (*aapke ghar ka kharcha kaise chalta hai*)’, the answer often given by Gonds is that they do ‘*majoori* (waged labour)’. For some, doing *majoori* is doing ‘nothing’. This shows that the Gonds are aware that *majoori* is not formal ‘employment’, because they work on their own will, choose their own type of *majoori*, and have control over the number of hours they have to work. So *roji* is not only a livelihood and an occupation, but also a means of experiencing subjective dignity, autonomy, and economic independence.

3.4.1 Multiplicity of Occupations

Gonds practice multiple occupations, including a range of wage work. Breman (2007) finds amongst the *Dhodia* people in Chikligam, a daily waging and the contractualisation of labour, where the wages are not paid hourly but based on the output (piece-work), as is commonplace in brick kilns, road construction, and farming. The Gonds mainly work at stone-cutting and guarding farms at night from animal damage. Breman, who researched livelihood diversification amongst the poor in Western Gujarat, found that a ‘combination of labour circulation and occupational multiplicity lies at the base of the strategy with which the rural underclass tries to keep their head above water’ (2007, p. 206).

Majoori is combined between men and women and is gendered, just like housework; girls usually perform domestic chores (Kingdon, 1998; 2002). If there are only boys in the family, the eldest boy will cook and do other household chores. In Bharatpur, forest wood collection is done only by women, and stone quarry work is done only by men. The other two sources of livelihoods for the Gonds are the *Mahua* flower and hen eggs. The former is so lucrative for the Gonds that they can use it to sustain and run their households for up to three months of the year. The Gonds sell hen eggs (*desi*) in the market at market prices. These hens are valuable because they produce larger eggs and their flesh is considered to be tastier than that of the *videsi*, which are foreign-bred chickens. Various livelihoods will be discussed in more detail throughout the thesis.

3.4.2 Subsistence Farming as Livelihood

Bharatpur is largely comprised of marginal, subsistence, and landless farmers. Household members divide the labour among themselves. Some rent out their farm land to other Gond families in the same village and share the yield (see Chapter 5). Some households engage in agricultural arrangements where they each spend some time working on each other's land. Households that depend on mining and migration will often not have the time to cultivate these farms, and so they will make arrangements with other non-migrating households to cultivate these households' lands in exchange for a portion of the agricultural output. In Bharatpur, farm-based labour arrangements are usually made among Gonds who are agnatically linked.

The two types of farming in Bharatpur are rain-fed and irrigated farming. The expenses of rain-fed farming are half those of irrigated farming. Irrigated farming is used to grow wheat and mustard, while rain-fed farming is used for rice, lentils, and soya beans. The total cost of irrigated farming is approximately Rs. 4,500 per acre of land, of which Rs. 2,500 goes towards buying seeds and ploughing, and Rs. 1,500 goes towards buying the fertiliser. The cost of watering the field is Rs. 500 per acre. Some households save the seeds from the previous year if the yield was good. If it was not a good year, they either buy seeds from the market or borrow from others for a share of their yield in return.

Nowadays, cultivation and planting are performed by tractors hired from other communities, mostly from *Bengalis* and *Yadavs*, costing up to Rs. 125 per hour. The ploughing season starts after the monsoon, and the Gonds start putting up fences around the crops to protect them from animal damage during the seedling period. The job of putting up a fence operates on a year-round cycle, starting with the collecting of forest wood for the fences and ending with full protective fences around the entire crop. An acre of land can yield up to 10 quintals of grain. This yield from the farm is in addition to the government's subsidised rate of buying grain on rationing/control using farmers' Below the Poverty Line (BPL) ration cards (see Chapter 7 'No Vote, No Card'). The excess yield from the farm is sold back at the market.

Agriculture plays an important role in the class-formation and politics of development in India. As Garikapati & Harriss-White (2008) point out, because most of India's

poor citizens reside in semi-arid tropical regions with scant and uncertain rainfall, households need to seek out market opportunities to meet the increasing agricultural costs by doing irregular and temporary forms of work. The ploughing and planting goes on for the first 20 days of the agricultural cycle. The crop is then guarded by Gond family members until the harvest season, when they chop and stack the crop. The most important crop for the Gonds is wheat, which is the source of carbohydrates, and chana dal (beans), which are a source of protein and fibre. All of the Gonds who own land are extremely busy doing farm-work from September until the harvest season in March.

3.4.3 Threats to Forest-Based Livelihoods

Forests have long offered the Gonds many livelihoods. Within Bundelkhand province, the district of Panna is the most densely forested area.⁴ The forests are a source of food security and livelihood and help to keep living costs low. The local tribes, SC population, and Yadavs all depend on the forest for hunting, cattle grazing, and fishing. However, the Forest department is promoting conservation practices throughout the villages and Panna town. Since 1985, the forests have been under the complete control of the Panna Tiger Reserve; those parts of the forests that yield good quality wood and contain stone and diamond mines are under particularly strict

⁴ According to the Madhya Pradesh Development Report (2002), the total forest area in Madhya Pradesh is about 60% of the total land area. In all, there are 94 national parks for wildlife in India, with nine in Madhya Pradesh alone.

supervision. In one of its visual notices, two villagers are depicted, with one asking the other not to fell a tree.



Figure 2. 3. A propaganda notice by the Forest department: two villagers, with one asking the other not to fell trees. Source: taken by the researcher.

According to local accounts, the tiger reserve was created because of the disappearance of tigers from the forests. However, according to the Environics Trust, a Delhi-based NGO for sustainable mining, illegal activities such as the killing of animals, smuggling of timber, and illegal stone and diamond mining are regularly carried out within the Tiger Reserve by the mining ‘mafia’, which comprises rural administration officers, forest guards, and mine owners.



Figure 2. 4 A Tiger. Source: www.wwfindia.org [accessed 12 December 2014].

The *sachiv*⁵ says that access to the forests has been banned because *Bengalis* continue to fish and hunt for game and meat, thereby damaging the sunflower buds (a highly desirable cooking ingredient) and affecting the entire forest ecosystem. Gonds have expressed that the *Bengalis* are not forest people and that they do not understand the extent of damage they are causing due to their ignorance with animals, plants, and trees. Other groups cause damage to the forests as well. The Yadavs let their cattle graze inside the forests, and the Gonds themselves also damage the forests by picking up wet wood. Wet wood can branch out into new trees

⁵ In Bharatpur, the village bureaucratic unit is the *panchayat* with the *sachiv* (secretary of the village panchayat) represents the state and is by the rural administration. At the moment, the secretary is not a Gond but belongs to Other Backward Class (OBC) governing the affairs of the Gonds, forest department, and the welfare state.

and thus is important to the forest's ecosystem. However, Vikram complains that even the collection of dry wood is restricted.

Shankar, a Gond from Bharatpur, strongly expressed his feelings against the Forest department as his whole family's survival depends on the income coming from the forest:

Unlike others (*Yadavs*, *Bengalis* and other SCs), Gonds have no land. Our dhanda (enterprise) is forest, and that is being restricted. The forests provide wood, quarries, mahuwa, and food. Wood is used for cooking and keeping the house warm during winter. In extreme crisis, we will migrate wherever there is work so we can eat. Nobody helps us. For everything that we need, there is so much paperwork involved, signatures involved; we do not understand all that much.

As the welfare state infringes on tribal people like the Gonds, their forest-based livelihoods are restricted. Two major factors in the dwindling of the Gonds' forest-based livelihoods are buffer zone policies and No Objection Certificates (NOC).

Buffer zones are intended to restrict the free movement of tigers into human-dominated areas. The law imposes penalties for harming a tiger unless it demonstrably attacks a human. However, there is misunderstanding among the Gonds about the terms and consequences. Even now, villagers are often unaware of these laws until they break them by entering the restricted areas, which are not clearly marked, and most of the Gonds cannot read anyway. Regardless, if they transgress, they are jailed or made to pay bribes to clear their names. The locations of buffer zones depend on which land the administration (Rajaswa) wants for building the hospitals and schools that get them re-elected. The consequences of buffer zone policies tend to fall most heavily on women and young children.

Another restriction to the Gonds' forest-based livelihoods is the fact that all major infrastructural projects, from railway stations to airports, require a No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the Forestry Department. NOCs are difficult to obtain, even as the city's slow development has left it difficult for people outside the district to reach. In 2010, a year before the fieldwork started, there was a protest march to encourage the local government to build a railway station; as of this writing, it had still not been built. Locals in Panna town are very aware of the industrialisation and urbanisation occurring in nearby Chhatarpur and Satna, but whatever changes the locals in Panna hope to achieve must be approved by the NoC from the Forestry Department first

3.5 Oral Histories of the Past

Through oral histories, a picture emerges of how Gonds were and are not only knowledgeable about forests, but reverent toward them. This reverence is a marker of their moral and cultural identity as forest dwellers. When asked about the Sur Gonds prior to 1947, they would say that the right person to ask about this was the oldest person, known to them as *dabloodukariya* (an obese old woman), who was over 100 years old who had died a year before I arrived in 2011. The older generation of the Sur Gonds recall the days of unrestricted access to forests under the *Rajah* generation. The Gonds of Bharatpur conceive their relationship to the forest in terms of a dependency on it for firewood, stones, *mahua*, and *amla* (gooseberry). In the past, the Gonds worked in artisanal manual stone quarries for the kings and obtained a portion of grain from the *Rajah* in return. In those days, there were not many more

than three households in the village of Bharatpur, which was surrounded by dense forest.

The oral histories of the Gonds reveal the politics of documentation: whose histories are represented, by whom and for what. The formal documented history⁶ is that of the Raj Gonds, who are financially better off, as they have become landed elites, and they enjoy the same social status as the landed elites. Compared to the Raj Gonds, the narratives of the Sur Gonds are not as historically well-documented. The oral narratives of the Sur Gonds express a distinctive pride in their relationship to the forests, viewing themselves as “sons-of-soil” attached to the land. What mattered for the Sur Gonds was not their glorious, distant past but rather their immediate and desperate present. Thus, the past is important for the Gonds only insofar as it represents a time when there were no forest restrictions and there was an abundance of flowers, animals, and fruits. I shifted my attention to the past that mattered to them. Ethnographic writing entails the mission of writing about the “people first” (Biehl & Petryna 2013), and order should emerge from the field rather than be imposed on the field (Silverman 1985).

3.5.1 Case 1: Positive Evaluation of the Past (Chotte Lal)

Chotte Lal, in his 60s and one of the senior (Sur) Gonds in Bharatpur, remembered the past as a time when forests were abundant. He said that the land which is now

⁶ Historians studying Gonds of Central India (David Baker, Archana Prasad, Suresh Mishra, Ajai Skaria, Andre Wink, and Sumit Guha) have extensively studied tribes of Central India like the Gonds, but do not mention Sur Gonds.

the tiger reserve was originally the property of the local Rajput Bundela prince, who later sold it to the government. The land was then converted into a national park for wildlife, which is older than the tiger reserve. Even today, the Rajput prince continues to be involved in the running of the national park. Chotte Lal thought that things had been better in the past because it was easier to live within and access the forests and there was an abundance of diamonds, stones, and flowers. He recalled that Rs. 100 today was equivalent to Rs. 500 during the 1970s. During his time, people worked in the quarries. They were not paid in cash but in conch shells. Chotte Lal worries about the future of the Gonds:

I wonder how it will be in the future. In the past, it was so nice when we had unrestrained access to the forest. Now, with so many rules and regulations, how are we going to live? (Fieldnotes, 2011)

These romanticisations of the past are important as partial truths. As Gardner observed, regarding narratives by elderly Bangladeshi migrants in London:

The narratives of the elders are not coherent wholes or necessarily wholly 'true'. . . . Indeed, we would probably be misguided if we assumed that oral histories ever produce coherent or objective accounts of the past. Instead, it may be more useful to think of them as myths. . . . [This view] involves a recognition that memory is inherently revisionist; what is forgotten may be as important as what is remembered. (1999, p. 65)

Chotte Lal has been totally paralysed and bed-ridden for the last 40 years due to working in a stone quarry a few kilometres from Bharatpur, before he got married. After marriage, he had four daughters and two sons. All of his daughters are married; he fell into debt with his close relatives to raise enough money for the marriage expenses. The couple cannot recall the amount of the debt but know that they have not finished repaying it. His wife says: '*Main apna pet katkar bhar dongi*' (I will repay

the debts by cutting my stomach; cutting here indicates to eat less, to desire less food. Shrinking the stomach means less space to consume food and more to spend that money on paying debt instead).

Chotte Lal recalled many things about Bharatpur village. He remembered working for 1 *anna* (1/100th of 1 rupee), 2 *anna*, and 25 *paisa*. He remarked how valuable *paisas* used to be, unlike today, when even 1 lakh rupees (in Indian rupees) is not enough to sustain their cash-dependent lives. He said that, in the past, Panna was the centre of the local market for grains and wheat. At that time, rationing (the distribution of essential grains and kerosene through the Public Distribution System) was not present: the concept of rationing staples started only when the *Panchayat* institution was introduced in the 1980s.

Chhota Lal said that previously almost all the Gonds had only practised subsistence agriculture and that everyone had a bullock for ploughing, known as 'hat time ploughing'. Nowadays, people hired tractors for cultivation, and there are more options to earn a livelihood besides practising subsistence agriculture.⁷ According to oral accounts, schooling, electricity, roads, and family planning programmes are not older than ten to fifteen years. However, the mechanised diamond mine of the National Diamond Mining Corporation (NDMC) has been operating inside the forest since 1955. Ideas of corporate social responsibility are only recent, and it is the

⁷ The Public Distribution System is a social policy by the Indian government to assure basic food security. Under this programme, the poor buy sugar, wheat, and kerosene oil at less than market rates.

NDMC that built the schools and provides electricity to the village of Bharatpur but the monthly bills still have to be paid by the Gonds.

Although he personally never experienced the traditional bondage system (*begari pratha*), Chotte Lal remembers that it involved the Gonds accompanying the royal ministers and other officials who were travelling through the forest from one village to another. In those days, there were no buses, roads or public transportation in the district. The only way to get from one village to another was either on foot or by riding a bullock cart. The Gonds, as chaperones, would walk from dawn until dusk. They were forced to accompany the officials and walk miles from one village to another against their wishes. In that sense, *begari pratha* was a form of bondage. He says:

Then the ministers had to cross a large chunk of forested area and they wanted someone to protect them against wild animals. In the past, the forest was plentiful and abundant with animals and flowers. In those days, there were not so many forest officers and guards in the forest, and the forest was still well conserved and protected. And today, look at the condition, they have at least a dozen forest guards (*Barakha*) but still the forest is being destroyed every day. This is the age of doomsday (*kalyug*). (Field notes, 2011)

3.5.2 Case 2: Negative Evaluation of the Past (Haridas)

Mohan, another very old Sur Gond in his 80s, recounted that during the *Rajah's* days, he was part of the *begar* system, where they had to carry heavy loads for the *Rajahs* and the landlords without being paid. They would be beaten if they refused to do the work of the *Rajah*. Because of their knowledge of the forests, they would accompany the *Rajah* on hunting trips. Haridas had also seen *goras* (Europeans), who used to visit the forest to hunt tigers with the *Rajah*. Those days, he reported,

were harder than today because wages were so low. This is a negative evaluation of the past in comparison to Chotte Lal's more positive account.

3.5.3 Case 3: Negative Evaluation of the Past (Yamcharan)

Yamcharan, another senior Gond, who appeared to be in his 60s, recalled that the wages in his day were calculated in shells. One conch shell represented one finished task and was equivalent to one bag of grain. However, that was unfair in proportion to the amount of work they were made to do. Hariram, a Gond in his 40s, recalled that many Gonds died from starvation and that, during the winter, they had no protection from the cold but to eat *mahua*, a fruit high in carbohydrates that insulated against the cold. This account implies things were much worse in the past.

Yamcharan told me that when the diamond mining company opened, the Gonds were first offered jobs at the National Mining Department Corporation (NMDC), but everyone thought that they would become bonded by working there. He says that they did not know what to make of the huge industrial plant, and thinking they were going to be made into slaves, the Gonds would run away from the company people into the forests. Parry (1999), in his study of the Satnamis (a SC community) working in Bhilai Steel company in Chhattisgarh, shows how the machines reminded them of goddess Kali who was after their blood. Yamcharan was also very upset by the current state of the forests. He told me that his son had recently been arrested by the Forest department for casually hanging around in the forest—an activity that is now illegal.

3.6 Conclusion

The above sections have laid out the general context in which Sur Gonds are undergoing cultural and economic change from their traditional dependence on the forests. The current marginalised position of the Gonds, their history and geography, and the influence of other cultures on theirs have been described. In addition, an overview of their livelihoods and their relationship with the forests has been presented through several brief case studies. The overall purpose of Chapter 3 has been to present a fuller background for the case studies that are presented in later chapters, and to distinguish the Sur Gonds from other groups in the region, such as the Raj Gonds. In the following chapters, I present my findings, including case studies of various Gond families in the village of Bharatpur.

From the narratives of Chotte Lal, Yamcharan and Haridas – all marginalised Sur Gonds – the view emerges of a dependent Gond society that had unrestricted access to the forests. However, a different past is revealed in the narratives of Ajay Singh, a Raj Gond; his narrative involves the loss of their kingdom and enslavement to the Rajputs. Today in Panna, this difference no longer matters, as Sur Gonds and Raj Gonds are commonly categorised as Scheduled Tribes and have the same access to various welfare state social benefits. The pursuit of these benefits produces differential outcomes: the Raj Gonds are landed elites and the Sur Gonds are landless, thus creating a class difference and social hierarchy amongst them. In Panna, the Raj Gonds also enjoy a special relationship with the state as they were historically important for the Rajputs in their battle against the Mughals.

CHAPTER 4. GOND FAMILY STRUCTURE AND LIVELIHOOD PROFILE

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the Gond family as one of their major sites of collective agency and the experience of dignity. It sets the basis for the tensions and conflicts Gond families experience as they are faced with growing forest restrictions as well as the impact of the informal economy on their economic lives. Based on my demographic survey findings, interviews, and observations, I describe the Gonds' family structures and household economics in depth, with attention to how their labouring bodies provide them a form of body capital that makes their livelihood activities—mostly gruelling manual labour—possible. As mentioned in Chapter 1, I define the family as an expansive and permanent construct: it can exist even as it gains and loses members, relocates, and reorganises. Indeed, I witnessed Gond families transforming amidst the decreasing availability of traditional livelihoods and other changes in labour market conditions.

In this chapter, I discuss the Gond family structure and their economic activities, efforts to earn their livelihoods through diverse income sources. I consider the politics of household resource allocation in terms of the division of labour along gendered and generational lines. An individual's gender and role in the family (generationally and otherwise) can determine his or her rights and responsibilities with respect to resources and duties: who goes to school, who is responsible for domestic chores and looking after children, and who goes to work in the forests or on farms. Intra-household negotiations are also at play in determining who gets

married, to whom, and when, as well as how many children a family will have. Our purpose in exploring the Gonds' politics of household resource allocation is to better understand the variability and changes in how Gonds' agency is promoted or constrained, and to understand how the Gonds themselves respond to changing economic and social circumstances. As these case studies show, each Gond family has its own particular vulnerabilities and capabilities, and hence, its experiences of agency, economic independence, and dignity is unique.

Contrary to the rigid distinction between *family* and *household* that is found in the literature, in the Gonds' daily lives, these concepts are not distinct. In the first section of this chapter, I discuss the Gond family (*parivaar*) as a site of collective agency, explore some of the complex ways in which it can (re)define itself (e.g., through the separation of the cooking hearth, *nyarpanna*), and connect the family structure to the village's layout and spatial use, which are integral to the Gonds' negotiations of livelihoods and agency (4.2). Then, I turn to the question of intra-family relations, and discuss how households negotiate the division of labour in along gender lines (4.3) and intergenerational lines (4.4). In 4.3, I report observations on how the Gonds negotiate gender relations, including marriage customs and dowries. In 4.4, I consider intergenerational negotiations of divisions of labour; Gond families typically comprise members of multiple generations working together to sustain the household. The Gonds' intra-household decision-making is unlike that which is observed in traditional, patriarchal societies, and has implications for the pursuit of livelihoods outside the home.

Through these descriptions and analyses, it becomes apparent that, for the Gonds, a key factor in the ability to access income, and to achieve food security and economic independence, is social capital/networks/relations: access to, and reliance on, relationships within families and social networks. Ultimately the evidence presented in this chapter shows how effective the Gonds are in exercising agency as they create a dignified form of living for their families. The agency of Gond families will be further elaborated through various case studies discussed in Chapters 5, 6, and 7. I draw Cleaver's (2005) definition of agency for the Gonds and also demonstrate that agency and access is contextual (Kabeer 1999, p. 438).

4.2 Family and Household as Site of Collective Agency and Dignity

From the demographic survey results conducted among the Gonds in Bharatpur, it was found that there was great variation of the Gonds' agency; this variation was contingent on the household size, landholding status, sources of income, and gender of the household head. The family defines how Gonds can and do address their long-term needs of social care, and their immediate needs of food security and self-sufficiency. The central characteristics of the Gond family include the following: (a) the gender of the household head; (b) landholding status; (c) marital status of the household head; (d) the number of household members; (e) household welfare cycle; and (f) life-changing event(s) in the life of the household head. All these factors influence the Gonds' agency to access sources of income through social relations, which are integral to creating self-sufficiency in food and economic independence and, thus, to escaping poverty.

The sources of income (multiple/diversified livelihoods) of the Gonds are seasonal and multiple; some live on only one source of income while others have a combination of many sources. The questions on the demographic survey helped to frame the larger question on how forms of precarious work through irregular and temporary jobs have led to durable and reliable forms of care and social security. The survey also revealed the social relations among household members and within the informal labour economy, as well as the impact of these social relations on self-sufficiency in accessing food.

The Gond families take pride in their ability to do harsh and enduring wage work. Such labour also constitutes the primary strategy for escaping poverty, debt and bondage; building entitlements for care and social security in their old age; and fulfilling their social obligations towards their families. The Gond ideologies and practices of co-residences and inter-generational sharing of homesteads and courtyards are influenced by wider economic changes.

A challenging question arose: whether to map the livelihood activities as a measure or indicator of their degrees of dignity. While conducting the demographic survey to collect data on households' demographic characteristics, it became clear that the Gonds partook of a diverse range of livelihood activities. It also emerged that the Gond families could be mapped not only according to their livelihood activities but also according to their subjective experiences of dignity and economic independence. Ultimately, because this thesis contends that dignity is an experience and cannot be measured, it was decided to map the family's ability to engage in

multiple economic activities using their body, capital, landedness, gender and marital status, and the size of the family. Thus, studying the economic activities gave a more complex understanding of the Gonds' 'hierarchies of strategies' (Hulme, 2004) to remain debt free and self-sufficient in food. The Gond family members help each other as their lives are interdependent and interlinked in many complex ways as will be shown in the thesis throughout.

4.2.1 Adaptability of Family (*Parivaar*) and Household Structure

It is in the family that the Gonds experience and fulfill their desires and aspirations to remain debt-free and self-sufficient in accessing food. Through strategic adaptations of their particular families to livelihood opportunities, and through adaptations of the family structure itself, Gonds can build and depend on the social capital that forms the basis of all their livelihood management strategies. As this chapter shows, the Gonds are strikingly effective at doing so.

The term *parivaar* (which translates to 'family' in Hindi) implies a family unit comprising one married couple with their children. However, not all Gond families are alike; as introduced in Chapter 2, they can be classified in terms of various household characteristics, such as married/unmarried, younger generation, and widowed/*de jure* female-headed. We now turn to a fuller description of the Gond family, and we explain the differences amongst the Gonds that impact how they diversify their economic activities. A Gond family's degree and type of agency arises from its kinship structure, household members' marital status, education, asset holding, and the ability to access financial resources.

4.2.2 Fluid Family Size, Structure, and Kinship Lines

Gond families can be fluid in size and structure, although they are generally extensive. On average, a typical Gond family is composed of at least eight or nine members, with a mother, a father, grandparents, and up to five children. However, some households are unusually large, like that of Dinesh, who had nine children, eight being girls. The entire village teases them for being a large enough family to have their own cricket team. On average, Gond families require at least Rs. 700 every week for groceries and ten quintals of wheat to last for an entire year both for personal consumption as well as for social occasions such as marriages. The Gond household cycle is determined by the ability of the family members to pool their resources to survive structural change, risks, and vulnerabilities (Breman, 2007).

In this thesis, *household* is treated as an empirical concept and also sited with the size of the household in terms of numbers of members, landholding size, number of sources of income, number of welfare state benefits, age and marital status. Family is treated as a normative concept because it is associated with ideologies of gender, kinship, agency, aspirations/desire for a fuller life, social mobility, resilience, and dignity. A household is a 'co-residential unit, usually family-based, which takes care of resource management and the primary needs of its members' (Rudie, 1995, p. 228, as cited by Ali, 2005, p. 43). The livelihood diversification emphasises assets, resources, and strategies (Niehof, 2004), the evidence of which is provided in Chapter 5. Households undergo both nuclearisation and division, but the sense of privacy is not achieved because of the need to accommodate all members of the

household. Field evidence amongst the Gonds suggests that both empirical and normative definitions of a household and family are equally important.

A Gond family is far more complex than as linearly conceptualised by the welfare state. According to the Census of Government of India (GOI), a household is 'a group of persons who commonly live together and would take their meals from a common kitchen unless the exigencies of work prevented any of them from doing so'. This view has continued since 1971, when the second census was conducted by GoI. However, this definition is far too simplistic to capture the politics of household provisions that occurs to maintain a household. This is especially true considering that most agrarian households have at least one migrating member contributing to the 'provisioning of household', which is rarely only through one source of income. There are usually multiple sources, thus calling for an anthropological view of such families sharing daily household provisions and staples of subsistence between different generations within the main homestead.

To understand the Gond family, it was found that, for them, the key features were size and sharing of resources; the family (*parivaar*) was 'bigger' than the household (a smaller scale of *parivaar* implies a married couple only). The *parivaar* usually means a joint family system comprising more than one generation. At present, except for a few neo-local (new-occupant) families, almost all the *parivaars* in Bharatpur are descendants of the first six settlers, and the village is now inhabited by male descendants who are agnatically linked.

The base of kinship amongst the collateral Gonds in Bharatpur is agnatic, as is the case in most of North India. These agnatic lineal relations show solidarity with each other during times of grief and celebration. For instance, if a member of the lineal family dies, then all the agnates of the lineal collateral family will show solidarity by shaving their heads. These forms of participation are also called 'lineage of cooperation' (Parry, 1979) for those agnates who attend each other's social functions, and 'lineage of recognition', which is based simply on recognition of a previous agnatic link (Mayer, 1960, p. 169, cited in Parry, 1979, p. 38). Such social gatherings in typical North Indian society require the participation of male members; the female members are usually involved in cooking meals on such occasions (Parry, 1979). In Bharatpur, the age difference between the oldest and newest members of the Gond community is not significant, as they marry and bear children early. As a result, the household structures undergo change and reorganisation, further impacting their livelihood strategies.

4.3 (Re)defining Family Through Separation of the Cooking Hearth (*Nyaarpanna*)

In this section, we consider a specific way in which Gond families can redefine themselves for the specific purpose of livelihood management: the separation of the cooking hearth (*nyarpanna*). As indebtedness is a real threat for the Gonds, leaving them vulnerable to food starvation, the sharing of the cooking hearth and food-related activities (like buying cooking materials and essential supplies) becomes an important part of Gond families. Rising costs of seeds and water to grow their own food only adds to Gonds' vulnerability to meet their families' food demands,

especially if the earning member is single or widowed, or if they are landless and have to grow their food on other people's farms. In addition to the family, social relations with each other to share the costs of agriculture and sharing the produce in lieu for 'renting' the farm is common in Bharatpur. (This is described in detail in Chapter 5 under land-sharing arrangements). In this section, I describe how different Gond families manage the sharing of food-related activities. I also note the different strategies I observed, as some Gond families have begun to experience more stability than others, even those within the same family or within same generation. These emergent strategies arise from, and illustrate, the Gonds' agency and experiences of dignity.

4.3.1 Defining *Nyarpanna*

Recently, amongst the Gonds, a heavy wooden log has begun to be used to mark the separation of a cooking hearth. Separating a cooking hearth within a *parivaar* means co-existing separately within a shared courtyard and having an independent cooking hearth for the young married sons (depending upon the birth order), but still maintaining kinship ties. This state of paradoxical independence and coexistence is called *nyarpanna*. It implies a certain kind of micro-scale independence, which some Gond families have begun to experience as a result of the impact of the income from the informal economy. However, this independence is not infinite, and neither is it permanent. As I describe below, the family ties amongst Gonds are never broken because of the offsprings' hope of inheriting their parents' house or farm after parental death. At the same time, *nyarpanna* lessens the burden on wives and in-laws who do not have to cook for all the members of the household; this is especially

significant if the family is large, as most Gond families are. *Nyarpanna*'s most important role is to prevent domestic conflicts among different daughters-in-law over sharing kitchen resources such as oil, sugar, wheat, and other essentials, as also confirmed by Fortes (1949) and Parry (1979) in their village studies in North India.

In some cases, *Nyaarpanna* can occur when there is an increase in the number of children; in other cases, it is because family members prefer privacy and can now afford to buy or rent a completely independent and detached room or house. The other factors affecting *nyaarpanna* are (a) land ownership and power relations between fathers and sons in the household; (b) the abilities and strategies of each household to meet their basic needs through diversified income portfolios; and (c) the chances that male members have of inheriting from the living parent based on the personal relations between father and son (Parry, 1979). Following are different case studies that illustrate how *nyaarpanna* depends on the type of household and kinship organisation, as well as the different degrees of co-existence and independence that these Gonds can afford based on their family circumstances and the income profiles of their households.

4.3.2 Case Study on *Nyarpanna*: Male-headed Household (Sukhram)

The first case is the family of Sukhram. He is the household head and lives with his wife, two sons, and one daughter. Vikram, the elder son, who married in 2011 and has a private room built for him in the courtyard of his parents' house, continues to share the cooking hearth as he is not yet financially independent. Once Vikram's children are born, he will start to gradually separate from the homestead. He will

make way for his younger brother, Rajesh, who will occupy the room vacated by Vikram in the courtyard and look after his parents. So there is no *nyaarpanna* in Sukhram's house as long as Vikram still shares his parents' cooking area. Vikram's paternal uncles will not share that homestead. They will have their own households clustered around their married sons away from Sukhram's house.

On the other hand, there is also a bilateral advantage for both parents and sons in continuing to maintain ties after separation. As observed by Fortes (1949) and Parry (1979) in their respective works on the structural function of kinship in the Indian family system, the process of household separation is very complex. For them, these structural changes involved the division of both material and non-material assets. There is a material advantage for the married sons in that they inherit land from their parents. The emotional advantage for their parents is that the sons will care for them until they die, and their bodies will receive proper funeral rites based on the Hindu belief system. The final death rites can be performed only by a male family member.

Even if the preference is to separate from the main household after children are born, there are few households that enjoy complete privacy. This is because separation means only an additional room being built within the same courtyard or, if there is any available space, somewhere in the village that has not been claimed by someone else, as described below. The Gond kinship relationships within the household are flexible and change with respect to household development cycles. Newlywed Gonds may separate from the *parivaar* as a result of myriad social and economic factors, such as the birth of children or the need for privacy and economic

independence, depending upon their household development cycle. Most widows continue to stay in the in-laws' or marital homes after their husbands' deaths, sharing the same courtyard but keeping separate from the main homestead to have their own independent cooking hearth.

4.3.3 Case Study: Uxorilocal Families

In Bharatpur, there are also uxorilocal households, such as those of Sita and Usha, who might not share the same courtyard as their parents' house but continue to reside in close proximity. Sita and her husband, for instance, live adjacent to her parents' house with their five children. Their children can be seen playing in these courtyards and sometimes carrying out farm work, such as guarding and putting up fences around the farms; sometimes the children will also sleep in their grandparents' house.

However, Usha, Kesri Bai's eldest daughter, has this situation and has moved to her birthplace (Bharatpur) with her four children and husband. The newly built house is inadequate for six family members; some of the children often stay with Kesri Bai and help out with domestic chores. Usha and her husband live adjoining Kesri Bai's house. They have five small children who need to be looked after; the children spend the entire day playing with other children in the village. The very youngest one, who is about two years old, is under the constant care of Usha, who takes her baby to the forests while collecting wood.

4.3.4 Case Study: Intergenerational Caring Arrangements

The household also provides inter-generational care. To care for parents in their old age, the youngest son is expected to stay in the parents' house, while the eldest son will move out of the main family house due to an increase in his family size. Even after separation from the parental homes, such elder sons continue to look after their parents and younger unmarried siblings; sometimes they even contribute towards their sisters' marriage costs and other financial needs of the households. Thus, *nyaarpanna* is a strategy used by the Gonds to manage their resources and assets so that they can exercise their agency without complete dependency on their closest kin for space or food. This arrangement also benefits Gond parents, who allow their children to share their household resources and courtyards in the hope of care in their most vulnerable days and also to receive proper Hindu death rituals; this is a significant marker of their need for a dignified death.

4.4 Village Layout

The Gonds live in clusters of joint families from the same lineage. Usually, their residences constitute single rooms, which can be either large or small; the number of 'private rooms' varies depending upon the number of married sons and their children. The six original Gond families are not genetically linked, but the different homesteads are linked collaterally. The *parivaars* are clustered around different generations depending on the number of male members who are married. Newly wedded couples will continue to help with their parents' household and agricultural

costs. In return, they share the cooking hearth until they have an independent source of income.

4.4.1 Limited Space

With recent economic opportunities and changes, the need for privacy and ownership has also become important for some Gond families. The village is experiencing immigration from Gonds who arrive in Panna and stay in Bharatpur. This is because the connectivity of the Panna district makes it easy to travel to working destinations and access various sources of livelihoods. As a result of this desirable feature, space in the village is limited. Gond families often have no privacy, as homes are shared with immediate family members. This is because there is insufficient space to accommodate all households and the increasing number of newer residences in Bharatpur. However, further in-depth fieldwork has revealed that there are also many co-residents within the same homestead, each having an independent cooking hearth even though they share the same courtyard.

4.4.2 Homes

The Gonds' homes in Bharatpur are low-rise, supported by rudimentary timbers, and made out of clay mud mixed with cow dung. Roofs are made of heavy stone chips arranged in a conical shape, and because they are low-rise, the Gonds use the roofs as storage spaces for daily household provisions. The houses remain cool throughout the year, and the women and girls regularly do *pottai* and *lippai* (replace the worn out cow-dung and clay mixture on the walls and floors in the house with a new layer, which keeps the indoors of the house cool during the summer and hot during winter). The men are also often seen working and repairing the house, as the house structures are built on a seasonal basis and have to be redone each season

to suit rainy and sunny conditions. The house is used for sleeping, and for families with valuables, keeping them safely hidden.

Some of the houses have also been provided with modern (non-Western style) toilets by the *Panchayat*, a village level self-governing unit, but no Gond family appears to have a functioning one. The *Panchayat* only gives the villagers money for their construction. The *Panchayat* has also provided water connections to the nearby drainage for the toilets; yet the Gonds continue to use open toilets. Women usually go to the toilet either early at dawn or at dusk, as it is less embarrassing at these times and they can avoid the gaze of the men. Bathing is either done at the site of the hand pump, or, depending upon the weather conditions, in the nearby lake.

4.4.3 Common Areas

Cooking and socialising are done in the courtyard. The walls bordering the homes are made out of small blocks of stones that adjoin each other. During the planting season, people busy themselves with fencing their fields to protect their crops from the animals. Fences are made out of wet wood brought from the forest, known as *jhariya*. The Gonds spend much of their day in common areas. They begin their day with the women cleaning their courtyards and preparing *chai* that will be drunk with double *roti* (bread from a local bakery). This will be followed by packing lunch, which is usually leftover *rotis* from the previous night. The lunch is usually *roti*. The children are left behind; school starts around 11 am and finishes around 3 pm. The parents and other adults of the house do not usually arrive home from their daily work until

6 or 7 pm. Until then, the children are supervised by the elder siblings of the house. The adults return, and the dinner is usually ready for them if the eldest female sibling is old enough to prepare the evening meal. If she is not, then the mothers will cook the evening meal. After dinner, some Gonds will sit around with local vendors who provide free movie shows in the evening, while others gamble and drink alcohol.

4.5 Lack of Comforts, 'Precarious' and 'Informal' Work

This section considers the Gond families' ideologies of care, dignity, and social security. One form of security for the Gonds is, paradoxically, the harsh conditions of their lives. In my observations of the Gonds, there was an evident assumption that having an able body could insure (at least partially) against economic hardship. Everyone in the family, both men and women, collected heavy loads of forest woods and trekked the next day on foot to sell it in the market; used their bodies to perform laborious and manual domestic chores; and presented signs of hardened palms and small cuts and bruises.

The Gonds are indeed a fit and physically active people, and thoughts of sitting on a chair or buying any other form of comfort are not their priority, even if some households can afford them. They inculcate the same habit in their children, who start to squat at an early age. I was impressed by their ability to be in that position whilst talking to me for hours without changing their posture. I tried to sit like that but failed, and they would make fun of me saying that I am too used to comfort and urban ways of living. Except for one house, none of the Gonds in Bharatpur had chairs. I was always offered a stone chip to sit on, and sometimes they would be intrigued as

to why I would not use the blanket that they offered me so my clothes were not spoiled. I would tell them that the stone chips were cleaner than my clothes. The men returned home after toiling hard for the day and had nothing to sit on except on the ground in a squatting position.

Along similar lines, Olivia Harris (2007), while studying the Andean peasants in Bolivia, also found how the peasants perceive urban researchers/dwellers and feel sorry for their lazy lifestyle. Like the Andean peasants, the Gonds associate living close to the land as being very moral, and as a salient aspect of their identity; they are proud 'sons of the soil' (Parry, 1971). As a result of my long-term stay with the Gonds, I learnt that the Gonds consciously avoid dependency on any form of comfort on the grounds that it that it will make them lazy, sick, or otherwise unable to undertake laborious work.

The Gonds' life choice of less comfort and fewer indulgent foods is made to suit their working lives. This is because any illness in the form of physical immobility, laziness, or depending on comfort is seen as a threat to their physically demanding lives, in which everything is determined by their physical ability and health. They are careful about what they introduce into their bodies, some because they simply cannot afford indulgent foods. The sugar-free and grease-free diets that the Gonds favour are a deliberate choice; foods containing sugar and fat are believed to cause laziness and sickness, thus threatening the Gonds' ability to work and earn their livelihoods. Yet on the other hand, it was hard to find anyone in the village whose weight could be considered healthy. Both men and women of all ages seemed to be extremely

skinny, and it was possible to see the toll that their working lives had taken on their bodies. At the same time, one of the main illnesses in the village was silicosis. Another example of their ability to endure a physical and strenuous life is their walking long distances to fetch wood and then to sell it, as buses would not allow women to board carrying loads of wood. Washing hands with soap is uncommon but can be seen in some homes. Television has become popular amongst the younger generation, but the older generation and the women of the first generation are less interested in television.

The ultimate source of vulnerability for the Gonds is the need to achieve, and the difficulty of achieving, food security. Self-sufficiency in agricultural work, their ultimate objective, requires the involvement of the entire household. Guarding the crops from animal damage is carried out throughout the year. Children are used to guard the farms because animal damage to crop yield is another threat to food security. Food consumption is arranged to suit their working lives. Fattening and sweet foods are only purchased from the market and eaten occasionally; they are mostly for the youngest children as sugar treats. Food cooked at home is very simple and used as 'fuel' for labouring. Communal feasts are organised only during marriages. On festive occasions, some Indian savouries will be prepared at home as offerings, which are part of the rituals, and then later consumed as *prasad* (sacred/holy/blessed food). The Indian *roti* (oven-cooked whole-wheat bread) is their staple diet. Morning breakfast is usually double *roti* (baked bread which is purchased from a local seller) with tea. They pack their lunch to take with them to work. Lunch is usually the leftovers from the previous night's dinner.

4.6 The Economics of Weddings and Marriages

Amongst the Gonds, weddings and marriages are important to the life of any family. The customs associated with Gond marriages serve to illustrate much about how families are defined and redefined, as well as the intimate connection between family structure and livelihood strategies. This section discusses some general characteristics of Gond weddings and marriages, then considers wedding ceremonies as a form of consumption that defines the Gond economy, and dowries as an important, though occasional, form of wealth transfer. The discussion further illustrates the Gonds' agency to define their families in ways that are related to their livelihoods.

Marriages are exogamous, so the brides have to be from outside of Bharatpur. For some women who move into Bharatpur after marrying, the households are not as cramped. Also there are others in the house, such as sisters-in-law and mothers-in-law, who help with raising the children and doing domestic chores, as discussed below in the section on intergenerational division of household labour (4.8).

Early marriage is preferred, as there are other siblings also preparing for marriage. Marriages constitute an important social obligation for the household head concerned, as they have hopes of care and security later in their old age. As a result, marriages have also become a matter of social status, with more money being raised through migration, or, in some instances, money being taken in advance to demonstrate the family's financial status, even if they are poor.

For a Gond girl, most of the time before puberty is spent learning domestic chores. By the time she reaches puberty, her parents will start looking for a groom. Sexual intercourse is prohibited between couples during the first three months of marriage. The bride instead stays in her natal home and continues to visit her in-laws. After three months, the groom will finally bring her to his home. After making this transition, the bride visits her natal home not more than once a year unless there is sickness or an emergency that requires her to visit.

Unlike the common Hindu practice in India of matching horoscopes, the marriage alliance of the Gonds is a practical arrangement; usually the bride is destined to spend the rest of her life with her husband. Such women will experience a weakening of ties with their natal homes, especially after children are born and they experience an increase in domestic responsibilities. On festive occasions, and when she gets pregnant or is ill, her sisters or someone from her natal family will visit. She will also be allowed to visit someone from her natal family who is unwell. Overall, her periods of travelling to the natal village gradually reduce. However, recently, those *de jure* female-headed households, such as widows who are the sole earners, are experiencing increasing ties with their natal homes because it helps to lessen their kinship obligations with their in-laws' and maintain economic freedom and independence.

4.6.1 Wedding Ceremonies as Consumption

In Bharatpur, it is common for up to eight to ten children to get married in one year once a suitable match is made; this can take up to a year or happen in just a matter

of days. The marriage ceremony now lasts only one day. This is because, unlike in the past when the guests would walk on foot for 20 to 30Km to attend weddings in distant villages, nowadays they come by bus, and their transportation costs are jointly paid for by the groom's and bride's families. The transportation costs add a strain to their marriage budget, so the families arrange accommodation for the guests rather than having the guests travel home and back multiple times. The guests are invited to stay only one night, and the next morning they are expected to leave.

Prahlad, a local school-teacher in Bharatpur, says that in the past, the Rajput influence of marriage practice amongst the Gonds was absent. Instead, he says, there used to be a *Gandharv* style of wedding, where young Gond men and women would self-select each other. The ceremony used to be plain and simple, unlike the current practice of Rajput-style weddings, where brides and grooms do not see each other until the wedding and where a priest performs the wedding ceremony. However, modern Gond marriages do not happen until the girl and the boy see and approve each other. Sometimes, they even marry outside their community, like Punjabi Gond, a Gond from Bharatpur who married a girl in another scheduled caste community. However, a penalty was paid for breaking the community's norm of not marrying within their own. As a penalty, he had to serve the whole village a feast.

Recently, weddings have become a reason for conspicuous consumption among the Gonds, who have started to experience material changes through the infusion of cash. The duration of the marriage celebrations has been reduced compared with

the past, and yet expenses have increased. The preparation for marriage begins during the winter season, around the month of December, and is consummated just after the harvest season (from March to June); this is also when all the migrants start to return from their circular migration (or long-distance migration *vides*, as discussed in Chapter 6 on migration).

Even though the Gond marriage ceremony has changed in recent years, there are still three traditional stages involved: *lagan* (engagement), *tilak* (marriage), and *bidaayi* (farewell to the bride). Although they do not follow all the customs and caste-based hierarchy of being Hindu, the Gonds do consult a *pandit* (priest) in times of marriage to fix an auspicious date for the marital alliance. These *pandits*, however, are not consulted to match the horoscopes of the bride and groom as is the practice in other Hindu and/or Rajput households. The meaning of marriage is different for the Gonds from those in the dominant Hindu society. For the Gonds, marriage is a practical alliance, and there are fewer complex norms to regulate the addition of the new bride as a household member – as long as she can cook and clean. In recent times, a pattern has been observed where the new bride is not expected to go to the forest to collect firewood. This work is performed by the younger girls, mothers, or grandmothers of the household. The main expectation from the bride is that she will take responsibility for household chores. The marriage alliance between the two families is expected to be life-long.

4.6.2 Dowries

A dowry is not mandatory, as both the groom's and the bride's families are often poor. During the marriage rituals, one of the main concerns for the bride's family is to keep the cost of wedding feast low; both the bride's and the groom's family mutually meet the costs of the wedding. This is another distinguishing difference between the marriage norms of Gonds and non-Gonds. Hariram said:

In our community, the wedding expenses are low if the families involved in the wedding are poor. They state it clearly before the wedding that they cannot afford to feed the entire village and so only the elderly men will attend the wedding. If the families can afford it, then the entire village including children and women will be invited to the wedding feast. (Field notes, 2012)

Gonds' weddings in Bharatpur cost from Rs. 2,000 to Rs. 4,000, and this is equally divided between the bride and the groom's family. For slightly well-to-do Gond families, the cost will be up to Rs. 10,000. Raghu, for instance, a wealthier Gond in Bharatpur due to his large landholding, found a wife for his son who was more educated than the son. As a result, there was no demand for a dowry by Raghu under the understanding that she would seek formal employment: he even paid for her to finish her studies and her computer training. As a result, she now works as a teaching apprentice in the town hoping that it will lead to a more permanent job. She has also cleared her entrance exams to become a teacher, although Raghu could not raise the 'bribe' to buy her a job as a teacher, which is much sought after job in places like Bharatpur.

Raghu, due to his well-to-do status, has managed to experience social mobility through his daughter-in-law's education and hope for non-farm work. In addition, he

has contacts with influential rural elites who inform him about how to access government jobs and schemes for the marginalised. The desire to have non-farm/salaried work associated with the female family members is an important marker of social status.

Although Raghu's daughter-in-law is so educated and a graduate, she is still expected to fulfil her role as a daughter-in-law by making her income available for domestic purposes. However, Gonds avoid dowry payments, because then they do not have to pay dowries for their own daughters' marriages either. Ramesh, Raghu's son, who got married to a more educated woman, says:

I received marriage offers from other families as well, but they wanted to offer a dowry. We did not accept; otherwise, who will marry my sister? If we accept a dowry, then everybody in the village will know. In our community, the dowry is exchanged in front of village elderly men who witness this transaction and the marital alliance. In the future, if my sister gets married, then we too will have to pay the dowry. So I married a different girl whose family was ready to give their daughter without the dowry. (Field notes, 2012)

The practice of giving a dowry is done in public for the Gonds. This is because this would help the girl if there is a dispute between the two families, or if the couples do not get along and it cannot be resolved privately. The marriage can be dissolved legitimately using these witnesses. This is another practice that does not conform to the traditional Hindu practice of dowry giving, where the amount is not fully revealed but displayed through material gain in the form cars, a house, scooters, etc.

For most Gonds, education is still a luxury, and so most will engage in dowry practices in order to secure a decent marriage arrangement, as well as help in asserting their social status. Some will arrange to pay a higher dowry if they want to

get their daughter married to a groom who is educated. The case of Raghu's son, Ramesh, is recent and is still the exception where a high dowry was not accepted by the bride due to the bride's higher educational status. The growing practice of dowry-giving amongst the Gonds is, in fact, a reason for the growing popularity of arranged marriages. Previously, money was never part of marriage; but now, with the probability that the groom's family will demand some money (dowry payments), parents must negotiate terms with one another. Whereas older Gonds practiced simpler marriages, today, under the influence of Rajput-style weddings, brides and grooms take part in elaborate ceremonies, where they do not see each other until the wedding and the huge dowry is made invisible.

4.7 Negotiating Gender-based Division of Labour

As women begin to contribute to their households economically, changes may be observed in intra-household resource allocation. Gond women's economic contributions have implications for the agency of younger girls, specifically with regard to the question of whether they marry before or after they finish schooling. Gond girls often face discrimination in that, unlike boys, they generally get married before completing village schooling (which goes up to 8th grade). This kind of gender-based discrimination around education is discussed in Chapter 7. The shifting of gender roles was an important trend that was observed in intra-household resource allocation, and in Gond culture more broadly, and the trend was spurred by the growth in the informal labour economy. Yet I also observed evidence that gender roles remained distinct and that females exercised a degree of subservience.

Even though the *Panchayat* head was a woman, she was just a nominal village head. Like other Gond women, her main task was playing her role of being a traditional Gond mother and wife, which was more important than being a village head. The village-level meetings were attended by her husband, and it was him I saw in all of the twelve months. He also looked after the administrative aspects and understood the workings of the entire village better than his wife. Being a woman, she could not openly interact with household heads, as she had to be veiled in front of male members of the village. Asking male members professional and bureaucratic questions would mean breaking the social norms of the village, i.e. the prohibition against talking to strange men who were not related to her as a husband, son, brother, or father.

Moreover, birthing, nursing, and caring for the younger children is an entirely female domain. The gap between each child is usually two years, but it can be less, as in the case of Gulab Bai, for whom Bharatpur is her in-law's house and who had two children in successive years. And yet, my understanding, after a year amongst the Gonds, suggests that the growing forest restrictions are also rapidly changing marriage and kinship relations, and thus the meaning of a household, as well as family.

4.7.1 Wives and Widows

I encountered three types of Gond women: married women for whom Bharatpur is their birth village, widows, and married women for whom Bharatpur is the home of their in-laws: these distinctions were important as the degrees of agency

experienced by Gond women varied upon their marital status. Therefore, it shows which Gond families will allow maximum acceptance of women's labour and which will constrain them depending upon the Gonds' marital status. It also shows her relations with the natal family, as well as her entitlements to land if land was involved. Each type is discussed with respect to kinship obligations, inheritance of property, work, and economic freedom. They are then analysed in terms of gendered forms of creating social security and security by *de jure* female-headed households as widows who are sole earners (Lewis, 1993; Arun 2012). The focus is on women who went through life-changing experiences after their husband's death, and who also have to cope with the seasonalities of agricultural cycles – a chief characteristic of rural livelihoods (Agarwal, 1990).

In rural North India even today, the social roles of mother and wife are more highly respected and expected of a woman than their roles as labourer/worker. In the case of the Gond community, which is patriarchal and would fit Searle-Chatterjee's (1981) characterisation of 'ploughing cultures',⁸ women symbolise fertility both in the context of the ideology of female goddesses in agriculture and in birthing children, preferably male, in their household roles. In her study on the sweeper caste in Varanasi, Searle-Chatterjee showed that change in social roles and economic differentiation of work by men and women cannot be understood without its context,

⁸ Searle-Chatterjee (1981) describes pre-industrial societies like rural India as 'plough cultures'. She found that even after moving and settling in urban areas—in her case the sweeper caste to the urban city of Benaras—their social norms and customs reflect that of an agrarian society.

especially in non-European places like rural India. This is attributable to normative ideas of 'motherhood' and a 'wife' as stronger in maintaining the household/family. Another study by Luke and Munshi (2011), with subjects who were female tea plantation labourers in Orissa, found that economic contributions by women in poor households weaken ties with ancestral families, a feature found in cases with historically marginalised communities such as the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

4.7.1.1 Rise of Uxorilocal Households

According to the village secretary, the number of uxorilocal households in Bharatpur has swelled in recent years. This is because the Panna district is well connected by bus routes all the way to Delhi, from where Gonds can take buses to various cities where work can be found. Bharatpur appeals to newly married men who are looking to start a family, build homes, and escape bondage-type situations in their own village, which are often located deep into the forests with limited connectivity with the surrounding areas. *Gharjamayees* are husbands of daughters from Bharatpur who have taken residence (uxorilocality) in Bharatpur, but are not part of the extended family (thus their separation of the household is not considered as *nyaarpanna*). This is because, according to Hindu norms, the daughter has been married into a different lineage with different sets of ancestors. This changes her social, economic, and moral status in the village.

One such instance is of Sita, a Gond woman who was born in Bharatpur but who continued to stay in Bharatpur even after marriage. Even though Sita's house is only

a wall away from her parents' house, she will not share the same courtyard as her parents, as that is the space for her married brother. Even so, her very small children can be found playing and sometimes eating at her parents' house while she and her husband are at work. Sita will make sure that when she goes into her parents' house, her sister-in-law is not around. Otherwise, such a visit could be quite offensive for the sister-in-law whose natal home is occupied by Sita, giving the appearance that she does not respect her sister-in-law's privacy. Married couples prefer to separate from their parental home for privacy, but few can afford it. For such uxorilocal households, there is no access to her parents' house unless they share the agricultural cost and get some share of the yield.

Women from Bharatpur who stay behind after marriage do not enjoy the same amount of autonomy and freedom as the widows discussed below, unless they decide to move away from Bharatpur to their husband's village to live off the land that belongs to him (if he has any). In fact, many women who married into Bharatpur said that they are better off in Bharatpur than in their own villages, which are very isolated and where bondage-type relations still exist. Men coming from such villages also tend to prefer Bharatpur, finding it quite secure, as they can access different sources of livelihood more easily. These facts explain the increasing number of uxorilocal households in Bharatpur.

4.7.1.2 Wives Married into Bharatpur

Women like Gulab Bai, for instance, show how they totally internalise submission to the in-laws. Gulab Bai, for whom Bharatpur is her in-laws' residence, was heavily

pregnant with her fifth child; she was only 24 and looked extremely pale and sick. When I mentioned this to her mother-in-law, she seemed unconcerned and instead said that she did not know why she looked like that every time she became pregnant. I told them that perhaps she needed to see a doctor or get some medication. The response was, 'Why are you adding more financial burden on us?' In their 1994 study in rural Rajasthan, Gold and Raheja described how women internalised submissiveness to their in-laws. However, they also argued that these women used folklore and oral traditions as a medium to create spaces of protest and resistance in their everyday experience of male domination, both sexually and non-sexually. Women, in their study, only partially internalised submission.

The household role of cooking and looking after the children is a huge burden that prevents most newly married women from socialising with each other. Even during festivals, women will go out with other women who are part of their extended kinship networks. In such a social context, it is rare for women to discuss their intimate lives out of fear of the men finding out, either at work on the farms or the forests, or from relatives and neighbours.

This is an irony considering women goddesses like Durga are revered by Gond men, as in most North Indian Hindu societies. Women are sources of positive images through weddings, festivals, songs, and other rituals. Durga, a Hindu goddess, is revered, and feared by all, including men, who will pray and fast for the goddess to seek her blessing for a good harvest. Durga is a symbol of fertility for most peasant communities in rural North India. In their own households, however, men fear such

power and sexual acceptance for their wives and, in fact, make a distinction in their minds between their wives and goddesses. On the other hand, for the women, the husband is a *swami* (a lord in Hindi), just like the Hindu male gods Shiva and Vishnu.

The only time women (married and widowed) feel free to speak their minds is when they go to their natal homes, or if somebody from their natal home comes to visit them. (When Gulab Bai's father paid her a visit, her body language seemed very relaxed). Another way for women to overcome the pressures of household chores and deal with their in-laws is having a supportive husband who can intercede. The politics of socialising with other unrelated women through her in-laws' kinship is strictly frowned upon; the reason for this is that as there are certain family practices concerning how a household is run that families want to protect and keep discrete.

Intra-family politics of socialisation between family members, specifically female members, is described by Kandiyoti (1988) as the 'patriarchal bargain'. It refers to a strategy used by women in traditional and conservative families to exert their influence in balancing gender relations in a family (p. 285). According to Kandiyoti, bargaining also influences specific forms of 'women's active or passive resistance in the face of their oppression' (ibid). Further, she noted that the patriarchal bargain is influenced by local historical and social contexts, and that it changes over time but undergoes transformation for the re-negotiation of relations between genders (p. 277).

Women who move to Bharatpur to marry men from there experience this kind of bargaining by bearing a male child and engaging in farm work. They also engage in

wood collection at a later stage (i.e., when children have grown up) or when there is nobody helping to get wood from the forest, or they are landless. Gond women contribute equally to the household income, and thus, patriarchal ideologies in Gond families are not as rigid and accommodate women's labour, unlike non-tribal families. At the same time, the women are also predisposed to being attacked on their way to the forests; to minimise this risk they do not venture alone into the forests. This is another reason why children's schooling suffers, as they accompany the women into the forests.

4.7.1.3 Widows

As argued throughout this thesis, even widows, as lone earners, have some means of exercising agency. This has become possible mainly because Gonds' ideologies of gender and kinship are different from the traditional Hindu ideologies, allowing women to have more economic independence from extended kinship networks.

However, these are not without constraints. The exercise of agency by such women is only partial due to the wider social control from the in-laws and complex norms regarding access to husband's property. Unnithan-Kumar's (2000) ethnographic study of the women of Girasia, a lower-caste Rajput community in Rajasthan, showed how female contributions to household economies have not brought any real power, prestige, or authority to women. In fact, women continued to be denied any share in property allocation and decision-making for shared resources, and the men fear the role played by women in production and reproduction. The question that Unnithan-Kumar asked in her study is 'not whether Girasia women have agency

or not, but to what extent their lack of agency is a conscious decision on their part' (2000, p. 65).

Many male members of the eldest generation in Bharatpur have died, leaving their wives behind to raise the children. (Mortality for the Gond men often results from contracting silicosis by breathing the silica produced by the cutting of stone.) Widows in Bharatpur have to adopt different strategies in order to meet their household needs, as well as perform the social obligation of being a daughter-in-law of the husband's family as a mark of submissiveness.

The marital status of Gond women determines their ability to remain independent, free, and autonomous. Widows are financially independent, but in comparison to married women, they are more dependent upon their children to help in running their homes. The children of widows can rarely afford to finish schooling. For lone women earners, extended help is available if the children are still small babies but, by and large, most widows observed have grown-up children, or have at least one elder sibling who has started to help with running the household and looking after younger siblings. Working and waging is grounded in their desire as lone earners to seek social security from their children when they grow old.

Unnithan-Kumar's (1997) study of Girasia tribal women's identity politics and agency explains the complex processes by which their decision to attain full freedom and autonomy is restrained, despite having economic freedom and control over means of earning for the household. In contrast to the widows, newly married Gond women will not be allowed to even fetch wood from the forests or to be seen socialising with

other women. Their movement within the courtyards is also regulated, as the space is shared by men of the household, and they cannot be seen in front of them. Uxorilocal and married Gond women have extended kin and husbands who will help with looking after their younger children.

As Agarwal (1994) suggested, 'Women's subordination, given their vulnerable economic position, may be a long-term strategy to obtain secure positions for themselves within their households and communities' (p. 66). Widowed Gond women, as sole earners for the household, protect and earn for their children's interests. This is because, for them, their children are their investment for the future and their hope for social security when they are old. Thus, for Gond widows, the ideology of social security to provide a safety net through their children's future support is important, as will be shown in the next chapter.

The Gond women, especially those who are sole earners, widows, or women who did not have a male child, will correct their many social disadvantages by investing in their children. They do this by building them homes, and by helping to raise their grandchildren in the hope of receiving familial care in their old age. These are challenging situations for poor women as they seek social security and care from their children in their old age. Palriwala (1998) noted that, even though women were able to secure moral and symbolic support for their families in their roles as mothers and wives, their autonomy was still limited to meeting household needs first and foremost before their own. For Gond women, their individual aspirations and desires are often sacrificed for the collective aspirations and desires of the household (ibid).

However, many households headed by widowed women are unable to afford to send their children to school. The exception to this is those widowed households with more than three or four children; then, at least one of the children attends school. For widows, the problem is not so much about space but about ensuring that the older children look after younger siblings, cook food, and, if possible, see that the younger ones are attending school. These households, where there is only one earning member with many mouths to feed, are less stable than the norm. If the widowed household has only two children, then all their time is occupied with wood collection, filling water, cooking, and, if they are a bit older, they will choose to contribute towards household cost. For most young Gond men, such work means working on road construction. Widowed women depend entirely on their children for assistance and social security, particularly in the later stages of life.

Typical of these widows is Tulsi Bai, herself no older than 35 and with her eldest daughter already married off, and the next eldest – at 15 years of age – about to be married. There are also four other younger children in the home, the oldest being about 8 years old and carrying out domestic household chores. Tulsi Bai had to force her second daughter, Rajkumari Bai, to work for daily wages to meet household needs beyond the usual expenditure due to her elder daughter's wedding. In 2011 Rajkumari Bai accompanied her mother to the brick kilns nearby to earn and save up for her own wedding. She got married in 2013. Another widowed household, that of Leela Bai, was the most vulnerable household. Every time I visited her house, she always appeared to be sick herself or was looking after someone who was sick in

her house. The strain on her body due to wood-collection and selling in the town could clearly be seen.

Another way in which Gond widows are constrained is that, within the wider North Indian ideologies of kinship and patriarchy, they are expected to be asexual. A widow is seen as an economic and reproductive unit whose reproductive function has been fulfilled. Female sexuality is limited to its reproductive function, and there is not much space for sexual expression.

4.7.2 Women and Property Laws in India

As mentioned earlier, inheritance and land rights amongst married Gond women today follow Hindu/South Asian norms (Kapadia, 1996). Parry (1979) discussed inheritance of property in India in the context of the Hindu Code Bill of 1955. According to this bill, the household head has the power to renounce his son's inheritance if relations are strained. Children in Bharatpur make sure they maintain good relations with their parents so that their right to inherit land is not denied. During my time in Bharatpur, I observed that married sons separate from their parent's home but still continue to maintain and perform their duties towards their lineal family. They do this as a way of maintaining cordial relations with their parents; this kind of relationship increases the son's chances of inheriting land from his parents. Once both parents are deceased, the land is divided equally amongst male siblings upon production of the death certificates to the *patwari* (the land gazetteer) at the rural land record office.

A widow's share of the land is usually respected if all the paperwork involved is completed; this is done with the help of the village *Panchayat* secretary. However, it is not common for a woman to demand her share of the land inherited after her husband's death, even if she is independent and taking care of her children, because a woman generally has a strong sense of kinship obligation to her in-laws. Even if she is on her own, social norms prevent her from alienating the rest of the extended family by claiming her property rights. Gond women settle for submission without contesting their rights because of illiteracy and the lack of any form of social security other than family and kinship support. They also fear that they will not receive full support from their natal home if they are financially more vulnerable than their in-laws' house, which is already constrained. Such women find their time is spent on caring. Income-generating activities compromise their leisure time (Folbre, 1984; Kabeer, 1994, as cited in Ali, 2005, p. 210), which has psychological consequences and compromises the nutrition of their children (Ali, 2005).

Parry (1979) discussed the practice amongst Hindu women of renouncing their inheritance rights. According to Hindu customs, for women there is an unwritten norm of non-material assistance from her brothers, such as moral and emotional support, in case of conflicts with her in-laws. In a typical Hindu household, there are other advantages to a woman giving up her inheritance rights in the natal home. She is assured a share of any agricultural cash crop from her natal home, as in the case of Ratna, who was married to Sawan, in the village of Bharatpur. Her marriage was hypogamous because she was wealthier than her husband. They received around 16 quintals of wheat from her family each agricultural year, which gave them

elevated status in the household. She was also assured a share of agricultural cash crop from her natal home from every farm yield. Yet when a woman marries, she gives up inheritance rights in some ways: if she separates from her husband, or if she falls out with her in-laws after her husband's death, she has fewer options other than her natal families. In Bharatpur, her husband's land rights may be transferred to the wife without her having to contest them with her brothers-in-law or other siblings from her husband's family.

4.7.3 Women's Role in Household Decision-Making

Households in rural and agrarian India continue to depend on women to meet their needs. However, women's reproductive contributions to their households are valued more highly than their contributions to the economic production of their households. According to a study on women's participation in the workforce by Rahman and Rao (2004):

North India tends to be more patriarchal and feudal than South India. Women in northern India have more restrictions placed on their behaviour, thereby restricting their access to work. Southern India tends to be more unrestricted, women have relatively more freedom, and they have a more prominent presence in society. (as cited in Kumar & Pandey 2012, p. 20)

The authors suggest that high female participation in the labour market is commonly seen among the low castes, especially in SCs and STs (ibid). However, as these studies carried out in North India indicate, women's economic contributions have not helped them bargain for higher wages. In the process of economic reforms, agricultural labourers like rural women remain badly paid (Garikipati & Pfaffenzellar, 2012).

Working on the farm is extremely significant, especially for households of elderly widows like Kesri Bai, who have never done any non-farm work except for selling and collecting wood. Widows like Kesri Bai, who engage in traditional forms of livelihood, do not experience the same kind of freedom from their kinship and extended families as women like Tulsi Bai, who combines both farm and non-farm work and is a single earner. Kesri Bai, despite earning throughout the year for the family, is not a single earner, as her children contribute towards meeting agricultural input and help raise money for their siblings' weddings. Thus, in Bharatpur, what gives women the most autonomy is their ability to earn and to run their home from their own earnings, especially through farming for food security.

Especially in the case of widows, financial independence and control over household earnings gives such women more freedom to achieve food security and meet the wedding expenses of their children. Being economically insecure forces Gonds to allow their women to work to meet the household expenses. In other non-Gond communities, women's work, like collecting forest wood, is used more for household purposes. These women are not allowed to sell their labour in the markets or engage in economic activities that would earn cash for the household, as that would mean being seen in a public space. Public spaces are highly controlled and regulated in male-dominated societies like Panna, in ways that inhibit participation of females belonging to non-ST communities in the labour market.

Several studies (Agarwal, 1994, 1997, 1998a, 1998b, 2003; Kabeer, 2000) have shown that, other than female heads of households, only widowed women in rural

South Asia are more vulnerable to economic hardship. Vera-Sanso (2012) found that it was erroneous on the part of such families to view the men's role as providers for the household, with women relegated to the role of non-working dependents. Furthermore, in Vera-Sanso's (ibid) life-course perspective study investigating the financial contributions of older women to their households, she concluded that rather than these women being highly dependent on their spouses, as is usually assumed, in fact these women and their husbands were interdependent (p. 332). Although there is no social transformation in the social status of widows arising from their economic contribution, their households do experience a measure of welfare because of being economically autonomous.

Married women in Bharatpur also earn for their households, mainly through wood collection; they do not, however, experience the same amount of autonomy and freedom as widows. Whilst labouring to feed their families, women are expected to be head-scarfed at all times or veiled if an elderly male member of her in-laws' house passes by. This norm is to honour the patriarchy. The dominance of Hindu culture over women's bodies and appearance is clearly visible. For instance, Ratna, a young bride in Bharatpur who had gone to see her sick mother, shares her bitter experience: 'Once, I did not veil while coming back to Bharatpur from my natal home and the neighbours complained about me to my husband' (Field notes, 2011). Veiling entails covering the face using the upper part of the sari. It is practised by Gond women who have come to Bharatpur after marriage. Veiling continues among these women even in widowhood. The women veil in the vicinity of elderly males from their in-laws' family, but in the vicinity of any another male belonging to the same village

they will wear a headscarf. Such controls are strong for younger newly wedded brides, but less so for widows, elderly women, and young girls. Veiling is practiced primarily by women for whom Bharatpur is their in-laws' home, but not for women for whom Bharatpur is their natal place. These practices are only meant to be carried out in public and in the presence of the elderly male members of the household (except if they are husbands, sons, and brothers).

It is evident from the above that Gonds are experiencing transitions due to economic contributions from female members. As Chapters 5, 6 and 7 will show, the role of lone earner and *de jure* female-headed households (FHH) is essential in livelihood management, for creating both social security and care. While the Gond community has allowed the *de jure* FHH, who are widows, to labour and work, this is largely due to their extreme poverty. Women like Tulsi Bai experience a paradoxical economic freedom because their wider extended kinship system is also very poor and cannot support them. At the same time, these women return to their in-laws' village even after migrating for work outside of Bharatpur, as they have to fulfil the obligation to get their children married in the hope that they will be cared for when they get old and cannot look after themselves. In many respects, Gond women's mobility is restricted and confined to their village and, for young Gond girls, to their household chores and the courtyard.

Scholars disagree as to whether this pattern of gender bias in work allocation amongst poor households is due to cultural influence in the economic sphere or vice versa (Kumar & Pandey, 2012). It appears possible that, as low-skilled wage

workers, women are unable to demand higher wages due to their gender, and that there are advantages for male labourers who can negotiate and bargain. However, the cases of the Gond women presented here, and in subsequent chapters, show that this generalisation needs further examination. This is because female workers covered in this thesis do not experience wage-based discrimination in the informal labour economy; this is even though they do much less physically strenuous and less time-consuming jobs on the work sites such there're more work than labour to do informal and precarious work.

Thus, the informal labour economy has opened up newer income opportunity items for FHH households, which in turn opens up space for renegotiating ideologies of work, kinship, and gendering at the household level. Even so, this is limited and does not extend to the wider societal level. The evidence in the form of recent acceptance of Gond women in the labour workforce goes largely towards household consumption, including getting their children married and creating their own forms of social security. Due to their extreme material poverty, every labourer who is available counts significantly in stabilising their families. Even as Rajput influence is seen through their marriage and naming practices, their tribal ideology of patriarchy and kinship remains largely unchanged. Gond girls, both younger and elder, would cook the *rotis*; the same would even be true of the older sibling if it were a boy. As mentioned above, household and domestic chores are very demanding, and everybody in the household has to contribute.

Still, gender discrimination was observed in that girls were not allowed to go to college in town or migrate by themselves (as will be seen in Chapter 7). A patriarchal Hindu practice that was observed among the Gonds was the veiling and head-scarfing of women as a mark of respect of patriarchy. This was largely due to the concerns of protecting girls from the influences of modern life; they feared that over-educating the Gond girls and having them seek formal jobs would make it difficult for the Gonds to find a suitable groom for their daughters. In many ways, young girls' bodies are regulated by the social norms of the wider society, which everybody adheres to in order to avoid unnecessary attention.

These discussions have shown how distinctions in terms of household division, separation, or nuclearisation in the study of Gonds' household formation and pursuit of livelihoods have direct implications for their choices of economic activities. Separation from the homestead (breaching the co-residential norm of sharing a homestead) and being financially independent are two important factors in positive change for women through engagement in the informal economy. These bring a change at a normative level by allowing the agency of the women earners to assert control over their means of earning, production, and consumption. This is especially true for widows as there are more constraints to their household income.

4.8 Negotiating Inter-Generational Participation in Work

The Gonds, like any other farm-dependent households, have more than one generation living in a single household. As such, they continually negotiate inter-generational participation in work. They all help and share their labour to meet the

household needs, which are largely based around food security. Despite the rapid expansion of family size in a given household, the age of the grandparents or the eldest generation of most households is no higher than 50. Most of the eldest members of the household do not know their age. I had to guess their age by knowing the age of their grandchildren. The evidence of age of the eldest generation was obtained through oral interviews. This section considers how the elder generation, male children, and female children all participate in work in specific ways.

4.8.1 Participation of the Elder Generation

The grandparents still earn and continue to care for the other two generations (their children and their grandchildren) unless they have a physical disability or are sick. They may also be physically fitter than the younger generations. In fact, in most households, farm work is done by the eldest generation. The women in the eldest generation still continue to gather wood from the forest as a daily routine to feed the whole family. Both the parents' and grandparents' generation (the eldest generations) have the same occupations; these include agriculture, wood collection, and stone quarrying. The women members collect wood, and men work in stone quarries. The entire household does farm-work, which involves three main phases: ploughing, seeding, and cutting/thrashing. Chapter 5 will discuss such farm-working households in detail. The occupations of the eldest generation, such as stone quarrying, are increasingly becoming less popular with the younger generation, who instead prefer to migrate to do domestic work in house and road construction industries. The younger generation is also aware of the ill effects of silicosis that results from working in stone-quarries.

4.8.2 Participation of Children

Children play a vital role in household management and make an important contribution to domestic chores; this is the reason for them to discontinue and ultimately stop schooling. Parents encourage child labour, as there is always a shortage of money in the house. This is especially true when an adult member falls sick or dies: finances come under stress, and child labour becomes necessary until the household reorganises its strategies. If a household has more than three children, then the earnings of one of the children goes toward the purchase of weekly groceries; the earnings of the other two are saved for unforeseen emergencies. However, it can also happen that the children might use their wages for their own personal use, especially the boys. While between 10 and 12 years of age, Gond children do light work like carrying small loads of forest wood of about 15 kilograms, or more rarely, work in the stone quarries to clear the debris. There are many other, lighter tasks, such as transporting stones from one place to another, laying bricks in the tractors, or arranging stones together. Whatever savings they keep will disappear during leaner periods in the monsoon.

Children's labour participation is part of the livelihood of the majority of households (Kambhampati, 2009; Khanam and Ross, 2011). Research has shown that child work participation almost doubles when children are not attending school, as parents trade their children's education for gainful employment (Rammohan, 2014). Research on domestic household work in Uttar Pradesh found that children's work participation towards the household economy was overlooked and unacknowledged (ibid). She attributed this to the fact that poor households tend to distinguish between

market work and domestic work with market work being more valuable thus, children's domestic work (performed by girls mostly) is perceived to be less significant as contribution as its unpaid.

The decision as to whether to send children to school or work depends upon parental assessment of whether schooling or labouring will produce the best return for the household. Such decisions depend on their assessment of how best they can cope with uncertainty, long-term and secured forms of care for their families, and their ability to back their children's schooling and their labour in running the household. If Gond children decide to quit school for work, it is not judged negatively by their parents, who have never been schooled themselves. An exception is Sukhram, who ensured that his son Vikram attended school: his experience with formal schooling and failure in securing a salaried job is described in Chapter 7.

Gond children are aware that modern amenities are luxuries for their households and so will earn money to buy them. It is considered a noble thing to not depend on parents for conspicuous consumption, for example, new clothes, mobile phones, CD players, or televisions. According to Kabeer (2009, p. 206), such early contributions of children to both wage work and household work compromise their growth. These vital contributions to the household economy are undervalued in the overall discussion of livelihoods.

4.8.2.1 Gond Boys

Boys start to behave autonomously at an early age and find very little use for education. Although child labour is technically illegal, it is rampant in the areas surrounding the town; children can earn up to Rs. 60 per day if they do stone quarry wage work. The lack of interest in sending children to school stems from the parental feeling that there is little evidence that schooling will result in better paid non-farm work. Instead, there is evidence to the contrary in the form of unemployed youths like Vikram, who have returned to work in stone-quarries, road construction, and other wage work. Vikram recently graduated, but was doing *majoori* as he was still unemployed. For the most part, children start by doing *majoori* to earn some money for the household: *Majoori* jobs are amply available for children and adults in the area. Chapter 7 discusses how schooling is traded for child labour and under what conditions this is happening in Bharatpur.

Child labour in Bharatpur results in deviant behaviour amongst young boys whose financial constitution exposes them to the adult world too early. Teenage boys who do *majoori* from the age of 10 onwards, start behaving like adults. Some might remain within parental control, whereas others might start socialising like adults, drinking alcohol, smoking, and sometimes gambling. Initially, they start to smoke or drink to impress older children. However, some get addicted to it. Adults in the household will give money to the children to buy alcohol for them, which provides children with temptation. Younger boys smoke, drink alcohol, and try to follow in the footsteps of elderly men of the village.

Some Gond boys will beat up elder men of the village in addition to using foul language. However, a recent visit in 2014 revealed how the youth of the village have decided to discipline such children. They have restarted an ancient tradition of *panchnama*, where five witnesses testify in front of the village about anyone drinking or gambling. The teenage boys of the village took such measures in their village on board and have instituted a reformatory measure where all adults who drink and gamble will have to pay a fine. This method has been in place since last year and has helped to bring down incidences of violence related to drinking and gambling. It has also discouraged the *Bengalis* from nearby villages and Panna town men from selling and making alcohol in Bharatpur, or coming to pay to eat meat, as meat is not consumed in most Hindu households in Panna town.

Almost all Gonds wish to have as many male children as possible; they continue producing children until they have at least five in the hope of having at least one male child. Having a male child also helps to gain positive favour from their parents who own the household, as they are more likely to transfer their property to the married sons who bore them grandsons. Sons are generally given greater freedom than daughters. However, eldest sons and sons who have lost fathers tend to experience less freedom, as they must be available to help their mother in the care of the younger siblings. In a more stable household, where both parents work, younger children, especially the male children, will do very limited household chores, and most of their childhood is spent playing with other children in the village.

4.8.2.2 Gond Girls

The female children, especially the eldest one, are expected to do well in domestic chores and prepare for married life. Only the younger girls in the household are fortunate enough to attend school on an uninterrupted basis, as elder sisters can manage most of the necessary household work. The household chores and agricultural work are labour-intensive and manual. As there is no refrigeration, meals are prepared and consumed on the same day. None of the households have source of water at home. They fetch water from the communal hand pump to wash utensils that are used for drinking water. The carrying of water is the most labour intensive task, as young girls carry 10-litre buckets on top of their heads. Older girls will carry one on the top of their head and one little steel tumbler on their waist. They wear special head pads called *kunthis*, made out of worn-out *saris*, to reduce the hardness felt on the head from the weight of the forehead-carried water-filled buckets. A great deal of time is devoted to cooking bread (*roti*), starting with preparing the clay fire with wood and then directly roasting *roti* on the fire. Firewood is collected from the forests by women or girls daily, and water stored for daily consumption is brought from the nearby hand pump. Domestic chores are essentially the domain of daughters in the family and are performed manually.

There is no class difference in the raising of Gond children. However, child-rearing is gendered. Girls as young as six will start cooking *rotis* on the hearth. They will learn how to collect and chop wood. They will also be taught to care for younger siblings. For most Gond children, family life is of crucial importance and there is

usually not much time for friends, especially for girls. Girls are not allowed to venture out on their own, even if they are accompanied by other girls. There are more restrictions as to girls' movements in and out of Bharatpur. Girls are expected to be docile and submissive to household needs, unlike boys, who have the freedom to choose between study and work, and can start helping parents in running the households. Girls are expected to be 'sincere' while boys can be 'spoiled' (Da Costa, 2010).

By the age of 10, the girls in this village start collecting wood from the forest. Girls will start doing household chores and taking care of younger siblings from the age of six. Children over the age of eight will start doing hard labour, like selling wood in the town. As the girls are so involved in doing household chores from an early age, they become accustomed to this way of life and know only the domestic world until they get married. Marriage is a major life-changing event, and a bride can hope to have more freedom to assert herself (depending on her husband). This is unlike the experience of boys, who can assert their desires as soon as they start earning and are no longer expected to do household chores. Just like men, the women also leave home for work and return in the evening. The domestic responsibility of managing household chores then falls upon the eldest sibling, no matter how old and no matter their gender.

4.9 Conclusions

This chapter has described the structure and inner dynamics of the Gond family, which is a focal point in this study. The chapter has shown that, contrary to simplistic

bureaucratic understandings, the Gond family is not static or linear, and it is not merely an economic unit. Rather, it is a site of constant negotiation of gender and kinship relations, as well as politics in intra-household resource allocations (practices of provisioning). Further, there is no typical or ideal household development cycle, which makes the bureaucratic labelling too limiting and trivial to capture the inner household dynamics of the Gonds.

Among the Gonds, there is a partial acceptance of gender inequality. The Gonds respond to urgent hardships by accepting women's labour for the household's consumption needs, but at the same time deny complete schooling for girls. This is because social aspirations from formal schooling are different for men and women in the Gond community. The chapter showed how, even though *de jure* female-headed households are financially independent and need to get their children married and create their own forms of care and security, Gond women have to follow the community norms. Empowerment is limited by the patriarchal norms of the community. As a woman's compliance to norms increases, her chance of getting her children married increases, as her compliant behaviour makes her appear normal and acceptable to others.

Having laid out the informal institution of the Gond family in this chapter, we now move on to discuss multiple sources of livelihoods through which Gonds have experienced the realisation of life-goals. In Chapters 5, 6 and 7, specific Gond families' strategies to remain economically independent are discussed.

CHAPTER 5. LIVELIHOOD DIVERSIFICATION IN BHARATPUR: FARMS AND FORESTS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the multiple livelihood sources pursued by the Gonds linking their village Bharatpur with the informal economy. These livelihood management strategies mainly involve diversifying livelihood portfolios (sources of income) in the form of cash by laboring, drawing on social capital in the form of relationships and networks, and exercising body capital to do enduring kinds of work. Through their precarious labour on farms, in forests, and elsewhere, the Gonds work to escape poverty, indebtedness, and food starvation. In so doing, they exercise agency and dignity to replace lost forest-based livelihoods that once sustained them.

This chapter builds on Chapter 4 by showing how the Gonds draw on social support networks, especially family members, in ways that are informed by their families' particular demographics and power structures. The Gond families build a form of collective agency by working together to contribute to their households' food self-sufficiency and to meet agricultural costs. Indeed, the Gonds' livelihood strategies are rooted in the ethos of care and duty to their families. As evident from the discussion in Chapter 4, Gond families and households are indispensable to their pursuit of dignified living.

In this chapter, the thesis (a) establishes the current status of forest-based livelihoods, which have been impacted by government restrictions and forest-conservation debates; (b) surveys the various land arrangements available for farming, and briefly

discusses the options for (c) stone-quarry work and (d) road construction work within Bharatpur. It will address how (e) each of these livelihoods is affected by cycles and seasons, and how the Gonds negotiate these and other contingencies to manage their livelihoods. Finally, it presents (f) several ethnographic case studies of livelihood activities within Bharatpur. The case studies are presented in terms of the family characteristics that impact livelihood strategies, including landholding status, number of earners, gender of household head, and generation of household.

As the case studies show, families within Bharatpur vary with respect to their capacity for livelihood diversification, their levels of social capital, and the degree of agency, all of which impact the Gonds' ability to experience a dignified living. The chapter ends with a discussion that compares the different agencies observed in the various Gond families and how they manage to make the most of their limited but formidable, reliable, resources. The households discussed here earn their livelihoods through local sources of income; these include forest wood collection and farming. The next chapter (Chapter 6) focusses on livelihoods beyond Bharatpur, including stone quarrying and construction, which are largely the purview of the most vulnerable Gonds. Overall, these two case study chapters (Chapters 4 and 5) illustrate how the Gonds' pursuit of livelihoods close to home has enabled them to realise their life goals, and in many cases maintain economic independence.

This thesis uses the livelihood diversification framework, explained in Chapter 1, to explore how immeasurable but experienced realities, such as the dignity and agency of the poor, help create food self-sufficiency and economic security within families.

The thesis analyses how the Gonds conceive labour, and how their livelihood management strategies constitute the basis for understanding the agency of the marginalised, it also reveals their idea of independence and freedom. As explained in Chapter 3, the ethnographic concept of *majoori* refers to the emic practice of waging and labouring. The term distinctly indicates less formal forms of work. Traditionally, *majoori* implies remuneration for wage work in central India. However, this chapter goes beyond the monetary construction of *majoori* to the Gond's social identity of food self-sufficiency, dignity and economic independence and security for their families.

5.2 Forest-Based Subsistence Activities

Forest-based subsistence activities play an important part in the Gonds' lives. The most important source of forest-based livelihood is wood, which they collect in order to keep their cost of living low. Wood is essential for cooking, building homes, and making fences in their agricultural fields; the Gonds also sell what they do not use themselves. Mostly it is the women's job to collect wood from the forest and then sell it the next day after walking 10km to Panna town, carrying the wood on their foreheads. Raghu Singh, a middle-aged Gond, said:

This is because it has become illegal to cut forests. So, the women are sent to do this work because it is easy to get away from the forest authorities when the women break the law because they say that they have families to feed. To impose a fine on a man seen inside a forest is easy because the guards say he will smoke and cause a fire in the forest. (Field notes, 2011)

It is normal to see Gond women carrying wood and walking from Bharatpur to Panna town, about 10km, to sell it. There are two kinds of wood – wet and dry. The wet wood is more environmentally important, and forest regulations prohibit the Gonds from taking it; however, they are allowed to pick up the dry wood. They also collect wet wood clandestinely. Sometimes their wood is seized by the Forestry Department, and their journey is wasted. A pile of wood will earn them only Rs.100 per day, but it is a source of immediate cash. Even so, to earn this small sum of money, they spend an entire day making their way to the forest and then returning home.

Money earned from selling forest wood (Bahuguna, 2001) helps to sustain the household during times when the men are waiting for contract work. As a result, the women have acquired a lot of say in the way the household is run. However, younger brides are not meant to be seen in public spaces and so will not do farming work or collect wood. They will be mostly occupied in nursing children and doing domestic chores. Older women, like Kesri Bai, continue to do both wood collection and farm work with the help of remittance money sent from migrating children to meet agricultural costs. If the household has no other work or income, then there is always wood collection to do. If the Forest department completely stops access to forests for the Gonds, then this will mean a huge loss of income for the Gonds.

Another important source of livelihood from the forests is *mahua*, a wild fruit whose flower is used to make alcohol. In the case of Panna, the Madhya Pradesh Human Development Report (2002, p. 85) offers a case study of 53 households living on the

outskirts of the Panna Forest Reserve. The report revealed that the households earned a total annual income of around Rs.3.23 lakhs (3230 GBP for 53 households) through the collection of *mahua* products, tendu leaves, and firewood. While the 53 households also had other income sources, the income from forest produce accounted for 85% of the total income of 46 households. Each family earned Rs.9,450 (approx. 94 GBP) on average per year from the forest (ibid., p. 85). Although forest-based subsistence activities have long been essential to the Gonds, these have recently been impacted by governmental forest restrictions and by a widespread debate over forest conservation.

5.2.1 Impact of Forest Restrictions

Although many members of the media and the public have expressed excitement over the success of the tiger reintroduction project, for the Gonds, the reintroduction of tigers represents yet another increasing restriction on their forest-based livelihoods. As mentioned in previous chapters, the Gonds once relied heavily on wood collection in the forests, and stone quarries which were also inside the forests. As a result, the household survey described in Chapter 2 revealed that every Gond family had more than one source of income. Given the longstanding importance of the forests to the Gonds' livelihoods, the increasing restrictions on forest access and use have been devastating as they used to be completely forest-dependent.

Scholars (Sundar, 1997, 2000, 2003; Rao 2003, 2005) have studied the impact of forest management governance on tribal people's access to the forests, as per the Forest Right Act of 2006 and its implications to their social development, and

relations with the state . The worst problem is not being able to carry out subsistence farming inside the protected areas of the forest. Such is the case even for the Gonds in Panna, who are forced to supplement their income by engaging in other precarious forms of work. Such work is especially important to the Gonds when they must provide extra income to meet the costs of participating in social customs and obligations, most notably wedding celebrations. Such customs are usually paid for by taking on additional work, often in stone quarries. These alternative livelihoods in the form of migration are discussed in Chapter 6. The government's restrictions on forest access and use exist within the context of a widespread debate over forest conservation in India.

5.2.2. Impact of Forest-Conservation Debate

The Gonds' livelihoods have been profoundly affected not only by forest restrictions, but also by the larger debate over forest conservation. Indeed, the debate over tribes and tigers in Indian regions like Panna, is in a larger sense a debate about conservation and social development. Madhya Pradesh is one of the states in which the natural forest has been steadily supplanted by commercial species (Sundar, 2000), and where vast swaths of forest have been destroyed and displaced to make way for development projects such as mining, industry, and large dams. As discussed earlier, Panna stands out as a place where many people are facing displacement, not due to economic development, but rather to tiger conservation. In this sense, the displacement of the Gonds in this region is different from the

displacement of tribal populations in other regions, which is prompted by the demand for commercially mined minerals such as iron and coal.

In India, several studies (Bates, 1985; Baviskar, 1998; Beazley, 2011; Corbridge, 1988; Rangarajan 2005) highlight the ongoing tussle between conservationists (Baboo et al 2015; Hariharan & Macmillan, 2015) and activists for tribal rights to the forests. While the former argue that anthropogenic use of land and forest will lead to land degradation, the latter calls for alternative policies and highlights how indigenous populations (like the Gonds) have a right to the forests that is violated by modern discourse of forest conservation. The conservationists favour various reparation schemes now in place, like giving cash for land. However, the concern with such schemes is that cash gets exhausted quickly, unlike the more permanent resources like land. Another factor in the debate is the cultural politics of indigeneity; the indigenous people's cultures are threatened as they lose their forests (Karlsson,2003; Shah,2007; Xaxa,1999;). The debate over forest conservation is thus a complex and high-stakes one, constituting crucial context for the Gonds' livelihood strategies.

One of the major concerns of social developmentalists and anthropologists regarding the rights of indigenous populations to use the forests is the government's joint forest-management programmes that bring forest department officials and indigenous populations together to co-manage the forests for sustainable use. In these ventures, the original inhabitants are referred to not as indigenous populations, but instead as 'villagers' (Sarin et al 2001). Through the use of this ambiguous

reference, their indigenous knowledge of forest conservation and biodiversity is implicitly dismissed, and their right to forests and to livelihoods is also violated.

These incidents reveal the indigenous population's loss of sovereignty as well as the welfare state's lack of moral responsibility towards them. Sundar (1997, 2000, 2003) who has conducted studies in the regions of Sambhalpur (in the state of Orissa) and Bastar (in the state of Madhya Pradesh); and Sarin et al. (2003) who studied tribal populations relation with the forest department in Uttarakhand, showed how such Joint Forest Management programmes (JFMs), based on the concept of civil society, have been overtaken by the Western discourse of forest management. Thus, Sundar doubts how far such state-led 'joint' ventures are really 'joint' when they, in reality and in function, represent state interests and can hardly be referred to as 'civil' (ibid). Further, the indigenous forms of forest resource management, also referred to as a customary right, is being replaced by modern discourse of forest management. With the constant international pressure on the Indian government to commercialise its forests and increase wildlife, the social development-based activists are losing their battle (Sarin et al., 2003). As they lose ground, tribal communities are reduced to mere passive objects rather than being active participants and stakeholders in the JFM model. In the case of the Gonds, this trend is aggravated by the fact that they are not only excluded from such devolutionary practices of forest conservation, but also cannot articulate their needs: they are largely illiterate and unable to be present to attend or run organisations in which to express their protests and assert their knowledge. In this context, their relationship with the forests becomes weaker by the day.

Another aspect of the conservation debate is the wealth of rich minerals and stones within the country's forests. The presence of these resources has threatened the Indian state's sovereignty as tribal populations in regions like Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh who are left extremely poor while the Indian state claims complete control and regulation over the forests. In places like Jharkhand, this has resulted in a hostile and violent relationship between the state and the Maoists, who claim to represent the poor. Miklian (2009) and Sundar (2006) show how, in the Dantewada district, people's movements like *Salwa Judum* (meaning 'purification hunt') act as a government front at the village level in mineral resource-rich and tribal-dominated areas of Chhattisgarh; they form counter-influence anti-government or insurgency movements like Naxalism. Naxalists, operating on Maoist ideology, have emerged as a government threat due to increasing inequality and unemployment amongst tribal and local youths. Miklian (2009) and Sundar (2006) show how Maoism, based on naxalist ideology, replaces the dysfunctional and non-existent state by existing parallel to it and mimicking its functionaries (e.g., by collecting taxes from the tribes for the use of the forest) and further slows social development in the region.

The forest department monopolizes the lives of the Gonds, whose use of the forests is restricted and strictly regulated by the forest officials. Not only do locals in Panna district require a No Objection Certificate (NoC), but even the welfare state requires an NoC from the forest department in order to seek clearance for undertaking any economic and employment-generating activity. The only power the welfare state has is to hold land records, which often get consulted when land is sold or when schools and hospitals need to be constructed. As a result of this practice, districts like Panna

that are affected by the monopoly of the forest departments experience higher than average migration rates.

Through the experiences that the Gonds in the village of Bharatpur have with the forest department, we see how the limitation on land resources is a major factor preventing the Gonds from experiencing the benefits of equitable treatment from the welfare state. Remarkably, the Gonds have shown resilience, entrepreneurship and aspirational strategy to express their agency of labouring. Amidst a wide-ranging debate over forest conservation that profoundly affects their livelihoods, the Gonds have set about cultivating alternative livelihoods rather than striking out in violent protest. In this way, they exercise agency in ways that are not only productive, but that also contribute to their sense of dignity and life-satisfaction.

5.3 Farming: Different Land Arrangements

In Bharatpur, the Gonds are able to accommodate each other's vulnerabilities through mutually beneficial social exchange based on land. Land based exchanges are essential as there is water scarcity in the region and their staple food is wheat based which is an irrigated crop. Being self-sufficient in food, mostly wheat, is what the Gonds strive for most. Some also form such exchanges outside of Bharatpur depending on the types of networks and what resources they are able to offer for an equitable exchange. One acre of farmland yields 10 quintals of wheat, which is enough for the Gonds to ward off starvation for a year. The different land arrangements in Bharatpur include sharecropping, leasing out land, mortgaging land, and selling land. Sharecropping, though rare, is practiced in the form of seed-

lending; one household lends seeds to another, either sharing the output directly or charging a price for the produce. Leasing of land is found amongst those Gonds who have more than two acres; the family saves one acre to meet their own basic need of 10 quintals of wheat per year, and then leases out the other acre to poorer Gonds who are landless or have less than an acre of land. The mortgaging of land occurs among households facing a crisis such as sudden illness; however, the practice is not lucrative, so most Gonds prefer to raise extra funds by taking on additional work or migrating. As land arrangements go, the selling of land is rare because land itself is scarce and precious. Only those Gonds who possess more than five acres of land, or who have a very small plot of land, would sell it if they were unable to maintain it through agriculture. Although not desirable, Gonds sometimes have to take such extreme and desperate steps such as selling land in order to avoid going into debt. A family's land-use arrangement is both an effect and a cause of its access to resources; the arrangement has implications for how the family pursues its livelihood and builds agency and dignity.

Garikapati & Harriss-White (2008) discussed labour-sharing arrangements in paddy fields in a tribal community in Arunachal Pradesh, where land is a means of social exchange between two or more households. They found that such an arrangement helps people to balance their economic lives with social obligations regarding families, as well as the various annual festivities that are characteristic of an Indian village (*ibid*). In Bharatpur, the same land and labouring arrangement can be observed, but occurring between cousins. These fungible resources, which are mutually replaceable (Bourdieu, 1986), are important forms of social capital

possessed by poor households. Overall, the variety of land arrangements provides Gonds with several options for pursuing livelihoods through farming.

5.4 Stone-quarry Work

Although farming remains the most common livelihood within Bharatpur, some Gonds also partake of stone-quarrying and road construction work: most opportunities for quarrying and road construction are located outside Bharatpur (as discussed in Chapter 6). However, these activities are available enough within the village, albeit on a limited basis, that they warrant brief discussion in this chapter as well.

Quarrying all over Panna district is a year-round source of income for the Gonds, together with diamond mining in the monsoon season and small-scale stone mining and quarrying in the summer. Work arrangements are made in one of two ways. One is non-contractual, where people get daily wages based on the number of hours put in. The wages are about Rs.150 per day. The other is contractual (piece-rate basis), in which wages are based on the pieces of stone cut. Wages can be Rs.250-500 daily, depending on the quality of the stone for the latter. Those who work on a contractual basis have a fair knowledge of which land will yield good quality stones and which will contain unsuitable boulders. This is useful knowledge because they can know how many days of work they can commit to and demand more if they are able to labour more. Stone quarry workers depend on traditional patron-client relationships; men mostly perform this work. When Gonds face extreme vulnerability,

migration is usually nowadays the safest option; however, in the past, working on a piece-rate basis in stone quarries was their best way to raise emergency monies.

In Bharatpur, there are two types of labourers in the quarries: the *maistries* and the *majdoors*. The former are skilled stone shapers and slicers, and the latter are labourers who clear debris from the site. Depending on the size of the stone, the income of each *maistrie* can reach Rs.12,000 (120 GBP) per month. The contract is not about the days but about the value of the stone itself. A *maistrie* never works alone on the site, as at least three others like him are required in order to cut down a block of stone. Their tools are a large and small hammer, a large and small chisel, and a stone shaper and slicer. Stone-quarry work is discussed in more depth in relation to the wider political economy in the next chapter on migration, as Gonds migrate up to the stone-quarry sites and stay put for about three weeks to two months.

5.5 Road Construction

In addition to stone quarrying, work in road construction is also available on a limited basis within Bharatpur. Road construction is a new form of work and is popular among younger generations. Similar to working in stone quarries, working and getting paid to build roads is done through contracts that last up to two weeks per contract; the pay is up to Rs.350 per day. As yet, there are no known health hazards associated with this work. Road construction jobs come through local contacts and labour contractors, that is, rural elites who have historically established relations with the Gonds and who also hire labour for other wage work in Panna town.

There are two types of roads: the *Pradhan Mantri Sadak Yojana*, which is for villages, and the express roads for main highways connecting different states. The wages are the same for both kinds, and work comes through those contractors who get the tender from the government. Wages for road construction range from Rs.300–350 per day. The length of the work depends on the length of the road: to build 10km of road takes 10 days. The work involves making the mixture (*masala*) and then laying it on the ground and making sure that it is of the correct thickness. The express/interstate roads are thicker than village roads as they are expected to be used by heavy trucks and other heavy vehicles and must be able to sustain the heavy load and constant use; therefore, they take longer to build. Village roads, on the other hand, can be less thick because only bicycles and motorbikes are expected to use them. In either case, the work itself is very strenuous and labour-intensive, which is why the Gonds demand such high wages. It is in fact this ability to endure strenuous work that builds their agency. Unlike in stone-quarry work, Gonds always work in a group of ten to fifteen at a time in the construction of the roads and highways.

The Gonds have made a niche for themselves in such precarious and labour-intensive jobs, which require their bodies to be flexible and to be constantly in a squatting position under the sun. I asked Rajesh, Vikram's brother, why the Gonds do this work only on a temporary basis and don't organise and demand better working conditions. He replied, 'Oh madam, there are many such contractors who want to make us permanent, but we refuse because they won't give us the high wages' (Field notes, 2012).

Thus, by binding themselves with a temporary contract, the Gonds create their own form of organised wage security by putting themselves at high risk but also charging above NREGA wages. They are aware of the politics of permanent jobs (lower wages and more repetitive work), which Gonds avoid in order to free themselves to cope with any household emergencies and seasonal fluctuations in farming, as they depend upon farming for food security.

In Bharatpur, people with capital and people with labour are becoming indispensable to each other because of the labour shortage. The Gonds have carved a niche in the precarious informal labour economy and are in an advantageous position to bargain for their wages. The Gonds are not bonded to the employers, and they cannot be harassed to finish the work, as in the case of labourers working in Tamil Nadu's sugar mills (Guérin et al., 2009), or farm work as in Breman's study in Gujarat (2010) amongst the *dhodias*. In contrast, in Bharatpur, debt is related to short-term contracts and is usually settled once the contract is completed. Thus, Gonds assert their agency by completing their work on time and by choosing not to begin a new job until they are paid for the previous one. The strategy works, as there is no shortage of such forms of precarious work in the region.

5.6 Cycles and Seasons of Livelihoods

The Gonds' reliance on informal labour means that, for better or worse, their livelihoods are flexible. From week to week and season to season, the Gonds' work varies in terms of space, time, and intensity. Thus, Gonds' agency is dependent also

on the cycles and seasonalities of the agricultural cycle. The livelihood calendar for the Gonds is not fixed, but is generally as follows:

June–September: Rain-fed agriculture (crops like rice and soybean) are sown, and migration occurs for the remaining nine months of the year. Interestingly, agriculture and circular migration take place simultaneously for some households, as shown in the case studies below.

March–June: *Mahua* fruit and *tendu* leaves are collected from the forests and sold for a good price, which helps to stabilise household income for up to three months. During the monsoon, the stone quarries are submerged, and small-scale stone mining stops, although mining for diamonds continues.

October–April: At this time, irrigated farm work is done, and peanuts, sesame, maize, mustard, green peas, some pulses (mainly lentils), and a major grain like wheat are sown. This season is busier than the summer season because there is not enough water in the summer to sow summer seeds.

Collecting wood and stone quarry work are done throughout the year.

This is a general calendar, and varies according to individual households as well as individual needs within a household. It should be noted that for the Gonds, a year is only nine months long, based on the Hindu agrarian calendar.

In addition to seasonal variation, the Gonds' livelihood practices also vary according to the household development cycle. The needs of the household change as, for

example, a wedding approaches, as in the case of Raghu Singh. He did not migrate for work until his two daughters recently came of marriageable age. He also has a widowed sister-in-law, and there are other agnates of the family living in the same homestead who depend on his farm for food security. Recently, he sold two acres because the burden of agricultural costs was too much for him as he struggled with throat cancer. Raghu Singh migrates to earn money for important lifecycle events and as a response to the depletion of more local labouring options. He also migrates because of rising agricultural costs like seeds and water; and recently, to raise money for his daughter's marriage. Although Raghu Singh also avoids going into debt to raise the costs of his daughter's wedding and maintains his indebted status instead of borrowing, his agency to do so is, however, less strained than the agencies of Gond widows, especially Tulsi Bai, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

These degrees of variation in agency and dignity reflect differences in household circumstances, as well as the gender and marital status of the family head, as discussed earlier. In the following case studies, several Gond families' experiences serve to illustrate some of the variations in livelihood activities according to factors such as landholding status, number of earners, gender of household head, and generation of household. The case studies show that families within Bharatpur vary with respect to their capacity for livelihood diversification, their levels of social capital, and the degree of agency, and that these variations help account for Gonds' differing ability to experience a dignified living.

5.7 Case Studies of Livelihood Activities

The following case studies describe several Gonds who sustain their livelihoods in Bharatpur's local informal economy throughout the year. By doing both farm and non-farm work, they pursue their own life goals and subjective experiences of agency and dignity. The various households are mapped to their livelihood strategies, and there is a comparison of how different Gonds experience kinship and patriarchy, depending on the type of family structure. It is shown how individual choices of work are constrained and promoted depending upon the type of household and family. The case studies are followed by a comparison of the Gonds's agency depending on their household circumstances and capability to access sources of income.

These capabilities are not the same for all the Gond households, as each is a product of a different household development cycle, and the households are not uniform in terms of the life course of the household head, the gender and marital status of the household head, and the landholding size. As mentioned earlier, Gonds' sense of agency influences how they create social security and care for their families. This section draws on the scholarship discussed in Chapter 1, particularly theories of livelihood diversification, social capital, and agency. Each of these will be described briefly before proceeding to the case studies.

The livelihood diversification framework is a flexible model that can capture the range and diversity of Gond families' livelihood resources and assets, and accommodate the temporal perspective of the household life-course and household agency

(Niehof, 2004). The framework is useful in explaining how agro-ecological factors, such as the cost of seeds and water, determine the costs of debt and credit relationships necessary to engage in precarious work for the Gond families, together with the range of income-generating activities undertaken in order to meet these needs on a long-term and long-term basis to guarantee care despite temporary and insecure forms of work. The livelihood diversification framework also helps to explain how farm- and forest-dependent communities like the Gonds transform themselves into a workforce by building on social interactions, networks, solidarity, and relationships both within and among them.

The second theory drawn on in this section, social capital, is a resource to which, according to social capital theory, disenfranchised people can resort when they have been continually neglected by the welfare state (Camfield and McGregor, 2009; Camfield et al., 2009). Social capital consists of the social relationships and family ties available to income-poor households like the Gonds, who establish trusting and mutually beneficial relationships through labouring and land arrangements. Social capital can be defined as 'reciprocity within communities and households based on trust derived from social ties' (Moser, 1998, p. 10, as cited in Ali, 2005). For Adler and Kwon (1999, p. 2), social capital is 'a resource for individual and collective actors located in the network of their more or less durable relations' (as cited in Niehof, 2004, p. 324). Putnam claims that social capital takes the form of 'features of social organisation such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit' (1995, p. 67, as cited in Ali, 2005, p. 60). Further, according to Gardner, social assistance also exists within families and extended

kinship systems. She says, ‘social protection is any form of assistance given from one person or group to another that provides insurance against risks and shocks, “safety nets” in times of crisis or social or economic resources in times of need’ (2009, p. 11). Through social capital, people can secure work from trustworthy and reliable labour contractors so that they get paid on time; they can also obtain security and welfare for their families.

The third theory of importance to this section, also described in Chapter 1, is the Gonds’ agency. This theory can account for a broad, intergenerational, temporal, and historical perspective on an income-poor family’s agency formation. As the case studies in this chapter and the next two chapters show, the Gonds adopt multiple sources of income, not only to reduce vulnerability, shocks, and risks, but also to create long-term forms of care and security for themselves and their families – all of which represent the exercising of household agency. The case studies in this section, specifically, show how the Gonds construct agency and dignity through livelihood diversification within Bharatpur.

The cases selected for this section allowed the observation of a wide range of livelihood patterns. The common factor among all of these households was that the members did not hesitate to talk after returning home following a hard day’s work. Tulsi Bai’s household moved around the most during my fieldwork, as she did different jobs every few months. Tulsi Bai was always on the move for new work with all her children and was the most vulnerable. Even though I could not visit her every day, she was always approachable every time I wanted to meet her. Much was

discovered about Sukhram's son Vikram, and about the family, as Vikram was my gatekeeper to the village. I became familiar with Kesri Bai as I visited her regularly on all my visits to Bharatpur. Jagdish Adivasi's house was chosen as a case study (discussed in Chapter 6) because, unlike other migrating households, his entire family migrated and he was landless. Sawan's case was also found to be interesting because he had never left Bharatpur to make a living on his own, and he survived only on local forms of livelihood. In the proceeding sections, each of these cases is discussed: first the landless, single-earner household (Tulsi Bai), then several examples of multiple-earner families (Sukhram and Uma Bai), then one land-owning widow (Kesri Bai), and finally three younger Gond families (Sawan, Usha, and Sita).

5.7.1 Livelihood of Landless, Single-Earner Household: Tulsi Bai

This section discusses a household that is landless but has a diverse set of resources, assets, and strategies to meet the family's livelihood needs: the household of Tulsi Bai, a landless, widowed, singer earner. This case illustrates how agency is practiced in one female-headed household. Tulsi Bai's story begins with a scene of an early-morning winter visit to her temporary dwelling. 'Leena', I yelled from my rickshaw in the early hours of one February evening in 2014 outside of Tulsi Bai's hutment, built on a farm about 10km outside of her village in Bharatpur. I did not call for Tulsi Bai because often she was not there, but rather her daughters' names, which I remembered. Usually Leena – the youngest daughter, at around five years old – was at home while the older children were either doing farm work or domestic chores, fetching water, or had gone to the forest to fetch wood.

I had grown close to Leena, as I remembered her being very unwell in 2011 when I was first introduced to Tulsi Bai by Aziz Qureshi. In fact, that was the first house that he took me to, and I remember that, for Tulsi Bai, I was just another NGO-type person or surveyor coming to talk to them. She appeared to be busy, as she was doing Leena's hair. Leena was severely ill with jaundice and looked extremely pale. Tulsi Bai told me that she had been very stressed because she had to make Leena drink milk for physical strength, but that she could not afford it as milk was scarce in Panna. As there was a shortage of land for grazing, the cows did not produce enough milk, and whatever was produced was watered down; thus, pure milk was unaffordable for households like Tulsi Bai's. Later, another Gond woman argued with her about her failure to turn up for work, and was very keen on employing Tulsi Bai. Such employers target desperate households like Tulsi Bai's, those with lone earners and five or more children to feed. These kinds of households, and *de jure* widows, appear not to be short of jobs.

Tulsi Bai was a young widow, aged 35 at the time of fieldwork. She had lost her husband to TB about two years before I met her. She had six children, with the eldest daughter married in 2010. Throughout the year, Bai and her daughter, aged 15, worked at a brick kiln 10km away from Bharatpur, where they loaded and unloaded red bricks on and off trucks with a handcart. They earned Rs.25 per trip; therefore their daily earnings depended on the number of trips they made per day. They had been doing this for the last two years. Before that, Bai sold wood, but when forest access was restricted, she sought work at brick kilns.

Her in-laws had no expectation that she would share her earnings with them, but she would be expected to do so if she were living with them. In general, a Gond woman, whether married or widowed, continues to show obedience to her in-laws by following the norms as their daughter-in-law. However, Tulsi Bai had an independent income, and this meant that she was not required to give any justification to them as to how she manages to feed her family. In this sense, she enjoyed complete freedom. While this did create friction with her in-laws and the other wives of the household, it did not result in hostile relationships.

Bai did not ask for help from her in-laws because this could entail an implicit reciprocity agreement with them, such as obligating her to cook and clean her in-laws' house. Instead, she relied on her eldest, married daughter, who came to help in extreme circumstances, for example to care for a sick child in her home. Her brother would also help her from time to time. He checked on her family by visiting her on the work site or at her home in Bharatpur. Maintaining communication with her brother and married daughter became possible with the use of mobile phones. Being employed – even if this means multiple jobs – is a much better option for widowed households than depending on extended kinship. Thus, a lone earner and widow such as Bai has to labour until she fulfils her parental role of raising money to finance marrying off her children. Money spent on marriage for such *de jure* FHH is earned by doing *majoori*, and being able to spend money on a marriage serves two purpose- a social marker of status as well as hope that they would be cared for when they get old or when their bodies cannot work anymore.

5.7.2 Livelihoods of Multiple-Earner Households

Here I describe Uma Bai and Sukhram's households, where I found that all generations were involved in earning for the household. The main difference between Uma Bai and Tulsi Bai, as discussed in the following sections, is that the latter household is female-headed and so has more constraints in meeting all family members' needs. By contrast, in the former household, the female not only has a partner (Sukhram as husband), but also her children are grown up enough to farm independently, which greatly reduces her own burden. Sukhram's household was a traditional male-headed household in which both members of the couple helped meet the income needs. Sukhram had lost his land and so had been forced to enter into a contractual arrangement with his affinal cousin, Kishore. Sukhram farmed Kishore's land and shared a part of the yield with him instead of exchanging money. In return, he offered his labour for cultivating and meeting the agricultural cost of his cousin Kishore's farm. Sukhram looked after three acres of land and, in return, he gave back four quintals of the total grain output. By sharing the output of the farmed product, Sukhram avoided going into debt. Moreover, both he and his cousin mutually benefit from this arrangement: the cousin could not afford the agricultural costs by himself as his children were still young and inexperienced in farming.

In Sukhram's household, all four livelihood options were practised: agriculture, forest wood collection, stone quarrying, and road construction. Agriculture activities are practised by all members of the household. Wood collection is done strictly by Uma Bai, Sukhram's wife. Road construction is done by his sons, including Vikram, while

Sukhram himself works in stone quarries. Sukhram, aged 47, is a skilled stone miner. Uma Bai, his wife, is about 45 years old. They have two sons and three daughters. The household is mostly run on the incomes of Sukhram and his wife, whose regular income from selling wood sustains the family in terms of food.

Recently, the Forest department put restrictions on the amount of wood each person can collect from the forest, and so a strategy employed by households is to recruit as many members for this task as possible so as to increase the amount of wood that can be brought into the house. Sukhram's family feared that soon the Forest department, which seemed to increase the control of movements into the forest on an almost daily basis, would severely affect their livelihood by limiting their opportunities to earn money. This is because most stone mining is done inside the forest where high-quality stone is found. If this income from mining were reduced, then Sukhram would be forced to migrate to Powai, about 60km from Panna. This is a place where illegal stone quarrying is known to take place and is a potential source of income; however, this would entail trekking and going away for three to four weeks at a stretch. Sukhram was uncertain about this option because all his children were now grown, except for the youngest daughter: Neelam was about 14 years old. The eldest child was Vikram Gond. Vikram and the younger son, Rajesh, did *majoori*, building roads, but only outside of Panna.

In Sukhram and his wife Uma Bai's household, their labouring strategy had earned them the status of *bada Ghar* in the village, not because they had land but because both husband and wife demonstrated that working together could overcome other

financial hardships. Sukhram's decision to stay away from alcohol and gambling played a crucial role in their son Vikram earning a full graduate education, their son Rajesh entering college, and daughter Neelam finishing the full basic schooling available in the village.

In the case of Sukhram and Uma Bai, we see that the agricultural division of labour within Gonds is carried out along conjugal and inter-generational lines, while sharecropping (such as Sukhram's land arrangement with Kishore) and seed exchanges occur along conjugal-affinal lines. More widely, such farm-based economic relationships are also formed along fictive kin arrangements, as all male inhabitants of Bharatpur refer to each other as *bhai* (brother). Thus, in Bharatpur, a range of possible social relationships constitute a significant social capital of the Gonds.

5.7.3 Land-owning, Older-Female-Headed: Kesri Bai

Kesri Bai was a widow whose children were all grown up. She acquired land after her husband's death, although as of this writing, it had still not been officially transferred from his name to hers; this was because her mother-in-law was still alive. Transfer would officially take place after the mother-in-law's death. Kesri Bai was the head of her family, rather than her mother-in-law, who was cared for by her other son. Kesri Bai's family was made up of four children, of whom two sons migrated for work, one worked in road construction, and the daughter (Usha) was married but had stayed back in Bharatpur with her husband.

While Kesri Bai's children migrated or worked in road construction, she did all the agricultural work, using her children's remittance money to meet the agricultural costs and avoid starvation for her entire family for the whole year. I remember when I first met Kesri Bai: she was sorting, chopping, and arranging the wood that she had collected earlier in the day. I connected with her in a way that I could not with Tulsi Bai. I realised this was because Tulsi Bai's hands were full working and waging for her small children, who were totally dependent on her, whereas Kesri Bai's children were grown-up and married, and she had more time to spend with me. Later, I discovered that she had lost one of her daughters, who was raped and killed while going to the forest to fetch wood. The grief had never left her, particularly as she later found out that the attack was originally meant against her.

Kesri Bai relied mostly on selling wood she collected from the forest to raise her children. She enabled three of her children to marry with the financial support she got from her slightly better-off natal family. She cultivated her own land as well as the land of her two eldest sons. Those lands were acquired when her husband died about five years ago, and the *Panchayat* gave them their share of land. Each son was given about 1.5 acres. As Kesri Bai was alone with five children to care for after her husband died, none of the children finished elementary school. From the beginning of their childhood, they had to help Kesri run the household: many of the households in Bharatpur that are run by widows have a similar story. Two of her sons, both of whom are married, have migrated to Kashmir and started working at construction jobs, sending money back home when they can to help cover agricultural costs.

Kesri Bai does all the farm work on her own with some help from one of her grandchildren. As observed by Vera-Sanso (2012) in her study of older women working as street vendors and earning for their son's families in Chennai, south India, older women support themselves, their husbands, and their younger relatives, and help poor families in their fight against poverty by subsidising their incomes, too. Anyone who is a grandparent in Bharatpur, no matter what their age, is automatically considered 'old'. Being elderly is not about age; rather, it is a normative concept.

In addition to doing the farm work that secures food for the household, Kesri Bai also collects and sells forest wood daily in Panna. At the moment, Dharmendra, her eldest son, lives in the courtyard of Kesri Bai's house, with his wife and a newborn son. Although Kesri Bai is a widow, her general condition is quite stable because all her children are grown-up, married, or able to take care of themselves. The household is run by a well-orchestrated and coordinated effort with the help of her sons. They assist with the agricultural costs, and in turn, Kesri Bai guards their farms, thereby stabilising her household.

However, not everything is harmonious among the household earning members. Kesri Bai and her son-in-law (Usha's husband, a *gharjamayee*) do not get along. Recent rumours of Kesri Bai having a close friendship with a Gond man who is a widower, has upset Usha's husband, who one day could not help but raise his hand against her. Often, conflicts about sharing agricultural yield are expressed in the inter-personal relationships of the households. Thus, even as families negotiate their

livelihoods, personal value judgements and ethics also come into close conflict and need to be resolved to keep the family unit coherent.

5.7.4 Younger-Generation Households: Sawan, Usha, and Sita

Here I discuss how three younger households in Bharatpur earned a livelihood. All of the individuals were born in the village of Bharatpur: Sawan, Usha, and Sita. They were all married and living with their parents in the joint family system/household. Through their stories, I describe below recent inter-generational occupational changes observed among the Gonds in Bharatpur.

Some households manage to escape working in quarries, but others have to continue with this older tradition, based on their assessment of their household income needs. Depending upon their residential arrangement after marriage, their degree and kind of agency differed. Inter-generational conflicts were rarely seen as each generation needed each other to manage their livelihoods. The generations are co-dependent on each other as they all work the farms together. Farming also involves protecting the farm from animal damage, which is also an all-round activity for which younger-generation Gonds are responsible for helping their families.

There is no argument over which generation is more responsible than the other, as they all make themselves useful in whatever activity they do as all activities are equally important. The elderly generation still owns the land (farm), but they do not necessarily penalize their children for not following their ways of living, especially male offspring. Some gender-based constraints do exist, as will be discussed in Chapter 7, relating to inequality in girls' schooling.

Sawan's household was very unique, as he had two mothers. His family was headed by his biological mother, but they shared the same homestead as his father's other wife and her children. The two families, with their different wives, were not in conflict; an amicable and respectful distance was maintained between the two families. The livelihood profile of Sawan's family is very different from that of the rest of the village. His father married twice, and after his death at a very young age, the family were left to fend for themselves. Sawan recalled the days when his father was still alive as happier times, because the family was well fed as a result of his father's earnings from the stone quarry. However, after his father's death, the whole household was forced to labour hard by, for example, collecting and selling wood. Sawan at aged 24 had never been outside Panna, but he had some assets due to marrying into a better-off family, which brought him food security.

Sawan worked doing all kinds of *majoori* except working in the stone quarry, which killed his father, and collecting wood, which is usually the role of the female members of the household. However, unlike other men of his generation, he did not choose the option of road construction. I never found him migrating, even to nearby districts, for work. He said that he did not have to because work came to him. I asked him how is it that I see him in the village almost every day, and he said that he works, but that all his needs are met by the work that he can find in Panna itself. The other reason is that his household is not desperate, unlike most households in Bharatpur, because his wife's family is well-off in terms of land, and so most of their basic food supplies come from her family. I found out from others that Sawan had been good at studies, like Vikram, but after the death of his father from silicosis, he was forced

to discontinue schooling and do *majoori*. Thus, Sawan's earnings are put aside as savings for the future. In the case of Sawan, we see that even though he was secure in terms of food, he still continued to earn additional wages for his immediate family.

In contrast to Sawan, the *gharjamayees* (households where husbands move to their wives' villages after marriage) are interesting because the women have 'stayed back' after marriage (known as *rukjana*) in the village of Bharatpur. According to many to whom I spoke, in this village, these types of households are increasing. The major reasons why men move into their wives' villages are because they might not have a landholding in their village of birth, or might have lost their land due to family feuds, or the land itself might be barren, or there is a water shortage in their village. In addition, it is worth observing that there are places around Panna where debt bondage is still practiced. This still occurs in extremely remote areas such as Powai and the Kalda districts, about 80km from Bharatpur, where villages have no electricity. These places have a higher population of Gonds than the area around Panna town. Another reason why some men move away from their own village to Bharatpur to escape starvation.

I discuss two such *gharjamayees*: Sita and Usha. As mentioned in Chapter 2, both their houses are very small and cramped for them and their children, as both households have at least four children. Most of the time, the *gharjamayees* are absent from Bharatpur, as they work away in stone quarry or take other long-term farm work outside Panna. Such households in Bharatpur are subject to other difficulties as well. They are unable to obtain any documentation to prove their

residence unless they show that their husbands, the *gharjamayees*, have removed their names from the voting list at their birth village. If such uxorilocal households want to build a house in Bharatpur, they can either buy or, if they are lucky like Usha, their parents can settle them on land adjacent to their farms. Sita's house is built just behind the courtyard of her parents' house.

Both Usha and Sita's households are totally dependent on farm and non-farm work, and both women contribute equally towards their household needs. As their husbands have moved to Bharatpur with their wives after their marriage, their social standing is not the same as others. They are not considered *bona fide* residents, and thus, even as they earn for their families, they do not significantly experience an improvement or acceptance of their social standing. Also, they are looked on with suspicion as having access to two different state welfare schemes and drawing benefits from both, even if it is only a little. At the same time, these families are not always privileged, as they do not qualify for the job card until they can prove the male member who has moved into the village has canceled his name from the job list in his original village. This leaves families at a huge disadvantage as they are not entitled to the state welfare schemes like the BPL cards, which can significantly reduce the economic burden of meeting food self-sufficiency.

The question of whether a *gharjamayee* household will get any of the output from their parents' farm is a sensitive subject because, after marriage, the 'daughter' is no longer considered a member of her birth family, and her and her family's survival become a matter for her in-laws and husband. This is always a cause of strain

between mothers and daughters. The mothers of women like Usha and Sita will sometimes oblige their daughters by looking after their grandchildren when they are very small, but ideally daughters should not expect their mothers' assistance in caring for their children. During my entire stay, I saw the *gharjamayees* only twice during the year, when they came back to take a break from work.

The main difference between *gharjamayees* and uxorilocal households is that in the latter, the men remain absent from home for a longer period of time.⁹ The women experience less autonomy and agency as they have moved back to their natal village. Even though their immediate families are there to support them, the social norms privilege the needs of the daughter-in-law and her children. This is unlike in a female-headed household, where the woman lives in the same village as her husband's family and has more autonomy and control over resources, assets, and strategies.

5.7.5 Analysis of Case Studies

In this section, I compare and contrast the above case studies in terms of the families' abilities to be debt-free, economically independent, and food self-sufficient. For this, I will describe the Gonds' (a) social capital of close kin networks, (b) individual body capital, (c) gender-based negotiations of resource allocation, and (d) Gond women's agency, social empowerment, and participation in India's informal

economy. As mentioned earlier, livelihood diversification, social capital, and agency are what enable the Gonds to experience a dignified living; however, as discussed in this thesis, these factors vary with respect to different Gond families.

5.7.5.1 Social Assistance From Close Kin Support Networks Rather Than State Welfare Schemes

These case studies show that families relied far more on close kin support networks than on social assistance from the government. Their physically demanding modes of livelihood required a close-knittedness among household members, knowing who does what, and learning how to do domestic chores, collecting forest woods, and farming at a very young age. Kin support networks were indispensable for some families' livelihoods. For example, I discussed how, for Sawan, staying behind in Bharatpur was possible only because his food security was met through his wife's slightly better economic status. His other needs were met doing *majoori* in the town and migrating to Jammu. In contrast, for lone earners like Tulsi Bai (who works in brick kilns and does seasonal sharecropping together with her children), migrating out of Bharatpur was not possible because her children were too young to look after themselves if she migrated. As a result, Tulsi Bai demonstrated her autonomy and affirmative forms of care, dignity, and independence by working multiple jobs throughout the year. She was therefore economically independent and free from kinship obligations, despite being landless and having to support a young family of her own. However, in this pursuit of being autonomous and self-reliant, her children's schooling has suffered, which I discuss more in Chapter 7.

Many Gonds shared the family-oriented subjective goal of seeing their children married and providing for their own family's food security. For some households, depending on household profiles and access to resources, livelihood management for welfare and dignity might lead to enhanced social prestige, as seen in the cases of Sukhram and Sawan. It might also mean social security for their old age, as seen in the cases of Tulsi Bai and Kesri Bai, who as older or single mothers face more insecurities and less (or no) support from the welfare state (see Vera-Sanso, 2012).

In summary, the data from my fieldwork showed families relying on and benefiting from close kin support networks where they were available, and working to compensate where they were not. I did not observe a strong reliance on social assistance from the government. This independence of government will be further explored in Chapter 7.

5.7.5.2 Body Capital to Perform Hard Labour

In addition to showing the importance of kin support networks for the Gonds' livelihoods, the case studies also showed that body capital was indispensable. Families like Kesri Bai's and Kishore's that stayed in the village did so largely by engaging in physically demanding forest wood collection and stone-quarry work. The domestic lives of the Gonds can also be just as manually demanding as their working lives, as was shown in Chapter 4.

The cases in the thesis (Chapters 4–7) show how the Gonds' able bodies constitute their body capital and help them in meeting their needs of care, security, and welfare of their families. This correlation is still quite under-researched in the context of

ethnographic studies of rural labourers' lives in India. Precarious work and the informal labour economy are only possible and worthwhile for income-poor communities because social relationships and trust arrangements constitute a major component in providing welfare for their families. Yet the diversification of livelihoods, the use of social capital, and networking are not sufficient strategies on their own. The ultimate way the Gonds get paid is through performing and completing work; thus, their body capital is crucial. Their discipline of strict non-indulgent food goes a long way in ensuring the continued availability of their bodies for labour.

5.7.5.3 Gender Politics of Resource Allocation

Another factor that impacted Gonds' pursuit of livelihoods, according to the case studies, was shifting gender relationships, specifically a decrease in patriarchal dominance. As mentioned in Chapter 1, a theme running throughout all the chapters is the shifting gender roles prompted by the informal labour movement. These case studies, together with others in this thesis, suggest that women may experience an increase in autonomy through participation in the informal labour economy. Women's economic contributions to their families appear to be associated with changes in resource allocation within households.

The recent acceptance of Gond women into the labour workforce contributes greatly to household consumption, including getting children married and creating their own forms of social security. Due to their extreme poverty, every worker that is available counts significantly in stabilising households. For a widowed woman, like Tulsi Bai, greater freedom and independence is now attainable by moving out of her in-law's

home and raising her children on her own. The autonomy and economic independence of women like Tulsi Bai are an unintended consequence of the failure of government social aid to adequately provide for such families in poverty.

However, as we have seen, this increase in female agency also comes at a cost. Single-earner households, in which the head did not have a spouse on hand to contribute to the livelihood, experienced greater difficulty making ends meet. While gaining an independent livelihood was an emancipation process for single earners, including *de jure* female household heads such as Tulsi Bai, the long-term goal of educating or securing basic literacy for her children was clearly compromised. In the next chapter, this will also be shown to be the case for migrating female-headed families where children accompanying their mothers had to discontinue schooling.

For Tulsi Bai, her strategy of performing riskier and multiple income-earning tasks in a given year earned her respect and an entitlement to care and security in her old age from her younger children. Although one of her elder daughters married into a slightly well-to-do family, Tulsi Bai had never asked for any help from them, as that would compromise her daughter's social standing in her in-laws' house. Tulsi Bai was also in a position to do farm work on her in-laws' farms back in Bharatpur, but that would entail giving up her independence and being at the beck and call of her kin relations, and perhaps having to do tasks she disliked. In her pursuit of dignified living, her decision to take riskier options, such as carrying heavier loads of wood on her forehead and working even when she was not well, was a strategy intended to minimise her dependency on extended kinship relations and even not able to afford

sickness as it would mean a day's loss of wages that can feed her family. Thus, her agency in earning a livelihood was driven more by providing for her immediate needs and was far more constrained than that of other Gonds, such as those of Sawan, and Sukhram.

This is in contrast to families like that of Raghu Singh, discussed in Chapter 6, whose agency was less constrained as he already had land and so did not have to migrate for food security. He chose to migrate only when his daughter became of marriageable age. He could have also borrowed money to raise the wedding funds, but instead, like others, he chose to avoid debt by migrating. This agency is different from the constrained agency of Tulsi Bai or Kesri Bai, who had to immediately take charge of livelihoods after their husbands died, and who had constrained choices of livelihoods and social networks due to gender. Besides, Raghu Singh could leave behind his household responsibility on his married son and his wife, which Tulsi Bai, and most widows in the village, could not do so as most of them had young and dependent children.

These observations of FHH are also confirmed by case studies in Chant's (1997) work about Mexico and Peru, where single female heads undergo sacrificial and austere measures. This is because the wider contexts to access economic opportunities are limited due to their gender and marital status, and thus, such households are much worse off. The causes of poverty in FHH need examination in terms of causes and nature as there is diversity in the experiences of living poverty by women headed households (Chant, 1997). Women's altruistic and sacrificial

behaviour could be caused by social control imposed by the wider society, which curtails equal access and 'culturally condones emotional blackmail' (Blanc-Szanton, 1990 as cited by Chant, 1997, p. 58). Further, the community's norms of purity and sexuality are placed heavily on widowed-headed households. The burden to preserve sexual purity is placed more heavily on widows than on males due to the latter's unleashed sexuality (Buitelaar, 1995, p. 8–11 as cited by Chant, 1997, p. 58). Further, authors above are concerned about the tension between the 'own free will' (Blanc-Szanton, 1990 as cited by Chant, 1997, p. 58) and such altruistic behaviour for women headed households.

5.7.5.4 Gond Women's Agency, Social Empowerment, and Participation in Informal Economy

Gond women's experiences in the informal labour economy show that, in terms of wages, they do not experience as much discrimination as men because there is generally a labour shortage in the precarious work-related labour market, and more work available, so there is no competition amongst labourers to acquire work contracts. The acceptance of Gond women's labour by their households is largely a reflection of returns that such families expect from the labour market. This study has shown how participation of Gond women in the workforce contradicts other studies on women labour participation in India (IMF, 2015), which indicate a drop in women's labour participation. These studies fail to capture how women perform precarious and irregular forms of work and how they negotiate their wages in sectors where there are labour shortages. Labour shortages are not permanent and infinite; rather,

they are dependent upon specific labour geographies and on regional politics of social and economic development. In the region of Bharatpur, Gond women have for the first time started to migrate to work in places as distant as Delhi and Jammu, exercising the choice to take up and leave such informal work as and when they desire. For this reason, studies on work participation along social–economic lines do not capture the whole picture of when and how labour enters the informal economy and for how long labourers continue to perform precarious work.

This ability to labor for their families has contributed to Gond women's agency in terms of economic independence. It is also a reflection of their marital status, which is a significant social marker, and is often regulated and controlled by the patriarchal marriage, family, and kin network. Referring to Sen's approach of capability (1985), Kabeer is concerned about whether women are aware of such capabilities and have the power to choose and make decisions and whether they choose to behave in ways that can be assumed to be for agency. Depending upon the context and its given norms, women's social empowerment and any change they experienced can be better understood.

For the Gonds, restricted access to the forest is a misfortune that has brought changes in their ideologies of patriarchy, gender, and kinship relationships, as deeper and more conservative norms have given way to accommodate Gond women's labour. However, for the majority of the Gonds, this accommodation is an outcome of misfortune caused by loss of forest based livelihoods and, for Gond widows, it is due to loss of main male earner. For lone earners whose situation arises

from unfortunate circumstances, like Tulsi Bai and Kesri Bai, the informal economy might open up new, positive opportunities to have more control over their family members' well-being. Gond women's agency is also enabled by the fact that in tribal communities, gender ideologies and relationships are different from non-tribal communities where more restrictions are placed on women's capabilities to exercise choice. However, Kabeer warns that even more important than women's ability to access resources and practice agency is that 'we have to ask ourselves whether other choices were not only possible but whether they were conceived to be within the realms of possibility' (p. 442).

The case studies discussed in this chapter help illustrate both common threads and distinctions among Gond families' practice of livelihood diversification within Bharatpur. The families all work to be debt-free, economically independent, and food self-sufficient, and in pursuing these goals, they draw on social capital of close kin networks and individual body capital. They undertake gender-based negotiations of resource allocation, and the women exercise agency, social empowerment, and participation in India's informal economy. Given variations in family characteristics, Gonds' efforts lead to varying experiences of a dignified living.

5.8 Conclusions

This chapter has described and analysed the diverse livelihoods in which the Gonds engage within or near their home of Bharatpur. Through their precarious labour, and within support networks and households of diverse demographics and power structures, they compensate for the loss of forest-based livelihoods. The livelihoods

described in this chapter centre mostly on forests and farms, with some based on stone quarries and road construction sites: with real threats of food starvation and indebtedness. The chapter described how the Gonds experience these livelihoods, including the impact of cyclical, seasonal, and contingent forces and events. The case studies of Tulsi Bai, Kesri Bai, Sukhram, Sawan, Usha, and Sita show how Gonds pursue livelihoods in the local informal economy while pursuing not only food security, but also their own life goals, subjective experiences of dignity, and collective agency with the other members of their households. Gond families strategise and manage to hold their heads up in the village by not only stabilising their food security but also providing for their children's weddings without borrowing money, even from their own kin and natal networks.

With the dwindling forest-dependent livelihoods and the lack of any substantial income from the town, an increasingly popular livelihood strategy is migration. This is the case even for Gonds like Raghu (discussed in the next chapter on migration) and Sukhram, who, despite having a privileged status in the village, are considering migration due to their growing vulnerability and uncertainty about their ability to continue farming. With this in mind, we now move to a chapter on migration to show what kinds of networks and opportunities are available for Gonds beyond Bharatpur. Migration is the most important source of income for the most vulnerable Gonds, including the landless and the widows. Migration strategies enable them to reinforce their kin support networks and find other forms of precarious work beyond what is available in their home village.

CHAPTER 6. GOND MIGRATION, INFORMAL WORK, AND AGENCY: LIFE BEYOND BHARAPTUR

6.1 Introduction

Although the Gonds have developed diverse livelihoods within Bharatpur, they have also pursued new work opportunities by migrating to regions beyond their home village. Most of the work opportunities made possible through migration are in the informal labour economy. Long-term migration can last more than nine months, while short-term migration is usually two to four weeks. These temporary, migration-enabled livelihoods, which the Gonds pursue in their quest for a dignified means of living, have in recent years come to play an increasingly important role in the lives of the Gonds. This chapter, building on work by Shah (2006), Rogaly (2003), Biswas et al (2003), De Haan (1999b, 2002), Deshingkar (2006, 2008), Harriss-White (2003), and Breman et al (2009), examines the livelihoods that are available to Gonds through migration both outside Madhya Pradesh (MP) and locally, 'trekking' to places near Bharatpur. It focusses on the working lives of Gonds as migrants and their impact on the labour markets.

This chapter first constructs a profile showing which Gonds tend to migrate and why; although most who migrate are men, some are women, children, and the elderly. For the most vulnerable Gonds, including the landless and the widows, migration is the most important source of income. For widows, as sole earners of the household, participating in labour migration enables them to receive full wages, and return with positive stories of economic freedom. There are many reasons why Gonds choose

to migrate; on the one hand this depends on their level of vulnerability, aspirations, and motivations, and on the other hand, on their collective agency in terms of resources, assets, and strategies.

After establishing who among the Gonds migrates and why, we trace the history of Gonds' migration and the benefits, tangible and intangible, that the Gonds have accrued through migration. Tangible benefits include assigned minimum wages, while intangible benefits include a sense of freedom and independence. Next, we distinguish between two types of migration observed among the Gonds: *pardes*, which is local and intra-state, and *vides*, in which the migrant travels beyond the state of Madhya Pradesh. *Pardes* is generally undertaken for non-farm labour in places such as brick kilns and at road construction sites. Migration beyond Madhya Pradesh, or *vides*, is often undertaken for work on farms or in stone quarries. *Vides* work is often arranged by labour contractors, who are plentiful in Bharatpur; in some cases, though, Gonds deploy independent strategies, selecting the contract that suits them best by going to the work site to negotiate on their own behalf. Improved transportation infrastructure and the inter-linking of Panna with other states of India has brought more choice for labour contractors looking for labourers, and thus migration is slowly becoming a normal process.

Finally, this chapter presents several case studies in order to show how various Gond families use *pardes* and *vides* to pursue livelihoods in quarries and on construction sites. As these cases show, Gonds exercise agency by choosing when and where to work (to the extent possible), and by holding out for the best terms and

conditions they can find. Overall, this chapter shows how migration-based livelihoods (Coppard & Rogaly, 2003; De Haan, 1999b, 2002) can contribute to the Gonds' subjective experiences of agency and dignity while helping them to escape poverty. Agency is produced through mobility in seeking work outside the villages (Gidwani & Sivaramakrishnan, 2003), as Gonds display entrepreneurialism, resilience, and adventurousness in such migration ventures.

6.2 Who Migrates and Why?

Dominant theories of the migration of poor households show how migration is embedded within the complex networks of a migrant lifecycle, gender, age, and previous experiences, as well as the 'stretched life-world' between the 'source' and 'destination' point (Rogaly, 2003). In India, a high percentage of migrants who undergo seasonal and circular migration, as the Gonds do, are small-scale marginal subsistence farmers with very large households. One study has shown that MP has the highest number of labour-migrating people in the country, the majority of whom are tribal people (Tripathy, 2005).

Migration is an accepted form of livelihood strategy for many poor agrarian households in South Asia, despite the government's measures to contain such labour mobility. As previous research has shown, the poor and less educated are more likely to embark on long-distance mobility (Gardner & Osella, 2003; Breman, 1996; de Haan, 1999b; Skeldon, 2003; Deshingkar [2008] as cited in Solinski, 2012, p. 139). The most popular destinations for *vides* migration have been Rajasthan, Jammu, Delhi, Gujarat, Chandigarh, and Hyderabad. For *pardes* migration, the most

popular destinations have been those where mining work is available, such as Powai, Satna, Pahadi Khera, and Ajaigarh, all of which are about 300 to 490 kilometres from Bharatpur. *Vides* has recently become popular, and around the time of the first fieldwork in 2011, new types of migrants were emerging, such as widows and young children.

Migration is seen as a means for poor people to meet their economic security and welfares. Although migration movements are often scattered, random, and temporary, incidences of migration as a Gond strategy for livelihood diversification has become a more common pattern since 2008. This was when new restrictions on the use of the forest were introduced, especially regarding the amount of wood that could be claimed for household consumption. In this way, the Gond case is consistent with Keshri and Bhagat's findings (2012) that among those with low economic, educational, and social status in the Central and North Indian states, temporary migration, as a source of security (Biswas et al., 2002), is a more common pattern than permanent migration from rural to urban sites.

In this section, I demonstrate the different labouring arrangements, their wages, the people who wage, and how bargaining power is attained by the Gonds. As temporary, unorganised labourers, also referred to as 'a reserve of casual labourers' (Bremen, 1996; Mosse, 2007), the Gonds assert their autonomy through their ability to do physically demanding work. As Corbridge and Shah (2013, p. 338) observe, the working class, including the Gonds, move constantly back and forth between agriculture and industry. This autonomy secures bargaining power in their wage-

work lives; labouring demonstrates agency to negotiate their wages and contractual conditions.

Gonds of all ages in the village of Bharatpur migrate for many reasons. After the monsoons, almost 70% of people in the village migrate to *vides*; this includes 80% of the young (aged over 12). Most are illiterate, but some of the young are semi-literate. Both individuals and households migrate. Migration to work outside of Panna is circular, seasonal, and temporary. The younger Gonds might continue to move from one destination to another if they do not get along with the contractor, or if they do not like the weather, the food, or the people in the place of migration. The young (aged over 12) migrate in small groups with their friends. They migrate less out of financial desperation and more out of curiosity, in order to get to know the world outside of Panna. A second reason for their migration is that they have stopped attending school and so are moving beyond the world of education and towards the world of livelihoods, income, and financial security for their families.

Pardes occurs in households that are less vulnerable (*majboor*), as they can migrate to districts near Panna, within the state of Madhya Pradesh. For other households, those which are not secure in terms of land and agriculture, inter-state migration (*vides*) is attractive. This includes recently widowed migrants and landless households. *Pardes* households attain their food security and can raise agricultural costs by trekking to nearby stone quarries. However, for the landless and the widows, food insecurity is a major concern, as agricultural yield depends on rain and money. They prefer to have greater control over their food supply.

In Bharatpur, there are both a solicited type of migration (working in stone quarries through traditional forms of patron–client relations), and an unsolicited type outside the cities (through unsecured social networks). This distinction between solicited and unsolicited migration is borrowed from Rafique and Rogaly’s study (2003) in Murshidabad, West Bengal. Unsolicited types of migration are associated with an insecure and precarious working environment (2003, p. 670). For Gonds, social networking matters because they become aware of wage cheating from other migrants’ stories. At the same time, there are some who migrate without any secured or solicited type of employment; this is discussed later in the chapter.

Another motive for long-distance migration, particularly for widows and the landless, is raising enough money for their children’s marriages. Ensuring marriages is also an insurance and hope that their children will care for them in the future when the Gonds as primary earners get older. For many widows whose daughters have reached marriageable age, *vides* is very attractive, as they can marry their daughters off without taking on a debt or obligation in the form of financial assistance from extended kin in the village. The threat of starvation is constant for Gonds, so migration can function as a basic source of security. At the same time, there are also Gonds who use the migrant labour offered by their members to improve their welfare. As discussed in Chapter 7, this results in raising the Gonds’ income levels to move out of poverty, but at the cost of trading the children’s schooling. In sum, Gonds undertake migrant labour to improve their welfare, raise their income levels, and escape poverty.

6.3 History of Gonds' Migration

Vides migration is relatively new. According to the village secretary (*sachiv*), the Gonds have been migrating outside for work, and he says that their pattern of migration outside of Madhya Pradesh (MP) is recent. Previously, only the SC community from other villages migrated outside of MP. The SCs have been migrating for almost ten years longer than the ST population, because nobody in Panna would give them work as a result of their untouchability.¹⁰

Earlier, the forest ban only applied to hunting and fishing, not wood collection. The restriction of wood collection is a direct blow to the livelihood of the Gonds as it means they do not have wood to cook and eat; therefore, from around 2011, they also started to migrate with the SCs. Earlier, the Gonds migrated only to *pardes*, in the nearby towns (internal migration) to work in stone quarries. According to Sukhram, Vikram's father, this type of inter-district migration has been going on for about 100 years.

6.4 Benefits of Migration

In her case study, Alpa Shah (2006, 2010) looked at migration by hill people, the Mundas, emphasising the emancipation and empowerment it offers to the most vulnerable. Shah (2006) shows how migration by tribal people to brick kilns in the

¹⁰ SCs are considered to belong to the polluting and untouchable group of people in the caste hierarchy, and nobody in Panna would give them jobs and so, the SCs had to migrate to seek work elsewhere.

village near Jharkhand, Tapu, was motivated not just by economics but also by the desire to complement other social needs and relationships that were not possible in a 'home' village setting. Although working in the brick kiln is temporary (only six months), it was still favoured by some in order to

explore and roam; for example to escape from a problem at home; or live out a prohibited amorous relationship.....(2006, p. 106)

So it can be seen that migrating to work in the brick kiln area allowed people to do certain things that could not be done at 'home'.

Migration can be a form of emancipation and empowerment for the most vulnerable (Shah, 2006, 2010). In his studies of the Golla community in Andhra Pradesh, Picherit (2012) shows that, for migrant labourers, the social outcome of rural development in their village was more important than the workplace issue of rights and wages. In contrast to the Gollas in Andhra Pradesh, the Gonds of Bharatpur seem to be unaffected by the various programmes that are slowly being implemented; for some, development is still inaccessible (see Chapter 7), and this migrating between destinations was a source of positive experiences in spite of unsecured and risky working conditions.

A mixture of motives can be at play in a decision to migrate. Deshingkar and Start (2003) distinguish between coping and accumulation as migration strategies. It must be noted, however, that migration is part of a mix of livelihood strategies and methods of accumulation adopted by Gonds, and many Gonds cultivate one rain-fed crop and do circular migration for greater security (Deshingkar, 2006).

When Gonds migrate to seek economic gain, it is not always for bare survival; in some cases it is to earn money for the marriage ceremony of a household member. Remittances from migration have bought social prestige and status for landless households, who are able to display their status by their ability to spend money on marriage ceremonies. For a handful of Gonds, like that of Raghu who first migrated in 2011 to raise wedding expenses for his daughter, migration is about social and economic improvement rather than food security or survival – as is the case for Jagdish Adivasi or Ram Kripal, who are landless. Extra income is a very positive result of migration for the Gonds, as their social status has been enhanced by their ability to spend money on their children's marriages. The marriages have become expensive compared to the past, especially in terms of money spent on transportation and on Hinduised wedding ceremonies, which include an orchestra, buffet, jewellery, and an expensive *saree* and ring for the bride. Some well-off Gonds, such as Raghu Singh, migrate not for survival but to accumulate and enhance or maintain their social status. Rajesh, the son of Raghu, who migrated to Jammu this year together with his wife and two daughters, says:

Migration helps in savings. While in Panna, all the earnings get exhausted by the end of the week, but *vides* earnings go towards saving and my father went to *vides*. While my father's and my mother's earnings were spent on paying for their living, mine and my sister's earnings were saved up for her wedding.

6.5 *Pardes*: Migrating or Trekking to Work in Stone Quarries

Chapter 4 discussed agricultural wage work, a type of work that Gonds migrate to perform. The other common type of migration-enabled work, *pardes* (work in the

stone quarries) is now discussed in the context of the wider political economy. Most Gonds who work in stone quarries are paid up to Rs.200–250 per day (twice the NREGA rate, which was Rs.125 in 2011), depending on the type of contract (*theka*). The Gonds can make a substantial amount of money by trekking to nearby places to work, undergoing temporary migration to locales about 60–80 kms from Panna. This is because the mine is almost guaranteed to be an illegal one, and therefore the workers can demand higher wages and advance payments. In this way, they demonstrate their autonomy in waged work and maintain some degree of economic independence.

Working in stone quarries is the most popular and most reliable source of cash for the Gonds for various reasons. Although the pay is better than for most other sources of livelihood, finding work in legal stone quarries is difficult because of increasing encroachments by the Forestry Department. As a result, many Gonds end up working in stone quarries in and around Panna district. For this, they usually have to trek for two or three weeks, or even months, from Bharatpur, depending upon the contractual arrangement with the quarry owner. It is only men who trek to nearby districts to work in illegal stone quarries.

Stone quarries are similar to other rural industries, such as salt pans, brick kilns, and rice mills, in that they are heavily dependent on a cheap, rural workforce with flexible and informal labour arrangements; these arrangements are often exploitative for the worker. In Panna, those who perceive themselves as poor will seek work in illegal quarry as this is a source of immediate cash in hand: only those who are

embarrassed to be seen working a menial job like stone-cutting are reluctant to take up such work. However, stone-quarrying is still the most lucrative informal and unorganised industry for the district of Panna, and is one in which the Gonds have created a niche for themselves. Stone-quarrying thus provides many Gond families with a useful livelihood strategy.

6.5.1 Who Works in Stone Quarries?

Work in stone quarries is still largely undertaken by the older generation. While it remains the most reliable choice of livelihood for older Gonds, it is not popular among the younger generation because of their growing awareness of the health risks involved in such work such as silicosis. Among the younger generation, migration to work on road construction, either within the state of Madhya Pradesh or outside, is replacing work in stone quarries. Gonds who do work in the quarries are generally fairly stable and secure in terms of land and food, and they work in the quarries only to raise money for marriage purposes. Child labourers and women who work in quarries just outside of Bharatpur are often involved in crushing big blocks of stone, for which they get paid per *tas/a* (a small bucket full of crushed stones); one *tas/a* fetches up to Rs.25. On average, one person crushes no more than four or five *tas/as* of stones per day. These crushed stones are then converted into cement.

Louise Waite (2005), in her research amongst the manual workers in Maharashtra's stone quarries, found that employers considered it more advantageous to work with workers with families rather than those working alone. This was because lone workers would exploit the employers by working at their own will, but still demand

the same wage. Working with families and friends was preferred because if one of them could not work or left due to sickness, there could be an immediate replacement. In addition, most workers in her study would spend the money they made from breaking stones on their children's education, and thus aspired for upward social mobility through labouring, which the employers found it easy to exploit. Such a need and desire, Waite (2005) shows, was not present with the lone workers, who did not share such family responsibilities and thus were unreliable as they could leave work at any time.

6.5.2 Work Process, Conditions, and Products

Work in the stone quarry involves the following process. First, the debris (earth) is cleared. The amount of debris to be cleared varies depending on the size of the site; it can take up to three truckloads of dump (debris) to be removed before any stone can be dug out. Depending on the quarry owner, the debris is removed either manually (which involves child labour and women, with wages ranging from Rs.60–125) or using a heavy utility machine called a hydraulic excavator. This machine costs up to Rs. 50 lakhs (50,000 GBP) and is operated by a trained operator; this operator earns a monthly salary of Rs.10,000 plus daily petty expenses. Machines are used in large stone quarries of approximately ten acres of land. Once the stone is dug out, after removing 12–15 feet of debris, holes are drilled (using a smaller hammer) into it to remove pressure. The smallest size of stone is 4 foot by 2 foot; it takes four *maistries* to slice a stone of this size into 300 chips over a period of three months. It is broken down into smaller blocks with a small hammer. Then, with a big

hammer (weighing around 12–15 kg), these smaller blocks are sliced into thin chips and then shaped around the edges. This work is usually done by men. Working continuously and breaking hard stones makes their hands very stiff, bearing the marks of cuts and bruises inflicted while working.

Although the stone-quarry owners in Panna depend on the Gonds to get their work done, the Gonds often work in unacceptable conditions. They push their bodies' capacities to cope with the harsh and brutal method of slicing and cutting the stones. Some do not eat nutritional food, and some stunt their growth by drinking alcohol: most look undernourished. None of the Gonds, men and women included, seem to have an ounce of fat on them. They work even if their body capital (Rogaly and Thieme, 2012) decreases from working in such hazardous conditions. Still, the Gonds have more bargaining power in the contractual negotiations than the owners, who have to chase them to get any work done. This is in addition to the fact that most of the quarries are illegal; the owners have no choice but to give the Gonds advance payments and wages or else lose their labour.

The product that is mined in Panna's stone quarries is sandstone, which is mined by slicing the stone chips. The sandstone is of two types: red and white. The red variety is used for local/rural houses as flooring, and there is a good market for it all over the country. Traders come to Panna to purchase these chips directly from the owners of stone quarries. The white sandstone is exported to European and American markets, where it is used for paving gardens and back yards. The agents for the foreign market come from Delhi and Rajasthan.

6.5.3 Work Arrangements, Terms and Conditions

6.5.3.1 *Negotiating Work*

When the employer or the labour contractor comes to the village to collect the *majdoors* (labourers), he first explains the nature of the work to them. Then, the Gonds decide whether they can commit to do this work. If they feel that they can finish the task faster than the time the employer has set, then they may prefer to take a contract (a type of lease arrangement allowing an indefinite time compared to piece-rate work where there is little flexibility and the work has to be done based on daily targets). This is because a contract is more profitable and he can take up another task while working on the existing one. The contract is flexible for the labourers, and they do not have to worry about completing the work to the timetable given by the employer. In a contract, the labourer will select an area of his own choice at the site of the mine, and mine it in his own time and convenience (see the case of Nandu below); the completion of the task depends upon the labourer. The value of the work arrangement will be fixed between him and the employer's accountant (*munshi*). For men working as *maistries* (professional stone miners), wages rise to Rs.250 per day based on piece-rates. If they opt to work on a long-term non-*theka* basis, they earn only Rs.150 per day.

The rates are fixed after the Gonds determine how many days they can commit and the likelihood of finding good quality stone. However, there is no guarantee that once everything about the contract has been discussed the Gonds will finish the work. Sometimes they might decide to leave a job if they find quarry work at another site

where the possibility of good quality stone is higher and they know they can make more profit. Sometimes, they will leave the work unfinished to attend social events like festivals and marriages and return to work later. Usually the Gonds do not leave work unfinished, but sometimes the land is not of good quality, and so they return to Bharatpur. The advance is then adjusted when the Gonds begin work at a new quarry with the same contractor.

For the Gonds in Bharatpur, contractual work is the most common form of work in stone quarries. *Thekedaari* (meaning work on piece-rate basis) is also a form of *majoori* for the Gonds, but the difference is that the labourer has the freedom to begin and end the work as he is able, even in the middle of a contract. This form of labour arrangement assures maximum bargaining power for better wages, but it comes at the cost of working in riskier conditions or being jailed if the workers are caught by the Forest department. In any case, the contracts are more flexible because workers can choose to work as much as or as little they want, based on their need. Further, the contractual work is not permanent, which means they can do other work at the same time. Contractual work is mostly found in the stone-quarry sector and is done by highly skilled stone-cutters. Contractual work is also a form of casualisation, as it involves an informal, non-contractual, and committal completion of work. Negotiating their own work conditions is an important way in which Gonds exercise agency to exert control over their own lives.

6.5.3.2 Compensation, Advances, and Risks

Each *maistrie* earns Rs.40 per chip, and each quarry 30 chips per month. This makes an average monthly earning of Rs.12,000, depending on whether the work in question is done on a contract or non-contract basis. The owner will then sell the chip to the market for Rs.200, half of which goes into paying the royalty to the *rajaswa* (rural administration), and the rest he keeps for himself as his profit (apart from what is paid to the *munshi*). Gonds take an advance from their employers. This advance system is a risk for both the labourer and the mine-owner; they have to protect their wages and advance money respectively. Says Vikram:

We don't mind a permanent form of work but we don't like to be under someone or work at their whims and fancies. We fix our own rates and work at our own pace. Our rates will always be more than the state's NREGA wages (Field notes, 2011).

The advance is whatever the Gonds ask and is used as emergency money for their families while they are away working in the stone quarries. So, both the labourers and the contractor/employer are at risk if either of the party fails to follow the terms of the negotiations.

6.5.3.3 Legality

In Panna, there is strong evidence of how illegal quarries represent the mafia nexus between the rural officials including the forest department and the mine owners. Even though these illegal quarries are considered to be legal by the Gonds, a sustainable mining NGO based in New Delhi, Environics Trust, reports that the process of getting a No Object Certificate (NOC) from the forest department is 'illegal'. Illegal here implies that leases are granted for land where there is a clear environmental violation.

Every stone quarry requires an NOC from the Forest department, and it can take many months before these quarries can be approved. However, local journalists and villagers said that Forest department officials and the top rural bureaucrats were making a lot of money as a result of illegal operations taking place inside the forests. This is possible because Bundelkhand is rich in mineral ores like limestone and diamonds, with Panna also specialising in building materials in the form of stones.

6.5.3.4 Mutually Beneficial Relations Between Workers and Owners

The Gonds only work with known contractors, and there have been no reported cases where the Gonds have not fulfilled their contractual agreement with the contractor. Thus, social relationships are used to seek information on new contractors, and to seek good and reliable people to work with; this helps the Gonds to maintain their bargaining power. Further, Vikram says that both the Gonds as labourers and the *thekedaars* as mine owners and contractors are indispensable to each other. The Gonds know their political place as labourers in the 'precarious economies'.

The labour contractors have a strict business relationship with the Gonds and punish them if they do not work for the money that is paid in advance of the work beginning. One stone-mine owner who often works with the Gonds told me that they cannot be trusted because they take advance money and leave the work half-done, and until they are chased around or beaten or verbally abused, the work does not get completed. According to him, the Gonds will often begin work in a new mine before completing mining in the older one, and restart the cycle of taking advance money

before completing the previous one. On further investigation of this allegation, I found that this is not true of the Gonds of Bharatpur, but that there are other Gonds from other *Gram Panchayat* with whom such incidences took place.

6.5.4 Precarity of Stone Quarry Work

Another factor behind the Gonds' anxiety about their financial future, in addition to not being able to gather wood from the forests, is that even the opportunity of working in the stone quarries may soon be lost. Working in stone quarries is the major non-farming economic activity involving migrating *pardes*, and the Gonds have been engaging in it for quite some time. It is not as old as farming and wood collection, but has become a significant source of immediate cash and financial mobility. It involves strenuous hard labour, working eight hours constantly in the scorching heat. Only Gonds can endure such harsh and risky working conditions, and that is why they charge significantly higher wages than others. Yet they may well stand to lose even this livelihood.

Almost all the labour force working in the stone quarry in Panna is made up of Gonds, according to Virendra Raja, a well-known stone quarry owner in the district of Panna; he is popular amongst the Gonds in Bharatpur because he pays them on time and treats them well, unlike other stone-quarry owners. His current lease on the stone quarry expires in 2017. His first lease was sanctioned for 1997–2007, and the second was approved for the following ten years. He quarries ten acres of land and has an hydraulic evacuator to remove the debris before the stones are dug out. He is not sure whether he will get another renewal after 2017 because the government

has now changed the rules; instead of allowing people to apply for a lease directly, the government will invite large bidders. Virendra says that small stone-quarry owners like him will be edged out, as only those who offer high bids will be granted a lease. Also, the environmental and rural development departments have become stricter: quarries now have to be 250 metres away from forest land and villages (or areas with a human population), hospitals, and schools, which he says leaves no land for quarrying at all because finding a space that meets the new requirements is impossible.

The closure of the quarries will not affect other poor communities like the *Bengalis*, *Sahus*, or *Yadavs* in the same way, because they are not labouring communities. They have small amounts of capital to start other businesses, for example in poultry, fishing, milk, or alcohol, and their families are not as large, so their needs are more easily met; this is mainly because Panna is not an expensive place to live. In fact, the *Gonds* were the only ones to complain bitterly against the action by the Forestry Department because it was their livelihoods that were directly dependent on the forests, unlike other communities who have non-forest based livelihoods and do farm work.

In May 2011, the period of fieldwork, the *Gonds* declared that there was no work in Panna; they meant was that there will be no more work in the future if all the quarries are closed and no new ones are sanctioned. Even collecting wood from the forest is penalised. This is in addition to the ineffectiveness of state-led benefits triggering migration. The continued precarity of stone quarry work hinges on two conditions:

forest restrictions that affect stone mine leases, and the limited potential for Gonds to own stone quarries. Each of these will now be briefly discussed.

6.5.4.1 *Future of Stone Quarries: Post-forest Restrictions*

All the stone quarry leases currently in operation will expire by 2020, including the diamond mine run by the National Mining Department Corporation (NMDC), which lies much further inside the Tiger Reserve. This expiration will not occur without certain environmental and legal circumstances, and not until 2020. Any stone mine lease requires a deposit of about Rs.1 lakh 40 thousand, which is paid to the government. This includes a penalty as well as compensation for the environmental damage caused by stone mining. On the other hand, there is less bureaucracy involved in getting a lease to start a diamond mine because the environmental damage is very minimal. The cost of a diamond mine application is also very low, and there is no deposit required. However, diamond mining is less popular because there is no guarantee that diamonds will be found, and so there is a risk of losing time and money.

6.5.4.2 *The Paradox of the Gonds Owning Stone Quarries*

All the stone quarries that are running in Panna district are in the proxy names of Gonds. The *sachiv* (the village secretary) says this is because a lease application is sanctioned only if it can show that it will generate economic growth and local jobs for the poor such as the Gonds. The quarry lessor who pays for the application of the lease is not a Gond; he pays a commission to a Gond who agrees that his name may be used to submit a lease application. By law, the Gonds, due to their tribal

status, can run a stone quarry on their own if they can organise themselves as a trust or a society. However, the Gonds do not have enough capital (up to Rs.10 lakhs, including bribes for officials to sanction the lease) to take on such an economic venture. Some members have tried to use their tribal status to start a quarry; they said that they were unable to sustain it due to a lack of trust in each other in terms of financial management and agreement over the distribution of profits.

However, the most discouraging factor in such ownership opportunities is that the *rajaswa* (the rural administration) will allot them a plot of land that will not yield good-quality stone. This is because most of the good land is inside the Panna Tiger Reserve, which is now under the Forest department where mining is completely banned. Another problem the Gonds face in starting and owning their own quarry is to sell the stones in the market which they don't have access to as its regulated by brokers and middlemen in addition to the uncertain and fluctuating market forces. For these reasons, they feel relatively more secure working as stone-cutters and stone-quarrymen, as such work is paid cash-in-hand and constitutes a clean transaction.

6.6 Leaving for *Vides*: Contracts and Labour Contractors

One of the main ways in which Gonds prepare to go *vides* is through labour contractors. These labour contractors are hired by the construction and big cement-making companies, miles away from labour colonies like Bharatpur. The labour contractors are in touch with labour brokers, who had started off as migration labourers themselves. Construction companies in migrating destinations use labour

contractors to find and hire migrant labourers. Solicitation is performed through jobbers and labour suppliers from Bharatpur itself, who are referred to as *jammadars*. The companies issue labour permits allowing such contractors to hire labourers. The pick-up points for the labourers are bus stands, as many of the migrant labourers come in by bus from remote areas. Sometimes, if the Gonds travel by train, it is because the labour contractor picked them up from the villages, discussed the work contract with them *in situ* in their village, and made an advance payment to them to provide them with their travel costs. The Gonds prefer such contractors because they know them well and do not have to worry too much if their money is not paid on time, as they know how to find the contractor to recover the balance amount.

Some Gonds in Bharatpur, like Sampat, do not mind using physical force and bullying strategies to recover their wages. In Sampat's case, the contractor could not pay him because the building that he took the contract for collapsed as a result of poor raw materials; yet Sampat managed to recover his wages. The responsibility for such accidents is not on the shoulders of the migrant labourers. When the contractor delayed paying Sampat his wages, Sampat found out from others about the contractors' visit to the district. Sampat went straight to the contractor's in-laws' house, not too far from Bharatpur, and used mildly threatening language to recover his wages. However, some migrant labourers are vulnerable to being cheated, particularly those who get picked up from bus stands. The contractor might not pay them the full wages if the labourer decides to leave before their 'contract' is finished.

In Bharatpur, recruiting labour and distributing wages involves a range of social and economic negotiations. These functions require a familiarity with the social base of the villages from which the labour is hired, and an understanding of the urban markets of temporary and casual hourly based wage work based employment. It is not enough to say that there are still primordial loyalties and ties that underlie the recruitment techniques by labour contractors without first knowing their social status.

Chandavarkar says about recruiters:

Since the jobber or his equivalent was a ubiquitous figure in Indian industry and labour organization, he has been constantly portrayed as a social archetype and cultural artefact, a pre-industrial survival or an institution peculiarity suited to the specificities of Indian culture and conditions. (Chandavarkar, 1994, p. 100; as cited in Picherit, 2009, p. 263)

Most Gonds are conservative in choosing the labour contractors with whom they want to work. Only those contractors who have a good reputation for paying all wages and have established a good word-of-mouth reputation in the village are dealt with. In the past, there have been some incidences of Gonds being cheated by a labour contractor, who would take them to the place of work but not pay them. They were then left without enough money to buy their return tickets. Most of those who have gone to Delhi and Rajasthan seem to have had such experiences. The contractor would cheat both the company that provides the work and the labourers. He would take *lakhs* of rupees from the company, saying that he needed it to give advance wages to the labourers, and instead flee with the money.

If a contractor does not have the money in advance to pay a labourer full wages, he is able hold back wages in case the migrant labourers suddenly decide to leave when

the work is incomplete. In such cases the contractor will ask Gonds to wait until he gets his full payment from the company for whom the labour contractor has committed to work. Sometimes, the labour contractor will not keep his word and not pay wages, even after the work has been completed as per the initial agreement between the migrant labourer and the labour contractor. However, there is a provision in the law whereby the labourer, in such situations where he is not paid on time, can lodge a complaint with the police about the company that the labour contractor was working for; the police can coerce the company into paying him. Unfortunately, it sometimes happens that the police are in cahoots with the company or the labour contractor and might not help the labourer to recover his money, instead sharing it among themselves. Mosse (2010), in his work on the Bhills of Madhya Pradesh shows how migrant labourers are vulnerable to being cheated by labour contractors, who often extract work without paying. This shows that there is discrimination in private firms against the informal labour economy because of the tribal, poor status of migrant labourers and their vulnerability to chronic poverty (ibid., 2010).

We now discuss three aspects of the decision to go *vides*: the willingness to take on bondage through debt, the willingness to compete for desirable jobs in cooler-weather locations, and the careful calculation of risk that occurs before a Gond labourer commits to a working in *vides* conditions.

6.6.1 Bondage Through Debt

In Bharatpur, Gonds who wish to raise money for their children, marriage, or to set aside for future emergencies, may take on debt through a system of advances for stone quarry work. In this way, bondage through debt can accumulate. In household surveys, it was found that 15 out of 71 households in Bharatpur had taken on debt for various reasons, most commonly relating to marriage or health. This bondage is binding for the labourer and the broker alike: both parties are at risk, but in unequal ways.

As D'Espallier et al. (2013) pointed out in their study of the paddy fields in Tamil Nadu, a labourer can abuse the advance system by taking an advance from two different employers at the same time. Conversely, the employers, having paid an advance, might not pay the balance of the wages due after the completion of the work. The broker tends to mitigate his risk by hiring labourers who are familiar to him through kinship, village affinity, or word of mouth from other experienced labourers. The labourers mitigate their risk by working for those brokers who have built a reputation for paying wages on time. According to Ballet & Bhukuth (2007), there are several factors involved in the creation of trust in the broker–labourer relationship. Its benefits notwithstanding, this advance system is a risk to both the labourer and the mine owner.

6.6.2 Preference and Competition in Cooler-Weather Locations

Those who travel to Jammu seem to be the happiest of migrant labourers: the weather is cooler there and so work feels less strenuous than in hotter places like Rajasthan. This fact shows that workers who are exposed to labour-intensive

outdoor work in the heat feel lucky that there is work available in cooler locations. However, there are concerns amongst Gonds about running out of work in these popular places. There is a tendency for the contractors to exploit them in cooler locations because the competition for work there reduces the Gonds' bargaining power. This awareness on the part of both parties, the Gonds and the contractors, of such competition can lead to vulnerable working conditions and higher risk of exploitation. More research needs to be done on the connection between the role of the weather in the choice of work and how Gonds can carefully negotiate their wages and contracts in order to avoid exploitation and still get full wages.

6.6.3 *Vides* as Calculated Risk

Some of the Gonds feel that going *vides* is a risk because they do not know the labour contractor personally: the migrants contact the contractor from the company that they want to work for. These companies are known to the Gonds by word of mouth, or from relatives or other migrants. It is also unusual for Gonds to go through a labour contractor or sub-contractor directly from the village. Instead, they will station themselves at the Inter-State Bus Terminal (ISBT), the country's largest bus terminal, where people use buses to go as far as Mumbai from Delhi. It is also a labour pick-up point, as most rural and temporary labourers who travel to Delhi by bus have to end the journey at ISBT. Most labour and wage negotiations take place at the bus station, and there are many options in terms of work and labour contractors from which the labourers can choose. However, coming back is not without cost.

The labour contractor, in almost all the Gonds' cases in Bharatpur, will withhold 50% of their wages, telling them that the rest will be released on their return in July: this is a condition under which they agree to work. In that sense, the migrants are bound to the labour contractor because they are forced to return to the same place of work otherwise they will lose wages as per the conditions of work. If they are lucky to have a good relationship with the labour contractor, then it is not a big compromise; but if the labour contractor mistreats them, then they are at risk that the contractor will cheat and take advantage of his ignorance. However, in most cases that were recorded, the labour contractor usually seems to release the funds on their return in July as there is a labour shortage for those doing wage work. At the same time, most of those who have returned have only been migrating for two years: *vides* is a recent experience for them, and most have not experienced a wide variety of labour contractors.

As a result, the Gonds prefer to work for someone they trust and who has established his reputation amongst them as someone who will release the funds when they return to finish the work. The Gonds usually work for someone who is familiar to them from the past experiences of other migrants; sometimes they even know where his house is. For those labour contractors who are from neighbouring states like Bihar or Delhi, and who are therefore complete strangers to the Gonds, there is a *jammadar* (a labour broker) from Bharatpur who will take responsibility for the funds to be released and the contract to be honoured. For this, he will take a small commission as he assures the worker about the work and the labour contractor who needs the labourer. In Bharatpur, there are quite a few Gonds themselves who work

as *jammadars*. There are some Gonds who have multiple roles, such as labour brokers and labour suppliers, while also working as labourers themselves.

When Gonds choose to pursue work through *vides*, a number of factors impacts their decision. Three are considered here: the willingness to take on bondage through debt, the willingness to compete for desirable jobs in cooler-weather locations, and the careful calculation of risk that occurs before a Gond labourer commits to working in *vides* conditions. Having considered some of the conditions and variables surrounding *vides*, we now turn to several case studies of Gond families who undertake *vides* migration as a livelihood strategy.

6.7 Case Studies of Migrating Families

While food self-sufficiency and economic freedom are the main motivators of migration among the Gonds, not all Gonds migrate for these reasons. This section discusses the different types of migration and explains a much broader framework for Gond migration. It begins with *pardes* migrants followed by *vides*. The migrating families were selected based on a wide range of patterns observed in the survey (the results of which are discussed in Chapter 2). It was found that every family had at least one member who was migrating, either *pardes* or *vides*. The migrating Gonds were selected using a snowball sampling method because a select segment of the population, those who were going to newer destinations like Jammu, were the ones who were keen to talk about their experiences. Most of the migration-based in-depth interviews were conducted after the harvest season, in March when the whole village had returned to attend marriage festivities.

6.7.1 *Pardes Migrants*

This section discusses three Gond families that went to work in stone-quarries in *pardes* and describes what such Gond families look like.

6.7.1.1 *Kishore*

Kishore's household comprises his wife, three sons, and one daughter. He is about 45. He works only on a piecemeal basis in the stone quarries and has a small landholding. He makes up to Rs.250 per day working in illegal stone quarries, and treks from Bharatpur for about 10–15 days every month. The household earnings come from stone quarries and wood. The grown-up children do some work but do not contribute to the household expenses. They use their earnings to purchase mobile phones or for other conspicuous consumption. Their daughter is now of a normal marriageable age in the village, which is usually below 18 years old. Kishore works in a stone quarry, about 30–60km away from Panna. He goes for almost two weeks at a stretch, returns with enough earnings to take a break, and then resumes other quarry work elsewhere. His wife collects wood on a daily basis. The earnings from the quarrying are used for everyday needs and to save towards the marriage and hosting guests. Kishore also has some land, but owing to financial reasons is unable to afford the agricultural costs. Instead, he has leased it out to Sukhram in the village to look after it. For the future, he says that if there is no other source of earning, then his family, like others, would consider migrating.

6.7.1.2 *Nandu*

Another case is Nandu, aged 24 years, a stone miner. Nandu works only on stone mining and is the only one from his generation to do so. He is a young father of two infant children and lives with his wife and his parents. His mother still holds the ownership of three acres of land. While I was there, I saw him twice turn down offers of work in road construction, even though it is very popular amongst his peers. Displaying the familiar preference for work flexibility, he does not like any long-term type of work and prefers to make money in one go and then take a break. He likes to choose his contractor and the mine owner carefully in order to avoid bondage. That way, Nandu is free, independent, and secures high wages.

6.7.1.3 Sukhram

Sukhram, Vikram's father, has started trekking to work in stone quarries after forest department authorities allowed the quarry at the Majhgawon stone site just near Bharatpur, to be resumed. One reason for his willingness to take on this work is the older generation's perception that it is easy to combat the health risks of the quarry by eating healthily and staying away from alcohol. Sukhram has made his name in stone mining and has no difficulty getting work as a stone miner. He says that the reason he has managed to give his family a more stable living is because, unlike others working in the quarries, he never drinks. This is in contrast to some of the Gonds from Bharatpur who spend their wages on alcohol and gambling.

Alcohol consumption among stone quarry workers is often reported, for example in the case study by Meher (2009) in Orissa. Meher found that for the stone quarry workers, drinking alcohol was important to performing the laborious task of breaking

stone, as it helped to numb the body, enabling it to endure pain and continue to work. This relationship between alcohol consumption and precarious labour requires more objective study to illuminate how it helps workers to perform precarious work. Even though there is an increasing awareness of the health risks involved in working in stone-quarries, this is still the most reliable and traditional form of livelihood, especially amongst the older generation of men.

6.7.1.4 *Tulsi Bai*

In the case of Tulsi Bai, not all her five children migrate with her to do farm work. Tulsi Bai migrates because she has no land with which to pursue food security. She has made an arrangement with the brick kiln owner whose farm she guards during the farming season, beginning after the monsoons. She returns to Bharatpur in April after the harvest season. One daughter, who is about six years of age, remains behind in Bharatpur to attend school and stays with their extended family; in return, she helps with the family's domestic chores. Her daughter, Shivali, is very keen on going to school, and she wants to finish her education. The other brothers, who are not very old, migrate with Tulsi Bai to help her; as a result, their schooling suffers.

During the winter, Tulsi Bai does additional agricultural work as a sharecropper. The land on which she works is owned by a labour contractor who also hires her to work at his brick kiln. While she is paid cash for the brick kiln work, the terms of the agricultural arrangements are different as she is paid in kind, receiving about a quarter of the total agricultural output of wheat. She does not have to pay agricultural costs such as watering. She, together with her five children, do the labour-intensive

parts of farm work such as ploughing, sowing seeds, putting up fences, and guarding the farm in the winter for up to five months. This starts in November, just after Diwali, and lasts until the harvest season in March. During this period, Tulsi Bai moves out of Bharatpur with all her children and, together, they all guard the farm. The children guard during the day while Tulsi Bai and her daughter work in the brick kiln. Then at night they all take turns. They return to their permanent home in Bharatpur around April, the harvest season.

6.7.2 *Vides* Migrants

This section focuses on several families who chose *vides* migration. These cases highlight several themes in such migration: families' agency to make the choice to migrate; migration as being not only about survival, but also entrepreneurship and adventure; *vides* as a voluntarily negotiated arrangement; migration as the most dependable livelihood available to a family; *vides* as a sort of wandering adventure; and finally, *vides* as a livelihood for women whose other opportunities might be limited.

6.7.2.1 *A Family's Chosen Work: Hetram Gond, his wife, and Their Children*

Migration is done with family, friends, or both; sometimes, entire extended families will migrate together. The extended family supports the wage earners by cooking and looking after the younger siblings.

This is not the case for Hetram Gond, who lives alone with his wife and small children. The couple does not want to seek support from neighbours or ask extended family to help look after their infant children and then be obliged to return the favour.

As a result, such young families prefer to migrate with their infant children. It became clear that those who were left behind were left because they could look after themselves, or were in the care of someone who could look after them. Those who accompanied the migrants did so because they had to be looked after.

Hetram Gond migrated with his wife and two small daughters, aged one and three, for the first time in 2010, and returned from Jalandhar in the state of Punjab. The family is unsure about whether to migrate again. In the meantime, the wife looks after their children and the husband, Hetram, having returned to Bharatpur, works in a stone quarry not too far from Panna. Hetram does not have to worry about food security and is not as vulnerable as other households. He is free to choose his work options and is not forced into *vides*. In Jammu, they were getting good wages of Rs.150 per day, but later they had to leave because one of their associates got into a dispute with the contractor over a delay in their payment. This delay resulted in a souring of relations with the labour contractor. The couple worked together, with the wife working carrying stones from one construction site to another. They returned to Bharatpur with about Rs.16,000 and relaxed for a few days, bought a music player, paid off their debts, bought jewellery, and recovered the gold that they had left with a jeweller. They returned to Bharatpur from Jammu for a few days and again migrated to Punjab. There, they received nearly Rs.110 per day as wages, and their wages were paid on time. They remained there for 7–8 months. They were also able to do overtime work (*upri kama*), which went into their savings. In this way, during the last 10 months or so, they have saved about Rs.40,000. Out of this, they bought two mobile phones at Rs.7,000; they then had a budget of about Rs.15,000 to spend

in the upcoming marriage season. The remainder was invested into a rural insurance system called Pearls, which is quite popular amongst agrarian households in Panna.

6.7.2.2 *Migrating for Survival, Entrepreneurship, and Adventure: Ram Gond*

Although most of the migrants are initially reluctant to migrate due to the fear of going to an unknown place, they soon realise the benefits of improving their current situation in Bharatpur. In fact, for many, the availability of work alone is enough push them to migrate, especially for the landless. At the same time, on returning, some find Panna less appealing when compared with the destination point of migration, which appears to them to be far more accommodating and non-judgemental. For instance, Ram Gond, who is 'vulnerable' compared to most, and landless at age 30, migrated with his parents and children (three boys and two girls). He began to migrate to Jammu in 2010. In Jammu, his wages were around Rs.200 a day, from which the labour contractor deducted about Rs.50 as commission.

In his family, even his elderly parents, as well as his brother and sister, migrated. They migrated to raise money for Ram's sister's wedding, food, clothes, and health care. When they migrate *vides*, thoughts of settling permanently are very difficult to resist. In Jammu, they experienced snow, highways and expressways, and different kinds of animals and birds from the ones in Panna. Ram says:

We have to go out for work because there is no work available any more in Panna. We also like to go out because we feel we are not being judged. We feel very accepted there. (Field notes, 2012)

They do not own any land, and they return from around March until July before going back to Jammu to work. They say that the world outside the village is a very practical one, where only wages and work are discussed, and they prefer that.

6.7.2.3 Voluntarily Agreeing to Terms and Conditions: Dharmendra

Circumstances are similar for Dharmendra, who migrated to Jammu. He is the son of Kesri Bai, who was introduced in Chapter 4. He helps Kesri Bai to meet the agricultural costs of the household through remittance in the form of migration. He migrated with his wife, their infant child, and nephew; the nephew looked after the child. Dharmendra found out about migration through his friends; he says he feels good about migration, as he has some work to do, unlike in Bharatpur, where there is nothing. His daily wages are Rs.160, and he and his wife could make up to Rs.4,000 per month between them. Out of this, around 10% was deducted by the contractor. The contractor held back roughly half the amount, saying that it would be returned to them when they returned in July.

On this occasion, he worked outside for nine months and made about Rs.35,000, out of which he had already spent Rs.10,000; fully Rs.22,000 had been held back by the labour contractor. This money would be released once Dharmendra returned to resume work after the monsoon. The money is held back to make sure the migrants return, and they agree to this kind of arrangement knowingly. It will be a loss to the labour contractor if Dharmendra does not return, as he too has borrowed money from the company on assurance that there will be a constant flow of labourers like Dharmendra who can finish the contract; the labour contractor has accepted the

advance money for these labourers. Dharmendra says that he cannot blame the labour contractor, because he says that he voluntarily agreed to the terms and conditions of working and wages; he will be more cautious next time.

6.7.2.4 Migrants as entrepreneurs: Bhargav

Through the continuous migratory experience of working with a range of labour contractors, some workers come to be known for their efficient and good-quality work, and are thus able to demand better wages for their skills. For instance, not long ago, Bhargav, aged 22 and landless, was just another migrant. However, in the space of two to three years, he has established himself as a professional mason, and his wages have increased. What is so interesting about Bhargav, according to other villagers, is that at a very young age he became a professional stone-mason and can now demand more wages (*dihadi*) from the contractor due to his mastery over the profession. His story is one of persistence, hard work, success, and entrepreneurialism in learning skills and adapting to new economic opportunities. Such an ability to adapt has enabled him to establish himself so that he does not have to worry about his next job as the work now comes to him.

Bhargav and his wife, Payal, first migrated to Chandigarh in 2007, when they were still unmarried. They worked there for two years constructing new homes. Later, in 2010, they worked in Agra, where they got Rs.180 daily. In 2011, they went to Jammu, and there they both earned wages of Rs.120 per day. They had met in 2009 and married in Bharatpur within a year. In 2011–2012 they migrated to Punjab, and Bhargav started to act as a master ‘masonry’. He learnt the difficult art of stone-

cutting and was earning up to Rs.350 daily. They worked there for 11 months and returned to Bharatpur in 2012. Payal worked as a manual transporter carrying stones on her head. Thus, both members of the couple contributed to the household's welfare.

6.7.2.5 Migration-Dependent Gonds: Jagdish Adivasi

Another case of a vulnerable household is that of Jagdish Adivasi, aged 45. Jagdish maintains a migration-dependent household, and he, too, is landless. His entire family, including his wife and his three grown sons, have migrated to Jammu each year for the last three years. They depend completely on migration for all their basic and major needs. In Jammu, they take irregular jobs such as building houses. They prefer to go there because it is an important place of pilgrimage, and they can visit the goddess Vaishnu Devi. Currently, two of the three children are of marrying age, and so far, they have not had time to seek suitable brides. The estimated expense for two marriages is Rs.60,000 (600 GBP). Such an outlay is possible because of the money they earn from migration and the work opportunities it brings. The whole family is involved in construction work, and they are all paid the same wage. They can earn Rs.170 per person per day, depending on the type of work.

Jagdish's family had previously been totally dependent on stone quarrying, but over the last three years, the quarries have been closed, forcing the family to migrate elsewhere to find work. All of Jagdish's wages are paid to him on time on the second day of every month. In addition, he and every adult member of his family receive an advance of Rs.500 a month for personal expenses; this amount is deducted from the

final monthly wages. He says that he is never sure where he will go next because he migrates to wherever he can find work. Because the work is unpredictable, Jagdish's living arrangements are unpredictable. Such unpredictability is a trade-off that Gonds often make in exchange for a certain degree of flexibility.

6.7.2.6 Wandering for Adventure: Keshav

Although the village of Bharatpur is changing and adapting to newer economic activities, for some, routine village life and agriculture seem unappealing; they want to experience an adventurous life outside of Bharatpur. For such people, Bharatpur is not changing fast enough in comparison with modern and urban cities like Mumbai or Delhi. For Keshav, aged 24, Bharatpur represents an unchanging world, and migration offers a chance to explore the world outside, even if only temporarily. Keshav, unlike most Gonds, is not vulnerable and does not migrate to support his family, but does so to escape the poverty, stifling village conditions (Shah, 2006), and the slow pace of the village in terms of change. Keshav has been migrating for almost eight years. The migration started in his family first with his elder brothers, who initially migrated with their wives and then became dependent on migration.

However, Keshav's case is different: he would disappear for years at a time and not call home to tell his family his whereabouts. There were rumours that he was probably dead because his family did not know where he was. It turns out that he fell in love with a girl from a village near Bharatpur who also migrated to work; they are now married and living together. His parents are old, but his mother continues to bring wood from the forest. Keshav's father is sick and remains at home. His older

brothers have also been migrating for a very long time, but, unlike Keshav, they do keep in touch with their parents and inform them of their whereabouts.

Keshav tells me that he decided not to bother his parents about his movements outside because it would be a burden for them if they found out that he was not keeping well or, in turn, if they were not well, it would stress him mentally. Previously, in his early days of migration, he was in Surat, in Gujarat. He liked the work there, but most of his co-workers were from Bihar. There was a problem with food because most Biharis will eat rice, but he prefers wheat. Later, he went to Punjab. He loved working there because he could eat wheat (*rotis*) and the lifestyle suited him. Also, the people in Punjab showed a lot of acceptance towards him, and he was not discriminated against. He made quite a lot of money there. He would usually get a job on a daily basis or on a contract basis by standing at the main bus depot together with other labourers. They would then be picked up in groups by the labour contractor. Something he did not mention in the interview, but that was later discovered from Vikram, was that Keshav had lost some money as he had left the work half-done. It seems that this was part of the contract between him and the contractor.

Keshav learned the value of education outside of Bharatpur and realised how powerless he was as a result of being unable to read or write. He thinks that if he were literate, he would have a secure job working as a control-room operator or perhaps in a big construction firm. The case of Keshav shows how the young use migration as a way of exercising their heightened curiosity of the world outside of

Panna as well as an escape. Keshav had returned to take a break from work and to marry his girlfriend.

This also shows that, for some, migration provided a break from the social and moral pressures of life back in the village. A temporary sojourn away for work helps the Gonds to free themselves from conservative and stifling social relationships embedded in the kinship structures and extended family relationships. In the village, it becomes difficult to balance social pressure with family economic needs; migrating helps to release this social pressure and explore other cultural contexts.

6.7.2.7 Women Going *Vides* in Bharatpur

The *vides* labourers described thus far were either men or families. Yet another category of *vides* labourers was also observed: women with limited opportunities who migrated for work because it was their most viable livelihood. Indeed, the results of the survey (Chapter 2) indicated that quite a significant number of migrants are widows who migrate with their young children. Children are not allowed to work because of strict laws against child labour (although they do work, not infrequently). Children who migrate to Jammu,¹¹ close to the border with Pakistan, say that they mingle with the *fauji* or the Border Security Force. Gonds in Jammu tell stories of how the army sometimes spends time teaching them the basic alphabet in Hindi.

¹¹ Jammu and Kashmir are the northern most state of India

This section discusses three case studies of lone earners and widows from Bharatpur. All of them live in extended families and depend on their families for food security, yet as the wives of deceased sons of the respective families, they hesitate to claim their right to their share of the land. The widows worry that they will lose their social status as the daughter-in-law and, as a result, not have a place to go if their natal house is also very poor and does not accept them. These widows might also have come from villages where the social and economic conditions are much worse than in Bharatpur. As a result, such a woman will wait for the landholding to be transferred to her after the death of the current heir, her mother-in-law. Migrating women say that they do not sense any threat to their personal security because they are never alone.

6.7.2.7.1 Radha Bai

Radha Bai is aged approximately 35. She was asked if she liked going out (to Jammu), and said she did not because it was cold most of the time, and there were no warm clothes available to wear while working during the winter. She had no choice but to return to the village in Bharatpur. At the same time, however, she did travel around and see the national park, airports, and heavy vehicles in Jammu. She experienced new forms of consumption practices that she had never seen nor heard in Panna. She says:

I got to know a lot about things that we could buy for everyday needs and to make our lives easier. (Field notes, 2012)

The wages for men and women are the same because the tasks that females do men will not do, and vice versa so this kind segmentation of labour along gender

lines is not necessarily discriminatory (as is shown in other ethnographies like Carsewell and De Neve, 2013 & 2014) as time is precious and lot of work needs to be done which works in the favor of labour more than the capital. This encourages more Gonds and widows to consider migration in their wider livelihood strategy. Radha Bai plans to return to Jammu again because, even though it was her first experience of migration, she did receive her wages and can now trust the labour contractor. She says:

I started to migrate from this year (2010) to Jammu. I was away for eight months. We started to migrate after my husband died due to working in stone quarry. Our house was totally dependent on income from the stone quarry, which had stopped after his death! Migration helps to meet basic needs. (Field notes, 2012)

The migration story of Radha Bai exemplifies the most common form of migration among Gond widows.

6.7.2.7.2 Kirat Bai

Kirat Bai, 40, migrated to Jammu with her three girls and one boy. She, like Radha Bai, also migrated for the first time in 2011, but in her case, all of her children are of marriageable age and she needs to raise money for them to marry. She went with her children to Jammu. Altogether, they made Rs.50,000. However, the labour contractor held back about three months' payment saying that they might not return to work, so he would wait before releasing the remainder. This amount would be handed over to them once they returned to work after the monsoon. If the migrant labourers do not return to complete the work that they began, their labour broker (who originally bought work for the Gonds in the village, a practice known as *Jammadar*) would bring the balance payment with him when he returned to

Bharatpur. He knew where they live. However, today, some, like Raghu, also get the money directly transferred to the *Panchayat* secretary's bank account. Kirat Bai and her three children earn around Rs.200 each per day, out of which they only get Rs.160; the rest is kept as commission by the labour contractor. Part of the wages is paid in advance for everyday needs like buying food.

Kirat Bai has been a widow for almost ten years. She is illiterate, and none of her children could finish school because as soon as they were physically able to handle hard work, they started to accompany her to work in the brick kilns in nearby Panna town; this included carrying and selling wood in Panna. Her daughter, who went to Delhi with others, loved the modern and urban buildings there and said that it conjured up in her mind images of a nice, secure home. She planned definitely to return to Jammu the next year.

6.7.2.7.3 Durga Bai

Durga Bai, aged between 50 and 60, migrated with her grandson. She started to migrate after the *Panchayat* stopped giving her work on the grounds that she was too old. Out of a need to survive with her family, she began to migrate in 2010: she went to Jammu with 15 other people. She is not sure if she will go again. She says:

There is no work here in Panna. There was a lot of work in Jammu. I know I am too old to migrate, but what can I do? I am forced to do so. The *Panchayat* in the village does not give me work because they think I am too old. I cannot sit at rest, because then who will feed us? We don't have our own agricultural field so we have to migrate for food security. I liked going out because the work is not that bad. I returned because a lot of other people returned. This is the second time that I have gone to Jammu. I work there in building homes. I left after the rains last year. It snows heavily in Jammu! We didn't have much winter protection from the cold when working on the site. (Field notes, 2012)

Durga Bai's husband died 25 years ago after he contracted silicosis from working in the quarries. He also had a second wife. Both the wives migrated together and have nine children between them. When the husband was alive, says Durga Bai, the family ate quite well because of the high wages from the stone quarries. However, after he died, the household members were forced to depend on wood collection until the forest restrictions increased, and now migration is quickly becoming a more dependable form of income. She is also the step-mom of Sawan. In terms of government rural schemes, the household does not have enough BPL cards or ration cards. The *Panchayat* head asks for money to make any cards for accessing rural benefits, such as the BPL ration card. This puts a strain on the family finances as they buy essential food supplies at the market rate, which is 100% more than the BPL card allows.

Both Radha Bai and Kirat Bai are younger widows who migrate to meet their immediate and future needs. However, they also migrate for social security and to care for their children by saving their earnings for future marriage costs. Migration, in this way, also helps in being independent and free from obligations to extended kinship on the in-laws' side, even in extremely dire conditions.

In Unnithan-Kumar et al.'s (2008) study on gender and migration in peri-urban Rajasthan, especially focussing on women, the authors describe how migration to urban centres for employment or economic security generally compromises women's health and nutrition due to lack of awareness and neglect. Access to health and nutrition is extremely limited because of gender. A study by Krishnaraj (2005)

finds that in the Indian context, women's migration is almost silent or unseen, so therefore undermined. This could be because of the social norms, discussed in the previous chapter, that de-emphasise women's economic roles. In Bharatpur, widowhood has created a freedom of opportunity for women to seek independence and financial security for their households. It means that these women can fulfil their social obligations for their children. Migration has positively helped the women in Bharatpur to secure social care by allowing them to invest in their children's welfare without having to consult the other members of their extended families.

6.7.3 Comparing and Contrasting the Case Studies

From the above case studies, we see how how Gonds returned to Bharatpur with overall positive stories and a wider acceptance of their social identities as tribal communities. How the wages were paid on time and how their skills to wage in precarious forms of work helped them secure higher wages and more work creating a mutually beneficial arrangement between migration labour market and the labourers.

Tulsi Bai's household is landless, so she has to move outside of Bharatpur for work. Landless people like Tulsi Bai often migrate due to a lack of jobs in Panna, because not having land means that their food security is always threatened. Her case is distinct because she is the lone earner and therefore vulnerable; she cannot expect much help from her in-laws. Except for Tulsi Bai's eldest daughter, who is married, the rest of her children are completely dependent on her. In 2014, it was discovered that her second eldest daughter also got married in 2013. Tulsi Bai and her children

to labour, save, and pay for the marriage. Thus, by combining farm and non-farm work Tulsi Bai's household is debt-free, relatively independent of her extended kin, and can provide for her own basic needs. In Jagdish's case described above, we see that he has the cooperation of his family. In general, because Jagdish's children are grown-up and take care of their own needs, his situation is not as precarious as Bai's.

The availability of this practical solution, migrating to earn a livelihood, has meant that Gonds like Kirat Bai, whose son's wedding was impending, feel more secure in fulfilling their duties towards their family, and they feel they can expect in turn to receive care from their children in their old age. Kirat and Durga Bai choose migration because all their children have grown up, so they are free from caring for and raising the younger ones. They can now move out of Bharatpur and engage in economic activities like migration. The result is that some income streams that previously ensured only survival have now become cumulative, as in the case of the slightly well-to-do household of Raghu Singh, who migrated to meet the wedding costs of his youngest daughter and the agricultural costs of his farm. Individuals like Raghu who previously might not have migrated are now doing so to meet additional costs of familial functions such as weddings.

Bhargav's case is another positive story about migration, showing that migration is not just about labouring, but also involves improving social networking skills and increasing workers' understanding of the work market, the function of contracts, and how to bargain for fair wages. Migration can also enable migrant workers to pay off

debts and enable saving and investment that can improve the standard of living of their families within a few years. As these cases also demonstrate, a great deal of co-operation among household members is required to make migration a successful strategy. In the case of Jagdish Adivasi, also discussed in Chapter 5, his children were all of marriageable age when the whole family migrated. In this way, they were always there to cover for each other in case of sickness, and to cook and look after their dwellings at the work site.

On the other hand, cases like that of Hetram and Dharmendra Gond reveal that with young children, migrating *vides* is not so simple. For such Gonds, migrating *vides* is motivated by survival, and *pardes* by the desire for economic and social enhancement. The *vides*-going Gonds needed at least one older child to accompany them so that younger children could be looked after while the adults worked. On the other hand, families like those of Kirat Bai and Durga Bai could afford to migrate because their children were old enough to look after themselves as their parents worked.

In contrast to these families, Keshav's story of migration was not considered a success story by many in the village, even though he had been migrating for a longer duration than the other families studied. This was because the other villagers saw him as a young wanderer who migrated not to help his family financially, but out of curiosity or to find an escape from Panna. His case demonstrates that most Gonds value only circular and seasonal migration and consider it a successful strategy insofar as it has a clear economic goal.

Ties to the village and fulfilling obligations toward their families were still of the utmost priority to most Gonds, as was also seen in the case of the Gollas in Andhra Pradesh described in Chapter 1 in Picherit's case study. The younger families who were studied also avoided permanent migration because of the feelings of isolation in an alien place, and because of a lack of means to settle permanently elsewhere. They found *vides* too foreign because they could not communicate with other people, and migrating workers seemed to miss their home more as they aged.

6.8: Conclusions

This chapter examined migration-based wage work that Gonds pursue beyond Bharatpur, a type of livelihood that has come to play an increasingly important role in their lives. Its advantages include not only tangible benefits such as above-NREGA wages, but also intangible benefits like a sense of freedom and autonomy, and, more importantly, the experience of dignity. The migration experiences of the Gonds arise out of the changing economic and social changes in the wider region. The impact of NREGA has allowed the Gonds to assess their wages above minimum sustenance. The chapter focussed particularly on how such work builds a sense of agency, independence, and dignity in the Gonds who undertake migration.

Many of the villagers interviewed reported positive stories about going outside the village to work, including experiencing less stigma regarding their tribal identities than they had expected, and liking the practical wage/labour relationships they formed with their contractors. The Gonds who have benefitted from migration-based livelihoods represent all ages, both genders, and a variety of household structures;

however, the most striking improvement is seen in the lives of the landless and those *de jure* widowed households who migrate because their children are grown up. Overall, the returns on migration (both *vides* and *pardes*) have improved household conditions and brought households social prestige and dignity making it possible for the migrants to fulfil the social obligation of securing marriages for their children more quickly than if they stayed in Bharatpur.

The thesis now shifts focus back to the village. The next chapter (Chapter 7) studies the Gonds' experience with the welfare state and how this leads to disenchantment. A major focus of the fieldwork in Panna was the different rural programmes that were an essential part of the social landscape: family planning, housing, senior care, widows' pension benefits, free education, and subsidised food rations. Chapter 7 also discusses how inadequate state provisions prompt the Gonds turn to the informal economy to meet their everyday needs. They do this not only to survive, but also to learn real life skills that bring them food self-sufficiency and enable them to be free from bondage. These values are more important to them than formal and salaried jobs. Chapter 7 considers the state as a formal welfare provider. This will include discussions of its various social policies designed to help Gonds move out of poverty, as well as the policies' real impacts on the lives of the Gonds. They are turning away from the welfare state to the informal and unregulated labour markets to fulfil their desires for dignified and affirmative forms of living, and affirm their ideologies of care and security for their families.

CHAPTER 7. GONDS' LIVELIHOOD DIVERSIFICATION INDEPENDENT OF WELFARE STATE

7.1 Introduction

The findings in this chapter build on Chapters 5 and 6, which detailed the various diverse livelihoods the Gonds have found to fulfil their need for food security and their quest for dignified means of living amidst increasing restrictions on forests and stone quarries. As the previous chapters have shown, the only possessions the Gonds depend on to achieve a dignified living and success in their livelihood management are their ability to endure harsh and precarious working conditions, the solidarity amongst their families and natal relations, and their own able bodies. The wide range of household profiles in terms of age, marital status, family size, landholding status, and gender presented in those chapters demonstrate that in the Gonds' quest to achieve these goals, they most value autonomy, control, and independence over their livelihood choices. They also value the ability to ensure that their children are free from debt and bondage, while also entitling them for care and security in their old age.

In this final case study chapter, we now explore another dimension of Gonds' exercise of agency: their decision not to rely on ineffective welfare state initiatives, particularly housing, education, and employment programmes. Gonds not only question whether these welfare social policies guarantee them financial and basic security, but also whether it provides them a dignified way of living. As this chapter shows, the Gonds' withdrawing from state welfare programmes represents a sort of

paradoxical way of exercising agency and experiencing dignity. The chapter describes the flaws in and ineffectiveness of housing, education, and employment social welfare programmes, and shows why the Gonds are unable to take full advantage of state welfare policies for various reasons. These reasons include their frequent absence from their village due to migration and the mishandling of welfare funds. The chapter shows how the Gonds feel disenchanted and discriminated against by the welfare state social programmes, and illustrates how they sustain themselves through the informal labour market instead. Here, agency is being produced through the politics of disenchantment and withdrawal from the welfare state programmes, leading to self-reliance and security that the Gonds pursue for themselves.

The investigation of the role of the welfare state was sparked by the results of the survey that showed that some of the most vulnerable Gonds, like Tulsi Bai, were missing out on welfare benefits. On further investigation, it was found that this was because these Gonds were not correctly classified in government records; either they were misclassified because they had not voted for the incumbent political party, or the appropriate social status cards had never arrived even after repeated requests. Based on such experiences, these Gonds simply lost trust in the welfare state. Even more intriguing was the role of the welfare state in the Gonds' livelihood strategies when Vikram, the only graduate in the village, went back to building roads despite having passed the entrance test to become a village schoolteacher.

Understanding why the growing forest restrictions were affecting the Gonds more than the rest of the community in the district, such as the Rajputs, SCs, and others who seemed to be fairly literate and did not have large families that depended on them, was also important. Although the simplest explanation was that the Gonds, traditional forest-dwellers, were already the most vulnerable to the imposition of forest restrictions, it was found that their situation was also compounded by the government's seeming ignorance of, or indifference to, the fact that the Gonds' inability to read or write prevented them from taking full advantage of welfare state benefit schemes specifically targeted at them.

In this chapter's exploration of the ineffectiveness of housing, village schooling, and employment programmes, the emphasis is on the latter two subjects because, methodologically, the housing social policy offered less opportunity to cover Gonds' aspirations of social mobility because it had only recently been introduced. Overall, the chapter illustrates the failure of government social aid policies to provide upward mobility and social security for the Gonds, and it explores how this failure has rendered the welfare state irrelevant and invisible in the Gonds' lives.

7.2 Social Assistance by the Government in Bharatpur

Before beginning the discussion as to whether the welfare state matters or not to the Gonds, it is important to answer how issues of social welfare, particularly housing, schooling, and employment programmes, have replaced the agenda of land distribution in states like Madhya Pradesh. Why has the state deemed issues of agrarian-capitalist relations and land reforms to be subservient to issues of

education, housing, and employment? This question is especially crucial as land is still the main form of security for the Gonds. However, because of the Gonds' low social status and lack of education, they are being made vulnerable to bullying and predatory tactics, which pressure them to sell their land to the landed elites.

As Lerche (2013) suggested, these large-scale agrarian questions need to be understood with respect to their regional, ecological, and local conditions. In her study among the Mundas, Shah (2010) observed that there is a difference between the hill people and the plains people, and that the tribes and their relationship to the landed elites in the tribal state of Jharkhand (as cited in Lerche, 2013) are not the same as in other north Indian states such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. In the case of Panna district, mining is more lucrative than agriculture, even for the rural elite, as there is a constant scarcity of water. Hence, class relationships in places like Madhya Pradesh are not the same as in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Punjab, where agriculture is the mainstay of the economy (Pinto, 2004).

In matters concerning land and farming, the only recourse available to farmers is the welfare state, with its various programmes. However, the state is a reflection of the local social relationships. In Bharatpur and Panna, politics and politicians are made up of the same elite who make up the landed elite, and it is they who are the initial beneficiaries of agrarian reforms, especially in India's northern states. The current chief minister of Madhya Pradesh is from the landed class, and he owns many stone mine leases around the state. This directly shows how the state and society are embedded within one another. Granted, even though the capitalist agricultural

relationships in rural India are in favour of the landed elites (Lerche, 2013), the land reforms implemented in the early 1970s were another way of lifting the poor (including marginal and landless peasants like the Gonds of Bharatpur) out of poverty. However, this relief never came to pass: recent research shows that almost 40% of the poor still remain landless (Rawal, 2008, as cited in Lerche, 2013, p. 342). The landless and marginalised have found employment in non-agricultural wage work, yet also continue to keep a foothold in agriculture whenever possible (ibid).

7.2.1 Inadequate Government Housing Programme in Bharatpur

Even though the government has housing programmes through which it allocates funds specifically for the housing of ST families (*Indira Awas Yojna*), very few families in Bharatpur actually live in this government-funded housing. According to the village *Panchayat* secretary, the money from the funds is allocated every year through a lottery system, and there is a quota for tribal populations. For example, if the government sanctions five households to receive the housing programmes, two of these will be reserved for ST people. This list is drawn from the list of those who are considered to live in *kucca* (mud and manure) homes. In Bharatpur, according to the *sachiv*, only five households have constructed homes from this programme since it was introduced about 30 years ago. Ram, who built a house through this programme, says that the money is less when the cost of cement, labour, and bricks are taken into account. The rest of the money is raised through *majoori* or going *vides* for work.

The fieldwork suggested that a major reason why the Gonds do not take advantage of the housing programmes is that their illiteracy makes the application process difficult. Ram Pyaare, from Bharatpur, shared his experience of applying for the rural housing programmes. He described it as being cumbersome as it requires '*lekha padhi*' (basic literacy). Nobody in Bharatpur can read, yet there is no help to fill in these applications. Ram Pyaare was hoping that I would take the lead and help him to advocate for housing rights and other such benefits that require basic reading and writing skills. The situation in Bharatpur mirrors the common problems of rural housing in India, which is understudied as compared to urban housing in the country (Tripathi & Verma, 2013).

7.2.2 Inadequate Government School System

This section discusses the government-supported school system that ostensibly serves the Gonds. Currently, most Gond children in Bharatpur will at least try to continue until the eighth grade, which is the maximum literacy level offered without having to go outside of Bharatpur. First, problems with the system and facilities, including inadequate meals and cursory oversight (inspections) are discussed. Following this is a further discussion of the economics, domestic work, and migration that are related to dropping out of school, and social/psychological impediments to school attendance and persistence that are faced by many Gonds. Together, these structural and individual challenges contribute to making the village schooling experience quite ineffective at educating young Gonds and preparing them for non-manual labour; these are discussed in the later sections of this chapter.

A school system can only be understood within the context that produced it and the people who comprise it. Da Costa (2010), drawing from her study in North-East India, wrote that schooling “is a mode of becoming and belonging to particular places, and times, within particular families and in relation to siblings, and parents, with dreams for shared or competing duties” (2010, p. 178). Because schooling is so contextually bound, “Our analysis of education must take into account to lend flesh and blood to stochastic projections, security, and empowerment (Da Costa, 2010, p. 178). This thesis attempts just such an analysis.

7.2.2.1 Village School and Infrastructural Problems

This section discusses various reasons why schooling in Bharatpur is not continued after the eighth grade, and why it is less valued than other forms of activities, such as earning for their families. The Gonds’ perceptions of their relationship to the welfare state are explored, as well as their understanding of its civilising mission through schooling. In addition, how the welfare state runs the education project through a rural infrastructure using rural teachers who lack motivation is also discussed.

The school facilities, even though provided for free by the welfare state, are very rudimentary and do not prepare the children to sit competitive exams that could help them to enter college education. In addition, there are structural hindrances in the household development cycle in the form of parental death or severe illnesses affecting family members that can disrupt basic schooling. Gonds have to be

available for their families and participate in elaborate grieving rituals, including special meals and trips into the forests to bury their dead.

7.2.2.1.1 Inadequate Facilities and Teachers

The infrastructure needed to motivate the young is totally absent in Bharatpur. The school is run by the rural administration, and the electricity and building infrastructure are provided by the NMDC. The school building is one big concrete rectangular block with no proper seating; children are expected to sit on the floor. The school has four teachers in the school, but not all four often teach at the same time, as they do not work full-time and cover each other's absenteeism. The teachers also do not motivate the Gond children to remain in the school. Instead, the teachers just take it for granted that the *adivasis* are too poor to participate in education. At the same time, many Gond parents have very low opinions of the teachers. They think these teachers work only to get their salaries. Instead of teaching, they are often found chatting with each other or taking an afternoon nap while the children play instead of studying. In Bharatpur, teachers do undertake activities that are not related to teaching, such as knitting or other small household chores.

According to Vikram, the reason why many in Bharatpur cannot finish schooling is because the school teachers there are very lax up to the eighth grade and pass all students indiscriminately. By the time they need to sit higher exams, the Gond children fail because their educational foundation is weak from the poor standard of schooling in Bharatpur. Except for Vikram, the rest of his generation had to drop out of school and do *majoori*, as their fathers had died due to silicosis. Vikram's dad is

the only survivor from his generation who escaped silicosis as he stayed away from alcohol consumption. In that light, it is remarkable that Vikram studied until graduation.

7.2.2.1.2 Culturally Inappropriate Meals

The Gonds' school provides free meals, but the poor quality of these meals is one of the children's main complaints about school. The food is prepared by a *samooch*, which is a type of cooperative, self-help group. The free meals are aimed at boosting school attendance. The people who cook are mostly women who get a small wage from the government. The food they prepare is greasy, fried, and largely vegetarian, with grains and pulses and overcooked vegetables in oil with a lot of salt and spices. The Gond children eat mostly vegetables, fish, and Indian bread (*roti*) made on firewood and cooked with very little oil. The Gond parents have told me that their children do not eat this food and instead it is fed to livestock. This fact shows that even a free meal a day is not sufficient to encourage Gond parents to send their children to school. The only thing that the Gond children were able to eat was *halwa*, an Indian sweet dish cooked in clarified butter with lots of sugar.

The fact that sugar is consumed by the children at school shows that there is some connection between the nutritional needs of the child and the demanding school routine. Children need their sugar or carbohydrates to study. No doubt, the Gond children eat Indian rotis every day, which meets their minimum carbohydrate requirement. However, most Gond children look underweight (malnourished) like their parents, who are very skinny. It should be added that nutritional status also

hinders Gond children in their studies, as their food intake is disproportionate to the amount of work they are expected to do for their households; they do not have enough energy left to concentrate on preparing for competitive exams. This is in addition to the lack of access to electricity, which prevents children from studying at night after working in the day time. Serious and hard-working Gond children sometimes study using kerosene lamps; however, they complain that eye strain prevents them from studying for too long.

7.2.2.1.3 Cursory School Inspections

Another sign of the systemic problem with the schools is the lack of rigorous inspections. One day, I witnessed a school inspector came for a surprise check. He came in a sports utility vehicle (SUV) and was dressed formally. From the urgency and restlessness of the school teachers, it appeared that they had been forewarned that there would be a school inspection, and all four teachers were present. The school inspector started by enquiring about the school's day-to-day functioning, checked the attendance rolls, and enquired about problems connected to free food distribution.

Later, the inspector asked to speak to the children in the class. Ganesh (Kesri Bai's grandson and Usha's son, who is discussed in detail below), aged 12, was chosen because he was bright. The inspector checked his homework book but did not ask him if he had anything to say about his experience in school, nor did the teachers tell the inspector that Ganesh, the eldest in his class, had skipped school twice because he had to help his family earn money. Also, Ganesh had once migrated to

Jammu to help with cooking and sibling care while his uncle and his uncle's wife worked in the construction of roads.

The inspector did not show any interest in talking to any of the children's parents, even though they lived only 50 yards from the school. In fact, judging by his behaviour, it appeared that he did not even want to take the time to ask any questions at all. 2The schools' unappealing meals and cursory inspections are two examples of the systemic problems that hinder the effectiveness of the schools. The next, lengthier section describes many impediments to attendance and persistence, which help explain the Gonds' poor school attendance and graduation rates.

7.2.2.1.4 Rigidity and Timing of Exam Schedules

Another reason for not being able to finish school is the timing of the examinations. They are held at the same time as the Gonds' busy season for collecting and sorting *mahuwa* (March through May). If children skip the exam, they fail, and eventually their enrolment in school is cancelled. This happened to Sawan, Raja, Atmaram, and his brother, who are all of Vikram's generation. They all had to drop out after their fathers' deaths from silicosis made it necessary for them to earn money and accompany their mothers to collect wood from the forests. Thus, a specific event in the household development cycle, such as the death of the primary earner, can have major life-course changing consequences for Gond children's schooling experience.

7.2.2.2 Economic Impediments to Attendance and Persistence

7.2.2.2.1 Household Economics

A major reason why Gond children do not attend school is bare economics. In Bharatpur, education is still seen as a luxury for the Gonds, as they need their children to participate in the household chores while the parents are away earning a living. It was noted that school time was the only time that Gond children were able to take a break from household chores. Children like Ganesh, age 12, cannot take full advantage of schooling because there is so much work to do in the house while the parents are away working the forests and stone quarries.

According to the local school teacher, Prahlad Singh, nearly 90% of the Gond children in Bharatpur do not go to school beyond the eighth grade, which is the maximum schooling available in their own village. As will be demonstrated, the Gonds' decision not to finish schooling is a calculated risk that they take. For them, education is seen as a luxury because there is evidence of graduate Gonds who have failed in securing a non-farm job like Vikram. This distances the Gonds even more from the welfare state. The state's promise of non-farm work through education is a mirage for the Gonds. Their current financial and household condition makes graduation an enormous challenge, all the more as it involves moving away from Bharatpur and staying in hostels in cities where the colleges are located.

This withdrawal from welfare state's schooling and education policy also demonstrates how the Gonds do not identify themselves with the collective welfare goals of civility and progress envisioned by the welfare state. Instead they establish their own subjective goals of development and life-satisfaction, including self-sufficiency in food, economic independence, and dignity. These goals ultimately lead

them to social security and the welfare of themselves and their families without the government's help.

The schooling of the children from families staying in the village was delayed mostly in the case of widowed households with younger children, like Tulsi Bai's. Her youngest daughter, Shivali, insisted on going to school and managed to do so by staying with her uncle and aunties in the village while Tulsi Bai went with her other children to do farming; she does this on land belonging to someone else a few kilometres away from Bharatpur. Tulsi Bai stations herself in a temporary dwelling on the farm itself with her two sons and the youngest daughter. She remains there throughout the farming period for sowing, harvesting, to cutting and stocking her own share; this is a quarter of the total yield and thus secures food for the family for the rest of the year. Sporadic school attendance by her children meant that they eventually lost interest in their education; sometimes, even the teachers lost interest in such children and showed no motivation to get them to study whenever they resumed schooling.

In Sukhram's family, the increasing financial vulnerability of the household was on Rajesh's mind more than completing his education. Although the entire household orchestrated their energies to keep the household assured of food security, the education of the other two children, Rajesh and Neelam (Sukhram and Uma's children), was compromised as a result. Rajesh, who was 16 at the time of the fieldwork, wished to finish his college course as it might have given him non-labouring career options. However, he is all too aware of the financial strain on the

household and knows that he cannot sit idly by, enjoying the luxury of going to college and studying like his elder brother, Vikram, while his parents labour for the household. He has considered other alternatives to education; he remains unconvinced of its practical use since Vikram has yet to get a position as a teacher, despite passing the teaching exam with distinction. Both Neelam and Rajesh are keenly aware of their household's financial constraints and do not argue for furthering their interest in schooling even if they desire to. Rajesh said, 'If I also go to school like my brother, then who will help my parents on the farm and ensure there is food to eat?'

In 2013, Vikram's elder sister was seriously ill, and the family had to pay Rs20,000 for her care. This exhausted all of their savings and left them with no money to farm, compromising their food security for the following year (2014). To meet this sudden and unanticipated economic shock, Sukhram had to either borrow money or work in a stone quarry for three weeks to compensate. Thus, the need to save for unforeseen hardships and emergencies keeps the situation among Gond families very delicate and unstable.

Naila Kabeer (2001) makes a valuable observation on why families such as the Gonds are losing out by not sending their children to school. This is common practice in households who do not have much to offer their children and are illiterate. Such parents will send their children to work with the purpose of receiving security and social care in their old age (ibid). This happens because parents put a greater value on the immediate future of the family and cannot afford to think about the long-term

security of their children, except to continue with what they have always done, which is getting married, having a family and labouring (ibid). This is especially true for the widows who are *de jure* female household heads and have to recruit their children to help make a living and survive.

As Vikram is unemployed, he is not a positive motivator or role model to encourage the Gonds to send their children to school; instead, parents find that it is more practical to send their children to do non-farm work. In their research on the uneducated and unemployed Muslim and Dalits in North India, Jeffery et al (2008) find that such families have very low expectations of the welfare state to be fair to them in helping to secure formal or non-farm work. The failure of state schools in rural North India to maintain high levels of school attendance indicates the failure of formal institutions like schools, thus giving rise to an informal set of social relations.

7.2.2.2.2 'Schools don't teach practical skills'

It was found that Gond parents do not want to send their children to school after the eighth grade because there are no job prospects in Panna. Vikram found it frustrating that even though he has his degree, he still has to pay a bribe to the officials to secure a job for which he is qualified. Vikram's interest in education was to improve his family's financial situation. There is little purpose in the Gonds encouraging their children to pursue education if there is no economic gain in the form of secured non-farm employment. In the case of Vikram, he was demoralised to find out that even after passing the written exam, he had to 'buy his job', as government jobs are very

much sought after, especially given the recent Sixth Planning Commission pay hike in the salaries of government employees.

Ultimately, the Gonds of Bharatpur have made up their minds that working for the household is more rewarding than going to school, as the time spent there is wasted if they could work instead and earn some money for their families. They cite the example of Vikram, a Gond youth who has a bachelor's degree, but who is unemployed and doing *majoori* alongside the rest of the Gonds who are illiterate. They justify their choices because there is not yet any evidence that formal schooling will enhance social status or lead to a formal job and ensure their children non-farm work.

7.2.2.2.3 Lack of Supplies

Many Gonds cannot afford their electricity bills and instead still use kerosene lamps. Lack of electricity in such homes is a major reason why children are unable to study, as kerosene lamps strain the eyes if used for too long; this is due to their overpowering smoke. The reason Vikram was able to study, and pass, a state-level exam to become a primary school teacher, with the hope of employment in a school, was because his parents were able to provide electricity and pay the bills so that he could study for as long as he wanted, especially during exam times.

School supplies, such as uniforms and books, are distributed freely by the local schools, but most children wear these uniforms even at home, so they get worn out quickly. The secretary of the school, a Gond from the village, told me that this practice is very common, so there was a rule that children who come with 'unclean'

or 'worn-out' uniforms cannot attend. The lack of supplies is just one of the economic impediments to Gonds' schooling; they are also discouraged from attending school because of the necessity of working for income and the perception that schools do not teach practical skills.

7.2.2.3 Social and Psychological Impediments to Attendance and Persistence

7.2.2.3.1 Lack of Encouragement, Hostility or Indifference from the School

Other obstacles to Gond schooling are social and psychological. Several of the households interviewed who have no children in school said that once there is a disruption to schooling, due to working or earning for the home or just doing household chores, the local school will remove the children's names from the register. This removal from the register is taken as an indication by Gond children that they are not wanted by their school teachers. That seems to be the main reason why most children are not encouraged to go back. The Gond children feel there is no interest from the school teachers to get them back into school, and additionally their parents never speak with the teachers to negotiate to try to save their lost year. In short, these children are not encouraged by either the school authorities or their parents to finish schooling. Some, like Tulsi Bai's sons, stop going after complaining that the teachers beat them when they do not obey. There were a lot of boys who stopped after reportedly being beaten by their teachers.

Ganesh, aged 12, has done well at school. He also helps with the household chores and helps his grandmother, Kesri Bai, with agricultural work. She says that the school teachers should be told not to sleep or do their domestic chores when they

should be teaching. Her comment is not an excuse for her grandson not to attend school; rather, her anger is connected to a moral failure on the part of the welfare state that offers everything free to encourage schooling among children, but does not monitor the quality of education or question lackadaisical teachers.

Individual family circumstances dictate whether the children can finish school; there is no parental pressure to do so. In the case of widowed families, it is very difficult for children to finish school, especially for girls, as the mother is busy earning a living and the female children must do domestic work. By that time, most girls who have finished the eighth grade have reached puberty, and further schooling will depend on their future in-laws and where they live after marriage. In agreement with Da Costa (2010), education must be grounded in the specifics of peoples' felt responsibilities.

In studies by Lloyd (1994) and Desai (1993), it is pointed out that the demand for schooling is likely to be lowest in areas where poverty is endemic and where economic opportunities that require some minimum level of literacy are largely absent. Kabeer (2000) also shows that families who face major fluctuations in household income streams will seek to minimise risk in ways that impinge on children's educational opportunities.

7.2.2.3.2 Scepticism of State's Educational Mission

On a deeper level, many tribal groups, including Gonds, simply do not believe in the welfare state's approach to education. As Hindus, the Gonds may be even more likely than Christian tribes to be sceptical of government's 'civilising' education

mission. Froerer's study (2012) of two tribal groups, the Hindu Oraons and the Christian Oraons in Chhattisgarh, showed how education is perceived differently by the two marginalised communities. She observes that, for the latter, the civilising mission of education proposed by Sen (1999), as taken up, but that this was not so among the Hindu Oraons. She explains that this is because, unlike the Hindus, the Christians were not so attached to the land. They did not hesitate to move out of the village and live lonely lives if it was necessary to do so to escape poverty and marginalisation.

On the other hand, for the Hindu Oraons, land was very important, and leaving the family behind was a new experience. She uses Bourdieu's idea of cultural capital to explain why the Hindu Oraons consider the welfare state's literacy and education programme to be dubious. She finds that, in extremely poor conditions, marginalised people value immediate material and economic gain over long-term transformative gain through education (drawing upon Sen, 1999). Hindu Oraons considered literacy as de-skilling and having far-reaching negative consequences such as delayed marriage. While some literacy is desired in a Hindu Oraon girl, too much is considered to be an unmarriageable trait. This is because she might not be attractive to a potential husband who is less educated than her. In such marginalised groups, marriage is a more salient institution than literacy.

Thus Froerer (2012) concludes that, even though both groups of Oraons share the same demography in the village in Chhattisgarh, their normative approaches to education are vastly different. For wage labourers like the Christian Oraons,

centuries of marginalisation have set up a momentum in the form of education as social capital (Corbett, 2007, p. 11, as cited in Froerer, 2012, p. 705), with the church playing a central role by helping them to find employment and continuing to provide support even outside of the village. Working and waging have helped the Christian Oraons to accumulate cash that could be spent on children's schooling expenses, as compared to the Hindu Oraons who do not have cash as they live in an economy based on mutual exchange; some of them run a shop based on trust and reciprocity. Additionally, those Hindu Oraon who have completed the twelfth grade and could have secured employment outside of the village eventually do return to the village. The only Hindu Oraons who did non-farm and non-traditional work did so because they had been recruited by the Hindu right-wing, the Rashtriya Seva Sangh (RSS), a Hindu fundamentalist organisation. However, they soon became disillusioned with the religious ideology of modern change that was of limited practical use. The Hindu Oraons do have fallback employment: selling timber from the forests, and other forms of rural small enterprise. On the perception of education among the Hindu Oraons, Froerer concludes that even though

there are countless other civilising attributes that are linked to educational attainment, particularly in relation to the cultural capital and embodied distinctions associated with status confidence world, it is the concern with economic benefits (namely, employment) that is most commonly articulated. (2012, p. 708)

In short, one category of social and psychological impediment to Gond children's school attendance is the Gonds' general scepticism of the welfare state's educational mission.

7.2.2.3.3 Perceived Unimportance and Impracticality of School

Another impediment to attendance is that the children who start earning for their family quickly find schooling impractical and ultimately unimportant. From interactions with the young of the village, this experience appears to be the result of the influence of leading a working life from an early age, including migration. Such an early exposure to the adult world of work means that the work becomes a distraction, and children lose interest in schooling. Some will continue schooling after returning from migration, but according to local schoolteachers, most lose interest again. The local schoolteachers have complained to the authorities that attendance is low during the harvest season in March because the children are sent away to work in other villages nearby. Another factor is the influence of television, which they consider as a more practical learning tool than going to school in the village. The teenage boys revealed that they viewed their parents as being less aware of the changing world than they were. This shows how difficult it is for young Gonds to stay unaffected by what they see on the television; some feel the isolation and alienation from the rest of the world.

7.2.2.3.4 Gender

There are also conservative reasons that prevent young girls from finishing their education. These reasons are connected to the fear of outside influence caused by studying in towns within the northern patriarchal kinship systems (Kis-Katos, 2007), such as those in the Gond community. Neelam, Vikram's younger sister, stopped schooling after she finished the eighth grade in Bharatpur village, and had recently migrated to Rajasthan and made some money when they were visited in 2014. For Neelam, the barrier to continuing beyond the eighth grade was that she was the only

girl from her generation interested in carrying on in education. When asked why the others did not want to continue like her, she said, '*Didi* (sister), they go to forests instead', meaning that they have to fetch wood from the forests and so cannot go to school.

7.2.2.3.5 Special Challenges for Migrant Children and Those from Female-Headed Households

Certain categories of children experienced particular obstacles to school attendance and persistence; this section discusses the children of migrants and children from female-headed households. Most of the migrant children are unable to complete school because more and more Gonds are recruiting children to go into the forests. More family members now need to hunt for wood because the quota per person has been reduced. While the local schoolmaster assured me that they hold special classes for the children of migrants, the fact is that the children rarely continue schooling on returning to Bharatpur after migration. They receive very little encouragement from home to go back to school, and they prefer the world of work. Instead, they help their families by attending the harvests and storing up food for the rest of the year. Parents who have not experienced schooling themselves cannot appreciate the returns of education for their own children (Homi, 2012).

This study also points out that almost all of the female-headed households have children who are unable to attend school. According to Self (2011), the mothers' increased agricultural productivity and participation compromises the children's education as they assist her in agricultural work. Kambhampati (2009, p. 98), in her

study of West Bengal, shows that there is a negative relationship between women who earn wages from farm work and their children's schooling. The schooling of the children from families staying in the village was most delayed in the case of widowed households with younger children, like Tulsi Bai's. Her youngest daughter, Shivali, insisted on going to school and managed to do so by staying with her uncle and aunties in the village. Tulsi Bai then went with her other children to do farming on land belonging to someone else a few kilometres away from Bharatpur. So Tulsi Bai stationed herself in a temporary dwelling on the farm itself with her two sons and the youngest daughter throughout the farming who assist her on the farm. Indeed, many studies in the Indian rural context indicate that school performance intersects with the mother's participation in the labour workforce, and with gender, caste and class. It is these factors that affect the overall motivations and performance of the children of the marginalised and others with pre-existing social disadvantages (Drèze & Kingdon., 2001; Chamarbagwala, 2008).

7.2.2.4 Summary of Schooling Challenges

In summary, for the Gonds, education is still a distant and almost inaccessible form of human capital as they are too preoccupied with making ends meet and cannot afford to miss any opportunity that might bring them additional income. Moreover, social and psychological factors also discourage them from attending. The education system in rural India discriminates on the bases of class, caste, gender, tribe, religion, and linguistic identity (Jeffery et al., 2004) (as cited by Da Costa, 2010, p. 177). As their stories make clear, the unemployment of Vikram, despite formal schooling, left the Gonds disillusioned by the promise of non-farm work for those

who received an education. This was especially true given that the Gonds still consider education a luxury, one that many households cannot afford. For most Gonds, the economic returns of welfare state-provided schooling were perceived to be low, as it requires precious time that could be used for working for their households or learning a more real-life skill. It should also be added that people who reside mostly in rural areas with low literacy levels are 'categorically marginalised' (Mosse, 2010), and thus geography does matter.

7.2.3 Employment Through the Rural Employment Guarantee Programme

In addition to the welfare state's provision of housing and schooling programmes, it also provides employment through the Rural Employment Guarantee programme. As the following discussion will show, this programme is no more effective than housing or schooling programmes at providing the Gonds with livelihoods or socioeconomic mobility. It was in 2006 that the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) was launched. In terms of the scale and volume of resources, it is one of the largest development programmes in Madhya Pradesh since independence. NREGA was one of the major initiatives on rural infrastructure development introduced under the Congress-led coalition government in 2006. NREGA's main objective is:

..to provide enhancement of livelihood security of the households in rural areas of the country by providing 100 days of guaranteed waged employment to every household in unskilled manual work at the minimum wage in demand within 15 days if asking for employment. (GOI, Ministry of Law and Justice, 2005, as cited in Gaiha et al, 2013, p. 760)

The aim is to increase lean-season wages in rural areas in order to stop forced migration (Mehrotra, 2008), and generally to benefit marginalised people belonging to SC and ST communities (Gaiha et al, 2008, cited in Behera et al, 2010, p. 458). It is an improvement on previous versions of rural employment schemes and assurances such as JRY; such employment guarantee schemes targeted the poor with a requirement that 33% of participants must be women (Gaiha et al, 2013). The work provided by the NREGA usually involves improving rural infrastructure such as building wells, dams, ponds, pools, housing or any other construction work; if there is road building, then there will be work available carrying rocks and stone. The Gonds refer to this work as work for the *Panchayat*.

Five villages are under the secretary's (*sachiv*) *gram Panchayat*. According to the *sachiv*, these five villages comprise 3,500 people (approximately 900 households), of which 60% are Gonds, about 20% are *Bengalis*, and the rest are divided into SCs, Yadavs, and Sahus. According to the *Panchayat* secretary, the SC and ST communities work for NREGA only when they return from working outside of Panna. Currently, the *sachiv* is getting Gonds from another village from his *Panchayat* near Shahnagar, which is the next Gond hamlet after Bharatpur. He says that even if he needs labour in Bharatpur, they are not around most of the year because they have migrated.

The *sachiv* was asked how he chooses labourers from so many households. He said that the procedure requires people to apply for a job under NREGA, and within 15 days a job has to be created by him. Nobody from Bharatpur applies because their illiteracy makes it impossible for them to fill out the forms themselves. So,

sometimes, he will approach them to see if they are available to work. The Gonds told me that they get paid only after the *sachiv* puts their name on a voucher and withdraws money on their behalf from the rural offices, as most Gonds cannot sign the voucher to receive the money.

After doing all initial surveys on livelihood, Mr Mehrotra, an NREGA officer for Panna, stated that there was increasing evidence of migration; this was despite the government's efforts to secure 100 days of work for the vulnerable communities, or give them unemployment benefit if such work was not available. These interviews were used to learn more about the NREGA, its status in Panna, and how it relates to poverty alleviation. It was through the interview with Mr Mehrotra that it was discovered that one of the objectives of NREGA was to create jobs within Panna and to contain migration. Its central aim was to guarantee the safety nets and statutory rights of the poor. However, my observations and interactions with Gonds and local people show that, considering the number of villages and the size of the households in each village, it seemed that it would be impossible to contain migration and guarantee jobs for everyone. This was because, clearly, there were no industries or formal means of employment.

Indeed, even though the programme began with noble intentions for the poor, promising a generation of more rural employment, eventually it unfortunately became misused in many places by non-eligible beneficiaries, and those who are not 'qualified' to be poor. Often resources are siphoned off by bureaucrats and rich farmers (Ram et al., 2009) who are not the actual targets of these programmes. This

was seen in the case of many rural households in Panna. It was found that very few in Bharatpur were working under the NREGA, and the demand for such jobs is very low to none. This section discusses some of the problems with NREGA based on existing studies from other states of India, including a lack of assessment, poor targeting, the unsuitability and undesirability of the jobs, and corruption. Each of these problems is discussed in turn, and then the likelihood of future improvement is assessed.

7.2.3.1 Lack of Impact Assessment

One reason for the problems cited above may be the lack of evaluation of these programmes. Behera et al.'s (2010) micro-level study on NREGA across different Indian states showed that the programmes for government policies under the label of 'Rural Benefits' have never undergone an impact assessment (Behera et al., 2010). NREGA's full realisation depends largely on creating awareness of employment as an entitlement (Drèze, 2007; Dey et al., 2008, as cited in Behera et al., 2010, p. 258), increasing lean season wages in rural areas, arresting forced migration (Mehrotra, 2008), and delivering prescribed benefits to the marginalised people belonging to Scheduled Castes and tribal communities (Gaiha et al., 2008; Behera et al., 2010, p. 458). Furthermore, Drèze (ibid) points out that the difficulties in the successful implementation of the NREGA also depend on how the poor households are targeted, and the recognition that poverty is not a 'static' condition as people move in and move out of poverty (Drèze & Sen, 2013).

Gaiha et al (2013) also point out the difficulty in rural India, and especially in northern and central Indian states, of targeting the poorer households. There are so many households who work on unverifiable income records and their physical assets; in addition, they have large families. The reason why some states, such as Tamil Nadu, have done well on the NREGA is due to the capable bureaucracy and the political will of the welfare state to implement the programmes (Carsewell & De Neve, 2014).

Behera et al. (2010), in their quantitative analysis of the performance of NREGA across rural India (especially in the marginalised communities), found that its success varied in effectiveness according to the socioeconomic context of the implementation of the benefit programmes. They found that the bureaucrats in rural North India tended to abuse NREGA policy because they did not accept responsibility for implementing benefits to the rural communities. The experience of NREGA in Panna, especially in the context of high illiteracy amongst the Gonds, allowed the bureaucrats and the village council secretary, the *sachiv*, to conspire in making the money intended for rural development disappear.

NREGA, founded in 2006, varies in effectiveness across the country, with predominantly poor performance in migration-dependent states such as Madhya Pradesh, a heavily forested area where most of the government programmes have not had much impact, largely from the consequences of illiteracy. Still, despite researchers' findings, the government itself does not assess the programme's effectiveness in a thorough or regular manner. More thorough and regular assessment would enable the government to identify where the programmes are

working relatively well. Indeed, to say that NREGA has failed across the entire country would be inaccurate, as studies done in the wealthier Indian states of Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, and Andhra Pradesh have shown what counts as ‘success’ (Khera & Muthiah, 2010, as cited in Carswell & De Neve, 2014).

These stories of NREGA’s success show that recommendations to write it off are premature; however, there is a critical need to evaluate whether poverty is diminished by employment programmes in the heavily tribal districts such as Madhya Pradesh, where most of the vulnerable groups are illiterate. States like Madhya Pradesh are largely under the control of the Rajputs, compared to the heavily tribal state of Rajasthan, where the district of Dungapur has been associated with the successful application of NREGA. This differential impacts of NREGA in different Indian states shows how different communities in India differ in terms of socio-economic demography and who controls the distribution of these welfare resources. These distributions of welfare resources are also resources of people’s entitlements and empowerment.

7.2.3.2 Poor Targeting

The Rural Employment Guarantee programme not only fails to conduct or allow assessments of its effectiveness; it also fails to accurately target which groups and individuals to assist. Bharatpur, in Madhya Pradesh, is a great challenge to the NREGA, with issues including illiteracy and the absence of workers during census time. Better government targeting could ameliorate this problem. However, this possibility is belied by Gaiha et al. (2013). They examined Madhya Pradesh and

Tamil Nadu to assess the success of the NREGA, and found that the former state had done better at identifying the poorer households because of its use of the practice of self-targeting. Self-targeting makes the NREGA programmes self-selecting, as richer people stay away from jobs that involve working on the roadside. The NREGA does not target people living in small towns or urban areas, as these people are usually not available to do physically laborious work such as road construction, building houses, etc.

State welfare programmes like the NREGA have recently been focal points of the political parties during elections, replacing past issues such as electricity, roads, and education. The objective of the parties has been to enhance the livelihood security of rural households by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment per fiscal year to each family whose adult members volunteer to do manual work (GoI Ministry of Law and Justice, 2005). However, evidence from Bharatpur shows that having a NREGA card does not automatically translate into improvement in the lives of the Gonds. The impact is very minimal, as all Gonds possess these cards, but the majority of their needs are met by working in the informal economy.

Another issue of targeting is the poor communication of information about the programme to the Gonds, who are illiterate and without computer access. In an interview with the district NREGA officer, Mr Mehrotra, he wanted to show off the NREGA website and tell how everything on it is explained in detail: the website has both a Hindi and an English version. There is awareness of this website; it is detailed in terms of tracking the application status of anything that villagers apply for, like

ration cards, passports, job cards, job applications, etc. Although the website is impressive, the people at whom it is targeted are not able to read, and most of them do not even know what a computer is, let alone the internet. For the communication to be effective, it would need to be designed with its target audience in mind.

Patnaik (2007) raised the important question of how to locate the marginalised within the neoliberal discourse of participatory development and social change. She found that the aggregate studies on poverty in India do not capture the increasing chronic poverty and food scarcity at village levels, and is highly pessimistic about various government survey methods to study poverty in rural India in order to locate the poorest, especially in tribal areas, as this study also demonstrates.

In contrast, individual economic and social indicators suggest that absolute poverty is high and that there has been an adverse impact of neo-liberal policies on poverty alleviation through the Public Distribution System (PDS). Drèze and Sen (2013), too, concur that people fall in and out of poverty and that it is not a permanent condition, contrary to the assumptions of the Planning Commission¹² in India that sets poverty aggregate figures that remain unchanged for ten years, or until the next census is conducted.

7.2.3.3 Unsuitability and Undesirability of Jobs for Most Workers

¹² The Planning Commission is a Government of India Enterprise to allocate funding for different sectors of the economy.

The Gonds are generally uninterested in the jobs available through NREGA because these jobs are less suitable or desirable than the informal economy. In Bharatpur, those who work for the NREGA are generally those who can find no other work, including the elderly, sick (e.g., with silicosis), and those otherwise unable to migrate. In addition, those who are taking a break before beginning their next job may also be available. (The latter category of people is scarce, because the able-bodied are usually resting before beginning new work). Of the elderly women who are able-bodied, some have started to migrate outside of Bharatpur. According to the survey and observations, over a one year period only 15 people from Bharatpur were working under the NREGA at any time. In short, those who work under NREGA usually do so because they really have no choice.

A major reason why NREGA is unsuitable to many Gond workers is that their large household size is too large to be supported by the wages that can be earned with a job card. One job card is issued per household and, in 2011, guaranteed work for 100 days at the rate of Rs.122 per day. In 2014, the wages had risen to Rs.146; in the informal market they stand to earn twice this amount. The low demand for NREGA jobs reflects the undesirability and unsuitability of most or all of these jobs.

Since most Gonds are not available to work as they migrate, most NREGA jobs in the district of Panna are filled from villagers outside and most of these workers are *Bengalis*. *Bengalis* do not migrate like the Gonds because they are not as vulnerable due to forest restrictions and stone-quarry closures. They have enough land and some capital and their families are smaller compared to the Gonds, so their

vulnerabilities are less and basic needs are met with local sources of income like NREGA.

Another reason why NREGA is unpopular is because of problems and delays with payments after the work is completed, as well as the variability and relatively low pay of the work. Some village heads stated that nobody in their village is available to work under the NREGA because the villagers need more regular, permanent work: instead, the villagers prefer to migrate. The NREGA provides work for only three months, and it is per household and not per member of the household. The three months (approximately 100 days) available is divided between husband and wife within the household, and so most of the time the villagers have no work. In addition, the wages are only Rs.146 per day through the NREGA (this was the level at which they stood in 2014), when other sources of income such as mining and agriculture or *majoori* is year round and wages range between Rs.200–350 per day. Thus, there is a lack of interest amongst the poor such as the Gonds simply because there are plenty of much better paid, or otherwise more desirable, jobs available to them.

7.2.3.4 Corruption

This research also suggested that the NREGA programme is characterised by corruption. Many villagers and other rural administrators within the NREGA maintain that a lot of programmes and information that villagers are supposed to know never reaches them. There were also suspicions that workers were never paid wages that were owed to them. An interview with a rural administrator who keeps a record of the NREGA wage distribution in the Panna district for the *Panchayat* rural works

shows that even with the computerisation of the NREGA, there are ways to practice corruption and mismanagement of funds, because he himself has done it on his computer. The rural administrator says it is very easy:

You enter that you are paying wages for 10 people for 10 working days and you request money for that figure but in reality, you only pay 5 people working for 5 days and the rest you steal. (Field notes, 2012)

When speaking with Mr Mehrotra, the NREGA official, he was sceptical about the possibility of corruption. Nowadays the money is deposited directly into banks, so the system seems fool-proof. However, research surveys found that almost nobody in Bharatpur had a bank account. Those who worked under the NREGA were paid by the *sachiv* when he entered their names onto a voucher to claim the wages. Similarly, this occurred with migration-based work and wages. Most long-distance migrants going *vides* used the *Panchayat* secretary's bank account to receive the money from the labour contractor if his payment was getting delayed from the company, as explained in Chapter 6. It was very interesting to see Mr Mehrotra jump onto the topic of corruption because at no point had this been mentioned by the researcher. In any case, even the Gond workers' suspicion that corruption might be in play is enough to colour their perceptions of the programme's value and legitimacy. In short, the NREGA is beset by myriad limitations, including lack of assessment, poor targeting, unsuitable and undesirable job offerings, and corruption. Yet for all these flaws, certain improvements to the programme appear to be possible, and these are discussed in the next section.

7.2.3.5 *Withdrawing from NREGA: Limitations of Reaching the Gonds*

The NREGA works on a per household and not on an individual basis. It does not matter who works in the household. Every job that they do through the *Panchayat* is recorded on a muster roll, which is submitted to the NREGA office. Payment for work is made every two weeks, and the labourers stand in a huge queue outside the block office. Their names are called; however, the money is not handed over in cash but instead the labourers bring a voucher that is again signed by the *sachiv* and deposited into their account.

One much-needed improvement to the NREGA is to make it more accessible to those who cannot read or write. The *Panchayat* is responsible for creating jobs, out of which it is compulsory that 60% require unskilled labour and the rest skilled. The NREGA has to create about 30,000 man-days of work for each village. If the *Panchayat* cannot create jobs, then the households will get unemployment wages, which are paid weekly, monthly, or quarterly. However, the Gonds in Bharatpur do not claim such unemployment benefits owing to illiteracy, lack of awareness, and because they are often absent from the village.

Another improvement is security against identity fraud. There was an NREGA workshop on how to create jobs under the NREGA. At the workshop, rural officials said that, in the future, there would be a possibility to start mobile banks in rural areas for villagers who do not have rural banks within 5km of their village. These bank accounts will be opened using the fingerprints of the household head in order to make it secure from identity fraud by middlemen such as the *Panchayat* secretary.

Technological innovations can improve both the timeliness of pay and the accountability of administrators. The software is a monitoring and evaluation tool to make sure that the labourers are paid on time by the bank. In addition, the software also acts as a whistle-blower on any rural administrator or village head who is not sending information from his end. For instance, one rural administrator asked a village head about the names of people who had been given money to build homes through *Indira Awas Yojna*, because it was found that there was something suspicious about those who were granted money to build houses and those who were not. He does not know if those villagers have benefited from the housing programmes. The rural administrator seemed angry at most of the village heads for the delays in payment and for not creating enough jobs.

However, most of the people who attended the workshop were more concerned about why there were delays in payments for jobs that had already been completed under the NREGA, and the problem of payment after the work was done. The meeting was not representative of the village scenario that was covered during fieldwork. This seemed to be suspicious considering there was not much work visibly seen under the NREGA. The workshop was attended by all the Panchayat heads (*sarpanch*), *Gram Panchayat* secretaries (*sachiv*), and the members of the *Zilla Panchayat* (the entire village committee) of the Panna district. The villagers, such as the Gonds, were represented by the village heads.

The most interesting part of the meeting was seeing how the local officers and administrators involved in maintaining the NREGA complained to the village heads

for not creating enough jobs in the village. According to the NREGA officers, the government has a lot of money for the NREGA, but they will only release additional funds if the *Panchayats* create jobs for the villagers and show proof that there is control over migration in and out of Panna district. Other money available from the NREGA for village infrastructures will also be made available, but only if the previous jobs are completed. According to them, about 75% of the work that is already funded by the NREGA is still incomplete which means new funds cannot be released until previous NREGA jobs are shown as complete on government official records.

Shrikant Dubey, the MLA, was present, not to condemn the NREGA but to help the villagers understand how it works and how they can benefit from it. The atmosphere at this meeting was congenial and there were few complaints from the *Panchayat's* perspective. However, ironically, the meeting was not attended by the villagers who were working on farms or in quarries, or who had migrated outside the area. Later, there were discussions with some Gonds who had trekked 20km to attend the meeting. They were asking the NREGA officials why they had not received job cards for the last five years despite official registration

Finally, NREGA can improve, and is already being improved, through increases in transparency. In a workshop I attended, there was a lot of talk about how the NREGA was becoming more and more transparent with the help of its web-based Management Information System (MIS), which aims to keep track of the rural infrastructure progress in each village. The MIS records the number of households working, and tracks the payment process to each member working on NREGA

projects. The software tracks the activities/actions of all the rural programmes within the rural infrastructure. In short, there is a general recognition of many of the problems with NREGA, and there are some efforts to ameliorate these problems. However, it is by no means certain that the problems are on track to be corrected in the near future.

7.3 Other Examples of Ineffectiveness in State Programmes

This section discusses other assorted examples of ineffectiveness in state welfare programmes, beyond the issues described above with housing, schooling, and the employment programme. Specifically, the politicised nature of the ration card distribution, the flaws in welfare for widows and senior citizens, the difficulty Gonds experience in voting, and the misuse of the title 'Gond' by individuals who are not truly Sur Gonds in need of government aid are all discussed.

7.3.1 Politicised Ration Cards

One important strategy that the government uses in distributing resources to the Sur Gonds is the ration card, or Below Poverty Line Card (BPL), which indicates their socio-economic status (Ram et al., 2009). This ration card is offered on the basis of a ranking by household assets, established in 52 questions. If the household answers in the negative for the top six household assets, then they get the red card, called the *mahagaribi* (extreme poverty) card; this is for the extremely poor households. If the household answers in the negative for the next 14, then they get the yellow card, called the *garibi rekha* (poverty line) card; this is for the below the poverty line category. If the household answers more than 14 questions positively

then they do not qualify for the below the poverty line ration card as they are not considered to be poor.

With the red card, rations are available at Rs.2 per quintal of wheat, and with the yellow card, the amount is about Rs.3 per quintal. For those who do not have the BPL ration card, they have to buy rations at the market rate. However, the ration card cannot be used to buy vegetables, milk, fruit, and meat. They can only buy kerosene (*mitti ka tel*), grains, and sugar. The Gonds refer to this as *galla uthana* (collecting the essential supplies). The survey (in Chapter 2) revealed that only 70% of the households in Bharatpur have a below poverty line card.

The livelihood surveys on Bharatpur showed that most of these families, despite being surrounded by various social benefits programmes such as subsidised ration supplies, were buying basic supplies at the market rate; many of them were not issued a BPL card even though they qualified for one. Some said it was because of the corrupt *Panchayat* and that they did not have enough political capital to influence village politics. It was said that only those who supported the ruling party got the BPL card. Some did not have BPL cards because they had moved to Panna from outside. It was a bureaucratic requirement to cancel their names from their village of origin, which most had not done.

Getting the NREGA card is easy because there is a constant need for workers for various rural infrastructure work, such as building canals, wells, houses, roads, gardening, and forest-related infrastructures. However, the Gonds said that it is the BPL card that they value the most as it gets them 100% subsidy on essential staples

like grain, sugar, and kerosene oil. Indeed, even though the Gonds are able to buy essentials like kerosene and grains on their BPL ration cards, considering the average size of Gond families, this is never enough. This is especially true for the purchase of kerosene, because the poor can only buy a maximum of 3 litres per month. A kerosene-lit fire is the most common form of 'night light source' that households can afford. In addition, a low level of agricultural productivity and agricultural costs mean that any immediate expenses, such as medical bills, jeopardise the ability to meet basic food costs. These facts point to the inadequacy of the ration card system.

Moreover, some people whom one would assume to be entitled to ration cards do not have them. For instance, Tulsi Bai does not have a BPL ration card. This means that the only way she can meet her food security needs is through sharecropping, forest wood collection, and working in brick kilns: having the card would potentially allow her to give up sharecropping. In addition, in 2014, three years after her husband's death, Tulsi Bai had still not received her widow's pension. Aziz Qureshi became her agent; he filled out her application and did all the background work involved in getting her onto the system. For this he charged her Rs.3,000. When asked how she felt about this, she replied that she does not mind because at least she does not have to do all the running around. Also, as she cannot read or write, she would not be able to complete the application on her own. However, the situation is no different even for those who can read and write, like Vikram.

Acquiring a BPL card is connected to rural politics, and only those who vote in favour of the local dominant political group have automatic access to such benefits.

When Tulsi Bai was asked why she had not applied for the BPL card, she said that she had, but the *Panchayat* asked her to pay money for it, which she does not have. There are many like her in the village who do not have a BPL card because they do not want to pay the bribe and get into a habit of paying money for everything. Instead, Bai prefers to work or wait until the system becomes more transparent.

Rather confusingly, it was discovered that those who have paid to obtain the BPL card say that it is not a bribe but a small fee so that the BPL card can be posted to their homes directly. This is more convenient for them than having to collect it from the rural administration headquarters in Panna, which is some distance away. However, most Gonds do not read or write, and many households do not have a full postal address to which the administration could send the card. In addition, most Gonds are confused as to why they are charged for the cards even when the cost may be related to the cards being mailed directly to their homes. The only explanation that made sense in ongoing investigations is simply that it is not common for Gonds to agree to pay for the cards because of their suspicions that the money might really be for bribery purposes, so it will take a while for them to become accustomed to the idea of a small fee.

7.3.2 Flawed Welfare for Widows and Senior Citizens

It was later discovered that there was welfare from the government to help widows and senior citizens, but again, the programme had many problems. In the past, the

Panchayat would bring this money to each recipient's house, but complaints about delays or lack of payment brought a new change in 2012, meaning that widows and senior citizens were required to go on their own to collect the money from the *Panchayat* office. Most eligible individuals said they were not aware of this change, and those who knew about it complained that for a meagre amount of Rs.250 every month, the government made an excessively big bureaucratic procedure of going to pick up the money. Most said they could not go, simply because by the time they returned from work in the evening, the *Panchayat* office would be closed. Some were able to go on Saturdays, but forest wood is collected even on Saturday for most Gonds. Therefore, Sunday was the only time when Gonds did not go to the forests, but none of the government offices would be open on that day. The welfare offered to widows and senior citizens is thus not designed in such a way as to be accessible and effective to those it is intended to help.

7.3.3 No Vote, No Card?

In addition to the ration cards discussed above, the other cards that reflect the socio-economic status of the Gonds are the job card and the voter identification card. The voter card is important for the Gonds as it is required for acquiring the BPL. While these cards are meant to raise the Gonds out of poverty, they are misused by politicians to secure votes—and this entanglement of politics and economics is very well understood by the Gonds. Furthermore, because they migrate for work outside of Bharatpur for eight months of the year, the Gonds are often not around to participate in voting or other development programmes that the *Panchayat* provides

for them. This makes them vulnerable to being ignored by the welfare state. As the Gonds are busy labouring in precarious economies to avoid their households falling into debt or starvation, they have no time to participate in politics or engage in the bureaucratic process of applying for benefits.

Those who stay behind state that they do not get to vote because at the time of the vote they are working in quarries or on farms. Even for those Gonds who own more than an acre of land, which is above the average household landholding of the Gonds in the village of Bharatpur, the pessimism towards the acquisition of the BPL card still persists. Ironically, Raghu's household (who own eight acres of land) does not have a BPL ration card because his political sympathies differ from those of the elected *sarpanch* (village head), even though the *sarpanch* is part of the same family lineage as him. Put simply it is because he, too, does not want to bribe the *Panchayat*, as then bribery might become a habit. The practice of not being willing to pay for accessing welfare state assistance is the way the Gonds demonstrate their own perception of how to be governed morally.

Raghu Singh expresses his disappointment with the welfare state as follows:

I don't have a BPL card. I used to have one. These cards are changed every election year. If I don't vote for the incumbent candidate, then they will cut off my name from the list of issuing the BPL card, even though I qualify for it considering that I am poor. People who are rich and do not qualify are getting the BPL card made under their name. I don't want to make a BPL card by paying bribes, which is what the *Panchayat* is asking me to do. There is no point in paying money because then every time I will have to pay—every election year. I am better off like this, without paying anyone. I have two sons and 4 daughters. The youngest daughter is only 5 years and goes to school. It is not that expensive to buy directly from the market. In the end, it all evens out. (Field notes, 2012)

Raghu can afford not to have a BPL card only because his food security is met through his eight acres of land; this is not the case for the majority of landless Gonds, who genuinely need a BPL card.

This kind of disappointment in the state or the *Panchayat* by the marginalised reveals their continued distrust and suspicion about the operations of the state. The attitude towards the welfare state is common amongst the vulnerable populations who deal with the state as little as possible to limit their frustrations and focus on stable means to obtain income. Shah (2010) questions the morality of such officers who knowingly prevent such 'well-meaning' programmes for the doubly marginalised (marginalised by both the welfare state and then by the rural elites) and forest-fringe communities, like the Mundas, from providing access to benefits. For instance, in the discussion of rural employment discussion earlier in this chapter, it was shown how the money disbursed for the NREGA is mismanaged, even though the NREGA officer was confident that it is 'fool-proof'. In fact, on the contrary, middle-men still manage to find ways to make 'cuts' (profits) through the development programme resources. Hence, it was not fool-proof by itself, as it was subject to manipulation by human intervention.

7.3.4 Misuse of the 'Gond' Title for Accessing Social Benefits

One final example of the ineffectiveness of government social programmes is the fact that some who are not truly Sur Gonds in need can claim to be such in order to access benefits from these programmes. The Gonds prefer to use their community name as their last name, and it is this title 'Gond' that enables them to qualify for a

caste-certificate, called *jati patra*, from the *Panchayat*. This certificate allows them to apply for reservations in jobs and education meant for Scheduled Tribes. It is this title/naming that allows the Gonds to be self-identified as automatically poor because they are considered to be indigenous settlers. However, according to Vikram, this title is misused by the Raj Gonds:

The Raj Gonds abuse the reservation system. We are the real marginalised people and not them. Instead they are going ahead by taking advantage of other ST quota when actually it's meant for real poor people like us. (Field notes, 2011)

Kapila notes how a north Indian pastoral group in her research took advantage of other ST quotas when they belonged to the 'open' category or the elite group. She says, 'Scheduled Tribe' in 2002 gave them 'specific entitlements and rights with regard to aid, education, and jobs' (2008, p. 117). This shows how groups may take up the terms 'tribe' or adivasi/indigenous because they find positive 'internal' reasons to identify with these groups, for example, because it brings respect from others. Today, regardless of the reasons behind such decisions, this is called 'identity politics' or 'politics of recognition'. Similarly, in her ethnographic account of tribal activism in Jharkhand, Shah (2010) observes that it is useful to explore how particular groups position themselves as being indigenous.

7.4 Conclusions

This chapter has shown how government social aid policies, which are intended to provide traditional sources of upward mobility and social security, have had hardly any impact on the Gonds' lives. This ineffectiveness renders the welfare state largely irrelevant and invisible in their lives, despite rural politics based on eradicating the

poverty of the very same poor who participate in *Panchayat*-level elections. Although the Gonds remain poor, they do not want to be treated as poor and do not accept assistance from anybody, including the welfare state, unless it comes directly to them. Despite several government programmes, they have pride in their ability to work to meet all their needs. These welfare state benefit programmes construct the Gonds as being passive, but the fieldwork did not bear out that characterisation. As was noted in the introduction, if the Gonds complain at all, it is against the Forest department, because they respect wildlife and they want their forests back. They do not ask for cars or a luxurious means of living; merely to be allowed access to the forests again would help the Gonds to be more independent.

Because the Gonds in Bharatpur work all day, or migrate seasonally out of Bharatpur for nine months each year, it is very easy for them to miss out on welfare state programmes. Also, as the chapter has shown, NREGA jobs are not in demand in forest-dominated regions like Central India, where Bharatpur is located, because forest-based livelihoods are still more reliable and provide immediate cash payments. For NREGA jobs, payment comes only after two weeks. These findings suggest that the observation that political clientelism by landed rural elites causes patronage-based patterns of development in rural North India (Corbridge et al., 2013) cannot be applied to Gonds in Bharatpur without considering the regional political economy of resource management. As we have seen in Bharatpur, this is based around quarries and forests making the Gonds less dependent on state welfare resources.

Further, unlike less-forested North Indian states (Lerche, 2013), forested states such as Madhya Pradesh have specific state–society relationships characterised by the balancing of tribal rights to forests with the need of the welfare state to build schools, hospitals, and provide jobs. Madhya Pradesh is not a typical North Indian State in that it has a significant tribal population, approximately 20% (Ministry of Planning Commission, 2010, Gol). Historically, this has not been integrated in the same way as the SC population in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, which significantly shaped the relationship between the welfare state and the poor.

One unintended consequence of the ineffectiveness of the welfare state is that the Gonds have become aware of the value of their wage work in the informal labour market, as compared to the standard government hourly wage rate. The Gonds then use this as a reference point to double up their wages. In this sense, there is a clear empirical impact of NREGA employment that has helped indirectly in social mobility, and safety and security for their families.

This study's findings about the meagre amount of money that the Gonds receive as pensions and compensation calls into question the survey methods and assessments used by the Indian government to calculate poverty estimates. It raises concerns about whether centralised governance is an appropriate source of rural and participatory development, one that is proportionate to the real cost of subsistence for Gond families in the region. Indeed, the answer to this question is suggested by the fact that so many Gonds look to the informal labour economy to meet their families' economic security and welfares. Clearly, much work remains to

be done on the problem of how best to enable Gonds and other tribes to make a living at a time when their traditional livelihoods are under threat, alternative livelihoods vary in availability and quality, and the government has thus far proved unable to offer meaningful assistance.

The final chapter will highlight the major findings of this study, explain the study's contributions and significance, and recommend both practical steps and further research that can advance the livelihood management opportunities of Gonds and other groups.

CHAPTER 8. CONCLUSION

8.1 Summary of Findings

Through one year of fieldwork in the village of Bharatpur, Madhya Pradesh, central India, data was gathered around (a) the impact of the informal economy and precarious work on poor and vulnerable populations; (b) the livelihood management strategies of such populations, particularly their engagement with the informal economy in ways that vary by household type; and (c) the agency and dignity that are experienced by these populations through livelihood diversification (Chapters 4, 5 and 6), temporary migration (Chapter 6), and withdrawal from welfare state aid programmes that were not aligned with their own perceptions of economic security and the welfare of their households (Chapter 7).

Precarious forms of work are often conceived in terms of wages, duration of work, who is labouring, and under what working conditions; thus, the focus of research is typically on materialities and on what is empirically measurable. However, in this thesis, paying attention to the subjective and experiential dimensions of precarious work provides an opportunity to study the degrees of agency among individuals and the varieties of the work they perform. Such an approach also allows the thesis to investigate *how* they perform work: by negotiating their wages above the NREGA wage, by choosing to work as and when their family life cycles change, and by leveraging the bargaining power they possess as labourers. Precarious work in the informal labour economy emerges not as an imposition, but rather as a well thought-out decision that fits within a broader strategy aimed at obtaining a dignified living.

The results of this study further indicate that, for the Gonds, social relationships, including families and kinship networks and the use of oral contracts, played an important role in their efforts to seek work opportunities. By mapping the household profiles and income portfolios of the households that were studied, this thesis reveals the interplay of formal and informal institutions in the lives of the Gonds. It also shows why long-term strategies, such as forest-based livelihoods and work in stone quarries, are being replaced by manageable short-term strategies like migration outside the state. This research, by showing a diversity in the ways poverty is experienced, offers a corrective to the tendency of poverty alleviation policymakers to unify and homogenise their understanding and treatment of vulnerable rural households. Clearly, in this thesis, poverty and precarious work are conceived not in empirical or absolute terms, but rather in subjective terms, as temporary experiences that people live through with the possibility of hoping and striving for a more secure future.

The findings of this study shed considerable light on how poor or vulnerable populations can exercise agency by diversifying their livelihoods. The case studies showed that none of the families have engaged in just one sustained and regular pattern of obtaining income. Meanwhile, the government welfare programmes, which were intended to alleviate poverty through subsidised housing, guaranteed rural employment, and free schooling, were ineffective. Their failure lies in the flawed assumption that the intended aid recipients lead fundamentally constrained lives. This view, which reduces the intended recipients to a position of passivity, was not borne out by the findings from this study's fieldwork. While the welfare state

programmes have had no formidable impact on the lives of the Gonds, this has not prevented them, or other poor or vulnerable populations, from gaining ample returns through their able bodies and through the social relationships they have forged in the informal labour economy in order to create their own independent means of living.

8.2 Contributions

In this thesis, the example of the Gonds and their working lives serves to bridge the literature on the agency of the poor (Chant, 1997; Kabeer, 1999; Unnithan-Kumar, 2000) with the literature on the working lives of labourers (Bremar, 1996, 2007, 2010) in the informal economy in India. The thesis contributes to this literature by showing that even under severe hardship, the poor do not stop aspiring and hoping to improve their lives (Hulme, 2004), and they focus on fulfilling social obligations such as arranging the marriages of their children. These social duties and obligations might in turn provide care for them in their old age. Thus, this agency amongst the poor, such as Gond families, is triggered by conscious exercises in practices of care that income-poor families provide to each other, as well by their choices of which livelihood strategies to prioritise.

Thus, it has contributed to the literature on livelihood diversification, vulnerability, informal work, family, and the informal economy in India by demonstrating how micro-scale understanding of agency and dignity play an important role in poor people's lives. Specifically, in this context, *vulnerability* is a dimension of poverty characterized by susceptibility to starvation and other threats to traditional forms of

livelihoods like the forests. *Agency* is the capacity to make a self-initiated change in one's living conditions and not to stop aspiring for a dignified life despite the vulnerabilities. *Dignity* in this context refers to the self-respect gained by performing labour and remaining debt-free.

People who are poor or vulnerable can indeed exercise agency in a number of ways: choosing the conditions in which they will work, commanding desired wages, and prioritising their families' needs and solidarity networks to achieve collective or individual goals. Poor or vulnerable populations may be aware of the risks and the exploitative nature of work, and compensate by demanding wages that are higher than the market rate. This study's findings include accounts of agency, resilience, and dignity among the poor or vulnerable, who make use of the informal economy to pursue the best possible outcome for their families and a chance for a fuller and more secure life. The thesis thus contributes to our understanding of the subjective and experiential aspect of living in poverty, especially the ways in which the poor construct agency and dignity through precarious work.

On the subject of agency, gender and tribal (or adivasi population) as the most marginalised such as the Gonds, particularly the agency of female household heads, female lone earners, and other kinds of female earners, the thesis argues that the agency of these women arises due to extreme hardship and expectations from their families. The thesis also states that this agency might not be a conscious choice, a finding that has implications for the exercise of agency by choosing from a range of economic activities (Chant, 1997; Kabeer, 1999; Unnithan-Kumar, 2000) such as

stone quarry work, temporary migration, and forest wood collection. The ability to choose and strategise their livelihood activities is unavailable from the state schemes of welfare and security for the marginalised populations such as the Gonds.

Further, the thesis contributes to the existing anthropology of India in four key areas: (a) family and kinship; (b) the agency, dignity, vulnerability, and independence of the poor; (c) migration, the informal economy, and livelihood diversification; and (d) state social policy, especially in the form of education. Further, the thesis compares how the state's definition of poverty does not encompass its experiential aspects. For the Gonds, poverty is defined through a lack of secure jobs; the uncertainty of non-farm jobs despite schooling opportunities; and, significantly, the loss of forests.

In terms of family and kinship, this thesis focused on the nano-dynamics of social and interpersonal relations (Hulme, 2004). I extend Schmink's (1984) assertion to show how households and families are directly shaped by informal economic forces and how they adapt to their loss of traditional forms of livelihoods. These changes might not be visible and quantifiable, but they cannot be dismissed because these are factors that help the Gonds to depend less on external institutions and create secure futures for their offspring. The poor often feel subservient to broader structural forces, but if we consider their interactions with the informal economy, then we can better understand the subjective and ideological factors that have even more influence on the livelihoods of the poor. The thesis has shown how 'fall-back' strategies of solidarity amongst household members can, in particular cases, create desired forms of long-term care, security, and economic independence; also, it has

been shown how practices of kinship and gender are changing to accommodate women's labour. Informal relations with labour contractors have flourished because formal institutions like the state cannot be relied on in cases of emergency, such as the loss of a household income earner. In short, the findings of the thesis show the distinctive ways in which the family operates as a form of social capital for the poor or vulnerable, as has previously been shown by Khan and Seeley (2005) in their studies of rural Bangladesh. In their studies too, a social network 'creates social capital for the poor, giving them the means to survive while shaping their attitudes, behaviour, values, [and] identities,' and determining which resources they can access (p. 95). More importantly, the focus of the thesis on older working women amongst the Gonds – and on the disconnect and alienation felt by such vulnerable populations (older women belonging to tribal populations) due to social policies aimed at poverty alleviation – the thesis shows that poverty frameworks in India do not account for and represent the particular hardships in the lives of tribal women like the Gonds, who are vulnerable due to limited literacy and have to depend on irregular and insecure forms of work in the absence of formal policies of care and security from the welfare state.

The thesis does not disagree that there should be transparency and accountability and that labourers performing informal and precarious forms of work are vulnerable to being exploited (Bremen, 1974, 2003, 2010; Harriss-White, 2003; Drèze & Sen, 2013). However, it does show that temporariness, irregularity, and insecure forms of work for labourers who are also landless are not necessarily hindrances to experiencing dignity and exercising agency. In that sense, the evidence presented

in this thesis does not support Breman's assertion on similar demographic profiles of labourers in the informal economy in western Gujarat, who are thought to be 'down and out' (Agarwal et al, 2000) of the neoliberal economic growth model in India. Specifically, it does not show evidence that the poor like the Gonds are 'stripped of dignity' as they do not have formal jobs and are landless. In fact, the evidence on the Gonds, rather, demonstrates that their access to temporary and irregular forms of work is part of an attempt to secure livelihoods and part of the wider strategy of informal labourers' livelihood diversification. These forms of work allow labourers maximum bargaining power over their employers, from whom they can demand wages that are higher than state-assigned wages. They are aware of the labour shortage in precarious and informal forms of work. Furthermore, the evidence presented here is in line with findings in Picherit's study (2012) of labourers in Andhra Pradesh, which states that even where labourers work as migrants in urban centers of India, their social aspirations and identities are rooted in their origin of villages, and they are interested in influencing how resources of welfare are distributed and controlled in their village. In his study, the concerns of the migrant workers are that they might lose out on crucial welfare-related decisions during their absence. In this study, it can also be seen how labourers who toiled all day complained about not being present to cast their vote which could change the politics of distribution of resources in their favour. The evidence of this study also corroborates Shah's evidence of tribal people's withdrawal from the welfare state in the state of Jharkhand (2010) due to the mismatch between their ethics of governance and those of the welfare state.

The thesis also agrees with Waite (2005) that the body capital of labourers, in the stone-quarries of Maharashtra, goes a long way in helping them to meet their social aspirations; those who do precarious forms of work can help in the creation of economic security and care for their families by investing in their children's higher education through this income stream and hope that they will be cared for by their children in their old age. Lastly, the thesis agrees with Vera-Sanso (2013) that older female income earners in income-poor and land-poor households are not a burden on their families. Rather, they are not only self-supporting, but also provide much-needed support to their families as they deal with financial hardships.

The accounts in this study also illuminate the practices of migration, the operations of the informal economy, and the popular strategies for livelihood diversification among the poor or vulnerable of India. As the findings have shown, agency is very much present in these people's lives, if at a very small scale. Indeed, migration should not be considered a permanent form of displacement; rather, it is an 'event' in the household development cycle and life-course, a choice that is made amongst the many other events, cycles, and life-courses of the vulnerable and materially poor populations. Further, as the poor or vulnerable exercise agency and build dignity, the more valuable resource is not land, but body capital. Through their capability for hard manual labour, the poor or vulnerable can access labour opportunities in the informal economy. By managing multiple sources of labour, they diversify their livelihoods, thus exercising agency and experiencing dignity even in the absence of landedness. Migration allows them flexibility, as well as opportunities to see the wider world and find situations where their skills are appreciated.

While showing the many alternative routes to agency and livelihood management that the poor and vulnerable can construct, this study questions the value of state education, as implemented in the context of footloose people such as the Gonds. For example, Vikram's experience with formal schooling (having to return to informal work to earn higher wages and having to 'buy' a job despite having a graduate degree) only confirmed his community's suspicion that the moralising and civilising discourse around welfare state-sponsored education may be unpersuasive. Moreover, this study has also shown that children's access to education is compromised in the likely event that they have to take over family responsibilities. Overall, this study suggests that the subjective and experiential aspects of poverty are crucial to understanding the lives of poor or vulnerable populations and to developing means of alleviating poverty. The Gonds ultimately appeared to be vulnerable rather than poor.

8.3 Limitations

This study does not claim to measure 'dignity' and 'agency,' nor does it suggest that Gonds do not deserve more formal ways of working than they currently have. However, their informal networks and relations need to be more fully understood in relationship to livelihood management not because they are simple, but because they are complex. Moreover, the study is aware that there are other ways for the poor to experience dignity and poverty. For the Gonds, work is also a way to meet their own personal goals and fulfillment. The study is aware that these calculations do not necessarily work for every member of the family, as was seen in the case of

girls whose bodily movements within and outside the village were regulated by community norms. Their domestic responsibilities and sibling care were without a doubt a duty they had to perform; thus, had to sacrifice their own aspirations for their families. The study is also aware of the politics of such dignity and agency, which is limited only to household heads and does not necessarily support the life goals of female children.

Beyond these qualifications of this study, the major limitation of this research is that the conclusions cannot apply to other labour geographies and unknown types of household relations and dynamics, nor can they apply to the complicated land and labour arrangements in more uncertain agrarian and politically volatile regions of India, where the welfare state is challenged by insurgent and anti-state social movements.

8.4 Recommendations For Future Research

There is still a need to better understand poor populations' attitudes towards work and how this intersects with their commitments to their families. Through the example of the Gonds, this thesis shows how practices of work and commitments to family are embedded in poor people's concern for their families' welfare and in their strong desire to be economically independent and create meaningful and manageable lives for themselves. As shown in this study and noted by other anthropologists studying rural households in South Asia (e.g. Gardner, 1995; Parry, 1979), agrarian households are increasingly experiencing both social and economic changes due to industrialisation and urbanisation (Gardner, 1995).

The dominant presumption that permanent and regular forms of work should be highly desired over precarious, temporary, and irregular forms of work also demands further ethnographic research, especially research focusing on wage negotiations and on which sectors have higher wages and why. Moreover, the link between gender and participation in work needs more ethnographic research to better illuminate how poor households negotiate the interactions between intra-household processes and non-household institutions (Hart, 1995, p. 59; Rogaly, 1997).

The preference of the Gonds for work within the informal labour economy over NREGA jobs suggests that scholars and policymakers should not necessarily dismiss job creation and participation within the informal labour economy without first understanding how this economy is valued by those who labour within it, or understanding how it fits within the wider discourse of affirmative and dignified labour, security, and care. In the words of Catherine Wanner, stories such as those presented in this study reveal the extraordinary resilience and creativity of people who are able to “invent and reinvent, to create and recreate means of earning a living so as to sew and re-sew the fraying of their lives together” (quoted in Morris & Polese, 2014, p. xviii). Thus, this thesis focuses on the livelihood management strategies and autonomy of poor or vulnerable populations, particularly on how these populations turn their vulnerabilities into strengths by enduring hard work, undertaking migration, relying on kinship networks, and devising other strategies for exercising agency and building dignity.

My fieldwork raised concerns about whether centralised governance is an appropriate means of rural and participatory development. As demonstrated, when faced with extreme hardship conditions, the poor want more secure forms of social and economic institutions they can rely on for social security and care. As I showed in Chapter 7, the meagre amount of money received in the form of pensions and compensations raises questions about the methods of assessment used by the Indian government to estimate individuals' levels of poverty. The Gonds create their own form of wealth through their social support networks, so that although they may be vulnerable, they are not poor in the traditional sense.

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Appendices

Glossary of Terms

Adivasis – indigenous people

Anna – a smaller ancient Indian currency

Atta – sacred offering to Gond goddesses

Barakha – forest guard

Bcc – road made out of cement

Begar pratha – traditional patron–client relationship

Bengalis – an ethnic group that speaks Bengal; refugees from Bangladesh

Bidaayi – farewell

Roti – Indian bread

Dabloodukariya – an obese older woman

Des – nation

Dihadi – wages

Didi – elder sister

Durga – Indian goddess

Galla utahana – to collect their rationing supplies from local ration shops

Garibi – poverty

Garibi rekha – below poverty

Ghar – a house

Gharjamayee – a son-in-law who resides in his wife's village

Gora – white man

Gram – a village

Jammadar – labour supplier

Jhariya – branches

Kalyug – doomsday

Kamai – income

Khadaan – stone-quarries

Kher Mata – a Gond goddess

Kucca – Made Out Of Mud/Clay

Kunthis – a soft head pad made out of worn-out sarees

Lagan – marriage

Lippai pottai – removing and replacing worn-out paint walls
 Mahua – a wild fruit
 Maistry – professional stone miner
 Majdoors – workers/labourers
 Majoori – labouring/waging
 Mitti ka tel – kerosene oil
 Munshi – accountant
 Nyaarpanna – gradual household separation due to independent cooking hearths
 Paisa – a small unit of coin of ancient Indian currency
 Palayan – migration
 Panchayat – a village-level governing body
 Panchnama – a traditional justice system where five witnesses can tesfiy the person to be guilty of the said charge either drinking or gambling
 Pucca – made out of bricks
 Rajah – king
 Roji – livelihood
 Rukjana – to stay back
 Samaj – society
 Samooh – communal
 Samajik sewa – social service
 Sarpanch – head of five council member
 Swami – lord
 Tasla – an elliptical-shaped plastic bucket
 Thakurs – landed elites
 Thekedaari – labour contractor
 Tilak – a sacred symbol on the forehead signifying marital status
 Vides-international
 Patwari- Land Gazatteer.

List of Gonds

1. Ajay Singh – An educated and employed Raj Gond living in town.
2. Aviram – A friend of Vikram who is also married and works on stone-quarries.
3. Aziz Qureshi – Labour union activist whom I had met through Prof. Kuntala; he gave me all the contextual information on the Gonds. He also works for Environics, an NGO for sustainable environment practice. He stays in Panna district and helped me in the initial village surveys.
4. Bhupat – A young Gond man who is a professional stone-Mason
5. Brijesh – A second generation Gond suffering from silicosis.
6. Chota – A Gond who lost his hand palm working on stone-quarries and was bed-ridden due to paralysis
7. Dharmendra Mahendra – KesriBai's son who sends her money for his migrant wages to rake the cost of agriculture.
8. Dinesh – A Gond with nine children
9. Durga Bai – An older Gond woman who migrates to support her very desperate family.
10. Ganesh – Grandson of KesriBai
11. Gulab Bai – A married Gond woman for whom Bharatpur is her husband's village.
12. Hari Lal – A widower who migrated to raise money to get his children married.
13. Hari ram – Another second generation Gond who is also considered wealthy as he owns 5 acres of land.
14. Haridas – An older Gond. Bharatpur is his wife's village, which he moved to after marriage many years ago. He is now looked after by his neighbors in exchange for using his cow for their dairy needs. He is completely blind and has limited to no mobility.
15. Hetram – A young Gond who had migrated a year before I left with his wife and two in-arm babies..
16. Jagdish adivasi – A landless Gond also from second generation who migrates with his entire household as there are three sons who are of marriageable age.
17. Keshav – A young Gond man who is a very experienced migrant laborer from Bharatpur.
18. Kesri Bai – An older Gond widow. She has three sons and one daughter, all grown up and married. She has never left Bharatpur.
19. Kirat Bai – A Gond Widow who has accepted migration for raising money for her children as they are of marriageable age and she does not want to brow money or assistance from her extended kinship or in-laws. Instead, she migrates with her adult children who work with her and help raise the marriage costs.
20. Kishore – Another Gond peasant and a cousin of Sukhram. They are also in a land exchange relationship.

21. Kishori – Grandaughter of Sukhram and Uma-Bai
22. Leela – A Gond widow who stays with her two small children in Bharatpur and is completely forest dependent. She has no land and supports her children as well as her mother-in-law who is completely blind and dependent on Leela. All the while I was there, she appeared to be sick or someone in the house was sick. Also, in the one year in the village, I never saw anyone from the natal family visiting her.
23. Leena – Tulsi Bai's youngest child who had contracted jaundice
24. Mahendra – Second son of Kesri Bai, and he migrated to Jammu with his wife and young children and helps Kesri Bai with agricultural cost.
25. Mehrotra – NREGA officer whom I interview in depth later in the thesis.
26. Mishra – Forest guard who helped me with transportation
27. Nandu – belongs to Vikram generation but engages in stone mining throughout the year.
28. Nanhe – another second generation Gond. He is Naresh's father
29. Neelam – the youngest daughter of Sukhram and Uma Bai
30. Pinki – Wife of Bhargav. She too accompanied him to migrating destinations.
31. Prahlad – A Raj Gond who teaches in the village-school
32. Radha Bai – A Gond widow with two young daughters. She has it yet received her share of the farm so she migrates for food security. Her daughter's also accompany her.
33. Raghu – A second generation Gond and considered to be wealthy by other Gonds as he owns about 8 acres of land.
34. Rajesh – the second younger son of Sukhram and Uma Bai
35. Rajkumari – Daughter of Tulsi Bai who accompanies her mother to work and raise money for her own marriage.
36. Ram – A landless Gond severely effected by forest and singe quarry closures.
37. Ram Pyare Dheer
38. Ramesh – Raghu's son and married to an educated Gond woman
39. Ramkripal ram -
40. Ratna – Sawans wife who lives in in Bharatpur with him.
41. Sampat – A young Gond man of Vikram's generation and is married. He gave Rs both vides and Pardes. He is the son of Brij Lal.
42. Sawan – A young Gond from the same generation as Vikram. He is married to a Gond woman of more privileged background.
43. Shankar – A Gond who has never migrated and was completely depended upon the forests.
44. Shivali – young daughter of Tulsi Bai, a toddler.
45. Sita Bai – A married Gond woman for whom Bharatpur is her natal village but she has moved in with her husband here.
46. Sukhram – Father of Vikram
47. Tulsi Lala Bai – A young Gond widow with six young children.
48. Uma Bai – Mother of Vikram

- 49. Usha – Daughter of Kesri Bai
- 50. Vikram – he was my main gatekeeper to the world of Gonds in Bharatpur. he is the first Gond to graduate in Bharatpur. He is of the younger generation and recently got married. He initially helped me in the village surveys. He is one of the many disenchanted Gonds who is unemployed despite being a college graduate. Even though he passed the entrance exam to qualify for becoming a school teacher, he could not 'buy' the 'job' that he told he had to do so during the job interview and as a result, went back to do wage work
- 51. Virendra – Panna's most prominent mine-owner.
- 52. Vishal Chouhan – Motorbiker who was unemployed at the time and took me in my initial days for village surveys.
- 53. Yamcharan – An older Gond who died of silicosis in 2012.