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'Somehow I Will Learn To Do All This Work': A Relational View of Women's Everyday Negotiations of Agency in Surguja, India

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A Relational View of Women's Everyday Negotiations of Agency in

Surguja, India

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Abstract

This thesis draws on in-depth narratives of adivasi women's lives in Surguja, India, to understand their everyday negotiations of agency. I trace women's responses during key events in their lives, what shaped their responses, and the resultant changes in their lives to analyse whether these actions constitute agency.

I pose four questions to conceptualise women's agency. First, how can we retain the link between structure and agency in individual accounts of agency? Second, in what actions is women's agency identified? Third, does understanding women's agency differently alter our understanding of men's agency? Lastly, how does a relational perspective add to conceptualisations of agency?

I argue, first, that agency emerges from context, which is a complex of individuals' immediate circumstances, their relative positions in multiple structures or fields, and the importance of various fields relative to each other. Secondly, these constantly shifting contexts imply that agency increases and decreases across time. Thirdly, agency takes a range of forms including silence, internal reflection, speech, and overt actions. Fourth, it emerges in patterns of behaviour over time rather than isolated actions. Fifth, actions change meaning over time, especially when they have positive outcomes, thereby producing potentially agentic narrative identities for individuals. Lastly, I argue that women's structural positions draw attention to their relationships-including their affective aspect, and the inherent sociality of individuals. Relationships mediate and motivate actions; they are the sites where agency emerges. The evolving nature of relationships over time implies that agency is a process rather than a static quality.

This relational, contextual understanding of agency challenges policy prescriptions aiming to increase women's agency in instrumental ways that often reinscribe patriarchal scripts. Instead, in being sensitive to the almost tenuous manner in which agency emerges in women's accounts of their lives there is a greater possibility of creating environments that better enable the women's agency.

Glossary

1. *Adivasi*

   The word adivasi literally means 'original inhabitant' and refers to India's many indigenous communities. It is most often used with reference to the tribal communities of central India. They are also referred to as scheduled tribes (ST). See also ST.

2. *Anganwadi*

   Anganwadi is the nursery centre run under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme of the Indian government. Food and nutritional supplements are delivered to infants, and pregnant and nursing women on a weekly basis, through the anganwadis. It also doubles as a playschool and feeding centre for children till the age of 5 years; they are fed one cooked meal at the anganwadi on a daily basis. It is managed by an anganwadi worker and an assistant both of who are salaried employees of the state government.

3. *Baiga*

   Spiritual leader in adivasi communities, specialising in adivasi rituals; baigas preside over weddings and other festival rituals and may also practice faith healing.

4. *Block (headquarters)*

   A block or sub-division is the administrative sub-division of districts in India. This is the lowest administrative level which is most immediately accessible to the villages.

5. *Dalit*

   The word Dalit means oppressed. It refers to scheduled caste (SC) communities; historically these communities have been outcastes from the caste system and considered untouchable. See also SC.

6. *Dewar/ guniya/ ojha*

   Faith healers or ritual specialists who are skilled in dispelling the evil effects of black magic; they also provide charms and spells to cast on others.

7. *Dhaan*

   Paddy

8. *Gram sabha*

   The village assembly comprising the entire adult population (18 years old and above) of the village. The gram sabha elects the members of the panchayat under the panchayati raj system. See also panchayat

9. *Khaandi*

   Unit of measurement for weight, equivalent to 30 kilograms; it is also used as a unit of measuring land with each khandi of land being the acreage of land in which one khandi of seeds can be sowed.

10. *Mahua*

    A tree native to north and central India. The tree flowers from approximately mid-March to mid-April and the flowers, also called mahua, are an important source of income and food for communities in this area.

	Mahua flowers are brewed into alcohol, also called mahua, which is both for home-consumption and also used in adivasi rituals and festival. Adivasis are also allowed to sell mahua liquor in limited quantities. Mahua seeds are pressed for oil. This is a valuable subsidiary source of income in Chhattisgarh.
11. Mitanin	The word mitanin means friend in Chhattisgarhi dialects and refers to community health volunteers, usually drawn from the village, who provide basic medicines and first aid to village communities. Mitanins receive a small, usually irregular, honorarium.
12. Panch	Members elected to the panchayat; each panch represents one ward of the panchayat area. See also panchayat.
13. Panchayat	Panchaya*t* is the lowest rung of elected self-government mandated by the constitution. It is a committee of elected representatives, who choose from amongst themselves a chairperson called the *sarpanch*. *Panchayat* members are elected by the *gram sabha* or village assembly which comprises the entire voting population of village adults (18 years old and above). Panchayats are envisaged as the main channel for administering government welfare programmes and disbursing funds at the grassroots. See Ministry of Panchayati Raj (GoI, nd).
14. Para	Neighbourhood, hamlet or settlement; villages are usually sub-divided into paras which are often community specific.
15. PDS (Public Distribution System)	PDS refers to the system through which the government distributes subsidised food grain. There are varying levels of the subsidy with the most vulnerable populations in Chhattisgarh entitled to 35 kilograms of rice at Rs. 2 per kilogram (as of 2013). It is also referred to as ration (rice) or 'society' rice locally.
16. Ration card	Ration cards are issued to households stating their entitlements to subsidised food grain through the PDS. They state the names of the household members and are non-transferable documents which must be produced in order to buy subsided rice from the PDS. In 2013, Chhattisgarh updated its card database and new cards have been issued in the names of women adult members of the household.
17. Sal seeds	Forest dwelling adivasi communities sell these to local merchants and government cooperatives; they are used in the production of soaps. This is a valuable subsidiary source of income in Chhattisgarh.

18. Sarna Dharm	Sarna Dharm is the traditional form of worship of the adivasi communities. They have no figures of god, believing god to be formless (*niraakar*) and inhering in nature. The word sarna refers to sacred groves of sal trees.
19. Sarpanch	The head of the panchayat. The elected members choose the sarpanch from amongst themselves. The sarpanch post may be reserved on a rotational basis for women or SC/ST members. See also panchayat.
20. Scheduled Castes (SC)/ Scheduled Tribes (ST)	Scheduled castes and scheduled tribes refers to communities that are mentioned in the first schedule of the Indian constitution as deserving of special concessions and benefits from the Indian government due to their historical marginalisation and oppression.
21. Taami	A unit of measurement, by volume, equivalent to two kilograms (when used to measure paddy). It is also used as a unit of measuring land with each 'tami' of land being the amount of land in which one tami, i.e. two kilograms, of paddy seeds can be sowed.
22. Tendu	The leaves of the tendu plant are used to make to traditional Indian cigarettes (bidi). People collect them and sell them to government cooperatives which monopolise tendu procurement. This is a valuable subsidiary source of income in Chhattisgarh.
23. Kotwar	Traditional village messenger; chosen by the village community. The community also decides what honorarium the kotwar will receive, in cash or kind, usually on a weekly basis.
24. Patel	Traditional village head, usually male.
25. Lakra	A red flower that blooms in winter. It has a characteristically sour taste once it is sun-dried. It is cooked as chutney and is a staple accompaniment with rice gruel. It is considered very simple fare and when people say that all they have to eat is rice gruel and lakra they are signalling their scarce resources.

Chapter 1: Introduction- Representing Women's Agency

1. The beginning

During the course of conducting this research it seemed clear that a woman's publicly audible criticism of her husband's failure to provide was agency, or another's having left the marital home due to familial violence, or a third woman's assertion over her husband's share of joint property. These are only three of the examples that I will discuss later in this thesis- a discussion that considerably challenges my then certitude in being able to identify agency. My interrogation of those assumptions means that even those events that I continue to identify as agency might now appear so for entirely different reasons than I had initially thought. At this juncture I wish to highlight three aspects of these examples that are recurrent themes in my thesis. The first is the attention to women's voices and their descriptions of their lives. The second is the everyday nature of these events. The third is that each of these events or actions references relationships in some manner.

My interest in listening to people's voices is what eventually settled me on the topic of agency. Briefly, my attention was drawn initially to how development discourse represents individuals; claims of listening to and amplifying people's voices appeared, on critical examination, to be based on limited evidence[1]. One effect of this is that such discourses present people in two-dimension, almost as caricatures rather than the whole person. The second effect is that people are presented as objects of development rather than individuals in their own right with the agency to direct their lives. In my view, therefore, the task of understanding and rendering people's agency visible is vital in order to challenge the marginalisation of people's own experiences in mainstream development representations. My research is thus premised on the fundamental need to listen to how people describe their thoughts, feelings, and experiences, all of which form the basis of their agency.

I use the term agency to refer to individual or collective action that results in some observable or experienced change in that individual's or collective's circumstances. Later in this thesis I will specifically discuss two aspects of this definition; first, what

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[1] The World Bank's three-volume *Voices of the Poor* series (Narayan et al 1999; 2000; Narayan and Petesch, 2002) which claimed to bring us the voices of poor people from around the world, has been the subject of much critique which exposes how the authors' claims of authenticity in amplifying people's voices are extremely tenuous (e.g. Rademacher and Patel, 2002; Pithouse, 2003; Cornwall and Fujita 2007). My reading of this series was instrumental in shaping my critical stance towards mainstream development's representations of people.

the term action refers to and, second, my use of the term 'experienced change'. Through these discussions, both with reference to the existing literature and the data that I will present, I will elaborate this definition to explain the approach to agency that this thesis arrives at.

The main aim of this chapter is to set the scene for this thesis. The second section describes how my initial interest in women's agency came about. I look at how agency is represented in development discourse and what it implies in terms of women's everyday actions. Although this was the starting point for my interest in this topic, my research ultimately went in a rather different direction. I further go on to discuss critical accounts of agency. I identify some challenges in both these understandings of agency. The second aim of this chapter is to explain how these challenges led me to the four questions I ask in this thesis. In the third section of this chapter I present these questions, and give a brief overview of how each chapter will answer them. Lastly, I conclude by explaining why discussing agency continues to be important and how my contribution, through this thesis, is important to this discussion.

2.   Setting the scene

The use of the term agency is so widespread that it is rarely defined (Evans, 2013), yet its meaning is deeply contested (McNay, 2016). Deciphering it requires an examination of what is being done and said in the name of agency, in what context, and how this transforms people's lives.

2.1.   Agency in development discourse

Agency has been a key part of gender and development (GAD) discourse since at least the 1980s. The manner of its incorporation, however, has shifted over time from signalling an alternative, radical, way of engaging with gender to being 'mainstreamed' in development practice (Jackson & Pearson, 1998; Cornwall, Harrison, & Whitehead, 2008). Cornwall, Harrison, and Whitehead (2008) remarking on the various terms associated with gender that have been integrated in the everyday language of development agencies note that these have had both positive and negative effects. This integration signifies that conversations about gender are no longer marginal concerns, and some of the terms have been useful in triggering critical policy debates resulting in the allocation of resources for gender based interventions. However, it has also resulted in the simultaneous proliferation of 'myths' and 'slogans' (ibid, p.4), often resulting in an oversimplification of the complexity of gender relations or women's

lives. In its most recent iteration, promoting women's agency is seen to represent an efficient way of 'using funds in an age of austerity' (Bowman & Sweetman, 2014, p. 203) or 'smart economics' (World Bank, 2012, p. xx).

The idea of efficiency just described, which is identified with individual choice, is evident in mainstream development discourse. It finds extensive mention, for instance, in the 2012 *World Development Report* (WDR), entitled *Gender Equality and Development,* which charts women's progress towards equality through an economic lens. The WDR 2012 defines agency as "…an individual's (or group's) ability to make effective choices and to transform those choices into desired outcomes" and "… the process through which women and men use their endowments and take advantage of economic opportunities to achieve desired outcomes" (ibid, p.152). Those choices, which are thought to be 'central to efforts to end extreme poverty', should be instrumental in yielding 'broad development dividends' for their families and communities (World Bank, 2014, p. 1).

The implications for women's everyday actions and practices are that they must act in accordance with this template, which becomes evident from examples of interventions. In Sridhar's (2008) account of a programme to improve children's nutritional status in India's Tamil Nadu state women were targeted to receive modern health education since they were thought to be the key decision makers regarding children's health. Women had to transfer this knowledge into practice, meaning that they had to change their traditional feeding practices to align with this new knowledge. Women who were able to do this were perceived as having agency because they were amenable to modern advice and knowledge. This was clearly based on the idea of individual choice and action that has been highlighted in the WDR 2012. In order to be seen as good mothers and women with agency, therefore, women simply need to do what they are told by development actors. One common model of increasing women's agency has come to be through their formation into self-help groups (SHGs) to avail of micro-credit or as thrift groups. Here agency is achieved through women taking responsibility for converting savings or loans into productive assets, and is therefore dependent on women's economic activity. In practice, women are expected to participate in group activities- usually some form of skill development, and convert that knowledge into practice so that they are able to repay the loans they have taken. In this view women's agency is achieved through their group participation,

their access to and use of credit, and their taking responsibility for the repayment of that credit.

What is striking in such models is that while they promote the ideas of individual choice and action, in practice they demand conformity to group norms and discipline, most often through clearly visible actions such as those mentioned in the above examples. Agency modelled or conceptualised in this manner therefore, firstly, misses out on forms of action that do not conform to this type of observable action. Secondly, the emphasis on individual choice, responsibility, and action tends to obscure how women's relationships and structural positions shape their opportunities for action and exercising agency. A problem also lies in the manner in which development discourse has constructed the category 'women'. In this view women present a malleable subject, or object, of development, seen as more naturally obedient to norms and therefore the ideal medium through which to channel development funds, guaranteeing therefore that loans will be repaid on time[2]. They are constructed as moral subjects who will use development funds only for the good of their children and families (Wilson, 2013). This version of agency is defined in terms of doing what mainstream development agencies think people ought to do, with little regard for what these actions mean to those individuals themselves. In reality these perceptions of women are also ideological, in that they are consonant with the more traditional views of women being subservient except that, here, rather than women being subservient only to their male kin, they are now first subservient to a paternalism that is embodied in development discourse (Evans, 2013). Many commentators see this as reinforcing patriarchal norms. As Evans says, women are constructed as the ideal handmaidens to authority (Evans, 2013, p. 48) rather than truly exercising their own agency.

2.2. Critical accounts of agency

An alternative way of understanding agency is in critical feminist accounts which focus on women's lives in their social context and how these varied contexts have differential impacts on the degree of agency that women may have. These accounts focus on making women's agency visible on the grounds that it has thus far gone unnoticed or been rendered invisible. One way in which women's agency has been understood is through the analysis of power, which pays attention to the particular

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[2] This is part of a broader critique of development discourse itself (e.g. Escobar, 1995) in which people of the 'underdeveloped' world are perceived and constructed as passive recipients of development, with an underdeveloped subjectivity and little or no agency.

locations of women in their socio-cultural contexts. This is important to challenge the standard conceptions of agency which have hinged on the notion of grand actions, or sudden breaks with the past, and signifying radically new beginnings as opposed to everyday actions. From a feminist perspective, it is these everyday actions that are effaced from view which are far more likely to be the province of women (McNay, 2016). Thus one way of emphasising women's agency has been to pay greater attention to these everyday actions.

One way in which agency has been conceived is as resistance. In this formulation of agency, action that emerges against all manner of constraint is understood as agency. It rests, however, in the notion of non-conformity or opposition to norms. In these effort to recover women's agency there is the ever-present danger that all and any of women's actions are identified as forms of agency resulting, as McNay (2016) notes, in a tendency to 'romanticize mundane practices' (ibid, p. 40). Additionally, as various scholars (e.g. Mahmood, 2011; McNay, 2016) argue, a feminist investment in the emancipation or liberation of women tends to look for agency in forms of resistance. This further prevents us from seeing forms of agency that appear in non-oppositional forms. While this understanding of agency focuses on relationships, which are key in the feminist perspectives of agency, they are construed primarily in binary terms of how much freedom or constraint they permit to the individuals in those relationships.

Feminist accounts pose their own problems as noted above. This description showed how they might result in an over-identification of agency such that all and any actions become bearers of agency. The description here is very brief and merely points to the issues that I will take up further, both with reference to the existing literature as well as the data I present. My aim here was to show the path that I travelled and to highlight the broad issues and reflections that led me to frame my questions as I have. These are presented in the next section.

3. Key questions for this thesis

The two preceding sections highlight what I identify as two challenges that arise from understanding women's agency in the ways described above. The first issue is the narrowing of the term agency where it represents primarily, but not only, productive activity. I remarked earlier that this model of agency rests entirely on individual choice and action. It thus makes no reference to individuals' structural positions, completely eliding the manner in which structures may constrain or enable particular actions. This

problem leads me to pose the first question in this thesis: **How can we retain an understanding of both structure and agency when understanding agency at the individual level?**

The second issue is what actions are considered to express agency. I noted that the idea of agency as productive labour is symptomatic of the privileging of visible or overt actions, 'doing' as it were, as the primary form of agency. Alternate, less easily visible forms of action such as speech, silence, or reflection and observation, are ignored. This results in certain aspects of agency being missed out altogether or misconstrued as women's subordination. Critical feminist accounts, while according recognition to varied forms of agency in their contexts, could sometimes go too far in the opposite direction resulting in any and every form of women's behaviour being exemplified as a manifestation of agency. In both cases the problem of misconstruing the meaning of actions persists; whereas the first case leads to expressions of agency being missed out or misperceived as women's subordination, the second case results in an over-identification of agency. These twin challenges lead me to pose the second question in this thesis: **How do we identify women's agency or in what actions is agency visible?**

Examining women's agency through the various modes or forms of action that women resort to leads me ask whether it is productive to apply a similar analysis to men's actions. The main reason for doing this is to understand both the similarities and differences between women's and men's agency, and what accounts, in particular, for the differences when one applies a similar method of analysis to understand them. This leads to the third question that I pose in this thesis: **Does understanding women's agency differently alter our understanding of men's agency?**

The last issue that I take up in this thesis is the relational aspect of agency. While critical accounts of women's agency draw attention to how agency is shaped by the structural context and relationships, they do not go far enough in acknowledging the degree to which relationships shape agency. Recognising that all individuals are formed in and through relationships, emphasising their inherent sociality, leads to the fourth and last question I pose in this thesis: **How does a relational understanding of agency add to our understanding of women's agency?**

I answer each of these questions in four separate chapters in which I present my own primary data and findings. In the next section I describe how this thesis is structured in order to answer these key questions.

4. Exploring agency in women's narratives

In order to understand the nature of agency I begin first by reviewing the existing literature on women's agency in India and South Asia, in chapter 2. Having outlined how I came to the subject of agency through development discourse earlier in this chapter, I ask in chapter 2 whether alternate readings of women's agency address the problems that have emerged in this discourse. I have three main concerns in reviewing the existing literature on women's agency. The first question is how agency has been conceptualised, especially attending to how the concept of structure is integrated into these conceptualisations. The second question that I aim to answer in this chapter is about how agency is identified in the literature, i.e. through what actions is agency thought to be manifested. This question stems from my observation that agency is usually identified in direct, observable actions, which often ignore other modes of agency. I find that while there are strands of literature that address this issue which consider how other modes of action are bearers of agency, these are nonetheless very few. My last concern in this chapter is regarding how relationships have been understood to shape agency. In order to understand this I look at some aspects of social theory, specifically relational sociology, to examine the way relationships have been theorised. Relational sociology claims to shift the attention away from the individual to relationships as the main focus of social analysis. I examine whether this changes how agency is conceptualised. While all the theorists locate agency in relationships, they do this in different ways, with some going further than others in their conceptualisation of agency as being relational. I discuss the merits and problems of these conceptualisations, noting that with a few exceptions there is once more very little attention paid to how structures shape agency.

Feminist scholarship is far more attentive to the matter of how structural forces shape agency and more concerned with underscoring how this shapes relationships in turn. However, within this broad area, there is a great deal of divergence over what should count as agency, and especially whether women's endorsement of certain positions should be validated as agency or whether those positions must necessarily have some emancipatory potential in order to be considered as agency. In order to understand the broader relational framework within which agency takes shape I finally turn to

Bourdieu's (1978, 1992) notions of habitus and field, which demonstrate the very close interrelationship between agency and structure. Further, Connell's (1987) work on gender, which takes Bourdieu's framework as its starting point, shows how substructures come together to produce the structural relationships in which women are located. Connell's notion of cathexis along with West and Fenstermaker's (1995a) conceptualisation of how individual interactions reproduce particular forms of subordination are especially useful in understanding relationships at the individual level.

In chapter 3 I focus on the methodology of my research. I first present the background of the Wellbeing and Poverty Pathways (WPP) project during which I conducted this research. The focus of this thesis is distinct from that of the project itself in which we aimed to develop a statistical model of wellbeing (White, Gaines, & Jha, 2014). I describe in detail the range of methods that I employed in collecting data and why I chose to concentrate on the qualitative data in this thesis. As I explain in this chapter, the reason for choosing in-depth narratives was to attend to women's and men's descriptions of their lives and understand the terms in which they describe their actions. A second theme that I take up in chapter 3, and further when I present the data, is how the data is co-constructed through the research encounter. These remain underlying concerns of this thesis.

In chapter 4 I turn my attention to the context of this research- Surguja, a district in the east-central Indian state of Chhattisgarh. The state is home to a large adivasi, or indigenous, population. The chapter describes how adivasis occupy a particular place in Indian academic and policy narratives, and both how this has affected their lives as well as how they have influenced state action in turn. The relationship between the adivasis and the state has been fraught by displacement and development, not all of which has benefited the local communities. I briefly discuss key sociological themes such as class, religion, and gender in relation to adivasi communities, and the transformations that are presently taking place along these axes. Lastly, I describe the four villages of this research in specific detail, explaining the choice of these villages. I explain how social welfare entitlements have alleviated some of the ill effects of severe poverty in these areas.

In chapters 5 through 8 I present the findings of my research, with each chapter focused on answering the four questions that frame my thesis by turn. In each of these

chapters I rely on in-depth individual biographies in order to show how agency might emerge. In chapter 5 I start with the question of how structure and agency are linked. I apply Bourdieu's (1992, 1998) concept of field in order to understand how individuals overcome obstacles to agency in any one structure. Through the in-depth descriptions of three women's lives, I show how the individual's simultaneous location in multiple fields or structures allows them to draw on practices from one field in order to make up for their lack of power in another structure where there exist obstacles to their actions. I show that gradual changes within each field result in individuals' power in each field changing over time, both increasing and decreasing. I describe how not only their different degrees of power in multiple fields but also the alignment between these fields, i.e. the importance of fields relative to each other, allows opportunities for agency to emerge. This understanding of structure and agency and their interrelationship is the broad framework within which I then examine women's actions in the subsequent chapter.

In chapter 6 I focus in detail on the nature of women's actions in order to answer the second question that I have posed- how do we identify women's agency. In this chapter I present narratives from interviews with 11 women in order to understand when actions can be posited to constitute agency. I first examine women's narratives for key events that have shaped their lives. I then look at how women responded to these events, i.e. what was the mode of their actions. Lastly, I examine what transformation they were able to bring about in their lives through their actions and whether these constituted agency. In order to understand how agency emerges I examine the passage of time over which these actions occur, analysing how agency emerges through closely linked sets of contiguous actions over longer periods. I then link this with the notion of the individual's narrative identity showing that past actions and transformation brought about thereby strongly shape the narrator's sense of their own agency (McNay, 1999; McAdams & Mclean, 2013). Thus, agency emerges not solely through the actions' material outcomes, but also how those actions and their effects shape the individual's sense of their agency over time (McNay, 1999; Mattingly, 2013). I posit that agency needs to be seen not in isolated actions but in patterns of behaviour over a longer period by showing that reading meaning into isolated actions without adequate attention to the context could lead to a misconstruing their meanings.

Chapter 7 shifts focus to men's narratives of their lives, applying the same methods of understanding their actions and agency as I applied to women's narratives in chapter 6. I study the narratives of eight men's lives in detail in order to understand key turning points in their lives and how men responded to those situations, what transformation resulted from their actions, and whether those actions could be defined as agency. Further, I also compare men's and women's agentic actions to understand how similar or dissimilar the two are, where they overlap, and where they diverge. I ask what accounts for the differences between the two. I show that analysing women's and men's agency by applying this same method reveals where men and women are subject to the constraints of structural effects and power asymmetries in their relationships. It is in those relationships where individuals experience less power and greater constraint that their strategies to overcome or negotiate with that power is revealed.

In chapter 8 I take the analysis of chapters 6 and 7 further, both of which hint at how relationships influence agency. It is the power asymmetries in people's relationships with both close and distant others that influences the nature of action that they resort to at particular moments in time. Given this close link between the nature of relationships and agency I explore this further through my data in chapter 8. In this chapter, which is about relational agency, I move beyond looking at relationships as sources of constraint or enablement for agency. Instead, I examine how the nature of relationships is influenced by each individual's actions, and motivates each of them to act in ways that allows for manoeuvring. I show that the most immediate context in which people act is their relationships. Broader social structures are realised in or distilled into the concrete reality of immediate relationships, and it is here that we see how people respond, act, and take advantage of opportunities to change their lives. I show this through women's descriptions of their marital relationships, which also expose how the emotional aspect of all relationships also influences the nature of individual actions, both mitigating negative impacts but also, in some cases, reinscribing what might be considered unequal aspects of those relationships (Connell, 1987).

I conclude, in chapter 9, by drawing together the findings of the chapters 5 through 8. The broad frame in which macro changes in structures take place are described through Bourdieu's concepts of fields and habitus which I describe this in chapter 5. I show how changes in fields are opportunities for some individuals to take advantage of

shifts in the degree of power enjoyed by others that are further enabled by the relative importance of different fields in relation to each other. While this theoretical framework is particularly helpful both in revealing the intertwining of structure and agency thereby defining the macro framework, I find it has limited applicability to conceptualise the micro-level changes in individuals' lives. I therefore rely on theoretical work that has the explanatory power to clarify how actions over a long period could be read together to understand individual agency. To this end, I find work on narrative identity (McNay, 1999; McAdams & Mclean, 2013; Mattingly, 2013) useful in two distinct ways. Firstly, it provides a way of understanding how actions evolve over time even while acknowledging the sometimes-contradictory nature of individual actions. Second, the individual's narrative identity allows them to craft a self-image which then becomes a psychological resource and source of motivation for future action. These go some way in explaining why individuals in similar circumstances might act differently, and thus bring varying degrees of change in their lives. Given the role that circumstances play in how individuals act, I dissect what this means. I conclude that circumstances bear on the person most immediately through close relationships within the family and community (Burkitt, 2016). Finally, I suggest that agency emerges in relationships rather than as a property of the individual.

5. Reflections and moving forward

I began this chapter with the aim of explaining what compelled me to focus on the subject of women's agency. My attention was initially drawn to how people are represented in development discourse and, in particular, how such representations tend to efface their agency. This interest narrowed down to how development interventions tend to create a template for agency. Reading alternate accounts of agency made me reflect on the kinds of actions in which we identify agency. These initial thoughts resulted in my identifying challenges in both mainstream and alternate readings of agency. I explained in the preceding sections how these initial thoughts ultimately led me to frame the four questions that I presented earlier in section 2, above. I went on to outline the path that this thesis will travel. My conclusions or approach to women's agency is anchored in women's accounts of their lives and an in-depth focus on their contexts.

5.1. What does this thesis contribute?

The issue of how people, both as individuals and categories, are represented remains a broad preoccupation for me. I have addressed this problem of what I earlier described

as a two-dimensional view of the person by focusing on the in-depth biographies of individuals. This thesis gives the reader a sense of the person, of the particularities that shape an individual so that we can understand the ways in which individuals act differently, and what compels them to do so. It this only through in-depth reading of this kind that we can truly hope to understand the myriad, less visible forms in which people exercise their agency. This is the main contribution of this thesis.

I explained earlier why I believe agency, and women's agency in particular, remains an important topic for research- the fact that so much of development practice is geared towards increasing women's agency makes it important to challenge static views both of women and their agency. Interventions premised on the idea of individual choice paradoxically constrain agency by dictating a template of actions that are thought to be manifestations of agency. These pay little heed to how the context informs the modes and meanings of individual actions. I believe it is the focus on the person and their context that exposes how actions are particular- both in their meanings and their effects, even against the background of a common context. As I will explain in the concluding chapter, this results in a far more nuanced idea of how agency emerges. In order to design interventions that better enable women's agency we must be willing to take this nuance, and a certain amount of unpredictability, on board.

The task that I ultimately set for myself in this thesis is to understand agency as a nuanced individual and social process. I proceed with this task by first asking what we mean by agency in the next chapter.

Chapter 2: What Do We Mean By Agency? A Review of the Literature

1. Introduction

Agency is a powerful concept because it represents the possibility of change in the face of entrenched structures of power which configure relations of domination and subordination, and advantage and disadvantage. It is particularly significant for groups that have been systematically marginalised, signalling the potential for individual and collective action that could enable them to emerge from their subordinate status and exercise autonomy to lead the lives that they desire. This is important in order to acknowledge that individuals and groups that have been traditionally thought to lack agency can be active agents in shaping their lives, and selves. Although this is an over-simplistic rendering of what agency can achieve, it speaks to the hold that agency exercises over the imagination of individuals and groups who are invested in challenging existing social structures. The emancipatory potential of agency lends it a central appeal in feminist discourse and practice. It is also, however, an intensely contested concept raising questions about who desires women's agency; what it looks like; and whether it lives up to the potential of emancipation from subordination that it represents.

Agency represents the idea that individuals and groups can act to overcome or modify their circumstances thereby effecting a material change in their positions. This chapter proceeds from this purposely-brief definition of agency, with the aim of examining and further expanding on it. Even such a brief definition raises multiple questions about the nature of agency, pointing to at least the following debates: firstly, about the nature of the individual and the collective; secondly, about what constitutes action; thirdly, about cause, consciousness, intentionality, and autonomy; and fourth, about the nature and degree of change that is expected as a result of individual or collective actions. These questions, while certainly not exhaustive, highlight the complexity of the concept of agency. Since each of these concepts is itself the subject of extensive philosophical discussion, this chapter cannot do justice to discussions around each of them, although they will surface in the focal discussion of agency. Instead, this chapter has the more modest aim of examining accounts of women's agency in two ways: firstly, how it has been conceptualised; and secondly, how it is identified in women's lives. As discussion later in this chapter will show, agency appears in specific forms in different places and the meanings of various actions are drawn from the contexts where they occur. In doing so, not only will this chapter attempt to examine broader

conceptions of agency and understand to what degree they are applicable in varied cultural contexts, but also to see how a specific non-Western context might modify a general conception of agency. These four issues will form the core of this chapter.

Feminist critiques of mainstream theories of agency elaborate how women's agency and associated concepts such as autonomy and power have been systematically under-represented. Feminist accounts have attempted to address gaps in the theorising and depiction of women's agency, and thereby make it visible (e.g. McKenzie & Stoljar 2000, McNay 2015). This leads, firstly, to the question of how such accounts have conceptualised women's agency. Secondly, it is also important to ask whether conceptualisations of women's agency are distinct from general conceptualisations of agency and, if so, what sets them apart. Thirdly, what value do such distinctions add to our understandings of women's agency particularly, and agency more generally. Although the focus of these analyses is on individual agency and the empirical data derived from individual narratives, it is pertinent to add here that relationships are a salient theme in all these narratives. In their narratives, women describe in great detail how their lives are intertwined with those of close and distant others. This thesis takes the emphasis on relationships as one of its focal points, also noting that this has been explored in feminist critiques of agency (McKenzie & Stoljar, 2000; McNay, 2015). To that end, therefore, this chapter will examine what the existing literature has to say about agency and relationships specifically, and how they are linked.

The second, and associated, issue, which this chapter takes up, is to examine how agency is being identified. By uncovering the 'how' it aims to understand, firstly, what actions are thought to represent women's agency and, secondly, on what basis those claims are made. A third important aspect of this question is whether actions that are identified as agency are so labelled with reference to the cultural context where they occur, the importance of which is further discussed in a later section. Lastly, this also raises associated questions of representation; about who ascribes the label 'agency' to particular actions- whether actions are perceived as agency by individuals themselves, by others in that context, or by outsiders. Issues of representation are not new. Moore (1988) draws attention to how women have traditionally been represented in limited ways in anthropology partly because early anthropology was practised largely by men. These were Western anthropologists studying the 'other' who is always constructed with reference to the self. Moore suggests that it is important to acknowledge that

race is also implicated in early anthropological narratives rather than critiquing them only as ethnocentric enquiries (Moore, 1988). Mckenzie and Stoljar (2000), reviewing feminist perspectives on autonomy and agency highlight critiques which question standard conceptions of autonomy because, in adhering to a masculinist normative standard, these do not represent women's realities. Feminist practice and theory have also been subject to these critiques, with activists and theorists alike challenging the unitary category 'women' so as to sensitise discourse and practice to difference- of race, class, caste, geographical location, and sexuality (Moore, 1988; Menon, 2015).

The specificity of women's experiences calls attention to their particular contexts. Thus, even as women's subordination through patriarchy is accepted as being prevalent to varying degrees, throughout the world, it takes particular forms in different places (Moore, 1988; Sharma U. M., 1978). It is the cultural and social context that renders particular forms of subordination as subordination itself and, therefore, actions too can be interpreted as expressions of agency only by understanding the contexts in which they are manifest. This chapter grounds the discussion of the women's agency in the context of India. Feminist accounts of agency have resulted in a vast literature across the social sciences. However, since my concern is with the Indian context I will draw primarily on the two disciplines where Indian women's agency is widely represented: anthropology and in gender and development. The chapter will also draw on cultural contexts that have similarities to those of India, i.e. South Asia as well as West Asia.

This chapter is set out as follows. The first section is a theoretical discussion of agency, also attending to how structure and agency are linked. The second section pays specific attention to whether, and how, agency and relationships have been conceptualised together. The third section examines how women's agency has been conceptualised in anthropology and gender and development. The fourth section will proceed to a discussion how women's actions are marked or identified as agency. The concluding section will analyse whether the existing accounts of women's agency are adequate for us to understand women's agency and what, if any, are the gaps that they present.

2. Action, structures, context

Agency refers to the idea that individuals have the capacity to effect some transformation of their world. This seemingly simple idea is, however, complicated by

discussion of whether this action is purely voluntary or determined by external factors outside the individual's control. This section will present a theoretical account of agency, based on the premise that discussion of agency is incomplete without understanding what shapes it, and how. Social scientists identify structure as an important influence on human action. Structure is generally agreed to be a theoretical construct which postulates the prior existence of an underlying logic that orders the events or objects within a given field of study (Chaffee & Lemert, 2009). Rather than being directly observable, structures are discerned through the ways in which they mould events, action, behaviour, and social institutions. It is by understanding the principles that shape observable events in the field under investigation that we are able to discern the meanings of those events, and recognise the structural patterns into which they fit (Chaffee & Lemert, 2009). Although structure and agency have often been thought of as binary opposites, they are, in fact, necessary counter-weights to each other. An over-emphasis on structures produces an overly deterministic account of society that nullifies the possibilities for human innovation, whereas an over-emphasis on human agency can easily ignore how it is shaped by social structures. Both these positions produce accounts of agency and structure as if they are distinct spheres of action and thereby fail to capture the intrinsic relationship between them: that structures, as an organising feature of society, arise from repeated instances of agency and, in turn, both enable and constrain further forms of agency (Chaffee & Lemert, 2009). This idea is especially important to understand how women's actions are produced through the structuring effects of, in the first instance, patriarchy.

Since my concern with structure, in this chapter, is specifically with regard to how it shapes agency, I attend to theoretical frameworks that offer explanations for the links between structure and agency. To this end I focus on Bourdieu's theory of practice (Bourdieu, 1977), which offers an empirically grounded explanation of the close relationship between structure and agency, and how they shape each other, thereby attempting to overcome the binary of 'structure versus agency'. I then draw on Connell's scholarship on gender, which too builds on Bourdieu's theory of practice. Connell's (1987) concept of the sub-structures of patriarchy offers an understanding of the broad principles that underpin patriarchy, even as it acknowledges that patriarchy takes specific forms in specific contexts. The idea that context exerts a powerful influence on women's actions is further explored through how structures, both singly and together, locate individuals in such ways as to produce specific experiences of

subordination. The work of West and Fenstermaker (1995a) shows how individuals' regulation of their own and others' behaviour and particular actions (re)shapes structures. Through this formulation, this section presents the broad contours of how agency and structure are linked, to the specific structure of patriarchy, and lastly, to how the interaction of different structures effects particular relationships and experiences of subordination at the individual level.

Bourdieu's theory of practice (1977) offers a way of understanding how human action is structured in social interaction and situations. He posits that the people's conditions of life produce habitus, which he describes as follows:

> "…systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures predisposed to functioning as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively "regulated" and "regular" without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72, emphases original).

This definition sets out the key features of habitus. Firstly, it is a system of dispositions which shapes individuals' default responses in various situations, i.e. it is a way of being, or an internalised repository of attitudes which shapes people's behaviour. Secondly, it is durable, i.e. it persists through a person's life, and across all situations. Thirdly, it generates and structures regular practice, which is not the result of conscious adherence to rules or strategy. Fourthly, it is transposable, with the potential to be adapted to changed contexts.

According to Bourdieu's theory of practice, therefore, individuals' responses arise from the dispositions resulting from repeated instances of past actions. This action is structured by the existing principle and, in turn, reinforces that same originating structure, and thereby reproduces that same structure as the source of dispositions on which future actions will be based. The durability of habitus reflects the social conditions in which practice is generated, whereby the aspirations that people have are compatible with the requirements of their objective conditions. Practices which conflict with people's conditions are easily dismissed as unrealistic and unthinkable (ibid, p. 77). Further, practice is not determined by a conscious anticipation of future

outcomes but is shaped by the generating principle. Bourdieu admits the possibility of a 'quasi-conscious' strategising attending to the regular response, which is generated through habitus, and which is aimed at an expected objective (ibid, p.76). In such situations too, individuals are deploying a way of being which comprises "… a whole body of wisdom, sayings, commonplaces, ethical precepts ("that's not for the likes of us") and, at a deeper level, the unconscious principles of the ethos…" (ibid, p. 77). Practice does, however, have the possibility to be transposed to new and unforeseen situations. Although habitus appears to orchestrate all actions in a given context, this is not the case according to Bourdieu (ibid, pp. 72-73). Instead- and importantly- all individuals in any given context who have internalised the same habitus act in accordance with that same set of principles in any interaction among themselves, and their actions and reactions will therefore appear in harmony with each other. This means that any single individual's actions are immediately intelligible to others endowed with the same habitus, who then bring their similar knowledge into play in order to react in the appropriate manner (ibid, p. 73). Taking this point further, it then becomes obvious that individuals' actions are not dictated by the interaction or the situation; rather, the sorts of situations that arise are themselves shaped by the same existing structures that enable and constrain the social action and interaction. This is because the situations that arise result from the actions of particular categories of groups (of individuals) that are endowed with a particular set of dispositions (ibid, p. 81). Although this model of how structures shape human action appears mechanistic, Bourdieu stresses that this is not the case, explaining that actions are not reducible to being mere responses to their directly antecedent stimuli. Instead they have the possibility of drawing from a range of possible responses which are structured by past practice.

To summarise briefly, habitus is a set of dispositions which relays structures, which Bourdieu theorises as fields (Bourdieu, 1990), into practice. As a set of dispositions, it shapes individuals' default responses to various situations without conscious strategising on their parts. It is in this manner that it generates durable patterns of action, which persist throughout people's lives and various situations that they encounter. At the same time it shapes practice to be transposed into new and unforeseen situations. Even though it shapes individual practice it also produces a consensus regarding the meanings of actions among individuals inhabiting the same cultural context and endowed with the same habitus, which allows for people to simply 'know' how to act in a range of situations that they are likely to encounter.

Most importantly, habitus is the means not only whereby structure shapes practice, but also how practice reproduces social structures.

While Bourdieu's theory of practice explains how practice is both the outcome of and the precursor to structure, we also need to know the characteristics of patriarchy in order to know what is being reproduced through the actions of women and men so that we can know which of women's actions represent agency. Patriarchy in itself is abstract, and merely asserting that it produces systematic subordination by age and gender does not tell us how to recognise it. The visible signs of women's subordination, in fact, are not the same everywhere and it is therefore important to recognise that patriarchal arrangements take different forms in different cultural contexts. However, there are common principles across contexts, on which women's subordination is based, and each of these results in particular forms of subordination, which are interlinked or operate in concert to give rise to the overall conditions of women's subordination (Connell, 1987). Connell suggests the idea of sub-structures and posits three: labour, power, and cathexis. Each of these is used in different ways to differentiate between men and women, and amongst women and men (Connell, 2005) producing patterns of dominance and subordination. These patterns, in turn, produce the socially desirable models of 'men' and 'women', by directing them towards particular forms of labour, or in the exercise of power, such that these patterns appear 'natural' over time.

The sexual division of labour ensures that men and women have responsibility for different tasks. This has various consequences for the importance of women's status and these have been the focus of extensive analyses. Vast areas of women's work have either been discounted, e.g. in agriculture, or were invisibilised such as in the case of domestic labour. In many societies work that draws a cash income is thought to be of greater value and because women are often less involved in such domains of work, this contributes to the lower status of women's labour; concomitantly the jobs that women undertake usually see a drop in their status. In agricultural communities, men are involved in tasks such as ploughing while women are usually confined to what are defined as ancillary tasks. In the modern economy there is a whole slew of employment domains, such as technology for instance, where women are dramatically underrepresented. In fact the sexual division of labour itself leads to the gendering of particular tasks and whole areas of work, such that this allocation is seen as 'natural' and reflecting the biological differences between men and women. Connell (1987)

refers, for instance, to how nursing has been constructed as a women's job or career because it is strongly linked with what is thought to be women's greater capacity to nurture and care for others, which builds on their reproductive role. In farming, even though women contribute as much labour as men do (Agarwal, 1994), their tasks are perceived as being less important, harvesting or winnowing for instance, even though these are crucial parts of the agricultural cycle. The other effect of the sexual division of labour is that men are usually involved in those tasks which earn more wages or to which accrue cash incomes. This arrangement results in their greater control over wealth and productive assets, with women rarely having such ownership rights or control. Thus in patriarchal agricultural communities, women are rarely the owners of the land; they are usually not allowed to plough the land which is seen as men's symbolic privilege; and women are rarely involved in the sale of produce from which a cash income could accrue (Agarwal, 1994). The other significant gendering of work is that of care-giving, where women are seen as primary caregivers, especially because of their role in reproduction, and care-giving is in turn seen as women's work. This works in conjunction with the preceding aspects of sexual division of labour to ensure that men not only monopolise certain more paying tasks but also control the systems of production, which then work to men's advantage (Connell, 1987, p. 103). The entry of both men and women into the formal labour force as economies have modernised and globalised has not erased these differences. They remain as intact as ever as evident in the gender wage gap for instance, which shows that women consistently earn lower wages for the doing the same jobs as men. Further, jobs continue to be routinely constructed as women's and men's work, with 'women's jobs', such as secretarial work, earning lower salaries. Lastly, in spite of women's entry into the labour force, they continue to carry the larger responsibility of household and care work, which are both seen as distinctly women's domains.

While social structures may not be directly visible, their power can be observed through social institutions which organise social relationships. This is evident in kinship structures which order women's and men's lives in particular ways; for instance, patriarchal kinship structures give men power and control over women's lives such as making decisions over 'giving' women away through marriage. It is also evident in the way families not only control women's bodies and sexuality by policing their behaviour, but also punish them for violating the norms that are meant to safeguard women's sexuality, and the family honour associated with it. This also represents how women's behaviour, when it challenges norms, has the potential to disrupt established

social relations both within families and communities. The power to punish, which in many cases takes the form of violence against women, is a clear indicator of the power that men exercise in their relationship with women (Connell, 1987). Power is not exercised only at an individual level and nor is it expressed only through naked force or violence. Power is evident when it structures social relations which are based on an unequal distribution of resources, such that one person or group has a greater advantage over others. This too can take varied forms: this could be at individual level as described above where men have the power to shape women's lives in patriarchal family arrangements; however, it can also take on an institutional character where it is more difficult to discern. At this level, power is exercised in the dominant persons' or groups' abilities to dictate the terms in which events are understood and meanings ascribed to them. This allows them to define the import of a particular situation. Connell (1987, p. 107) cites the example of how women are defined as weak in many cultures in order to deny them power. Anthropology examines this in detail across different contexts.

Feminist anthropology has played an important role in analysing the varied ways in which relations of power produce women's subordinate status. Moore's (1988) scholarship examines how the Western origins of the discipline and a male bias have both contributed to erasing or minimising women's experiences from view even though women are present at the level of observation. She mentions three layers of bias. First is the (male) anthropologist's bias that, in most cultures, men have more information about their culture and are more accessible and are, therefore, the key informants. The second bias arises from the culture under study itself- that women are subordinate in many cultures and this view is conveyed to the anthropologist. The third level of bias arises from Western culture which assumes that a bias in other cultures is analogous to that which exists in Western culture (Moore, 1988, pp. 1-2). This aspect of power, although not directly observable, exerts greater influence through the manner in which it 'sets the agenda' and shapes knowledge, thereby shaping institutional and organisational ideologies (Connell, 1987). Another aspect of having power versus powerlessness is that not all members of a powerful group are equally powerful; for instance not all men exercise the same degree of power over all women. The degree of power that each man has may be determined further by age or class for instance. Patriarchal norms also govern the practices of men, such that they must act in ways that are deemed 'masculine', and mark out men who do not uphold these norms (ibid, p. 108). Thus a man who is unable to enact the role of breadwinner,

for example, may be susceptible to mockery that he is not a man on that count, also resulting in his not having an equal voice among his male cohort or, perhaps, even within the household.

The third sub-structure that Connell describes is cathexis, which is the emotional aspect of all relationships (Connell, 1987, p. 111). She draws on this from Freud's use of cathexis to refer to an instinctual or psychic charge but generalises it to relationships with all objects and persons (ibid, p. 112). Cathexis can carry the contradictory emotional aspects of both affection and hostility, both of which exist simultaneously in all social relationships. Here, she also adds that emotional aspect is not just 'expressed' but must be consciously enacted through practice (ibid, p. 111). Connell emphasises also that while the three sub-structures of labour, power, and cathexis, are useful concepts to understand the axes along which difference and inequality is structured, they work together, taking on diverse forms, resulting in the cumulative effect of women's subordinate status. One example of this is how women's lives are shaped in the social arrangements under particular types of patriarchy. Kandiyoti, in her work on 'patriarchal bargains' for example, describes how women's lives are shaped in what she refers to as a 'corporate model of patriarchy', characterised by the patrilocal, patriarchal joint family- a social arrangement that extends through South and West Asia (Kandiyoti, 1988). In this model of the patriarchal family, power, exercised through social institutions such as kinship for instance, results in women leaving their natal families to join their conjugal families. These kinship forms also usually coincide with men's control of wealth and productive assets, as in the cultures that Kandiyoti describes, resulting in women's labour being deployed by the conjugal household's production system for the reproduction of that household's wealth. Women neither have control over the productive assets of the household, nor any say over how they can use their own labour. As young brides they are subject to the control of mothers-in-law who control the domain of household work. They neither earn a separate income because the tasks that fall to them do not pay wages, and nor can they afford the opportunity to seek such paid work since their movement is curtailed by the family's need to police their behaviour, and especially their sexuality (Kandiyoti, 1988).

In order to understand how these structures are reproduced it is helpful to follow how women's lives change over their life-course, conferring varying degrees of power at different times in their lives. Women have no power as new brides and their

movement is severely curtailed with their being restricted to doing only household tasks delegated by their mothers-in-law. This gradually changes when they themselves become mothers especially to sons who will perpetuate the male line, and as their mothers-in-law grow older or are widowed. In this situation, there is a generational shift in the control over the household, i.e. when a woman's husband gains control of the household assets she too gains control over domestic management; this is accompanied by the simultaneous decline of her mother-in-law's power in the household (Kandiyoti, 1988). Here, the woman who was once the powerless new bride now acquires a position of power when she herself becomes a mother-in-law. It is important to note here, that men are also subject to control by their senior male kin, reflecting Connell's (1987) observation that all members of a dominant group do not have equal power, albeit their lives are not as constrained as women's. Kandiyoti (1988) also stresses on the fact that it is the quality of women's relationships with men- initially their husbands, and later their sons- who control the family wealth, that determines the control that have over domestic management. In fact, relationships allow subtle shifts in the model that Kandiyoti describes, in which she suggests that women accept the situation where they have no power in the conjugal household as young brides, with the knowledge that when they become mothers-in-law the roles would be reversed and they would wield power over their daughters-in-law, and perhaps also their mothers-in-law. It is this awareness on women's part that Kandiyoti (1988, 1998) refers to as the patriarchal bargain. This is not to say that they do not attempt to reduce their powerlessness in the early years of their marriage. They do this by building relationships with their husbands and other powerful family members by enacting the role of the good daughter-in-law, thus winning the support of senior female kin for instance, and thereby being able to influence household decision-making in their own, or immediate family's, interest. Sharma (1978) describes how, even though in theory women do not control the household's productive assets, there are numerous instances of how they may influence other family members and bring them around to their views.

Women's enactment of their roles reflects the norms or social arrangements laid down by social institutions, which are themselves shaped by social structures. However, while each of the sub-structures described above has a particular impact on people's lives, the impact each of them has is not necessarily equal. In Kandiyoti's (1988, 1998) work, for instance, we see that women could be subject to different degrees of power through their lives, and men too exercise varied levels of power depending on their

own seniority. Importantly, it should also be noted that each of the substructures could well alleviate or moderate the effects of other substructures. This is particularly true of cathexis, which even as it structures such aspects of people's lives as sexuality, so as to produce heterosexual norms of relationships between men and women, the emotional aspect that it emphasises also has a potentially destabilising or tempering effect on the effects of other sub-structures when it takes the form of care. It can, however, also further increase the structural impact of labour and power when it takes the form of hostility. Cathexis assumes particular importance given that women and men are always embedded in and constituted through relationships, especially in the domestic sphere which is defined primarily through relationships. These relations may both constrain as well as offer support for their actions. This aspect of relationships and their importance in constituting agency is further discussed in a later section.

While Connell's (1987) analysis talks about the interaction of the substructures of patriarchy, West and Fenstermaker (1995a) talk about the interaction between gender structures and structures of race and class, and the simultaneous experience of multiple forms of inequality produced by each of these structures. West and Fenstermaker begin by critiquing the various ways in which multiple structures have been theorised as working together, describing the mathematical metaphors such as additive or multiplicative categories as being insufficient to understand how inequality is produced (West & Fenstermaker, 1995a). Elaborating on this they explain how additive categories of difference and inequality result in a whole which can never be more than the sum of its parts; e.g. a person who is a woman and non-white would always be thought of as facing two forms of inequality, but would that necessarily mean she is less subordinated than someone who also, additionally, faces class subordination? They further add that the term intersectionality[3] too does not wholly capture the experience of persons facing multiple forms of inequality. They critique it on the basis of the fact that it rests in categorical memberships (e.g. of race or class, or gender) but question whether any combinations of these categories can be equalised. Thus, does the person who faces race and class inequality have the same experience as one who faces gender and class inequality? Can these two different experiences be considered equivalent in any manner? Their answer is in the negative. Instead they propose that gender, class, and race are experienced in particular situations and it is that specific context that produces the experience of inequality, which may also

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[3] The term became popular following Collins' (1990) work on race, class and gender and Crenshaw's (1991) critique of race being absent in legal scholarship in the USA.

emphasise one form of inequality and de-emphasise others. Their conceptualisation of all forms of difference is that they emerge in social interaction, i.e. in 'doing difference'. Giving the example of gender, they state that gender is not an individual characteristic but, rather, emerges from social interaction. They further break down how the enactment of gender through a host of activities makes it appear as an almost naturalised difference, something given rather than socially produced. They argue that gender is accomplished through individual conduct in respect to normative standards that define what is appropriate for each sex category, i.e. what is manly or womanly. It is implicit that conduct is always with respect to others. Conduct is therefore always being assessed by others (see also Bourdieu 1977, p. 73). This assessment is on three counts. Firstly, whether it conforms or deviates from the norm; this informs others about how to prepare for future interactions. Secondly, gender is interactional in that the process of determining whether it conforms or deviates is done with reference to the situation in which the conduct takes place. Lastly, they state that there is an added institutional arena which makes those interactions, at the level of social relationships, further legible at the broader level (West & Fenstermaker, 1995a, p. 21). Even though West and Fenstermaker's analyses are about how structures interact to produce particular experiences, they also constantly emphasise the relational quality of those experiences. In further iterations of 'doing difference'[4] (e.g. Fenstermaker & West 2002; West & Fenstermaker 1995b), they emphasise that their interest lies in examining how inequality is being produced in social interaction or practice. In each interaction, particular categories of difference are more or less salient, i.e. it is in the setting in which the experience unfolds that one or the other category is reinforced (West & Fenstermaker, 1995b) and which therefore produces every individual's unique experiences of inequality. This does not deny the force of structures in the interaction. West and Fenstermaker suggest that this is evident in what they term accountability, which refers to the anticipated evaluation of our actions by others. This evaluation rests on the 'historically specific institutional and collective contexts' (Fenstermaker & West, 2002, p. 213) from where each action derives its meaning.

The preceding section has focused on how agency is distinctly shaped by structure. The starting point of this analysis was Bourdieu's theory of practice which demonstrates

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[4] West and Fenstermaker's (1995a) emphasis on social interaction as the site where inequality is produced has invited some sharp criticism that it effaces from view the structural roots of that inequality (e.g. Collins 1995). In response, they stress that structural inequality is their point of departure and the fundamental premise of their argument (West and Fenstermaker 1995b).

how agency and structure reinforce each other, mediated by habitus which, as a set of dispositions, transmits structure into action and constantly reinforces structure anew (Bourdieu, 1977). Bourdieu's model has the advantage of emphasising a relational view of agency and structure, which forms the basis of the analyses to follow. Connell (1987), drawing on Bourdieu's theory, also attends to how structure is built up through repeated action. Connell explains this specifically for patriarchal structures, positing the idea of sub-structures each of which produces specific types of relations of dominance and subordination. Importantly, while these sub-structures act together to produce women's overall subordinate positions, each of them may also at times have an ameliorating effect on the others (Connell, 1987). This is especially true of cathexis or the emotional charge attached to all relationships. This process also allows for negotiations in relations of domination and subordination and, depending on the context, will produce specific forms of subordination and patriarchal models (Moore, 1988, Kandiyoti, 1988, 1998). The influence of context, especially how it is constituted through the interaction of various social structures together, is exemplified in the work of West and Fenstermaker (1995a; 1995b; Fenstermaker & West, 2002). Their model places relations at the centre of analysis, positing the idea that the experience of inequality or subordination that result from difference- of race, class, gender etc., is produced through social interaction. A common thread that runs through these analyses is that of relationships, both at the structural or social level, as well as the individual. The emphasis on relationships and relationality is explored further in the next section.

3. Agency and relationality

As stated earlier, a key concern of this thesis is how agency is negotiated in relationships. Rather than therefore presenting the larger literature on agency I will restrict myself to examining in this section how agency and relationships and relationality have been conceived of together. In order to do this I draw on literature from sociology and psychology as theorists in both disciplines have worked on this topic. In sociology, recent years have seen a new interest in the 'relational' in social theory (Prandini, 2015). The impetus for a relational sociology (RS) stemmed in great measure from a critique of the individualism versus collectivism debate that has long characterised classical sociology (Emirbayer, 1997; Prandini, 2015). Prandini, summarising a range of theoretical positions in RS says that "(T)he individual is 'social(ized)' and the social is interiorized by individuals; they are made by the same stuff, 'relationships' (Prandini, 2015, p. 3, emphases in original). While this is

something that various commentators in RS seem to have in common, RS nonetheless comprises of a diverse range of theoretical positions. Associated ideas have been voiced in other disciplines too, but with shifts in emphases. Gergen, for instance, writing in the discipline of psychology, says that the conception of relational being should collapse the notion of separation between individuals, and expresses this core idea thus: "(T)his vision, relational being, seeks to recognize a world that is not within persons but within their relationships, and that ultimately erases the traditional boundaries of separation" (Gergen, 2009, p. 5). While these examples give a broad overview of relational thinking, the idea is presented in greater detail below.

Emirbayer, one of the earliest scholars of relational sociology, plots the relational position in opposition to substantialist constructs of social reality, which give primacy to entities, e.g. individuals or groups, as the basic unit of analysis (Emirbayer, 1997). According to him, the development of the RS field reflects the increasing need to understand social reality in a dynamic and processual manner. The substantialist position conceives of entities as pre-formed, which then enter into relationships with others[5]; for instance, individuals, who have prior fixed attributes, have relationships with other individuals. Relational theorists do not accept that discrete entities, such as individuals or even societies, can be the starting point of sociological analysis. Instead, Emirbayer contends that individuals derive their significance and sense of identity from their changing roles in constantly evolving relations. It is these relationships, or transactions as Emirbayer refers to them, that become the primary units of analysis rather than the constituent entities whose identities the relationships contribute towards constituting and making significant, and individuals cannot be conceived of as separate from these relationships in which they are embedded (Emirbayer, 1997, p. 287). Further, the relations between entities are dynamic and ongoing processes, which are constantly being reconstituted and are of a complex nature (ibid, p. 289). Individuals come into being from the recognition accorded to them in relations of mutual trust, rather than as pre-constituted entities with already given fixed attributes who then enter into relations with others (ibid, p. 296). However, Emirbayer acknowledges that in spite of the shift in focus away from individuals towards the relational context, RS continues to face the difficulty of how to analyse dynamic processes that are a key characteristic of this relational approach to understanding

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[5] Bourdieu emphasises that his own theorising attempted to overcome the binaries of a substantialist position, and advocated a relational understanding of social reality (Bourdieu, 1990 p.126). Emirbayer draws on the same sources as Bourdieu, though he does not reference Bourdieu in this early work.

social reality. He attributes this to a residual substantialism that continues to privilege the self and individual (ibid, p. 305). This is reflected in the fact that even as Emirbayer attempts to depart from a substantialist position, there is nonetheless the danger that the idea of relations as the 'primary unit of analysis' returns us to precisely that very point of departure, where relations become fixed entities themselves.

Emirbayer's position is broadly reflected in the work of Crossley. Crossley presents his work in an empirical frame, elaborating extensively on culture and showing how it is relationally produced. A significant part of Crossley's object is, as with Emirbayer, to move away from the collectivism versus individualism debate; he takes this forward through this conception of culture as relationally produced, asserting that culture is not an object or an entity in itself. The reason that he proposes this is grounded in three basic premises about the inherently relational constitution of individuals; firstly, individuals become social actors in and through their interactions; secondly, the individual is, therefore, an abstraction that is useful as an analytical tool; and thirdly, even while phenomena may be observed at the individual level they make sense only in the long-lasting relational contexts in which individuals are embedded (in Prandini, 2015, p. 7). Crossley then goes on to posit that specific forms of culture arise from social relations in that an 'artwork', for instance, is conceived as such because of a shared understanding of its meaning. This meaning is itself grounded in the network or web of relations between artists, art purveyors, exhibition spaces, and the audience for art; it is through their common understanding of what art is or meanings that they ascribe to an object that it acquires the status of an artwork. The interactions or ties that produce culture are themselves cultural and- repeated over a period of time, they give rise to the shared norms of that community. They result in production of shared meaning between the participants which, in turn, reinforces those ties[6]. He also further posits the concept of a 'social space' which locates individuals according to social positions which is determined by parameters such as age, gender, income, and ethnicity for instance. Social space is an arena of interactions where individuals who are proximate to each other in that space tend to form networks. Individuals in the same networks tend to share tastes because their very proximity to each other promotes interaction among them (Crossley, 2013, pp. 139-140). The device of the 'social space' means that age, gender, income etc. are no longer individual attributes but serve to locate individuals in that space, which is itself constituted through interactions. By locating individuals thus, Crossley also shows how similarly positioned

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[6] This formulation strongly echoes Bourdieu's (1977) concept of habitus, described earlier.

individuals get drawn into the same networks and generate particular cultural forms (Crossley, 2013).

Powell terms his concept as 'radical relationism', which he describes as "…an epistemology that contains no residual dualist elements and therefore treats all social phenomena, including individuals themselves, as constituted through relations" (Powell, 2013, p. 187). There is a broad overlap with the work of both Emirbayer and Crossley, in that Powell too agrees that relations are constitutive of individuals. Taking the view that relations are fundamental and therefore the 'only elementary' (ibid, p. 189) unit of analysis he posits that, arising from this, individuals and their actions are the sum total of their configurations of their relations stating: "In other words, human beings are figurations" (ibid, p. 190), also adding that radical relationism is, therefore, anti-humanist. These are the two features that emphasise the radicalism of his concept. He takes the view that relations are constitutive of all objects, i.e. both individuals and social institutions are configurations of relationships at different scales. Based on this, he argues against the dualism of agency and structure, and separation of micro and macro levels of analysis, which I will discuss in the next sub-section. Emphasising that relations are always processual, he conceives of them as work. He explains this by suggesting that work implies that all parties to that relation are in some way transformed by the relations themselves.

Moving away from RS and into the discipline of psychology, Gergen's work attempts to elaborate the idea of 'relational being' (Gergen, 2009). Gergen makes an explicit move away from the notion of the bounded individual, which he posits is at the root of all anxieties that individuals in late modernity experience; he attributes this to the fact that bounded individuals are in state of constant evaluation, the result of the notion of separated persons. For Gergen no communication or action can happen unless it is co-created. As he explains, communication takes on meaning because of the reactions that are expressed in relationship: e.g. one person's greeting becomes a greeting when it is reciprocated, thereby being recognised as such. The nature of the reciprocated greeting in turn determines further communication. It is in this process of co-creation (Gergen, 2009, p. 36) that all acts take on meaning, taking shape as something specific for individuals. As he says, even what appears as a solitary act- such as the writing of this thesis for example- is in effect a conversation, a conversation with scholars who I am reading and their ideas, with my supervisor and her engagement with my ideas, and potential readers of this thesis. All these actions take on meaning because there

exists a community that recognises the meanings of these actions, a community which has itself been formed through the relations among individuals who have previously performed such activities (ibid, pp. 36-39). However, this co-action also constrains in that it has an ordering or patterning effect over time; in turn, this patterning effect makes our actions meaningful and intelligible to others. Gergen proposes that actions acquire meaning only in relation to other actions, rather than in isolation; they acquire meaning because they are performed in relation with and towards others. This idea of co-action or the co-creation of all human action feeds into the notion of agency that Gergen proposes, which is described in the following sub-section.

3.1. Relational agency

With the exception of Crossley, all the scholars mentioned above explicitly deal with how a relational view might transform our understanding of agency. Emirbayer says that a relational view can potentially transform our understanding of key concepts of sociology; he uses the examples of power and agency to explain how this might happen. On agency, he begins by stating that agency is intertwined with the dynamics of the context, "… especially from the problematic features of those situations", i.e. those that present challenges or demand solutions (Emirbayer, 1997, p. 294). It is the "temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments-the temporal-relational contexts of action- which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgment, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 970). Agency is always directed towards something involving relationships with "surrounding persons, places, meanings, and events" (Emirbayer, 1997, p. 294). Agency involves a process in which the individual is engaged with others in collectively organised contexts which are arenas of action; it is ongoing with lived experience, and embedded in context. Emirbayer does a similar exercise to understand power relationally saying that rather than being the property of individuals it emerges from and is expressed in relationships and reflects how they are socially configured. From his reconceptualisation of the macro, meso and micro levels of analysis, it is pertinent to mention what he says about the micro level at which individuals are the subject of observation and analysis. He takes the view that selves and individuals come into being from the recognition accorded to them in relations of mutual trust and reciprocal recognition (Emirbayer, 1997, p. 296). His manifesto also touches upon some of the challenges that face RS and how to deal with some of issues that sociology must confront. Of these, one that seems pertinent to shaping relations

and, therefore, how agency might emerge in relations is the issue of 'categorical membership' or identities, e.g. those of race, gender, class, or ethnicity which Emirbayer argues have become so reified as to "totalize" (ibid, p. 309) identities that are actually multidimensional. While he accepts that issues of identity and categorical memberships can serve a socially progressive agenda so as to advance the cause of marginalised groups, he suggests that a relational view challenges the reification of categories, which he contends are 'essentialist' modes of thought; a relational view deconstructs this essentialist perspective and allows for the 'unfreezing' (ibid, p.308) of categories. However, in so doing the question arises whether he minimises the implications that categorical memberships could have for shaping relations, which he acknowledges are socially configured. His contention that categories such as race, class, or gender give rise to static identities is to cursorily dismiss the real structural inequalities that they effect. Arising from this is a second issue, which is the lack of an explicit link with power especially where particular identities (of gender, class, or race) have clear implications for how power is expressed in relations. This appears to be lost opportunity to take the relational view further in the way that West and Fenstermaker (1995a), for instance, explicitly link power and categorical membership, both of which shape interactions and the resultant experiences. By placing these categories at the centre of all social interactions West and Fenstermaker resurrect the experiences of dominance and subordination that structures produce. In so doing, their model accomplishes to a far greater extent the feat of integrating a structural perspective with individual experience, and the relationships between the two.

Powell's intention to collapse the dualism between agency and structure is encapsulated in his statement that agency and structure should be treated as "…opposed but complementary ways of parsing the same phenomena" (Powell, 2013, p. 198). According to him this means that rather than events fitting into either category, the same event can simultaneously be thought of from either perspective, or that all phenomena can be accounted for either as completely agential or structural. However, in the absence of empirical examples it is unclear what end such an analysis serves, even though it appears to be aimed at breaking down the opposition between agency and structure. Agency is posited as the individual's capacity to participate in relations, and transform some aspect of their context. He argues against the notion of free will on the basis of his earlier conceptualisation of humans as figurations of relations. He adds that structure is produced through agency, i.e. the work that individuals do to transform some aspect of their worlds, and agency itself need not be

intentional. Agency too is structured since all action is the result of figurations (of relations) and individuals are themselves figurations. Powell's emphasis on the term 'radical' draws on how he treats agency as emerging from relationships, rather than being the property of individuals themselves, in combination with the fact that relations are the fundamental constituent of individuals and social institutions.

Gergen too proposes an idea of agency that explicitly challenges ideas of individuals being conscious of their intentions. The idea that all action is co-created is accompanied by the notion of constraint, which is a patterning effect over time (described above). While the idea of constraint explains how actions are made intelligible to others, it raises the question of how new patterns of action and their new meanings evolve, as they must in order for there to be some explanation of change being effected over time. This can be explained through the fact that each individual is involved in multiple relations at any given point, each of which have their own patterns of co-action and resultant meanings. However, all individuals carry residual patterns of actions from one arena of relations to another, which supplement, modify, or transform the already existing actions in each arena or context (Gergen, 2009, pp. 42-43). This produces new forms of action, new patterns of actions, and new meanings all of which may be produced quite unintentionally. This carry-over between relational contexts changes the individual themselves through the vast permutations of co-action that become possible. Gergen contends that co-action is key to forming identities but it remains forever incomplete because of the endless number of actions that are possible (ibid, p. 45). Thus co-action is both constraining as well as flexible, depending on the relational context where it is being performed. This preceding explanation gives some sense of how agency may come about- i.e. actions that produce some material change in the individuals' existing positions. On the issue of agency itself, Gergen notes that neither of the traditional explanations of action- i.e. the causal which proposes that external factors are the cause or trigger of individual's actions, or that of voluntary agency which suggests that individuals are free to act a they choose, are adequate accounts of agency. This is not because of the clear dichotomy of these two perspectives, but because they are both rooted in the notion of the bounded individual. He draws attention, instead, to the fact that agency is rooted in relationship, i.e. in the co-creation of action. According to him the idea of intention, which refers to a purpose in the individual's mind, cannot adequately explain agency since the way that intention is presented is actually a discourse. Moreover, it is a discourse that harks to a fundamentally individualist perspective. For

example, the statement 'I intend to go to work' could mean any number of things: it could be that I am under pressure to earn money; that I wish not to remain at home; that I want the opportunity to socialise with my colleagues or attend a post-work social event; or it could refer to a combination of some or all of these wishes. Each of these is rooted in relational contexts. Could this statement, therefore, be taken as an expression of intent and thereby of agency? Gergen would suggest, instead, that we recognise our actions as rooted in the 'tradition of co-action' (ibid, p. 81) rather than attribute it to the individual's intention to act.

Burkitt (2016) is among the most recent work on relational agency. He states that humans can be conceptualised as being in relation because of their joint productive activity which cause some transformation of reality. He seeks to develop a relational view of Marxism, alluding to Marx's statement that social formations are 'the sum of interrelations, the relations within which these individuals stand' (Marx [1857] 1973 in Burkitt, 2016). In so doing, he draws support for the primacy accorded to relations as a ground in which individuals become. He continues this line of thought by saying that individuals are simultaneously embedded in multiple social relations so that even when they confront or challenge social structures they do so from this standpoint rather than as agents acting alone. Individuals' agency is, therefore, not dependent merely on their relation to structure but on the possibilities and the constraints that result from these multiple relationships in which they are nested, i.e. "the nature of our interdependence with others and how this shapes our mutual interactions" (Burkitt, 2016, p. 331). Based on these understandings of the individual as being 'in relation' he states that all agency emerges only through relational contexts, further specifying that agency is any action that produces some transformation of the individual's world and on others with whom they are in relation, irrespective of whether the person has exercised reflexive choice in that action. This is an acknowledgement that often circumstances may be such as to preclude the possibility of reflexive choice. Reflexivity itself is relational in that our relations to others, which have an emotional dimension, also shape how individuals choose to act. The emotional dimension can be ambivalent because feelings of support and attachment exist alongside contradictory feelings such as of compulsion (ibid, p. 335; see also Connell 2009 on emotional relations, pp. 81-83). Burkitt conceives of relations as unfolding over time and space and of individuals having '…a personal biography that cuts across and intersects the manifolds relations at different times and places' (Burkitt, 2016, p. 336). Following from this he suggests that agency is not the result of any one specific

situation because it is a history of relationships and experiences which shape an individual's actions at all times. He concludes that a relational ontology must therefore allow for a far more complex conceptualisation of agency. Firstly, agency is not an absolute power in individuals but needs to be seen as a matter of degree since individuals, in relationships existing over space and time, are simultaneously acting and being acted upon. Secondly, individuals may not always be conscious of the entire range of contextual forces that bear on their choices. Thirdly, plans are made in interdependence with others, some of which may depend on the skills and capacities of others rather than the self. Lastly, the emotional aspect of relations suggests that choices are not predicated merely on cognitive reflexivity, but also on internal dialogues imbued with ambivalent emotional charges (ibid, p. 336).

As this section has shown there is no one 'relational agency' that dominates this field where there is agreement regarding the importance of relations. However, there are two strands of thinking that have been visible in the work presented above. The first emphasises the importance of relations (as opposed to individuals or groups) as the primary units of analyses. In this view, represented in the work of Emirbayer (1996) and Powell (2013) above, relations are accorded primacy but this does not fully erase the notion of bounded entities, although that notion is relocated from the individual to the relationship in this instance. In the second view, represented most forcefully by Gergen (2009) and also by Burkitt (2016), individuals are constituted through their relations, and their actions too are produced in relationships rather than being the product of individual intention. It is pertinent to mention, that even while some scholars of relational sociology refer to structures, there is strikingly little analyses of how structures might impact relations among individuals, a critique that will be developed in a later section. The idea that individuals are produced in relations, while a powerful concept, is not unique to the literature presented above, and can be discerned in various disciplines to varying degrees. The next section considers a specifically feminist view of relationality.

3.2 A feminist argument for relational agency and autonomy [7]

Another understanding of relational agency and autonomy has evolved from feminist critiques of general conceptions of autonomy and agency. This feminist view of

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[7] I purposely employ both terms, agency and autonomy, here. This follows partly from the title of Mckenzie and Stoljar's (2000) volume, *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self*, but also alludes to the terms being used together and sometimes interchangeably. I discuss this in a later section.

relational autonomy (McKenzie & Stoljar, 2000; Stoljar, 2015) is based in the broader emancipatory politics of feminism, and the general critique that standard conceptions of autonomy are roughly conflated with the somewhat caricatured atomistic, rational, freely choosing individual which reflects distinctly masculinist normative ideals. This view of autonomy evolved in a system of knowledge that marginalised women's interests. The relational perspective is used to designate a range of feminist critiques the crux of which is that individuals are socially embedded and formed within social relationships. These relationships are themselves determined by social factors such as gender, race, or class (McKenzie & Stoljar, 2000, p. 4). While these feminist perspectives critique the standard conception in different ways, all of them agree that a conception of autonomy is nonetheless essential, albeit reconfigured to reflect people's relational embeddedness. Mckenzie and Stoljar (2000) mention five distinct categories of critiques of autonomy from which relational perspectives have emerged in the discipline: symbolic; metaphysical; care; post-modernist; and diversity critiques. The main thrusts of these critiques overlap, persistently targeting the Enlightenment's conception of the rational, freely-acting, independent individual as their starting point (Stoljar, 2015).

The symbolic critique suggests that the idea of self-sufficient independence as the goal of human life excludes understandings of how cooperation and interdependence contribute to human lives, and implies that interdependence is inimical to autonomy. Metaphysical critiques are directed against four specific claims of individualism: individuals are causally isolated; individuals' sense of themselves is separate from their families and communities; agents' essential properties are intrinsic; and lastly, individuals are metaphysically separate beings. In response, feminist theorists argue the following. Firstly, the fact that people are produced by being cared for and nurtured by others proves that they are dependent on others and on relationships to be formed, and in this sense are not causally isolated. Secondly, individuals' sense of themselves is derived from the relationships in which they are embedded precisely because they are produced in relations with others. This is also the criticism directed at the belief that agents' properties are intrinsic, with critics arguing that social relations are constitutive of individuals. Lastly, feminist critics argue that a notion of metaphysically separate beings does not preclude the idea that individuals are constituted in relationships and these are an essential property of individuals. Care critiques target the masculinist ideal which disavows relationships of care and interdependence which are central to, and symbolically associated with women.

Postmodernist critiques tread the familiar ground of criticising the unitary subject, but specifically question the assumption that agents' own motives are transparent to themselves, asserting instead that autonomy is a historically and culturally specific discourse and must therefore reflect broader, complex notions of the agent. The last group of diversity critiques challenges the unitary, cohesive nature of individuals. Drawing on work on identity and intersectionality this again suggests the need to conceptualise more complex individuals who are embedded in multiple relations, and draw on varied identities through those relationships (McKenzie & Stoljar, 2000, pp. 6-12).

Following from the critiques above one can draw the broad contours of relational autonomy. Friedman (2000) mentions two essential conditions for the expression of autonomy. Firstly, it must be a reflection on choices, which comprises not just a cognitive process but also an emotional dimension. Secondly, it must be free of interference, in which Friedman includes coercion but specifically excludes socialisation which influences how people reflect on their choices (ibid, p. 37). She envisages a shift to relational autonomy in four moves. The first is to disassociate autonomy from male traits and values. This is made possible by understanding women's narratives of autonomy which challenge their stereotypical associations with the roles of mothers, wives etc. or imbue these roles with new thinking. She also notes that not all men are encouraged to exercise autonomy, depending on the social contexts in which they are located. The notion of the self-sufficient male is also challenged by communitarian philosophers. These ideas challenge the strong association between masculine traits and autonomy, thereby creating openings for a relational and gender-neutral autonomy. The second move is therefore to reconceptualise autonomy in a way that breaks this association completely. The association of autonomy, and therefore also agency, with male traits risks missing out on women's autonomy and agency. Further, it overlooks the fact that men value some of the same things as women; social relationships for instance. Most importantly, these two steps seek to overcome what could be termed a bias in identifying autonomy as represented only by masculine traits, further compounded by male socialisation which promotes those very traits. This effectively overlooks women's expressions of autonomy and, in the process, perhaps broadly repudiates relationships given their strong association with women's lives. Together these result in considerable distortions in recognising autonomy and agency. The third step, which is explicitly aimed at highlighting the relational character of autonomy, requires that it

should be based strictly in procedural accounts, i.e. be content-neutral. Friedman's reasoning for this is that even the notion of a self-sufficient individual is a prescriptive basis of autonomy since it is associated with masculinist ideals, which must be jettisoned in favour of procedural autonomy which can accommodate more diverse views of individuals' lives. She further reasons that autonomy is a fundamentally relational capacity because it evolves in relationships and in reference to others, and the critical questioning which it entails also arises in a social context, often questioning that very context (Friedman 2000, 37-41). In the fourth step, Friedman considers the implications of relational autonomy for women and their lives. This is partially to caution about the disruption that could potentially result from exercising autonomy. This could happen in one or both of two ways. Firstly, a critical reflection on relationships could result in a repudiation of those that oppress or deny an aspect of the self. It could also conversely be the case that the capacity of act autonomously leads to others rejecting the individual. An individual may also choose to disengage from those prior relationships which impede autonomy. Overall, the critical reflection that autonomy entails results in a greater likelihood of individuals challenging commonly held social norms especially where those norms suppress some significant aspect of the self (ibid, pp. 43-44).

Another basis for a relational view of autonomy rests in substantive accounts of autonomy which pay attention to the content of individuals' actions, unlike procedural accounts which are concerned more narrowly with whether the individual is able to act freely (Stoljar, 2015). Emphasising the content of autonomous actions is an acknowledgement of the need to examine whether individuals are acting under coercive or oppressive conditions. This is important from a feminist perspective to understand under what circumstances women are truly able to act in autonomous ways that also serve their interests, and do not further oppress them. The argument posed by substantive accounts of autonomy is that oppressive socialisation undermines autonomy such that even when people appear to be procedurally autonomous, this may be an effect of their inability to recognise their own oppression. This also recognises that oppression are produced and experienced both relationally and contextually. However, the choice between procedural and substantive accounts is not straightforward. The issue of what women are endorsing, and to what degree they are doing so freely, is considerably debated in feminist discourse and practice. It is in this context that Stoljar (2000) approaches the relational perspective from a different angle, favouring a substantive basis of autonomy even while acknowledging

that procedural autonomy is compatible with the idea of relational beings for three reasons. Firstly, they allow individuals to nurture relations of care and interdependence; secondly, they acknowledge that capacity for autonomy itself develops in social relationships and contexts such as the family; and lastly, procedural autonomy accedes to the diversity of choices that individuals make about how to live their lives (ibid, p. 95). However, Stoljar cautions against a purely procedural autonomy[8] because of what she terms as the 'feminist intuition' which rejects those autonomous acts resulting from identifying with the oppressive aspects of female socialisation (ibid, p. 95), arguing instead for a strong substantive autonomy. Firstly, individuals must endorse their own acts, or believe themselves competent to act in consonance with their internalised values. Additionally, their internalised values must *not* be the product of norms that "…diminish or extinguish agents' capacities for autonomy with respect to decisions governed by the norms" (ibid, p. 108). Individuals, to be truly autonomous, must be able to both act against strong norms and see themselves as competent to act in such ways.

In discussing substantive accounts of autonomy such as Stoljar's above, it should also be noted that they are also the target of critiques that they reflect a dominant Western, liberal feminist discourse which is inadequate to understand women's autonomy in non-Western contexts. Mahmood's (2001; 2012) work on a women's mosque movement in Cairo is one example of an alternative reading of women's autonomy. Although she draws on liberal feminism which she says sees all action as a possible site of resistance to and reconfiguring of norms, she avers that this is based on liberal feminism's underlying emancipatory spirit (Mahmood, 2012, p. 19). This, she suggests, allows only for binary readings of suppression and resistance, but does not account for all the motivations that spur women to action or to aspire to different forms of selfhood (Mahmood, 2001, p. 209). Mahmood is critical of the emancipatory underpinnings of liberal feminism, and especially the idea that agency is predicated on resistance to social norms. In fact she draws attention to how the emancipation from the nuclear family, as a feminist project, was challenged by African American women or South Asian women as they highlighted the cross-cutting interests of race and class, along with gender. Instead she pushes for understanding agency in more nuanced terms as *acting in one's own interests* (Mahmood 2001a, pp. 205-6; Mahmood 2012, p. 157). She exemplifies this by describing how women involved in the mosque

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[8] Stoljar (2000) presents five detailed reasons why procedural autonomy is at odds with the feminist intuition, which are not presented here due to lack of space, building an argument for a strong substantive autonomy.

movement actively cultivate a 'pious self' which brings them into direct conflict with both the secular Egyptian state sometimes embodied by their male family members, as well as the traditionally male authority of Islamic theology (Mahmood, 2001). She suggests that rather than focus on how women of her study uphold traditional Islamic values such as modesty, which are expressed in their comportment and acts such as veiling, it is more important to examine how their actions alter existing gender relations and challenge their subordination (Mahmood, 2012, pp. 153-155)[9].

Mahmood's repudiation of liberal feminist discourse and insistence that women's actions be severed from the belief that women in all cultural contexts desire freedom from subordination has itself been critiqued. McNay (2015), for instance, remarks that Mahmood's questioning of liberal feminism which is essentially a substantive normative position, appears remarkably innocent of the political context where her own research is situated. She contends that Mahmood ignores the class positions of her respondents and how this might affect their identification of certain Islamic norms, and how these norms might be interpreted by practitioners of competing ideas of Islam itself. Further she avers, that attempting to trace women's lives and their agency from their perspective is a feminist project in itself and cannot, therefore, be divorced from the normative premise of equitable gender relations on which it is based even though these should, as Mahmood insists, be understood in their context (McNay, 2015, pp. 49-50). This is only one example of the complexity of women's autonomy and signals the importance of reading actions with reference to their contexts, which will be discussed in greater detail in a later section. This draws attention to the manner in which the term autonomy is used interchangeably with agency, which presents problems of contextualisation. The term autonomy, unlike agency, carries a greater burden of normative prescriptivism, suggesting that individuals are the authors of their own actions. This ignores structural power relations which may be an obstacle to such self-endorsed actions as Madhok, Phillips, and Wilson (2013) note. This is not to suggest that agency does not carry its own weight of meaning; it does, however, offer greater flexibility and has been adapted to alternative, less normative accounts of action.

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[9] I have focused here on how Mahmood deals with autonomy and gender relations. Mahmood, however, asserts that she is equally preoccupied with alternate possible modes of agency and not the emancipatory politics that is implied in feminist readings of the term (Mahmood 2012, x-xi)

This section has presented a brief overview of the basis for feminist conceptions of relational autonomy. These draw on feminist critiques of standard accounts of autonomy, and consistently highlight the essentially social and relational foundations of the person. This is a unifying feature of the various perspectives. This section, although not exhaustive, has purposely presented two accounts of relational autonomy that stand on either side of the procedural-substantive line. This is illustrative of one of the central debates in discussing women's autonomy and agency. However, it should be noted, that in spite of this apparent divide both Friedman's (2000) and Stoljar's (2000) proposals talk about the possibilities of disrupting existing gender relations, thereby retaining the idea of emancipation from patriarchal structures in some form. While Friedman believes the very act of critical reflection makes this possible, Stoljar argues for also attending to the content of that reflection and its resultant behaviour or outcome. Mahmood's (2001, 2012) scholarship, while not a relational reading of autonomy, too exemplifies this debate with a plea for recognising agency that evolves in non-Western contexts and is shorn of liberal assumptions of emancipation. This highlights the third point that relational perspectives constantly emphasise which is attention to context. Not only is context important in terms of the social relationships which constitute people, it is equally so because actions take their meanings from the context and must be understood with reference to it. This contextual, relational reading of autonomy and agency dislodges to some degree the idea of an independent, pre-social agent. However, as McNay (2015) cautions, both procedural and substantive accounts of agency can easily lapse into prescriptive formulations which dismiss the very differences that they claim to value.

3.3 Relational agency: a summary and reflections

The preceding two sections outlined the contours of how relationality could influence conceptions of agency and autonomy. Drawing on diverse strands of scholarship and presenting varied perspectives on relational agency, they argue for according importance to the conception of individuals as being embedded in and constituted through their relationships. There are, however, some striking differences in how this premise is advanced.

3.3.1 Summary

One view for instance, espoused by relational sociologists, argues for placing relations at the centre of analysis, the aim of which is to displace fixed entities such individuals

and groups from the forefront of analysis. Emirbayer (1997) argues for this on the grounds that the relational view better represents the dynamic and processual nature of social life. Even though theorists such as Emirbayer (1997) and Powell (2013) agree that agency emerges in relationships and produces changes in the individual's environment, they retain an emphasis on treating the relations as the primary unit of analysis, rather than the individual in relationship. This is aimed at collapsing the divide between agency and structure. However, Emirbayer retains the idea that agency does modify structures. Powell, seemingly taking a different approach, says that it is unnecessary to categorise phenomena according to whether they are structure or agency, but that they can be analysed as being both agential and structural. It is notable, however, that his position draws remarkably on Bourdieu (1977) when he says that repeated action produces structure and that agency is itself structured. While this view appears to displace fixed entities such as individuals and groups from the focus of analysis and replace them with relations there is the ever-present possibility that relations become the new 'fixed entity'. There is, therefore, the risk that the dynamic and process-oriented account of relations would itself become static. There is simultaneously the opposite risk that focus on constant flow represented by relations may not accurately reflect the individual's lived reality and, therefore, blunt the analytical focus. Further, the idea that the individual is an abstraction, or merely a configuration of relations, as posited by Crossley (in Prandini, 2015) and Powell (2013) denies the embodied nature of the individual. While this may be a theoretical move, it further emphasises the flow of relations and ignores the embodied quality of agency (Bourdieu, 1977).

A second view of relational agency is that individuals are constituted in relationships and agency itself, therefore, cannot but be relational. These perspectives coalesce around the idea that relations are important not as a unit of analysis as relational sociologists suggest, but because firstly, they are implicated in constituting individual identities and secondly, they are sites of action and agency. Retaining individuals at the centre of analysis it argues forcefully against the notion of the bounded individual. This idea of relational agency is represented in the work of Gergen (2009) and Burkitt (2016) while feminist theorists such as Friedman (2000) and Stoljar (2000) talk about a related idea of relational autonomy. This view of the individual is also evident in West and Fenstermaker's (1995a; 1995b) arguments for placing experience of inequality, which is relationally produced, at the centre of analyses to understand how it is produced. Gergen (2009), therefore, prefers to describe agency as co-action to

emphasise that it is co-produced in relationships. Friedman's (2000) view that the capacity for autonomy evolves in and is expressed in relations echoes this idea, while also resonating with Burkitt's (2016) understanding that when individuals act to challenge structures they do so from a position where there both possibilities and constraints that arise from the multiple relations in which they are embedded. The appeal, by scholars mentioned here, to erase the bounded quality of individuals does not rest on the idea of the individual as abstraction, unlike in the work of some relational sociologists, but rather to approach relations as a site that enables and constrains human action, and is thereby actively constitutive of agency. However, there are certain differences in these perspectives as noted in the next subsection.

3.3.2 Issues for reflection

The similarities above are tested by the degree to which these strands of scholarship reflect the politics that attend to conceptions of individuals and their relationships, and to how agency is conceived. This view categorises the above approaches in a very different manner. There are two critical interrelated aspects of the politics that call for reflection.

The first aspect that demands critical reflection is how distinct understandings of agency account for the influence of social structures. This question roughly separates the theoretical positions into two categories. The first is marked by a striking absence of a serious analysis of social structures. The relational sociologists are guilty on this count. Even while they allude to structure, they do so in ways that do not examine the striking influence that structure exercises over agency. Thus Emirbayer (1997), talking about race and class, is almost dismissive in his charge that such sources of identity, which are arguably structural, have been reified and are essentialist modes of thought which present an obstacle to a relational conception of agency. This absence of structure is also evident in the work of Gergen (2009) whose focus on the individual in relation with others, remains largely at the individual level. The danger implicit in such an analysis is that it could easily disregard how those relations, whether at the individual or collective level, are the effects of structures such as race, class, and gender. Of relevance to this critique is that these accounts of relational agency are produced by predominantly male scholars situated in North America and Western Europe, both of which reflect their own forms of privilege. This coincidence of multiple sources of privilege is crucial to how knowledge is produced in ways that allows an erasure of competing views of relations and ignores the very conditions of its

production, which Connell (1987) refers to as the exercise of power in setting the agenda. It is this very form of privileged discourse that has been critiqued in feminist scholarship (Moore, 1988).

The second aspect of politics is that of the conception of the subject. There is a fundamental agreement for the need to displace the notion of the strongly bounded, unitary, self-sufficient individual in almost all the accounts of agency and autonomy that have been presented above. Gergen (2009), for instance, critiques modernity for the unfettered dominance of the 'bounded individual', showing how this concept is implicit in present economic and political formations. His argument for blurring the boundaries of individuals and understanding how they are relationally constituted is without doubt a political act as much as one of academic scholarship. Burkitt's (2016) appeal echoes a similar politics. Their views find resonance in the arguments posed by feminist scholars, who also demand an understanding of the relationally constituted individual. However, when demanded from feminists, it takes on a different political hue. Feminist demands, steeped in an emancipatory politics, insist on a relational view in order to account for how women have been subordinated through the structuring effects of patriarchy, or race, or class which are manifest at the micro-level in relationships (Moore, 1988; McKenzie & Stoljar, 2000). In addition, part of the feminist project is also to extricate women from their relationships, as it were, and accord them recognition as individuals apart from the roles of wife, mother, daughter, and sister (McNay, 2015). We are therefore, faced with two somewhat divergent perspectives, each of which confronts different issues of politics but is presented in exactly the same language, i.e. 'relational being'. This requires a balancing act between three mutually competing demands. The first is to understand the individual as relationally constituted. The second is to recognise that these relations can be both supportive and oppressive, especially when they are the effect of structural inequality. Nonetheless, they remain sites of agency though this is qualified by their enabling or constraining effects on it. The third, which I would argue is crucial to feminist politics, is to not lose sight of the individual even as they are enmeshed in and constituted by their relationships. This presents a critical challenge since the feminist project is itself based on critiques of power relations between men and women, where each are categories rather than individuals. This is, of course, the source of critique within some strands of feminist scholarship but nonetheless demands further attention. It is only once women have been accorded the recognition of individuals, aside from their relationships, that we can begin to talk about women's agency, relational or otherwise. Only then can we

maintain a distinction between the two seemingly similar ideas of individuals being constituted in and by relations, and being subsumed within them. To elaborate, this implies that even as we recognise that women are constituted relationally, as are all individuals, this does not imply that they cease to have desires and interests that strikingly individual, even if these coincide with others with whom they are in relation. Walking this tightrope remains necessary, from a feminist viewpoint, to guard against the latter so as to enable women to overcome their subordinate status, which too is produced in relationships.

The preceding sections of this chapter have presented accounts of agency and structure that theorise the nature of social relations and how change could come about. In the subsequent sections, I look at empirical accounts of women's agency to understand how it has been identified and what makes it count as agency.

4. Conceptualising Indian women's agency

This section is devoted to the question of how has women's agency in India been conceptualised? It asks two further associated questions: firstly, whether conceptualisations of women's agency are distinct from general conceptualisations of agency and, if so, what sets them apart; and secondly, what value do such distinctions add to our understandings of women's agency particularly, and agency more generally. In order to answer these questions I take up empirical accounts of women's agency and examine their conceptual bases for recognising agency as such. In order to understand these accounts, the first step is to get a sense of the cultural context in which this agency manifests. The first sub-section is therefore a brief description of the Indian cultural context with reference to women's position and gender relations. This is followed by empirical examples from the literature on women's agency in India. There are two main criteria on which basis I select the research presented here: firstly, whether there is a concept of agency that the literature advances; and secondly, whether the literature presents a sufficient account of the narrative on which basis agency is identified. The focus on agency is self-evident, with the aim of understanding how a theory of agency been applied in the field. This illuminates what the theory tells us about agency, about women, and whether it applies in a cross-cultural context. The last two assume importance in light of the fact that most theoretical work on agency has evolved in Western contexts and largely conceived in the context of a male subject, as mentioned earlier. Through this process I also wish to analyse whether or not studies theorise agency clearly, either on basis of existing theoretical

representations or whether they advance new models of agency, or whether agency is a catch-all phrase for 'something' that women are thought or seen to be doing. The reason for focusing on narratives is to understand firstly, from whose perspective agency is being recognised, and show this narrative has been related to the context of its production.

4.1. The cultural context

Women's identities in India are intertwined with wifehood and motherhood as evident in the fact that marriage is near universal (Palriwala, 1999), seemingly reinforcing ideas presented earlier about the inherent relationality of all individuals. Marriage not only establishes conjugal ties but also serves to regulate women's sexuality and is, in turn, intricately tied up with notions of family and community honour (Chowdhry, 1993). Women are also thought to be the repository of cultural values and norms in their roles as mothers and, therefore, pass these on through their children (Uberoi, 1993). Family is therefore a central site of the reproduction of gender relations combining material, affective, and social relations and signalling identity and social status (Dube, 1988; Palriwala, 1999).

The structure of family varies across India, taking diverse forms which in turn affect women's roles and status, even as it has seen changes over time. Karve (1953/1993) distinguishes primarily between north and south India; whereas marriage in north India classically takes place between unrelated strangers, with the exchange of dowry, and is hypergamous, marriage in south India, following the Dravidian pattern, takes place between kin, with bride-price payments, and is usually isogamous. Marriage in western and eastern India is thought to roughly adhere to the north Indian pattern. In practice there are variations within all these groupings. North Indian marriage subordinates women to a greater degree because women have limited contact with natal kin due to marrying strangers, and no claims on their natal family wealth after marriage. Newly married women are the least powerful members of their marital families, and subject to the authority of their husbands, and all senior male and female kin (Sharma 1978; Chowdhry 1993). In contrast, south Indian women enjoy greater mobility between their natal and marital homes, and greater claims on natal kin support in large part because they traditionally marry within the kin group (Kapadia, 1995). Kapadia (1995) notes that marriage patterns vary across caste and class in Tamil Nadu, where south Indian kinship patterns are epitomised, with brahmins following more north Indian patterns and likely to marry non-kin and traditionally 'lower' castes

practising more Dravidian patterns of marriage. For north India, Sharma (1978) and Wadley (1995) both show that women's positions vary with life-stage, economic status, and the nature of natal kin support that they are able to claim in practice (see also Grover 2011). Vera-Sanso (1999) argues, in the case of south India, that although traditionally mothers-in-law dominate relationships with their daughters-in-law, this relationship too is affected- sometimes inverted- by their relative economic positions. Marriage is predominantly virilocal in most of India, although there are exceptions among matrilineal communities such as the Nairs of Kerala in the south, and the Khasis and Jaintias of Meghalaya in northeast India. Among these communities marriage has traditionally been uxorial with children thought to belong to their matrikin. Nongbri (1993) describing matrilineal descent among the Khasis, says that even though wealth is inherited by the youngest daughter through the female line, this does not automatically confer her with power and authority. She administers the family wealth in consultation with her mother's brother, which gives him power in the family[10]. Further, women's traditional inheritance rights neither erase the emphasis on their chastity and modesty as symbols of family honour nor guarantee women's inclusion in traditional community meetings (Nongbri, 1993). Nonetheless, there are examples of women in some tribal communities, such as among the Kondhs of Odisha in the east, who traditionally express their views and are heard in community meetings (Abrol, 2016). This is not say that marriage forms and relations have been static; where earlier, the bride and groom did not see each other until after their wedding, it is now far more common in both urban and rural areas for the couple to have at least seen each other, if not have met a few times in chaperoned situations. Changes have also come about as a result of political, economic and social developments (Basu & Ramberg, 2015). Parry's (2004) description of marriage in an adivasi community suggests that where marriage was earlier more fluid with divorce and remarriage not uncommon, it now more often follows a mainstream pattern of a lifelong monogamous union. Recent times have seen men from Haryana in northwest India marrying women from as far as Kerala in the south, due to acutely falling sex ratios in Haryana. Superficially, this challenges traditional caste and community endogamy although this does not automatically mean that gender relations themselves have undergone a drastic change.

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[10] In 1986, the then all-male Meghalaya state legislature enacted the Meghalaya Succession Act allowing Khasi and Jaintia men to will their self-acquired property as they chose. Nongbri (1993) comments that this law was aimed at reducing the perceived female bias among these communities although gender relations are far more complex than this.

These comments, above, demonstrate that family is also a site for the generation of wealth. Marriage is an occasion when transfers of wealth such as dowry and bride-price take place. Changes in dowry and bride-price practices reflect wider changes in society and political economy and have implications for women's positions and gender relations. Dowry, which is traditional in north India, has become more widespread across classes and castes, increased in monetary value, and changed form with grooms' families making demands for cash and consumer durables (Palriwala, 1989). Palriwala situates this both in economic changes since colonial times, especially the spread of a capitalist economic model, along with continued symbolic subordination of women[11]. She suggests dowry inflation has become such that daughters have come to symbolise dowry itself and argues that it has further devalued their already subordinate status (Palriwala, 1989). Kapadia argues, in a slightly similar vein, that an increasing shift from bride-price to cash dowries in Tamil Nadu has resulted partly from a shift in traditional occupations to small and medium scale entrepreneurship, with dowry being used as capital investment and demanded in order to guarantee that the bride will later enjoy a comfortable life[12]. She further suggests that this shift curtails Tamil women's traditional freedom (Kapadia, 2003). Polit (2012) noting a similar shift in central Himalayan communities argues, in contrast, that this has been enabling of women's agency.

Family is also a key site of organising labour. Women are assigned the roles of carers for children, the elderly, and the infirm. This marginalises their earning potential while engaging them in unpaid work. In agrarian communities, this is marked by women's relegation to tasks that are seen as ancillary to the main agricultural activities, while they in urban areas they are often tasked with jobs that highlight their domestic or nurturing roles, such domestic work or teaching. Combined with their lack of control over property or assets, this combination of roles ensures that they remain

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[11] See Palriwala (1989) for a succinct explanation of evolving dowry practices associated with socio-economic change from the colonial period onwards.

[12] Kapadia's (2003) argument is that dowry is now a form of upward class mobility, and a symbol of modernity finding expression in the cultivation of individual 'self-made' status as opposed to ascribed, caste-based status. She grounds this in wider changes in political economy associated with capitalist growth, and social transformation in Tamil Nadu. Resultant kinship patterns reflect these changes with marriage no longer confined within the known kin group as earlier. White (2017), discussing the spread of dowry in Bangladesh, similarly grounds her analysis in broader socio-economic changes, concluding that increasing dowries go hand-in-hand with capitalist modernity. She attributes this partly to the intense competition for scarce resources with dowries seen as a source of business capital and to strengthen men's weakened economic positions. They also thereby re-inscribe patriarchal ideologies of male provision and female dependence.

subordinate vis-à-vis men (Agarwal, 1994). Further, while economic change has brought women into the labour force, in recent years their participation has actually declined from 37 percent in 2005-05 to 29 percent in 2009-10. Discussing the importance of control over economic resources and how it increases their 'bargaining power' in families, Agarwal (1994) states that just because women do not express overt defiance against the gendered division of power this should not be misconstrued as unequivocal submission on their parts. Rather, most women express their consciousness of their vulnerable positions through covert action which reflects the constraints on overt resistance to their subordination. This brief overview serves to highlight the diversity in marriage and family structures across India and also that, in spite of these regional variations, women in all regions are in a subordinate position to men. Moreover, it highlights the degree to which Indian women are enmeshed in relationships and points some way to how these relationships invariably shape their lives. The next section goes on to examine accounts of how women exercise agency and what forms it takes.

4.2. Accounts of women's agency in India

This section looks at how women's agency has been conceptualised in empirical accounts of women's lives. One of the difficulties of the extracting agency from the vast literature on various aspects of women's lives is its entanglement with a slew of terms: empowerment, voice, and autonomy. One influential view is that agency is an key component of empowerment; empowerment is another term that will therefore be foregrounded in discussion in this section. In mainstream development discourse (e.g. World Bank 2012; 2014), women's agency is exemplified in their ability to take advantage of economic opportunities and control over their earnings and expenditures; freedom of movement; control regarding decisions about marriage age, remaining in a marriage, and childbearing; freedom from violence; having in voice in society and being able to influence policy. Women's agency also has the benefit of promoting their children's welfare and, finally, collective agency can bring about policy and social transformations (World Bank, 2012, pp. 151-152). This conception of agency, combining both the freedom to choose effectively and convert those choices into desired action, has been a staple of development discourse, with a history in programmes that aim to enable women's agency and empowerment.

4.2.1. Agency in women's empowerment interventions

Interventions to enhance women's agency often show a neat transformation from women constrained by circumstances into being able to overcome their circumstances. While these transformations may be possible because of interventions where women have been trained not just with practical skills and training but also with skills to critically reflect on their positions, this portrayal of the changes that are wrought tend to ignore critical aspects of structural relationships. This is visible in a range of domain specific interventions.

Swendeman et al (2015) discuss a programme that aimed to secure the rights of women sex-workers. They specifically examined what made women choose to remain in this work rather than return to their families, once their families had re-established relationships with them. They described women's choices to stay in sex work as a form of agency even though contact with families was maintained. This construction of choice and agency ignores how the economic basis for relationships is a significant factor in altering how sex-worker women's families view them; i.e. the fact that they are able to provide financially for their families and also donate to local moral causes, e.g. temples, had a significant effect on their families' acceptance of them, which was rooted in local morality and views of relationships. In contrast to Swendeman et al's approach, is Magar's (2003) description of conflict resolution 'courts' in a lower-middle class Delhi slum where both members of the couple and, if necessary, their families are called in to resolve conflicts, especially violence, between the couple. The court is run from a feminist perspective which recognises women's rights- especially freedom from violence. The aim of the court is to resolve the couple's conflicts and it rarely advocates the end of the marital relationship, unless as last resort. This intervention is far more alive to the local meanings attached to marriage, which arises from two reasons: firstly, that women who form the court are drawn from the community themselves, and recognise the difficulty of seen to be breaking up relationships/ families and secondly, it is clear recognition of a context where women living alone might face greater difficulties in the community. The intervention also recognises extended family relationships in this context; even with its feminist slant it encourages women also to be realistic and make adjustments in their marital homes. It is also not scared of taking to task women's families when they are seen to aggravate the conflict. This last point is reflective of Grover's (2011) observation, in a very similar setting, that women's families sometimes undermine their daughters' marriages. She gives the example of how when women's families want access to their daughter's labour they

aggravate conflicts so that their daughters return to the natal home for some period only letting them return when their labour is no longer required. Both Magar (2003) and Grover (2011) highlight that relationships are mix of various material and affective components, neither just one nor the other.

Paul et al (2015) describe women's agency in the context of reproductive health. Their study infers women's agency in their choice of abortion as a method of child spacing when they are unable to avoid conception, or the fact that they try and return to their natal homes to avoid conception for some time. While there may be elements of agency in these two actions, albeit quite constrained the authors fail to devote attention to the very fact that women are unable to demand the use of contraception in their relationships with their husbands. Further, the decisions regarding abortion are usually taken along with, or substantially influenced by, their mothers-in-law. While conceding gender norms are at play and young women/ wives remain relatively powerless, this representation of agency does not account sufficiently for the patriarchal ideology at work in controlling women's fertility.

This is far more evident in Unnithan-Kumar's discussion of female-selective abortion (FSA) (Unnithan-Kumar, 1999; 2009). Placing this in the context of women's overall subordinate status and their neglect, she argues for understanding women's agency as an outcome of structural factors that impinge on the decision to abort by accounting for the views of doctors, community health workers who facilitate FSA, and the women themselves. The decision to abort, while not easy for women, is placed in the context of limited resources or acute poverty and how this material condition will play out when having to fix daughters' marriages; the reality that women's lives after marriage can be especially harsh when dowry is seen as inadequate is significant consideration. She also notes that rarely is a first or second female foetus aborted, saying that it is not that girls are unwanted but that the financial burden of having more daughters is what creates an issue. A woman doctor describes the problem of how when she refused to abort female foetus on ethical grounds, the mother later abandoned the baby and was herself beaten by family for not having undergone an abortion; this raises the troubling question of what is ethical under these circumstances (Unnithan-Kumar, 2009). Unnithan-Kumar devotes much greater discussion of the structural contexts in which decisions are made, resulting in agency seeming much reduced as compared to the previous studies. However, this much-reduced agency is perhaps a far more realistic representation of how agency is

manifest, in small everyday actions. On the one hand FSA serves to reinforce the devaluation of women, and women certainly do not take these decisions alone- they do so in the context of family, material provision but, importantly, also in imagining what a future life for a woman will be like if they cannot provide well for her, which shows that FSA is a complex situation demanding a more than a dichotomous understanding of good and bad.

Sridhar (2008) describing a World Bank funded programme to improve child nutrition in Tamil Nadu, in the 1980s, shows in her analysis that construction of agency is entirely predicated on individuals' behaviour. In the programme that Sridhar describes, mothers are targeted as the key to improving their children's nutrition. This rests on the three ideas; firstly, that nutritional outcomes are entirely affected by individual behaviour, i.e. mothers feeding their children; secondly, health education is targeted only at mothers, reinforcing their traditional roles as carers but also feminising what is thought of as ignorance; and thirdly, the idea that traditional beliefs about feeding are feminised, backward, and ignorant. In this programme, women who responded to the health education and feedback from monitoring their children's nutrition by changing feeding patterns in accordance with the advice were seen as women with agency, and construed as good mothers. It is this individual behaviour, i.e. responding to modern health education, that is seen as agency. Notably, however, this behaviour is understood without reference to the socio-economic contexts in which women are located (Sridhar, 2008) in which men are the greater decision makers regarding household spending and/ or the there may be simply be insufficient resources to feed children adequately. This purposeful ignorance of how structures constrain and enable agency draws a very false picture of what agency should look like.

Studies such as Paul et al (2015), Swendeman et al (2015) and the interventions critiqued by Sridhar (2008) are illustrative of the view of agency is predicated in individualised behaviour and the idea that women need only be provided with the appropriate resources in order to lift themselves out of their subordinate status. Critiques of this discourse highlight the largely instrumentalist view of agency that it posits, with women's agency seen as a medium to increase efficiency in the economy or harness the thus far unfulfilled economic potential of women. These views of agency that appear in this development discourse have four distinct features. Firstly, they are intricately tied up with very economistic discourses (Evans, 2013; Wilson, 2013). While they recognize that women's subordination is produced through gender

norms and the way in which these shape relationships, I would argue that in their conceptualisation of outcomes these same relationships are given short shrift. The feminist critiques of the family and kinship, of women's work, and their relationships, which have partially provided the impetus to these very interventions, and which have been critical to understanding the interconnected nature of these aspects of people's lives are missing in this view of agency. Secondly, this discourse conveys the view that agency is something that did not exist prior to development interventions. Agency almost appears as something endowed by development itself. White (2015) argues that this constructs the development agencies that facilitate interventions as agents and women as the passive recipients of agency (see Sridhar, 2008). Presented in this manner, it is difficult to discern how the intervention enhances women's agency. This involves a blunt description, in broad strokes, of women's lack of knowledge or representing that knowledge as ignorance. In contrast, post-intervention, the newly acquired knowledge and action predicated on it is more easily presented as agency. This leads to an associated difficulty of over-identifying agency, which I discuss in a later section. Thirdly, the emphasis on women's acting is resonant of the masculinist ideal of agency which has been much targeted by feminist critiques. There is simultaneously a view of dramatic transformation that is wrought by women's agency. Although the nature of transformation may be more visible at the scale of the everyday and therefore not challenge entrenched gender norms at a structural level, the emphasis on the number of women who have been included in interventions are presented as the grand scale of transformation that is underway. This is, of course, an exaggerated view and one that needs to be checked. These features, I would argue, conform in far greater measure to the idea of agency as free will, since even though they understand patriarchal structures as the source of women's subordination, the idea that women's agency can be endowed by an outside intervention seems to suggest that agency exists outside those structures.

4.2.2. The fantasy of women's agency

These four features of agency, above, serve to highlight a difficulty that accompanies 'resurrecting' agency, by which I mean uncovering agency that is thought to have been hidden. O'Hanlon (1988), in her critique of the construction of the subaltern subject, argues that while the subaltern subject has agency that may thus far have been neglected, the resurrection of this subject as a rational, freely-acting agent ignores the historical context in which that agency has been shaped. Importantly, it ignores the constraints under which that agency has developed and operated. It is the very fact

that the subaltern subjects' agency may be so constrained that it cannot, in fact, adhere to the masculinist ideal of freely choosing rational subject. O'Hanlon's argument is valid in the context of any marginalised group, and echoes McNay's (2015) similar point in the context of feminist conceptualisations of agency. Further, this conceptualisation of agency is accompanied, I would argue, with the risk of over-identifying agency. This stems from the somewhat decontextualised rendering of agency that is produced in this discourse, and which identifies any action that does not conform to existing (here) gender norms as agentic. This produces the twin problems earlier identified in feminist critiques, i.e. over-identification of one type of action as agency, and a simultaneously under-identification of real manifestations of agency which do not easily fit this template. This template tends to employ a binary view of action versus passivity, or speech versus silence, without recognising that each of these forms of action could be agency. This problem re-emphasises the need to understand the cultural context in which agency is manifest to understand when action is agency and when it is not, and equally what appears as passivity could in fact be a choice to not act following critical reflection of one's interests. This may well be, as Agarwal (1994) has pointed out, a recognition of constraint and the futility of particular forms of action in particular circumstances, but is nonetheless the product of critical reflection. The studies that are cognisant of structural constraints present far more nuanced understanding of agency but also tends to be less positive about women's agency, rather than presenting it as a triumph of development interventions or some kind of feminist consciousness that emerges from that. In fact, such studies allude to the issue of how agency varies in degree, in different situations (Burkitt, 2016) rather being achieved or endowed through an intervention. Agency is not a 'thing' to achieve, or an individual characteristic; rather, it emerges in the situation, in configurations of relationships, in specific circumstances. I will discuss this last point in much greater detail through my findings in chapters 8 and 9.

4.2.3. Forms of agency

This section is devoted to the second question that I raised in the introduction: how is agency identified or in what action is it seen to be manifest. In the previous section, I highlighted how conceptualisations of agency which rest on the idea of the freely-acting subject tend to result in two associated problems, over-identifying agency in all action and simultaneously missing forms of agency that may not manifest as overt action (Madhok, 2007). This problem is retained in the interventions described above

and I would argue that feminist discourse might also be guilty of missing out on diverse forms of agency in non-western contexts.

Agency is largely indentified in overt action as studies in previous section show. One alternate forms of agency that has been clearly recognized is speech. A most prominent work in this context is that of Abu-Lughod who describes lyric poetry as a form of resistance (Abu-Lughod, 1985; 1990). In the Indian context, Raheja and Gold (1994) describe women's ritual songs, which are openly sexual, as a form of resistance. These take place as performances sometimes in mixed groups. I would, however, hesitate to characterise them as a form of women's agency for one significant reason: that they take place in an authorised setting in which these songs are meant to be performed[13]. Even though they talk about their husbands and mothers-in-law in a seemingly critical fashion, the question arises as to what degree they are the result of women's critical reflection about their own circumstances. Further, do they in any way alter women's positions or gender norms? It does not seem apparent that they do. In contrast, I would argue, that Ram (2007) offers a far more compelling account of speech as a form of agency in what she describes as Tamil women's laments. Tamil women's traditional poetry, which celebrate girls' attaining puberty and growing into womanhood by likening this to the blossoming of flowers, are sung at ritual occasions. Women take these songs and turn them into a lament which challenges this celebratory view of womanhood, by singing instead of how womanhood is actually a existence of hardship, far removed from the idyll that is traditionally described in this poetry. Further, they sing these songs in public so that they can be heard chiefly by men at whom they are aimed. While this may not necessarily alter their material positions, it speaks to a critical reflection on their lives and challenges a dominant script of marriage and family. In this sense, it is similar to what Abu-Lughod (1985; 1990) describes; both authors are careful not to imbue these forms of speech with a western feminist consciousness that may not exist in these communities, even while recognising these as forms of subtle resistance or agency.

However, in these alternative accounts too, there is a danger of over-identifying anything and everything as agency. Thus, I believe, that Polit (2012) is mistaken in

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[13] There are other similar examples where women are able to assume roles in opposition to their traditional docility, the 'lath-maar' Holi being one of them. The Holi festival marks the onset of summer and in a well-known spectacle in the north Indian town of Mathura, women celebrate by taking to the streets with sticks in order to beat men. This is a mock performance and all returns to normal the next day.

identifying silence as agency when she describes it as part of the repertoire of the ideal daughter-in-law to improve her situation. Kinship and patriarchal gender norms, demand docility of a daughter-in-law in the Indian context and to act in that way to endear themselves to their mothers-in-law is to adhere to that norm. While it might improve the woman's situation in no way does it challenge norms. Instead, I would argue that what she describes is the reinscription of patriarchal structure through women's docile behaviour. Rao (2014), in contrast, offers a far more nuanced view of agency in describing the lives of Dalit women in Tamil Nadu. In a situation where Dalit women are compelled to work from a young age in adverse circumstances, she shows how the choice to withdraw from paid work once women contract a good marriage can be understood as a form of agency. Rao underscores the importance of understanding the context in which women may choose to withdraw from adverse incorporation in labour and instead choose more traditionally valued roles of wife and mother, in which they feel they have greater opportunities to influence their husbands and the material conditions of the household.

One of the difficulties in identifying alternate forms of agency is that there are too few examples. In the context of silence and apparent passivity, Seymour (2006) rightly argues that there is an insufficiently psychological understanding of what motivates particular behaviour in understandings of resistance, about which she talks; I would argue that this also true of agency for which we need a better psychological understanding of individuals, which is relatively understudied in accounts of resistance and agency. Studies that are instructive on this count are in the realm of in-depth narrative accounts which seek to understand narrative identities (McAdams, 2013). Riessmann (2000a), for instance, uses narrative to understand what is goes through the mind of the person, arguing that only through this is it possible to understand how norms are challenged. Her research in the context of childlessness seeks to understand how women are able to stave off or challenge the stigma associated with this situation. Madhok (2007), although describing a different context, also describes in detail how women make small changes in their behaviour depending on contexts which allow them to challenge gender norms; in the case of women *panchayat* members, for instance, one woman dismisses the need to veil herself in the official setting of the *panchayat* meeting even though she may continue to do so in non-official, traditional settings. In doing so she constructs a clear narrative which reflects the development of her thinking on this score. Lal (2011) describes the lives of single working class women in Delhi who employ the narrative of compulsion to portray their

singlehood in a positive light. They do so by emphasising their contribution to their families and looking after the needs of parents and siblings, emphasising their 'sacrifice' in not getting married, rather than surrendering to the notion that their singlehood is bad in itself. All these examples link with the broader notion of narrative identity (McNay, 1999; McAdams, 2013) which presents two opportunities for understanding agency. Firstly, it allows an individual to weave their own experiences, and the resulting disparate views of themselves, into a coherent identity. This involves storying one's life into a coherent narrative which allows for some consistency in our own self-image. The second associated point is that while a particular experience at the time when it takes place may have a different meaning for us than it does many years later when it becomes part of the larger narrative of our life. For instance, at the time when an event occurs we might not construe our own actions as agentic but might do so many years later when fitting into events that have taken place later. A sense of agency may stem from this narrative process. This is something that I will discuss further in later chapters.

5. Conclusion and moving forward

This chapter has drawn together diverse strands of scholarship to understand what women's agency might mean and what it looks like. It began with theoretical accounts of agency that sought to understand how agency and structure are interlinked. In order to arrive at a clear framework of how agency emerges in the face of structural power, I drew on the combined scholarship of Bourdieu (1977; 1990), Connell (1987) and West and Fenstermaker (1995a) to show how macro structures are represented in micro interactions and how they may shape and be (re) shaped in turn.

Following this, I examined how theoretical perspectives of agency understand relationality and presented a range of work from the field of relational sociology. While some of these perspectives were less emphatic about the role of structures, other took cognisance of the fact that structures are reflected in individuals' relationships. It is this latter perspective that I find useful in understanding relationality.

Turning to accounts of women's agency I identified two problems: first, that there is insufficient reference to how structure shapes agency, and second, a tendency to narrow the focus of agency to overt actions. In looking at alternate readings of agency, which adopt a more nuanced perspective of agency and action, while there was

greater recognition of the wider range of forms that women's agency could take, it sometimes went too far in the opposite direction resulting in an overidentification of agency. There is a need to maintain a balance between these two opposites, which each present problems. I suggest that this is best done through a greater attention to the context in which agency emerges and understanding what actions mean in those particular contexts. This demands that greater attention be paid to the range of actions that women resort to and simultaneously some understanding of a psychological perspective of what those actions mean for the persons. This, I argued, could be done by understanding narrative identities.

Understanding the range of actions in their contexts, I suggest, complements the macro framework of the links between structure and agency. It is attention to micro actions in women's lives which can tell us something about how habitus and practice can gradually change and thereby bring about some change at the broader structural level. This is the framework through which I will discuss my findings in chapters 5 through 8, as I move further. The next chapter describes my methodology and how I came to collect my primary data.

Chapter 3: Methodology

1. Introduction

This thesis is concerned with how women represent agency in narratives of their lives. It draws on data that I collected within the framework of the Wellbeing and Poverty Pathways project (WPP project)[14] during which I did 15 months of fieldwork over a three-year period in two rural areas, one each in Zambia and India. The WPP project employed a mixed methods framework; it used qualitative methods to design a survey and explore local constructions of wellbeing and quantitative methods to model wellbeing statistically. I draw on the qualitative data from surveys and in-depth interviews and the focus of my analysis in this thesis is distinct from that undertaken in the project as a whole. Even while engaged in surveys which were primarily concerned with quantitative data collection, my focus was as much on the narratives, meanings, and descriptions that contextualised the numerical scores rather than on just the reported numbers. I continually turned to the narratives to understand people's lives and what constitutes their ideas of wellbeing. In so doing, my focus was on three interlinked themes. The first was to attend to people's voices in their own terms. The second was on understanding the framing effects of the research encounter and how this affected data production. My third focus was on understanding how interpersonal power dynamics affect the research process. Even though I conducted research in both India and Zambia, I have chosen to focus on Sarguja (India) for this research in order to ground my analysis in a specific context and literature.

This chapter is set out as follows. I will first describe the WPP project in brief to set the background of my own research. I will then discuss my motivation for undertaking this research. The third section describes how fieldwork was set up and then in the next section I go on to describe my own interests during the course of the fieldwork, i.e. collecting qualitative information and the forms this took. Following that I will highlight the factors that affected this process. I will then discuss the process of qualitative data analysis. Finally, I will conclude with some reflections on this process.

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2. Background to the research: The Wellbeing and Poverty Pathways Project

The WPP project grew out of the widespread interest in wellbeing that is current in international development and social policy circles more generally. There were two related objectives of the project. The first was to develop and statistically validate a conceptual model of wellbeing. The second was to examine the added value of using subjective perspectives of wellbeing to understand people's movement into, within and out of poverty.

In doing both these things there was great awareness of the fact that most measures of wellbeing had been tested in Western contexts; we felt that there was a strong need to understand non-Western constructions of wellbeing in their own terms. Thus the very starting point of this research was to acknowledge these differences and allow these to lead the way in which questions about wellbeing were framed (White, Gaines, & Jha, 2014).

With these starting points we did field research in two relatively marginalised rural communities, one each in India (in Sarguja district, Chhattisgarh state) and Zambia (Chiawa, Kafue District in Lusaka province). We did two rounds of fieldwork in each place, with each period of fieldwork lasting for between three to four months; in Zambia, we did fieldwork in August-November 2010 and July-October 2012, and in India, we did fieldwork in February-May 2011 and February-June 2013. In both places I led the fieldwork working with researchers from the local areas.

2.1 The Inner Wellbeing model

The model that the WPP project developed is the Inner Wellbeing model (IWB). It evolved from a broader framework developed through the Wellbeing in Developing Countries Research Group (WeD)[15] at the University of Bath that describes wellbeing as being derived through the interrelatedness of the material, relational and subjective aspects of people's lives (Gough & McGregor, 2007; White, 2010).

The IWB model theorises wellbeing as a seven-domain model, each of which refers to different aspects of people's lives, and that people's wellbeing is enabled or constrained by their perceptions of these interrelated aspects of their lives. These seven domains are economic confidence; participation and agency; social connections; close relationships; physical and mental health; the self referring to people's views of

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[15] WeD (2002-07) was an interdisciplinary project researching the social and cultural constructions of wellbeing in communities in four countries (Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Peru, and Thailand) based at the University of Bath.

themselves; and values and meaning, referring to the overall sense of meaning that people derive from their lives (White, Gaines, & Jha, 2014).

The IWB framework has developed through extensive piloting and fieldwork during the course of the WPP project[16]. This process was informed largely by qualitative research which took various forms; it involved consultations with our partner organisations in both countries, as well as preliminary group discussions and individual interviews with people in the community. It also involved the thorough testing of the translated research instrument with the research teams and community members. Thus qualitative information was a significant part of developing the IWB framework (White & Jha 2014).

2.2 The research instrument

The research instrument[17] was a survey with three parts; the first section comprised of basic demographic and health questions; the second section began with a global happiness question and comprised of the IWB questions; and the third section consisted of questions about economic indicators, access to welfare entitlements, and two questions asking about overall economic position at the time of the interview and how this had changed over the previous five-year period. The IWB questions were presented with five pre-set answers. People were asked to choose their responses from these answers which were graduated along a five-point scale with the first answer representing the lowest level of wellbeing and the fifth representing the highest level of wellbeing for each question. The scale was bipolar, anchored by strong negative ('1') and strong positive ('5') answers at both ends, and with a neutral mid-point ('3'). For instance, the answer scale for the question 'If guests come do you feel you can look after them in the proper way?'[18], was as follows: '(1) not at all'; '(2) very little'; '(3) just ok'; '(4) somewhat well'; '(5) very well'.

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[16] For more on the development of the model see White and Jha (2014)

[17] This was the final version of the research instrument, which evolved over a four-year period starting with collaboration with Oxfam Hong Kong (OHK) in 2009 (White, 2009) and over the course of the WPP project. The research instrument's development is also described in White et al (2012)

[18] This was the second question in the IWB survey's 'economic satisfaction' (2011) or 'economic wellbeing' (2013) domain.

3. Why qualitative?

In this section I will briefly describe my motivation for undertaking my doctoral research. I describe initially how various aspects of the WPP project drew my attention to a disjuncture between qualitative and quantitative data. In this context, three inter-related points along with my earlier training as a mental health professional and qualitative researcher were instrumental in my decision to base my analyses on qualitative data. In the second section I explain how qualitative data analysis is suitable to explore women's agency in personal relationships.

3.1 The starting point

I began working on the WPP project one year before starting my PhD. My fieldwork took place within the parameters of the WPP project which directed most of my time to collecting quantitative data. The large sample presented the opportunity to talk with many more people than I could have had I undertaken independent research. In the process of collecting both quantitative and qualitative data I became alert to a 'tension' between the words and the numbers, resulting in reflection on two points. The first is that rendering people's descriptions of their thoughts and feelings into numbers conflicted with my training based on the precept that the research relationship lies ultimately in listening to people empathetically and in their terms, which is crucial to the quality of information gleaned from the research encounter. Changing verbal descriptions of thoughts and feelings into numbers disregarded this fundamental aspect of the relationship and the nuances of people's descriptions[19]. This also echoes Narayan's (1993) reflections about the quality of relationships that are foundational to fieldwork, i.e. whether they recognise people as active subjects or merely subjects of fieldwork (p.672). This led to my recurring question regarding the meanings of the quantitative data which arose partly from my inability to understand them as representing people's subjective perceptions. I would therefore say that the quantitative scores were constructs that were produced during the data collection. The other danger in converting verbal descriptions into numbers, is the divergence in meaning that this sometimes results in. Camfield et al (2008) describing their fieldwork in Ethiopia, during which they collected both quantitative and qualitative data, found instances where the two types of data were strikingly at odds with each other. They give the example of a man whose overall score regarding the quality of his life was positive but whose verbal description was that his life was 'dead' adding that he 'wanted to die' (ibid, p. 17). This leads them to highlight the importance of context in

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[19] This point is also linked to the broader issue of representation that I described in chapter 1.

trying to understand the data so as to be able to understand what people are referring to when they answer questions. Kanbur and Shaffer (2007) while describing the use of mixed methods allude to the distinct philosophical outlooks that underpin each method producing a tension between the two sorts of data and their analysis. This tension results from the positivist/ empiricist stance that guides quantitative data as against the more interpretivist approach of qualitative methods, each of which is reflected in different understandings of the world and the nature of the research process, which in turn shape the activities of data generation and interpretation (ibid, p. 186).

This leads to my third point about how the nature of the research instrument shaped my methods and the resulting conversation that I had with people. The questions were direct, very specific in what they were asking, and forced people to answer along a particular scale when, in fact, their thoughts expressed as words were much more nuanced than what the survey items could capture. Ideally, I would have asked these questions indirectly, which would have allowed people to reflect on what they would like to tell me. This made me reflect on the processes of data collection and how they affect the resultant co-construction of information. These factors reinforced my preoccupation with people's voices and led me to concentrate solely on the qualitative information as the basis of my analyses.

3.2 Exploring agency through qualitative data

I have described above the particular reasons that convinced me to draw on qualitative data for my analysis. In addition to these, qualitative data is eminently more suitable to the topic of my analysis, the reasons for which are outlined here. Firstly, women's agency is conceptualised as a dynamic process that changes over time. Qualitative data is more suitable to attend to change unfolding over time and how those changes take place. Secondly, rather than asking women about agency I started by basing my analytical categories on empirical observation. Since I did not start off knowing what I was looking for, I had to listen to women's narratives of their lives before I could identify various events and trajectories in their lives as expressions of agency. As such I am reliant on the qualitative data and women's narratives of their lives as the source of the concepts and ideas which I will analyse. Qualitative data is far more suitable for this purpose as Kanbur and Shaffer (2007) remark, allowing for an inductive process that is open to information emerging from the raw data which potentially produces alternate theories for understanding the information rather than

hypothesising on the basis of existing theories and models. Riessman, echoing Kanbur and Shaffer (2007), reflects that the narrative interview, as one type of qualitative interview, often offers digressions which are contextual cues that potentially challenge our assumptions about the topic under discussion (Riessman, 2012, p. 367). My experience confirms this: when I asked people to explain the basis on which they had chosen a particular answer from the range provided, I found that they might be thinking about very different issues to those we had had in mind when developing the item (Ewing, 2006; White & Jha, 2014). This leads to the third reason for the suitability of qualitative data analysis: it foregrounds the voice of the person, constructing them as active subjects and highlighting their part in the production of knowledge (Kanbur & Shaffer, 2007; Narayan, 1993; White & Jha, 2014). The last reason that I draw on qualitative data is that I hope to look beyond 'women' or 'women's voices' and the myths and assumptions associated with these categories. James (2007), talking in the context of children's agency, discusses how such generic categories risk subsuming individual children and the diversity of their experiences under the all-encompassing category of 'the child'. Cornwall (2007) makes a similar point in describing how the myths inherent in representations of women can bias us towards assumptions about people that may, in fact, limit our abilities to understand them in their own terms (Riessman, 2012). Rather than relying on pre-existing ideas of women's agency, I hope instead to give play to the variety of ways in which women represent themselves as taking charge of their lives.

4. Doing field research

The WPP project set out to complete 350 surveys in each place, during each round of fieldwork; 300 were to be with husbands and wives interviewed separately and a further 50 were to be with single women heading households. In India we interviewed 341 people at Time 1 (T1) in 2011 and 371 people at Time 2 (T2) in 2013; of these we interviewed 187 people at both times, 157 people only at T1, and 187 people only at T2. I did 136 surveys, alone or with a co-researcher, and 22 qualitative interviews.

Relationships with people in the communities were mediated through local non-government organisations (NGOs) and team members. In India, our NGO partner, Chaupal, assisted in recruiting local staff, introduced us, and explained our research to the communities. During both rounds of research, Chaupal staff actively facilitated our interviews in the research villages easing the process significantly. I worked with researchers recruited from either the research villages themselves or nearby villages;

at T1 two men and two women joined me; on the second occasion the two women re-joined along with two different men, although the two who had been with us previously also worked with us a few times. My colleagues helped me gain an understanding of the areas and build relationships in the community. In Surguja, two local researchers had strong connections in the communities where we did our research, and I benefited greatly from their mediating my relationships with people there.

4.1 Ethics and consent

The SAGE Dictionary of Social Research Methods defines informed consent as:

> An ethical principle implying a responsibility on the part of the social researcher to strive to ensure that those involved as participants in research not only agree and consent to participating in the research of their own free choice, without being pressurized or influenced, but that they are fully informed about what it is they are consenting to.
>
> (Davies, 2006, p. 150)

We undertook fieldwork after having obtained formal ethics approval from the University of Bath. I was concerned throughout with three interlinked aspects of ethics, which I discuss in the broader context of the WPP project, and are linked with the issues raised in the definition above. Firstly, I was concerned about the process of seeking consent was done in the best possible manner. Secondly, I was concerned with whether and what people would gain from being interviewed. Lastly, I was concerned with the impact of the research on people's lives. I discuss each in turn.

4.1.1   Seeking permission

The first concern about seeking consent relates to being transparent about the purpose and process of the research, echoing the last part of the definition above. Davies (2006) also goes on to note that however much this may be the ethical benchmark that researchers need to strive towards, it is easier said than done. The actual practice of seeking consent is fraught with having to take into account various factors that may come in the way of achieving this ideal- this was visible in our process. The first step was explaining the purpose and process of the interview and answering initial queries about these. It was only after this that we sought permission to start an interview, part of which was also to respect people's choices regarding whether they would speak with us. This was a brief conversation in itself, since many people whom we interviewed were not literate, and of those who were few would have had

sufficient literacy skills to understand the implication of a written consent form. There was also a related concern that people could be wary of signing documents that they could not understand especially given the permanence of affixing signatures on documents. Marzano (2012) remarks that the wholesale translation of informed consent procedures from their original home in medical research has led qualitative researchers especially to be resistant to the idea of gaining consent. This is based on their belief that where earlier the generation of good quality qualitative data was dependent on the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee it is not predicated on gaining consent, and the need for signatures on a series of forms that may or may not be comprehensible to the interviewee comes in the way of building this relationship. This I found to be true in my research locations, where people have limited literacy and find the implications of the informed consent difficult to grasp even when they can read it. The issue of consent is further complicated by the fact that at least some of my interviewees cited instances of having been duped because of having affixed their signatures on forms which they did not understand. Rather than insist on signatures or thumb impressions, therefore, we recorded consent as having been given verbally and recorded signatures only when people seemed comfortable signing. Most questions that people asked at this stage related to how they would benefit by agreeing to be interviewed; this reflects the frequency with which people participate in surveys, especially in India, with the expectation that these are precursors to the introduction of government or NGO programmes. We explained that there were no benefits while introducing the purpose of the interview but re-emphasised it before proceeding to talk with people while also telling them that they could withdraw consent at any time.

Johnson and Rowlands (2012) observe that qualitative research is, by its very nature, unpredictable, deriving as it does from an inductive process of constantly understanding the data and simultaneously analysing and integrating that knowledge into the remainder of the research. This limits the possibility of predicting exactly what issues can arise when conducting an interview. However much one may want to take care of the interviewees emotion and feelings while interviewing them, it is impossible to know for sure what will become difficult for them. It is precisely such issues that have led to the idea of an 'ethics of care' which embeds consent in the idea of a relationship that is constantly attuned to the needs of the interviewee and interviewer (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012). My process of gaining consent was based on my ability to form relationships with people and taking care that the relationship of trust was not

compromised. This involved constantly attending to their feelings through the interview process; allowing them to pace the process; and leaving them to decide when to begin and end interviews or persist with the interview even if they were distressed. I also explained that the information would be anonymised and analysed, but it is difficult to know whether people grasped the implications of this. For example, there were instances of people requesting that their names remain unchanged because they felt that this would help them gain access to government or NGO benefits when their names were put 'out there'.

4.1.2 Recompense

This leads directly to the second point of how and what people stand to gain from participating in research which brings no material benefit. Although the project's stated aim was to explore what benefit accrues from including people's subjective perceptions in policy and practice, I was constantly aware that there would be no immediate impact on respondents' lives. People whom we interviewed also voiced their anger and frustration about having been previously 'surveyed' with promises of benefits from government or NGOs, which had never materialised. This was voiced openly, especially in India, when during the second round of fieldwork we attempted to talk to the same people again, who then refused to be interviewed for precisely this reason. Although we made no claims that people would receive benefits, they nonetheless had expectations of recompense, if only for having given us their time. This underscores that obtaining informed consent is no straightforward process but, rather, involves constant negotiation of the many expectations that people undoubtedly have in such contexts. Their conclusions about our presence in their communities are likely to have been based on their previous experiences of researchers' visits and their outcomes, regardless of how we presented ourselves to them.

4.1.3 Relationships with the local community and NGO partners

The requests for recompense took different forms, some of which are described here. These are embedded in a web of relationships between NGOs, communities, my colleagues and myself. Throughout fieldwork I was conscious that the surveys took up a great deal of time- between one to two hours, and although we tried to talk with people when they were not busy we invariably intruded on some work. Bearing in mind that there was no compensation for talking with us, I was constantly aware of a need to address this by 'giving back' in some way. This issue was further complicated

during the second round of research in Surguja (2013) when we considered offering financial incentives because of the difficulty in finding the people whom we had previously interviewed, or the fact that they were unwilling to speak to us again, not having benefited in any way from our earlier research. Chaupal, our local partner, themselves conduct research about the functioning of welfare schemes and were concerned about being faced with financial demands in the future and, therefore, cautioned against this idea. I was also aware that were it not for the fact that Chaupal enjoyed immense goodwill in the research villages, stemming from the staff's professional and personal relationships, we would be unable to do the surveys. Since offering financial incentives would complicate Chaupal's relationships with the communities- and ours with them- we heeded their advice.

Instead, we decided to photograph people whom we interviewed and give each household four prints. This worked well since being photographed otherwise required the expense of travelling to the district town, being photographed, and paying for prints. During these sessions I could have informal conversations about our research, explain what we were doing, and respond to queries including to people's expressed displeasure about not getting any compensation. It gave me space to respond to their queries without the pressure that they might refuse to be interviewed and allowed me to observe interactions between people, since I usually met them individually. These events often turned into small social gatherings that were the source of much entertainment as people waited their turn, or scolded some to hurry, and cajoled others to smile while posing. It also allowed me to interact with people in a lighter manner as I cajoled them to pose and smile. Interestingly, people also sometimes felt that they owed me something for having photographed them. This was usually in the form of fruit or fresh vegetables from their gardens. On most occasions I refused their offers, but gave in when people were particularly insistent or likely to take offence at my refusal, as I discuss below.

4.1.4 Relationships, power dynamics and gifts

I have described above how my relationships with people acquired a 'social' tone as opposed to being merely 'professional'. In spite of recognising that all relationships are social I have always characterised my research relationships as essentially professional. This implies being aware of power dynamics in the relationship and reducing that imbalance to the best of my ability. Part of this has been to always make it obvious that I have no expectations from the person- neither that they will definitely talk to

me, or of being treated as anything other than an interviewer- and certainly not as a guest. On most occasions I therefore refuse any offers of food and water. I do this, firstly, because of my belief that I am burdening people by taking up their time and, secondly, because I am conscious that many of them are poor. In reflecting on the instances that I have mentioned above, however, it is obvious that the distinctions between social and professional relationships are mine alone; in fact, the people with whom I have spoken may not be making any such distinction. My constant preoccupation with minimising the power imbalance through my behaviour may have prevented me from realising that people with whom I speak may have their own views of our relationship- and their offering me 'gifts' are recognition of that. Giving me these tokens may have been their attempts at equalising the relationship by casting it in terms that they understand, while my refusing them may have had the paradoxical effect of negating people's choices in how they wanted to treat me. This dynamic runs through the gamut of my research encounters, and I discuss it again in the interviewing context, below.

4.2 Fieldwork with a team

In recruiting teams in both locations we were concerned primarily with their understandings of the local communities and how they talked about them, rather than with their educational qualifications. We did so because we considered it important that they would treat people with respect and listen attentively to them. We then considered whether they had good skills for working with people, which are essential to doing good interviews. Their skills were crucial to my understanding what people said about their lives, as also in interpreting the local context for me. In both places, therefore, I spent significant time training the teams in how to do good interviews, in terms of both process and the substance that emerged from it; in reality these two things are intricately interlinked. I demonstrated this by conducting interviews with each team member shadowing me by turn, and working with them side-by-side throughout fieldwork. We also stressed good language skills since my researcher colleagues also translated on most occasions. The accuracy of translation was important because they had to be my 'voice' when they translated my words, and then be the other person's 'voice' when translating their words to me. This was a process through which we could all be relatively equal participants. It was also one avenue for me to build relationships with the people whom I had to interview.

Through this fieldwork I was usually part of a conversation with three participants; the person I was talking with, a colleague, and myself. This was because I preferred to have somebody to translate since there were often points in the conversation where people used the Sargujiya which I did not understand well. These two parallel objectives placed a heavy demand on my co-researchers because their translation and relationship-building skills had to work in tandem, both being crucial to a good interview.

Although I worked with each of member of the team quite closely, I developed stronger relationships with some members. This reinforced our ability to work as a team when we interviewed people together. This rapport was reflected in the fact that we started mimicking each other's styles during interviews, with my colleagues phrasing their own questions in ways similar to mine, and with me emulating their tone while greeting people as a way of breaking the formality of my relationships with people. These close relationships with my colleagues made the onerous task of interpretation a more natural process and opened up space for me to have in-depth conversations with people. They also equalised my relationships with my co-researchers and possibly represented to people whom we were interviewing together that I was genuinely willing to learn from them and about their lives.

4.3 Research encounters

This section describes the 'doing' of fieldwork in more detail. In order to understand people's lives and their subjective perceptions I needed to move beyond the scope of the surveys. I needed to observe their lives and get a sense of their contexts to make sense of the conversations I had with them. My research encounters could be thought of on a continuum ranging from completely informal encounters to formal ones; by this I mean that some took place quite by chance with no agenda on my part, while others were strongly structured by the kind of information I was seeking out and the process by which I was doing it- a survey, for instance. In between, were more in-depth semi-structured conversations which opened up the space for people to describe their lives in more detail. Multiple encounters with the same person helped me to render context to sometimes fragmentary stories and piece them together into more textured, nuanced narratives.

4.3.1 Sampling

All the survey interviews were administered individually. The samples for the surveys have been mentioned in Section 4. Sampling was purposive, with the aim of interviewing people from all parts of the research villages; some villages were made up of community-specific clusters, or *paras*, and it was therefore important to interview people from each of these. The sample for qualitative interviews was selected purposively from this larger sample of survey interviews of which the twofold aims were to identify and fill gaps in the information, as well as get a diversity of perspectives on each topic. I, therefore, attempted to individually interview a diverse group of people representing different communities, socio-economic background, and age or life-stage in order to get a multiplicity of views. The overlap between the two samples allowed for both breadth of information through the large numbers for whom the survey was administered, and depth of information through the qualitative interviews. The combination of depth and breadth strengthened the data allowing for greater diversity of views through the use of multiple research methods (Beitin, 2012, p. 248).

4.3.2 Survey interviews

The majority of interviews were done to administer surveys. In these, I aimed to maintain a conversational style to temper the rigidity that a structured survey introduced. This also enabled me to attend to the varied responses to the questions, especially when it seemed that people were answering not what I had asked them, but something else altogether. This reflected, firstly, that what they were talking about was of far greater significance to their lives and, therefore, foregrounded in their conversations and, secondly, that my question may not have been sufficiently understandable to them. I encouraged people therefore to first reply in their own words rather than giving them pre-decided options to choose from; this was especially important in the IWB section in which they had to choose one option from a scale of graduated answers that most closely reflected their thoughts and feelings about that issue. I hoped thereby to accord primacy to their voices rather than subdue them by transposing an alien way of answering as the answer-scales invariably are. Descriptive answers presented opportunities to ask further questions- 'what', 'when', 'where', and 'how'- about what they said. This both built on the relationship that I had already established with them, and furthered it by establishing that I wanted to listen to their descriptions of their lives. I sometimes had to end discussions and request that we return to them at the end of the survey if the person had the time and inclination. This

worked well on some occasions but the conversational thread was lost on others. In some of these I was able to pick it up again in longer qualitative interviews.

4.3.3 Qualitative interviews

The main aim of the in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews was to understand the context of what people had been saying to me and to elicit greater detail about their lives and the forces that had shaped them. I usually interviewed people whom I had already spoken to while administering surveys, using these conversations as a basis for identifying those whom I wanted to interview again. Before returning to interview individuals a second time, I would prepare by reading notes from their previous interview and then make a mental list of the questions that I wished to follow up on with them. These questions fit within a broader set of topics, roughly cohering with the IWB domains, which I tried to cover in all interviews.

In the first instance, I returned to people with whom my conversations had been truncated due to paucity of time. My colleagues also reported interesting conversations that they had and I sometimes returned with them to people they had previously interviewed. In returning to these people, I wanted to hear stories that represented, as far as possible, the diversity of lives and experiences in the local communities (Beitin, 2012, pp. 248-249). People were often surprised when I returned to talk with them a second time; usually this was because nobody, let alone a stranger, had ever spoken to them in such depth about their lives and some people commented in this vein as also that they had already told us everything that they could possibly could about their lives. The setting for these interviews was more relaxed than for surveys. This was due in part to my own comfort in doing interviews that allowed me to listen to people in their own terms. Even though I had a clear idea of the kinds of areas that I wanted to cover through these conversations I was not discomfited when they did not go quite according to plan, because they usually allowed me to pursue new lines of questioning and revealed new information both about the individuals themselves as well as their communities. Riessman, referring to these 'digressions', suggests that they are important sources of 'contextual and associative cues' (Riessman, 2012, p. 367). They serve two important purposes: firstly, to challenge our assumptions about the topic and, I would argue, the person and secondly, to reveal the nature of the relationship between interviewer and interviewee. Although she suggests that it 'exposes fissures' (p.367) I would also posit that in fact it could also demonstrate that the interviewee feels free enough to take the conversation in their

own direction. This life-story approach, which I adopted in most cases, could completely overturn the ideas that I had about particular people and could lead to a completely different direction of questioning (Riessman, 2012). I would argue that this is a particular strength that also potentially allows us to hear what may have been previously silenced voices (Arnold & Blackburn, 2004).

4.3.4   Negotiating power in the interview setting

My general approach was to start by asking people to tell me their life story, beginning from such details as when and where they had been born, and bringing them up to the present time; this often caused amusement but simultaneously gave me the opportunity to ask what I refer to as 'stupid' questions- about information that might seem patently obvious to people in the community or perhaps even what I would have gleaned from having listened to various accounts of different people's lives. My particular reason for doing this stemmed mostly from the fact that very often when I interviewed people quite a common response was "what can I tell you? I am not so educated."

I was conscious of a power dynamic at work and no matter what I said in response, in their opinion, I was the educated person who could provide them with information rather than the other way around. My 'stupid' questions, therefore, demonstrated that I was in fact seeking information from them and thus negating to some extent the existing power dynamic between us. The other thing it frequently did was to defuse the formality of the conversation since my questions often sent people into peals of laughter. I did, however, have to time this question with care to ensure that it was not placed inappropriately.

This leads to the fact I had to attend constantly to how people seemed to feel about what they were telling me and whether it was appropriate to carry on with a line of questioning that could be painful for them. Although I always began my interviews by explaining that they had the freedom to refuse to answer any of my questions or end the interview at any time of their choosing, I realised that this also had the sometimes-opposite effect of encouraging them to talk further. Frequently, I felt concerned that people felt obligated to talk with me once they had committed to doing so, and I wanted to ensure as far as possible that they were not doing so at the cost of some hardship to themselves. Paradoxically, what I presented to them as their control of the interview setting may have sometimes inadvertently strengthened my control.

4.3.5   Fieldwork in one's own country/ culture

I briefly discuss here the experience of doing fieldwork in one's own country (India) in the light of discussions around 'native anthropologists'; these focus on notions of being 'insiders' or 'outsiders' to one's culture. While I concede that doing fieldwork in India is, for me, imbued with the familiar, in the sense of knowing 'how things are' (Narayan, 1993), I cannot by any stretch call myself an insider to the communities where I undertook research. This reflects the distance, geographical and socio-economic, between the people with whom I interacted and myself such that neither of us could have recognised the other as completely familiar (ibid, pp. 676-677). Moreover, my method of building relationships with people is predicated explicitly on my therapeutic training such that I avoid an overt identification that is based on common cultural factors. Instead, I aimed to be consistent in my behaviour across contexts treating people with respect by listening to them carefully so as to be able to understand their perspectives (Saarthak, 2002). Through this process I hoped to avoid falling into the trap of thinking that I had complete knowledge about the culture of the place, especially in the case of the Indian research site (Appadurai, 1988). Nonetheless, there were certainly moments of identification from both sides- my respondents and mine. An example was when I attempted to speak in the local language/ dialect which, while evoking mirth and pleasure, also lead to proclamations from local people that I 'now belonged to this place' as much as it is conceivable for me to belong. I attribute this in great measure to my efforts to recognise/remember individuals across the two rounds of research in each place and to thereby demonstrate that I did indeed see them as people rather than as research subjects (Narayan, 1993).

I also refer briefly to my experience of doing fieldwork in Chiawa. As I have remarked above, I consistently use the same process in order to establish relationships with people whatever the cultural context of my work. It is this process of listening and observing acutely that was most effective in helping me understand the contexts of both places where I worked. Although I was dependent on my colleagues for translation in both places, this reliance was slightly greater in Chiawa. In both places my colleagues' readiness to share their knowledge and spontaneously translate even outside interview settings went a long way in supporting my work. I continued to rely on these relationships beyond each fieldwork period, calling on them for clarifications during my transcription process. Adopting a consistent process and asking questions

that resisted the idea that I 'knew' either place, more especially Surguja, were fundamental to my approach to fieldwork.

5. Qualitative data analysis

This section discusses my approach to data analysis. The starting point is to acknowledge that while the data that I will present in the remainder of this thesis is authentic, they are so in the sense of being accurate reproductions of what I asked people, whom I spoke to, and what the replied. These conversations are produced in particular interview settings, and shaped by the identities of the people involved and the contexts in which those conversations take place. However, I also emphasise here that these narratives are the starting point from which I will formulate my analytical categories. Thus, while I make claims of authenticity for the women's voices that are the foundation of subsequent analyses, I am aware of the limits of those claims. As James (2007) discusses in the context of children's voices, that claim is limited by the fact that the data is crafted by analysis and those analytical categories must necessarily highlight some aspects of the narrative while ignoring others (p. 265). The next step after the interview has been conducted is the translation and transcription of recordings, which is described in the next section.

5.1 A note on translation and transcription

Most of the interviews that are the basis of my qualitative data analysis have gone through two levels of translation. While I understood what was said in Sargujiya, I waited for my co-researchers' complete translation into Hindi of the person's responses. On occasions where I thought that either the translation of my question or of the respondent's answer was inaccurate I would seek clarifications at that time; these are part of the interview recordings. I would note the time elapsed (if) when there was some significant shift in the interview tone, such as laughter, distress, or another person joining us, and note observations about the process and substance of the interview shortly after its conclusion.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim in English. Initial translated skeletal transcripts were produced by persons contracted by the project. I then listened to all interviews and re-worked the transcripts to reproduce the conversational tone of the interviews, translating as far as possible in the way that Hindi, or Sargujiya, is structured even if this sometimes makes for awkward sentence construction in English. Complete transcripts describe the entire process from beginning to end, including

observations recorded during and after the interview, and explanations about meanings of certain phrases. I also had to translate while retaining the context and decide when to translate some phrases literally if they evoked particular ways of thinking, feeling, and speaking. While I relied most of all on my fieldwork notes regarding the context of each interview and of discussions with the local research team on how to translate the conversations, I also turned to the dictionary and sought other bilingually fluent people's assistance on the best translations of particular Hindi words into English. On starting my data analysis, and right up to writing this thesis, I occasionally returned to the interview recordings and notes to reacquaint myself with the contexts of some interviews and to modify translations of some words at this juncture. These were words which were discussed at some length during the analysis for what they represented, e.g. my use of the word self-respect, as translation of the Hindi/ Urdu word *izzat*, drew my supervisor's attention, leading to a discussion about conceptual and cultural weight these terms carry, invoking particular constructs of human subjects in different contexts. Thus, the process of translation and transcription, while being a first step in making sense of the data, does not always have a defined end as is evident in the next section on data analysis.

5.2 Analysing data

In an earlier section, I described my approach to the qualitative interview as a life-story approach (section 4.3.3). However, definitions of the life story describe it as a stand-alone account- without questions- of a person's life as they have lived it, told as completely as possible especially highlighting the most important aspects (Atkinson, 2012). Atkinson adds that it is constructed through the interview encounter and analysed in that light, and should have the narrator's final approval (Atkinson, 2012). The transcripts from my interviews do not strictly adhere to this definition- the questions are part of the transcripts, and my respondents did not have final approval over the transcript. Riessman's definition of narrative interviewing, therefore, better describes my data:

> "A form of interviewing that involves the generation of detailed 'stories' of experience, not generalized descriptions. Narratives come in many forms, ranging from tightly bounded ones that recount specific past events (with clear beginnings, middles and ends), to narratives that traverse temporal and geographical space– biographical accounts that cover entire lives or careers**."** (Riessman, 2006, p. 190)

She also comments that the interviewer actively elicits the narrative- although they must cede control over the subject matter to the speaker, and that it is this conversational process that creates the narrative.

I have broadly followed a narrative analysis approach to data analysis- the narrative takes varied forms, ranging from a life story that is crafted together from the information gleaned from a series of discrete encounters to just the single answer to a question in an interview. It also refers to different sorts of texts- i.e. both the story told by the interviewee and the interpretive account of the researcher (Riessman, 2008, p. 540). I began by reading all the qualitative interviews to get a sense of the ways in which women speak of their lives. It is pertinent to mention that I did not collect data with the aim of understanding women's agency and did not, therefore, ask women directly about agency. Rather, I used it as an analytical concept while reading women's narratives. There were three broad themes which led my reading of the data: i) silence/ doing/ speaking ii) resistance/ conformity iii) assertion and denial of agency. In highlighting particular pieces of information I also reflected on how the information fits vertically, i.e. within this person's narrative, and also laterally, i.e. with other people's narratives about the same things. At this juncture I started coding interviews in NVivo (QSR, 2014), with codes reflecting the three themes above. All these steps are part of a thematic analysis (one of a range of narrative analysis tools) in order to examine narratives on the basis of content (Riessman, 2008). My final analysis, however, relied more heavily on reading complete transcripts although I kept returning to their coding in NVivo as well.

5.3 Problems in defining concepts

Thus far, I had been analysing narratives in order to identify actions that could be thought of as agency. At this juncture I hit a roadblock because I had still to define the term agency. Furthermore, even when I highlighted sections of narrative that seemed to reflect women's agency, subsequent readings suggested that women's actions were the result of their circumstances rather than wrought by choice. I did not know whether the thoughts, feelings, and actions that I was coding actually represented agency; I would be able to decide that only after arriving at a clear definition of agency. This difficulty also signals a further issue: that agency, and also resistance, is so valued a concept in feminist discourse, that women's everyday actions are easily categorised in these pre-defined structures. I therefore decided that rather than using the term agency to code narratives it would be productive to step back and simply

define the range of women's actions with codes which described the action; these were silence, speaking, observing, thinking, and doing. The terms were derived from women's descriptions of their responses to various events in their lives. I then coded qualitative interviews in this manner and also began to search for these themes in qualitative notes in surveys. Although it was possible to code women's actions in this manner, it was more difficult to clearly delineate clear analytical categories, e.g. gender relations, work, or community in women's narratives. It also seemed useful to see whether men's narratives presented a similar difficulty. Men's narratives were much easier to analyse in this manner, in direct contrast to the difficulty I faced in analysing women's interviews according to clear analytical categories. In fact, for men's narratives I did not go through analysing the range of actions as it was possible to analyse them at a conceptual rather than descriptive level. This suggested that there was a clear difference in manner that men and women speak of their lives and this is reflected in their narratives of themselves (McAdams & Mclean, 2013).

Having identified these themes for my data analysis I also attempted to understand how representations of women's agency in the narratives challenge or converge with pre-conceived ideas about what women's agency looks like. Arnold and Blackburn (2004) argue while introducing their edited volume of life-stories from India that life-stories are useful to challenge pre-conceived views about the self in society; they serve to illuminate individual agency and the very specific forms that this takes in each individual's life and how agency doesn't belong only to the individual but is produced in the relationships in which each person is also embedded. My use of individual narratives serves a similar purpose of delineating the very specific ways in which women's agency is produced.

The narratives also made me aware of how the particular settings have been instrumental in producing women's telling of their lives. Ewing (2006) writing from the perspective of psychological anthropology draws attention to precisely this issue when she says that the context is a frame constructed by the interview itself. Although, as she says, there is no checklist of the elements that constitute that frame, it is for the interviewer to be aware of how the frame shifts during the course of the interview itself, for instance from an informal to a formal question. It is for this reason that it is important to attend to the cues and signals that are a part of all communication between two people because this is also how power is being negotiated in the interview (ibid, p. 98). Her descriptions of how people both simultaneously reveal and

conceal information which provides them scope to both simultaneously deny and assert an action are crucial to my understanding of how women represent their agency in the interview setting. Her view complements Narayan's (1993) anthropological approach which considers narratives as constitutive of rather than distinct from the analysis itself because their rendition and content is purposeful and represents particular points of view which are then reflected in the analysis (p. 681).

6. Reflections and Conclusion

This chapter has presented my experience of doing fieldwork and my reflections on the process. I am conscious that each interview I did was in specific circumstances of which were crucial to determining the nature of that interview and the substance that emerged from it; these circumstances were the result of the relationships I formed both with people I interviewed and my co-researchers. As Ewing (2006) points out the interview context itself frames the information that emerges from it by providing opportunities to both reveal and conceal information. This makes it incumbent on the interviewer to examine their relationship with the narrator as a factor in producing that silence, as well as investigating what silences reveal about persons' lives.

This, in turn, underscores another aspect of the interview settings that I was constantly aware of throughout, i.e. my own identity/ ies. The interviews were definitely influenced by my own identity as an educated, urban, Indian woman. At one point during the first period of research in Sarguja I became aware of how my perspectives from my earlier gender related work influenced the questions that I asked all women; e.g. whenever women talked about difficult relationships I almost invariably explored whether they had ever considered leaving the relationship even though I was aware of the difficulties this also presented for most women. This was not so much the articulation of a particular view, as much as it stemmed from a degree of worry on my part regarding how women protected themselves from violence, and second, to understand what options they thought they had in those circumstances. It is also important to add, however, that I conducted the majority of interviews with male colleagues actively participating in the conversations. In spite of received wisdom that it is preferable for women to interview women in these locations, the presence of my male colleagues does not appear to have hindered the quality of conversations that we had; their skills as empathetic listeners and our joint promise of confidentiality seem to have resulted in conversations that are striking in the amount of intimate detail that they reveal.

This depth of detail that we were privy to through these conversations brings me to my last reflection on the interview setting- the emotional responses that are evoked in the narrator, my colleagues, and myself. This draws on therapeutic traditions which define transference as the narrator's emotional response towards the interviewer, and counter-transference as the interviewer's emotional towards the narrator. Ewing (2006) discusses how both these feelings- transference and counter-transference- affect one's responses in the interview and thus shape the conversation. While it is impossible for me to accurately measure the emotional impact on the women to whom I spoke, I could gauge that for some of the respondents these opportunities to talk evoked a feeling of being heard and consequently encouraged them to open up further. This, along with their stories, certainly affected me and influenced the sorts of questions I asked and the length of the interviews; the more people opened up, the more it deepened the relationship which further encouraged my questions and their reciprocal responses. This process also importantly reflects how power could be more equally distributed through the conversation, with me as the interviewer as much a captive audience to the story that people wished me to hear, perhaps revealing information for which they did not otherwise have an audience.

This chapter has documented the process of my research. Throughout I have focused on three main themes that have been of continuing concern. The first is attending to people's voices; it has shaped my research process through data collection, especially influencing the conversational tone of all my interviews, till analysis, e.g. where I deliberately started my analysis from reading women's narratives to incorporate their descriptions of their actions into my understanding of agency. The second concern was how the research encounter co-constructs the data, which I have discussed at length in sections on different types of interviews. The third theme that has been of constant concern is the issue of interpersonal power through the research process; this is reflected in my discussion about listening to people, about recompense for their time, about the impacts on respondents, as well as how my own identity is implicated in my research. Through discussion on these three parallel themes this chapter has focused primarily on how the methods, data, and analysis are all interlinked in the research process and its outcome. I will continue to refer to these themes through the chapters which describe and analyse the data.

Chapter 4: Surguja

1. Introduction

Surguja district in the northern part of Chhattisgarh state is composed of plains, low table mountains often shrouded in mist, and large tracts of dense deciduous forest, especially lush in the monsoon. The landscape lends itself to the romanticism of a rural idyll. The ease with which such images are evoked, however, belies how these forests have come to symbolise an often-contentious relationship between their forest-dwelling populations and the state (Bijoy, 2008).

Adivasis or scheduled tribes (ST)[20], the populations mentioned above, are India's indigenous tribal communities. They are the classic 'other' of the Indian imaginary; inscribed, from ancient to modern times, across popular mythology to official documents, as savage, backward people. While sympathetic, nuanced accounts of adivasis exist, they have not mitigated the emphasis in official accounts, from colonial (Damodaran, 2006) to present times (Sundar, 2012), that adivasis need 'development', targeting them for 'interventions' by the state (Sainath, 1996; Vij, 2015) and others. Discourse about adivasis takes shape primarily in these terms.

This chapter seeks to do two things. Firstly, it briefly describes key issues that have characterised the state-adivasi relationship from colonial through contemporary times, going beyond the specific locale of Surguja to central India more broadly. This section also discusses how adivasi society is changing in response to both internal and external influences. The second aim of this chapter is to provide a detailed description of the four study villages. The next section briefly describes who the adivasis are before proceeding to the main aims of the chapter.

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[20] The terms 'adivasi' and 'scheduled tribe' are often used interchangeably although they have very different origins. Scheduled tribe (ST) is based on tribal or indigenous communities' inclusion in the fifth and sixth schedules of the Indian constitution, which outline special protections for the communities listed therein. The term adivasi (literally 'original inhabitant') on the other hand, was coined as a rallying cry for social movements in what is now Jharkhand, during the early 20th century. Chandra (2015) points out that adivasi is imbued with the socio-political aspirations of the Chhotanagpur communities and is used primarily in central India (covered in Schedule V). In fact, some communities in the area also prefer to refer to themselves using their specific community names (p.2). Both Chandra (2015) and Bijoy (2008) emphasise that the terms are not coterminus, with ST referring to a more diverse range of communities across India. See Chandra (2015) and Bijoy (2008) for further detailed analyses of both terms.

2. Who is adivasi?

The question of who is and isn't adivasi has plagued sociological and policy discourse in India since the introduction of the colonial census operations. Adivasis have invariably been discussed by referencing Hindu society, and often thought of as being an earlier, primitive form of Hindu society. Béteille (2008) argues that there is no one parameter on which basis tribes and castes can be comprehensively distinguished; whether this be level of technology employed (p. 26), kinship arrangements (p. 27), or degree of isolation. Xaxa (2008) and Béteille (2008) both remark that historically there has been a permeable boundary between the two, with numerous instances of each morphing into the other. This results partly from what earlier sociologists have called the 'Hindu method of tribal absorption'- referring to everyday social and economic exchange which extended beyond the confines of Hindu society.

Colonial views of tribes built both on brahminical notions of caste purity as well as ideas of racial superiority (Damodaran, 2006) thereby ascribing all the behaviour of tribes to an inherent 'tribal' quality (Banerjee, 2006). The administration's need to understand the society they were dealing with, lead to the drawing of rigid boundaries to classify communities (Damodaran, 2006, p. 47)[21] which were inscribed in official documents and have carried over into present times. It is partly because of this that Xaxa (2008) remarks that tribes and castes no longer morph into each other, with the adivasi identity having crystallised to some extent in response to state interventions. Chandra describes how some communities proactively assume 'backward and savage' identities in aspiring for inclusion in the scheduled list which confers constitutional protections on STs (Chandra, 2015). The next section explores this complex relationship by discussing the state's and adivasis' mutual claims over the forests, which have come to symbolise their relationship.

3. The forest, adivasi and state

Ecological evidence indicates that people have lived in the central Indian forests for centuries. While this emphasises the enduring relationship between adivasis and the forest, and the shaping of identities in those locales, it does not automatically imply that adivasis were isolated. Damodaran describes how central India's mineral and forest wealth has been exploited from ancient times, with adivasis involved in exchanges with communities for this purpose (Damodaran, 2006, pp. 53-54). It was in

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[21] Damodaran (2006) also details, however, that there were administrators who were preoccupied with nuanced descriptions of various tribes and the differences amongst them rather than simply corralling them off as 'jungly' (p.52).

the colonial period, however, that the administration formally took over the forests through the successive Forest Acts of 1864 and 1927. The cordoning off of large areas as reserved forests affected adivasi livelihoods by restricting their access to cultivable tracts in the forests; to common pasture; to wood and timber for firewood and house construction; and to economically and ritually significant non-timber forest produce (NTFP). It is evident from this that the forest shapes the material culture of the adivasis. Further, adivasis foraged seasonal produce, which forms a significant and distinct aspect of their food culture, and medicinal plants from the forest (Xaxa, 1998). Lastly, there is a belief that the forests and nature are god's garden and if there are no flowers in the garden then the gardener, god, will not take the trouble to water his garden. This is, therefore, the reason that adivasis see nature as a form of god's beneficence and protecting all of nature as devotion[22]. The colonial administration's regulation of adivasis' previously unfettered access to the forest through the Forest Acts, therefore, affected all these aspects of adivasi culture. Little changed after independence; in fact, customary rights shrank further with the state and private industry making forays into central India in order to extract the mineral wealth that would form the bedrock of a modernising economy and state. This has been an increasingly fraught, on-going process with adivasis refusing to acquiesce to their alienation from their lands (Bijoy 2008). The next section discusses the ways in which the adivasis have responded to the state.

3.1. State policy and adivasi responses

Adivasi mobilisation against the state, and now also non-state actors, can be traced back about 150 years in response to the policies that have displaced them from their lands since colonial times (Sundar, 2012). There were a number of organised adivasi protests against these moves at various times (Bijoy, 2008, p. 1758), as a result of which the British ceded some concessions to the adivasis, which took into account some of their customary rights and dependence on forests. Although these laws remained largely unchanged after independence, they did not hinder the quest to exploit central India's natural resources, consequently displacing people from their lands (Bijoy, 2008; Sundar, 2012). State power is manifest in the everyday exchanges between adivasis and low-level government functionaries who, for instance, regulate

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[22] This was an example that was given to Sarah White and myself during conversations with a group that we met at the Chaupal office, in Ambikapur, during an initial pilot phase in November 2010. The group consisted of people who could share their understanding of adivasi identity and life either because of their own adivasi identity or because of experience working with adivasi communities. They were Gangaram Paikra and Narendra Das of Chaupal, Pariyap Ekka, Dhirendra Tiwari, Anil Dwivedi, and Stephen Sona.

access to the forests (Nilsen, 2012; Ramnath, 2015). Throughout, there have been agitations against various state policies: large infrastructure projects, the clearing of forests, and mineral extraction. In 1996, in response to large-scale adivasi agitation, the Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) (PESA) Act[23] articulated an explicit state policy against introducing legislation contrary to customary practices regarding community resources. Bijoy (2008) contends, however, that states continued to legislate in flagrant violation of the PESA Act. This history of displacement and consequent agitation also resulted in the Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006, which sought to redress adivasis' displacement from the forests by conferring on them rights to occupy forest land for living and cultivation[24]. It also gives villagers the right to vote on whether their common lands can be taken over for resource extraction or development projects[25].

The other most commonly referred adivasi response to state policies is the Maoist (also Naxalite[26]) movement, which espouses a radical leftist ideology aiming to overthrow the state through violent revolution. While the ideological moorings of this movement are anchored in the state's neglect of marginalised populations from amongst which the Maoists draw their core cadres, it is neither an exclusively 'adivasi movement'[27], nor is it the exclusive medium of adivasi agitation (Nilsen, 2012; Sundar, 2012). The main thrust of most agitations by the adivasis has been against big development and infrastructure projects (e.g. the Narmada agitation) and to secure rights and entitlements, e.g. forest rights, right to food security).

4. Adivasi community: class, religion, gender

Adivasi communities are perceived as being relatively egalitarian. These may be overstatements especially because they are often made in comparison to caste Hindu society (Béteille, 2008; Xaxa, 2008). Further, as the previous sections have shown adivasis are subject- and respond- to outside forces of change by reshaping their lives.

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[23] The PESA Act extends the *panchayat* system to the scheduled areas in Schedule V and VI of the Indian Constitution.

[24] See (Bijoy, 2008) for a detailed description of the FRA (2006)'s provisions and discussion of their implications.

[25] This is has been recently used most effectively by the Dongria Kondhs to keep out large mining companies from their habitations in the Niyamgiri hills in Odisha. See Tatpati and Misra (2015).

[26] The terms Naxal and Naxalite are drawn from the north Bengal village of Naxalbari, where the movement began in 1967.

[27] The movement, which began in West Bengal, has spread to Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana where there are both adivasi and non-adivasi populations.

The next sections discuss briefly whether these perceptions of adivasi society hold up to scrutiny.

4.1. Class in adivasi communities

Adivasi communities are considered to be relatively classless but some differentiation is clearly apparent; Xaxa points to the fact that there are clear differences in the sizes of landholdings which allows for the categorisation of cultivators as marginal, smallholders, mediumholders, and in some cases even rich farmers (Xaxa, 2008). Dasgupta (1999) places this in a historical context in the case of the Oraons of the Chhotanagpur area[28] in her description of the Tana Bhagat movement in the early 20th century. She traces this movement, which was both religious and secular in its concerns, as a response to the domination of an upper class of Oraon landowners who not only held the prime land resources but also claimed ritual roles, as also to dominant non-Oraon groups such as the *banias* or traders, the missonaries, and the colonial administration. In her discussion of the how the Bhils in Rajasthan have taken advantage of the FRA, Bose highlights the fact that already better-off households are invariably able to secure larger landholdings. Thus, individual land tenure has changed social relationships within the community leading to different classes of households in what was earlier a relatively egalitarian society (Bose, 2013). Adivasis have also moved into non-traditional occupations where they have had access to education and reserved quotas in government jobs or entered private employment, also transforming adivasi communities.

Some degree of differentiation may already have existed in adivasi society. The Maoists, for instance, agitate as much against traditional leadership within adivasi communities as against the state, on grounds that they represent the interests of dominant male elders. They contextualise these structures as having been legitimised by both the colonial and independent Indian state. During the colonial period when faced with uprisings the administration negotiated peace through traditional clan leaders. In so doing they strengthended traditional leaders who then became the locus of contact between the administration and local population (Sundar, 2012, pp. 244-245; Chandra, 2015). Xaxa (2008) also comments that social solidarity is fragmenting because of clearer class divisions. The next section looks at how religion figures in adivasi identity today.

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[28] The Chhotanagpur plateau is a distinct geographical area covering most of present day Jharkhand and some adjacent areas of the neighbouring states of Bihar and Chhattisgarh.

4.2. Religion and adivasi identity

The early colonial census operations classified adivasis as animists, thereby clearly distinguishing them from Hindus on the basis of religious practice. Adivasis believe that god, although *niraakaar* or formless, is embodied and to be worshipped in nature. Some communities do this at the *sarna*, a sacred copse of sal trees, while others worship in homes with offerings of fruit or with animal sacrifices. The present day census, however, does not accommodate adivasi worship as a distinct category often resulting in adivasis identifying as Hindu (see Business Standard, 2015).

During the colonial period, missionary activity resulted in a spate of conversions to various forms of Christianity[29]. This was encouraged by the administration which had political hopes of garnering the population's sympathies. The adivasis of what is now Jharkhand, who were the first to convert in east-central India, also had complex reasons for conversion. Bara situates their motivations in the then socio-economic context saying that it was primarily for secular reasons, such as access to the administration to secure their traditional land tenure arrangements, that initial conversions took place. Conversion was, therefore, not a wholesale buy-in to Christianity but rather an active selection of aspects of religion that would serve the adivasis' own purposes (Bara, 2007). The manner in which these material concerns converged with new forms of religious affiliation was also evident in the early 20th century Tana Bhagat movement which critiqued the spirit worship practices within the Oraon community. The movement, which was indigenous to the Oraon community, advocated strongly against the propitiation of both malevolent and beneficent spirits, since they were perceived as being responsible for an unjust social order that the movement aimed at reforming. This was, however, a way to undermine the power of traditional ritual specialists who were aligned with dominant landowners in the community (Dasgupta, 1999). In the process, the proponents of the Tana Bhagat movement also forbade drinking, dancing and singing at traditional celebrations, all of which are strongly associated with adivasi rituals[30].

Hindu proselytisation is relatively recent and not to be confused with the 'Hindu method of tribal absorption' described earlier. The present efforts are aimed at

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[29] Bara (2007) describes the chronological entry of various churches into east-(Xaxa, Cultural Dimension of Ecology: A Case Study of the Oraons, 1998)central India.

[30] This is only a brief description of the thrust of the Tana Bhagat movement. See Dasgupta (1999) to understand the complexity of relationships, both religious and secular, which framed the movement.

'reclaiming' Christian adivasis through *ghar-wapasi*, literally 'returning home', as well as conferring Hindu status on 'unconverted' adivasis. Organisations such as the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram (VKA)[31] claim that adivasis are Hindus who have continued to live in forests. The basis for this claim is that adivasis too worship nature, as do Hindus (Sundar, 2012). Froerer, describing the everyday processes through which the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) aims to garner support, also situates these in local socio-economic contexts as do Bara and Dasgupta. In her Chhattisgarh study village, RSS supporters targeted adivasis who were economically better off than themselves and lay down contraints on their earnings from traditional liquor, for instance, by saying that liquor destroys community life (Froerer, 2006). Current Hindu conversion efforts are also buttressed by the political aspirations of the right-wing Hindu movement such as that described by Baviskar (2005) in the context of western India. Tracing 'waves of Hinduisation' (ibid, p. 5107) over the previous century in the Narmada valley, she says that whole habitations of adivasi households became *bhagat*, literally devotees, signifying their incorporation into the Hindu fold. She describes this as part of a broader quest for upward mobility to counter the discrimination that adivasis traditionally faced but also notes how *bhagat* adivasis are mired in conflict with Christian adivasis as part of the broader politico-religious Hindu movement.

These movements have provoked a backlash in the form of resurgent adivasi identity which has resulted in ever-sharper divides. In 2013, Sarna followers in Jharkhand objected to the installation of a statue of Mary portrayed with adivasi features and in traditional adivasi clothing (Yadav, 2013). While this may reflect the church's efforts to accommodate adivasi identity, Sarna followers saw this as a clear strategy of conversion. Sundar (2015) attests to the deep divides around religion in Bastar, southern Chhattisgarh, where both Hindus and evangelical Christians are active. She describes how communities that once shared festival feasts now cook separately, and marriage too has become taboo between converts and non-converts.

4.3 Gender relations in adivasi communities

Early studies of adivasis paid little attention to the status of women with almost no comprehensive descriptions of women's lives. Nonetheless, adivasi women are generally thought to enjoy greater freedom than non-adivasi women; their greater visibility in outdoor work and freedom to divorce and remarry are two examples of

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[31] *Vanvasi* literally translates as forest-dweller. The VKA is associated with the right-wing Hindu organisation, RSS.

evidence that is offered in support of this view. It is difficult to generalise however, because firstly, practices vary in different communities and secondly, outside change affects women's roles and gender relations just as it does other aspects of community life.

Sundar (2012) reminds us that everyday life amongst adivasis, including in livelihoods, is deeply gendered. Sinha (2003), describing adivasi women of Jharkhand, comments that they have limited economic rights especially in property inheritance. Even though single women are entitled to maintenance from either natal or conjugal families when widowed, through land that they can cultivate, this always reverts to men upon their deaths. Furthermore, even though women can cultivate the lands themselves they are prohibited from ploughing, sowing, and building roofs thereby effectively increasing their dependence on men. Women's rights to maintenance have been also been abrogated due to the changes in property rights; agitations for individual tenure have largely furthered men's claims to common resources while excluding women from common ownership rights on the pretext that women's ownership rights will break down community unity, and that land belongs to the male line (Sinha, 2003, pp. 56-57). Bose adds that Bhil women in Rajasthan have been largely excluded from claiming individual forest land titles. One woman described how her individual claim would have resulted in intra-family conflict and that the process has re-emphasised that women are ultimately outsiders in the communities where they marry (Bose, 2013). The Maoists also counter the claims of traditional unity, protesting that traditional authority structures rendered women voiceless. The fact that half of Maoist cadres in central India are women is an effort to redress this issue (Chandra, 2015).

Sundar (2012), Chandra (2015) and Sinha (2003) all remark upon how witch hunting usually targets older, widowed, or single women who are blamed for the loss of lands due to displacements, and are also seen as competitors for common resources. This gender asymmetry in witch-hunting is underscored by the fact that men alone can assume the roles of spirit-healers or witch-finders (Sinha, 2003). This commentary is not to suggest that witch-finding is restricted to adivasi communities; in fact, Skaria mentions that it was common among both castes and tribes in the colonial period (Skaria, 1997, p. 112), and Mehra and Agrawal mention that witch-hunting continues today across communities irrespective of their standing in the socio-economic

hierarchy (Mehra & Agrawal, 2016, p. 53)[32]. Women are also excluded from participating in some clearly marked male spaces and rituals, e.g. hunting (Ramnath, 2015).

Sinha adds further perspective about women's freedoms in discussing how their sexuality is controlled in adivasi communities commenting that, in Jharkhand, they are considered the property of either their fathers and husbands. Further, while divorce is not uncommon, divorced women are thought to be of lower status than other women, even though they can remarry; widowed women have a relatively better status (vis-à-vis their caste counterparts) and can remarry (Sinha, 2003). The comparatively open interaction between the sexes earlier has also been modified through Christian and Hindu religious activity which attempts to reshape women's lives in more domestic roles (Xaxa, 2004). The Maoists too have affected gender relations by agitating for women's resource claims against what they describe as a male gerontocracy. On the other hand, however, while the movement gives short shrift to traditional proscriptions against marriage across clan and tribe, they often dictate choice of partners amongst the cadres, thereby imposing new constraints on interaction between the sexes. Chandra (2015) describes how the leadership regulates couples' lives, making it difficult to divorce and remarry.

This section has briefly examined some aspects of adivasi society. While these descriptions are brief due to lack of space, they point to axes of change that are current in these communities. The next section takes a closer look at the four research villages in Surguja district.

5. Surguja

The recorded history of Surguja can be traced as far back as circa 1600. The Imperial Gazetteer of India (1908-1931, V. 23, pp. 172-173) notes that the Surguja area[33] came under the control of the Rajput kings of Palamau, in present day Jharkhand, in 1603. In 1758, Palamau became a tributary state to the Bhonsle Marathas of Nagpur. In the late 1700s the Palamau chief came into conflict with the British when he attempted to expel their forces from his area, resulting in prolonged skirmishes till 1818 when

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[32] Regular witch-hunting rituals continue to this day. One such event was reported from a village neighbouring one of the research villages, in which 11 women were branded witches. This event reportedly took place in 2010. More recently, five women were killed in the neighbouring state of Jharkhand, after being branded witches (Singh, 2015).
[33] The Surguja area of that time may not conform exactly to present-day Surguja as borders have been redrawn in recent times to create new districts for administrative efficiency.

Surguja eventually came under British (East India Company) control. The Rajput chief, on whom the British conferred the title 'maharaja', continued as a titular ruler. While the chief could administer his territory and levy certain customary rents he also paid an annual tribute to the British administration. He could not, however, interfere with the settlement and collection of land revenue; tax collections; excise collections; arrangements regarding salt and opium production; justice delivery beyond sentences of two years and fines of Rs.200/-; or in disputes with other states (The Imperial Gazeteer of India, 1908-1931, pp. 171-172). After independence, following the states' reorganisation in 1956, Surguja became part of Madhya Pradesh (MP). It became part of Chhattisgarh on 1 November 2000, when this new state was created for administrative efficiency from the predominantly adivasi belt in the eastern part of MP, also coincidentally a mineral-rich area. Ambikapur continues to be the district headquarters.

Census 2011 recorded a population of 840,352 in Surguja, with 415,860 females and 424,492 males. The total child population (0-6 years) was 126,032 of which there were 61,825 females and 64,207 males. The overall sex ratio is 980 and the child sex ratio is even lower at 963[34].The majority of the population is rural, accounting for 703,650 persons, while the urban population stands at 136, 702. The population of STs is 482,007 of which the majority, 452,904, are in rural areas and only 29,103 in urban areas. The scheduled caste (SC)[35] population is 40,090. The overall literacy rate was 60.9% with 51.9% of females and 69.6% of males being literate (Government of CG, nd).

5.1 The research villages

The research was carried out in four villages of Surguja district. These were Banpur, Kanhaigarh, Mahuabagh, and Kewarpur[36], in three different blocks. Each village is distinct in terrain and degree of remoteness. These factors affect the communities' sources of livelihoods, socio-economic arrangements, and their access to government welfare provisioning. They were chosen purposively in this manner in order to understand how location, terrain, and community shape people's lives.

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[34] Sex ratios are expressed as number of females per every 1000 males.
[35] The term scheduled caste (SC) refers to communities at the lowest rung of the caste ladder and traditionally considered 'untouchable'. They are eligible for special protections in the Constitution. The Constitution also abolishes untouchability. See Ministry for Social Justice (nd) for details.
[36] The names of the villages and *paras* are pseudonyms.

Access to the villages was mediated by a Chhattisgarh based organisation, Chaupal. Chaupal mobilises communities and advocates for their access to welfare entitlements, e.g. subsidised food rations through the public distribution system (PDS)[37]; work in the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS)[38]; nutritional support through Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)[39]; and midday meals (MDM)[40] in schools. Chaupal's close relationships with the local communities were crucial in enabling this research and helped to understand changes in the local context over time (see chapter 3 on methodology).

The next section describes the four villages in some detail, beginning with their physical settings and then going on to describe the communities, livelihoods, and some of the resources which serve the areas.

5.2 Terrain

Banpur, the least accessible of the four villages, is in the midst of dense forest and edged by hills on one side and paddy fields on another. In 2011, the main part of Banpur was reachable by foot or cycle after traversing approximately two kilometres further from the last stretch of motorable road. A tarmac road was almost complete in June 2013 and public transport is accessible from between three-five kilometres away which requires, usually, that people walk that distance.

Kanhaigarh is at the top of a hill with a tarmac road all the way till the far end of the village. The village, made up of 20 *paras,* constitutes a *panchayat* in itself. The *paras* are situated both along the road and in midst of fields which the residents cultivate,

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[37] The public distribution system (PDS) is envisaged to provide supplementary food staples at subsidised prices to render them affordable for economically disadvantaged households. Households are categorised according to income and receive fixed monthly stocks of food-grain per their categorisation. See Department of Food and Public Distribution (nd). Subsidised foodgrain is a legally mandated entitlement according to the National Food Security Act 2013.

[38] MGNREGS (also MNREGA/ NREGA) was introduced as law in 2005. It aims to secure up to 100 days (150 days in drought-hit areas, in 2015) of wage employment to each rural household. All households' adult members can take advantage of the provision usually by doing unskilled labour at MGNREGS sites. Wages are mandated to be paid into bank accounts within 15 days of work being done. See Ministry of Rural Development (nd).

[39] The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) is an early childhood development programme through which 0-5 years old children and pregnant and nursing women receive daily/ weekly food and nutritional supplements. It has a network of *anganwadi/ balwadi* centres which also double as pre-schools for 2-5 year-old children where they are also fed one hot cooked meal. See Ministry of Women and Child Development (nd).

[40] The mid-day meal scheme provides one cooked meal daily, for children in classes 1-8, in government schools. The aim is to improve school enrollment levels as also to provide nutritious food for children. See Department of School Education and Literacy (MHRD, nd).

with some smaller *paras* accessible only on foot. In spite of the tarmac road there is no public transport into the village because of the steep incline to the top of the hill. The residents therefore walk down, and back, the approximately seven kilometres to the main road.

Pandopara, Korwapara, and Oraonpara are three settlements of varying sizes, and named for their respective dominant communities, which form Mahuabagh. They are about three kilometres away from a tarmac road and, although they all lie within a half-kilometre radius, each is quite distinct from the others. All three settlements are set largely amidst scrub forest with Pandopara edged on one side by forested slopes. Public transport is available at the main road at long intervals.

Kewarpur is close to the block headquarters, about an hour's drive south of the district headquarters, Ambikapur. It is a large village interspersed and surrounded by intensively cultivated fields. Further away it is surrounded by forest and bordered on one side by a river. The tarmac road goes right into Kewarpur making it accessible throughout the year and public transport is available not far from village. It is divided into community-specific *paras* which are easily accessible by concrete roads.

5.3 Social composition

Banpur has 83 households of which 78 are Majhwar (ST) households. There are three Agariya households (ST); two are Ghasiya (SC) households; and there is one Oraon (ST) household. Most of the Majhwar households are of similar economic status with largely strong social ties amongst them. There are, however, some households that are worse off than others which affects their social ties with the larger community. Both the Ghasiya households are economically worse off than the remainder of the village and report caste-based discrimination as well. The Agariya household too is worse off and reports discrimination.

Kanhaigarh has 178 households; 78 Pahari Korwa; 34 Majhwar; 37 Oraon; 25 Yadav (OBC[41]); two Kanwar; and two Lohar (OBC). Yadavs and Lohars are caste Hindu communities while the rest are adivasi communities. Each of these communities live in clearly defined *paras*. While there are social ties amongst them, these are subject to local politics and petty conflict as well the physical proximity between their

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[41] Other Backward Classes categorises communities according socio-economic status and confers some constitutionally mandated protections on them.

neighbourhoods. The Pahari Korwas are well known for their traditional fighting prowess; although they consider themselves to be of high status other communities do not see them this way. The Yadavs, traditionally cowherds from eastern Uttar Pradesh (UP), migrated here at least hundred years ago in search of fresh pasture for their cattle. They are a Hindu caste and see themselves as being of higher status.

In Mahuabagh, Pandopara has 15 households. These families, all Pando, migrated here about 20–30 years previously because the abundant land had not yet been settled and this has resulted in close social ties amongst them. They are largely of similar economic status with no household being well off. The Oraonpara, constituted of 26 Oraon households, is economically better off presenting a stark contrast to the other two *paras*. There are 11 households in Korwapara with eight Pahari Korwa households; two Rajwade (OBC); and one Agariya household. Although it is small community, with some of the families related to one another, it is unclear how socially cohesive it is.

The communities in Kewarpur are Kanwar (76 households); Gond (11 households); Ghasiya (five households); Painika (10 households); Bargah/ Yadav (21 households); and Lohar (three households). There are eight households for which the community is not known. The Kanwars are relatively better off than others. They are spread out throughout the village, while it is the other smaller communities who are concentrated in particular *paras*. The Kanwars have strong ties amongst themselves as evident from wedding celebrations and funerals, and dominate the socio-economic and political landscape of the village.

5.3.2 Community representation in sample

The communities mentioned here were grouped into five categories according to observed socio-economic differences. The first group was at the lowest rung and the fifth group at the highest rung of this scale. The first group is the SC group which has the Ghasiya community. The second group classified as ST1 included the Agariya, Majhi, Majhwar and Pando. The third group is OBC group comprising the Painika, Rajware and Yadav communities. The fourth group is PTG group comprising the Pahari Korwa. The fifth group, named ST2, includes the Gond, Kanwar, Kerwar, and Oraon communities (White et al, 2012). Table 1 shows the percentage representation of each socio-economic group across the total and sample populations.

Table 3: Percentage distribution of socio-economic groups across total and sample populations

	SC	ST1	OBC	PTG	ST2	Total
Total population (households)*	7	112	82	86	153	440
Percentage of total population*	0.02	0.25	0.19	0.20	0.35	100
Percentage of sample population (2011)*	2	33	20	15	30	100
Percentage of sample population (2013)**	0.81	28.3	15.09	19.95	35.85	100

* Source: White, Gaines Jr, Jha, & Marshall (2012)

** Source: Fernandez, White, & Jha (2014)

5.4 Religion

The religious practices of the communities range across traditional adivasi worship to professing various forms of Hinduism and Christianity. As described earlier it is sometimes difficult to clearly distinguish between adivasi and Hindu worship. In this research, therefore, people were asked whether weddings were presided over by a *baiga*, a traditional adivasi healer or ritual specialist, to indicate adivasi practice; or by a *pundit*, a Hindu priest, to indicate Hindu worship. There was also a mixed category of worship where people said that their weddings were presided over by both[42]. Christians were far easier to identify and might be either Catholic or members of new evangelical or healing ministries that have taken root in Chhattisgarh recently. The main festivals are *Kathori*, which is celebrated in the Hindu lunar month of *Vaishaakh* (April-May), and *Nawadhaan*, which is celebrated in November/ December to mark the first cooking and eating of the grain, now usually rice, from the recently harvested crop. These are community festivals and Hindu or Christian allegiance does not preclude people from celebrating these festivals as these are strongly associated with nature and the harvest which are an important part of people's lives in this region. Table 2, below, depicts the frequency and percentage distribution of the sample population by religion and community.

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[42] The 'mixed' Hindu-adivasi category was introduced during the second round of research in 2013.

Table 4: Distribution of religion by community (frequency and percentage): 2011, 2013

Religion / Community	Sarna Dharm		Hindu		Christian		Mixed: Sarna Dharm + Hindu*	None*	Total	
	2011	2013	2011	2013	2011	2013	2013	2013	2011	2013
SC Ghasiya	5	2	0	0	2	1	0	0	7	3
	71	66.67			29	33.33			100%	100%
ST1 Agariya; Majhi; Majhwar; Pando	89	74	21	5	2	3	22	1	112	105
	79	70.48	19	4.76	2	2.86	20.95	0.95	100%	100%
OBC Painika; Rajware; Yadav	21	10	44	14	2	6	26	0	67	56
	31	17.86	66	25	3	10.71	46.43		100%	100%
PTG Pahari Korwa	35	63	16	5	1	1	5	0	52	74
	67	85.14	31	6.76	2	1.35	6.76		100%	100%
ST2 Gond; Kanwar; Kerwar; Oraon	42	37	38	11	21	35	50	0	101	133
	42	27.82	38	8.27	21	26.32	37.59		100%	100%
Total	192	186	119	35	28 8	43	103	1	339	366
	57	50.54	35	9.51		11.68	27.99	0.27	100%	100%

In each cell, figures above are frequencies; figures below are percentages

*Categories added in 2013

Source for 2011 data is White, Gaines Jr, Jha, & Marshall (2012)

Source for 2013 data is Fernandez, White & Jha (2014)

As Table 2 shows, the most significant change that occurred in the distribution of religion across communities, between the two rounds of the data collection, is that the proportion of Hindus across all communities went down from 35% to 9.51%. This can be attributed to two reasons. Firstly, in 2013 an added 'mixed' category was introduced as an option; a large number of people who had earlier identified as Hindu could have shifted into this category. Secondly, in 2013, the proportion of respondents from Kewarpur went down significantly and there was a commensurate increase of respondents from Mahuabagh. This too would have changed the religious makeup of the sample, which is also reflected in the proportionate increase in Christians from the ST2 group. This number reflects the greater number of Oraons, many of whom are Christian, in the sample in 2013.

5.5 Livelihoods

The mainstays of people's livelihoods are farming; collection of NTFP; daily wage labour in MGNREGS or from private contractors; or some combination thereof. The importance of each of these livelihood sources varies by location and terrain. In Banpur and Kanhaigarh, for instance, there are perennial sources of water which, in combination with the monsoon rains, allow the cultivation of two paddy crops annually, or one paddy crop in combination with either coarse grains, or oilseeds. Banpur also benefits from its forest location through collection of large amounts of NTFP. Kanhaigarh residents supplement their livelihoods largely through labour (especially MGNREGS) and the sale of firewood in the close by plains villages. In Kewarpur too, agriculture is the mainstay of the livelihoods with NTFP and labour being important supplements. Mahuabagh is, however, almost entirely dependent on collection and sale of NTFP and labour, as lack of irrigation makes it impossible to cultivate the land except during the rains. In all four locations access to land varies by community and many land-holdings may be so small that the harvested crop may feed the household for only four-six months or even less. In 2011, for instance, only 79 of 318 respondents harvested enough paddy to last them 10-12 months. For the vast majority of 186 out of 318 respondents, their harvested paddy lasted for between one to six months (White, Gaines Jr, Jha, & Marshall, 2012, p. 33). The amount of paddy harvested, and by implication the size of the landholding, are both without doubt reflective of inequality within the communities, as mentioned earlier by Xaxa (2008). The MGNREGS has had an important contribution to make in reducing out-migration for work; Kanhaigarh residents reported, for instance, that earlier all able-bodied villagers left to work as unskilled, casual labour wherever work was available. Although

MGNREGS has stemmed this, it is troubled with problems of delayed wage payments. This acts as an obstacle to the poorest people accessing it, as they need cash income on a daily basis in order to survive.

During the first round of data collection in 2011 about 90% of the 340 respondents were involved in farming and daily labour, and 75% reported being involved in the collection/ sale of forest produce. Most people were dependent on more than one livelihood source (White, Gaines Jr, Jha, & Marshall, 2012, pp. 28-29). In 2013, again the most important livelihood source was farming with 69% of the sample reporting it as their mainstay; it should be noted however, that 41.10% of these people reported it in combination with some form of daily labour. Daily labour was the main (sole) source of livelihood for 26% of the sample. The collection and sale of forest produce was reported to be the mainstay for 9% of the respondents, sometimes in combination with farming or daily wage labour (Fernandez, White, & Jha, 2014, pp. 21-22).

5.6 Government welfare provisioning

Since Chhattisgarh was formed in 2000, there has been an active movement to secure people's entitlements under various welfare schemes. The main welfare schemes pertain to subsidised food rations through the PDS; rural employment in MGNREGS; nutritional supplements in the ICDS; and mid-day meals in the government schools. This section discusses the two most significant social security provisions of PDS and MGNREGS.

Due to Chaupal's active work in the research area there have been marked improvements in service delivery over time. Drèze and Khera (2010), writing about the PDS in Surguja district, describe the process through which improvements have been brought about. These improvements are the result of a combination of elimination of middlemen in the PDS; government monitoring of grain delivery; distribution through the *panchayats*; and expanded coverage to almost 80% of the state population in 2010. This is borne out by the access to PDS in the two rounds of this research. In 2011, 83% of 332 respondents were getting rice in the PDS (White et al, 2012, p. 45) while 81% reported the same in 2013 (Fernandez, White, & Jha, 2014, pp. 50-52). Whereas earlier, it was common for people to go hungry during the lean period, PDS provisions have stemmed this to a great extent. Only 4% of the respondents reported going hungry in 2011 (White et al, 2012, p.32); this went up to 9% in 2013 (Fernandez, White, & Jha, 2014, p. 29). This change may well be affected by fewer respondents

from Kewarpur and a proportionate increase in respondents from Mahuabagh, which is economically worse off.

The positive picture that emerges from the above data may well be changing, however, with new policies of direct cash transfers being introduced since the change of government in New Delhi, in May 2014. The incumbent Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government has been vociferous in its belief that entitlements under the PDS and the NSFA 2013 are excessively generous (Sharma, 2015). There have also been modifications to the PDS with rations now being linked to the number of adults and children in each household. This has shrunk people's food-grain quotas with adverse consequences for the poorest families (Sharma, 2015).

The MGNREGS uptake figures for 2011 showed that 71% of respondents who had a job card had taken up work through MGNREGS in the previous 12 months. In 2013 the corresponding figure was 49%. Among the reasons that hinder uptake in MGNREGS is the fact that wage payments, although stipulated to be paid within 15 days of job completion, are often delayed for months on end; in 2011 only four percent of the respondents who worked in the scheme received timely payments. This particularly affects the poorest families who are dependent on daily wages and for whom, ironically, the scheme was especially envisaged as a social security net.

As in the case of PDS the current BJP government at the centre has signalled its intent to decrease funds to the MGNREGS, even though in 2015 extra work-days were sanctioned for drought–hit areas. The planned fund decrease since 2014 has already reduced the uptake of the scheme because district administrations worry that funds will not be available to disburse wages for jobs that could get underway (Chari, 2014).

While social welfare schemes have no doubt improved lives in the research villages, these are no means a solution to the poverty in which the majority of households continue. As recently released data from the Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) show the vast majority of 90% of rural households in the country are not in salaried employment, with daily wage labour being the mainstay for over half of rural households throughout the country (Shrinivasan & Bansal, 2015).

6. Conclusion

Through this brief discussion it is apparent that adivasi society is neither as egalitarian as it is perceived to be, and nor is it static or immune to changes that have swept through society more broadly. It has been subject to the efforts of various change agents and responded in varying degrees to them. This response has been through active participation in the state's and others' modernising projects and has, in turn, also reshaped the state's responses and policies through resistance and agitation.

Surguja bears witness to the sorts of changes that can come about in people's lives as a result of direct action on social welfare, in concert with NGOs, which can enable people to give voice to their demands and demand action from the state. While there have been positive changes as a result of state policy, incremental long-term changes which can as easily change the trajectory of people's lives are wholly dependent the direction that state policy on social welfare provision takes. The lives of people in Surguja remain vulnerable to such shifts because of their poverty and thereby greater dependence on social protections from the state.

Chapter 5: Agency and Structure in Women's Narratives

1. Introduction

This chapter draws on women's narratives of their lives to understand how they negotiate obstacles to agency in specific structures and the manner of transformation that follows from this. In chapter 2, I discussed the theoretical aspects of this link through Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and field. I also noted that the work of some scholars, in the field of relational sociology for instance, presents inadequate accounts of structure in the analysis of agency. One outcome of this is that the link between agency and structure remains under-articulated with agency described seemingly as arising in isolation. The aim of this chapter is to draw attention to the manner in which people respond to obstacles in their exercise of agency within specific structures, by focusing the efforts of their actions on alternative structures where the obstacles to agency are less rigid. This agentic action has the potential to not only transform the targeted field and the position of the individual in it, but also to bring about some change in original field of action itself.

In order to show how these changes occur I apply Bourdieu's concept of field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Bourdieu, 1998) to my empirical data showing how concurrent changes in various fields create opportunities for individuals' agentic actions. Agency is shown to emerge in situations where the constellations of relations in various fields are themselves undergoing changes. Two important points to be noted are that firstly, changes in field need not be on a large scale, they need merely to be sufficient for some new form of action to emerge. Second, individuals' concurrent locations in multiple fields allow them to draw on practices from various fields to act in an agentic manner often using their relative power in one field to make up for, or improve, their position in another where they lack power.

This chapter is set out as follows. In the second section I briefly re-present Bourdieu's concept of field. In the third section, I introduce three women- Gulabi, Bhavani, and Sujanibai, presenting the trajectories of their lives. I focus on each of them in turn, drawing out instances when they have acted in an agentic manner to understand the circumstances in which agency has emerged. I focus particularly on the alignment of structural positions that allowed these women the space and opportunities to exercise their agency at those moments. Finally, I will summarise these findings in the fourth

section and present some conclusions about the links between structure or field, and agency.

2. The field

In order to understand how opportunities for exercising agency emerged in three women's lives, I apply Bourdieu's concept of field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Bourdieu, 1998). Fields can be understood as a 'network, or a configuration, of objective relations of positions' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 96). Fields are social spaces which simultaneously exert power on the participants in that field, and are also sites of struggle where those same participants confront each other with the resources at their disposal which accrue to them according to their respective positions in that structure. These struggles could either result in the conservation or the transformation of those structures or fields (Bourdieu, 1998, pp. 32-33). Transformations in the field change the constellation of relations in that field, resulting in changes in individuals' power. Individuals' simultaneous situation in multiple fields also has the potential for their capital to fluctuate in each of these; but this also means that a relatively less powerful position in one field can be ameliorated by a more powerful one in another. It is this balance of positions in different fields which, I argue, creates the possibilities for agency to emerge. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) also mention that the practices in the field are not codified as explicit rules (ibid, p. 98) and further "[A]t each moment, it is the state of relations of force between players that defines the structure of the field" (ibid, p. 99). This allows for transformation in the field, shifting the relative positions of different players and allows some to exercise greater agency than before. Most scholars agree that this agency may be not be conscious, but may arise from the circumstances. Those circumstances are the product of the relations of power that define each field and so locate individuals within them.

3. Structure and agency in the narratives of three women's lives

Arnold and Blackburn (2004) introducing their edited volume of life-stories from India talk about the importance of these stories in uncovering the agency in people's everyday lives. Riessman (2000a; 2000b) makes a similar point in noting that people's narratives make us understand how they negotiate everyday life and this provides the context in which they exercise agency. She adds another point, mentioned earlier in the methodology chapter, which deserves re-emphasis here: the fact that narratives often reveal surprising insights regarding the person's life that challenge not just our assumptions about that particular person, but also about categories of people. This

can be seen in her research, about women who do not have children (Riessman, 2000a; 2000b). In order to understand in depth how structures actually shape people's lives we must necessarily engage with the details of their life trajectories at the micro-level.

The next section introduces the three women[43] through whose narratives[44] of their lives I examine how structure shapes agency. Here, I briefly describe their life trajectories and their lives at present and how significant transitions in their lives have been shaped by structure and their resultant agency.

3.1. Gulabi: "I had said that I would become a 'madam' and, here, I was one… my dream had come true."

Gulabi was 38 years old when I first met her in November 2010. At this time she had been married for about 22 years and lived in a joint household with her parents-in-law, husband, and three sons who, in 2010, were 17, 14, and 10 years old. She lost her first two children, both girls, very early. She had studied only till class eight during her childhood, but subsequently studied through the Open School system and appeared at her school-leaving exam for class 12 in June 2011. Gulabi is from the Kanwar community and identifies as Hindu. I interviewed Gulabi on four occasions, undertaking three surveys in November 2010[45], March 2011, May 2013, and one in-depth semi-structured interview in May 2011. This last forms the core of what is presented here. I also met her informally on various occasions when we talked about her work and the village; these exchanges are also woven into the formal conversations on which I report here since I would revisit these topics.

Gulabi, the eldest of five siblings, grew up in the main district town, Ambikapur, where her father was a government employee. She was educated till class eight[46]. Gulabi

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[43] The names of all people whose lives are described in this thesis are pseudonyms.

[44] A brief note on how narratives are presented in this thesis. Sentences or phrases included in the text are presented within double quotation marks. Larger sections of narratives are presented as block quotes without quotation marks; within these, sections in single quotation marks refer to what the narrator was thinking, while sections in double quotation marks refer to active speech that was reported within the narrative. Hyphens between passages indicate discontinuous narrative. Ellipses appearing mid-passage indicate trailing sentences; ellipses at the beginnings and ends of passages indicate omitted sections. Exchanges between the respondent and myself are prefixed with the initials of our respective names. Bracketed words indicate my additions to clarify the sentence. Hindi and Surgujiya words are italicised and explained in the footnotes or glossary.

[45] This first interview was part of a piloting phase and conducted jointly with Sarah White.

[46] This is equivalent to upper primary school, approximately till 13 or 14 years old.

attributes her withdrawal from school due to shortage of money resulting from her father's alcohol consumption, which had the additional fallout of violence against his wife and children. Gulabi recalls that she would pray then that she would not end up married to a similar man. Her father arranged her marriage soon after this.

Marriage involved many transitions. Living in the district town Gulabi had not done the household work required of women in rural households: collecting firewood and seasonal produce from the forests, and agricultural work. Her memories of that time are tinged with loneliness as she recalls that people made hurtful remarks about the uselessness of bringing an educated daughter-in-law who could not contribute to the rural household. She was taunted, and therefore often alone as she did not join other household women in their work. Her husband, Devsaya, then as now, remained outside this fray according to her, and neither did she remark upon her situation to him alluding that he would have been irritated by this. Like her, her husband is much more educated than his contemporaries in the village, having completed school till the senior secondary level in a boarding school away from the village. He too, therefore, was less proficient in the tasks that a village man should be able to boast about such as ploughing the fields. What is inevitably a difficult transition for most newly married young women was further marked by these difficulties for Gulabi.

Furthermore, her conjugal family, once dominant in the village community, was badly off and there was very little for meeting daily essential needs including food, let alone anything leftover even for extras. Her parents gave her small gifts of cash on her visits to her natal home, as is customary, but this was enough only for a few essentials. Moreover, she said, once she started her own family these sums were never be enough to look after her children's needs. In order to contribute Gulabi eventually became proficient at household work and boasted that she was soon quicker than her sisters-in-law. However, the poverty eventually drove her to enquire about a job in a local NGO, which she got. This was unusual, but, she said, that she presented this decision to her parents-in-law as a fait accompli rather than ask their permission as would have been the norm. This marked the second significant change in her life.

Since she was required to do fieldwork in remote habitations she shifted base closer to her work area and Devsaya followed her. Eventually, Devsaya too got a NGO job and Gulabi withdrew from her job to manage the household. However, life did not become easy. Devsaya's salary was not enough to cover all their expenses. Gulabi started doing

home-based piecework and, eventually, also daily wage labour. Things were so bad at one point that they withdrew their children from school. Gradually, Devsaya's salary increased and Gulabi once more returned to a NGO job. They were both working in the same NGO at that juncture. The three boys returned to school.

The third significant transition came about when Gulabi contested the *panchayat* seat from Kewarpur in 2010. She was encouraged to do so with the support of the NGO management, as it also amplified their aim of enabling community members to become more involved in decision-making at the *panchayat* level, which affects how welfare schemes are implemented. By the time I met her for the first time, she had been in her post for about a year. She, Devsaya, and their three sons were once more living in a joint household with her parents-in-law. As far as possible she continued to do her earlier work in the NGO, not wanting to lose out on that job should she not get re-elected for another term. This elected post had placed Gulabi squarely in the public eye and in a position of some power locally. She has been the subject of gossip and innuendo as women in such positions often are. As I will discuss in the next section, she has been defiant in pursuing her work and taking on individuals who obstruct her work.

This brief retelling of Gulabi's life is marked by three significant transitions: first, her marriage and subsequent changes; second, her decision to enter paid employment; and third, her election to the *panchayat*. In the next section, I discuss how each of these transitions has been shaped by structural factors and made it possible for her to exercise agency.

3.1.1. "Somehow I will learn to do all this work"- Three transitions: fluctuating power, transforming the field

In this section I discuss in detail how structural factors, theorised as fields (Bourdieu 1998) have created opportunities for Gulabi to exercise agency. I first discuss her decision to enter paid employment followed by her election to the panchayat. I then return to her life immediately after marriage, since this reflects more micro-level factors, to discuss how that time may have laid the foundation for her to exercise agency in later circumstances.

Although her conjugal family was traditionally dominant in the village with her father-in-law being the *patel*, their poverty at the time of Gulabi's marriage played a

significant role in the way that Gulabi was able to negotiate her life[47]. Even though the norms of family would dictate, among Kanwar families, that Gulabi remain confined to household management, the family's position was considerably diminished by their lack of economic power, or capital as Bourdieu would put it. Their resultant weakened position was further underlined by the fact that community elders do not automatically pass on their exalted status to their heirs. The fact that Devsaya was educated could not translate into enhanced economic status nor enhance their existing position as long as he was unemployed. Enter into this scene, an educated daughter-in-law otherwise unskilled in the arts of traditional household management. The diminishing economic status of the family gave Gulabi one of the openings that she needed. This was the opportunity to work outside the home. In the context of Kewarpur, the Kanwar community behaves in a somewhat similar manner to upper-caste Hindu communities in that women tend to observe some seclusion, especially among the better-off families. This may stem from their settled life and the fact that they are a dominant land-owning community. While it would have been expected that Gulabi ought to have restricted herself to household work, she challenged this. Further, there is a difference between doing outside labour- considered to be low status work, versus 'service' or a salaried private job which is considered prestigious. This is where Gulabi was at an advantage because of her education. This itself, I would argue, was the outcome of another field at work, namely the state, and the discourses it produces, which I will discuss following this. Continuing with the field of the family, I would argue that Gulabi's conjugal family benefited from Gulabi's work. There are two ways in which this has happened. Firstly, by working outside the home and using her education this justifies their decision to bring an educated bride and, even more importantly, a job such as this brings prestige to the family. Aside from that, it has widened their network of connections and given them access to a new set of people.

These advantages have been strengthened by Gulabi's election to the *panchayat* and Gulabi's and Devsaya's returning to the joint family. In this situation the advantages of Gulabi's position are directly visible to the community where the family resides. In these different ways, Gulabi has been able to strengthen her own position in the family. It was the decline in family fortunes and a resultant underlying shift in household power that allowed Gulabi to act in ways that were unusual at that time. I would argue that it is impossible to know precisely whether Gulabi reflected on these

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[47] Gulabi describes their poverty. My statement regarding their position vis-à-vis other Kanwar families in Kewarpur is based on data from the Wellbeing Pathways survey as well as observations of interactions between Gulabi's and other Kanwar families in Kewarpur.

matters or acted because there was simply no option, i.e. what may appear or be presented to us as agency could have been action resulting from compulsion. Either way, I would argue that her parents-in-law's reaction or lack of censure would have opened up further avenues of acting that might have been closed to her earlier. From Gulabi's narrative we also know that Devsaya got a job after she did. Even if she was not instrumental in getting him a job it certainly put him in touch with the people who could employ him, and also provided an example of the kinds of things he could do. It is also noteworthy that once Devsaya was in paid employment it appears that he was able to graduate to a higher salary much quicker than Gulabi could. The moment that happened, Gulabi left paid employment and stayed at home to look after the children, devoting herself primarily to household management and childcare, even though Devsaya's salary was not enough to manage on. While one could argue that it made economic sense for the better paid partner to remain in paid employment and the other to manage the household, it is significant that the moment the salaries realigned to a traditional male-breadwinner model, Gulabi decided or was compelled to leave her job. This could have been due to the value ascribed to the roles of being a 'good wife' or a 'good mother', something that I will explore in greater detail in the next chapter. However, she continued to do home-based work since they needed more money. This reflects the constant shifting of positions within the family as various members acquire and lose power of different kinds.

The next important shift that has come about is directly the result of the discourses produced in the field of the state and reproduced in the local context of the district. While the block or the district cannot be conflated with the state, here they nonetheless represent the state or are its manifestations in the local context. In recent years, the devolution of some administrative power to the *panchayats*[48] has been accompanied with the understanding that marginalised groups must also find representation here and resulted in some seats reserved for women candidates. This focus on women's representation has not been an isolated attempt, but has been accompanied by efforts to increase female enrolment in primary, secondary, and tertiary education, and to empower women through economic activities etc. Notwithstanding critiques of these programmes, they have with varying emphases and delivery certainly resulted in some discourse, even at the grassroots level, for improving women's subordinate status. Gulabi, both because of her education and her employment, had certainly come into contact with these discourses, as would have

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[48] See p.10, glossary entry for *Panchayat*

Devsaya. What has happened as a result of this? It led directly to the possibility of Gulabi being able to stand for election with the support of the NGO where both she and Devsaya work. In this, the 33 percent reservation for women, and Kewarpur resultantly being a reserved seat for women candidates directly benefited Gulabi. Here was an opportunity to influence all kinds of decision-making locally and to further her own role in the NGO.

This decision is the direct outcome of the changes both in the field of the family and the field of the state. Bourdieu describes the field of the family both in terms of power relations within the family itself, as well as the constellation of power among families. In this case, for Gulabi, the field of the family was weakened while the field of the state became stronger relative to the former. In the field of the family, Bourdieu (1998) describes as fiction its 'natural' discourse of the male-provider and female dependent or nurturer (ibid, pp. 66-70). In fact, Bourdieu's allusion to the fiction of the 'natural' form of the family is evident in the utterances of many women in this research site, who work for wages because they must provide for the family, either alone or alongside their male partners, thus demonstrating the struggles that are inherent in the field of the family. In Gulabi's case too, this fiction of male provision was quickly revealed in two ways: firstly, because farming was yielding such poor returns; and secondly, because Devsaya was neither a proficient farmer nor was he was earning in some alternative manner. This weakening of the male-provision role usually not only allows, but also often forces, women to do similar sorts of work as men, e.g. unskilled daily wage labour. However, this would be less acceptable in higher status communities, which the Kanwar consider themselves to be. Gulabi was able to overcome this because at the same time she was a direct beneficiary of the discourses of modernity produced by the state, e.g. women being educated. This also marked her out as different and therefore she could act in different ways than other women in the family/ community because of this. Thus this simultaneous change in both fields allowed for an opportunity for Gulabi to act. This reflects what Bourdieu has said about how a particular class's practices at a particular point in time are not an essential property of that class but can undergo change. Thus here, modernity allows for a change in the practice and in this case, Gulabi's actions allowed her conjugal family to reinstate their position of dominance through a new, modern practice, as I further demonstrate.

The second important aspect is what Gulabi brought to the family. Her election to the *panchayat* increased the prestige of the household which had been traditionally dominant but was losing this prestige. Through Gulabi's election the household was now directly involved in new forms of power which have the legitimacy of formally being part of the political field. This buttressed their prestige and position by suffusing it with the power of the state institutions. It also, additionally, brought them into new fields such as politics. This had two further effects: it brought them into contact with new people and broadened their network of acquaintances and second, it brought to the fore new opportunities for advancement. The advancement itself could be of different sorts, e.g. economic advancement or access to new forms of credit etc. and of a social or cultural type. There is no doubt that certain forms of consumption are newly noticeable in her family. For instance, when in 2013 Gulabi told me that she was able to send her second son to a residential school in the neighbouring state, where they were paying an annual fee of Rs. 150,000/- I was surprised that they could afford this along with the annual fee of Rs. 72,000/ for the youngest son's hostel and school in Ambikapur. This was a far cry from the days when they had to withdraw the children from school due to lack of money. This move certainly attracted the attention of Kewarpur's residents, including resulting in some allegations of corruption. There is no doubt that lines of credit would be easier to come by for a *panchayat* member, and they frequently receive some gifts for favours done or even for things to move in the *panchayat* according to the standard procedure. Sending her children to more expensive schools was also advancement of the second type. These are private schools so this itself signalled the family's upward mobility. Further, in yet another form of modernising discourse, which I described in chapter 4, the older son had begun to study in a school that is run by a Hindu religious teacher or order. Devsaya, who told me about this, said that this was to inculcate discipline in him and that they might send the youngest son there too. While this may well be true, it is difficult not to connect this with the more religious tone that has coloured Indian politics in general[49]. While both Gulabi and Devsaya identify as Hindu, this further identification cannot be divorced from a move towards emulating a more powerful class of people: people who have far greater access to power and a discourse that dominates politics today.

In terms of relationships within the community it has allowed Gulabi to challenge the authority of fictive elder male kin who she would not traditionally even have spoken

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[49] Indian politics is currently dominated by the right-wing Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) which rules at the centre as well as in numerous states, including Chhattisgarh and neighbouring MP where this school is located.

to. She narrated how she would tell them to leave from the gr*am sabha* if they were drunk, and warned them that she would thrash them with their own slippers if they dared show up drunk to disrupt proceedings. This was certainly unusual behaviour on any woman's part. This stemmed partially from the authority vested in her because of being an elected representative and the power that this bestowed in her person for the time being. However, I would argue that it also stemmed in part from the very patriarchal structures that she challenged to some degree. The very fact that Devsaya partnered her in her *panchayat* role worked in her favour. Superficially, Devsaya's support of Gulabi's work resembled the oft-reported pattern of women *panchayat* members being rubber stamps for their male relatives. While Devsaya was a partner in the *panchayat* work, albeit in the background, this did not necessarily reduce Gulabi to a rubber stamp. However, his presence signalled that Gulabi had his support in whatever she did. In part, this was because the family's advancement also depended on Gulabi's connections. It meant that she could speak out, even to male elders, because she has her household's, especially husband's, support.

It was in her personal relationships, especially with Devsaya, that Gulabi was far more circumspect about how she behaved. Even as she discovered new avenues to explore her capabilities and seems to gain confidence over time, she ensured that she did not step on too many toes. This could be partly so that her access to the outside world remained unchallenged; hence her continued attention to the household management even though this meant that she carried a large workload. Since Devsaya's support in particular was crucial to her continued working outside the home she was especially careful regarding how she resolved conflicts with him. She has consistently described how she treads softly around these, making sure not to antagonise him. This behaviour has been consistent from the beginning of her marriage, to which I now turn.

When I asked Gulabi what had propelled her to this point in her life, there were two references that were constantly repeated. The first was her determination, notable in this statement "…the moment I touch some task I won't leave it till I have done it completely." The second was Devsaya's support. While both represent quite personal micro-level factors one is more internal while another is more external. She stated very simply that he had never let her do anything alone and no matter what she did, he had been there to help her in the background. On the other hand however she also talked of the caution that she exercised in her relationship with him, where she is careful not to say anything that could irritate him and cause any kind of rupture. This is

a telling remark seemingly at odds with his support for her. It signalled that she was conscious of certain limits in the relationship and simultaneously recognised that Devsaya's support was essential to her pursuit of her aspirations. It is instructive, here, to recall Connell's (1987) substructure of cathexis, which works in tandem with the substructures of labour and power, and can both reinforce or ameliorate their effects. On the one hand, Gulabi and Devsaya have both upended the traditional male-breadwinner model when it was impractical for them to follow it, and then returned to it when it was once more viable. On the other hand his seeming lack of support in the early years of their marriage when he said nothing about her being taunted for not working could well have worked to her advantage. Even though, till the time of our last conversation, Gulabi was aware of some boundary regarding what she could and could not voice to her husband, it does seem that his relatively passive or relaxed attitude allowed Gulabi to develop her potential in her own way.

Gulabi's learning the household work could be construed in two ways. Certainly it was instrumental in her fitting into the household, into the role of the daughter-in-law. Unlike Polit (2012), however, I refrain from characterising this as agency because it worked merely to reinforce a norm of how a daughter-in-law ought to behave. What I think is present are elements of reflexive action in which there was certainly self-interest. These elements of reflexive action could have laid the ground for later agency. Certainly, at the time of speaking, Gulabi characterised it as part of her determination. In this we, therefore, see a trajectory from helplessness to assertion and overt action. This is also a question about the narrative identity and how it works as a source of agency, which I will discuss in the next chapter. Gulabi was far more constrained in what she could have done then. Whether she fitted in or not, she had to stay in this household. That is what the norm dictates and furthermore, her natal household was not necessarily a happy or supportive one either. In fact, in the very first conversation we had with her she stated that once a girl gets married then her parents have no responsibilities towards her. As she reflected back on that time, she presented this- her learning the household work, as something that she chose to do. I would argue that there was little choice in the matter, but her choice was in how she faced up to it. Once she decided she would do it, she would do it well because she recognised the financial constraints of her family and more importantly this was her way of doing things as I noted above. Having once established herself as a good daughter-in-law, she could, when the circumstances arose as mentioned earlier, challenge some rules which could transform the relations of power in the family.

3.2. Bhavani: My parents tell me "it is your karma, your stars weren't good so you got that house."

Bhavani guessed she was 50 years old when I interviewed her in May 2011 because she could not see comfortably enough to thread a needle. A month earlier while interviewing her husband, I had to request her not to reply for him; she replied that her husband could not answer us as his brain was worn out from excessive tobacco consumption. She lives with her husband and younger of two sons; the elder son, his wife, and child live in the same house but cook separately. The family is resident in Kanhaigarh village, living among the Hindu Yadav community to which they belong.

Bhavani was married most likely during adolescence, as she was the eldest of five sisters. She grew up in relative comfort, lacking for nothing. After marriage, in contrast, she came to a poor household where even food was short. She sounded bitter over her marriage into a poor household, and till date expressed her anger to her own parents; her sisters were much luckier to marry into comfortable households. Not only was the household poor, her parents-in-law did not care whether she remained or returned to her natal home. She reported crying incessantly in early days till the "water [from my tears] had finished from all the crying". It was only the thought of her parents' honour that prevented her from leaving; their name would be sullied and it would be difficult to find husbands for her sisters since it would be perceived that they could behave similarly. Her parents attempted to compensate by frequently calling her for long visits to her natal home. They also gave gifts in cash and kind. While this is customary when a woman visits her natal home, in Bhavani's case, her parents explicitly attempted to make up for her circumstances. As recently as the previous year (to our conversation), her brothers had organised her health treatment since she and her husband, Sitaram, were badly off. Further, Sitaram, who is poorly educated, was unlikely to know how to navigate the labyrinthine bureaucracy of government hospitals. She adds that her husband's silence[50], that unlike his parents he did not voice a similar lack of interest as to whether she stayed or left, also made her stay on here. She said this was especially the case when she was expecting their first child attributing his silence to his concern for her, even though this may not have been articulated in words.

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[50] Silence or not saying anything in this context means that he did not reprimand her or express anger towards her. I will discuss this further in chapter 8 in the context of marital relationships.

Eventually, she realised that unless she started working there would be little to eat. She noted that her parents-in-law were indifferent in managing the household, working- or not, as they desired. Her family's advancement would be entirely up to Sitaram's and her hard work. She demanded that she and her husband establish their own kitchen. Her parents joined her in voicing this; while the woman's parents have some interest in seeing their daughter managing her own nuclear household this overt support is rare. Once she had separated her household, her parents helped her set it up and sent provisions when they could.

She and Sitaram subsisted with difficulty, mostly on manual labour and some farming. Their poverty meant that their elder son attended school for some time, while the younger worked with them. She cried when she described her younger son's anger at this injustice, and said that she promised herself that she would ensure that his children would be educated. The hard work and poverty mean that she suffers from chronic ill health, no longer able to do manual labour. Since the household was now slightly better off, she no longer needed to contribute except by managing the household chores, though this is also not light work. In recent years, the family had become more comfortable. This was partly due to some help from her natal family, along with government welfare provisioning, especially in form of subsidised food-grain. Nonetheless, their home was modest in spite of the fact that they belong to the comparatively better-off Yadav community. Further, even though the few Yadav families in Kanhaigarh seem to be closely connected, Bhavani alludes to their own poverty as a source of social ostracism. She comments that asking for help from their Yadav neighbours yields nothing but excuses and that her family are 'small people'.

In 2013, when I returned for further fieldwork, I could not interview Bhavani though I met her occasionally. I was kept abreast of negotiations and then preparations for the younger son's wedding. His wife had completed school and would appear at qualifying exams as a government-school teaching assistant. Bhavani said to me with pride that her daughter-in-law would sit on a chair for work. Although the results for this exam were not known when fieldwork concluded, Bhavani said that she would want her daughter-in-law to try once more in case she did not qualify this time, failing which she ought to confine herself to household chores. This son's marriage also seemed to have improved the family's fortunes through the dowry they received; a new TV and some furniture was visible in the house, and all family members seemed better dressed than

earlier. On the day that I visited their household, Bhavani was cleaning freshly harvested paddy, stating happily that it would last them a few months.

Bhavani, like Gulabi, faced a particularly difficult transition in marriage- this was the first of many in her life. Her anger was palpable till the time of my interviewing her. Moving past the early gloom, however, she somehow carved out a place for herself and thereby built a life with her husband, which is what I deal with primarily in the next section. There are two aspects to this which I discuss in the next section: first, the manner in which Bhavani's changed situation motivated her to demand the separation of her household from that of her in-laws'; and second, how this separation itself was facilitated by her relationship with her husband.

3.2.1. "I cried till my tears had dried up": Obedient daughter, docile daughter-in-law?

Bhavani's marriage was the most significant transition for her, marking the shift from a relatively comfortable life to one almost of penury. The intensity of change was evident in her description of her conjugal household as "a noose". How does her situation in the field of the family help us understand her opportunities to exercise agency? Bhavani is simultaneously located in two families, in both of which she did not initially have much power. However, she was also affected by the how the two families are located in relation to each other in the field of the family. Bhavani's narrative clearly implied that her natal family's greater wealth placed them, unusually in the ccase of caste-Hindu communities, in a more powerful position compared to her conjugal family. This meant that while her natal family would suffer if Bhavani had returned to there, as I described above, their greater wealth afforded them the power to bargain for Bhavani's better position in the conjugal family. This was evident in her frequent visits home in the early years, and especially in their support for her demand to separate her kitchen from her parents-in-law's. This was the second significant transition in Bhavani's life.

Bhavani's parents' support strengthened her position sufficiently that it allowed her to act in an agentic manner, e.g. in demanding for the separation of her household. In this respect her concurrent location in both the families weakened her parents-in-law's position especially given their weak economic status. It is important to note that her natal family's assistance to Bhavani in no way subverted patriarchy. On the contrary, it reinforced patriarchal values that link familial honour with women's behaviour such

that Bhavani did not realistically have the option of leaving her conjugal home. Paradoxically, it was this very structural effect of patriarchy that afforded Bhavani some space for exercising agency. As mentioned in chapter 2, while women theoretically do not have access to their natal family's support after marriage, it is well known that they count on varying degrees of support in practice (Wadley, 1995; Grover, 2011). This support may be a mix of practical self-interest on the natal family's part, as well as reflect the emotional attachments between family members, which nonetheless reinforce the idea that married women must remain in their conjugal families. It is this complex of patriarchal values and sentiment, along with Bhavani's own location in two families, and the relative positions of her conjugal and natal families in the field of the family, which shaped Bhavani's agency. It was both constrained, in that once married there was no way out of marriage, and enabled by allowing some freedom from the restraint that a newly married woman may normally face.

The second aspect of Bhavani's assertion was the manner in which it was linked with her relationship with Sitaram. Bhavani mentioned that her relationship with her husband was also a key factor, in tandem with others, in her decision to remain in her conjugal home. This was not an overtly voiced support on his part since, as she says, he could not have directly challenged anything that his parents said. In this sense his behaviour accorded with the norms that enjoin the younger generation to acquiesce to the rules laid down by senior family members. Bhavani termed Sitaram's behaviour as support, however, because even though he did not challenge their behaviour, he did not in any way endorse their indifference to her. Moreover, he had never expressed any anger towards her. In fact, she describes his concern for her in later years which she attributed partly to his knowledge that she had enjoyed a more comfortable existence before marriage. This clearly indicates how their families' relative structural positions also found expression in their own relationship. This emotional element of the relationship or cathexis (Connell, 1987) is intertwined with other structural factors, described above, as partly affording Bhavani the space to exercise her agency. I will discuss this emotional aspect of relationships further in chapter 8, where I discuss the relational aspect of agency.

3.3. Sujanibai: "I thought '*arrey*, where will I go? Whose house will I live in?"

Sujanibai was probably in her 60s when I interviewed her in May 2011. I first met her in February 2011 when we were introduced by Gangaram Paikra, the director of

Chaupal; he described her as an activist and community leader. I interviewed her on three occasions, undertaking surveys in May 2011 and May 2013, and one in-depth semi-structured interview in May 2011. She was a single woman living alone in Banpur. Although she said she was widowed, on further enquiry it transpired that the relationship with her common-law husband[51] had largely ended prior to his death. He had been the *patel* and, even after his death, she too was addressed by this honorific thereby acknowledging their relationship. Sujanibai is from Banpur's dominant Majhwar community. She professes faith in the relatively new Changayee healing ministry although she earlier practiced adivasi rituals.

Sujanibai was married young in keeping with the norms at that time. She left her husband soon after marriage since neighbours in her conjugal village told her that he was not a good man; she returned to her natal home, where her parents told her she would have to return to her husband's house. Instead, she ran away eventually reaching Banpur where she was given refuge. She then mentioned how her second husband cast a spell on her causing her to be possessed so that she would live with him, saying "I just came to his house one day and I started living there. If that had not happened… I knew that he was already married so I could hardly have married him could I? I would not have just landed up like that knowing that he was married… so it was a spirit."

Not only was this man already married, but he later brought another woman[52] as a third wife. Sujanibai said that he was alcoholic. Throughout her life with him he was violent towards her, including during her only pregnancy. She would often leave the house, seeking refuge with others or at her natal home. She says, however, he would always cast a spell on her and she would feel compelled to return. When their daughter was four years old Sujanibai decided to leave her with her own parents. Apart from this she also faced the animosity of the senior co-wife. Sujanibai says this woman gave her some medicine which prevented her from conceiving again and also asked a traditional healer to cast a spell that caused Sujanibai's daughter's death and Sujanibai's own ill-health for many years.

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[51] I refer to him as Sujanibai's husband since that is how she described him, even though their marriage was not solemnised.
[52] This woman was his niece and even though this was an unacceptable relationship he lived with her. This relationship, which meant that Sujanibai's junior co-wife was also her niece by marriage, made Sujanibai stay away for longer periods while that relationship lasted. Sujanibai made clear her censure of that arrangement.

Throughout this time, Sujanibai saved money earned from daily labour and the sale of forest produce. She paid for her current house to be built and started living here. She also bought a small piece of land in another part of the village; she and her second husband lived there for some time. She invested her money in a herd of goats and even in 2011 she had about 30 goats and did profitable business in goat rearing. Thus, throughout her marriage, Sujanibai was independent and supported her husband rather than the other way round. The reason for constructing her own house was also due to the violence and the precarious nature of her marriage in having to contend with two co-wives; she started staying away from him after the younger wife came since this junior co-wife was her husband's kinswoman and this relationship was therefore prohibited. She was unable to recover from the illness caused, she believes, by the magic spells even though she visited numerous healers. Eventually she came to know about an indigenous healing church, Changayee[53]. She started praying with a small group of people and found relief, both mentally and physically; she says she recovered from her illness through Bible reading and prayer, and gave up the adivasi traditions of worship. This incensed her husband who declared their marriage at an end. Nonetheless, he continued to visit her and eventually died in one of her houses.

Sujanibai attributed her worship in the Changayee church with having given her peace saying that had she known about it when her daughter was ill she could possibly have saved her, saying that it gives one the tools to heal through prayer, without having to rely on a *baiga* or *devaar* and pay for the ingredients that he or she required for the rituals. She has persisted with this worship even though there was animosity towards Changayee followers in the village. Although she had been told that the villagers would not perform her funeral rites because of this, she said that her relations with everybody continue to be as close as earlier. In fact, this is also evident in the fact that when a NGO started working here and formed a SHG, the community chose Sujanibai to be their leader. She became the local mobiliser for this NGO, conducting meetings, disbursing credit, and attending meetings in Ambikapur. She is dismissive of this role, her tone at odds with Gangaram's earlier reverence of her leadership and activism. She found no value in the work; she would not have taken it on but for the insistence of the village community.

Sujanibai seems to keep largely to herself, partly because she spent much of her time grazing her goats in the hills outside the village. She was self-sufficient and in fact helps

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[53] Changayee literally means 'wellness' or 'to be well'.

a number of community members financially. There was certainly an element of give-and-take in this; her neighbour, whom she helped financially, would cook for her when she was ill. She did not farm on her own, but rented the farmland to her niece (by marriage). She was treated like a village elder, often consulted on various matters. A clear pattern of self-reliance and independence emerges from Sujanibai's narrative. This is partly emphasised by the fact that by the time I met her, she was one of few single women and also comparatively better off than others in the community, whereas most single women were decidedly worse off. Gangaram's description of her activism perhaps influenced my sense of her of independence too, even prior to our conversation.

In analysing how her agency has been shaped by structural factors, I examine two aspects of her life: first, I attempt to explain what has shaped her self-reliance and independence and second, I examine her dismissal of her mobiliser role in the NGO. I will show that they are synonymous outcomes of the same structural factors. Sujanibai's narrative reveals three main transitions. The first is the manner in which Sujanibai established her independent household. The second transition is her role as an NGO mobiliser and what this signified to her. The last transition that I will examine is her conversion to the Changayee healing ministry.

3.3.1. "Where will one get the strength? One gets it from one's heart": Self-reliance and agency

The field that I primarily consider with respect to Sujanibai's action of establishing her independent household is that of the family. I find it useful to think about the power relations within the family itself, i.e. her conjugal family including her husband and co-wives, as well as the location of this family within the community. Sujanibai's entry into this family is unconventional as she has herself remarked "[T]hen this husband [talking about her second husband] was already married and he was much older than- maybe 10 or 15 years… but I think he cast a spell on me or had some spirits haunt me so I became infatuated with him." Further, "[H]e didn't even put any vermilion in my hair part[54]… brought me here just like that. And here also it was always sometimes out, sometimes in, sometimes out, sometimes in [referring to her seeking refuge elsewhere when he was violent]…" Sujanibai characterised herself as completely lacking agency in

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[54] Vermilion in the hair part is a marriage marker.

this event[55], which was at odds with the dominant narrative tone of the remainder of our conversation. She explained leaving her first conjugal home as resulting from people's gossip, but did not deny her own actions in that. In contrast, this statement denied all responsibility on her part, to the extent that she did not even know this man. She presented a passive self being possessed, acted upon rather than acting, in order to suffuse her part in entering the relationship with some degree of legitimacy[56] (see e.g. Spencer, 1997). This legitimacy was then furthered through the narrative of illness and suffering caused by her co-wife's instigation of spirits. My aim here is not to deny the reality of Sujanibai's sufferings nor her beliefs as to their causes, but to recognise that her agency lies in denying all agency in those events.

Sujanibai's position was complicated by the senior, legitimate co-wife's presence. Her husband was the village headman and even in a small, relatively egalitarian community such as Banpur, this commanded status as evident in people continuing to address Sujanibai as *patel*. Sujanibai's position in this conjugal arrangement, however, was precarious, e.g. she knew that she would have no access to the land as her elder co-wife ensured that she retained control of the land. Thus Sujanibai's economic interests were not aligned with that of her conjugal family as would normally be the case. Most significantly, Sujanibai remained outside the formal structure of a family; she was not a member of her husband's official household and nor did they live together permanently. Further, she was not visibly a mother, a role that confers full adulthood[57] on young people. It is the very patriarchal nature of the family that forced her to build an identity separate from the family. By this I mean that it was accepted that the first wife was the 'real' wife, that she or her children would inherit the land[58]. Thus various avenues to achieve power in the field of the family were closed off to Sujanibai, effectively rendering her powerless. However, that power is effective only because

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[55] I purposely employ 'event' as opposed to 'action' to describe how she was the passive objec*t* of something that happened to her.

[56] Sujanibai's ascription of her agency to spirit possession, in this matter, is not singular. Mangali ascribed illness, in the early days of her marriage, to spirit possession. In Mangali's account, a young man from her natal village asked a ritual specialist to cast the spell so that she would reciprocate his thus far unrequited affections. I believe that Mangali, a respectably married woman, had even greater interest in disavowing any affection she may have felt.

[57] Community members frequently referred to parenthood as the event that confers a real sense of responsibility and adulthood on young people. Gulabi talked about parenthood as the period when she and Devsaya would have to take over the household responsibilities from her parents-in-law. Piyaribai talked of her newly married son and daughter-in-law as children still; she would give up her household responsibilities when a grandchild is born because *that* is when the couple would understand how to shoulder the responsibilities of running the household.

[58] Villagers referred to her house, not Sujanibai's, as the *patel*'s house.

people are invested in their positions, or that power is important to them. This may not always be the case. Bourdieu notes that there are no explicitly codified rules of the field; rules, or dispositions towards a regular practice are effective insofar as the people have an interest in 'playing the game' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 98-100). I suggest, that in fact Sujanibai's series of actions attest to her lack of interest in 'the game', i.e. she showed no desire to participate in the objective relations of power that establish her own position in field of family. This 'lack of desire' may, of course, have stemmed from her inability to command power in the field of the family-certainly within her conjugal family, and she may felt compelled to portray herself as lacking interest in the game simply because she could not overcome the obstacles to her participating in it.

This lack of power in the field of the family both barred her and, thereby, freed her from participating in that field on the already established terms. Instead, circumstances compelled Sujanibai to seek work and earn her own money. Being free of the rules of the field of the family she was not hampered by norms governing the behaviour of a new bride or by more traditional family responsibilities, this opened the way for her to participate in the economic field more effectively. She saved money and converted those saving into assets. These visible sources of her success in the economic field allowed her to establish a different kind of status in the community. Her economic status is validated by the fact that community members request her for financial help and advice. Her economic success then resulted in her having much greater power in the village community and in the conjugal family too. Eventually both of these reinforce each other. Once she had achieved economic success, her status would have been reinforced by her then established relationship with the *patel*. Her position in the conjugal family would have been buttressed by her economic success, e.g. building a house, buying land etc., and her husband's dependence on her for money. Concurrently, her elder co-wife's position too had weakened, as she had no children, leading to a realignment of the power in the field of the family.

The second important transition was that of taking on the role of a community leader through her work as an NGO mobiliser. Here, I suggest that it was her economic success that positioned her as a leader in the community resulting in her being chosen as a NGO mobiliser in the community. However, contrary to some discourses that position SHG participation as empowering for women, this role did not open a new avenue of agency for Sujanibai. I would argue that having already been freed to some

degree from a relatively powerless position in the family, Sujanibai did not wish to be enmeshed in similar positions of vulnerability in new fields. She was answerable to NGO staff about the disbursement of funds and repayment of loans; this is contrary to the relatively self-reliant and independent life that she had managed to build for herself. It was for this reason that she saw it more as a constraint that an opportunity. She remarked that she still felt accountable because most villagers were still to repay loans that were disbursed to them.

The last transition that merits attention is that of her conversion to the Changayee church. The fact that she did so in spite of her husband's anger and violence testifies to her already having charted a distinct path for herself. More importantly, however, was her statement that it made her self-reliant, and that the Changayee form of prayer put the tools of healing in her hands:

> They [faith healer] will ask for whatever price is required… maybe a chicken, some paddy, a coconut, maybe alcohol… whatever it takes. One has to give whatever is asked, so there is that cost to it. For some days the problem will be resolved but then it takes hold again and one goes back to the healer and it costs the same amount all over again… so there is always some expenditure in that. But in this there is prayer and then things are okay. If one is more ill then one can call one's friends and they will pray alongside you… so when more people pray then things become okay. And there is no cost- no coconut, no incense, no *ghee*, nothing… just pray.

This statement reinforces her sense of self-reliance and independence because she feels that it leaves greater control in her hands. Although it is true that she is placing her faith in god, and in his hands, she felt a greater degree of control in this relationship rather than one that necessitated a human intermediary. Her statement also suggested that traditional ways were not effective and, in fact, this is the modern way to seek cures, that places greater control in one's own hands. This is in line with the type of modernising discourse that the church and Hindu organisations propagate, both of which aim to eradicate what they view as the backward, superstitious worship and healing practices of adivasis (Froerer, 2006). It is in this sense that her dismissal of her NGO role and her espousal of Changayee worship are both somewhat similar in that they were outcomes of her sense of self-reliance. Having once been at the margins of the relations of power in the family, Sujanibai was able to dictate her own terms to some degree. However, a note of caution is in order: she would not have been able to do this had she not been financially secure. This reflects the idea that individuals need

to have power in some or other field, and in Sujanibai's case it was her economic power that yielded new opportunities for agency.

4. Conclusion

The main aim of this chapter was to show how structure is decisive in shaping agency, not merely as a constraint, but, equally importantly, in enabling agency. I rely primarily on Bourdieu's (1992, 1998) concept of field to understand how structure affords opportunities for agency. First, fields are not static relationships of power; this implies that individuals' power can increase and decrease depending on various factors. Second, individuals' simultaneous location in multiple fields means that they may counter their weaker position in one field by their greater power in another field; the relative importance of their power in different fields in the overall scheme of power can realign their overall position. I elaborate further on these points, below.

4.1. Rupture and transformation of the field

Rupture, in varying forms and degrees is visible across the narratives presented in this chapter. I use the term rupture, gradual rather than sudden, to refer to a break with the past or present tradition. In each of the life stories presented above there is some form of break with the existing practice; this is either caused by a transformation within the field or it is responsible for some transformation. The potential for this break with existing practice is always possible due to a constant struggle for greater power in the field. These struggles are also triggered by whether the interests of all members of the domestic unit are aligned or at odds with one another (Bourdieu 1998, p. 70), and to what degree either may be the case. In Gulabi's case, we see for instance, that her conjugal family's weakened position in relation to other families in the community is key point which breaks with the past. Their relatively weakened position allowed for new practice to emerge, e.g. Gulabi's employment outside the household. This has two effects: first, it strengthens Gulabi's own position in the family and second, it reaffirms the family's position in the community. Once Gulabi has established her own power, her interests actually lie with the strengthening of the family's position in the community, each buttressing the other.

In both Gulabi's and Bhavani's narrative marriage itself is a form of rupture with their own lives thus far, in that they both end up in poorer households. This also prevents them from inhabiting the role of the ideal daughter-in-law since the situation is itself not ideal. While in Gulabi's case this allows her to transform her position through her

own economic contribution, Bhavani relies on her natal family's greater wealth and status to transform the domestic unit entirely and thereby exerting greater control over it. Unlike Gulabi, her interest is not aligned with the larger family because it does not command any prestige (see Bourdieu 1998, p. 70). It is in Sujanibai's case that we see that the greatest degree of rupture, partly brought on by her own actions and partly because of the situation that this results in. As described above, Sujanibai's appears to be situated at the very margins of the field and the routes to increasing her power are limited. Rather than remain in this position, or perhaps because of it, she has no option but to resort to other means of rehabilitating herself. In her case, the rupture takes the form of a complete exit from the domestic field, unlike the majority of women and men. Further, even though her association with a *patel* might have been helped her status, she makes no attempt to reinstate herself in the family field. In this sense, her situation is most extreme in part because the structure of the family does not allow her to have any power in it.

Importantly, however, what I refer to as rupture are often quite difficult circumstances which demand some new form of action or practices on the parts of individuals. This creates a sense of ambivalence about whether that action will or will not succeed as agency. Further, the nature of those changes strongly suggests that agency often arises from circumstances which create a compulsion to act in new ways which have unpredictable outcomes. I discuss both these aspects further in the next chapter.

4.2. Changing practices

I noted earlier that transformations in the practices of individuals are possible. The case studies above have shown how this might come about. First, it is possible that what is valued as a practice at a particular point in time may lose it value over time; e.g. women's seclusion and restriction to household management loses value and women working in paid outside employment becomes something that is valued. The change in practice could come about because, among fields themselves, there are some that are relatively more important than others. There may be instances where the economic field is more important than field of the family in situations when the family unit is no longer synonymous with the unit of production. In such instances, therefore, economic power might assume primacy and change the practices in the domestic field.

This echoes Gergen's (2009) statement that because individuals are simultaneously enmeshed in multiple arenas, each with their distinct range of practices, they tend to

carry over practice or meanings or actions from one arena to another. This is reflected, for instance, in Madhok's (2007) description of the veiling practices of women *panchayat* members, where some women who first stopped veiling in their public roles gradually stopped doing so in the domestic sphere a well since it no longer carried the same meaning or value. This kind of change is visible in all the three case studies above. While it seems more immediately obvious in the cases of Gulabi and Sujanibai, it is also evident in Bhavani's permission for her new daughter-in-law to seek employment even though this is not something that she could aspire to herself.

I have sought to demonstrate, in this chapter, how structures shape agency by both constraining and facilitating it. I have shown this through three case studies in which I examined three women's narratives of their lives. These case studies show that agency emerges from circumstances that are created by structural factors. Second, they emerge through gradual changes in structures, and further result in gradual changes in repetitive practices, i.e. agency does not necessarily emerge as change on a grand scale. Third, much agentic action takes place as a response to existing circumstances rather than through conscious reflection of how it will change durable structures. I have also mentioned the importance of relationships in shaping agency, as well that of narratives and narrative identity. I will discuss both these ideas in detail in chapter 8. In the next chapter I look at women's actions and practices to understand when and how these qualify as agency.

Chapter 6: Action, Narrative, and Agency

1. Introduction

This chapter aims to understand how women respond to different circumstances in their lives, and to consider whether those responses constitute agency. In the previous chapter, I described how there were key moments in women's lives that presented opportunities for agency. I analysed how those linked with changes in various fields, and how those changes in turn created opportunities for agency. In this chapter I examine women's narrative descriptions of how they responded to the changes that events wrought in their lives. I then examine whether women's responses resulted in significant change in their lives, what the nature of that change was, and whether it indicates women's agentic action.

I take this analysis further by examining the passage of time over which this agentic action occurred, i.e. whether it was immediate or occurred over a longer period? I ask how women viewed that action at the time of the event, as well as retrospectively. These answers are closely intertwined with the narrative that is produced through the interview encounter. I consider, first, how the narrator employs their narrative to represent themselves to others. I also examine how the narrative is shaped by past action and achievement, and how this retrospective view further shapes a particular narrative identity which then drives the individual's sense of their own agency in the present.

This chapter is set out as follows. The second section presents the literature on narrative identity explaining how this is linked with individuals' patterns of behaviour over time. The third section identifies and describes certain key events that configure women's lives. In subsequent sections, I describe the responses of different women during these key turning points, showing how these range through varied forms of action, i.e. silence, speech, reflection, and overt action. I discuss what motivates women to act in particular ways, and how particular outcomes of their actions may influence them to alter their responses when faced with subsequent difficult situations. In the fourth section, I examine how these patterns of actions take place over time, and how the passage of time influences women's perception of events and their own responses to them. In the fifth section, I take this further to understand what kind of narrative this perception produces and that this becomes a resource in

itself. I conclude by drawing together these threads to understand how they are implicated in the process of producing agency.

2. Narrative identity and agency

The term narrative identity has been used in various disciplines to describe the role of the narrative in forging the individual's identity. While there are fundamental overlaps, which acknowledge at base that our narratives of our lives imbue our actions with meaning, there are also differences in how the term is used in different disciplines. McAdams (2011) posits that narrative identity emerges during late adolescence and early adulthood, linking it with neurological and cognitive developmental stages. In his conceptualisation a narrative identity allows individuals to weave together distinct episodes and memories from their lives into coherent narratives about themselves; it reflects their self-understandings (McAdams, 2011; 2013; McAdams & Mclean, 2013). This may change over time when challenged by new events, especially those that compel change in our patterns of actions, but the purpose remains fundamentally to develop our sense of self that is forged through experiences. This narrative structure then becomes a base for future actions such that individuals try to act in accordance with this template that they have evolved of themselves. This is a particularly helpful aspect of this concept since people have contradictory views of themselves and their worlds. This is not surprising since these ideas of the self emerge through varied circumstances some of which are unforeseen, presenting unpredictable challenges, such that individuals may not always be able to act in ways that are consistent with past patterns of behaviour. Thus incongruous or contradictory patterns of behaviour and views of the self, which may be present in all individuals, need somehow to be assimilated into a single coherent narrative of ourselves. McAdams and McLean (2013) suggest that our responses to various life-events coalesce around certain key themes, e.g. redemption, communion, and agency. Redemption refers to how a negative event could eventually lead to positive outcomes; communion is described as the interpersonal connection to a broad collective or with individuals; and agency is described as the degree to which an individual was able to act autonomously to effect change in their environment (ibid, p. 234). These themes are drawn from extensive life history research in the United States. I am, therefore, hesitant to apply them to narratives from Surguja particularly since they reflect more standard conceptions of agency which I have previously critiqued while reviewing the literature on agency in chapter 2. The template that McAdams suggests, however, as one that allows individuals to derive a coherent sense of self resonates universally, and offers a way of

understanding the seeming contradictions that are invariably present in individuals' lives and are represented through their narratives. I will show how what appear as contradictions are reflective of the pulls and pressures of people's circumstances, and individuals' actions are examples of how they sometimes comply and, at others, circumvent or overcome situations over which they may have negligible control.

McNay (1999), writing in feminist theory, offers a similar but less psychological understanding of narrative identity which is explicitly allied with the notion of evolving agency. She argues that narratives encapsulate the 'temporalised understanding of the self' (ibid, p. 316) which allows for understanding a coherent sense of selfhood. Not only is it an expression of selfhood, it simultaneously shapes identity itself (ibid, p. 319). It is the narrative that reveals the individual's lived experiences and how their practices converge or differ from ideological norms and how these, in turn, reshape norms and values. This echoes Das's (2007) reference to the fact that divergences between the ideologies of stated norms and how they are expressed in lived reality provide spaces for new forms of actions to emerge. McNay goes on to say that the narrative is an active process of reconfiguring and understanding the past, in order to anticipate the outcomes of present and future actions. Most importantly, she argues that time plays a crucial role in understanding women's agency in order to resurrect the coherent sense of self that evolves through the narrative process itself.

3. Key events

I began this chapter by asking what events constitute turning points in women's lives. I turn first to what are acknowledged turning points in women's lives. Perhaps, the most obvious is marriage, with its associated change of location from the natal to conjugal home, some household responsibility, and being subject to new hierarchies of relationships. The next significant transition is motherhood, often accompanied by increased household responsibilities with childcare added. Depending on household composition, it may allow the young mother to have a greater voice in the household. This is often the time when joint households separate into smaller nuclear households accompanied by the concomitant distribution of joint assets such as land. A young married woman could acquire greater power when this happens, now becoming in charge of her own household. In the absence of this separation, the next transition occurs when the senior conjugal pair of the household either passes on responsibilities to the next generation, or if the household head dies. In either situation the daughter-in-law now acquires responsibility for household management and is not as much

subject to her mother-in-law's authority as earlier. These are the typical life stages a woman expects to pass through in South Asia.

However, in addition to these, there are other events too that significantly shape women's lives. The first is domestic violence which, here, I discuss in the context of the marital home. While the previous chapter focused on the nature of change wrought in women's lives through marriage itself, this chapter focuses on this specific aspect of that change which frequently arose in my interviews with women. I do not claim that women faced no violence in natal homes, but it was less remarked on in my interviews with most women[59]. Not all women faced violence even though they may have been subject to strict controls in the conjugal home, and different women responded in varied ways, depending on their particular circumstances. Another set of challenges is related to economic adversity. In rural communities, such as those in Surguja, which are often outside the formal economy and subsist on agriculture and subsidiary livelihoods, a family's economic circumstances are unpredictable unless they have sufficiently large landholdings or other assets. Subsistence or cash income from rain-fed agriculture is unpredictable which means households often go through cycles of poverty, usually losing assets in the process. I also examine some such situations to understand how women responded to these changes. The three key themes through which I discuss women's patterns of actions are violence in the marital home, motherhood, and their economic circumstances, tracing the varied trajectories of different women's lives through these events.

3.1. Violence in marital homes: "It is only when you get married that the worry begins; then, you have to think on your feet."

Mangali's description of marriage, quoted above, encapsulates how women interviewed in this research viewed marriage. In this section I use the example of violence to depict the transition that marriage represents. Given the dominant script of the 'happy family' (Jha & White, 2016), the mention of violence drew my attention during interviews. This was more so because, some women presented their marital lives as content even though they had experienced violence. I believe this demanded a clearer understanding of why and how they bore with violence. I present five women's narratives about their experiences of violence to understand why they bore with

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[59] This is likely to have resulted from my in-depth questioning on marital relationships, during interviews. Some women did report having faced violence in their natal families.

violence, whether this was a passive acceptance of the situation, and if they attempted to change the situation.

In most parts of rural India, marriage is still arranged by parents and families within the caste or tribe. Strict arranged marriages of previous years where the couple would have never seen each other until the wedding have given way, in some cases, to mixed arrangements where the couple are able to meet after the marriage has been fixed. Some couples may even have some say in their choice of partner, for instance stating a preference for an educated spouse. Nonetheless, familiarity with prospective spouses is still limited especially in north, west, and east India where they are selected from among unrelated strangers belonging to the same caste or tribe group. Some adivasi groups of east-central India, e.g. Oraons, have traditionally departed strikingly from this practice in allowing, even encouraging, young people to live together before marriage in order to know whether they would be a compatible couple. However, these practices have been changing as the Oraon have moved closer to mainstream culture, or formally adopted either Christianity or Hinduism (Xaxa, 2004). Marriage, in most cases in Surguja, demands that women move from their natal to conjugal homes even though it is not unknown for families with only daughters and enough cultivable land, to bring in at least one son-in-law, referred to locally as *ghar-jiya*[60], to live with the bride's family. Weddings in rural Surguja are often performed when girls are quite young, often as young as 15. During the 2011 research period, I observed four Kanwar weddings in Kewarpur, where I confirmed that the brides were no older than 15 or 16 years old[61]. In the chapter on Surguja, I referred to the common perception that adivasi women have greater freedom and enjoy a relatively more equal relationship with men than their caste-Hindu counterparts. In spite of numerous scholars having noted that this is an easy romanticisation of their lives (see e.g. Kelkar & Nathan, 1991; Sinha, 2003; Xaxa, 2004) it persists as a lay perception. During my fieldwork I could understand why this notion persists but remain sceptical of its sweeping veracity. I apprehend that this idea stems from emphasising superficial differences regarding gender relations between tribes and castes, rather than exploring whether these are merely different manifestations and degrees of women's subordinate status. In part, the perception of adivasi women being different is at one with the othering of the adivasis, especially the view that they are 'primitive' people who therefore have

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[60] The Hindi term is *ghar-jamai*, literally meaning 'son-in-law in the house'

[61] Census 2011 data indicates that 15.05% of girls aged 15-19 years, belonging to rural ST communities in Chhattisgarh, were married (Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, Ministry of Home Affairs. (2017, August 29).

freedoms that the more 'evolved' caste communities do not. Unnithan-Kumar (1997, p. vi) describes how she encountered similar notions about the Girasia tribals of Rajasthan but was struck by the similarities and the continuities with caste-Hindu communities, rather than differences. I find that with adivasi women in Surguja too, it is the similarities that appear more striking, especially in the light of the purveyed narrative of difference. Where differences from their caste-Hindu counterparts are visible, these may allude, in some cases, to different forms of gender inequality rather than to gender equality. The fact that women drink with men, or that separation and remarriage, including widow remarriage, are not frowned upon are offered as instances of women's freedom. While these examples are all true, they must also be qualified. While women drink since alcohol is part of adivasi worship and celebrations, women who imbibe frequently outside such events invite censure. In practice women do not have the same freedom to end a marriage that a man does and remarriage is acceptable because remaining single is less so. Further remaining single proves to be an obstacle to subsistence for women (Kelkar & Nathan, 1991; Sinha, 2003). All the women whom I interviewed were vehement that it is women who would inevitably carry the burden of shame or dishonour were they to end a marriage. The narratives below will also show that, even among adivasis, it is women who must actively shoulder the task of 'adjusting' after marriage.

Rajini had been widowed for three years, with three young children, when I interviewed her in May 2013. She was living in Mahuabagh's Korwapara. She occupied that portion of the joint conjugal home that had been in her husband's share. She continued to live here even though she had always had a conflictual relationship with her parents-in-law. She had no other house of her own and feared that if she were to leave, she and her children would be deprived of her husband's share of cultivable land that provided their subsistence. Although she had never studied, Rajini was the *mitanin* for the local community which brought some minor prestige in occupying such a low-level government post, but only a pitiful and irregular honorarium, not even enough to feed the family. Rajini was Oraon, as her husband had been, and observed traditional adivasi rituals. They had lived in neighbouring hamlets about 10 minutes apart. They started meeting often, though Rajini readily concedes that this was unusual and tends to draw community opprobrium. Her natal family, who were locally influential, seemed not to have approved the match but, nonetheless, organised the wedding to pre-empt an elopement that would have brought dishonour upon them. After the wedding Rajini moved to the joint conjugal household where there was

already a great deal of conflict among the men over the apportioning of land and their respective contributions to the household's joint income. At this time her husband lived away for work. She faced a daily barrage of abuse including violence, saying that her parents-in-law did not like her:

The biggest change is that you have to adjust in a totally new household. You have to do so many things which you may have not done in your natal home and one worries 'will I be able to do this or not? And 'will my parents-in-law approve of how I work or not?' That is the biggest fear.

Rajini would return to her natal home for a few days when the abuse was beyond bearing, but did not reveal her circumstances to her natal family as she was apprehensive about being blamed for having chosen badly in marriage. Although she confided in a few friends, her resignation to the situation was evident:

There wasn't usually a lot of time [for us] to talk, after talking a bit I would say, "I need to go off to do my work"- and they would also go off for their work. They would also say "whatever it is, now that we are tied in this life we have take on those responsibilities. We will have to endure this in whichever way."

This is similar in tone, although different in circumstance, to Kisuni and Durga, two sisters who had endured such physical violence that their parents had brought them back to the natal home, where I interviewed them in April 2011. The family, resident in Kewarpur, were Kanwar and identified as Hindu. Kisuni had been married approximately five years, while Durga had been married for about two years. While Kisuni's husband was responsible for inflicting violence on her after about three initial peaceful years, in Durga's case, her parents-in-law joined her husband in abusing her verbally and physically. Kisuni, who lived separately with her husband and bore extreme violence for many months, attempted to remonstrate with him:

…he would reply 'you have not brought anything from your father's house[62] so don't you say anything to me. This is not your father's property so don't say anything!' He would frighten me…

Neighbours who remonstrated with her husband were told that they could take Kisuni off to their homes; they realised how extreme the violence was only when Kisuni's husband attempted to set her alight in the open courtyard of their house. Although Kisuni's parents had an inkling of the difficulties, it was only when her neighbours

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[62] Refers to dowry; this is a noticeable change from the traditional practice of bride-price payments.

alerted them to this incident that they brought her back to the natal home. Kisuni had never told them the extent of violence:

> I used to think 'what will I say? Why should I bother my parents by telling them this? Whether I live my parents' house or parents-in-law's-husband's, I have to die anyway, so I may as well stay here and live or die.'
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> That's why I didn't say anything.

Durga decided differently. On one occasion, when Durga's mother-in-law tried to hit her, she retaliated by pushing the older woman away. Durga then reported the incident to her paternal uncle. He viewed her situation sympathetically; her mild retaliation was only reasonable in the circumstances. She returned home soon afterwards.

Mangali had a different response to the violence she faced. Mangali was in her 30s in 2011 and had studied till class five. She had been married for about 18 years and had five daughters. The family is Kanwar and observes multiple religions; Mangali self-identified as Hindu but had also attended some Changayee gatherings, while her husband, Sudhir, has joined the Changayee Church. She, her husband, and five daughters occupied their allocated portion of the joint conjugal home in Kewarpur, and maintained their own kitchen. Mangali had faced violence from her mother-in-law in the early years of her marriage. Her parents asked her to return to the natal home when she told them about it. However, she ignored their advice throughout:

> My parents would say "How will you stay there, how you will you bear this grief? There is so much more life left for you- how can you stay there for so long? Just come back here." But then I would ignore them and return here…
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> This was the thing, if I had returned to my natal home then they [conjugal family] would have taken Meeta [eldest daughter] and kept her here… how could I have lived without her?

Earlier in the interview Mangali mentioned that her husband loved her even though her parents-in-law did not care for her:

> …but my husband loves me. So then I thought 'doesn't matter if they [parents-in-law] don't like me, the two of us will live in peace and make our lives comfortable.' This is what I thought and where could I have gone anyway? After all God has given us all this one life and brought us- husband and wife- together. Even if my husband is mad, or lame… I will

not leave my husband and go anywhere. I have stood by his side and he too has stood by mine.

Rajini, above, found herself in changed circumstances later; her husband too had started beating her and he had, at that time, returned to live in the conjugal family home. She felt unsupported:

…I thought 'it would be better to die than to struggle in this manner.'

S: You must have been very sad to have thought, 'it would be better to die'. (*R: Yes.*) Did it ever cross your mind 'I could go away, I could return to my natal home'?

R: I was in quite a dilemma then- there were always fights and beatings… In a way, I had also got used to it but there was one occasion when my husband told me "you just leave the house and get lost!" That is when I took all my belongings and went to my parents' house. I stayed there for a year.

S: When you went to your natal home what did people tell you… because they must have understood what is happening with you?

R: When I was there… people didn't necessarily criticise, after all how long can people criticise? But they would say, "when you are so badly mistreated in that house then how are you going to live there? So what if you have two sons… leave them be. Return to you natal home and labour, and do whatever it takes to live. And if there is a [marriage] proposal from elsewhere then we will arrange things."

The turning point for Rajini was the moment that her husband asked her to leave, marking a breakdown of the relationship. She remained at her parents' house for a year, without her children, and returned to the conjugal home after community elders mediated a reconciliation in which her husband promised that he would not beat her in future. It also became obvious that her natal family knew of the violence due to their proximity.

What the above examples point to is that the early years of marriage place women in quite vulnerable positions. Even where there is support, from the natal family for instance, women rarely see this as giving them the complete freedom to end the marriage. When I asked Mangali how people would react to a woman having ended her marriage she was blunt:

They will wonder why she didn't stay; they will say that her behaviour

wasn't okay so that is why she didn't stay. That is what people will say!

It was Sumati, Kisuni's and Durga's mother, who summed it up when she said:

In earlier times, people used think that their parents shouldn't lose their

honour in any way. It was this that made us endure everything… and

today I have my husband, and grandchildren… everything. These days,

people do not have the strength to bear [much]…

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… we didn't want our daughter to have ten husbands [i.e. get divorced

and remarry]… if there was just one that would be right and we would

have had our honour.

Sujanibai, who we met in the previous chapter, reinforced Sumati's words in her recollection of how her parents turned her away when she left her first husband. However, we also know that, for whatever reason, she did indeed leave her first husband. Similar too was the case of Sathinibai, a Kanwar woman in Kewarpur. Sathinibai was in her 50s when I met her in March 2011, the senior of two co-wives, with an atypical marital history. Sathinibai had been married at a young age in accordance with the norm of that time, to another man. The current marriage, which had not been ritually solemnised, began when her current husband convinced her to leave her marital home so that she could be a mother to his children as his own first wife had left. This event occurred when she was quite young, and she has been in this marriage for at least 30 years. However, her husband who had subsequently lived with other women, even as the relationship with Sathinibai continued, left her to fend for herself and absconded from Kewarpur since this is Sathinibai's natal village and her brothers threatened him for having eloped with Sathinibai. Sathinibai has lived alone for many years with her husband visiting to give her money, which she used to build a house and survive. She said that she had lived as she pleased, and done as she pleased. In this, Sathinibai and Sujanibai sound strikingly similar. However, it is unclear whether leaving the marital home in itself- as in cases of Rajini, Sujanibai and Sathinibai- constitutes agency and I will discuss this in a later section.

Anita's narrative too presents the complexity of understanding of what exactly constitutes agency in these situations. Anita was 28 years old when I interviewed her in April 2013. She lived in an extended household with her husband, three young children, and mother-in-law. They are the sole family Agariya blacksmith family in

Mahuabagh's Korwapara[63] and worshipped through traditional adivasi rituals. She described how she and her husband, Shyam, fought when they had both been drinking and he often beat after getting drunk. Earlier, before the children were born, she had told her parents about violence in the extended conjugal family and they took her away from what they felt was an unsafe environment. Anita herself did not then face violence. She said that although she did not want to return to here, Shyam procured a charm from a *devaar* that compelled her to do so. Shyam began beating her after the children were born. At the time of our interview, however, she no longer told her parents about the violence because she feared that she would lose her children if they compelled her to return to the natal home. In fact, when there was violence, she went to a neighbour's house rather than to her natal home, further away, in order to avoid this very situation. After I interviewed Anita, she asked to borrow my phone to call her natal family. I stood away to let her talk in privacy, but could not help overhearing her son tell his maternal uncle that "papa hit ma" just the previous day. Anita hushed him and hurriedly grabbed the phone, laughing into it as if to negate what her son had said in order to avoid the very situation she had just imagined in her conversation with me.

I do not wish to convey, from the narratives presented here, the faulty impression that women have no support at all. In all the examples above, each of women was either able to escape from violence or could have called on support to do so; however, the fact that they do not always do so is indicative of some form of constraint. One of the factors that gives many women an advantage, in this area, is that their natal families often live in relatively close proximity and that they are, therefore, likely to see or get to know when their daughters face violence. Grover (2011), describing a similar situation in a poor neighbourhood in Delhi, remarks that such proximity means that parents often call daughters to the natal home, and allow them to return only when the conjugal family gives an undertaking that they will not harm the woman. The important qualification, though, is that exit cannot be the first option even if the woman does not have children. In the conversation with Sumati, her daughters, and her daughter-in-law, they all spoke as one to reiterate that a man who refuses to stop the violence even after the families' and community's intercession is clearly at fault, and a woman who leaves such a marriage would be treated with sympathy. While their structural positions locate women as vulnerable, real support from natal kin or

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[63] It is common for settlements of single communities to call one or two households of such service castes or communities to settle in their *para* to serve the needs of the local community. Anita and her husband, Shyam, make and repair the Pahari Korwa households' traditional weapons and agricultural implements.

community members does mean that there is a way out of this situation. The difficulty seems to be that in order to take advantage of that support the woman must be seen to have endured the violence in silence, almost as if this silent endurance confers on her a moral position that makes her worthy of supporting. In Kisuni's case, for instance, her husband left her at her natal home on numerous occasions and when he did not arrive to collect her after a few days, her relatives would leave her to her marital home, castigating him for not having returned for her. On none of these occasions did Kisuni report the violence and nor did her family appear to suspect from his behaviour of not returning for Kisuni that there was a difficulty in the relationship. Mangali's act of ignoring her parents' entreaties because she feared she would lose her child indicates how relationships may constrain options to exercise agency immediately, a point that will be discussed in detail in Chapter 8. In a similar situation, Rajini left her children behind in order remain safe but her husband sought a reconciliation keeping the children's welfare in mind, as he believed they needed their mother. Importantly, it was not Rajini's decision to the leave the conjugal home, or to return to it; it was decided for her by her husband's injunction to leave. Behaviour that does not conform to a norm, as Rajini's return to the natal home, should not, therefore, be assumed to signify agency. I would argue, in fact, that Rajini's agency was practically nullified because she was compelled to concede to her husband's demand that she leave the marital home.

Lastly, Mangali's, Rajini's, and Anita's situations highlight how motherhood brings about changes in women's lives and shapes their responses. I describe this further in the next section.

3.2. Motherhood: "When one child wants for food and the other wants for clothes, then, the heart is troubled"

In the quote that prefaces this section, Bhavani echoes women's concerns as mothers. Motherhood is the next turning point for women, usually cementing their positions in their conjugal homes and bringing true responsibility and, therefore, the real marker of adulthood. Piyaribai, in an interview in May 2011, stated that her newly married son and daughter-in-law were children still, and they would understand true responsibility when they have their own children; it is only then that she could consider handing them the responsibility of household management and herself 'retire' to grandmother-hood. The more immediate concern of this section lies in how motherhood shapes women's actions. At the very least, it challenges women to emerge from the silence

that appeared as the dominant mode of action in the previous section, and motivates a reflection on their changed priorities. I describe how this happens through the experiences of three women: Bhavani, quoted above and whose life I described in chapter 5; and Mangali and Rajini, whose narratives about marriage and violence I presented in the previous section.

In the earlier section we got an inkling of how children cement women's place in the conjugal family in Mangali's statement that she could not have left her conjugal home because her husband and parents-in-law would have kept her daughter. I now examine this narrative in further detail. When I asked Mangali what gave her the determination to endure the violence she faced, she mentioned two things; the first, that her husband loved her and the second, that once she had children there was no choice but to endure. Motherhood, however, changed the nature of that endurance. Whereas, earlier, she bore the violence passively, she began to take a much more active stance against it based on a new consciousness of her position:

> … Earlier I would never fight back but when my oldest daughter, Meeta, was born then I stated getting some confidence, I had strength 'I have a child now so I need to have some confidence.' Thinking all this I started fighting for what was mine; first I demanded that we be given our field. They gave us a 15 *taami* field so we manage quite well in that. They continued to fight, so one time … I also hit her [mother-in-law] and she was injured; she still has the injury even today.
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> I thought 'now I have a child… even doing labour everyday is difficult- the body cannot have the same strength everyday. And if one does labour everyday and then if the children fall sick then how will one manage? Who will look after the children especially since people fall ill so often?' That is what made me think that it is better that the land should be split. I have five children and I thought when the time comes to get them married I want them to go to good houses…

This passage, above, describes in detail Mangali's conscious reflection of her position and how it challenged her to act in different ways. This reflection demanded action of her to change what she viewed as the unjust treatment meted out to her because it also affected her young child. Mangali also stated that her husband decided that they would start cooking separately since Mangali was given the worst scraps of food by her mother-in-law; they proceeded to set up their kitchen separately, without informing

his parents. This was left to Mangali to do as her husband went away for work around this time, perhaps purposely as implied by Mangali. Mangali presented this decision alternatively as her husband's and then her own. This decision was then accompanied, at a slightly later stage, by Mangali's assertion over their share of property. In the narrative above it is evident that her children's wellbeing was a crucial motivation for this demand. This was evident in her statement that she needed to have confidence, which was expressed in her speech as well as her action.

Mangali's demand for the separation of joint property echoes Bhavani's actions. In her case, while she did not face violence, the poverty of her conjugal home, described in Chapter 5, made her simultaneously angry and sad. She was also disdainful of her parents-in-law who did little work and seemed unconcerned about how the family would make do. Like Mangali, she too felt that in order to fend for herself she would have to separate her household from that of her parents-in-law. Her parents supported her in this. In this sense both women followed quite similar paths, given that they both also had the support of their natal kin- whether materially or emotionally. Thus, Bhavani talking about how she sought help from her parents said:

> … They [her parents] will do whatever I ask of them, they fulfil my every request. But I feel embarrassed, ashamed that when I have come to my marital home then how I can I ask more of my natal home? [As if addressing her parents] "I'll take what you give and eat whatever we have here." As long as the children were young I did trouble them (S: *…for help in looking after the children?*) Yes, but not any more…

Knowing that she and her husband would not be able to look after their children with their earnings, Bhavani saw no option but to request her parents for help. This was echoed by Mangali too, who described how her family gives her and the children gifts and has promised that they will extend help for her daughters' education and weddings.

Rajini, was one of the only women I interviewed who had left the conjugal home for a long period to return to it later, during which time she was without her children. In order to understand how motherhood influenced her actions, I now present a further account from her. Following her return to the marital home, her parents-in-law, who were angered by her return, insisted that Rajini and her husband separate their household. A year after this, the family moved to the neighbouring district where Rajini's husband had found work. He then started drinking heavily and had begun

sometimes to beat Rajini. Rajini insisted that they join the Changayee Church, where congregants were prohibited from drinking, in the hope that this would influence her husband. The family returned to Mahuabagh and he abstained for some time. Soon after their return, however, he died due to unknown causes. Rajini wondered whether she should continue to worship in the Changayee Church and what fallout this would have, especially on her relationship with her conjugal family which observed adivasi rituals:

> Everyone [conjugal family] prays together, what do I do alone? [As if addressing conjugal family] "So I'll go along with your religion." The children are small… how do I ignore my elder brother-in-law's and sister-in-law's advice? That's also… do I stay or go? That's why I left [Changayee Church].
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> They [conjugal family] think 'yes, if she leaves then this entire property- this land- will be ours.' They always behave badly with me. They are trying to run me out of here.
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> Because he [elder brother-in-law] must be thinking 'her husband has passed away anyway, so she should leave, and then the land, the house, everything will be ours'- this is why they fight with me. Why they fight… I don't even know! I can't leave my children and go. Who knows what my children will do when they grow up- how can I leave this and go?

Rajini's narrative was full of the ambiguity of her current situation, and her actions and thinking reflected that. The most significant marker of her situation was her widowhood. Whereas earlier she was able to return to her natal home perhaps with some hope that her husband would look after the children, that option was no longer available to her. Her actions were strongly centred on scraping together a life for her children and their futures. However, in spite of stating this clearly, she also contended with the conflict with her in-laws without any real support from others. Her natal family helped her financially when she requested it, but were not physically present to support her in her fight with her in-laws, which left her on her own. It is in Rajini's narrative that the disjuncture between her own interests and the children's interests is most visible, almost as if Rajini was thinking out loud and weighing her options as she talked to me. This was itself a natural outcome of the fact that this was an unresolved situation that Rajini was living through then, in which she could not predict the outcome of her actions.

Mangali and Bhavani, in contrast, presented their decisions quite unambiguously as enhancing their children's wellbeing, which was also presented as being allied with their own. In Mangali's and Bhavani's narratives, the situations they described had been resolved, with at least some degree of satisfaction to them, and lay sufficiently in the past that both women could clearly take ownership of a whole range of actions- their reflection, their considered silences, their spoken demands, and actual implementation of their decisions, and present them as having had clearly positive outcomes for themselves and their children. It is the clear path that those actions show, leading up to the present that allows the two women demonstrate their agency.

This raises a significant issue of time, not only in terms of how the past and the present are viewed, but also how they are being presented in the narrative. This also emphasises agency as a process rather than as a property inhering in singular actions. I shall discuss the issue of time and how it shapes agency as a process in greater detail in a later section of this chapter. The other significant issue that this section has raised is the economic aspect of women's relationships and their stake in the joint wealth of the conjugal family especially land. These are often the source of conflict as evident in Rajini's narrative in the first section, where she described her husband's family fighting over their wealth. The importance of assets is reinforced once children are born to the couple. Women's ownership stakes in these assets then assume importance in their narratives; note, for instance, that Mangali refers to fighting "for what was mine". Rajini's position too was complicated by her and her children's claim to her husband's share of land. I will discuss this further in a later section as well as in Chapter 9 on relational agency.

3.3. Changed circumstances: "If you have things, if you have money, then you have the world… otherwise there is nothing"

Rukmaniya's view of her life, in the quote that begins this section, refers to the impoverished state of her marital home. The previous two sections moved across women's typical life stages as turning points. In this section I look at how changed circumstances, especially poverty, shape women's responses and to what extent these responses allow them to change their circumstances. To clarify, for many women, the changes were the result of their marrying into poorer homes than their natal homes.

Rukmaniya grew up in the plains near Kanhaigarh, and came to Kanhaigarh when she got married. She was about 35 years old when I met her in 2013, once to administer a survey and the second time for an in-depth interview. She is a Christian Oraon. She lives with her husband, and four sons who ranged in age from 12 to 19 years at that time. The three elder boys attended school in the town where Rukmaniya grew up, living with her brother during the term; the eldest had just completed school and hoped to attend college. The family lived in their own house next-door to her elder brother-in-law, the land having been given to them when the joint assets were allocated among her husband, his father and brothers. This happened when Rukmaniya and Sukhram decided that they needed to save their limited income to take care of their children rather than contribute a significant share to the joint family. Rukmaniya's natal family was not well off. The poverty was such that on one occasion when her younger brother could not attend school since he did not have clothes, she and her sister transplanted seedlings so that they could earn enough money to buy him a uniform. It is for this reason that her brother was eager to support his nephews wanting to repay what he viewed as his debt to Rukmaniya. Rukmaniya's narrative, combined with my observations of her brother-in-law's home, suggested that she had married into a better-off household. Her husband, Sukhram, was a mason. Rukmaniya constantly referred to Sukhram's irregular work and regular drinking. These were causes of worry on various fronts, especially because Sukhram dipped into scant resources while barely earning anything. My introduction to Rukmaniya brought into sharp focus the friction attending the marital relationship, arising primarily from Sukhram's inability to provide for the family. This occurred while I interviewed Sukhram, asking him about how well the family got along among themselves[64]. Rukmaniya, having overheard the question, replied angrily instead "look at him, he has been drinking. How do you think that we can get along when he is like this?" Such instances of women speaking out, and in Rukmaniya's case in front of her husband[65], must be understood along with other actions, in order to understand whether they constitute agency.

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[64] The question was "How well do you get along amongst yourselves?" This is the first of five questions in the 'close relationships' domain of the IWB survey, in 2013. I have described the IWB framework in chapter 3 on methodology.

[65] Rukmaniya was not the only woman to criticise her husband's behaviour in front of him. Bhavani interrupted her husband's interview, to state that his incessant tobacco chewing had addled his brain and prevented him from answering coherently. Although Mangali did not criticise her husband in his hearing, the preface of our conversation consisted of her abruptly bemoaning the fact that it fell to her to take the lead in their marriage. This is described in Jha and White (2015).

I interviewed Rukmaniya on two occasions, about 10 days apart; on both occasions she repeatedly drew attention to Sukhram's lack of effort to earn. The first time, when I conducted a survey, was prefaced by her angry interruption described above. Rukmaniya's initial anger had subsided by the time I interviewed her and, punctuated by tears, she decried her fate and her helplessness:

> … I am not very happy… [he is] always drunk. How much will my natal family do? They can't pay for land if we want to buy some. The children make me happy… [I will] get daughters-in-law [who will help in the household]. My mind is always working and I am always deep in thought [about how to manage].
>
> -
>
> Why did they [natal family] give me in such a house? It would have been better if they hadn't given me [anywhere]

When I asked her whether she felt heard[66], she instructed me:

> Please advise my husband "you have children!"

This theme developed further during the second, more in-depth, interview. Sukhram was at home and listened at times. Lakshamaniya was comfortable with his presence although I asked repeatedly whether we could sit outside to talk undisturbed. She described how he had started drinking heavily only in the previous three-four years which made me ask her the reason she thought this had happened:

> Maybe he thinks that now that the children have grown up, they can earn well and support the family, though I still do not know the exact reason.

I thought it only fair to ask Sukhram, who was listening, whether he wanted to say anything:

> R (to Sr): Tell her why you drink so much alcohol?
>
> Sr (already slightly drunk[67]): What do I say?
>
> R (to me): Some people drink because they don't have children, but he has four sons, so I don't know why he drinks.

Sukhram explained that he stopped going to the neighbouring district for work because he thought it was important to remain at home for his children. He got only intermittent work over here, however:

> S (to Sr): How many days' work do you get in a month?
>
> Sr: 10-20 days, depending on the work…

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[66] This is the third of five questions in the IWB survey's 'participation' domain: "Do feel that you are heard?" (Beyond family; listened to seriously, not necessarily that people do what you say) (2011, 2013).

[67] Sukhram had been drinking mahua liquor that had been brewed in the house that day.

S: … And is that enough to manage on?

Sr: It will have to do… [we get] society rice anyway..

S (to R): What do you think, is it possible to manage on that?

R: No, it isn't.

Sr: I think it is enough, but the one who cooks, prepares the vegetables… she will know best.

S: Hmm…

R: If he works for 10 days it is not possible to survive.

Sr: You can survive on 10 days' earnings, but the children's expenditure will not be covered.

The conversation continued in this vein for a few more minutes. Rukmaniya's helplessness of the previous interview had evolved into a strategy to mobilise against her husband's behaviour. I knew from both interviews that she frequently remonstrated with her husband to temper his drinking and contribute to the household. The manner of her addressing him through this interview appeared to buttress this further. In this case, the speech was not just expressive of her views or her helplessness; it was, in fact, an active assertion of what she believed to be her and children's rights in the household, i.e. that Sukhram contribute substantively to providing for them. This was further emphasised because of how she used my presence to bear witness to the change she sought. During the first interview it became clear that Rukmaniya did not usually talk about this situation and was far more preoccupied with running the household through whatever means she had, whether by selling alcohol or doing manual labour. Her main interest was that her sons should study. It was unclear whether she asked her brother for assistance in this, or he offered, but this was the main source of support for Rukmaniya.

In contrast to Rukmaniya's use of speech in an opportunistic manner to underline her concerns, Pariya found herself in the position of being forced to speak in order to contain the impact of her changed circumstances on her family. Pariya was in her mid-30s when I interviewed her in May 2011 at her home in Kanhaigarh. She was Oraon Hindu. She was the *anganwadi* worker in her area. She was married and had four children, three daughters and a son, all of whom attended school. I met her a month after her husband had left the family home without having informed Pariya that he was leaving, let alone why; she had not heard from him since. She explained how when she and other *anganwadi* workers were called to meetings in the district or sub-district headquarters, they would often take lifts in strangers' vehicles to avoid walking

the long distance to and from their villages. She believed that her husband suspected her of having an affair due to this. She found his behaviour particularly unusual because she thought that they had always communicated well in the 19 years of their marriage. Her natal family had already advised her "… not to do anything wrong, do what my husband expects me to do and not sit in other people's cars" after she informed them about what had happened. After much thought, considering how she would explain why she was doing so, she called various relatives to find out whether anybody knew his whereabouts. However, as a result of Pariya's calls to her conjugal family, she then had to explain the situation:

> My elder brother-in-law has agreed to not send me to my mother's place.
> He says "let him [Pariya's husband] say whatever he wants but we [conjugal family] have not seen any of this [evidence of Pariya having an affair]…" So they agreed not to send me to my natal home.

In Pariya's case the sudden change of circumstances and the resultant instability it brought to her situation compelled her to speak in order to safeguard her interests in the marital home. Her constant reiteration of her innocence, "[B]ut I am doing nothing wrong, I only go for meetings" underscored the precariousness of her situation in the marital household, so much so that even after 19 years of marriage she had to worry about her rights to the joint assets of the marital household. In this sense her speaking out was an act of safeguarding her interests and those of her children rather than merely expressing her distress at the situation. This is also in stark contrast to Mangali's choosing to remain silent about how her mother-in-law treated her in order to safeguard her interests even after her children came along.

4. Rupture, action, and narrative identity

The narratives presented above show that action is a complex of various modes of action, which I suggest include silence, reflection on one's position, observation of the situation and others, and speech. When I first began to examine the narratives for examples of agency I focused on overt visible actions, although on further reflection I found that it was not always clear how these actions constituted agency. This suggested two problems with this approach to understanding agency. First, I was attempting to extract examples of agency from women's narratives that seemed to exemplify resistance to the established norms of women's behaviour. Second, I was making the oft-repeated mistake of highlighting women's overt actions, without adequately understanding the context of those actions. Having recognised these difficulties, I decided instead to focus on all the instances of women's thoughts,

feelings and behaviour that they described in their narratives and the situations where these arose, without categorising them as instances of agency. It is this exercise that clarified the connections between various modes or forms of actions, and how they come together or must be viewed together in order to understand how women come to exercise agency. Moreover, the various modes of action may not be chronologically proximate and may, instead, need to be viewed over a longer period.

A common thread that runs through the narratives that are presented here is that in each of these women's cases the circumstances that result in some changed action on their parts results from some form of rupture. In the previous chapter I used this term to describe the change in practices due to transformations in various fields which also results in opportunities for people to act in agentic ways. While the idea remains the same, here I attempt to understand how a break with established norms can result in agency. I take my cue from Das's assertion that there is always a gap between a stated norm and its enunciation in everyday life (Das, 2007, p. 63). The particular form it takes arises from the context that individuals inhabit. Rupture offers an opportunity to exercise agency, not necessarily because people intend to redefine or challenge the norm, but because it is the context which the individual inhabits that demands their renegotiation of practices in their everyday existence. It is this that eventually results in norms being redefined over a period of time. While context shapes the mode of the action that the individual resorts to, not every action in itself necessarily transforms norm or transforms the person's life. It is because the forms of action are contingent on the circumstances that I argue that agency emerges from the demands of the context.

In Mangali's case, for instance, the norm that assumes primacy in the narratives presented above is that of the 'good mother'. Her effort to embody the role of an ideal mother is an important source of her consciousness and the ensuing actions that she undertakes in order to guard her children's interests. However, the manner of constraints she faces are obstacles to her being able to fulfil that role, and it is therefore the pursuit of the ideal or norm that results in multiple forms of action. Not all of these, however, lead to transformations in existing practices. Her silence regarding violence is an example of how the context does not result in changed norm or action; it reflects the constraints on Mangali's ability to resist the violence. Simultaneously, however, the very same consciousness of her role as a mother made Mangali recognise the need to act in her own interest. Even while she was unable to

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resist violence directly, she recognised that guarding the interests of her children required that she protect herself first. In order to buttress her position she ensured her husband's support for her cause, part of which was to cook separately so that Mangali could eat better food. They acted on this by simply buying a few utensils and cooking separately one day, without discussion with the conjugal family. Finally, in order to ensure that they could run their household independently Mangali demanded their share of the family land. While this last action seems to be the most reflective of agency, treating it as such in isolation would ignore the work or action that went before it, and which made it possible for Mangali to reach the point where she could make this demand. What we see here is a combination of silence, reflection, speech, and action at various points in time, all of which are connected in their pursuit of a common end. There are two further points that are noteworthy about this last demand. Mangali did not walk away from the conjugal household where her interests were subjugated but, instead, demanded what she saw as her due. This was both practical economic logic and also reflected her sense of entitlement to conjugal family's assets. Mangali's narrative exemplifies how the very act of trying to conform to a norm, in her case of fulfilling the responsibilities of motherhood, results in changed actions or practices, which can themselves have further unforeseen consequences.

Even though Mangali's stated motivation for action is her children's wellbeing, her pursuit of this end allows her to remake her status as a daughter-in-law in the household. In this sense she re-forms the context of her subjugation (Das 2007) in which, by her actions, she alters the nature of relationships to some degree. In this, I argue, that Mangali's motivation does not stem only from what she perceives to be her role as a good mother, but equally from a consciousness of what is due to her as a person. This realisation develops over a period of time through a set of interlinked factors. This is linked to the identity she carves out for herself as someone who is determined to overcome obstacles, saying " I have stayed here all these days and I have not been defeated by this situation so there is no reason to be scared now. I get support from my children." Her consciousness is reflected in an incident, in which after narrating a dispute[68] with her mother-in-law to Meeta, her daughter, Meeta

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[68] Her mother-in-law attempted to have a *devaar/ guniya* perform an exorcism in the belief that Mangali was a witch. This seems significant in light of the fact that by this time Mangali had already demanded her husband's and her share of the family land. Various scholars describe how witchcraft accusations are often a ruse to deny women their rightful share in

confronted her paternal grandmother "do you think she will just be a slave to all of you? Send her to her natal home!" Mangali used this event to describe her own sense of agency, saying that she warned her mother-in-law that she would not submit to her unreasonable demands any longer saying "I bore this once but if it ever happens again then I will make them dance!" She suggested through this statement that she would indeed take on a witch-like persona to trouble them. This statement of Mangali's represents an arc from her early helplessness in the marriage to a more forceful presence in her conjugal home with the confidence that not only could she resist her subjugation, but could also assert her will in the household. Through the earlier examples from her narrative, it is evident that this was not a linear movement but one that shifted back and forth between seeming passivity in the form of silence, which was however accompanied with a reflection of her position and the possibilities it offered. It is only when Mangali was relatively confident of her position that she demanded her share of household assets. This confidence stemmed from her husband's support, which I will discuss in chapter 8.

However, it also interesting to note the discordant notes of her narrative, in which she revealed a strikingly contradictory set of feelings, of extreme sadness resulting from the conflictual relationship with her mother-in-law, as also the stubborn determination that she would not be denied her fair share. Every description of her negative emotions, including one in which she says she sometimes feels that life is not worth living, is itself negated by a reiteration of her determination to face her situation, especially to ensure her daughters' wellbeing. The manner in which she presents her determination exemplifies the role of narrative identity in evaluating past actions and their consequences such that they fuel how individuals evaluate their present circumstances and their options to act. In spite of this contradictory set of emotions and thoughts about herself and her life, Mangali continually reiterates her determination, which I would argue is key construct of her identity which finds repeated mention in her life narrative.

5. **Time, action, and agency**

Rajini's narrative, presented earlier, reflected the ambiguity of her current circumstances and her continuing evaluation of them even during our conversation. The very fact that her current course of action had yet to result in a clear outcome,

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productive resources. While this usually with reference to single women, it would not be unheard of in the context of married woman who is seen as a threat to the family's harmony.

such as her getting formal rights to her husband's land, rendered her tone tentative. Even though her actions mimicked those of Mangali's and Bhavani's, she did not know whether they would yield the desired outcome. The 'present moment', therefore, always presents a challenge for claiming one's agency. This is also evident in Rukmaniya's narrative, in which she talked about what her actions had achieved; she presented her actions as the everyday acts of living but not as having transformed her life. Neither Rajini nor Rukmaniya, therefore, remarked that their actions have moved them from helplessness to a more active stance in taking control of their circumstances. In Rukmaniya's case in particular, this is strikingly absent. Rajini, on the other hand, describes how her role as the *mitanin* opened new possibilities for her, even though these were intangible rather than material advancements. Rajini described for instance how this role has increased her knowledge, not just about basic first aid, but also about social interaction:

> The biggest thing is that I have… a social circle… ever since I entered this line [of work] I meet these good people. Earlier I was hesitant, but now because I have to keep going out I have become more open. I can now explain things to people, or give them advice.

Rajini also placed this in the social context. Rajini, like Gulabi and Pariya, faced the innuendo that invariably arises when women do 'outside work' aside from traditional livelihood activities. Rajini occasionally attempted to explain her predicament to others and why she worked, but also dismissed such people as illiterate and incapable of understanding her work, conceding to a necessary pragmatism in this regard:

> … I have to live in this village, isn't it… if I misbehave or get angry with them then tomorrow when I need help then nobody will come forward. I am alone so there is also no option but to just bear with this… otherwise when I have some work nobody will help me.

These passages once more show how various forms of action necessarily co-exist in order to further desired ends. This silence is qualitatively different to Rajini's earlier silence about abuse and violence, even though both instances of silence resulted from the anticipated negative consequences of speaking out. In this case, however, her acknowledgement of these adverse consequences did not prevent her from continuing the actions that were the very source of censure. It is this combination of silence and action, and Rajini's experience of how it has changed her life that suggests that these actions together constitute agency. It is also noteworthy that the silence was not merely mute acceptance of the consequences, but was occasionally replaced with

speaking out. It is because Rajini had already experienced the changes that her work had wrought in her life that it was possible to make this claim. In fact, her having become more open was evident in that, unusually, it was she who initiated the interaction with me.

I liken Rajini's action of approaching me as well as the way in which she appeared to be thinking out loud about her present situation to 'narrative experiments' (Mattingly, 2013, p. 318). Mattingly develops the notion of the narrative as an experiment that allows people to journey through alternative 'plotlines' which present 'possible futures' (ibid, pp. 318-319). In this sense each event in the present is an experiment in a possible future. Rajini's actions could be seen as experiments or imagining a possible future when she talked about her then existing dilemma regarding her relationship with the conjugal family. However, by invoking her achievements in becoming a *mitanin* even though she was illiterate, she was also describing what had once been a possible future which had come to pass, and become part of her present reality. This demonstrated the possibility of transformation. Mattingly further argues that this experiment, through the construction of the narrative regarding a possible future, is not just about undertaking and experiencing that potential journey but that the practices involved in that journey also forge oneself into an image that one envisions for oneself. In Rajini's case the distinction between the past and present is clearly demarcated in the ways that she described past events which had achieved desired transformations, e.g. joining the Changayee congregation or having become a person who could give advice to others in the community. The question remains, however, whether her present actions, and moreover which of them, will eventually allow her weave a similar narrative of success. In her past actions she demonstrated that she could be a good wife and a good mother, but the question remains whether her present actions would meet with a similar success and allow her to further burnish this image of herself of as a good mother. It is this that formed the crux of her anxieties at the time of our conversation and therefore marked that moment as a narrative experiment in progress.

Mangali's narrative shows how the possible future had taken root in the way that she described her transformation through her series of actions. This is underscored in her remark that "[E]ven if I have to beg in order to live, I will not compromise on their [daughters'] education." Her reply when I ask the reason for this comment is telling:

What I think is this… that if I had studied then, somehow, I wouldn't have had the troubles [violence] I had. I could have gone [from the conjugal home] and I would have had a good life. If I don't educate my children then what if they also have the same trouble.

This remark highlights how the future represents hope that demands a constant negotiation of the present in terms of how to act, and to imagine the possible outcomes of those actions. Even though Mangali could not have that life 'free of troubles', the journey that she described in her narrative showed her that the possibility existed for her daughters, and suggested one route to that future which, in turn, determines her present actions.

Rukmaniya's narrative is a stark contrast to those of both Mangali and Rajini. Unlike both of them Rukmaniya did not have the experience of her actions having yielded some significant transformation in the past. To return briefly to a structural analysis, as in the previous chapter, Rukmaniya had no significant power in any field, neither in that of the family whether her conjugal or natal family, nor in the economic domain. Even though her brother supported her sons' education due to his sentiment for Rukmaniya it placed her in a position of some supplication. In turn, she insisted that her eldest son remain at her brother's home throughout so that he could take over household tasks that her brother would normally have done. Her lack of education and relatively few livelihood options apart from farming, in Kanhaigarh, restricted her own chances of improving her economic power which were already severely restricted due to her husband's lack of income. She therefore had no means to increase her power which could have afforded her opportunities for exercising agency. Instead, Rukmaniya's hopes were pinned to the future stemming from her sons' educational progress:

If we educate them then they will do well… if only we manage that then they will improve their situation. My son [eldest] worked and bought chairs for the household. They don't drink.

Rukmaniya described how her sons looked up to her brother as role model:

Instead they don't want to stay here. My husband drinks and all my four children dislike that, so they prefer staying there. And my brother has given them so much love and affection, so they have also developed a special bond with them.

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> They respect my brother a lot because they feel that their father is not supporting them in their schooling. It is their uncle who supports and encourages them.

Rukmaniya repeatedly indicated her displeasure with her husband throughout this conversation which continued in Sukhram's presence. She used this narrative to envision a possible future for her children, and through them for herself. Her entire investment in this hope of an imagined future was revealed through my last brief conversation with her when I delivered the photographs which we had taken after completing the surveys. Rukmaniya asked me for photographs of Usha, my colleague, and myself. When Usha asked her the reason for this, she replied that she would place them along with her pictures of gods and, when she lit incense every evening, she would also seek our blessings for her sons. Although we found this amusing, she explained that she could see how education had 'made' our lives, bringing us far away from home for work. She hoped that by invoking the names of educated people the successes that she associated with good education would pass on to her sons. While it is easy to dismiss this as superstitious, this exchange, along with the previous conversation, marks the narrative as a process that infuses our actions with meanings that come to bear on lives. This action reveals how the future holds out hope and shapes actions in the present. It also draws attention to how people use the narrative itself in an agentic manner as Rukmaniya repeatedly did, and also how the narrative then itself becomes constitutive of a particular identity that individuals further build on through retelling their life stories.

6. Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how agency emerges through patterns of action which take place over a period of time, and together with their outcomes coalesce into narratives for the individual. Individuals use the process of constructing narratives to organise episodes and events into a coherent whole, a narrative identity, which shapes their sense of self. In turn, the self acts in ways that cohere with the narrative identity, also drawing on past events to anticipate the outcomes of actions in the present.

The chapter began by showing that action itself can take multiple forms beyond overt, visible action; what form it takes is contingent on the circumstances. This understanding of action recognises that the meaning of the actions are derived from the circumstances. The circumstances that trigger or motivate action are the outcome of some form of rupture. In the previous chapter I described rupture as arising from

structural changes, but it also affects how individuals are thereby able to inhabit their known worlds. Often rupture acts as an obstacle to acting or pursuing what people know and understand to be their ideal roles in families and communities, challenging them to discover alternative practices to pursue the same roles. It is in these instances that individuals must be creative about how they act, so as to continue to pursue those roles that they value in new ways. These opportunities for renegotiating how to inhabit norms and roles are potentially sites of agency. Here, I re-emphasise that this sometimes results in the gradual transformation of norms themselves, although, paradoxically, this could occur because individuals attempt to conform to the norm through a new form of action rather than because they act to purposively challenge the norm. However, I have also shown, that at times, women undertake to challenge the norm over time because they see the existing norm as not serving their purpose.

Secondly, these actions often unfold over longer periods; these are not isolated actions but patterns of actions whose transformatory effect is visible when they are seen in conjunction with one another. There are two main reasons that actions need to be seen over a period of time. First, individuals' desired outcomes usually come to bear over a long period because the constraints on their ability to act mean that they must act in multiple ways, or adopt multiple modes of action, often through a step-by-step process that results in smaller achievements first, before resulting in broader transformation for them. Second, narratives emerge over time. Women's narratives of their lives are both an organised way of telling their stories and also allow them to shape their own identities. This passage of time allows individuals to understand and fit what are sometimes contradictory feelings and actions into a single coherent identity.

Lastly, I have shown how the narrative by its very emphasis on past achievements allows the person to hope for desired future. In drawing on past events and their outcomes, individuals also imagine how present and future actions will result in desired outcomes and this shapes how they act in the present. The narrative identity allows individuals to anticipate the outcomes of alternate patterns of action that they might adopt in the present. This narrative identity itself draws out those episodes and outcomes that best allow the individual to tell the story of their lives as they would like to be seen.

In this process that I have described above, agency emerges from a series of actions or patterns of behaviour that evolve over time. These actions coalesce into a narrative

identity which presents a template for present and future actions, and shapes the individual's sense of their self. Further, agency is often articulated or claimed with retrospective effect since the present moment is almost always an experiment in imagining a possible future with unpredictable outcomes.

Chapter 7: Identifying Action and Agency in Men's Narratives

1. Introduction

This chapter is about identifying men's agency. In chapter 6 I presented women's narratives of their lives for accounts of how action constitutes agency. In this chapter I will replicate that process by examining men's narratives of their lives. As in the case of women, I will examine men's narrative for key events in their lives and how men responded to them. I look at whether their responses resulted in some significant transformation in their lives and how their actions resulted in those changes. I examine whether men's actions in these situations constitute agency.

Analysing men's actions in this manner has a further purpose: to examine whether men's agentic action is similar to women's agency and at what points it diverges. To that end I consider whether there are key events around which agentic actions converge and what these are in order to determine whether these events are similar or dissimilar to key turning points in women's lives, which I described in the previous chapter. I ask what accounts for the differences, if any, between the key events around which men and women described their actions.

This chapter is set out as follows. The second section briefly describes the themes around which men described their actions. I discuss each of these by turn and present narratives in which men recounted their responses. The third section draws out the manner in which men's accounts of their lives is both similar and dissimilar to women's agency. In the fourth section I discuss how understanding men's action and agency can illuminate our understanding of women's agency. I summarise my findings in the concluding section.

2. Key themes in men's narratives of their lives

The process of examining men's narratives for accounts of agency was spurred by the difficulty I faced in identifying agency in women's narratives. I described this in Chapter 6, where I explained how it was this difficulty that made me retrace my steps to identify the various forms of women's actions as the first step to understanding whether their actions constituted agency. At that point I had speculated that this problem arose because the manner in which agency is defined or how agency is identified is dictated by men's definitions of what agency should look like. In this reading, therefore, men's descriptive accounts accord with the standard conceptions

of agency that have been the frequent subject of feminist critiques. In order to test this I examined the whole range of interviews that I had done with men. This in-depth reading of men's narratives made agency appear very evident. First, identifying clear themes, for instance family life or social relationships, or even stories about the self, were easier to demarcate whereas in women's narratives it had been harder to say where one theme shifted into another. In this sense, therefore, it was easier to map the themes that dominated men's narratives. I will return to this discussion in later sections in order to consider what this implies for understanding women's agency, and whether men's agency is quite as fixed a quality as it initially appears.

Unlike women, men did not often talk of marriage in ways that made it seem like a key turning point, reflecting the reality that it is a much greater transition in women's lives. Instead, marriage and parenthood and their consequent responsibilities converged largely into one theme that was discussed together, in which the responsibilities of parenthood- especially material provision, were the most discussed. It was largely in this context that men also discussed their marital relationships where these took the form of a joint project to provide for the household. This leads to the next important theme which was a central preoccupation for many men: work and livelihood. Although this preoccupation was evident in women's narratives too, in men's narratives the discussion around livelihoods and work was further related to broader social relations and how these influenced what men were able to do. The third theme which drew my attention was again linked to material circumstances and, as with women, related to poverty and men's responses to it. More importantly, these three themes reflect the fact that just as women's roles are gendered through the reproduction of kinship and family roles, so too are men's (Osella & Osella, 2006). I discussed how women's lives are gendered through their kinship and family roles both while reviewing the literature as well as in the previous chapter on women's action and agency; this chapter will show how men's lives are similarly gendered.

One further theme in men's narratives was that of alcohol; it was mentioned so frequently as to almost take on a persona of its own. That it was such a central preoccupation was evident not only in the fact that men who consumed alcohol mentioned it, but also that it invariably found mention even in the narratives of men who did not drink. While some men I interviewed admitted to frequent drinking and described its multiple impacts on their lives, others' narratives were those of personal transformation defined by their triumph over alcoholism. Men who did not drink,

especially non-adivasis, underscored this point to signal personal virtue, most often by comparing themselves with those who did. As I noted in Chapter 4, brewing and consumption of alcohol is an important aspect of adivasi festivals and celebrations where it is a part of sacred offerings to the gods as well as consumed by mortals. Its intimate association with adivasi culture and identity is often used as a convenient tool to vilify adivasis, especially men, as lazy or incapable of restraint, and therefore seen as a mark of their 'backward' nature. Adivasis are conscious of how these stereotypes have gained widespread acceptance among non-adivasis; this was evident in my interviews with men, as well as during discussions with the group that we met at the Chaupal office, in Ambikapur, during an initial pilot phase in November 2010[69]. This has resulted in varied responses both from within and outside adivasi communities. Both Christian and Hindu religious groups have traditionally been among the strongest proponents of abstinence from alcohol, situating this in broader reformist discourses which position Christianity and mainstream Hinduism as 'modern' in contrast to 'backward' adivasi culture. However, there have been similar movements internal to adivasi communities too, such as the Tana Bhagat movement in the early 20th century(Dasgupta, 1999).

Some adivasi groups who recognise that they face a disadvantage in mainstream opportunities, such as in government or private employment for instance, acknowledge the compulsion to conform to notions of what is acceptable in these institutions. This has partly been an outcome of adivasis' own perceptions that their alcohol consumption has had negative impacts on their material lives, with some community groups having decided that none of their members would brew or consume alcohol except during important festivals. This was frequently mentioned during my research. Adivasi elders are quick to point out that this was the traditionally the case anyway. The issue is also intimately intertwined with adivasis' access to forests and forest produce which is, in turn, linked with their identity which I have discussed in Chapter 4. At the individual level the responses vary. Some adivasis who have converted or come into contact with these mainstream discourses are often critical of the adivasi traditions of brewing and consuming alcohol. There are others, however, who view these criticisms as a further threat to their way of life. They note that the alleged increased alcohol consumption is sometimes construed as part of an assertive adivasi identity which non-adivasis perceive as a challenge to their earlier exploitation of adivasis. I have attempted to introduce a measure of nuance to this

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[69] See p.93, footnote 22

discussion about alcohol consumption and adivasi identity, which, while not exhaustive, serves as a background to the narratives I present in this chapter.

In the next section I discuss the themes of family and social relations by turn, in both of which the theme of poverty and material circumstances comes up. I present men's narratives to show how their actions were configured by these particular circumstances

2.1. Family: "When we are living together, then everyone must have a say in how we live"

Dhoopram's statement above encapsulates a commonly held view of how families must pull together. Dhoopram added more to this, saying that if he and his wife were not to agree on the route to their family's advancement then it would be impossible to pull themselves out of poverty. This is certainly not a view unique to men; women's narratives too talked about the family having to pull together. The narratives that follow are drawn from interviews with six men, who I have purposively chosen in order to show that even while there is a certain fixed quality to the manner in which men talk about family relationships, this could vary according to their age, life-stage, and social and economic circumstances. Men's descriptions of close relationships do not reflect the need for the same degree of negotiation that was evident in women's accounts, especially of marriage. As I have already stated marriage or the marital relationship itself was, therefore, a muted preoccupation for men. It had far more relevance for its implications for parenting, for instance when a widowed or divorced man considering remarriage was concerned about whether a new wife would care for his children from a previous relationship. Many men did, however, state the need the need for family members' views to be taken into account in decisions, even if they believed that these must accord with their own opinions.

Dhoopram was in his 30s when I interviewed him in May 2011; this was an in-depth qualitative interview following immediately after my colleague, Pritam, administered a survey during which I had already begun asking further questions. Dhoopram headed a nuclear household comprising himself and his wife, Gangi, and two sons and a daughter who ranged in age from one to eight years old. The family, like most others in Banpur, was Majhwar and they practiced adivasi rituals. Dhoopram and his wife survived mostly on daily-wage labour through MGNREGA or private sources, and the sale of seasonal forest produce. They could not access subsidised rice from the PDS as

they did not have the requisite card. They had not farmed at all in the previous year since the family lands, owned jointly with Dhoopram's father and brothers, had been mortgaged to fund his youngest brother's wedding. That these combined circumstances were a source of worry was obvious in Dhoopram's slow, reflective tone as he spoke to us. Dhoopram's perspective of how the family ought to live, how he and his wife must pull together, emanated from worries about how they would manage given their state of poverty. Dhoopram described these worries in detail, first describing the difficulty of redeeming their mortgaged land:

> Yes, it has created a burden for me because my father cannot do so much.
> It is only if my brothers and I come up with the money that we can redeem
> the land so I tell them that we must do something.

He described his quandary, saying that he might have to look for work outside the village as the income from selling forest produce might not be sufficient to cover the mortgage:

> It is difficult… but if I am able to save then money will go towards getting
> the land back. If I take a loan from elsewhere to pay off this one then that
> will not work because then I will still have a loan to pay off.

In response to my question about what gave him the mental fortitude to carry on, he talked about the how he had no choice but to work, constantly weighing his options regarding the most profitable use of his time:

> D: So we [Dhoopram and Gangi] stay at home for a couple of days and do
> the work that is required here, and when the food finishes then again we
> go to do some labour to earn money. When there is enough left over from
> what little we have farmed we survive on that, building up our strength to
> go and work and also doing whatever else we have to in the house, but
> then we have to also do some labour to earn more money. When then
> there isn't anything then I have to wrack my brains to figure out what to
> do- who to go to for work so that I can earn enough to last for the next few
> days.
>
> S: You have talked about this 'wracking your brains'- it is this mental
> strength that I have been…
>
> D: Everything that I know is in my mind, in me. If I don't force out all this
> knowledge from within myself then how will things move forward?
>
> S: You also talked just now about going to people in search of work, to see
> if anybody would have work to offer you- were you talking about people in
> this village or in other villages?

D: I might need to go to other places as well. If I get work in the village then well and good… Otherwise we also make do with what we have in the house, whether it is some firewood or some roof-tiles. So, say I have made some tiles for my roof and some are left over and I have just stored them on the ground where they might disintegrate- in case I'm not able to get work, then I will make do with selling the tiles or firewood. This is the way I have to constantly think, use my brain…

Dhoopram's narrative shows how men's actions cannot simply be categorised as overt, visible action. His description of how he had to constantly think of sources of income was indicative of the kind of strategising that prepared the ground for the actions visible to observers. The statement regarding whom he needed to approach for work also highlighted the fact that it was essential for him to maintain good relations with people in the community in order to continue working which I will describe this further in the next section. In this context it is important to know that Dhoopram had himself separated his household from that of his parents' so that he would not be touched by what he described as his sister's misbehaviour. His reluctance to clearly state what this misbehaviour was coupled with the ramifications thereof, including that the community would have demanded a fine, suggested that it was of a sexual nature. Dhoopram had therefore decided that separating his household was the only way to safeguard himself from the potential fallout of what had happened, which would have entailed financial losses for him. Dhoopram's account was not unique in its focus on family and material provision but his account also reflected his position vis-à-vis others in his village community.

Devsaya's narrative too described how he and his wife worked together to ensure that their family, especially their children, would do well. Devsaya was 44 years old when I interviewed him in March 2011; I also interviewed him in 2013, administering surveys with added qualitative components on both occasions. His family was Kanwar and his father was the *patel* in Kewarpur. Devsaya reported, in 2011 that he practised adivasi rituals but identified as Hindu in 2013[70]. In both years when I interviewed him, he was working in a local community-based organisation where he coordinated programmes that focused on improving agriculture knowledge and skills within the district. He also

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[70] Devsaya was not unique in this regard. This variation in religious identification reflects the somewhat porous boundary between adivasi and mainstream Hindu rituals, which could sometimes be similar in style and their offerings. It is also common for families to combine some 'new' mainstream Hindu practices with their traditional adivasi practices. In chapter 4 I mentioned that this lead us to add a 'Mixed: Sarna/ Hindu' religion category during the second fieldwork period in 2013.

supported his wife, Gulabi, who I described in chapter 5, in her *panchayat* related work. His quiet manner deflected attention from this last part of his role, unlike in cases where men have been perceived as being the 'real' *panchayat* representatives rather than their women relatives, Devsaya did not assume that role in his speech or his actions. Devsaya talked about not being able to cultivate his family land because they were too few in the family to work the land; his father was elderly, Devsaya and Gulabi were often preoccupied with their other roles, and all their three sons were studying. Further, Devsaya believed that their sons ought to be educated because that would be the route to better lives for them. Devsaya himself was one of few men in his age group who had studied outside the village and had completed school. By his own admission, he was not as proficient a farmer as others in his village. None of this seemed to be a pressing worry for him, however, even though he did not feel his family was very well off. Rather, unlike Dhoopram who worried about the burden of loans, Devsaya saw loans as the means to a better life for his family, saying that he was always confident of being able to get enough to meet the family's needs. This confidence that their everyday lives were relatively comfortable allowed Devsaya to think much more about his sons' futures, saying that he was concerned only that they work hard and take advantage of the opportunities that he and Gulabi had put their way. This security was most evident in Devsaya's statement that his own father educated him and thereby freed Devsaya to educate his own children; this referred partly to the material advantages that had eventually accrued as a result of having been educated and that, therefore, he too understood how education would be important for his children.

My interview with Karmsaya was dominated by his narrative of personal transformation from being a regular, heavy drinker to complete abstinence from alcohol. This change was at least partly triggered by the eventual realisation of the impact of his drinking on his family. Karmsaya was about 50 years old when we first met him in Kanhaigarh during the first piloting phase of the research, in November 2010[71]. He was introduced to us as being actively involved in community mobilisation through the Pahari Korwa Mahapanchayat, a community based organisation representing the interests of the Pahari Korwa community. Karmsaya reported that he identified as Hindu in 2011, but stated that he practised adivasi rituals in 2013. On both occasions he also reported that he followed the locally popular sect of Khuta

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[71] This first interview was conducted jointly with Sarah White.

Bhagat[72], which also enjoined its followers to abstain from alcohol and meat consumption. I interviewed Karmsaya on three further occasions: once to administer a survey during a second piloting phase in February 2011; one in-depth qualitative interview in May 2011; and one survey in February 2013. Karmsaya's delight in talking with new people was evident in how he peppered his conversations with details about his views on everything. This set him apart from many others of the Pahari Korwa community, who were reserved and initially wary of our research team's presence among them. Karmsaya attributed his behaviour to his desire to glean new knowledge from as many sources as possible. Karmsaya lived in a nuclear household with his wife of 25 years, two sons, and one daughter; two married daughters lived in their own households. What he did not mention- which we learned from his wife, was that their eldest son had committed suicide some years previously after Karmsaya said something to him while drunk. This assumes significance in light of the manner in which he described how he stopped drinking. Karmsaya had been describing a hypothetical situation in which, if he had been drinking excessively, his family would call either a family or community elder to intervene. I interrupted him:

S: You seem to be telling me this as an example, but has this ever happened, if I may ask?

K: Yes, it has, it has already happened.

S: Could you tell me something about that? What did you do that your family felt the need to call Hiral *Guruji*[73], you said he is your maternal uncle? (*K: Yes…*) What happened and how was it resolved… that is what I would like to understand.

K: I will tell you about it from the beginning. One of my sons was studying in class nine. At that time I used to drink (*S: Yes, you have said that you used to drink, but you stopped.*) Yes. So I had gone to have a drink, *double-full* [uses English words][74]. I was completely senseless. When you have so much to drink then you are in a different world. I came home. [Addressing family] "Give me my food! Get me some drink! Kill a chicken for me… that is what I want!" But only if all that is available can I have it! So, my family

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[72] The Khuta Bhagat sect was mentioned most often in Kanhaigarh village. Households often affirmed their allegiance to this sect by raising a triangular white flag. I was unable to ascertain through my questioning whether it was linked to the Tana Bhagat sect that I have mentioned both in chapter 4 and in section 2 of this chapter.

[73] *Guru* referred originally to a spiritual or religious guide but now also refers to any type of teacher or instructor; *ji* is an honorific. His maternal uncle had been a schoolteacher and commanded respect on this count.

[74] This combination of English words, *double-full*, almost always combined together, was frequently used in local Surguja parlance to signify large quantities.

couldn't give me all this so I started beating them with a stick. I threw them out of the house in the middle of the night, so obviously they were angry [responding as his family members would have] "the bastard, he drinks and harasses us" So that is the time that they went and called *Guruji* the next morning. He scolded me "what are you allowing this addiction to do to you? This drinking will be the ruin of you. Throw away this anger that you have in you body, swallow it! Don't let it out because, when you do, this is what happens. You will be locked up in gaol or your life will be ruined." This is how he scolded me. Since that day I stopped drinking.

Karmsaya had already previously mentioned that he was violent when drunk. This passage may have been a milder description of both his behaviour and the family's response. It is common to call a family or community elder, as they did Karmsaya's maternal uncle, to counsel someone who is seen not to uphold his responsibilities seriously and this was perhaps the only route that his family could pursue. Karmsaya talked about the further impact on his family:

I saw that he [maternal uncle] had stopped drinking; he's a teacher; and there is always good food, good things, good clothes, bedding and sheets in his house. They live well, they sleep on beds… it is seeing all this that touched me somewhere inside. They have everything they want when they need it. If I want a *lungi*[75] but I have wasted my money on drink, then I can hardly buy a *lungi* without money, can I? They can have anything, they have trousers and *lungis*, and they wear wristwatches. They have got ahead. I decided that I too would educate my children and make sure that they too get good jobs. I said to him "you have shown me a good path and I will follow your lead."

Karmsaya talked about how things had become better for his family in material terms after he had stopped drinking and that he would do everything in his power to educate his children. Although many men described their drinking, there were few who brought to it the degree of import that Karmsaya did in his account of his life.

Others usually confessed their drinking either in response to questions about how they thought they were doing in economic terms[76], or to questions about relationships in

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[75] A common lower body garment worn by men across South Asia consisting of a length of unstitched fabric tied around the waist and falling loosely to the ankles.

[76] These questions were part of the IWB survey's 'economic satisfaction' (2011) or 'economic wellbeing' (2013) domain.

the household[77]. In the second case, especially when talking about violence, it was often accompanied by embarrassed laughter reflecting both a slight unease in talking about it, indicating that it was not quite right and, yet, an acknowledgement that it was a regular affair. Such was Shyam's reaction for instance. Shyam was 37 years old when I interviewed him for a survey in February 2013. He was Agariya, practicing the community's traditional occupation of a blacksmith in Mahuabagh's Korwapara. He observed adivasi forms of worship. He had been married to Anita, who we met in chapter 6, for 16 years. Shyam admitted that he beat Anita when he was drunk saying that "I feel very bad when I beat them [the children too on rare occasions]" and they have to call *seyan*, community elders, to resolve things between them. He also reflected on his responsibilities to his family, saying that he would ensure that his children studied and most importantly he would not get them married young. This was a comment on the course of his own life. His childhood had passed in poverty and he had got married young because family elders said they wanted to see him married during their lifetimes. Shyam commented that this often resulted in boys getting married even before they could plough the fields[78], meaning that they did not even understand the responsibilities attendant to marriage, let alone being ready to shoulder them. He remarked that he had been illiterate with little means to make a life other than by selling firewood in the nearby block headquarters. It was here that a government-school teacher had taken interest in his life and told him about adult education classes and the open school system, through which he was studying when I interviewed him. He hoped to eventually pass at least class 10, if not finish school till class 12. It was this experience that made him say that he would ensure that his children studied. However, he also talked about education not just as a means of material advancement but also a critical source of empowerment, so that people would know and could demand their entitlements.

Birsukh echoed Shyam's views on education when he talked about his children. Birsukh was 37 years old when I interviewed him for a survey in April 2013. I was surprised when he said that he had been married for 20 years since he appeared too young to have been married for such a length of time. He seemed conscious of this himself because he spontaneously prefaced his answer with the explanation that his

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[77] This was in response to either of two of the questions in the IWB survey's close or family relationships domain: "If problems arise in your family, how often are you able to discuss and sort them out?" (2011, 2013); or "How uneasy are you made by the amount of violence in your home?" (2013)

[78] This marks the passage from boyhood into manhood.

mother had been ill during his childhood, and he had therefore married young so that his wife could manage the household. Birsukh was Oraon and observed adivasi rituals. The family, consisting of himself, his wife and five children, was resident in Mahuabagh's Oraonpara. All five children studied away from the village at schools with boarding facilities. He described how he wanted all five children, three daughters and two sons, to complete school but had limited means. He had therefore gone to great efforts to find out about schools which charged lower fees so that he would be able to educate all five, although this was still an uphill task. Alongside his description of his material responsibilities towards his family, he also made another telling comment about the nature of family life when he said that they got along well because the children were still young. This refers to the constant worry regarding the breakdown of the household into nuclear units as children, usually sons, get married and seek to establish control over their share of family resources. Usually such statements were accompanied with men also stating that it was their views or thoughts that drove family decisions and as long as their will prevailed then the family would flourish. The nature of family responsibility was most telling in two further statements that Birsukh made saying, first, that he experienced tension[79]:

> … when I start thinking about how I will manage everything [financially].
>
> Then I don't even feel like eating or doing anything at all.

In response to whether life had been good to him[80] he said:

> Before marriage I had no fears but now I feel scared, when returning late
>
> for example, because I have responsibility for others.

This statement of Birsukh's also underlined Dhoopram's description of how he had to constantly wrack his brains regarding work, in both cases reflecting the fear of not being able to live up to the responsibilities towards their families. This was not a worry only for relatively poorer families with young children. Although many people, both men and women, said that they would have no more worries and responsibilities once their children were married[81], this was not the case in reality.

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[79] This was the third question in the 'physical and mental health' domain of the IWB survey: "Do you suffer from tension?"(2013).

[80] This was the fifth question in the IWB survey's 'values and meaning' domain: "To what extent do you feel that life has been good to you?" (2011, 2013).

[81] This was usually in response to either of the following two questions in IWB survey's 'self' domain: "How close would you say you are to accomplishing what you had hoped for at this time of your life?" or "Looking to the future, how confident do you feel that you will be able to fulfil your responsibilities?"

In fact, it was obvious from most people's narratives that it was not that their worries regarding their children ended, but simply that their exact content changed over the life course. Kishan was 52 years old when I conducted an in-depth qualitative interview with him in April 2011. Kishan was Painika, and identified as Hindu but also followed a large sect called Kabirpanth[82]. He was a preacher in the sect and presided over community rituals. This lent him some prestige locally and in the surrounding villages. He had been married for 35 years to Piyaribai, living with her and their son and a grandson (their married daughter's son) in Kewarpur, while their daughter lived in her own household. Kishan's son, Laldas, had been ill during adolescence and this had left a lasting impact. It was reported that he found it difficult to understand instructions clearly and easily grew tired; this meant that there were few jobs that he could really do. At the age of 28, he was still unmarried at the start of our fieldwork in 2011, although he got married during that period. When I asked Kishan whether he would trace out his life, he replied with a succinct summary beginning with his childhood poverty that was only alleviated during his adulthood after his initiation as a preacher for the sect, before revealing the worry that consumed him:

> …I devoted myself to the *Guru* [Kabir] and with his grace, life has become better, we eat now. Earlier I would have had just one *anna*[83] but now I have eight *annas* today... that is *Guru*'s grace. Then there is also the weakness of the body… both my son and I are very weak; I cannot lift heavy weights because I hurt my leg, and you can see my son, and make out yourself that he is not strong and can't do heavy work. This is the trouble in my life... that I must think about my son's life and my own… that entire burden is on my shoulders. I cannot tell him to go and do physical labour… I carry that weight. My life will pass somehow, but how will he manage?
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> Yes, that [worry about son] is the weight that I feel pressing on me. This is my sorrow, my worry, the rest is fine.

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[82] Kabirpanth means the Kabir-sect. The sect is devoted to the teachings of the 15th century mystic, Kabir. It is not known if Kabir was Hindu or Muslim but both religions claim him as theirs. He was of the Julaha weaver caste, most likely from what is present day eastern UP. This is also the reason that many of the Painika community, traditionally weavers, are Kabirpanthis. He preached that there was one god, who was formless, and that he could be reached directly through prayer and devotion without the intermediation of priests. His prolific body of devotional poetry in colloquial dialects has been passed down in both classical and folk oral traditions remaining popular till the present.

[83] One *anna* is equivalent to 1/16th of a rupee; this unit is now outmoded but is still used in colloquial speech. A rupee now has 100 paise.

Although many people talked about the inevitability of what must come to pass, Kishan's demeanour in talking about his son, when I asked what enabled him to carry on, was particularly stoic and philosophical. He recounted that even as his son had been unwell many years previously, he was called to preside over a community function:

> … Here, my son was suffering, three nights and four days had already passed in the same way. At the same time I felt '… here they [community] have asked me to come and pray at the *ashram*…if I don't go that would sadden them…' So I reflected to myself a bit that there is one god and I told him "O Lord, I am leaving my son to go and pray in your honour… you can save him and leave him for me, or take him to yourself." I left it all up to him…
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> -
>
> …So when I go anywhere I leave it all up to my faith in my *guru* "if you leave him [son] to me, then well and good and, if not, then you take him. If you leave him with me then too he is yours, and he is also yours if you call him to yourself."

This is not to say that Kishan had succumbed to the notion of fate, but that he was articulating the limits of his own control over events. He emphasised side-by-side the importance of work:

> Doing one's duty is also important… we have to work for everything. After all, you [Shreya] have also come from Ambikapur today, from Delhi. You have applied your mind, thought of how to work, and that is how you have come to Surguja. We have to work to earn a livelihood… just standing still will earn you nothing will it? You work, do your duty to put food on the table, isn't it? Having faith is all well and good, but without acting there will be no food. There is your companion and your family so you have to plan for everything somehow, isn't it? God gives you that intelligence and confidence to plan for your life… If there is scarcity then you have to think of who you will approach who can loan you something, who will support you in your work, who will advise you on how to farm profitably. That is the way one lives. What else can I say?

In the passages above, Kishan talks not only for the need to act but also to reflect on how to act, which has been evident in most of the narratives that I have presented above.

All the men whose narratives have been excerpted above, talked about the need to strategise, choose the right moment, weigh their options, all of which have bearing on their actions. While this is in no way different from women's narratives, there is greater emphasis in men's narratives on the concomitant forms of reflection or thinking, and overt action. Unlike in women's narratives, there are fewer references to the need to remain silent and control one's speech in most men's narratives. Further, men were far surer of their status in the household as evident from statements regarding how much they felt cared for. Devsaya, for instance, stated with complete confidence that no matter what responsibilities Gulabi had on a given day, she ensured that his meals were served on time. Similar was the case with Kishan, who during his interview told Piyaribai to make us some tea; when my colleague, Kanti, said that she was busy, he replied that 'there will always be work to do but guests do not visit everyday' with every confidence that she would indeed interrupt her chores to make tea. Kishan's account also shifted back and forth between social relationships and close family relationships, revealing how intimately the two are connected, both for the purposes of material provision and to nurture relationships that are important. This was already evident in the manner in which Dhoopram talked about having to think about whom to seek work from, or Devsaya's references to taking loans, all of which are implicitly dependent on social relationships. Each of the men whose narratives I have presented above spoke about social relationships in different ways and it is this aspect of their lives that I will turn to next.

2.2. Social relationships: "We are all a community… in this village"

This pithy statement of Dhoopram's signals the importance of social relationships. Men's accounts of their lives were replete with descriptions of how their social relationships shaped their actions. Moreover, the nature of these relationships was a key source of motivation for their actions. In the following narratives I aim to show the range of ways in which social relations influenced men's actions by following the accounts of the same men who I introduced in the earlier section. As will be evident, the manner in which social relations shape, and are shaped in turn, by men's actions is very much a function of a set of converging factors which include structural factors such as social and economic status, but which are also influenced by individual relationships and personalities. These social relations were further affected by life-stage such that younger men had to bide their time before their views could be taken seriously by community elders. Men's status in the community was also critical, as wealthier men of particular communities acquired a patron-like status in their village,

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while those whose economic situations were precarious hoped that the goodwill they enjoyed would count for something during times of need.

I have noted above how Kishan described how it was important to keep his professional commitments even in the face of personal difficulties. This reflected the constraint that there was on his ability to act as he wished and the manner in which he had to strategise about the best course of action. In his case social relationships impinged on his actions quite directly in that he was dependent on the community's respect for his position in order to earn from his livelihood. His own consciousness of this was evident when he described how his personal qualities played a direct role in how he was chosen for his work in the Kabirpanth:

> People saw my family's traditions and habits, that we never touched anything unclean… no drugs, no tobacco, no alcohol… I haven't had any of this even when I was young and even today I don't chew tobacco or smoke. Seeing that I had good head on my shoulders, people thought 'it would be a good idea to make him a priest.'
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> -
>
> Yes, and also that I spoke decently with people… nobody knows how you speak at home but it is important to speak well with everybody… they could have forgiven up to 75% of my wrongs but I had to have at least 25% good qualities… that was what it was.

It is apparent that Kishan's actions in how he treated people had a direct bearing on his having been chosen for his role and having remained in it. He went on to say that once he became a preacher his role required him to travel to the surrounding villages to preside over rituals leaving him with less time to do the heavy labour that the family subsisted on. However, while earlier he would have had to go in search for work he said that it was his good fortune that now work came in search for him; even if he were not to step out of the house to look for work, someone would come looking for him to preside over some ritual and the day's needs were thereby taken care of. Kishan's narrative reflect how his actions in the way he responded to and treated people were significant to securing his position and continued to play an important role in the family's wellbeing. This was not just a matter of prestige or respect for Kishan, although that was undoubtedly important too, it was more fundamentally a matter of material provision first and foremost.

In many ways, Devsaya's narrative too echoes Kishan's. Like Kishan, he too commanded respect locally although, in his case, I would suggest that the source of respect was somewhat different. Devsaya was the son of the *patel* and therefore enjoyed some respect because of his family's local prominence. This was further underscored by Gulabi's role as the *sarpanch*. Devsaya did not remark on these connections and it was clear that he sought to convey his own independent identity during our conversations. In a similar vein to Kishan's remarks, Devsaya too talked about how his actions of helping people with knowledge and information are what made people trust him. He established this from the word go when replying to my question about which religion he practiced to which he responded "… [M]y faith lies in my actions", explaining that it was when his actions brought relief or solutions to people's problems that he considered himself to be acting out his faith or religion. This comment was repeated in different ways throughout his narrative; he later added that people sought him out for this very reason. His actions were also indicative of the larger change that he desired in his community. He remarked on how his ideas to change the village, for instance in farming techniques or livelihoods, were too new for the *seyan,* the elders, who simply did not understand them and who therefore acted as "obstacles to progress". He was therefore biding his time till all people could understand his ideas for change. It was in the context of these ideas that he mentioned Gulabi's role as *sarpanch-* the only time he did so, remarking that it was because he desired this change that he saw it as his duty to campaign for Gulabi believing that "my village should have everything". This was the only occasion on which he conceded that her public role was very much a joint project for both of them. Both these preceding comments highlight how a range of actions unfolds over time as I also described in the previous chapter with reference to women's narratives. Although both Devsaya and Kishan spoke from positions of respect in their communities, Kishan had, additionally, already acquired a certain degree of authority within the community that he presided over. This was where Devsaya differed from him in that he did not as yet command the status of an elder and this was one of the obstacles to his actions.

Karmsaya's views about his community echoed Devsaya's statements both in his view that it needed to change and that people in his community did not understand his ideas of change and therefore resisted them. The context in which Karmsaya said this, related to his leadership of the Pahari Korwa Mahapanchayat, was rather more fraught than the context of Devsaya's statements. It later transpired that Karmsaya had been removed from a leadership position some time earlier mainly due to his perceived

arrogance[84]. In our conversation, while Karmsaya did not tell us this, he dwelt at length on how the community was ranged against him. Much of this had to do with conflicting ideas of how the community ought to advance. His used his personal transformation almost like a calling card, constantly invoking it as a route to material advancement in conversations with others in his community:

> … If we Korwas were to send our children to school, even though we may be uneducated ourselves, we may be poor, and we may be fools… but if we send our children to school then who knows… he might study, till the 10th or 11th, or 12th? He will be able to do something to live this life. He will get some knowledge. He might become an office boy or a teacher or even- if he studies a lot, then he can do other things… maybe even a doctor! But that is only if the parents pay some attention and send the child to school… if I go, and taking my wife along as well as my children, and all I do is to indulge in drink then the children's future is finished. If there is daal and rice in the house and ten rupees in my pocket and I say "go, get a bottle!" then everything will be finished. This is why I have been telling people "O brother, leave this drinking. You want to eat mutton, that is fine; but amongst our community, us Korwas, at least let us stop drinking. You are ruining your lives, selling them away and you are straying. You will be finished." This is why people have been saying I am a stupid man… [mimicking them] "O don't talk to him [Karmsaya]!" So be it… I might be stupid as far as you're concerned but not for god, I'm not. This is why people say "o now he's a disciple of god is he, this Karmsaya? And he's a big farmer… he's a big man now!" But I say it is because I have become rich that I tell you that if you were secure then you would also not be fighting [when the community drinks together] with each other…

The ideas expressed in this passage are closely linked to adivasi identity that I described earlier. Here my aim is show how Karmsaya, once a leader in the community, was now almost made into an object of ridicule. While he was somewhat better off than others in his community he was nonetheless affected by this turn in his relationships with others. This took various forms, both material- in that not everyone would be willing to help him farm, as well as in the sense of belonging, or sense of

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[84] This was also the result of village and *panchayat* politics which is very much shaped by community identity and interests. The Pahari Korwa community saw Karmsaya as being in the camp of the then *sarpanch,* a Majhwar, and felt he was taking undue advantage of his proximity to this person.

solidarity with his community. Karmsaya's story never once faltered from the very strong narrative of personal transformation, and he communicated very strongly how his constant observation of others, his reflections on his own situation, and his actions had brought him to this point. Although there was a strong underlying tone of self-belief in his own actions, there was also a concomitant wariness arising from what he sensed was his marginalisation in the community.

The fraught nature of social relations and the impact that they can have on personal fortunes was most visible in Dhoopram's narrative, where it was not even alleviated by having acquired some financial stability as in Karmsaya's case. In the earlier passage of Dhoopram's narrative, in section 2.1, he described the worries arising from his financial situation and especially the burden of repaying loans. At the time of our conversation, Dhoopram was preoccupied with how he would contribute his share of expenses towards his friend's upcoming wedding. It is customary for all households in the village, or at least of the same community, to contribute a fixed amount of rice, daal, and vegetables when a wedding is to take place while some people also assist in preparing and serving the wedding feast. This is just one of many practices that underlines the reciprocity of social relationships in the village. Dhoopram's straitened circumstances meant that he had nothing to spare for this event. Although he would not be penalised in any manner he was concerned about the fallout on his friendship, all the more so because of his impoverished circumstances:

> S: … If for some reason you are unable to contribute then what would be the effect of that?
>
> D: He [friend] will remark upon it… "I contributed for his [Dhoopram's] wedding but he didn't contribute for mine."
>
> -
>
> … He will bear this in his heart… that he contributed for my wedding but I didn't for his, and he will recall it the next time that I am in need.
>
> S: If he were to tell others in the village that you are unable to contribute would that result in your being excluded, or people cutting off relations with you?
>
> D: No that would not happen because everyone gives whatever they can. We note down whatever people are giving and it is up to you where or how you manage to contribute.

Although there was no strict rule regarding these contributions, the matter took on an added gravity for Dhoopram not least because of the implications a fractured

friendship could have for him in times of need. Dhoopram was ever cognisant of such possibilities because of his particularly precarious situation without access to subsided PDS rice[85]. It was largely for this reason itself that he had separated his household from his parents', which I described earlier, saying that had he not, it would have resulted in his ostracisation from the community:

> If something like that were to happen, then in order to repair the situation it would cost me much more. I would have to pay a fine and where would I be able find the money to pay that fine?
>
> -
>
> Nobody will come to my house, I will also not be doing any work so then people will also not come to my house. That would definitely make me also think 'I have not paid the fine so nobody comes...'

Dhoopram's narrative makes visible the degree to which men's actions are shaped by their social relationships in way that women's narratives did not highlight. Further, it also exemplifies the fragility of community solidarity and social relationships which are also accompanied by the ever-present threat of exclusion.

Shyam's narrative too reflects that the reciprocal nature of social relations can easily shift, requiring a constant adjustment of one's foothold on this slippery ground. Shyam's consciousness of this fact arose from his being the only Agariya family in Mahuabagh's Korwapara, and moreover being economically dependent on the Pahari Korwa community for their livelihood[86]. This resulted in two contradictory feelings about his place in the Korwapara's community. Shyam was sure that his Pahari Korwa neighbours would come to his aid in an emergency[87]; this certainty, however, arose from the fact that he provided this service whenever it was demanded of him, often working till late evening leaving him little time for any other livelihood activities. Moreover, he did so because Pahari Korwa men were aggressive in their demands, and

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[85] His wife, Gangi, reported during her interview that her MGNREGA wages had been diverted towards repayment of a loan that her father-in-law had taken from the bank. Since MGNREGA wages are deposited directly into bank accounts, the bank manager had done this without consulting her or father-in-law. No amount of protest had rectified this situation highlighting how difficult it is for individuals who are uneducated to get even those entitlements that they are aware of. This had further contributed to the family's poverty in that year.

[86] There was one other non-Pahari Korwa household in Korwapara which consisted of a widowed Rajwade woman who lived there alone. Notably, however, she was economically better off than all the other residents of Korwapara and was, therefore, not dependent on anybody there for her livelihood.

[87] This was his response to the third question in the IWB survey's 'social connections domain': "How much can you trust people beyond your immediate family to with you through bad times?" (2011, 2013)

he feared that if he did not accede to them they could harm him when they were drunk; this was also why he refused to craft their swords. This situation shows how Shyam navigated this terrain to safeguard himself, asserting himself when required, for instance by refusing to make swords, but also acceding to demands which exacted other costs from him.

Dhoopram's and Shyam's descriptions of social relationships offer a converse image to Devsaya's view of social relationships. While all three men see them as sources of earning and securing themselves financially, Devsaya had a far greater degree of manoeuvrability around them, being sure of securing loans when he needed to and securing support for his work in community. Dhoopram was far more constrained in how he could act and it was noteworthy that the constraint was such that he would sever family ties rather than risk the enforced severance of community ties. While Shyam did not face the degree of constraint as Dhoopram did, his actions were shaped by the fact that he was in some ways an outsider in his community. These differences are real in that they reflect the three men's locations in different fields, most especially in the economic field. Devsaya clearly had much more power in this field than did either Dhoopram or Shyam. As I described in chapter 5, his power was also strengthened both by Gulabi's position as the *sarpanch* and his family's position in relation to other village households in the field of the family. This was further underscored by their joint investment in Gulabi's political position which had served to make up for family's reduced economic power some years previously. In contrast, both Dhoopram's and Shyam's power in each of these fields was so minimal that their actions were more acutely shaped by the limited power that they had in this field. In their cases, we are offered a view of men's agency that requires a great deal of reflection over how they can act and what the effects of those actions would be. The fact that they are younger than both Kishan and Devsaya suggests that in men's accounts of their lives there is a need to be equally aware of life-stage and age, just as with women's accounts, in order to understand how the particular contexts affect the ways in which they can act.

3. A comparative account of women's and men's actions

The previous two sections presented how men respond to key events in their lives. This laid the ground to answer a key question for this chapter: whether men's agentic action is similar to women's agency and at what points it diverges. I begin by comparing women's and men's for their references to their own actions and

achievements. I then analyse what this tells us about the nature of power in individual's relationships. Lastly, I describe the forms that women's and men's actions take.

3.1. Individual achievements

There is a greater emphasis on individual achievements in men's narratives. This is especially true when they talk about the family, where they are usually acknowledged as the household head, which therefore accounts for their greater sense of their authority. This effect reconfirms that women do have indeed less power in the household. Women's narratives, presented in chapter 6, reflect the constraints within which they operate to a far greater degree. This emphasis is less marked only in cases where women have had opportunities to play a publicly visible or primary role in their own advancement. Thus Gulabi, Mangali, and Sujanibai, even while acknowledging the obstacles to their agency, constantly reiterate their own roles and individual achievements in reaching where they have. In contrast, the sense of individual achievement is almost absent in Lakshamaniya's narrative; when she talks about 'I', it is in the sense of how limited her possibilities are. In Rajini's case her individual achievements are more evident than in Lakshamaniya's, but much more tentative than in Gulabi's or Sujanibai's cases. What accounts for this? I would argue that women such as Gulabi, Mangali, or Sujanibai who have negotiated obstacles on their own have done so primarily because of circumstances that prevailed in their lives. Consequently this has demonstrated to them the possibilities of working around constraint, but because they have had to do this quietly, e.g. sometimes through compliance rather than by overt changed actions, or alone, they are more conscious of their individual capacities. They recognise their own contributions to their changed circumstances as distinct from those of their close others. This reveals both the additional possibilities of not only reducing some forms of their dependence on others, but also very evidently having others much more dependent on their own actions. Both these possibilities make these women's own actions far more central to their narratives of their lives. What it also highlights is the nature of power at work in relationships and under various circumstances.

3.2. Relationships and power in individual narratives

A focus on individual biographies is critical in revealing where power impinges most on the person's actions. Individuals talk about relationships that most constrain them; the effects of power on individuals' actions are revealed in their narratives as patterns,

some of which are distinct for women and men. The first key pattern in women's narratives is the emphasis on family relationships which highlights this as the most proximate source of power that they negotiate with. The second pattern is that women rarely negotiate social relationships on their own but, rather, rely on the support of their male kin which is critical in their being able to challenge power in social relationships. What this also points to is that women are not simply challenging male power when they do this, but that they challenge complex relationships of power in which men are also involved, sometimes by taking advantage of men's power. Sujanibai, for instance, could do as she pleased partially because her husband was a powerful man in the village and she could draw on his already existing privilege as the *patel*. Gulabi, similarly, could take advantage of the traditional male authority of her father-in-law and she could do so because she was enmeshed in relationships where there is struggle for authority in the village. Her allegiance to her own family is important because it is partially through their power that she can assert her own political authority in the village.

In men's narratives the manner in which power impinges on their actions is much more evidently linked with social relations as I have described in section 2.2 above. In their narratives it is implicit, if not explicit, that they have greater power in the household, e.g. Shravan's statement "where will she [wife] go now, she has children" is an obvious reference to the fact that married women rarely have the choice of leaving their conjugal household. Only when men themselves are not in a strong position within the household do they not assert this power. Dhoopram, therefore, talks consistently of an equal relationship with his wife without asserting his own greater power, because their economic strength is heavily dependent on Gangi's equal contribution. In other's cases, where men's financial contribution is greater, they assert a greater say in the household. This is also linked to years in marriage and the period over which the household has been established. In this context Devsaya, interestingly, talks only indirectly about his control when he says that no matter that Gulabi has not eaten she will ensure that he gets his meals on time. Kishan is more direct in revealing his own authority when he talks about taking the family along in all decisions, but that they must listen to him because he is the household head. In contrast, I would suggest that this authority is undermined in Sukhram's case where not only does he make no such assertions, but his position is further undermined by Rukmaniya's statements regarding his inability to provide for the household, which she makes in his presence. It would be erroneous to conclude here that men's actions are

not shaped by their family responsibilities, but these are not as much sources of motivating action as they are for women.

Nonetheless what this discussion points to is that for all people, whether men or women, agency is rooted in relationships. We have to examine the multiple relationships that individuals talk of to understand what motivates their actions. In comparing Devsaya and Dhoopram we can note that both talk of social relationships as sources of their action. In very fundamental ways their sense of self is rooted in their social interaction. Devsaya, for instance, talks about how he sees his faith as expressed in helping people with his knowledge; this is what makes his work important to him because he sees his knowledge as a way of helping people prosper. This motivates his action and his work, a large part of which is to meet people and discuss with them what they can do. Further his faith that he can make ends meet by taking loans shows that fulfilling his family responsibilities is very much tied to his social relationships. In Dhoopram's case too social relationships are very important but he sees them as a way of reducing his burden of loans. His identity too is tied with social relationships in that he must contribute for his friend's wedding so that their friendship remains intact, but also so that he can have someone to turn to when he needs help. This reflection is constituted both through the memory of the past relationship which has an affective component and also the material aspects of his life and relationships. Whereas both Devsaya and Dhoopram are relying on social relationships in the same way and their actions are shaped by that, Dhoopram talks of them as more constraining and therefore driving his agency, while Devsaya describes as more liberating in driving his agency. This contrast in their descriptions of what social relations can do for them is reflective of their respective positions in their communities. Just as women are not a singular category, neither are men. As Connell (1987) notes not all men have the same amount of power. Just as women's agency is affected by their class and caste or community locations so to is men's scope for actions shaped in the same way.

3.3.   Forms of men's actions.

The most common form of action that men refer to in their narratives is 'doing' or overt, visible action and speech; there are far fewer references to silence. However, their narratives also reveal that the form of their actions is also shaped by their positions both in the family and the community. Thus Dhoopram, for instance, would have found it difficult to protest if he had been ostracised from the community, but he could criticise his sister's behaviour to the extent that he chose to sever his

relationship with her and separate his household from his parents'. Another example is that of Shravan, who at one time worked as a community mobiliser for the VHP in Banpur, during which period he was asked to worship according to mainstream Hindu practices. Although could not speak out against the VHP's directions to worship because he worked for the organisation, he could ignore the instructions because his superiors could not monitor his actions in the village. Further, he would have found it difficult to follow their instructions in a village where everyone else continued to observe adivasi rituals. The nature of actions, therefore, depends on the relationship within which it happens. If we were to examine men's actions only in relation to the women in their families, it would certainly show that men both speak and act more frequently; this is an indication of their greater power and, therefore, also greater freedom to act in that relationship. Viewing their actions in other relationships, where they have less power, reveals similar types of constraints that were visible in women's relationships- including within their families, and on their actions. It is important to understand first, the nature of action and, second, the relationships within which that action is happening as an indicator of how power is acting on the individual. It is this understanding that reveals how a substantive agency is actively shaped in response to the context.

In comparing women's and men's accounts of how they respond to various circumstances we are able to understand what accounts for the differentiated stress on individual achievements in their narratives. I noted that women stress their individual achievements to a lesser degree unless they have been faced situations where they had no option to act alone. Men, in contrast, stress their own actions to a greater degree, most especially when these are in relation to family relations which involve women too. I argued that this is a reflection of the men's greater power in the household. Taking this analysis further showed that the relationships that individuals stress in describing their actions reveals something about the obstacles they face in those relationships, and it is in these relationships that they feel power exerted on themselves to a greater degree. It is for this reason that men describe social relations in greater detail than their household relationships. This is also linked with the individual's position in their community which affects how much power they may have. Lastly, I showed that the form that individuals' actions take is also influenced by the relationship in which it occurs and the kind of power that they exert or is exerted on them in that relationship. In the next section, I discuss why these findings are important and how they help us better understand women's agency.

4. Why men's agency?

There are three reasons why this chapter is important. The first reason is that I do not want to create the erroneous impression that women have a great amount of agency. The previous two chapters established that women exercise agency in ways that we might not always recognise, repeatedly emphasising the context in which it emerges. An important constituent of that context is the manner in which men perceive their relationships and agency towards women. This chapter's importance lies in showing that even though women are able to act in agentic ways, it is men's narratives that reveal a vast difference in the real and perceived degree of power that men and women have. In many cases, women's agency needs to gestate over a longer period and women have to disguise their agency, i.e. bide their time in strategising, whereas men have less need to do that in response to women. The most obvious difference is the narrative device in which women take time to openly lay claim to their agency. This indicates something about the different ways in men and women perceive themselves; men are quicker to talk about their own actions while women's similar claims are more layered within their relationships. For instance, Ramcharan, a resident of Kanhaigarh village, emphasised repeatedly that he has always been a man of action. This reflected the multiple layers of power he had- economic, social, political, and gender, which combined to make him an extremely influential person in Kanhaigarh. Karmsaya's and Devsaya's narratives too are determined in a similar manner, implying that their lives have been configured largely by their own actions. However, it is also important to be aware of the limits of this power in all three men's narratives, which we can recognise only by listening to what others say about them. Ramcharan, for instance, mentioned only briefly his wife's contribution to his household, asserting that he was the family patriarch. He did this both by describing how his family always listened to his advice, although it seemed that there was no other option for them, and when describing his household composition said that they lived as joint household. His family, however, undermined that narrative in their own interviews, with his wife, two sons, and their wives, all saying that the family had already divided into nuclear households. Ramcharan's sons sounded particularly bitter, suggesting that their father that had cut them out of their rightful share of the family assets while taking advantage of their labour contribution. These narratives reinforce Ramcharan's power but, simultaneously, also contest it and, in doing so, challenge his self-image of the family patriarch. In Karmsaya's case, his wife's revelation that their son committed suicide made Karmsaya's omission striking and his narrative of change became less his

individual triumph than a response to the loss of his son. Devsaya's narrative of running the household with barely any reference to Gulabi is undermined by Gulabi's reflection and assertion of her contribution to their advancement thus far. These examples show that even when men's narratives give some credit to women's claims or contributions they rarely share the narrative to the same degree that women do in mentioning men; men emphasise their own actions and power to a greater extent.

The second reason that this chapter is important is to avoid the privileging of overt action as the sole form of agency. Even though men's narratives emphasise their actions, this chapter also showed that even for men overt actions alone are not the only way in which they exercise agency, and that their actions are constrained in different ways. The nature of narrative and modes of action that are described reflect the nature of constraints that a persons faces. This changes either when we understand their narratives as part of a larger whole, e.g. by also referring to the narratives of other people to whom they are bound, which reveal challenges to the power of dominant men. I would suggest that the issue is not that men are doing much more in terms of overt actions, or women less so, but that men do not need to say that they were silent or observing the situation because they can lay claim to their actions. This could be partly a reflection of reality, in that men have more power to act, which is further reflected in narratives that men and women employ differently. Men might be skipping over the multiplicity of their actions that lead to one final action or outcome. This becomes visible only in the narratives of men who have less power, e.g. Dhoopram, or in the instances where they lack options, such as when Kishan talking about his son, expressing his helplessness. Women talk through the various stages of their actions in greater detail because they encounter hurdles at each of those times; they also acknowledge the contributions of others, especially men's. This does indeed point to women's lesser agency. It also continues to point to the need to understand women's agency better since the forms it takes are often hidden from view.

The third reason for this chapter's importance is that it highlights how different types of relationships find mention both in women's narratives, in the previous chapter, and in men's narratives in this chapter. This brings me to the need to understand both women's and men's actions in the context of relationships, not just as enabling or constraining certain types of actions but as being the immediate context in which agentic action takes place. This is what I will focus on the next chapter where I will develop my argument that agency must be understood not as the act of individuals

alone but as the actions of individuals who are simultaneously enmeshed in multiple relationships. Thus even while it is the individual who acts the motivations for their various actions lies in relationships with both close and distant others.

5. Conclusion

This chapter aimed to understand the similarities and differences between women's and men's agency, and what could account for the differences in particular. The main reason for doing so was to determine whether examining men's agency could enhance our understanding of women's agency. The method through which I did this was by examining men's responses to key events in their lives, as I did with women's narratives in the previous chapter. This chapter showed that there are indeed both similarities and differences in women's and men's narratives of their lives.

The similarities lie in the fact that, first, both women and men emphasise particular themes in their narratives, e.g. family or their social connections, the material aspects of life, or their personal transformations. The second similarity lies in their equal emphasis on the relationships in which they are bound. However, while these similarities exist they also hold certain differences within them. Thus men, tend to refer to family relationships in a more fixed manner and less as obstacles to their freedom to act. Second, their references to family are less to marriage and more to parenthood and its attendant responsibilities. The third differences lies in the fact that while women referred more often to close familial relationships, men talk more about their relationships in the community.

The significant differences between women's and men's narratives lie in their different emphases on individual achievements and, linked to this, the distinct forms in which they characterise their actions. As I argued in the previous section, this is an indicator of the power that men have to act in ways that are not immediately or easily available to women. Men are less constrained in domestic relationships vis-à-vis women, who may choose less visible forms of action to pursue their interests. Men's actions take more varied forms only in situations and relationships where they enjoy less power and face greater obstacles to their actions. In such situations, men's narratives take on a slightly similar tone to women's more tentative claims of their actions and achievements.

Lastly, what this chapter has indicated is that all action happens within the context not just of particular circumstances but, more proximately, of relationships. It is this that accounts for women's and men's emphases on different sets of relationships when they describe their responses to events in their lives. The next chapter will examine in some detail how agency is relationally situated and produced.

Chapter 8: Relational Agency

1. Introduction

This chapter is about understanding agency from a relational perspective. The analysis of individuals' actions, in the previous two chapters about women's and men's actions respectively, indicates how these emerge from the nature of relationships in which people are enmeshed. I noted, first, that individuals' roles and the associated responsibilities towards others are important in motivating their actions in particular circumstances and, second, that their narratives highlight those relationships which affect individual's actions through the power that they exert on them. The aim of this chapter is to understand how a relational view adds to our understanding of agency.

This chapter returns to the broader concern of understanding how structure and agency are linked, but from a micro-level, individual, relational perspective. I base this on the understanding that relationships at the individual level reflect structural effects, which are not immediately visible either to the agent or the observer (Bourdieu, 1990, pp. 123-139). In order to understand the effects of structures we must turn to the immediate context of the individual which is composed of the individual's multiple relationships(Burkitt, 2016).

This chapter is arranged as follows. In section two I re-present those aspects of relationality that have guided my thinking on agency. In section three I present women's narratives focusing on their descriptions of relationships; although conjugal relations assume primacy. I also examine their descriptions of parenthood in section. In each section I examine how relations are the sites of agency, emphasising the ways in which women have creatively reworked existing patterns of behaviour which have resulted in agentic narratives for themselves. I conclude by summarising these arguments to highlight that our understandings of agency are clarified when it is analysed through a relational lens.

2. Relational agency

Relationships and their constitutive interactions reflect the effect of structures. Bourdieu (1990) phrases this in the converse manner when he says, in the context of social and symbolic spaces, that "…the visible, that which is immediately given, conceals the invisible which determines it. One thus forgets that the truth of the interaction is never entirely to be found in the interaction as it is available to observation" (ibid, p. 127). Relationships are not just individuals' experiences, therefore, but reflect broader social patterns, rendering the abstract, i.e. structures, into something tangible and comprehensible. McNay(2004),

writing in feminist theory and building on Bourdieu's analysis, suggests that agency elucidates how social structures shape identity, for instance gender. Her reason for doing so again rests primarily on the idea that structural locations are revealed through lived social relations. The concept of a structure such as patriarchy, and how it (re) produces gender, becomes obvious only through the lived reality of social and economic relations among individuals and groups (West & Fenstermaker, 1995a). Burkitt's (2016) scholarship, in relational sociology, reflects a similar preoccupation with lived relations and social structures. He emphasises that the multiple bonds that people form over time each carry meaning for the individual. The reason they are meaningful is because they are both embedded in and emerge from concrete interactions of different kinds, whether those are economic and material, social, or affective. Different relationships have different meanings, each of which exert their pulls and pressures on the individual. When individuals act, therefore, they are neither doing so as isolated persons or directly in response to structural factors but, rather, in response to how those structural factors are encoded in their meaningful relationships (Burkitt, 2016). Burkitt further highlights that these relationships extend both backwards and forwards in time, creating a unique biography for each individual not only of their own experiences and including their relationships. It is this history of our relationships along with their anticipated future that is brought to bear on the nature of our actions.

This raises the question about whose interests are at stake when individuals act. In a relational perspective, where the individual is so thoroughly enmeshed in relationships such that they are constituted through the bonds of those relationships, interests may overlap to the degree where it is difficult to draw a fixed boundary between the varied interests of the people who are bonded through relationships. This adds a further complexity to understanding individuals' actions, where each person's actions have implications both for themselves and others with whom they are relationally connected. What this underlines, however, is that while it is individuals who perform actions, the motivation for those actions may well emerge from the nature of their relationships with others- this is what I examine in the narratives that I present in the subsequent section.

3. **Conjugality: "If he dies before me then my life will become bad, then it will be a dog's existence"**

Sathinibai's comment, above, highlights the companionship of the conjugal relationship by imagining the effect of its absence. Given the near universality of marriage the conjugal relationship is undoubtedly significant, especially for women. The narratives that I

presented in chapters 5 and 6 have already shown how women's actions were configured by their roles and responsibilities towards others in their families and communities. There were also examples of the how others' responses to them were equally significant. In this section I deal more explicitly with the how the affective aspects of the conjugal relationship, which I noted in earlier chapters too, played an especially significant role in women's actions. I use the term affective to refer to both negative and positive emotions which affect the relationship. I examine both women's and men's narratives to understand this. In proceeding with this analysis it is important to remember that affective ties are crucial to legitimating the ideological underpinnings of the family, through the cultivation of a 'family feeling' which rests on practice and actions that are expressed as love (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 68).

Bhavani, whose life I described in chapter 5, initially appeared to criticise her husband, Sitaram, saying that he did not have the intelligence or the exposure to get many things done. These were all the more glaring given that she made these statements in public to complete strangers, more so because men are perceived to be the public face of the household or family. In my later conversation with her, however, these criticisms were tempered by her remarks about his support for her. Bhavani mentioned that one of the reasons that she chose not to leave her conjugal home, even though her parents-in-law did not seem to care whether she stayed or left, was because her husband remained silent:

> Mother-in-law and Father-in law ... whatever they did, they did right according to them. But my husband didn't say anything. That is why I stayed here. If he had also said "go if you want…" then I would've gone[88]. But he stayed silent.
>
> -
>
> S: As you said, your husband didn't say anything and so you didn't go, but if he had said something you would not have been able to bear it… how did he behave with you?
>
> B: He is very good to me. He does not say anything. Whatever he gets he gives us to eat. He pays attention to whether I have eaten or not, had my bath or not. If my clothes are torn he asks me to get new ones. He pays a lot of attention to me. That's why I have stayed back. Now I think since I have spent half of my life here I might as well spend the other half here, and after that we return quietly to the earth.

Bhavani's narrative covered the gamut of ways in Sitaram conveyed his care and concern for her: material provision and his attention to her needs; his silence, which in contrast to

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[88] Recall that Rajini returned to her natal home for precisely this reason.

his parents' utterances were supportive; but also the sense that this life or marriage is fated. This is in spite of the fact that even at the time of our conversation in 2011, and with her sons grown up, she still asked her parents "what did you push me into?", saying that her marriage into a poor household "still stings till today" even though she does not reveal her pain to anyone else. When I asked whether Sitaram ever protested his parents' behaviour towards her, she explained that there was no question of his challenging his parents. His silence was significant in the conjugal context not only because it imbued the then-nascent relationship with an affective character, but also because it evolved into a longer pattern in their relationship. She explained his reaction when she demanded that they separate their kitchen from her parents-in-law:

> B: He didn't say anything [object] "I'll do whatever you say."
>
> S: It seems that he respects your point of view.
>
> B: Yes, he does. He listens to whatever I have to say.
>
> S: … Would you agree that this is something that is different [from other men]?
>
> B: It's like this. He thinks 'she comes from a richer family so if I say something she will be hurt.' That is why he listens, so that I am not hurt. He accepts what I say. He wonders why his parents treated me such. And he feels '…if I also hurt her where will she go?' So he listens to what I say.
>
> S: … And when you think of this, how do you feel… do you feel that it is fine that he gives in to whatever you say?
>
> B: It is not just that. I too accept whatever he says. If he were to say "stand there" then I would just stay standing. We both listen to what the other has to say.

I asked whether their relationship had begun like this or this pattern had evolved over time:

> … From the beginning he always thought 'she comes from a rich family, if I hit her or I say something rude to her, she won't come to me. She will go off to her natal home. Mother keeps saying something to her, father also keeps saying things to her. If I also say something to her, she won't be able to stay here.' So my husband would never say anything. He would keep quiet, quiet. 'If all of us say something to her she won't be able to stay here. My parents always say something or the other but only if I don't then she'll be able to stay here. If everybody says something to her where will she go? I will be here to protect her. Where will I be able to take her and go away?'

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In chapter 5 I described Bhavani's greater power arising from her natal family's relatively more powerful position in relation to her conjugal family. This passage above describes how that relationship in the field of the family shaped the personal relationship between Bhavani and Sitaram. Sitaram's silence, which was both a negative, in that he did not say anything to his parents, is simultaneously supportive because he is also silent towards her. While in the case of his parents it represented perhaps an inability to challenge norms, with respect to Bhavani Sitaram's silence could act as source of agency since Bhavani felt confident of his love for her and therefore chose to stay on her marital home.

A similar pattern can be found in other women's narratives as well. I have described elsewhere how both Gulabi and Mangali too described a similar reciprocal restraint exhibited in their relationships with their husbands (Jha & White, 2016). In Gulabi's case while she perceived Devsaya's silence to be something positive since it gave her space to manoeuvre in her own way, she recognised that she would need to observe similar behaviour in order not to test the limits of that restraint. In Chapter 5, Gulabi described how Devsaya has never let her do anything alone. In reply to my question about how she managed her role as a the *sarpanch* she said:

> Whenever I go anywhere he always makes sure I get where I need to, he is always there "do what you can". Even though I am the one who does everything at least I know that he is completely supportive and that he always says "you do what you need to… I am here." I am always in front but he is there in the background.

Most important was Devsaya's considered indifference, another type of silence, to the gossip that Gulabi was subject as a woman who works outside the home as well as the manner in which she challenged the authority of senior men in the community, described in chapter 5. These two statements combined together demonstrated the degree to which his silence, combined with his more obvious support, was integral to Gulabi's ability to do her work.

Mangali too constantly referred to her husband's love, in chapter 6, as the one thing that prevented her from leaving the conjugal household. In her case though it was not an unequivocal feeling. Even though she fought for her rights in the household, had her husband's support, and also acknowledged his love for her she continued to express dissatisfaction with the marital relationship in the present. This was at least partially due to her perceived greater responsibility in the marriage, which she described as having to take the lead in the marriage; in her view, inverted the convention that her husband ought to

have shouldered this role[89]. Her perception of her conjugal relationship was more complex than simply these two alternating feelings. When I asked about whether her husband accepted her decisions easily since she was the one who was compelled to take them, she said that whereas he did not always listen to her earlier, he did so at the time of our conversation. I queried what she thought accounted for this change:

> Now he feels that we have these children and if she [Mangali] leaves then the entire burden will be on him and how will he manage.

I then asked her what she thought the ideal conjugal relationship ought to be like:

> M: I can't say because my relationship hasn't been like that- I have just had sorrow. I just don't know what a husband and a wife are meant to be like; we just became husband and wife and that's that. I don't know how to think about it.
>
> S: You have sisters for instance- do you see a difference between their lives and yours?
>
> M: How will I not? They have good lives, when they come they are happy. I also say 'if only my husband would have been like that' but this is my fate. Whatever god has fated for you is what will happen.

This feeling was reinforced in her statement that had she been educated she 'could have gone, and had a good life', that she need not have remained in this marriage had she had the means to build a life for herself.

In the narratives presented here, all three women considered their husbands' silences to be supportive and expressions of affection. This is reflective of their relationships and the personalities of the people involved. What we see therefore is how relations of power- between men and women and among families, are legitimated through ties of affection Expressions of affection are important to fuse the interests of all family members so that they integrate with the collective of interests of the family (Bourdieu, 1998, pp. 68-70; Connell, 1987). This is already evident in Bhavani and Mangali's references to the reality of structural positions in their relationships, and visible in their decisions to remain in the marital home, described in chapters 5 and 6 respectively. In Bhavani's case it is also evident when she refers to her natal family being richer, while Mangali referred to impossibility of leaving because of her children. All these statements also refer to the manner in which the affective is deeply intertwined with the material and the imperative to perpetuate the family. It is not my case to discount the affective aspects of relations, but to bring to the

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[89] Mangali had expressed clearly that her marriage was not the way it was supposed to be, because her husband would not speak when outside the home, for instance when they visited the market, and this role fell to her (Jha and White, 2015, pp. 154-158)

fore how they also contribute to the emergence of agency; however, my aim is to do without losing sight of the fact that affective relations continue to be reflective of power. The affective is particularly powerful because while it is supportive, it can also have the effect of making power less visible. Thus the fact that Devsaya, Sitaram and Sudhir all remain silent is an aspect of their personalities and their relationships, but it also represents the fact that they have greater freedom to resort to silence as a form of expression in their marital relationships, whereas women have less freedom and greater compulsion to do so. This could be seen as exercising 'strategies of condescension' (Bourdieu, 1990, pp. 127-128), which is seen in some behaviour which seemingly negates power and, in doing so, simultaneously reinforces it. Affective expressions could be both genuinely supportively while also falling in this domain.

Piyaribai was in her 40s when I first met her in February 2011. She lived in a nuclear household with Kishan, her husband- who I described in chapter 7, son, and daughter's son; her married daughter lived in her own household. The family is Painika, belonging to the Kabirpanth sect. I first interviewed her during a piloting phase of the research; I later conducted two in-depth qualitative interviews with her, one each in May 2011 and May 2013. Piyaribai's main concern during the first interview was about her son's marriage, which they were hoping to fix, and during the second one about the impending wedding since the marriage had been fixed. She was waiting for her daughter-in-law to come so that she could gradually hand over her household responsibilities; Piyaribai hoped that it would soon be her own time to rest. The family was not well off but enjoyed some prestige locally since Kishan was a preacher in the Kabirpanth community. They had been married for about 30 years. Although Piyaribai's narrative suggested a life in which she had not had to think of alternative ways of pursuing her roles of a wife and mother, she was nonetheless conscious of her contribution to the household and her rights in the conjugal home. She remarked that when they quarrelled and both shouted at each other, Kishan would tell her she should return to her natal home:

> … I reply to him, "…now, when I am growing old, why should I go to my parents' home? Better still, if you want to go somewhere, you can go! I am going stay in this house itself!" There is some tension for some time…
>
> -
>
> … see, I have built up everything here in my marital home. What is there for me in my natal home? My natal home holds nothing for me. This is my place…

In response to how long the tension lasted, she said:

> Even when we quarrel they are short. Ultimately, together we resolve the issue at sometime or the other, and everything is resolved. And if the woman does not talk to the man for long then the man will say "do as you like!" How can a woman do as she likes? She will not be able to do things alone so she has to talk to the man.

She went on to explain that a woman is more dependent on a man because she does not have physical strength but, also, that this sort of quarrelling would lead to people being alone. I then asked her whether she felt she had been consulted in the household:

> P: He consults me…we both decide things together for the household. If we don't work according each other's suggestions then we won't be able to get along. (*S: You won't get along…?*) We won't!
>
> *S:* If he were to decide things on his own then what would you say to him?
>
> P: It will never work with just one person… why would we do that… I'll do this, he will do that… this is the way we divide the work between us.
>
> -
>
> S: What would you say… since you have been married, has he always consulted on all major things or is there something about which he did not ask you?
>
> P: He asks. (*S: Has there been something about which he didn't consult you?*) If he had not asked me then the same thing… things would go off-key. We are responsible for the household, no mother-in-law and no father-in-law. If he had not consulted me on small or big matters… some people [men] just earn and keep it just like that, but it is the woman who keeps the earnings properly and safely… if he would have done things as he pleased then I wouldn't have said anything [to him], but neither would I have done anything for him, I would have remained angry throughout.

Even though Piyaribai had not had to renegotiate norms and practices in new ways in order to overcome challenging circumstances as other women described in their narratives, she was nonetheless conscious of what was due to her in the conjugal relationship, and this rested not just on established convention but also on the relationship that she and her husband and built up over the years. This is most evident when she says that they might have lived otherwise too, without much communication, but that would have been a very different sort of relationship marked by anger rather than by cooperation. She echoed Mangali's words when she said that she would have been broken-hearted if her husband had not consulted her in the choice of a daughter-in-law, since they would have been taking a decision for their child, not his child alone. In this she reaffirms how the parental and conjugal relationships converge and the manner in which they shape relations

between partners. However, it also signifies that women are aware of their rights in the conjugal household but that this more openly expressed by older women who are surer of their places.

It is Piyaribai's neighbour, Sathinibai, who perhaps best described what it means to be in conjugal relationship by describing what it would have been like if her partner were not there:

> I do everything according to my own will. He [husband] never tells me what to do, in fact he always tells me "you don't have to worry about anything, you can do whatever you like." So I go and collect the wood and things, but it's not because he tells me to do it. He tells me if I want I should go off to my natal home, it does not matter, I should go whenever I like, and visit people- whomever I want to- over here. But if he dies before me then my life will become bad, then it will be a dog's existence for me because there will be nobody to ask after me. She [junior co-wife] will not ask about me, I will not even have anybody to give me a glass of water. If I die before him then I will not have any trouble.

Even though Sathinibai was older than Piyaribai, her marital arrangements, which I described in chapter 5, allowed her greater freedom in the matter of how she lived her life. This freedom, however, was not so much her choice as much as initially enforced on her because her husband, Uttamdas, did not live with her for any length of time in the early part of their relationship. This was all the more conspicuous because he had convinced her to leave her first, ritually solemnised marriage, to run away with him with the expectation that she would look after his children from a previous wife. While she had done this, Uttamdas had left Kewarpur due to Sathinibai's family threatening him, living with other women during this period. One of these women had become a junior co-wife and lived in the house with Sathinibai and Uttamdas at the time of our interview. Sathinibai's narrative highlights two things. First, Sathinibai did not choose her current conjugal arrangements and it was unlikely that she predicted this outcome. Second, in the time that Sathinibai lived alone she managed her household independently; although Uttamdas gave her money each time he visited her, she hired labourers to construct the house the family lives in now, earned through running a shop, farming, collecting forest produce, and later also helping Uttamdas in his carpentry work. This account of her life fits neatly into the template of agency as women's independence and there is validity to that perception. Valorising that construction of her actions, however, would obscure the manner in which her situation, especially the conjugal relationship, was critical to how she was compelled to

act. Sathinibai herself was clearly proud of what she achieved on her own but equally angry at her husband's behaviour. She remarked that had she been younger, at the time of our conversation, she would not have stood for the manner in which he had gone off with other women, but a few years ago she found it difficult to continue entirely on her own and had called him back to live with her. It is then that she had to also contend with her co-wife, which has produced a new set of relationships within the household, where there is clearly animosity and bitterness but also the love, affection, and concern for the other. Both Piyaribai's and Sathinibai's narratives reflect the time over which their relationships have evolved showing the sense of ease in the relationship even when there could be tension. This is partly due to the fact that both women had reached a stage of life where people typically said they no longer had worries; in response to the question "[L]ooking to the future, how confident do you feel that you will be able to fulfil your responsibilities?[90]" many people typically answered that their responsibilities would be over once they had performed their children's weddings. This was reflected in Piyaribai's replies over a period of four months in 2011, which ranged from the preoccupation with finding a bride, organising the wedding, welcoming her daughter-in-law along with anxieties regarding whether she would fit in and look after her parents-in-law well. Piyaribai's narrative tone was starkly different, for instance, from Gulabi's who even though she had been married for 24 years in 2013, did not speak with quite the same ease in front of Devsaya as Piyaribai did in front of her husband. This was due to the fact that, for one, Gulabi continued to test the boundaries of the relationship in terms of how much freedom it could afford her which was especially important so that she could continue with her role in the NGO and the *panchayat*. Their narratives therefore reflect the manner in which their relationships have been different and are tested in different ways. Even though Piyaribai sometimes presided over rituals within Kewarpur in Kishan's absence her role as a support to her husband was sanctioned by convention and did not challenge gender relationships to any great degree, whereas Gulabi's roles clearly reshaped women's roles in new ways and there was therefore a constant sense that she was treading lightly, always testing her foothold first.

Sathinibai's narrative echoes Sujanibai's in some respects in that, for both of them, their economic independence resulted from the nature of their relationships where even though they were in some form of conjugal relationship, they were largely responsible for their own households and often for their partners' upkeep too. Further, it is not as if they were the only two women among those I interviewed who were in this situation. As I have

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[90] This was the fifth question in the 'self' domain of the IWB survey.

commented in the chapter on Surguja, there were relatively few single women heading their own households among the overall sample due to the fact that this it is culturally more acceptable for women to be in relatively stable long-term conjugal relationships. In fact, those women who are single would prefer to contract a marriage, even if that is as junior co-wife, as we have seen in the case of Sujanibai for instance. In this too, Sujanibai was not alone. Two women in Mahuabagh, Satibai in the Pandopara and Pushpa in Korwapara, too were married but lived in separate households from their husbands. Pushpa's example is illustrative of the need for women to be in relationships which gives then some respect and thereby greater manoeuvrability in economic and social activities. Pushpa was in her 40s in 2013. She had been widowed with a young son many years previously. As the remainder of her conjugal family passed away she was eventually left to fend for herself. She then started living with another man; she reported not knowing initially that he was already married[91]. Once she found out, she and her son returned to her natal family. However, a few years after this, this man with whom she had been living once more called her to be his wife, although this relationship has not been solemnised. She returned to Korwapara where she maintained an independent household looking after herself and her son. The only time when this current husband lived with her is when he comes to collect mahua during the season. Pushpa stated that neither of them supported each other economically, maintaining clearly distinct households. It seemed as if Pushpa's strategy was aimed more at stating that she was married since it was clear that she was single in all but name. This points to women's greater vulnerability is being unmarried and their desire for relationships even in name rather than not at all. This enforces its own kind of agency, compelling women's economic independence so that this independence reduces their vulnerability to some degree, especially in conjugal relationships where their interests, economic and otherwise, could be at cross-purposes with others'. Unlike Sathinibai, however, Pushpa did not express any affection for her current husband saying that life would have been good if her first husband had been alive rather than with a second husband with whom she lived without having got married.

The reason for discussing these previous examples is to highlight that agency is not just relational in situations where the relationships are obvious and visible. Very often relationships may not be immediately visible, such as in the case of Pushpa and yet it is possible to discern that there even the faint contour of a relationship shaped her actions. This is even more obvious in Sathinibai's case, where she repeatedly pointed to the house,

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[91] There is an echo of Sujanibai's statement that she would not have started living with her second husband had she known he was married. Pushpa did not, however, claim that her actions were driven by spirit possession.

asserting with pride that she was responsible for having built it. All the narratives above point to the manner in which relationships produce and are shaped by varied, contradictory emotions. This is, of course, the nature of relationships as they are constantly negotiated and evolve through circumstances. Beyond that, however, it points to how agency is rarely the result of 'rational intent' stripped of emotion. Even where individuals have the chance to reflect on their potential actions, this reflexivity involves a cognitive evaluation that includes an affective element (Burkitt 2016). The narratives above, especially Mangali's and Piyaribai's, also show that relationships are not just the site of actions, but exist within larger webs of relationships, such as parental and conjugal relationships which converge at times and diverge at others. Thus there is a further context in which each relationship is shaped, both at the micro-level, e.g. within the household, and also at the broader level within fields such as was evident in chapter 5.

4. Parenthood

The narratives presented in chapter 6 showed how motherhood is key turning point for many women, a time of greater consciousness of their interests which are often expressed through their pursuit of a the role of 'good mothers'. In the previous section, I have shown how the parental and conjugal relationships converge in terms of each partner's interests. I devote further attention to it in this section. I return briefly to Rajini's, Rukmaniya's, and Mangali's narratives which have already been presented in chapter 6. Rajini's narrative is one of few instances where the relational pull of the parental relationship shows up a conflict with the individual's own interests. As I described in chapter 6, Rajini's relationship with her conjugal family was conflictual from the start, and intensified further after her husband's death, with the conjugal family having attempted to intimidate Rajini into leaving her late husband's portion of their home. Leaving this house would have spared Rajini this conflict. Simultaneously, she recognised her children's right to a subsistence from that land and property. It was the combination of the simultaneous pressures exerted by these two types of relationships that motivated Rajini's actions, whether to work and earn whatever income she could from that, but also to simultaneously resist her in-laws attempts to intimidate her. Further, there were seeds of new relationships being formed in her role as *mitanin,* primarily with community members; this too was an agentic action in that she saw it as protecting her own interests so that when she needed help there would be people she could call on. The relationships together motivate Rajini to act through various modes of action, which have been described in chapter 6.

Mangali's narrative shows a different way in which agency in produced, which is most evident in the statements that she makes regarding ensuring her daughters' education. In chapter 6, we heard her say that she thought it was essential to educate her daughters to ensure that they would be independent enough so that they would not have the troubles attendant in her marriage. Juxtaposed against her own statements regarding how she continued to feel about her marital relationship even at the time of our conversation, i.e. that somehow her having to take the decisive role was some kind of inversion of the norm, this presents an interesting contrast. Even as Mangali acted in ways that have proved agentic over time, recognised that her actions resulted in desired outcomes, and saw herself as someone who acted to overcome troubles, she continued to see her life as full of troubles. Importantly, the source of her troubles was the very nature of her relationship with her husband, which she viewed as burden and quite clearly less than ideal. It was, however, that very quality of her relationship with Sudhir that compelled her to act, which gave her the decisive say in key events in their mutual relationship as well as with the extended family in ways that resulted in some significant forms of transformation in her life, e.g. separating their household. Her contradictory utterances are most revealing of how affective ties have both negative and positive connotations. While these actions point to how her conjugal relationship motivated her actions and was shaped by them, it also points to how much the relationship with her daughters was itself shaped by her own experiences of violence, and how that relationship in turn shaped her thinking an actions with regard to her daughters. Her eldest daughter, Meeta, seemed to have played a pivotal role in the development of Mangali's own consciousness. She validated Mangali's sense of having been treated unfairly by supporting Mangali in an altercation with her mother-in-law. However, even as Mangali described her own reluctance to assert herself early in her marriage, she hoped her daughters would have the freedom to do so. Her statements and actions on this last score were telling of her own view of her relationships in the conjugal household.

Rukmaniya's narrative paints a different picture of how the parental and conjugal relationships shape each other and thereby the individual's agency. Even though the manner in which she condemned Sukhram's behaviour is something that stood out initially, the tone of our subsequent conversation was very different from the first. In chapter 6, I argued that this was the result of her using that conversation as a medium of negotiating with her husband, of reminding him of his responsibilities. However, her narrative was also clearly split into two parts: 'before' alcoholism and 'after' alcoholism. This told the story of two qualitatively different periods in the relationship. The first, in the early part of their

marriage, was marked by Sukhram having shouldered the responsibility of looking after his family, working hard to earn money, demanding a separation of the property so that his income would be solely for his own family, and the manner in which he and Rukmaniya together looked after the children when they had each been hospitalised with pneumonia. In the second, the 'after', there was a negation of everything that had marked the initial years of the marriage. Rukmaniya repeatedly talked about this in terms of how it affected their children's chances for the future:

> If a husband and wife lived well together, then they would talk about their
> children, plan for them… how they will prosper in life. I keep thinking of all
> this… it keeps me awake.

The friction from the conjugal relationship, which I described in chapter 6, resulted not only from Sukhram's behaviour when drunk, but also the manner in which it affected his children. His sons, especially the eldest were embarrassed by his behaviour too. Rukmaniya's statements attested to the fact that her sons felt unsupported by their father and preferred to live at their maternal uncle's house.

Through the narratives above, I have shown the manner in which different relationships intersect, sometimes converge in their interests, and sometimes diverge. In women's narratives, because of the nature of their lives in rural Surguja, the two sets of relationships that took centre stage were the conjugal and parent-child relationships. In the examples above I have shown that neither of these of relationships is immune to the pulls of other relationships, none of these exists in isolation. Further, even though it is the individual who acts in order to seek some transformation in their situation, the motivation to act stems entirely from a relational pull. In the concluding section I discuss why relationships are key to understanding women's agency.

5.   Conclusion: Agency in Relation

One of the aims of this chapter was to understand how women's relationships influence their agency. I took the stand that it would be more productive to understand agency beyond notions of enablement and constraint and, instead, view them as the sites of everyday negotiation. To elaborate, while all relationships exert pressures on individuals including negative pressures which constrain action, this does not automatically close opportunities for all action. They could close opportunities for some forms of actions, while simultaneously compelling individuals to seek new ways of acting. Further, I also aimed to demonstrate that the motivations for actions do not lie solely with individuals. Rather, motivation emerges in a relational context. Individuals consider both how they are

impacted by others' actions, and how their own actions impact others. It is in considering agency in a relational context that it is possible to understand the interconnections between the material, cultural, social and affective aspects of people's lives (Bourdieu, 1990; McNay, 2004; Burkitt, 2016).

Understanding agency in a relational context also shows how women's loyalties and identities are enmeshed with their families' or households' identities. It shows how the family is simultaneously a material, cultural, social, affective, and ideological project with each of these aspects so closely interlinked with the others that to separate them even at an analytical level is to lose some sense of the whole (Bourdieu, 1998). This also points to Connell's (1997) notion of substructures with each imbricating the other. In order to understand how action results in agency we need to understand the individual's perspective of their world- of which relationships are not just a fundamental constituent but form individuals themselves, and the possibilities that it holds for them. If agency is itself an aspect of the self or the person, then it is difficult to imagine an agency that is not shaped by relationships when people are fundamental relationally constituted. In saying this I do not mean to privilege agency as an aspect of selfhood; to do so would be tantamount to saying that a person with less agency is somehow less of a person. This is not my aim. My aim is to highlight that people do indeed act in ways that are agentic which would be recognisable as agency if they were to be understood in the relational context. I have also argued earlier- in this and in previous chapters, that the converse can also be true; actions that appear like agency lose that interpretation when understood in a relational context.

Further, individuals' actions do not belong solely to themselves but also in the relationship, i.e. our actions have an impact because of the particular meanings that they bear and the manner in which they are understood by those in those in relation to us. To further elaborate this point, I draw attention to the meanings of silence in conjugal relationships in the narratives that I presented earlier. In these women described their husbands' silences as positive, often a form of support that in many of their cases, allowed them to stay on in initially difficult circumstances. This was apparent in both Mangali's and Bhavani's cases, both of whom stated with confidence that their husbands' silences meant that they cared for their wives. What to an observer might have appeared to be a lack of support was, in fact, quite the opposite. This is both a cultural form, i.e. love and affection are expressed through silence and actions rather than through speech, and is also associated with the particular circumstances of each relationship. Thus, when Bhavani states that Sitaram

remained silent, i.e. did not object, to the manner in which his parents spoke to her, it is a muted criticism of his silence and an acknowledgement of his constraint in the relationship with his parents. This further reinscribes the meaning of his silence in relation to Bhavani, which is an expression of support. There might be a different situation in which silence could be an expression of anger and distress as described by Piyaribai who stated how if Kishan had not always taken decisions in consultation with her, she would not have said anything but would nonetheless have been angry.

I have also shown how different sets of relationships influence each other, especially where the conjugal relationship overlaps with the parental one. We see how the meanings of individuals' actions in one relationship filter into other relationships. Thus we see that concern for the welfare of their children shapes the conjugal relationship in some way. This is most obvious in women's actions. In Mangali's case for instance, we see that even as she acknowledges her husband's love, she also situates that silence in his role as a father when she says that Sudhir fears he would not be able to look after their children if Mangali were to leave because of something her uttered to her. In Rajini's case, which I discussed in chapter 6, even though she left the marital home, she returned because her husband stated that their children needed their mother.

One of the objectives of the feminist project has been to uncover and understand women's experiences. There is a danger though that the narration of those experiences without context renders those accounts to be too abstract and, as McNay contends, is often used in constructing a 'tendentious unity among women' (McNay, 2004, p. 179). This poses the additional problem of how categories such as 'women' are created and who creates them. The relational context, which is established through women's narratives, goes some distance in demolishing those myths by showing how particular configurations of relationships make agency possible for particular women (Hemmings & Kabesh, 2013). Thus, even though, I have categorised relationships broadly as conjugal and parental for the purposes of my analyses, each of these relationships serves different women in slightly different ways. There are both similarities and divergences in the ways in which different women use the opportunities offered by the relational context.

Women's narrative descriptions of their relationships also highlight, most importantly, the role of emotion in their relationships and how it affects their actions. Clearly the emotional aspect of all relationships, and especially the parental one, influences women's actions greatly. This presents a real complication for understanding agency, because it makes

women's motivations for their actions slightly fuzzy (Hemmings & Kabesh, 2013). What does this mean? Recognising the work of emotion in women's motivations for actions challenges assumptions that agency must be linked to 'choice' (Burkitt, 2016) and must always be seen as resistance. Additionally, it is ignorant of the fact that men can, and do, contribute to increasing women's agency through their own supportive actions. This alliance between women and men is a forceful challenge to the idea that agency can only ever be viewed in actions of resistance (Hemmings & Kabesh, 2013). It is by paying attention to emotions that plural contexts and forms of agency become visible, as I have shown in this chapter.

It is difficult to pinpoint where women's interests lie entirely through observing just their actions which could appear to ignore their own interests. However, it is often the case that women may view their own interests as converging with their children's interests or those of the family. Situations of violence against women reveal this disjuncture most clearly, where women choose to stay on in violent situations because they may otherwise lose their children, or feel that they may not be able to safeguard their children's interests if they were to leave. However, as the discussion in chapter 6 showed, women do attempt to change such situations over time through patterns of actions, which over a longer period, can change the nature of their relationships and thereby give them greater power to transform their own circumstances. This again, highlights, how agency emerges in the relational context, through women's consciousness that they need to resort to alternative modes of action, which may lead to more gradual change rather than sudden dramatic change. It further highlights the importance of observing patterns of action over a period of time in order to understand how agency emerges. Relationships too evolve over longer periods leading to new opportunities for women to act in an agentic manner.

Chapter 9: Conclusion- A Relational View of Women's Everyday Negotiations of Agency

1. Introduction

I began this thesis by defining agency as individual or collective action that results in observable or experienced transformation for that individual or collective. While this premise remains unchanged at the conclusion of this thesis, I build on this definition to propose a relational model of agency. I posit that agency has six distinct properties: one, it is emergent from the context; two, it evolves over time; three, it emerges through patterns of contiguous behaviour rather than through isolated actions; four, these actions take a range of forms beyond observable or overt action; five, it is both shaped by, and shapes the individual's narrative identity; and six, it is relational or embedded in individuals' relationships, reflecting the nature of power that configures those relationships. Further agency is not a given and there is no tested formula which will enhance individual agency. Additionally, agency is not visible only as large-scale action, but comes about through small-scale, sometimes almost-invisible actions that result in gradual changes over time.

In order to explain this model of agency, I first refer to the four questions that I posed in this thesis. First, how do we retain an understanding of the link between structures and agency in individual accounts of agency? Second, how do we identify agency, or in what actions is agency manifested? Third, how does understanding women's agency differently influence how we understand men's agency? Fourth, how does a relational perspective of agency add to our understandings of agency?

This chapter is set out as follows. In the second section I re-present the four questions I posed in this thesis and answer each of them by turn, summarising the findings that I have presented in chapters 5 through 8. I draw these findings together into a composite framework, drawing on theoretical work that I presented through this thesis. In the third section I briefly touch upon what this implies in terms of intervention models. Lastly, I conclude by summarising the main claims of this thesis.

2. Key questions and some answers

In this section I answer the four questions that I asked in this thesis summarising the findings presented in chapters 5 through 8, each of which focused on one question. I

explain why they are important in themselves and how they fit into the model of agency I propose.

2.1. Conceptualising the links between structure and agency in individual accounts of agency

The first question, which asked how we could retain an understanding of structures in individual accounts of agency, was the central focus of chapter 5, *Agency and Structure*. I conceptualised structures as fields, defined as objective relations of power (Bourdieu, 1990; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). There are multiple fields, and each is characterised by a particular species of power. The extent of the field is itself defined by the relations of power within it; those relations are dynamic in that the individuals who are in the field can increase or decrease their capital over time by using the means that they have at their disposal through struggles and confrontation with other participants in the field (Bourdieu, 1998). The extent of the field is itself defined by the nature of power relations within the field, which means that the boundaries of the field are never pre-defined but remain flexible to incorporate new entries or allow exits from the field. Individuals participate in these relations because the species of power has legitimacy, i.e. held to be valuable by the individuals who are active participants in 'the game' (Bourdieu, 1990). At any given moment, individuals are located simultaneously in multiple fields in each of which they could have varying degrees of power. Equally important is the balance between multiple fields themselves, i.e. which field is considered to be more important, and therefore which forms of power are more valuable in relation to each other. It is this degree of legitimacy or value that the particular form of power in each field holds that ultimately determines what an individual can do with their power in various fields (Bourdieu, 1990). It is based on this idea that I show how, when limited power in one field presents an obstacle to agency, that the individual can mobilise their greater power in another field to overcome the obstacle in the first. This particular type of action may eventually result in their transformed status or greater power even in the original field where they found their actions to be stymied.

In chapter 5 I showed how individuals are able to transform their power and status- and thereby their position in one or more fields, by being able to work around the obstacles to their actions in one field. I used the in-depth biographies of three women to demonstrate how this might be possible by identifying key transitions in their lives, examining in which field they had less power, and where their greater power could

balance this out. In all three cases, I identified marriage or a conjugal partnership as a moment when the women had extremely little power in any field at all, especially in the field of the family which was the extent to which most of their actions had reach. Each of the three women circumvented the obstacles to their agency in three different ways. In Gulabi's and Bhavani's cases I argued that both women aimed to conform to their roles, i.e. as ideal daughters-in-law it was their duty to contribute to their conjugal households. In Gulabi's case the obstacle in fulfilling this role arose from her inappropriate skills- her education rather than traditional household skills- which meant that in order to support the household as she felt was her duty she sought an alternative form of action, i.e. through salaried work outside the home. It was both her otherwise powerless position in the field of family- within the family itself, but also her conjugal family's decreasing economic power in the village community that allowed her to adopt a new form of action. It was a similar combination that allowed Bhavani to separate her household from her parents-in-law. However, in both cases I emphasise that neither woman was seeking to change a norm. If anything, both were seeking to conform to roles and responsibilities, but they did so by slightly altering their actions. In Sujanibai's case, we saw a distinct- and somewhat intended- departure from norms in her action of living with a married man who took her as his junior common-law wife. In her case, because all power in the family was barred to her she had no choice but to increase her economic power. Interestingly, it was her economic power that ultimately sanctioned her unusual role in a family. While economic power is always valuable, it is unusual, in this context, when it accrues to single women who are able to then use that power to increase their own capital. Gulabi, for instance, was much more dependent on her family's traditional power to bolster her own position in the community.

The reason for re-presenting these examples briefly was twofold. Firstly, to show that actions and the resultant agency emerges in plural forms from varied impulses. The impulse for agentic action could be anchored in the attempt to uphold one's perceived roles and responsibilities in the family and community, though it could take some changed form of action because the traditional form of action could be closed to the individual. Secondly, this further implies that agency does not necessarily challenge or transform norms immediately. Instead, the resultant agency of the individual can transform the terms of their relationships such that they can act to effect some material change in their lives. That change may result in the transformation of one or more norms; conversely, however, it could also reinscribe other forms of patriarchal

practices and ideologies. Both effects, but especially changing norms, are usually evident over a period of time rather than immediately. It is not necessarily the intention to change the norm that results in their transformation, but actual practices and actions, i.e. the particular forms that they take that lead to gradual changes in the ways that patriarchal norms are constantly renegotiated. It is for this reason that actions assume importance, which was the focus of the second question of this thesis.

2.2. Identifying women's agency

This second question that I asked in this thesis was how, and in what actions, women's agency can be identified. This is the main focus of chapter 6, *Action, Narrative, and Agency*. This emerged, as I explained in the introductory chapter, from two simultaneous, and seemingly opposite, problems: first, agency was inferred only from observable action and, second, that it was over-identified such that all everyday actions are counted as agency (Madhok, 2007). I sought to answer the question of how one can, then, maintain a balance between these two positions in chapter 6. In that chapter I examined women's accounts of their lives to identify, first, key turning points in their lives; second, how they responded to those events and what transformations were wrought through their actions; and, third, whether those actions constituted agency. The themes that I identified as crucial were marriage- specifically violence in the marital home, motherhood, and material circumstances such as poverty.

This chapter dealt with five distinct ideas. The first was the range of women's actions, beyond overt, visible actions, that contribute to and are constitutive of agency. The second idea was that these actions need to be seen as patterns of behaviour. The third idea related to how women's narrative identities, not just when narrated to others but also their sense of themselves, are a source of action and agency. The third major concept, which underpins both the first and the second ideas, was the notion of time and how it is constitutive of agency. The last idea which again underpinned the first and second was the close connection of the context to the nature of action chosen by individuals, the meaning of that action, and lastly how it contributes to agency evolving over time. In this sense both the notion of time and context are fundamental concepts which underpin the nature of action, and subsequently the narrative identity that individuals shape for themselves.

In chapter 6 I employed the narratives of eight women to show firstly how their responses ranged across not just overt action, but also through silences, speech, and

observation and reflection. I purposely characterise all these as forms or modes of action because these are all ways in women explicitly described their responses to their circumstances, and as occurring contiguously or concurrently; these actions together resulted in some outcome that women desired for themselves. This is not to say that all actions resulted from strategising. In fact, some actions, especially silence, could be seen to reflect the nature of constraint that women felt due to their lack of adequate power in particular circumstances. Women acknowledged this, but also sought other ways to safeguard their interests. Women's agency emerged not from single isolated actions, but was rooted in their combinations of actions over time, for which reason it is erroneous to read isolated actions as representing, or not, women's capacities for agentic actions. Agency was not, therefore, a fixed quantity but retreated and emerged as the context allowed or was itself shaped by some actions on the part of women themselves. Thus, even as most women found themselves lacking in options to always prevent violence, bearing it in silence, they also employed some strategies to save themselves from its worst effects. It is this fact- their strategising, that prevents me from easily categorising their silence as the absence of agency.

Further examples showed how women's responses to their circumstances changed once they had children, with their sense of their children's' interests influencing their actions. This resulted in a gradual expansion of the range of their actions, a greater voicing of their demands for instance, and, in some cases, outright action which would have been unexpected earlier. It is with reference to understanding the motivations for these actions, that I emphasise the fundamental importance of understanding the context. The slightest change in context, I argue, can change the meaning of actions significantly, which I explain by referring to an example from chapter 6. Rajini's action of leaving her conjugal home is not agency because, even while it is unusual in not conforming to a norm, she does so because her husband demands it; had she decided to do so without that prior demand her actions would have had a different colour. Not only does context shape the individual's actions, but it is also constitutive of the meanings of actions. I contend, therefore, without detailed attention to contexts we would be at a loss to decide what actions are and are not agency.

Women's narratives of their lives also showed, quite naturally, their contradictory and ambivalent feelings in various situations. All individuals evolve a sense of themselves, appropriating selectively from their experiences- including culling those experiences that challenge this image, into a narrative identity that is largely stable over time

(McNay, 1999; McAdams, 2011; 2013). This narrative identity becomes a template that anticipates how we might respond in the future. This identity evolves over a period of time, incorporating our sense of who we are by evaluating our responses and their effects on us or on our lives in a retrospective manner. It is this sense of how we view the effects of our actions that results, at least partly, in a sense of agency. Women's narratives were replete with examples of both their sense of having effected change in their lives- which gave them hope for the future, but also simultaneously revealed situations which constrained their freedom to act.

This preceding point emphasises the importance of time to understand women's agency. The retrospective view of events allows us to take note of the effects of one's actions, which may not be visible in the immediate or short term. This framing of past events gives rise to a sense of agency in situations where we may not initially have felt that we could act in an agentic manner. Recognising the danger of this preceding statement being construed as 'women imagining that they have agency' I introduce a necessary caution here. I do not wish to suggest either that women's agency exists in their imaginations or that women can manifest it at will. Individuals' sense of their own ability to effect change is one constituent, in combination with the context and how it shapes actions, that motivates them to act in particular and, sometimes, new ways. This change in practices could be the precursor of broader changes which gradually re-shape practices within fields. This might imply, for instance, that where women experience the transformation that can be brought about through voicing their demands, they might do so more often leading to a gradual change in women's responses to situation where they might earlier have kept quiet. We saw this in the case of Mangali. I posit that it was significant that her daughter could assume sufficient authority to challenge her paternal grandmother's treatment of her mother, something that might not ordinarily be common behaviour. Actions and their effects, constantly, reshape the context from which they arise and thereby allow for a changed practice over time. It is this possibility of change that represents hope for the future. The passage of time is therefore not only important because it shapes our retrospective view of events such that they can be psychological resources, but also because they represent hope for the future. Each possible action in given circumstances is an experiment in an imagined or anticipated future that the individual desires (Mattingly, 2013; 2014). The hope for change is equally a motivation that shapes our actions.

The findings presented in chapter 6 can be summarised as follows. First, women's agency is manifested in a range of actions beyond overt actions. Second, in order to understand whether action is agentic it is imperative to understand the context of the action. Thus, examining the context in detail has two important outcomes: it alerts us to forms of action that may not immediately appear as agency and it clarifies whether actions are indeed agency through an examination of their antecedents and effects. Fourth, women's actions and their resultant effects shape women's narrative identities, giving women a sense of who they are and possible or anticipated futures. This imagining of alternate outcomes and futures is a source of hope that drives action in the present. This interrelationship between women's actions, narrative identities, context and time, and the manner in which they co-constitute agency is where my approach to understanding agency deviates from standard conceptions of agency. These findings led me to ask whether applying a similar method of understanding men's agency would alter our understanding of men's actions and agency, which was the focus of chapter 7.

2.3. Men's actions and agency in narratives of their lives

The third question that I posed was whether understanding women's agency differently, as in chapter 6, altered our understanding of men's agency. This was the focus of chapter 7, *Identifying Action and Agency in Men's Narratives*, where I examined the narratives of eight men in a similar manner as with women's narratives. I identified key transitions in their lives, noting their responses to those events and their consequent effects, and finally examined whether those responses were agentic. The chapter aimed to understand what the similarities and differences between women's and men's agency were, and what accounted for these. Key themes in men's narratives reflected those in women's narratives to some degree- notably their attention to family responsibilities and material circumstances. These differed, however, in that men did not focus on the transition of marriage itself, but on the attendant responsibilities of providing for the family. Their narratives also contained more detailed accounts of social relationships in their communities than did women's narratives.

Two key ways in which men's narratives differed from women's was that, first, they referred to their individual achievements to a far greater degree than did women and, second, they described their responses most frequently in the forms of overt action and speech, but less so as silence or observation and reflection. I suggested that both

these effects varied according to the relationships in which the actions occurred and were symptomatic of the effect of power in those relationships. To elaborate this idea further, I noted that men referenced their individual achievements more frequently in relation to the women in their families. In comparison, the only women who reflected as much on their individual achievements were those who had actively negotiated their own advancement, and on whose actions their families were also dependent to some degree. The reason why most women did not refer to their individual achievements was because the most proximate source of power on which they were both dependent and they negotiated with was within the household itself, embedded in relationships with senior male and female kin. The fact that men referred to their own achievements more frequently was underpinned by the fact that in those particular situations they were less reliant on support from others. I further showed that it was in situations where they had less power, such as social relations in some men's cases, that they talked about their relationships with others as being crucial to their capacity to act. I argued that this pointed to the fact that men did enjoy greater power in their household and familial relationships, meaning that their confident assertion of their own authority did not require that they work through a range of actions. I also suggested that this could be partly a narrative device which implied that even when men might have resorted to a range of actions, their greater chances of influencing outcomes in the household could make them focus on their overt actions rather than necessarily talking through the range of what they did.

It was in their social relations that men's narratives spoke of greater constraint in their actions. This was influenced by men's positions both in their families and especially communities. It was for this reason that men referred to social relations to a much greater degree than their familial relationships. Further, in these situations men deployed a greater range of action, including silence and strategising. This, I suggested, was the result of the greater power impinging on their actions in these relationships. The references to these social relations also varied according to who had the power in the relationships. Younger men, with less established authority in the community- and, sometimes, even in their own households, were likely to describe the constraint on their actions. For these men, such as Dhoopram, social relationships were key to their advancement and their actions had be carefully planned so as not to upend those chances. Devsaya, in comparison, had greater authority in the household but, even though he had a public role through his work, had less say in the community. This was reflected in his statements that elders barred the way to progress in the community

and he would wait to implement his ideas. It was also in these relationships that men referred more often to actions apart from overt actions.

I also noted three important reasons for understanding men's agency. Firstly, that I do not want to leave the erroneous impression that women have unfettered opportunities for agency, even while highlighting that they exercise agency in ways that may not be immediately obvious. It is the comparison with men's actions that reveals how women's agency emerges over a longer period, and must take varied forms because overt action is not always possible for women. The second reason for that chapter's importance was to move away from privileging overt action as the sole or primary form of agency. I also made the allied point that no particular form of action is the preserve solely of men or women. This chapter showed that men too adopted varied forms of action, but simultaneously acknowledged that there were differences in how frequently they did so or referred to doing so. This second point, I argued reflected real differences in women's and men's opportunities to exercise agency. The last reason that a chapter on men's agency was important was to highlight that, for both women and men, agency is manifested in the context of relationships (Bourdieu, 1990; Burkitt, 2016). Both women and men describe those relationships which are important sites of action in their lives, where they must negotiate on an everyday basis in order to achieve some desired end or to advance their lives. This emphasis on relationships in both men's and women's narratives led to the idea of understanding agency relationally.

This still raises a broader question of why it is important to write about men's agency in a thesis which is so emphatically about women's agency. I explain here why this serves an important purpose. My understanding of women's agency draws in significant measure on feminist critiques of standard conceptions of agency as being reflective of masculine models of action and autonomy (McKenzie & Stoljar, 2000; McNay, 2015). Taking this argument further leads to the conclusion that the standard models render a whole range of women's actions invisible. It was this that directed me to begin my research by identifying the range of actions that women described in their narratives. However, I am cautious about categorising women's agency as something distinct from men's agency; there are inherent dangers in doing so. First, conceptualising women's agency distinctly from men's agency runs into the risk of reifying 'a women's agency', that it ought to be held as something unique. Such a distinct model of agency would be as vulnerable to critique on the grounds that it is

'essentially feminine' as standard conceptions have so far been to the criticism that they reflect 'essentially masculine' characteristics. The second danger would be that comparisons of women's and men's agency using such distinct models would lead to an impasse where both would be held to be different, but would tell us little about who has greater opportunities to exercise agency. Both problems further entrench broader notions of women and men being essentially different, rather than increasing our understanding of the social nature of gendered differences. I believe it is more productive to understand both women's and men's agency through a common model, which privileges neither one or another form of agency, nor emphasises any one set of relationships over another as the site of agency. It is only through such a model that one can understand first, where the differences in women's and men's actions lie, as I showed in chapter 7. Lastly, I discussed what accounts for differences in women's and men's agency, both in how it is expressed as well as in how it is described. This combination reveals that agency is expressed to different degrees because the nature of obstacles that women and men face, and the opportunities to overcome or circumvent them are different, not because women and men are essentially different. It is true that the that women and men rely on different forms of actions, but this difference rests on the context of relationships and nature of power in them, rather than remaining constant. This is a result of their social positions or, put another way, their locations in multiple fields and the practices that are available to them in those fields. This understanding situates agency squarely in the realm of relationships, which was the focus of chapter 8.

2.4. Agency as a relational concept

The last question that I asked was how a relational perspective adds to our understanding of agency. This was the central concern of chapter 8, *Relational Agency*, in which I returned once more to examining women's narratives, focusing on their relationships. I once more focused on two key themes from their narratives, i.e. marital relationships and their parental roles and how these were inextricably linked with their actions. The fundamental premise of examining relationships in this manner arose both from my own empirical research, as well the theoretical scholarship on relationality. The manner in which women described their actions was always described with reference to their relationships. For instance, women remained in or left the conjugal homes because their husbands either said nothing- even when others in the family were abusive, or demanded they leave respectively. These may seem like simple examples of how actions are always in response not just to another's actions,

but they also point to the cultural weight or meanings attached to each individual's actions. Context, which I have repeatedly emphasised in the previous three chapters, therefore gets distilled or is encapsulated in individual relationships. Relationships are not only individual associations with their constitutive material, social, and affective aspects but also reflect structural effects. They locate individuals in relation to each other, and render abstract concepts tangible and visible. Relations among men and women therefore visibilise how a structure like patriarchy is (re) produced through everyday interaction (West & Fenstermaker, 1995a; 1995b; Fenstermaker & West, 2002); these relations endow abstract concepts with a reality. There are two important points that I have made here. First, context is not just something external to the person; it is proximate and internalised, and made so through relationships and interactions (Bourdieu, 1990; West & Fenstermaker, 1995a). In other words, the context, including structural effects, is distilled into individual relationships and interactions. Second, the meanings that are attached to relationships are both personal- in that they arise from the individuals' interactions, but are also, simultaneously, derived from a particular cultural context. The fact that women construe their husbands' silence as a form of support, for instance, is both the outcome of their particular individual interactions, as well as a cultural form of supporting another by not expressing anger. What does this imply for our understandings of agency?

I argue that agency cannot be separated from relationships because all actions are in fact interactions in relationships (Burkitt, 2016). This is true even when actions do not appear so to the observer. Thus Gulabi's action of seeking out a salaried job outside the home was not just a response to her experience of poverty in the conjugal household- as it might appear to us, but also her manner of fulfilling her responsibilities towards her conjugal family as well as a response to how she felt excluded from the family initially. Her actions, therefore, were grounded in the context of her relations with her husband, conjugal family, and most of all to her children. Similarly, Rajini's action of continuing to live in the conjugal home is an assertion as much of her children's rights to their father's property as it is of her own. What we see, therefore, is that all actions, which are always actions in response to some structural effects, always occur in the context of individuals' relationships with others. It is by acting in relation to others and shifting the contours of relationships, both with proximate and distant others that individuals' agency becomes evident. It is this that,

in turn, can affect the 'objective relations of power' (Bourdieu, 1990) and eventually bring about changes in the field.

Clearly, such a progression as I have described here, is not linear or simple. The data that I presented in chapters 5 and 6 especially, which revealed something of women's thoughts as they are responding to situations, or in retrospect, reveal how relationships are not simply a matter of obvious power being exerted in relationship. Power is exerted as much through ideas and meanings attached to actions. This is best explained through an example, which I devoted some attention to in chapter 8, regarding men's silences. A number of women described their husband's silences, which referred to not expressing anger, as supportive and enabling. Even while they are supportive for women, however, it should be noted that they are nonetheless symbolic of the power that men exercise in relation to women. It is men who can choose, in many more circumstances, whether they speak or not- an option that is less commonly available to women. In doing so, men reiterate their power but because it is also simultaneously supportive, it allows women to avail new opportunities for actions. While men's actions may in themselves be reinforcing an existing relation of power, the ensuing women's actions could subsequently- through their effects over time, alter those relations of power. It is worth reiterating at this juncture that all relationships also have an affective aspect which cannot be divorced from an understanding of how relationships are the site of all actions. Even though men's silences are reflective of their power, I think that it is important to reinforce that these actions are equally the product of affective ties with their wives. The fact that women also view them as symbolic of love and affection is what, in part, makes these powerful sources of support for women too. It is because of this that I assert that the structuring effects of fields are most proximately visible in individual relationships, and it is these relationships, therefore, that are the immediate contexts of all action.

There are two main points that highlight why agency is primarily a relational quality. Firstly, relationships with proximate and distant others reflect not only individual interactions, but also the individuals' locations in multiple fields. Interactions between individuals reflect these multiple positions. In the process they make abstract positions that reflect relations of power real and immediate to the person. Individuals interacting in relationships are acting according to the particular roles they embody in their multiple relationships- i.e. mother, daughter, or wife- which endow them with specific responsibilities in each role respectively. The outcomes of these interactions

therefore have effects not just on the individual relationships, but can also alter the broader relations of power in the field thereby altering the field itself. The second point is that when individual are responding to structures or fields, they are doing so from this relational context not as isolated individuals. The breadth and depth of their relational web is at work in the patterns of behaviour that they employ when they act in response to structures.

The preceding section answered each question individually in detail. The purpose of this was to enable me to present these together as a single framework, which is the focus of the next section.

2.5. 'Somehow I Will Learn To Do All This Work': A relational view of everyday negotiations of agency

The primary reason for conceiving of a relational agency is that agency is not the property of individuals but inheres in a relational space since actions are co-constituted in relationships even though they are performed by the individual. The second reason for a relational conception of agency is that opportunities for agency arise from the relations within and between fields, which I discussed in chapter 5. The third reason for underlining the relational is that individuals' relationships are the proximate context of all actions, but also reflect the structural effects of relations between fields. The preceding section focused on summarising how I answered the four questions that I posed at the start of this thesis. I now consider how these elements come together in a relational approach to understanding agency.

The relational framework is anchored in two associated ideas that I have already discussed in detail above, and in chapters 5 and 8 respectively. The first, idea stems from Bourdieu's assertion that "...to think in terms of the field is to think relationally" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 96). The second idea is that when individuals act, they do so not in isolation but as individuals constantly in relation with others. These relationships are both micro-level individual relationships in that these are the relationships which have an immediate effect on individuals' lives, but they are also reflective of individuals' structural positions, their positions in multiple fields; macro-level relationships are made concrete in individual micro-level relationships. While the concept of fields is useful for having understood the broad relational framework in which agency is produced, it does not provide a sufficient theoretical perspective to examine in detail the micro-actions actually result in agency. It is for this reason that I

focus extensively on the modes of actions, and the individual subjective experiences they result from and in through which agency emerges. In doing this I again take a cue from Bourdieu when he says that the social world is structured both through objective relations (e.g. fields) as well as the individuals' subjective perceptions of those objective arrangements (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 133). It is this latter subjective aspect that I wish to represent through the examination of actions.

In order to understand this internal, subjective space we need to examine the detailed biography of individuals. It is this biography which tells us how individuals perceive their relationships, and how habitus influences their actions. Habitus does not just tell individuals their own place in relationships, and thus shape their actions; it also gives them a sense of the other's places (ibid, p. 131). It is in knowing where we are in relation to others that we can deduce what possibilities for action exist. A detailed examination of actions, and their forms, is what directs us to understand how they produce subtle changes that affect the relationships within which the actions are taking place. They also produce an effect on the person, shaping a narrative identity that is potentially itself an agentic narrative. But in doing so they also (re) produce some types of power inequality or change others (West and Fenstermaker 1995), perhaps challenging one type of structure and its determining practice, while reinforcing another. This attention to action constantly draws us back to the relationships in which actions occur, without which we would have no sense of their meanings; as I have stated repeatedly, relationships are the context of actions. I have also stated then that this simultaneous attention to both actions and relationships then directs us to understand the concomitant changes that keep occurring, whether over short or longer periods of time. It is for this reason that I contend that agency is processual rather than a fixed quantity; it exists on a continuum, increasing or decreasing as the context allows.

This section has showed how individual actions are contained and embedded in a relational context comprising both macro and micro level relationships. While these two types of relationships reflect each other, i.e. changes in one can produce changes in the other we can understand how these changes come about by understanding how the individual acts within the context of these relationships and how their actions affect the relational context.

3. Implications for development interventions

In introducing how I came to settle on this topic of research I expressed my apprehension that existing development interventions might not really serve to enable women's agency because they conceptualise agency through a narrow template of actions. Moreover, because they rest on individual choice and actions they ignore how individuals' actions are embedded in their relationships. Here I briefly describe how interventions might be designed differently so as to incorporate a relational view of agency and take account of unpredictable ways in which agency comes about. I believe first, that interventions should not define what actions they expect agency to be manifested in. Instead they would be more likely to benefit women if women could decide on their own how that skill is best utilised by them. This is best explained through examples, of which I give two; one of women's successful mobilisation for prohibition of alcohol in Andhra Pradesh (AP), India, and the second of adivasi communities' movement against the felling of natural forests in Chhattisgarh.

The 1990s saw the introduction of the National Literacy Mission (NLM). Literacy was envisaged as a tool for development and empowerment. One of the distinctive aspects of the programme was that primers were written by NLM staff to reflect the ways in which illiteracy was an obstacle in daily life, e.g. resulting in exploitation because people did not know their rights; in this manner it discussed numerous social problems. Literacy classes were conducted for groups in designated centres in each village, but because of the added emphasis on empowerment people began to talk about their general problems in the village community. Women discussed their experiences of domestic violence within these groups, eventually conducting their own analyses as to the causes- linking violence explicitly to men's alcohol consumption, and possible solutions. In one village women were so angered by the behaviour of drunken men during an NLM programme that they forced the closure of the local liquor shop so that men's very access to alcohol would end. Their story was then printed in the NLM primer and shared in other villages, resulting in women's committees being organised to demand the similar closure of liquor shops in their villages. This eventually spread across districts and became a state-wide movement for prohibition which was spearheaded by women. It eventually resulted in the imposition of prohibition in AP in January 1995, although this was lifted by the end of the year for political reasons (Pande, 2000; 2002)[92]. A similar example is of how the *mitanin* cadre of Koriya district

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[92] I have described only the bare outlines of this movement here due to lack of space. Please see Pande (2000) for a detailed description of how the prohibition movement in AP developed

in Chhattisgarh mobilised local communities against the destruction of the natural forests in their areas (Nandi & Garg, 2017). *Mitanins* saw the tree felling as having a direct effect on the people's health because it compromised their food security by destroying forest produce on which adivasis are dependent for their subsistence, as well as being an attack on their very culture. In response to this they actively conducted meetings across the area to mobilise the local communities to successfully put an end to the destruction of the natural forests on which they were dependent[93].

I refer to these examples even though they better exemplify collective forms of agency because I believe there are lessons in these for interventions aiming to increase women's agency. In both cases, there was no specific programme that sought the specific outcomes that these movements eventually had. Nonetheless, women were able to link an indirectly related intervention or training- in one case literacy and, in another, health related training- to their lives or immediate contexts. It was when they became conscious of these links that they strove to find solutions which could address what they understood to be the root cause of their difficulties. The effects of a collective consciousness are vastly different in scale from that of an individual consciousness as these examples show. The women whose lives and actions I have described in this thesis were able to bring about changes largely only within the ambit of their households. What is similar, however, is how women were able to act once they were conscious of some effect on their life of which they could identify an antecedent cause, and therefore reflect on what could address it. Second, even though I have given examples of individual agency I have also shown how some of its effects become examples for others, which can have larger transformative effects over time. Further, in the cases that I described earlier it was individual action that began the campaigns. Women adapted some aspect of the intervention, or contextualised it in a way that it became relevant to their lives. Third, both these examples also demonstrate the importance of observation and reflection, choosing opportunities for speech with care so as to maximise its impact or to create allies, rather than just 'doing'. Lastly, they emphasise the importance of relationships and actions take shape within relationships. Even though collective mobilisation is necessarily underpinned by relationships, these examples further show how certain actions, e.g. the closure of liquor shops, takes place entirely because of the ways power can shift in different

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against the background of a larger women's movement, what led to the imposition of prohibition, and why it was ultimately lifted.
[93] See Nandi and Garg (2017) for a detailed description of the movement, the obstacles it had to overcome and its successes.

relationships. It is in these four significant ways that these examples can provide lesson for designing development interventions to enhance women's agency.

4. Conclusion: A relational approach to conceptualising women's agency

In this thesis I proposed that agency emerges tenuously through unpredictable circumstances. I find that rather than being based on people's choices or intentional actions, it emerges through interactions between a complex of macro-structures, micro-actions, close relationships, and the constant evolution of all three over time. This implies that, firstly, agency is not a fixed property. Secondly, agency is not attached to any one type of action. Third, agency is not a predictable outcome of a set of circumstances.

Instead, I proposed that agency always emerges through a context which is itself a process of interactions. Second, agency changes over time, increasing and decreasing based on the prevalent circumstances. Third, the manner in which agency is expressed also depends on the circumstances and the modes of action that are available to individuals in those situations, which may take forms such as silence, speech, reflection, or overt actions. Fourth, these various forms of actions are linked, revealing that agency is not necessarily manifested through isolated actions but, rather, through broader patterns of behaviour. Fifth, these actions shape the individual's own sense of agency, both in cohering with or challenging how individuals view themselves. This process shapes the individual's narrative identity as a potential source of agency. Lastly, agency is always relational because individuals are always in relation with near and distant others. The circumstances, described above, compel action on the individual's part because those actions have implications both for the self and others with whom the self is in relation. This further emphasises the inherent affective component of agency which constitutes its relationality.

This understanding of agency has evolved through listening to women's and men's narratives of their lives, which were focused on understanding people's lives in the round. They revealed a broad range of circumstances and actions over longer periods, which allowed me to understand how agency might emerge in different forms. Agency emerges in an almost tenuous manner- there are no prescriptions of how it will come about. However, by understanding the manner in which both micro and macro relationships and circumstances shape agency there is a greater possibility that of creating an environment that better enables agency.

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Name	Brief Person Description
Interview Dates; Type; Team	
	Women
1. Anita • 2 April 2013; survey, with Usha Kujur	Anita was 28 years old in April 2013. She has been married to Shyam for 16 years, and they have three children. They live in an extended household along with her mother-in-law. Anita is educated till class three. The family are blacksmiths, the traditional occupation of the Agariya (ST) community to which they belong and settled in Mahuabagh's Korwapara some in order to provide this service to the community. They earn primarily from this work but Anita also does wage labour and collects seasonal forest produce. The family practices adivasi rituals.
2. Bhavani • 16 May 2011: survey; with Usha Kujur • 16 May 2011: qualitative interview	Bhavani was approximately 50 years old in May 2011. She is married and lives with her husband and younger son in Kanhaigarh, while her older son and daughter-in-law maintain a separate household in the same house. In 2013, her younger son too got married during the course of field research. Bhavani is not literate. She manages her household and helps with farming the family fields. The family has previously been very poor although they are slightly better off now. Bhavani's natal family is better off and have been a source of support for her, both economically and emotionally, both in the past and presently. Bhavani is from the Yadav (OBC) community, who are Hindus.
3. Durga • 28 April 2011: joint qualitative interview with Kisuni and Sumati; with Kanti Minj and Usha Kujur	Durga was in her early 20s at the time of her interview in 2011. Like her elder sister, Kisuni, she had been married but had recently returned to her natal home, in Kewarpur, because of the amount of violence she had faced in the conjugal home. Her parents were at that time talking to her parents-in-law and husband through community elders on both sides to determine whether they would allow her to return to her marital home. The family is Kanwar (ST) and practices Hinduism.
4. Gulabi • 1 December 2010: pilot survey; with Sarah White	Gulabi was approximately 41 years old in May 2013 at the time of her last interview. She is married and lives in a joint household with her husband, Devsaya, her three sons, and her parents-in-law in Kewarpur village. She was

Name	Brief Person Description
Interview Dates; Type; Team	
• 25 March 2011: survey • 24 May 2011: qualitative interview • 10 May 2013: survey	educated till class 8 before getting married and was pursuing the remainder of her schooling at the time of this research. In 2011 she was due to appear at her school-leaving exam through the open school system. She had grown up in the main district town and made the transition to a rural household after getting married. She has been working at local community-based organisation for many years primarily on health awareness. At the time of this research she also held an elected post of *sarpanch* in the *panchayat*. Gulabi belongs to the Kanwar (ST) community and identifies as Hindu.
5. Kisuni • 28 April 2011: joint qualitative interview with Durga and Sumati; with Kanti Minj and Usha Kujur	Kisuni was in her 20s at the time of her interview in 2011. She had been married for approximately three years during which time she had borne extreme violence. At the time of her interview, at her natal home in Kewarpur, her parents had recently brought her back to stay with them after they got to know the extent to which her husband had been beating her, saying that they would not let her return to the marital home. She remarried prior to the second fieldwork period in 2013. The family is Kanwar (ST) and identifies as Hindu.
6. Mangali • 17 May 2011: qualitative interview; with Pritam Das	Mangali was in her early-mid 30s in May 2011. She has been married for about 18 years and lives with her husband and five daughters in Kewarpur. They maintain their own household in her husband's family's house. Mangali is not literate but all her daughters study, with the eldest one in the higher secondary school in the neighbouring village. Mangali manages her own household, farms the family fields, and collects seasonal forest produce. She maintains close ties with her natal family, in the neighbouring village and relies on them for support- both material and moral; in fact, her eldest daughter lives with them during the week. Mangali is from the Kanwar (ST) community. She identifies as Hindu but, in recent years, has also attended a new healing church called Changayee.
7. Pariya • 15 May 2011: qualitative	Pariya was in her mid 30s in May 2011. She had been married for approximately 19 years at this time although at the time of this interview her husband had left home two weeks previously

Name Interview Dates; Type; Team	Brief Person Description
interview; with Pritam Das	without informing, and had not since been in touch to explain why he had done so. She lived in a nuclear household with her husband, and four children. Pariya had been educated till class 8, completing middle school and is the *anganwadi* worker for her area. The family survives on her meagre honorarium, farming and some wage labour. She belongs to the Oraon (ST) community and identifies as Hindu.
8. Piyaribai • February 2011: pilot survey; with Sarah White and others • 8 March 2011: survey; with Kanti Minj, Pritam Das, Usha Kujur • 10 April 2011: qualitative interview; with Kanti Minj • 29 May 2011: qualitative interview; with Kanti Minj • 4 June 2013: qualitative interview; with Usha Kujur	Piyaribai was in her late-40s in May 2013 and lives in Kewarpur village. She is married to Kishan, and lives in a joint household with her husband, and son and daughter-in-law. Piyaribai is not literate. She manages her household. They survive on a combination of farming and her husband's work as a preacher/ priest in the Kabirpanth. She too participates in this work, standing in for her husband in some rituals, if he is not available immediately. The family was previously poor although they manage right now. However, they remain insecure about the future as their son, who has mental disability and suffered from severe illness when younger, is unable to do much physical work. Piyaribai belongs to the Painika (OBC) community and follow Hindu forms of worship as well as Kabirpanth rituals.
9. Pushpa • 25 April 2013; qualitative interview; with Usha Kujur	Pushpa was approximately 40 years old in April 2013. She had been widowed when quite young and had remarried, becoming the junior co-wife to an already married man some years previously. She maintained her own household, living with her son in Mahuabagh's Korwapara. She survived primarily on farming and labour and also collected some seasonal forest produce. She was Pahari Korwa (ST) and practiced adivasi rituals.
10. Rajini • 26 May 2013: qualitative interview; with Kanti Minj	Rajini was approximately 30 year-old in May 2013. She was widowed three years previously in 2010 and lives in her own household with her three children in Mahuabagh's Korwapara. She is the *mitanin* for her *para*. Rajini's household is in her marital family's house and she therefore has

Name	Brief Person Description
Interview Dates; Type; Team	

ties with them even now, although these are mired in conflict over the property. Her natal family, in neighbouring Oraonpara, is locally prominent and economically better-off than most. Her brothers are an important source of financial support for her and assist with her children's education when needed. Rajini has been the *mitanin* for approximately two years. She earns a small, irregular honorarium from that. She also farms that portion land belonging to her marital family, which constituted her late husband's share. She is Oraon (ST) and practices traditional forms of worship, although she used to attend the Changayee healing church.

11. Rukmaniya

   - 17 May 2013: survey; with Usha Kujur
   - 24 May 2013: qualitative interview; with Usha Kujur

Rukmaniya was in her late 30s in May 2013. She lives in Kanhaigarh village with her husband and one son, while three of her sons live at brother's house in another village, during the school term. She manages the household and does some casual labour while her husband, who is mason, either does construction work or casual labour. They manage the household with some difficulty as her husband works irregularly. They have some support from her brother who takes care of her sons' education and associated expenditures and helps them out in times of distress. Rukmaniya is Oraon (ST) and identifies as Roman Catholic.

12. Sathinibai

   - 29 March 2011: survey; with Kanti Minj

Sathinibai was in her 50s in March 2011. She is married and the senior of two co-wives; this is her second marriage, of 25 years, although it has not been ritually solemnised. She lives with her husband and co-wife in Kewarpur, which is her natal village. She lived independently for many years even during this second marriage as her husband would often go away. She helps her husband with his carpentry work and also does some labour, collects seasonal forest produce, and runs a small store from her house. The family is Painika (OBC) and Sathinibai identifies as Hindu, but also follows the Kabirpanth.

13. Satibai
   - 6 May 2011: survey and qualitative interview; with Kanti Minj

Satibai was in her 40s in May 2011 and lives in the Pandopara in Mahuabagh. She lives alone and her husband lives in the neighbouring district, Jashpur; she has no surviving children. The reason that she maintains a separate

Name	Brief Person Description
Interview Dates; Type; Team	
	household is that her husband who is now old and unable to work said that he would no longer be able to support her. However, she returns to their joint household each month to collect her share of their PDS staples. She lives next door to her brother, maintaining a separate hearth. She survives primarily from the sale of forest produce, supplemented by some casual labour and appears to be slightly better off than most other people in this para. She is Pando (ST) and observes traditional adivasi rituals.
14. Sujanibai • 8 May 2011: survey; with Pritam Das • 19 May 2011: qualitative interview; with Pritam Das • 5 May 2013: survey; with Pritam Das	Sujanibai was about 60 years old in May 2013, and lives in Banpur. She is widowed, although she had already been separated before her husband's death. She has no surviving children, and lives alone. Her late common-law husband, who was her second husband, was the *patel* and she is still addressed by this title. She survives primarily through rearing goats, collection and sale of forest produce, and earns something by allowing her late husband's nephew to farm her share of land. She was formerly a local community mobiliser for a CBO. She is Majhwar (ST) and now professes faith in the Changayee healing church although she earlier followed adivasi forms of worship.
15. Sumati • 28 April 2011: joint qualitative interview with Kisuni and Durga; with Kanti Minj and Usha Kujur	Sumati was in her 50s at the time of her interview in 2011. She has been married for about 45 years and lives with her husband, son and daughter-in-law, and grandchildren in a joint household; at the time of her interview both her daughters had returned to their natal home due to their husbands having been violent. Sumati does some household work but no longer managed it, having handed over responsibility to her daughter-in-law. The family is well-off, locally prominent, and her husband is considered to be a community elder. The family is Kanwar (ST) and practices Hinduism.
	Men
16. Birsukh • 23 April 2013: survey with Kanhaiya Yadav	Birsukh was 38 years old at the time of his interview in 2013. He is married and lives with his wife, and five children- although the children live away during term time. The family is resident in Mahuabagh's Oraonpara. Birsukh was not educated during childhood because of his family's

Name	Brief Person Description
Interview Dates; Type; Team	

poverty and can only sign his own name. He mostly farms his own land and does some wage labour when it is available under MGNREGS. The family is Oraon and observes adivasi rituals.

17. Devsaya	Devsaya was 46 at the time of his last interview in May 2013. He has completed his schooling, one of few men his age to do so in Kewarpur village, to which he belongs. He is married to Gulabi; they live in a joint household with his parents and their three sons. Devsaya works in a CBO in which he provides information on better agricultural methods. His father is the *patel* of Kewarpur. The family is Kanwar (ST) and Devsaya practices adivasi rituals.
• 28 November 2010: key informant interview; with Sarah White, Narendra Das	
• 25 March 2011: survey	
• 10 May 2013: survey	

18. Dhoopram	Dhoopram was approximately in his mid 30s in April 2011. He has been married for about 13 years and lives with wife and three children. He survives mostly on casual daily labour and sometimes he (or his wife) gets work on the MGNREGS worksite. The household survives with difficulty, as they do not get PDS rations. Dhoopram is part of the cultural troupe in the village, which performs traditional adivasi dances at fairs and functions. Dhoopram separated his household from his parents because he worried that he would be tainted by his sister's misbehaviour. He was also angered by his parents not having checked her behaviour and separated his household both for this reason and to avoid being ostracised by the community because of these circumstances. He feared that it would result in loss of earnings for him because he was dependent on his connections for work. Dhoopram is Majhwar (ST) and practises traditional adivasi forms of worship.
• 8 May 2011: survey, qualitative interview; with Pritam Das	

19. Karmsaya	Karmsaya was about 55 years old in February2013. He lives in Kanhaigarh village with his wife and three of his children (two daughters are married and live in their own households), and one sister. He has studied till class 5, finishing primary school. He has been associated with a CBO for many years. His own story is one of personal transformation from someone who drank excessively to now being a teetotaller. Although he advocates this message to his community members they are reluctant to
• 30 November 2010: key informant interview; with Sarah White	
• 10 February 2011: pilot survey: with Kanti Minj and Sarah White	
• 2 May 2011: qualitative	

Name	Brief Person Description
Interview Dates; Type; Team	
interview • 22 February 2013: survey	emulate his example and this sets him at odds with them. He earns his living through farming and casual labour including in the MGNREGS. His family life has been marked by his drinking and resultant violence with one son possibly having committed suicide due to this. He is Pahari Korwa (ST) and identified as Hindu on one occasion but on the second, said that he observes adivasi rituals.
20. Kishan • 26 April 2011: qualitative interview; with Kanti Minj	Kishan was 52 years old at the time of his interview in 2011. He is married to Piyaribai, and they live with their son and daughter-in-law in Kewarpur. Kishan is locally well-known as a result of being a preacher in the Kabirpanth sect. His work, which includes presiding over community rituals, and weddings and funerals often takes him away to the surrounding villages. They have some small amount of land although Kishan now finds farming more difficult due to having less time to cultivate the land. The family is Painika (OBC) and follow the Kabirpanth sect along with Hinduism.
21. Ramcharan • 22 May 2013: qualitative interview; with Dinesh Tirkey • 9 April 2011: survey	Ramcharan was 62 years old in April 2013. He lives in Kanhaigarh in a large joint household with his wife, three sons, a daughter-in-law, and two grandchildren. He has been married for 30 years to his current wife; he was previously widowed. He is well-off with among the largest landholdings in the village; the entire family farms the land together. He is locally influential in the community and has twice been the *sarpanch* of Kanhaigarh, apparently enjoying wide support from the community. He is credited with having mobilised the village community to build a road to the village up the steep incline from the plain below, since the elected member of the state assembly refused to give development funds for it. The family belongs to the Hindu Yadav (OBC) community.
22. Shravan • 29 November 2010: pilot survey; with Sarah White • 17 April 2011: survey with Pritam	Shravan was 36 years old in May 2011 and lives in Banpur. He has been with his (common-law) wife for 15 years and they have one son. They live in a nuclear household. He has studied till class eight and is one of only two people from his village to have studied till secondary school. He is the local mobiliser for a CBO and has done this role for

Name	Brief Person Description
Interview Dates; Type; Team	
Das and Sarah White • 25 May 2011: qualitative interview; with Pritam Das	various organisations, including the Hindu religious organisation, the VHP. He is a respected man in the village by dint of this role and this is also a source of livelihood for him, supplemented by farming and labour. The village mimics his own progress since his influence has grown over time and he often seeks to use his own example, as when he stopped consuming excessive alcohol, to give advice to other members of his community. Shravan is Majhwar (ST) and practices traditional adivasi rituals.
23. Shyam • 23 March 2013: survey with Usha Kujur	Shyam was 37 years old in 2013. He lives with his wife Anita, children and mother in Mahuabagh's Pandopara. He could not study much during childhood due the family's poverty and also married young. However, at the time of speaking he had completed class 8 through the open school system and was continuing his studies, hoping to eventually complete school. The family is Agariya (ST) and provide blacksmith services to the *para* and surrounding areas. Shyam has a share in some family land in his own village, and does wage labour when he can, although he does not get too much to do so. The family observe adivasi rituals.