

# Commons and Community: Evidence from the South-western Tribal Belt of Madhya Pradesh

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Sah and Shah (2003) have shown that the incidence of poverty in the South-western tribal belt of Madhya Pradesh is alarmingly high. About three-fifths of the households in this tribal belt were categorised as chronic poor. A large part of chronic poverty is due to population pressure and failure to access production resources, decline in land holdings, recurring droughts, failure to access land-based livelihood, lack of off-farm employment avenues and high interest consumption loans from the moneylender resulting in a debt-trap that pulls people into chronic poverty. Since the positive impact of growth linkages on the chronic poor is weak and operates with a time lag what becomes pertinent for them is inclusion in various interventions by the state on the one hand and social mobilisation that makes them aware of their rights on the other.<sup>1</sup>

This paper argues that lack of formal institutional structure and lack of progress have not discouraged formation of social capital<sup>2</sup> in this region. With the help of civil society there is increased awareness of issues pertaining to the loss of natural resources. This has strengthened the social network's capabilities in terms of associational activities and led

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to trust among the social groups and individuals and collective action for shared goals. In relatively less remote areas, the stratifications created by political and economic processes have displaced the social hierarchy. But in remote rural areas, where economic hierarchy is fragile and reshuffles itself within a short span<sup>3</sup>, the social elites get an upper hand even in non-social affairs. The dominance of social hierarchy in decision-making would, however, not be due to the weakness of political elites; it is rather lack of efficiency in local governance that gives space to social norms and informal institutions in non-social affairs of the community.

*The Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA)* Act of 1996 has provided a new turn to the process of reforming governance in the tribal regions. The Act empowers the community to take hold of its land, water and forest resources. Introduction of *Gram Swaraj* in 2001 by the Madhya Pradesh government further empowered the community by involving it directly in all the decision-making processes - power that was earlier enjoyed by the *Sarpanch* alone. These changes in governance are postulated on three basic premises. First, traditional ways of decision making of tribal society could be integrated with decentralised governance through *PESA*. Second, the community would get an institutional space to govern its affairs. These provisions would be able to level and homogenise the differences and lead to informed decision-making by the people at the grassroots level. Lastly, the new system would usher in a regime of people's participation, where, governance would be more responsible and fruits of development distributed more equitably. These political reforms have thrown up a new dominant group that controls financial resources and challenges the existing hierarchy. This may disturb the apparent homogeneity of the tribal society. The emerging heterogeneity may curtail the participation of the community in governance. On the other hand, the provisions of the *PESA* have come in direct confrontation with the earlier Acts and the existing state departmental rules that governed the natural resources in the tribal regions. This has made the Act redundant in relation to management of the natural resources of the region.

The objective of this paper<sup>4</sup> is to understand the impact and efficacy of these changes. More specifically, the paper addresses the following three sets of propositions. First, if villages were socially, politically and economically divided, dominance of any one of the groups in decentralised governance would influence the distribution of gains. Second, political reforms that give management of natural resources to

the community would create expectations that would be frustrated by the existing departmental laws. Consequently, the community may resist state interventions that curtail their access to natural resources. Lastly, transfer of social capital in the political domain may be resisted by the economic stratification within the society.

## 1. Historical Processes

The tribal belt of the South-western Madhya Pradesh, also known as *Nimar*, comprises of Khandawa, Khargone and Badwani districts, and is flanked by two hill ranges, the *Vindhya* in the north and the *Satpura* in the south. Around 12<sup>th</sup> Century, small tribal communities, Bhil and Meena, who lived in the forest and cultivated small patches of land that they cleared by burning, populated Nimar. The tribal influx also started during this time, mainly from Rajasthan and Gujarat. This was the time when *Pannar* dynasty in the region was disintegrating. The state was in anarchy and tribal chiefs emerged as landowners, recognised *Garasiya* or unrecognised *Bhumihar*. Muslim invaders, unfamiliar with the region, could not control the tribals and encouraged Rajputs to settle and control them.

The *Badwani* state was established around 13<sup>th</sup> Century and over time this small state with its barren soil and hilly surface escaped the notice of the Mughals, Marathas and the British agents. Although there is no known account about Badwani dynasty, what is known, is that Sisodia Rajputs from Udaipur were the rulers of the state (Shrivastav 1970). As a result of the Muslim invasion of Rajasthan, Gujarat and Malwa that occurred around 1200 AD, many Rajput warriors fled and came to settle in the Narmada Valley. *Bhils* who had ruled this entire region till the eleventh century came to be gradually displaced, and could retain their rule only in the hills of Vindhya and Satpura. The Rajput take-over reached its great heights in the fifteenth century. In order to establish their control on land, the *Sisodia* rulers hired *Bhil* warriors for their army. And thus, the local *Bhil* came under the protection and patronage of *Sisodia* rulers. Many of these Rajput rulers married *Bhil* women and the result of the union is said to be the origin of *Bhilala* tribe. The *Bhil* polity that existed before the Rajput influx was not centralised. The territory was divided into a large number of localities, each under a hereditary chief called *Patel*. But there was no taxation, no system of surplus extraction to make the chief richer than his band. Later as the *Bhil* were forced to accede to their subjugation, the Rajput selected some tribal chiefs to act as representatives of their authority in the villages, such that the

chiefs came to be the link between their ruling political system and the traditional tribal polity. Till 1947, the *Sisodias* could manage personal powers and hereditary perpetuity to rule Badwani.<sup>5</sup>

Between 1820s and 1860s, there were widespread Bhil disorders all over Khandesh, Satpura and *Nimar*. When military action failed to quell the *Bhils*, the British chose to investigate *Bhil* disorders, in order to understand what caused them and through that knowledge, control them and prevent their recurrence. Thus, a policy of pacification came to be implemented (Shrivastav 1970). Despite British co-optation of some *Bhils* into an indigenous force like the *Bhil corps*, and their deployment against other *Bhils*, resistance continued unabated throughout the region even after 1860s. Economically, things were a lot worse off for the Bhils.

There are other reasons for Bhil insurgency. First, the '*bania*' the trader moneylender, became ever present in tribal life, both as financier of agricultural operations and as a local agent for the collection of land tax (Baviskar 1995). The *bania* became the instrument of worst process of tribal exploitation, in nexus with the state, to extract surplus.<sup>6</sup> Second, with colonial rule, the authority of the headman, *Patel*, to permit fresh clearings in the forest came to be abrogated and was instead vested in state officials. In the process, property rights were sharply redefined. Tribals were increasingly excluded from the forest and their customary use rights restricted. Land was leased to contractors whose activities turned vast tracts of forest into semi-barren land. The expansion of the railways (1870-1910) also resulted in the widespread destruction of forests and the beginning of the process of tribal land alienation. Third, the British had tightened the system of taxation; both where they ruled directly as well as in areas managed through the Rajput rulers. This surplus extraction had added to the miseries of tribals. And lastly, collection of excise duties was given out on contract to the *bania* who would advance loans to the *Bhil* in exchange for first rights to their produce. The *bania* who were intermediaries between the administration and the people, encouraged taxpayers to grow market oriented cash crops that were more risk prone during scarcity. The increasing burden of taxation, depletion of natural resources and land alienation and extraction by the *bania* made survival even more precarious than usual, necessitating seasonal migration to far off places during bad agricultural years.

*Bhil* insurgencies consisted of looting and plundering non-tribal villages in the plains. The *Bhil* had been pushed from the agriculturally more productive plains to the poorer hills because of the British

policy of encouraging immigrant *Patidar* settlement on fertile Narmada plains. From that position, the non-tribal plains below were prosperous targets. This resistance, however, was not directed against the British, but against the rich villages that could be attacked more easily and profitably (Baviskar 1995). This is also an indicator of the distance and suspicion, born out of experience of the *Bhil*, for the non-tribals.

Around 1870, tribals were encouraged to stop shifting cultivation and settle down on forestland.<sup>7</sup> Most of land cultivated by *tribals*, even today, consists of a part of depleted forestland. Such encroached cultivation is essential to subsistence in a land-starved economy. Although encroachment results in deforestation and soil erosion, it is the only way out when opportunities are none and resources are lacking. The necessity to encroach on forestland needs to be appreciated within the social frame that values agriculture and the autonomy it provides. Agriculture is the main source of livelihood of the tribals. But agriculture is difficult in the hilly terrain for cultivation is practised without terracing the slopes. As a result, only a small part of the available land that is relatively plain has the capability of retaining moisture and exploiting its yield potential. Market oriented high yielding crops like cotton, soyabean and wheat are grown on these fertile plots. In the rest of the slopes that constitute the bulk of the cropped area, traditional crops like maize, pulses, bajra, jowar and groundnut are grown. Agriculture is rainfed and energised wells serve less than 10 per cent of the cropped area during *rabi*. Since land productivity is poor and monsoon failures are frequent, livestock rearing and migration constitute the major coping mechanisms. The ownership of livestock varies. The yardstick of wealth is the number of cattle, goats and hens that a family possesses. Goats are important assets that can be converted into liquid money during times of shocks. The forest by and large has depleted but wherever accessible it is the source of fodder, fuel, fibre, fruit, house-building materials, medicines, etc.

Demographic pressures amongst the tribals have resulted in rapid fragmentation of agricultural land. The fragmentation of land has become a source of chronic poverty in the community. With poor resource base, seasonal migration provides much needed stability to the households. There has been a long tradition of tribal migration in search of employment from the region. While market mechanisms have become more dominant, agricultural productivity depends on the availability of fertile land and use of seed-fertiliser technology on it. Fertile lands in the tribal villages are scanty. Thus, seasonal migration

becomes necessary for monetary supplement to the limited production base. During years of scarcity, even well off tribals have to resort to migration.

## **2. Dissent against the State**

After independence, the administrative set-up did not change, though the rationale of development<sup>8</sup> did. Independent India inherited an economy with intense poverty. Agricultural production was stagnating and productivity was falling (Blyn 1966). The industrial sector was small and traditional manufacturing and trade were stunted. Moreover, trade and infrastructure were designed to feed colonial interests. Modern industry was discouraged and the regime flooded the Indian market with low cost industrial goods that further depressed indigenous industry. The capability of industry to absorb the work force was marginal. Reduced death rates and increased pressure from growing population led to fragmentation of land. The landless class increased rapidly. The system of collecting agricultural tax reinforced these tendencies. Consequently, agriculture - the dominant sector of the country - was characterised by a large labour-force tilling small and fragmented plots with seed varieties just capable of feeding its growing population.

The debate over the development strategy after independence was guided by these considerations. The prime need before the country was to 'accelerate the rate of material capital formation'. The limiting factor in this regard was low saving. It was argued that shortage of saving was mirrored in the inadequacy of production of capital goods. It was assumed that with faster growth in production, benefits would trickle down to the masses. But growth remained too little to trickle down.

The situation further deteriorated with respect to distributive justice when second generation problems of new agricultural technology started emerging in the mid 1970s. The new agricultural strategy created islands of prosperity amidst a mass of poverty. Inequality across groups of people and across locations got intensified. Tribals, marginal farmers and landless labourers were losers and so were the areas that remained outside the purview of the new agricultural technology. The lopsided investment in Research and Development between irrigated and dry farming technology adversely affected the tribal who depended on dry farming. This capital-intensive approach resulted in inequality and concentration on the one hand and violent social disruption on the other.

Government support for large irrigation projects has further affected tribal interests adversely. The critical relationship between the tribal, environment and development led to ideologically driven struggles that brought together concerns for conserving nature with the issue of justice. The tribal of Madhya Pradesh, including of *Nimar*, has a history of revolts (Dubey 1998). In contemporary Madhya Pradesh despite numerous interventions by the state, movements against state policy have been quite successful. Small informal loans supplied by *bania* during scarcity or input credit on failed crops with high interest rates end up with the tribal debtor losing his land. The immigrant *Patidars* are settled on the fertile alluvial lands in the Narmada plains whereas hilly infertile dry lands are left to the tribal. The rapidly increasing tribal population moved into the forests that, since Independence, have come to be fully under state control. Tribals who cleared forest areas for cultivation now face charges of encroachment.<sup>9</sup> Control over forest is a major contention that has brought into play civil society institutions like the *Adivasi Mukti Sangathan* (AMS). On the other hand, displacement due to large dams in the region has rationalised the presence of movements like *Narmada Bachao Andolan* (NBA), an NGO that has provided alternatives in existing development paradigm.

The concepts of development, environment and governance have different meanings for the tribals and the state. State as the authority of development rationalises its action through projects of national interest and through interventions that rest on out-dated mode of land acquisition, that make the tribals powerless. The struggles against the state are placed within the discourse of ecology and development as the case is with *Narmada Bachao Andolan* or are located against state's force and repression as in the case of *Adivasi Mukti Sangathan*. These struggles are able to mobilise *Bhil*, *Barela* and *Bhilala*, and have gained support from a number of institutions outside the region (Baviskar 2001). The success of these initiatives in weakening the state repression and strengthening the development initiative is mixed.

The *Adivasi Mukti Sangathan* attributes tribal oppression to their powerlessness before state and market. Corrupt revenue officials, brutal policemen and foresters, poor education facilities and failing health services make up a system that marginalises the tribals. In the last three years, the political activities of AMS have brought it into direct confrontation with the power elite. The AMS has successfully compelled the government to retrieve tribal lands and other property that had been taken over by moneylenders. The campaigns of the AMS forced the

government to suspend several corrupt revenue officers, policemen and forest officers.

To counter the AMS, the non-tribal deputy chief minister of Madhya Pradesh, Subhash Yadav, organised the *Adivasi Samaj Sudhar Shanti Sena* (ASSSS) in 1997. Commercialisation of country liquor replacing home made *Moudee*<sup>10</sup> has assumed notoriety in the *Nimar* tribal belt. The anti-liquor campaign of AMS had resulted in the closure of legal and illegal liquor vends in around 250 villages with considerable losses to both vendors and their protectors. One such 'injured party' was *Bhanjadia Patel*, the hereditary tribal headman, of Kabri village and the block Congress committee president. The AMS took the battle to *Bhanjadia's* own door when its members in Kabri declared that no liquor would be sold in the village during *Indal*, the most important tribal festival. The campaign turned violent and had to face state repression. The incident was reported in the media as rivalry between two tribal groups. Unlike *Narmada Bachao Andolan*, the *Adivasi Mukti Sangathan* is declared by the state as an armed struggle that is trying to misguide tribals (Baviskar 2001).

The campaign of the Narmada Bachao Andolan started with Sardar Sarovar Project in Gujarat<sup>11</sup> in late 1980s and took a decisive form in Madhya Pradesh with the construction of a 400 MW hydroelectric plant at Maheshwar. This project would submerge 61 villages, about 5,000 hectare of rich agricultural land in *Nimar* plains and would adversely affect the livelihood of 2,500 households. In the mid 1990s the NBA started mobilising project affected persons (PAPs) in the submerging villages on the issue of the futility of this unsustainable pattern of development that results in environmental destruction as well as serious relocation and rehabilitation (R and R) problems. The successful campaign around these issues forced the Madhya Pradesh government to review the project and suspend the work on the project in early 1998. The success of the NBA campaign was due to three major factors. First, the Maheshwar campaign was an extension of a larger process against the state's unsustainable approach to development that brought together national and international NGOs, environmentalists and the PAPs. Second, it brought to the forefront the issue of involuntary displacement, outdated mode of land acquisition, and human rights violation of the PAPs. Lastly, all through, the campaign was projected as the non-violent struggle of tribals against environmental destruction.



The differences in these two struggles are acute. While Narmada Bachao Andolan campaign was instrumental in making the state realise its mistakes, the *Adivasi Mukti Sangathan* turned out to be a violent campaign between groups of tribals fighting to gain supremacy over each other. Despite these differences, the effect of the two campaigns within the tribal community of *Nimar* has been binding and has created social capital in the form of closer ties between the communities. When it comes to non-tribal intervention in their affairs, no outsider shall be able to create space, no matter how harmless it could be to their land and livelihood, if there is even an iota of misgiving. Notwithstanding the changes around them, this suspicion is neither unjustified nor detrimental to tribal livelihood.

### **3. Commons and Community**

Multiplicity of institutions in development is a feature of all Indian communities. In the tribal context, they have a uniqueness affecting the evolution of new institutions and their relations with the old with different value systems of trust, reciprocity and non-competitiveness. While the analysis deals with some of them, the setting is mainly around the metamorphoses of relationship between the commons and the community. Depletion of tribal resources - land, forest and water - has a history. After independence tribals lost control over the forest because of the Forest Laws. The *PE&A* transferred the power to manage natural resources, including land, water and forest, to the community in accordance with its tradition and in harmony with the provisions of the constitution and with due regard to the spirit of other relevant laws. This section argues that even after reforming political governance, the existing forest laws have not allowed the control of forest to pass to the community.

Kirchali had a dense forest adjoining the village about 20 years ago. Today it is a depleted thin forest located about a km away. Depleted though, the remains are still sufficient for meeting the timber, fodder and fuel needs of the villages around the forest, including Kirchali. As the forest falls under the control of the forest department, the administration of the forest does not fall within the purview of the *Gram Panchayat*. Entry to the forest has been restricted and any use - in the form of wood, minor forest produce, fuel and fodder - is deemed as illegal by the forest department. Pospur, on the other hand, is surrounded on all four sides by steep hills. A few decades back the area had forest but today it is barren. The forest department is trying to rejuvenate this forest by

creating undisturbed natural rooting environment and also by sapling plantation. The upper hills are under the administration of the forest department; whereas the lower reaches including the valley are administered through the *Panchayat*. The lower reaches are the only land that can be brought under agriculture. A few years ago, the community had access to upper reaches of the hills for grazing animals as well as for wood but now the entry to the upper hills has been restricted. This was done mainly to restrict the entry of the cattle that destroyed the forestation, as unrestricted movements helped gully formations and erosion of thin topsoil that holds the vegetative growth.

In these villages, as a part of *Gram Panchayat*, the institutional forest and watershed committees are in place. But these committees are not empowered to control the structure created by the forest department. Although these resources, are within the villages they are out of the reach of the community. Though the control of these resources should have been with the *Gram Panchayat* and its committees, forest laws govern their management. The community in Kirchali is, nonetheless, using the forest resources, illegally. The villagers in Kirachli are not too resentful of this loss of access to forests, but in Pospur, the community is much more agitated about the restrictions and more aware about its rights. Their inability to manage their resources is not because of their illiteracy or lack of awareness about the laws. In a sense, *PE&A* is a legislative Act that has no *locus standi* of its own; the overlapping power of the state forest department is a crucial impediment in passing the control of the forest to the community. Without reforming it, the grassroots situation may not change.

About half of hundred two villages falling in the *Pati Janpad* are outside the control of decentralised governance. These villages, called *Van Gram*, are administered by the forest department. Unlike *Panchayat* administered villages that get a life long lease of the land, agricultural land in a *Van Gram* is allocated to individual households at a maximum of 6.25 acres for 15 years and the lease is renewed afresh by the forest department. The forest officer of the range manages land, water and forest in these *Van Gram*. The community's access to forest for timber, fodder and fuel is much better in *Van Gram* than forests falling under *Panchayat* administered villages. The community is aware about the denial to control their resources and the consequent hardships caused by it. But it accepts the superiority of laws of the Forest Department.

The failure of access to natural resources needs to be viewed within the context of the efforts of *PE&A* to empower the community as well

as the discredit that the state receives due to its repressive ways. Discrediting of the state originated due to tribal migration into these virgin hills, even as late as early 1950s, in search of arable land that has put the community as well as the commons into an impasse. Both the livelihood and the commons have transformed over the years into a new politics of environment. Tribals who cleared areas under the control of the Forest Department for cultivation now face the charge of being encroachers and destroyers of forests. Control over land, especially forestland, is highly challenged by the *Adivasi Mukti Sangathan*. On the other hand, the process of empowering the community was a new approach of managing commons; it was meant for changing laws to accommodate community participation in governance of the commons. The theoretical strength to these steps has been provided by the seminal work of Gadgil and Guha (1992):

That (a) the use of natural resources with a monopolistic command by a few influential castes in the society was in fact a prudent way of natural resource use for, it provided checks against over exploitation by others; (b) the traditional societies had non-exploitative and harmonious relationship with nature whereas modern society has subordinating relationship with it; (c) the fissures in a traditional society are naturalised by non-competitive nature of their interests; (d) any violation in the traditional use of nature is an aberration rather than the traditions; and (e) an opportunistic behaviour by traditional communities is an infection of the modernity. Implicit in the formulation are first, variations of uses and abuses of commons arising from the binary nature of local, traditional, women and tribal versus outsider, global, state and market. The traditional amounts to sustainable use of commons, whereas commercial exploitation by the state is implicit in the arguments (Agrawal and Sivaramakrishnan 2001). Secondly, the naturalising non-competitive behaviour of the society reflects that conflicts over the resources were actually conflicts over sustainability of resources. The dichotomy, thus, provided strength to two differing ways. The civil society took a leaf out of the ecological history of India and attributed powerlessness of tribals before state and market as the cause of tribal access failure to natural resources. This resulted in the NBA and AMS mobilisation of tribals against repressive markets and state. The other process influenced by the construct was the appealing aspect of traditional communities with conservation; and so started joint management where communities have become equal partners in management of natural resources like forest and water or in Madhya Pradesh that *PESA* gave control of commons to the community.

The above, however, de-links the environmental politics from livelihood struggles of the community. The uniform tribal character as protector of nature artificially homogenises and hides the social identities and conflicts. On the other hand, treating livelihood and environment simultaneously could provide understanding of how both apply to each other, so that one can ask what do we mean by sustainable; sustainability of livelihood or environment!

It can be argued that economic growth adversely affects the natural resources because of critical interactions between livelihood, technology and nature. But the implications of environmental degradation are conceptually different in remote tribal economies and in dynamic non-Remote Rural Areas. In the former situation (RRAs), the livelihood processes influence nature not because of over-use *per se* but because of sheer survival of different participants. Stagnation and low level of economic activities are, thus, the cause of degradation. This calls for developing new opportunities that create *interest* for protecting nature. In the latter situation (non-RRAs), nature degrades owing to uncertainty of availability of natural resources to various segments of the society. Over-use of nature is not because of availability of resources *per se* but owing to mistrust and uncertainty about their availability. In order to maximise his or her returns in this uncertainty, everyone over-uses nature. Regeneration rests on sharing information with trust between community, classes and social groups that have varying perceptions about the access to commons.

It will be worth understanding how these macro processes are influencing the micro realities.

#### **4. Political Freedom and Community**

##### ***Unfreedom***

The political leadership in Pospur-Gupsee village Panchayat is with a woman *Sarpanch* from Gupsee village. She represents the political interests of her husband who is a representative of Pati *Taluka (Janpad) Panchayat*. He is a seasoned political figure in the tribal area, and guides her in her political affairs. Though the Panchayat headquarter is in Pospur, the village is neglected with respect to amenities, facilities, investment and agricultural infrastructure. A large part of investment is diverted to Gupsee.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, Pospur is not intensely divided on economic lines. On the other hand, though the affairs in Kirchali-Ramkula *Panchayat* are

no different,<sup>13</sup> the individual initiatives in technology transfer in agriculture have resulted in significant prosperity to a few in the village. Since both the *Panchayat* and the *Sarpanch* are located in Ramkula, Kirchali, like Pospur, is also discriminated against. The community keeps itself detached from the affairs of governance in both the villages.

Economic stratification in Kirchali is well-developed and visible when one moves in the villages during early rabi season. The two hundred plus household village looks deserted and unmanned, except for about thirty households that are engaged in wheat and gram cultivation; pre-sowing irrigation and sowing of the crops are the major activities that engaged some of the family members. These households have perennial irrigation, obtained at a very high cost and risk. Kirchali is an un-electrified village enclosed from two sides by Ramkula and Surana villages that have electric connections. Individual initiatives have resulted in intensive investment in irrigation and energising the farm in order to reap economic gains. Two families, the *Patels* and the *Bhagats*, took the early initiatives in investment in agriculture in Kirchali. They have strong political clout and could get cheap institutional credit for risky agricultural investment in digging a well and energising it. Demonstration of economic gains attracted others to come forward for such investment; substantial investment is involved in such transfer of agricultural technology that includes digging wells in rocky terrain, drawing electricity line from some distance, investment in new seed varieties and yield increasing fertilisers. All this has to be borrowed at a high interest and with sizeable risk.<sup>14</sup> The risk involved in digging a well in Kirchali is high. But the economic incentives in the form of cropping pattern changes and increase in yields keeps the desire to invest alive. Half of the wells in Kirchali provide water only up to November. The perceptions on size and certainty of economic gains of investment attract new entrepreneurs; as such, there are individual attempts to draw electricity even from a distribution point that lies two km away. The community in Kirchali is stratified on economic lines; there are about 25 wealthy families with perennial irrigation while 100 poor households have less land and no irrigation facility. The middle constitutes average farmers. Each group has its own agenda; the rich want cheap labour, modern yield increasing inputs and investment so that their agricultural income is protected. The poor, on the other hand, want employment and labour opportunities nearby so that they do not need to migrate. Such economic stratification has not yet developed in Pospur. The irrigation well failures are very high in Pospur, and this implies repayment of loan to the *bania* at an exorbitant interest, which is

disastrous. Consequently, there are only a few irrigated farms in Pospur; the economic homogeneity of the community is, by and large, undisturbed.

Sen (1999) has conceptualised that unfreedom - economic, political, social, transparency and security - can pull people into poverty. Sen's proposals of unfreedom include both inability of the community to exercise its rights freely as well as opportunities of individuals to operate freely for, poverty can manifest by unavailability of services at the macro level as well as access denial at the micro level. Political unfreedom can surface by micro processes of lack of freedom to choose who governs as well as macro principles of how to govern. Political freedom, it can be argued, could create an environment that helps the community to participate freely in the process of governance: choose the leaders that are committed; plan and manage their resources for local development; criticise the approach and monitor the functions of those who are governing. If the political process is free, it can help fulfil the expectation of the community. Political freedom, thus, can be operationalised as freedom to individuals to (a) choose who governs them; (b) be governed in a participatory process; (c) plan and manage their natural resources; and (d) be able to criticise and organise protests against uninformed decisions so that gains are equitably distributed within the community. One can use the findings of this paper to evaluate the extent to which each of these freedoms has successfully been attained.

The findings reveal that the process of choosing who governs them is free and fair. People have used their franchise in deciding who would govern them freely. But the process created fissures in a homogenous community with social, political and economic interests. Once the political leaders took over their responsibility, the process of decentralised governance, instead of becoming participatory, became highly centralised. The gains of decentralised governance have been too few and highly iniquitous. The community's expectations remained unfulfilled and participation slowly dwindled. The role of the Sarpanch, and the exclusive group of his people, has made people lose their faith in the *Panchayat*. Political decentralisation has not only fractured the homogeneity of the tribal society but has also made governance highly centralised.

The community does monitor how those in governance have neglected it. But it does not get enough opportunity to register its protest about such governance. It is only once in five years that they get the

freedom to punish bad governance by rejecting those involved in such governance. The community has no freedom in the process of planning the programmes it needs. The blame for this unfreedom to decide what local development should take place and how, falls at various levels. First, the process of centralisation at the Panchayat level is too overpowering for the community to exert pressures for initiating participatory processes. Secondly, the quantum of financial allocation is too thin to meet the demands of the community. Third, the desire of the bureaucracy and the elected representatives, at higher echelons, to control the activities and finance of the *Gram Panchayat*, does not allow independence to the *Panchayat*. Lastly, existing laws that govern the natural resources obstruct the process of giving their control to the community.

### *Creation of Social Capital*

The main support for social capital formation in the tribal region comes from the pattern of settlement of villages. Each of the hamlets comprises close relatives who easily forge their social solidarity norms and frame of *Jati Panchayat*<sup>15</sup>. This pattern of settlement, where social relationship converts into association, is capable of creating issues at community level. This apart, the following processes are instrumental in creating social capital and its varied manifestations. The first of these is the presence of a left-oriented civil society that helped ease economic repression. Second, dependence on informal community legal structure that binds people together. Lastly, lack of development of the region and livelihood struggles gave space to social elites to oversee emerging political and economic leadership.

The space available to the social hierarchy in non-social decisions has emerged not because of enactment of *Gram Swaraj* or *PESA*, for these processes had marginal impact on community involvement in development decisions. State inaction in this region has helped the practice of informal community consultation. The informal community consultation in development is a more recent phenomenon forced by civil society mobilisation in the area. This mobilisation was the result of development-induced displacement, awareness campaign on depletion of natural resources and repression of tribal rights.<sup>16</sup> State failures made the contemporary movements succeed in mobilising the community to protest against the access failure to natural resources on the one hand and tribal exploitation on the other. The influence of *Narmada Bachao Andolan* and *Adivasi Mukti Sangathan* in mid-1990s has changed the

political discourse of the region significantly. Earlier, the newly emerged political hierarchy, through the state apparatus, would take every decision without even consulting the individuals who were affected. Such changes came first in the form of agitations of activists for redressal of tribal grievances. In the late 1990s, the situation improved further; individuals themselves started going to the concerned officials in the *Taluka Panchayat*<sup>17</sup> for all decisions that affected them. But the more recent changes go a step further. When the state-run watershed project in Pospur, through Pospur-Gupsee Gram Panchayat, led the local community to believe that their access to natural resources is being adversely affected by the structures, the social hierarchy prevailed over the political hierarchy and the community asked the project authority to wind up the project. The community had the last word. The debate was not only on access failure to natural resources but also about the presence of outsiders in the village. The fear of outsiders has brought the community together.

The consequences of development initiatives are rooted in the tribal psyche; the fear of displacement due to Sardar Sarovar Project is wide spread in the region. Also imprinted in their psyche are the state repressions on the issue of natural resource management. Both of these experiences - the former contemporary and the latter historical - are painful. The response to outsiders is cautiously guarded, though it varies in both the villages. While the inhabitants of Pospur are vocally against any outside presence, the community in Kirchali is more tolerant to outsiders. The community in Kirchali, as compared to Pospur, seems to be much more calculative for prospective gains accruing to them because of outside interventions. Although in both the situations, social hierarchy, forced by the community at large and also because of pressures of a few well to do and influential people, resists outsiders, the nature and extent of economic stratification guides their behaviour. Apprehensions about outsiders in Kirchali are related to considerations of possible economic gains that individuals could get. However, in Pospur the considerations are to protect the community. The attitude of the social hierarchy in Pospur is loaded with caution and apprehensions that outsiders would acquire their resources. Community leaders are polite but firm in asking not to be disturbed.<sup>18</sup>

Notwithstanding the catalytic role of civil society in creating social capital, the relationship between civil society and governance could be



vicious as well as virtuous, as would be seen. The question is under what conditions the social capital manifests itself in the political domain in a virtuous pattern.

### ***Informal Institutions***

The second process that helped social capital formation is weak institutional arrangements like constitutional and legal framework, and administrative structure in the region. These institutions in a tribal society have both formal as well as informal features. Experiences with these formal institutions<sup>19</sup> have also resulted in lack of faith of the community in these institutions. Moreover, remoteness to state in terms of non-availability of legal agencies and their fairness has resulted in dispute resolution by the communities' own informal structures. The community institutions control decisions on petty crimes, land disputes originating from short-term land transitions, divorce and socially unaccepted relations. This is partly because the legal apparatus in the area is lacking and partly because the traditional ways of settling these disputes are effective. The village social justice committee<sup>20</sup> created under decentralised governance has recognised this role of the community. This kind of dependence on informal non-legal structures that exercise their power through social hierarchy also strengthens the social bond within the community.

Though informal legal and institutional arrangements exist in both Pospur and Kirchali, the role of economic and political leadership has been different in these two villages. Consequently, the local community has become overpowering in Pospur. In Kirchali, where state presence is regarded as necessary in providing electricity to energise wells<sup>21</sup>, economic leadership dominates. The individualistic approach towards economic prosperity, which consolidates productivity gains, is regarded as more important than social processes. The community initiatives do not pose any challenge to economic leadership. In short, social capital exists in the tribal areas, albeit in dormant stage.

### ***Social Exchanges under Market Failure***

Lastly, state and market failures have influenced life and livelihood of the tribals in both Pospur and Kirchali differently. As compared to Kirchali, the relative remoteness of Pospur and its poor agriculture have resulted in trust and cooperation for survival. The individualistic approach in Kirchali made livelihood struggles less painful. Relatively few households resort to migration in Kirchali compared with

Pospur. The interaction between economy and society has a positive influence in daily livelihood struggles in Pospur. On the other hand, in Pospur, the interaction between economy and the polity is marginal. Livelihood struggles have forced about a third of the households to migrate outside the village for more than seven months each year.<sup>22</sup> This hardship is also the cause of a process of developing trust and cooperation. Migration pushes agricultural land into short-term institutional arrangements like leasing, renting or mortgage. These short-term land transactions are between trusted close groups. Short-term land transitions are economic arrangements between the migrant family and the family that manages his land in the migrant's absence. But it also provides necessary representation to the migrant in social spheres; it acts as *social exchange*.<sup>23</sup>

The contract that governs the land transitions through non-market institutions significantly varies across households. The urgency of forming a contractual relationship between the two parties - the migrant and the tiller - decides the arrangements that would guide the economic exchange. In the last few years, the short-term land transitions, both in Pospur and Kirchali, have increased fivefold. Crop failure is one reason for this development but equally pressing is fragmentation of land with division of family. Small land holdings during droughts are not only uneconomical to operate but also have a cost that makes alternative livelihood options difficult to negotiate. Consequently, the owner enters into an agreement with a prospective tenant so that he earns some rent as well as uses his family labour properly. Short-term land transactions, however, are negotiated not only within the village but also within closely related families. Thus, the owner is free to move out of the village with his family in search of some employment opportunities. Such movements help the small landholder to optimise returns to his family labour. The economic gains to a tenant, apart from sharing the output, are in the form of claiming rental value for use of his bullock and interest on capital used to purchase out-of-pocket inputs. During the absence of the landowner, the tenant is morally bound to inform the owner about important events that affect him; such events are sickness of aged parents, social events, and situations that have employment implications. During a crisis, close relatives do provide support to the remaining members of the owners' family as a matter of custom. On the other hand, the tenant spends money, when necessary, on behalf of the migrant.<sup>24</sup> In the process, land in exchange engenders a symbolic presence of the migrant household in the village and his representation in the social hierarchy without his being physically

present. The power to till land of a migrant protects economic interest of both the migrant and the tenant but in the exchange, the migrant also obtains control over his social interests. The most preferred arrangement<sup>25</sup> is crop sharing because it preserves the migrant's links with the community. In order to force the contract in terms of labour use and sharing output,<sup>26</sup> the migrant has to make a number of trips to the village, especially during the peak harvest season. That re-establishes his severed interests in the social set up in his absence.

### *Expressions of Social Capital*

The social capital in Pospur, nonetheless, seems to be developing and providing support to the traditional social hierarchy to exert its power on the political hierarchy. In the process, programmes that could have positive economic implications for the well being of the community are resisted. The relationship between the community and the society in the village did provide impetus to mobilisation of dormant social capital but in local development affairs, the social capital could only manifest itself in the form of resistance to development. This is something to admire as well as to criticise. Does it not mean that the social capital, in its negative aspect, isolates people from the outside world and development? This seems to be keeping the community frozen in time and denies social capital a space in development. The criticism seems to be partially true. In as much as the state repression and access failure to common resources are the basic constraints in well-being, the importance of emerging social capital cannot be overemphasised as an important force behind their united struggle. But, the desire for change is also present in Pospur. This has resulted in diverting the social trust and solidarity in the community in the form of emerging organisations that take advantage of non-tribal institutions, technology, markets and programmes.

The increasing popularity of *self-help groups* in Pospur is an indication of the parallel leadership that is emerging. The first is the traditional social leadership that helps the social capital preserve natural resources by blocking explorative non-tribal entry in the village. Another is organising tribals to take advantage of existing government programmes through *self-help group*,<sup>27</sup> that too against the wishes of the traditional social elites. Though both processes have extended the social base, the latter is not the legitimate successor of the former. Despite the fact that both forms of social leadership are exploring a new base of social relations, the latter does not directly contest the supremacy of traditional social elites and

their ways of employing the social capital. There is a possibility that, like Kirchali, the traditional leadership may be influential only in social processes while the economic processes may be governed by the newly emerging leadership. It is difficult to define operation of *self-help groups* in Pospur as an indicator of social capital formation. These groups reflect the interests of individuals, so they are seen as decelerating the trust within the community, as they function more as economic units and hence they stratify the community on economic lines. Thus, the associational value of self-help group is colonised by the competitiveness of economic enterprise. The economic stratification counters the process of trust building in the community. Such an association creates a process where the moral capabilities of the community reach its limits in acting as an impartial source of virtuous agency. Self-help groups, thus, should not be regarded as a source of social capital as they are seen as a process that erodes homogeneity that is a prerequisite for social capital to manifest.<sup>28</sup>

The social capital as it manifests in Pospur may not be operationalised by indicators like community engagements with organisations and associations like religious *bbajan mandalies*, farmers' organisation and *self-help groups*. It has to be observed in day-to-day involvement of the community in the affairs of the village. As noted earlier, the homogeneous social hierarchy has a potential to create space for community involvement in politicising a debate, but it does not ensure participation in decision-making. A vibrant social structure is present in both Pospur and Kirchali but it is only in Pospur that one witnesses the manifestations of social capital. Moreover, the way the social capital is employed in Pospur only strengthens the fact that (a) social capital may not necessarily manifest in virtuous imperatives; (b) all associations may not create trust and cooperation in the society, some, like SHGs with economic interests inbuilt, may even stratify the society.

These findings are at variance with what Pai (2001) has tried to establish. She observes that social segmentation emerges as significant in determining development of trust and social capital between groups. The findings of this study reveal that trust and social capital within tribal context is omnipresent. Economic segregation and its intensity play a dominant role in manifestation of social capital. It remains unutilised under some conditions, is used in virtuous pattern in some and vicious in others.

These findings, however, corroborate the observations of Rudolph (2000) that not all associations are likely to create trust and cooperation with positive implications.

## **5. Concluding Observations**

Social capital is omnipresent in the tribal context. Its utilisation in development decision-making and its pattern of manifestation would be contextual to the milieu where it is operational. The findings of this study reveal that (i) factors like the pattern of settlement, importance of social norms, and failure of state have helped to perpetuate the trust and cooperation in the community, (ii) civil society has played a significant role in making this capital available for wider use, and (iii) the pattern of manifestation of social capital depends on the complexities of economic stratification and efficiency of decentralised governance. Three different forms of leadership have emerged in this tribal society: the traditional, the emerging economic leadership and the political leadership. All the three have created their own space in the community, but their relevance depends on their ability to deliver. The efficiency of working of political decentralisation is not different in both the villages but the political leadership is unable to use social capital for the betterment of the condition of people in both Pospur and Kirchali, because the policies and programmes it has introduced are inappropriate and ineffective. What is different in the two villages is the individualistic economic efforts in Kirchali that have paid sizeable benefits as compared to Pospur. The dormancy of social capital in development decision making in Kirchali is significantly influenced by intense economic segregation that has given a strong message to the community that well being is a function of individual efforts. In contrast, in economically homogenous Pospur, the social capital is much more vibrant.

However, the trust and concerns for fellow members in both the villages is in perpetual conflict with the political hierarchy which is self-serving. In Pospur, this conflict has vibrant expression of vicious as well as virtuous pattern of social capital. On the other hand, in Kirchali, the social capital has remained uninvested and dormant. Despite the fact that the social capital has positively influenced non-social events since the early 1990s, its manifestations in governance have been marginal. One wonders why the social capital could not be transferred into the sphere of governance. This raises issues regarding the nature of benefits that decentralised governance could potentially give to the community and

of the likelihood of this process to address the livelihood problems of the marginalised. The community at large finds that the benefits are not worth wasting their days' labour.<sup>29</sup>

In remote rural areas, market and state failure has invited intense community participation in informal institutions. This has helped in developing and perpetuating social capital; the informal institutional arrangements that replace markets and formal legal institutions, more often than not, result in mutually beneficial exchanges that help the creation and perpetuation of social capital. The civil society has given the community the needed support for trust and cooperation to be visible in different spheres. The inability of the community to use its social capital for local development is rooted in the heterogeneity created by the individualism of the economic and political elites. If economic inequality is high, the social capital remains dormant and under-utilised. Both virtuous and vicious investment of social capital can take place simultaneously.

The following features of social capital are discerned from the study:

1. Social capital in a traditional society is omnipresent but remains dormant. Once activated by the catalytic action of civil society, complexities of economic stratification guide its manifestation.
2. Social capital not only enhances the efficiency of institutional arrangements that have emerged due to market failures but also strengthens the trust and cooperation between groups.
3. Social capital need not always lead to efficiency in governance; it could work in a vicious pattern, obstructing options that are virtuous in nature.
4. Virtuous and vicious patterns of social capital can manifest simultaneously in one place.
5. Transfer of social capital from the social sphere to the political sphere is possible only if the gains of decentralised governance are large and equitable.

In economically homogeneous and relatively remote rural areas the social capital is much more vibrant. The trust and concerns for fellow members are in perpetual conflict with the political hierarchy which is self-serving. Participatory democracy has capabilities to convert cumulative unfreedom to distributive unfreedom. *Gram Swaraj* has failed

in theory but *Gram Swaraj* must succeed to harness the capabilities of the social capital.

### Endnotes

1. It is argued that through these processes the concentrated marginalisation could be converted into distributive marginalisation where one could be economically poor but politically free and socially included.
2. Social capital comprises of systems of norms, institutions and organisations that promote trust and cooperation in a community. It is considered a form of capital because it helps in accelerating the process of well-being and healthy decision making in the community. Putnam (1993) is the best-known exponent of the concept, though both neo-institutional economists like North and sociologists like Bourdieu were early proponents of this concept. Durston (1998) argues that:

In economic exchange, social capital reduces transaction cost arising when dealing with outsiders in unregulated environment; it helps in honest and efficient governance. Social capital strengthens each time it is activated; social capital, like culture, is perpetuated and it could take a virtuous or a vicious path. Repeated social interaction virtuous or otherwise strengthens civic participation or non-participation; and social capital developed in culture or religious spheres is transferable to political or economic spheres.

3. Agriculture being the main economic activity, division of family due to marriage of a son, leads to weakening of economic hierarchy. The newly formed households are relatively resource

deficient and rely on social networks for support not only in social interactions but also for economic survival; also see, Sah and Shah (2003), for details.

4. This research is a part of larger study on multi-dimensional poverty in remote rural areas. Macro findings have identified Southwestern tribal belt of Madhya Pradesh as one of the economically poorest region in the country. Badwani district in the region has been selected for in-depth study to understand why and how people in Remote Rural Areas are trapped in chronic poverty. Two Janpads, one relatively developed Sendhwa and one resource poor Pati, are selected for the study. One village from each of the selected *Janpad*, Pospur from Pati, and Kirchali from Sendhwa, were selected based on their relative remoteness; Kirchali is relatively less remote compared to Pospur. The paper uses the case study method and compares two communities, Kirchali and Pospur. For a detailed write-up on the background, demographic, social structure and brief history of communities, see, (Sah and Shah 2003).
5. Rajput rulers of Badwani were treated with honour by *Mughals* and were given their original powers. These rulers in early 18<sup>th</sup> Century, however, assisted the *Maratha* invasion in the Malwa. British took over the state briefly in 1861 to 1873. From 1894 till 1910, the state was administered directly under the British Political Agent. During the First World War, the then Prince of the Badwani state, Ranjit Singh, served the forward line of France. In recognition of this, he was granted powers to rule again. In 1921 the prince received, with hereditary perpetuity, some more powers. After his death, his minor son, Devi Singh, was invested with administrative powers. Till independence, the Sisodias ruled the state. In 1948, the state was merged in India. For details, see, (Shrivastav 1970).
6. The interest rate charged by the *bania* in the region is as high as 50 per cent for four months. A shock in the form of death of bread earner, prolonged illness or failed crop result in the tribal debtor losing his assets - land, silver and animals. The riches and affluence of the trading *bania* community in the towns of *Pati*, *Sendhwa* and trading centres like *Chacania*, *Dhanora* etc. can be traced to exploitation of tribals by them.



7. In contemporary *Nimar* hills, a large part of cultivation is on encroached forestland. *Tribals* do not want to talk about when they settled on these upper hill lands. It is recalled that the most recent tribal influx in the hills has been in last 75 to 100 years. A significant proportion of the resettled households have acquired land rights by 1970s. About 10 per cent of encroachers are still fighting for their rights. Vast tracts of the *Nimar* hills are still uninhabited. Population pressures may encourage tribals to settle on these tracts for survival, fuelling a new confrontation with the state. The British made shifting cultivation illegal, reserved the forests and established sources of revenue there (Morse and Berger 1992).
8. The economic critique of the colonial past legitimised the option to govern the new nation state; in order to legitimise their political authority, the Congress assumed the role of central allocator with an aim to remove inequality by a process that resulted in rapid economic growth. The process required efforts and sacrifice by citizens. The *dalits*, the small and marginal farmers, the landless labourers and the tribals were the groups that made the sacrifices.
9. The scale of the problem is reflected in the fact that in the *Nimar* hills many villages are identified as forest villages, i.e., lying outside the revenue system. In Pati taluka of Badwani district, out of 106 villages, 46 are identified as forest villages. Rights of tribals in the forest villages are highly restricted by the forest department.
10. Commercialisation of liquor is a recent phenomenon. As forests have dwindled and opportunity cost of fuel wood increased many fold, *Moudee* (the home made brew made out of *Monda* flowers) making has become a costly affair. Consequently, purchase of country liquor has replaced *Moudee* brewing. The *bania* has also started liquor supply. A section of the tribal population, about 5 to 7 per cent, is alcoholic. Country liquor is cheap but is a cause of indebtedness for these households.
11. Sardar Sarovar Project, a large irrigation project costing the state Rs. 80 thousand million in 1986-87 prices, is one of 30 major, 135 medium and 3000 minor dams planned on the Narmada river. These projects will displace a large number

of families from Madhya Pradesh. Resettlement and rehabilitation of the project affected persons has been casual to put it mildly (Sah 1977; 2002).

12. Political leadership in the village is thoroughly corrupt; the popular saying in the village is that during the first year the elected *Sarpanch* renovates his house. In the second year he invests in a motorcycle followed by investment on agricultural infrastructure (well and energising it), in the next year. A diesel engine arrives the following year and a tractor in the fifth year.
13. Kirchali is a part of Ramkula-Kirchali Panchayat. The Sarpanch is from Ramkula. The political affairs of the Sarpanch are dealt with as if that is his private business.
14. Ramesh, an educated *tribal*, who had to leave his *Talati* training in early 1990s, and the *Patel* with their economic clout and nearness to the *Sarpanch*, invested in drawing electricity connections from the nearest distribution point from village Surana. They are also the agency between the community and the Ramkula-Kirchali Panchayat *Sarpanch* and corner a substantial portion of IRDP loans and subsidy meant for the community. Over a period of time, other villagers like Vesta, Girdhar, Jagdish and Ristan came forward and invested in a well and energising it. Vesta purchased an electric motor (Rs. 3,200) two years ago and invested Rs. 6,000 for drawing electricity. He repaid the loan within two seasons. In 2001 when the availability of water from the river bed became uncertain, Vesta thought of investing in digging the rocky fields for water and completed the well (an investment of Rs. 10,000). He got water but not for the whole crop season. Vesta intends to invest some more capital for deepening the well. Since his land is irrigated all the borrowings were repaid within two seasons. He was taking a ratio of 2 kg seed resulting in 22 quintals of wheat.
15. In fact, *caste Panchayat* along with *traditional village Panchayat* are the two tribal institutions that promote community participation in all social decision-making. (Sah and Shah 2003).
16. Conflicts over natural resources between the state and the community in this tribal belt have a long history. However, the exploitation of natural resources is also from within. But the solidarity created by *outside* (state and *bania*) exploitation did

bind the society. Two of the most active NGOs that are mobilising the tribals in the area are *Narmada Bachao Andolan* and the *Adivasi Mukti Sangathan*. While the former is mobilising the tribals on failures of development paradigm adopted by the state, the latter is organising them against natural resource depletion, state repression and their rights (Sah and Shah 2003).

17. A discussion with the Chief Executive Officer of Pati *taluka*, where the Advasi Mukti Sangathan is active, brings out the fact that awareness about tribal rights has grown significantly in the area over the last 7-8 years. Earlier when a tribal came to the taluka Panchayat he was always accompanied by the activists of AMS. Now they come on their own.
18. Even during the fieldwork of the study, because of the nature of the investigation where land, assets, livelihood etc. were being discussed, the community was apprehensive of the presence of outsiders. There was a perception, in both Kirchali and Pospur, that such investigation is part of state activities to understand the pre-submergence situation so that resettlement package can be identified for individual households. In Kirchali the community accepted the team after discussions on the nature, scope and implications of the study. But in Pospur the situation became ugly and at one stage the social leadership forced the team to abandon its work. The team was told in no uncertain terms that the community is happy in Pospur living as they are, earning their livelihood based on thin agriculture, some through on-farm labour and migration. Fortunately, a group of economic leaders, especially those who have had benefits of *self-help group*, could feel that the study is not for acquisition of land. The social hierarchy in Pospur had a strong message: *'Please leave us as we are. We do not need any outside help for our livelihood. We are content with our life and livelihood despite poor agriculture, hard labour and degrading migration. Do not disturb us'*
19. This is especially true for forest guards and the police. What is commonly discussed in the village is that traditional local conflict resolution methods are far more just, for the police will settle the dispute by taking money from both the parties and would be biased against the group that has given less bribe.

20. Eight committees deal with decisions relating to agriculture, health, infrastructure, education, social justice, defence, development and assets. The political decentralisation has accepted the role of traditional leaders in both Pospur and Kirchali. Traditional leaders are a crucial part of Village Security Committee that deals with all disputes emerging in the village.
21. In Kirchali, individuals are investing over Rs. 20,000 for digging wells in rocky terrain with high risk of failure and in drawing electricity line from the nearest Distribution Point. There are over thirty individuals that have such connections. This process brought economic success to individuals, but has stratified the society on economic lines. Remoteness of Pospur, its difficult terrain, high risk and initial failures in such investment has made the village more homogenous.
22. The remoteness of Pospur and poor agricultural base has resulted in a relatively large population relying on migration as a coping mechanism compared to the less remote Kirchali (Sah and Shah 2003).
23. Tribal economy is based on reciprocity. The short-term land transaction, especially share cropping and fixed rent, create social trust based on social return in exchange of economic gains. This latter (social) function of exchange is as important as its formal (economic) function of exchange.
24. A sharecropper, Ramesh, said that I will have to look after the aged parents of my close relatives in their absence in any case, but I will have to bring a doctor and spend Rs. 30-50 on an injection or two in case I have leased-in their land.
25. A large number of variations exist when the contracts are agreed upon. With share cropping at one end and mortgage of land on the other, a large number of fixed rent contracts fall in the middle. Depending upon the bargaining power of different participants, the urgency of the deal to materialise, and perception of cost of enforcing the contract, terms and conditions vary even in a village.
26. Moral hazards are involved in sharecropping: The tribal who is leasing out land would like to ensure that the tenant, as agreed, has applied labour and inputs on the field for he has

to share the out-of-pocket cost. Similar is the case when the crop would be harvested and shared, for the landowner has to ensure that he receives the crop output portion as agreed. For enforcing these, the landowner migrant has to either make a number of visits to the village or leave all the monitoring in trust on the other party. In this area the first option is more prevalent, not because of lack of trust but because it re-establishes his ties with the community.

27. In Pospur, seven '*Self-help Groups*' comprising around 10 members each, are in operation. Members of these groups contribute Rs. 50 to Rs. 100 per month. One of the 'Self help Group' has provided loan of Rs. 20,000 to a farmer in order to get his mortgaged land back from a trader. Another 'Self-help Group' has over Rs. 20,000 in a nationalised bank and is in the process of receiving a loan of Rs. 0.3 million for goat rearing.
28. It has been argued that associations that draw on inherited identities and solidarities need to be taken into account as associations that may generate social capital. Rudolph (2000) suggests that only those organisations that are egalitarian, non-interest oriented and voluntary associations would create collaborative and cooperative conventions that can and do mediate between the individual and society or individuals and the state.
29. Migration keeps a sizeable workforce out of the village for over 6 to 7 months. Moreover, iniquitous distribution of benefits and unfulfilled expectations of the community from decentralised governance lead to more empathy towards the institution. (Sah and Shah 2003).

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