

THE STATUS, SURVIVAL, AND CURRENT DILEMMA OF A FEMALE DALIT COBBLER  
OF INDIA

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by

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(ABSTRACT)

Historically, oppression has been and continues to be a serious issue of concern worldwide in both developed and underdeveloped countries. The structure of Indian society, with its hierarchies and power structures, is an ideal place to better understand the experience of oppression. Women throughout the long established Indian hierarchy, and members of the lower castes and classes, have traditionally borne the force of oppression generated by the Indian social structure. The focus of this research explored the way the way class, caste, and gender hierarchies coalesce to influence the life choices and experiences of an Indian woman born into the lowest level of the caste and class structure. This research specifically addressed the female *Dalit* cobbler (leatherworker), who exists among a caste and class of people who have been severely oppressed throughout Indian history. One female Dalit cobbler from a rural village was studied. Her life represents three levels of oppression: females (gender), Dalits (caste), and cobblers (class). This study was based on three interconnected research questions that attempted to uncover the way class, caste, and gender hierarchies influence the lives of Dalit female cobblers: what the Dalit female cobbler has experienced in terms of economic, personal, and social struggle; how the Dalit female cobbler manages to get through her day-to-day struggles; and where the Dalit female cobbler sees herself in the future. Participant observation and triangulation were major components in the design of this study, as it was important to view the local daily life of this individual. Detailed field notes were collected and recorded, interviews based on open-ended questions were conducted, and site documents were gathered. The findings that have become evident throughout this observation have increasingly exposed one continuous theme in particular: the 'lived' experience and position that one must accept his or her station

in life without question. This dissertation, however, has shown how acceptance does not mean that one stops trying to thrive. On the contrary, the life of this particular female Dalit cobbler exemplifies the ingenuity and perseverance of people who are not members of the dominant social structure. It demonstrates how one individual had the ability to negotiate multiple levels of oppression and succeed in sustaining herself, her family, and her community.

## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to Sana, her family, and the village that welcomed me with open arms. It is also with great appreciation that I would like to include Dr. Marcie Boucouvalas for her unconditional support and astute understanding of human rights issues.

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## CHAPTER 1

### OPPRESSION AND THE DALIT FEMALE COBBLER

#### Introduction

Historically, oppression has been and continues to be a serious issue of concern in both developed and underdeveloped countries. The composition of Indian society, with its hierarchies and power structures, is an ideal place to better understand the experience of oppression and the lives of the exploited. In India the combined effects of the caste system, class inequality, and patriarchy<sup>1</sup> result in the marginalization of more than half the population (Khan, 1994b). Women throughout the established hierarchy and members of the lower castes and classes<sup>2</sup> have historically carried the impact of oppression generated by the Indian social structure.

This dissertation focuses on understanding the way class, caste, and gender hierarchies coalesce to influence the life choices and experiences of an Indian woman born into the lowest level of the caste and class structure. Specifically, this research focuses on the *Dalit* cobbler (leatherworker), a caste and class of people who have been severely oppressed throughout Indian history. By studying the female gender of this particular class and caste of people, this dissertation typifies three targets of oppression in Indian society: females (gender), Dalits (caste), and cobblers (class). Of particular interest to my research is the experience of social struggle, day-to-day pursuits and survival, and personal hopes for the future that characterizes the modern Dalit female cobbler.

#### Background: The Caste System

A noteworthy hallmark of the caste system is its framework of social preference. In Indian society *Brahmans* are placed at the top of the social hierarchy and Dalits (formerly known as untouchables) are relegated to the bottom. The origins of this hierarchy have often been

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<sup>1</sup> The terms gender and patriarchy will be used interchangeably in this document.

<sup>2</sup> Class refers to the pecuniary characteristics of the population and caste makes reference to the social strata of Indian society. Members of the same caste and class can be found in many different socioeconomic categories, often as a result of the reservation system.

argued, yet scholars have generally agreed that the system did not fully solidify until approximately 700 A.D. Academics argue that around this time Hinduism supported a social hierarchical system, therefore allowing the ensuing social structure the ability to achieve justification based on religious values (Ram, 1998).

The caste system in India broadly divides the population into four major groups, known as *varnas*. From top to bottom these are: Brahmans (priestly castes), *Kshatriyas* (warrior castes), *Vaishyas* (trading and artisan castes), and *Sudras* (laboring and servant castes). Additionally, there is one other group that is sometimes referred to as the fifth caste but technically has no caste standing at all. Traditionally, this population is referred to as untouchables or out-castes. Today they are better known as Dalits, Scheduled Castes (SC's), or *Harijans*. Membership in these groups is determined by birth and, as a result, cannot be amended (Jatava, 1997).

The caste structure in India is extremely complex. In addition to the four *varnas*, there are well over 3000 diverse subcastes or *jatis* in India. Every *jatis* is an element of the four *varnas* or the Dalit non-caste. They are differentiated by region and are based on inherited occupation, religious convictions, and social proscriptions. While members of a *jatis* are able to subsist in agreement beside one another, extensive interaction on social and religious planes is firmly disallowed (Chaube, 1997).

Purity and pollution are the ideological constructs upon which the caste hierarchy has relied. The Brahmans were traditionally considered the purest human subjects, while untouchables and women of any caste were considered to be the most depraved and polluted (Jatava, 1997). The untouchable population had been severely isolated throughout Indian chronicles, and Dalit female cobblers remain idly at the lowest ebb of their rank. Class, caste, and gender create a triple oppression for the Dalit female cobbler because women fall at the bottom of the gender hierarchy, the Dalit population is the lowest position one can hold in the caste structure, and the leatherworking industry is considered the most undesirable of economic occupations. Because of these triple levels of oppression, the female Dalit cobbler endures a unique experience as one of the most oppressed populations in India.

#### Background: Origins of Untouchability and the Dalits

Untouchability was initially introduced for the purpose of segregating what Indian society perceived as two individual races. *Vedic* literature classified India into the *Aryan* race

and the *Anaryas* or *Dasyus* race. The segregation of the two was based upon specific phenotypic differences such as skin pigmentation, the shape of the lips, and the nasal bone. As time passed, skin pigmentation became the most distinctive racial dividing line and continues to remain so today.

Of the two races, the *Aryan* populations are light-skinned and traditionally formed the first three varnas of the caste system. These three original levels represented class and social distinctions within the Aryan race. For example, the highest members of society were part of the Brahman caste, the next highest were part of the Kshatriya caste, and so on. It is suggested that around 2,000 B.C., partial Aryan descendants, known as the Sudras, were also allowed entrée to the caste system in an extremely restricted sense. They were made the fourth and last caste of the Aryan community (Dahiwale, 2002). In this manner the caste system was first formed.

In opposition to the Aryan population, those labeled as *Anarya* and *Dasyus* were dark-skinned and traditionally functioned as a slave class. Because of their low status in the Indian social structure, this group of people was shifted and isolated away from the Aryan houses and living areas. As a result they were separated physically and socially from caste members. They were given the names of *Antya*, *Antyaja* and *Antyavasin*, which mean untouchable, isolated, and non-caste<sup>3</sup>. This was the initiation of untouchability in India (Rao, 2000).

Untouchability has been practiced in Hindu society for many centuries. The most notable justification for the continuation of this practice is the desire of Brahmans to maintain purity and to avoid pollution. In an effort to preserve caste structure, the ancient Code of Manu (*Manusmriti*) details thousands of rules describing acceptable social intercourse among different castes. The Code of Manu is an ethical code maintained by classical Hinduism. It teaches that the caste system is divinely ordained and the only means of transcending the caste system is through repeated incarnations (Massey, 1999). The laws include descriptions of what items can or cannot be accepted by a person from a particular caste, what one can and cannot eat, with whom one can or cannot eat, and, perhaps most importantly, who one can and cannot touch. Untouchables were so called because the mere sight of their shadows was thought to be polluting.

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<sup>3</sup> These names come from ancient times and were utilized to indicate a certain class of people. The word and prefix *Antya* indicates an untouchable.

In contemporary India, sixteen percent of the total Indian population claims the status of Dalit. The 1991 census estimates that the Dalit population in India totals approximately 138 million people (India, Ministry of Home Affairs, Registrar General and Census Commissioner, 1993). Dalits are kept socially and physically separate from caste members in a number of ways. Occupation and physical appearance often differentiates the Dalit from members of the caste system<sup>4</sup>. In addition, the Dalit population is commonly clustered together in segregated hamlets at the edge of a village. They are usually a small and assailable minority in any given region. This position of vulnerability makes resistance to exploitation and violence difficult.

The befouled status of the lower castes has encumbered the Dalit population with years of subjugation and such conduct has resulted in widespread intolerance of the untouchables. For example, the female Dalit is restricted from entering places of public worship in most Hindu villages. She is not allowed access to watering places, public charitable institutions, or many footpaths and roads. The Dalit female is restricted in terms of the use of fineries and jewelry and is not allowed admittance to hospitals, educational institutions, and public employment. They suffer from discrimination and prejudice at public places and institutions and are expected to perform low status jobs such as scavenging (Ghosh, 1995).

Dalit women live in permanent tension. They have to take water from upper-caste wells, go to the nearby fields of the upper castes for defecation, and are often beaten by upper caste women when they do not want to work for them as slaves. They live in permanent fear that they might be beaten or burnt or that something might happen to their husbands and children (Krishnan, 1993). The Dalit female has also been subjected to violent atrocities that are acts of revenge for having tried to exercise their legitimate rights as dictated by the Indian Constitution (Kshirsagar, 1994a).

The Constitution of India acknowledges the existence of bigotry and untouchability and forbids such practices. The Constitution of India's chapter on Fundamental Rights is adamant in terms of endorsing parity. Article fourteen, in particular, disputes all categories of prejudice and articles fifteen and sixteen contest the subsistence of caste discrimination. Also, article seventeen is quite specific in terms of obligating to eradicate untouchability against Dalits

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<sup>4</sup> The Brahmans are often described as light-skinned with longish noses, as opposed to the darker skinned Dalits. However, there is no proof of any anthropological distinction.

(Gaikwad, 1999).

Despite these constitutional guarantees, virtually two hundred million Dalits in India still suffer from sub-human conditions and this persists as a significant human rights matter. The Constitution of India has not been able to obstruct this practice, as Dalits continue to be deprived of the right to own land, the right to education and health care, and are constantly subjected to torture and degrading treatment (Singh, 1996).

Dalits represent not only a socio-cultural group, but often represent an economic group as well. In 1971, the census figures indicated that over half of the Dalit workforces were landless agricultural laborers, as compared to twenty-six percent of the non-Dalit workforce. According to Mohammed Shabbir (1997), Dalit women mostly work for an average wage of twenty-five to fifteen rupees per day<sup>5</sup> in fields they do not own. Higher caste women, however, work in their family's fields and supervise female field hands. Because these upper caste women's families own the land, they receive all the benefits of the crop's yield. Upper caste women do not typically have to seek out wage labor on farms. Limited access to land and land ownership continues to be a major concern for many Dalit individuals.

Research also reveals that ninety percent of the Indian population that died of starvation and diseases were Dalits (Khan, 1995). Rigid caste rules have also excluded the lower castes from education and occupational changes. As reported by Dunn (1993), in many rural areas, ninety to ninety-nine percent of Dalit females are functionally illiterate. In addition, a number of studies cited by Dunn, have revealed that Dalit women compose a large portion of the prostitution population. As indicated by these data, untouchability and poverty tend to sustain each other.

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<sup>5</sup> A day is based on an average of eight hours worked.

Despite the oppression experienced by Dalit individuals, they do not accept themselves as abject individuals. Dalits view themselves as an oppressed nationality. Dr. Ambedkar<sup>6</sup>, known as the father of the Dalit Movement, coined a slogan, “Educate, Unite, and Agitate” (Chentharassaery, 2000). This slogan represented Dr. Ambedkar’s message to the Dalits of India. He tried to communicate the need for Dalit education in order to fully understand the predicament of the so-called fifth caste. Uniting meant converging in numbers. Agitate represented the perseverance needed to fight for egalitarian status within the Indian society. Dr. Ambedkar spent his time advocating for the Dalit population and tried to inspire this population to speak out aggressively for change. As a Dalit himself, Dr. Ambedkar felt that increased access to education, in conjunction with a united front of social protest by the Dalit population, could represent a clear-cut solution towards Dalit enfranchisement.

The prolonged social struggle that burdened the Dalit population for centuries continues to filter into the day-to-day struggles of this population. Education, upward mobility, and opportunities that might be available for other levels within the social hierarchy of contemporary India are still inaccessible to this group. Today in India there are some organized groups that attempt to address the plight of the Dalit population through various programs designed specifically for this purpose. Day-to-day survival and lack of education in terms of social awareness, however, precludes participation by the majority of Dalits. Change, when it has come to the Dalit population, has come slowly.

#### Background: Toward Social Change

The first steps toward social change for Dalit populations were undertaken by the British in the 1930s and 1940s. A body of legislation referred to as Protective Discrimination was instituted by the British colonial government so that untouchables would be allowed some upward mobility within the Indian educational system and government (Ghosh, 1995). In 1955

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<sup>6</sup> Dr. Ambedkar is known as one of the primary and highly educated principals of India. His scholarly background includes years of study in a plethora of topics including economics, anthropology, politics, law and religion. He earned his B.A. at Elphinstone College in Bombay (Mumbai), India. He earned an M.A. and a Ph.D. from Columbia University in New York and he earned a D.Sc. from the University of London and entrance to the Bar from Grey's Inn, London. The majority of Dr. Ambedkar's education was endowed by fiscal provisions from the Gaikwad of Baroda. This individual was known for his monetary gifts to reformers and educators during the colonial period. As a Dalit during this era, the reservation system was not yet in existence. Having financial sponsorship was the only opportunity for this future leader to accomplish his goals and make a difference for the Dalit populace.

the discriminatory behavior exhibited by the Indian society against the untouchable caste was made a legal offense by the Indian parliament (Lynch, 2001).

Despite this legislation, the rules of the caste system were kept alive by many traditionalists. Hinduism continued to advocate the caste system and many individuals remained strict followers. Many zealots still have difficulty accepting equal treatment for all individuals and sometimes use unorthodox methods to address their convictions. It is not uncommon to hear of brute force being used against an individual who has overstepped the traditional boundaries between castes. Similar to discrimination that continued (and continues) to occur in the United States after the civil rights movement, having legislation in place that prohibits discrimination against untouchability does not always preclude ongoing oppression.

A more recent government attempt at instituting anti-discrimination legislation is the reservation system. The term reservation refers to a small percentage of specified slots reserved for oppressed populations in various government agencies and institutions of learning. The concept allows qualified individuals to enter places of higher learning and maintain government employment. Individuals become qualified for a reservation through a written test that assesses educational levels, abilities, and skills. Determinations are then made based on test outcomes. These reservations exist: (a) in the state legislatures and the union legislature or parliament, (b) in services under the states, and (c) in educational institutions. Reservations constitute the core of affirmative action for the uplifting of these groups.

The Constitution of India affords reservations in support of three groups - the Scheduled Castes (SC), the Scheduled Tribes (ST), and the Other Backward Classes (OBC). The Scheduled Castes are those individuals who retained religious affiliation with Hinduism and were previously members of the untouchable caste. In other words, this population consists of present day Dalits. The Scheduled Tribes (ST) include communities that did not accept the caste system and preferred to reside deep in the jungles, forests, and mountains of India away from the main population. The STs are also referred to as *Adivasi*, meaning aboriginals. The Other Backward Classes (OBC) include former caste members who belong to the Sudra varna and also former untouchables. The distinguishing feature of this group is that they switched from Hinduism to numerous other religions and, therefore, are no longer officially bound by caste doctrine (Jaffrelot, 2000). As is indicated in their name, this group is referred to as a class and not a caste because of their disavowal of Hinduism.

Some oppressed communities have profited from reservations when there are individuals capable of qualifying through the administered test. Other communities have found that they fail to qualify any of their members through the testing process and have watched their already meager existences continue to decline. In addition, the reservation system is in many ways discriminatory against the female gender. Programs for the rural areas are biased toward men who own land and are from Hindu caste groups. Females experience exploitation under the auspices of the state agencies. There is little or no job security for women in terms of surviving economic and social problems. Rural Dalit females seldom have access to land and other land-based schemes. Little or no education is often characteristic of the rural female. In this respect, Dalit females have little or no opportunity to gain access to the reservation status (Duncan, 1999).

#### Statement of the Problem

The complex hierarchy of Indian society has generated an oppressive social structure that treats the lowest segments of the population as sub-human. The Indian social structure is, historically, a patriarchy. While the plight of the untouchable female within this structure has been recognized, it has barely been addressed or remedied in Indian society.

Policies tailored for the lower castes and females never seem to apply to the poor, rural Dalit female cobblers who are the most disadvantaged group. A significant disadvantage for the Dalit female cobbler is the unavoidable existence of multiple oppressions: class, caste, and gender. Experiencing compound oppressions complicates one's ability to extricate oneself from his or her existing situation. There has been little or no documentation that illuminates the status, survival, and present dilemma of the Dalit female cobbler as expressed by this distinctive group.

#### Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this study is to begin to examine the status, struggle to survive, and current dilemma of female Dalit cobblers. This research traces the forces that have led to the emergence of their current status and consciousness via an in-depth, intensive case study. A by-product of this study is to heighten the awareness of policymakers, who essentially dominate the destiny of this group, so that new opportunities will unfold for the Dalits. It is hoped that educators, social scientists, and other individuals who share an interest in the plight of the Dalit will be stimulated by the information presented here and pursue future research on this unique

population.

I argue that Dalit women stand at the bottom of three dominant power structures: caste, class, and patriarchy. It is imperative to understand and address the interaction of these three structures, as they have caused Dalit women to suffer from a form of oppression that is often different from both upper-caste women and Dalit men. An integral component of this study will be to keep mindful of the extent of these relationships among the dominant power structures individually and collectively and how they may have shaped the life experience of the female Dalit cobbler.

### Research Questions

This study was predicated on three interlocking questions that attempt to ascertain the way class, caste, and gender hierarchies influence the lives of Dalit female cobblers:

1. What has the Dalit female cobbler experienced in terms of economic, personal, and social struggle?
2. How does the Dalit female cobbler manage to get through her day-to-day struggles?
3. Where does the Dalit female cobbler see herself in the future?

These questions should generate a better understanding of the experiences of Dalit female cobblers in the past, the present, and the future.

To better address these questions the dissertation has been organized as follows. Chapter Two examines academic literature related to the study of the oppression of Dalit women in India - to provide an historical and theoretical framework for presenting an inquiry on the Dalit female cobbler's experience of social struggle and development. Chapter Three presents the method employed in this study. Specifically, it discusses the design of the study, boundaries of the study, data collection, and data analysis procedures utilized. Chapter Four addresses the social, political, and economic background of my primary informant and her family. It describes the social setting of the village in which she lives, the failing leather industry in which she works, and the intricacies of her familial relationships. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a backdrop for the analysis of caste, class, and gender oppression discussed in the following chapters. Chapter Five explores in detail how the varying ways caste, class, and gender hierarchies unify to inspire my primary informant's life decisions, prospects, and day-to-day campaign to survive. The chapter explores these issues through an assessment of my informant's

daily struggles to survive, her complex relationships with various members of her family, and her place within the village and among members of her community. Chapter Six serves as a conclusion for this research. In addition, it also serves as a venue for proposing areas for future research among Dalit female cobblers in rural India. It is in no way assumed that academic interest in Dalit female cobblers has been exhausted by the information presented here. Much future research is needed on this population and it is a goal of this dissertation to help stimulate the continued study of oppressed groups in Indian society. Finally, the Postscript provides detailed scenarios concerning what may materialize for my informant in the future. Until follow-up research can be conducted, the presentation of future scenarios is useful in responding to unanswered questions generated from my research. Furthermore, a glossary has been added for the purpose of clarifying terminology unfamiliar to the reader. In view of the fact that this study has been conducted on foreign territory, it proves to be most helpful to include such explanations.

#### Significance of the Study

This study is not primarily intended for purposes of generalization, but rather to heighten awareness. This study addresses the gap of knowledge and lack of available data concerning the Dalit female cobbler and her plight. It also considers possible reasons as to why the Dalit female cobbler may resist an acknowledgement of her dilemma or the possibility that she does not recognize her status as an impasse. This study hopes to provide these women with a voice, which will impart a sense of empowerment.

#### Limitations of the Study

This study in no way claims to speak for all female Dalit cobblers. The Dalit population is not a homogeneous mass that can be easily simplified into a uniform group, but is rather a diverse and disparate collection of individual personalities and life histories. It is the goal of this study to highlight the life experiences of one of these individuals. This dissertation represents an in-depth analysis of the life experiences of a single Dalit female cobbler.

#### Summary

This chapter has integrated central information on the background of the Dalit population and has underscored the complexity of oppression faced by Dalit female cobblers, in particular.

By studying the female gender of this particular class and caste of people, this dissertation typifies three targets of oppression in Indian society: females, Dalits, and cobblers. Education, upward mobility, and opportunities that might be available for other levels within the social hierarchy of contemporary India are still inaccessible to this group.

The Dalit population, which totals sixteen percent of the entire Indian population, is characterized by extreme vulnerability as a result of years of subservience and oppression. In addition, untouchability and poverty tend to sustain each other, as it appears to permit economic exploitation and indigence. This makes resistance to exploitation and violence difficult.

Some Dalits have risen above the oppressive measures of Indian social structure to restrain opportunities for advancement. The reservation system has played an integral role in these advancements. However, the number of Dalit communities that are able to take advantage of this opportunity for advancement remains limited. Whether this system has the ability to bring equal opportunities to the majority of the oppressed population has yet to be seen.

The purpose of this study is to begin to examine the status, struggle to survive, and current dilemma of female Dalit cobblers. Dalit women stand at the bottom of three dominant power structures: caste, class, and patriarchy. It is, therefore, imperative to understand and address the interaction of these three structures, as they have caused Dalit women to suffer from a unique form of oppression.

In order to fully demonstrate this interaction, it is essential to pose research questions that will provide the required information and inventive insights. The Dalit female cobbler's experiences in terms of economic, personal, and social struggle is addressed in this research, together with her capacity to handle her routine encounters and how she views herself in the imminent future.

The participation of Dalit females in any training that might enhance their status within the Indian society is limited by a lack of opportunity for this population. The research reported in this study offers a glimpse into how these women have, nevertheless, learned to survive despite the odds against them. This study conveys what it is like to be a Dalit female cobbler.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

While the plight of the Dalits is receiving increasing attention due to a variety of factors such as social action groups within and outside of India, Dalits who have risen in social class as a result of the reservation system, etc., only a few studies – for example Sumitra (1988) – have lent voice to the Dalit women themselves. Moreover, specific research on the experience of the Dalit female cobbler in India is missing. Accordingly, the purpose of this review is to provide an historical and theoretical context into which inquiry on the Dalit female cobbler's experience of social struggle and development fits. The chapter is separated into two sections. The first section examines how scholars have defined and categorized the untouchable population, otherwise known as the Dalits, within the Indian context. This section addresses the complexity of the caste system and forms the basis for definitions and understandings of the social status of Dalit women in India. The second section discusses the conceptual frameworks used by academics to examine the process of oppression and struggle. This body of literature provides the theoretical background to analysis of the social struggles and development of Dalit female cobblers. Together these two sections address historical and contemporary research on the emergence and current state of the untouchable population, as well as the legitimacy and significance of continued analysis on oppression and struggle in India.

In addition to the purposes stated above, this review of the literature also illuminates the scarcity of research that exists concerning the particular experiences of Dalit female cobblers. Ample research on the plight of the Dalit as a socially defined population has been conducted (Das, 1995; Gnanadason, 1990; Gorhe, 1995; Lal, 1999; Singh, 2001; Trivedi, 1990, Meera, 1979; Mendleson, 1998; Sharma, 1994). Minimal research, however, exists on this discrete conglomerate of female leatherworkers (Fernando, 2001). Through the review of the literature, little or no information has been found addressing the female cobbler and her experiences regarding gender, how she views her role as a female, and if she sees her future role changing in terms of her aspirations and functions. These unanswered topics are an aperture that this study will attempt to address.

### *Defining Untouchability*

The untouchables, or Dalits, are stationed at the bottom of the hierarchal stratum of the caste system. In Hinduism the religiously based hierarchical prototype only recognizes four castes (Kirpal, 1999), with the untouchable level representing those individuals who are deemed to be impure. Historically, Dalits are referred to as the fifth caste. As a fifth caste, they are positioned below the lowest of the caste levels; they are a non-caste. It has been argued that they have been labeled as such for the purpose of isolating them from caste status (Michael, 1999).

Various authors have argued that the caste structure has several distinguishing features that separate it from other forms of social organization (Gaikwad, 1999; Rao, 2000; Singh, 1996; Ghurye, 1950). G. S. Ghurye, a social philosopher, has divided these features into six important categories: a) a segmental division of society; b) an established hierarchy; c) restriction on feeding and social intercourse; d) civil and religious disabilities and privileges of the different sections; e) lack of unrestricted choice of occupation; and f) a restriction on marriage. These six categories represent the variety of restrictions and other features that scholars have utilized to define and categorize the caste system in India.

Among these categories, it has been argued that the occupational restrictions of untouchability attribute the most to the unclean status that defines untouchable populations. Referred to as the occupational theory, this argument states that untouchables have become connected with impurity because they have historically been relegated to low status, manual occupations associated with dirt or unclean tasks (Fernando, 2001). Because of their involvement in these unhygienic occupations, the individuals engaged in the activity become seen as impure and contaminated as well.

Scholars and social activists alike have refuted this theory regarding the emergence and continued existence of untouchability in India. Among the first to address this issue was Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the father of the Dalit movement. Dr. Ambedkar disagreed with the view that such occupations were the cause of untouchability. He argued that such occupations are prevalent in all human societies, and yet, have not resulted in caste systems elsewhere in the world (Jatava, 1997). Therefore, while occupational status is an integral component in defining untouchability from a social perspective, its role as the primary catalyst for the creation of the caste system is greatly disputed.

A second theoretical framework used by academics to explain the origin and creation of the caste structure in India is otherizing or the creation of an “other” (Said, 1978). The concept of otherizing refers to the establishment of a pair of opposing counterparts or binary oppositions. In many societies, oppositions imply or are used in such a way that privileges are granted to one of the terms of the opposition, thus creating a hierarchy. This can be seen in the English language with the social opposition of white and black, where black is used as a sign of darkness, danger and evil and white is used as a sign of purity and goodness (Adams, 1965). Another example of a contested binary opposition in the English language are the terms rational and emotional, in which the rational term is usually privileged and associated with men, while emotional is inferior and associated with women (Ayer, 1946).

At the root of all social oppositions is intent to define one's self through identifying what one is not. For example, in India the Dalits are conceptually opposed to the highest level of the caste system, the Brahmans. Because of this opposition, Dalits become defined as impure and unholy, while Brahmans are considered the most pure and holy of all castes. Untouchables are placed outside of the village and are excluded from many social and religious practices, while Brahmans are situated at the center of the social and religious life of the village (Shyamal, 1997). In this way, untouchability becomes the other. It becomes what Brahmanism is not. This desire to define one's self by defining what one is not has been a powerful influence on the initiation and continuation of the caste system.

In addition to scholarly discussions of caste in India, it is important to also consider how the Indian state and the Dalits themselves have defined untouchability. By examining state definitions and programs designed to aid Dalit individuals, the changing nature of Indian attitudes toward caste are made apparent. Also, it is important to map the way Dalit populations have defined themselves in order to understand where they see themselves within India's social hierarchy.

The Government of India Act of 1935 defined Scheduled Castes for the first time. This act stated that Scheduled Castes were defined as untouchables who accepted the caste system (Gaikwad, 1999). The act of definition established by this document was the first step to opening up a dialogue on enhancing the social, economic, and political opportunities for Dalit populations. This act of definition made Dalits a unique and separate population that was worthy of individual consideration and eventual legislation.

The second piece of state legislation enacted concerning the Dalit population was in April of 1936 when the British Government issued the Government of India Order of 1936 (Austin, 1966). This legislation identified specific castes, races, and tribes as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes existing in the following provinces of India during the 1930s: Assam, Bengal, Bihar, Bombay, Central Provinces and Behar, Madras, Orissa, Punjab, and United Provinces. During this historical period, castes were referred to as depressed classes, denoting the class poverty that commonly coincided with low caste status. J. H. Hutton, the Census Commissioner of India at the time, was responsible for ranking these classes in accordance with their social and economic productivity (Aggarwal, 1991). Eventually, this system of ranking was used by the state to enact affirmative action legislation, which was then further supported by the Constitution of India.

Affirmative action legislation was undertaken for the express purpose of uplifting the backward classes of citizens to levels of equality with the rest of the country. It was argued that the backward classes were unable to compete effectively for open selection on the basis of merit (Kshirsagar, 1994b). Therefore, the government enacted to reserve a certain number of positions in places of learning and public services in favor of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes<sup>7</sup>. This body of legislation was referred to as the reservation system. Ultimately, the purpose of reservation policy was to eradicate the social, educational and economic disparities caused by purposeful societal discrimination in the past.

While the Indian state has continued to refine its definitions of untouchability and address the oppressive characteristics of the caste system, many popular social movements have also risen to simultaneously redefine and combat these issues. Historically, the *Bhakti* movement of the sixth and fourteenth centuries is the earliest known controversy over caste and gender structures in India. *Bhakti*<sup>8</sup> means to revere. It embraces devotion and an intense personal attachment to God.

According to Hindu thought and philosophy (Jatava, 1997), *Bhakti* focuses on the

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<sup>7</sup> The Scheduled Castes are those individuals who retained religious affiliation with Hinduism. The Scheduled Tribes include communities that did not accept the caste system and preferred to reside deep in the jungles, forests, and mountains of India away from the main population. The Other Backward Classes include former caste members who belong to the Sudra varna and also former untouchables who have switched from Hinduism to numerous other religions and, therefore, are no longer officially bound by caste doctrine.

<sup>8</sup> From *Bhaj* in Sanskrit.

individual's ability to reach God outside of the restrictions of the rigid caste system. The concept of Bhakti attempts to override obstacles such as language, caste of birth, religious beliefs, and racial diversity. Although Bhakti was an important religious and social movement, its influence was not successful in ending India's internal weave of religious and political conflict. Primarily this is because the movement tried to directly counteract the supremacy of the Brahman clergy. It attacked the caste system from a purely spiritual level. It distrusted and challenged the Brahman's principle means of control: purity and the authority to allot untouchability. Because the Bhakti movement was extremist and restricted to a criticism of the spiritual plane, minimal achievements for social egalitarianism resulted (Zelliot, 1992).

Recently, untouchables have attempted to redefine their social position by adopting the name Dalit in order to refute the notion of desecration and impurity. This change in name has also become the title of a new social movement in India, the Dalit movement. The word Dalit means oppressed and denotes a nuance of a coalescence that has enabled advancement toward egalitarianism (Jatava, 1997). It makes reference to an unprecedented phase in the advancement of India's untouchable population; the ability to define one's self is power (Rao, 2000).

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was the leader of the Dalit movement in the 20th century. He actively worked to establish a place for the Dalit population within the established hierarchy and forcefully spoke out against the oppressive nature of the caste system. He was also involved with the engineering of India's constitution.

Discussions on the content of India's Constitution took place at the Round Table Conference in London from 1930 to 1931. This conference included primary agents representing a variety of communities in the Indian sub-continent, including Dr. Ambedkar. They assembled to confer and form a union on the major issues that needed to be incorporated into the constitution. These issues would allow for an independent and autonomous India.

During the conference, Dr. Ambedkar wanted and demanded equal rights for all with total eradication of the carrying out of untouchability. There was fervent resistance to his demands by the prevailing caste members involved in the conference. Those opposed to his efforts, tried to dissuade him from discussing such issues until the British had left the continent. He was not amenable to this approach, as he had great insight and perceived that the presence of the British may work in his favor to the benefit of all Dalits (Omvedt, 1994).

As a result of Dr. Ambedkar's influence on the formation of the Indian Constitution, the

document ensured the end of caste discrimination in India. As a result, some reform policies emerged to speak to the issue of untouchability; the most effective of these being the reservation system. Unfortunately, no direct acts were taken to defy the existence of the caste system in general (Shabbir, 1997).

Entrenched caste bigotry, infighting among oppressed groups, and increasing debates over affirmative action legislation continue to restrict the success and limit the influence of the Dalit movement (Omvedt, 1994). The high caste communities feel discriminated against by the government policy to reserve positions for oppressed populations. In many cases a large number of high caste members compete for a few places, while members of oppressed populations do not have to compete at all because of the large number of reserved places for them compared to the candidates. Sometimes in order to fill the quota, candidates from the lower castes are accepted even though they are not suitable. Additionally, some reserved positions may remain unmanned because there were no qualified candidates from the lower castes. These debates have caused increasing tensions among the castes.

Within the population of those who qualify for access to the reservation system, there is much infighting over opportunities. For example, in the order of priority for a reserved place, candidates from the Scheduled Castes are preferred over candidates from the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Tribe members are preferred over candidates from the Other Backward Classes. This hierarchy of preference has fractured oppressed populations in India into distinct and separate groups who are forced to compete with one another for services. The segmentation of this population has greatly diminished the unity and power of a cohesive Dalit movement (Kirpal, 1999).

The Dalit movement is not the only force that has arisen in India to address the concerns of oppressed populations. A women's movement has recently been the most communicative and outspoken lobby for the Dalit plight. Women in India, especially Dalit women, have been victims of dowry, domestic violence, rape, prostitution, and custodial violence, among a vast array of social and economic proscriptions. The Uniform Civil Code debate has disputed the unfairness inflicted on women. The Directive Principles of State Policy, under Article 44 of the Constitution, affirms that it is the state's responsibility to secure a Uniform Civil Code for its residents throughout India's territories. Currently, however, Hindus, Muslims, Christians, and Sikhs abide by their own religious laws concerning matters of marriage, divorce, and inheritance.

While these and other social movements have advanced the status of many individuals, Dalits and female Dalits in particular must continue to face the hardships caused by existing power structures in Indian society (Austin, 1966). In response to these hardships, the Dalit Panthers, a high profile activist group, has exposed the oppressions of the Dalits, and continues to forge ahead in speaking to these inequalities.

### *Oppression and Struggle*

Historically, social scientists have examined oppression and social struggle in a multitude of geographic locations and from a variety of theoretical perspectives. Among those addressed below are theories on power and domination, theories on survival techniques and strategies, and theories on possible avenues toward social struggle and change. These theoretical perspectives represent the complexity of oppression and struggle in India and provide the theoretical basis for my research.

In order to better understand how oppression in a complex society works and functions, issues of power and domination need to be explored. In India the caste structure privileges the upper castes and disempowers the lower and non-caste populations. Additionally, gender and class hierarchies interface with those of caste to create manifold levels of oppression for individuals. A variety of authors have offered insights on how these power structures are formulated and maintained.

Charles Lemert's explanation of Michel Foucault's concept of hegemony describes the formulation and maintenance of power structures and domination. For Foucault, society is totally dominated by power relations. These relations work to prevent any broad changes from occurring in order to maintain the existing hegemony, or system of power (Lemert, 1999). Such a system of power makes social change difficult to achieve unless pursued from within the existing structure of power relations. Foucault's notion of power and hegemony allows certain people to define the realm of possibility for others' actions. He refers to the peripheral effects of power and how they affect individuals' understandings of their own social worlds and how things work within it. In this way, power and domination can be subtle or even unnoticed by those whom it affects. In this kind of social situation, change can only be achieved when a population is able to change the nature of the existing power structure (Foucault, 1977).

Bernard Cohn (1971), an anthropologist and social commentator, employs Foucault's

notion of hegemony to the Indian context. He argues that untouchables continue to be oppressed by upper caste groups because they have adapted to the needs and experiences of a population at the very bottom of the system. They have learned that it is not beneficial to directly challenge the existing Indian hegemony from the outside. Instead, they have learned that it is to their benefit to work within the boundaries that have been framed for them by those who have been empowered with the authority to do so. The untouchable population has learned to work within the hegemony.

Cohn's work is important because it places the untouchable population within a power structure, the Indian hegemony. He asserts, as does Foucault, that it is difficult, if not impossible, to enact change from outside of the hegemony. His work illustrates how adaptation to Indian power structures, the ability to work within them, is a logical response to domination. These ideas of adaptation and hegemony helped me to understand the reactions of my primary informant to domination and power in her daily life experiences (see Chapter 5).

Another anthropologist, Kathleen Gough (1955), has attempted to describe in detail the nature of the Indian hegemony in order to better understand how it continues to maintain itself. Gough asserts that oppression of the low castes is maintained due to political and economic variables. Her work reveals that the caste is more than a hierarchy promoted by religion. She examines how various structures of power, such as caste and class, can interact to impede on one's ability to succeed in a society. Her arguments on the Indian caste structure are class-based, as she explores the hierarchy in terms of class and politics (Michael, 1999).

Gough's research is important because she approaches the question of Dalit populations from an economic and political, as well as social, perspective. I found her work useful to my research because it fervently links social status to economic issues such as occupation and access to resources. It also emphasizes the influence of multiple power structures (political, social, economic, and religious) within the society and the impact of these structures on life choices and future expectations. In other words, it is within this type of socially conscious research addressing the social, political, and economic factors that define caste in India that my own research on Dalit female cobblers fits.

Lastly, numerous academics suggest that misplaced abjection is one cause of oppression in India, specifically for women (Jain, Jain & Bhatnagar, 1997; Ali, 1997; Kanungo, 1993). In patriarchal cultures, women have been reduced to the maternal function; that is to say, they have

been reduced to reproduction. As a result, women, maternity, and femininity are all debased along with the maternal function. This misplaced abjection is one way to account for women's oppression and degradation within patriarchal cultures (Zimmer-Tamakoshi, 1997). Gender as an analytic concept can help to illuminate much about power and domination concerning such topics as divisions of labor, kinship, politics, and other aspects of the lives that women and men live (Michael, 1999).

Gender survival strategies may differ from culture to culture, yet there are often commonalities. One such commonality is discussed by Nancy Goldberger (1997). She notes *silence* can appear as a stance of “not knowing.” However, she argues that silence is often used as a means of self-preservation for women. The utilization of silence as a means of self-preservation additionally reveals the importance of understanding the backdrops that most often promote this option. Family, community, culture, and politics are normally the conditions beneath the fear to overtly communicate, thus leading to the option of silence as a means of survival (Goldberger, 1996). Hence, literature on gender has been an important consideration in my research on Dalit female cobblers in India.

In addition to the theories discussed above, numerous anthropologists have also examined untouchability in order to better understand how oppressed individuals develop survival techniques and strategies. Joan Mencher (1983), for example, examines why there has not been more social criticism of the caste structure from the Dalit population. She argues that those at the bottom of the Indian caste system have internalized the idea that they are in need of less and therefore have less need to rationalize their inequities. She contends that this group has accepted their position within the Indian societal context and, therefore, do not recognize a need to challenge the system.

In a similar vein, Pierre Bourdieu, as discussed by Caterina Pizanais (1998) in greater detail, notes the process by which an oppressed population grows to accept their position in society. He argues that people accept their position in society because that is what they are trained to do when they become acclimated into a specific cultural habitus. A cultural habitus is attained through adaptation to specific collective groupings which include social categorizations, genders, families, peer groups, and nationalities. A person's habitus is a merging of a range of collective groupings that concurrently interrelate with the ability to sustain discrete peculiarities. The cultural knowledge acquired from involvement in these collective groupings form the

cultural habitus which in turn shapes behavior, sensing, and the experience of survival (Pizanais, 1998). Because a person is acclimated into a specific cultural habitus from birth, the rules and norms of that habitus begin to seem natural. When this naturalization of the cultural habitus occurs, it makes it difficult for individuals to challenge the system of which they are a part. The system itself is seen as something that always was and always will be and is, therefore, unchangeable.

The ideas expressed by Joan Mencher and Pierre Bourdieu on the acceptance of oppression by disadvantaged groups are integral to my understandings of the life experiences of Dalit female cobblers. I witnessed countless examples of acceptance and blind compliance to unfair forms of domination from my primary informant throughout the research process. Initially these responses seemed to indicate apathy and indifference to her current situation. However, I found that there were deeper and more complex rationales behind her acceptance of her social status. My analysis of this form of survival strategy was greatly informed by the work of these scholars.

Finally, the topic of social struggle and change has been addressed by academics and social activists alike. Among the theories useful to this research was Paolo Freire's "pedagogy of the oppressed". Pedagogy of the oppressed, which has been influenced by a myriad of philosophical currents including Existentialism<sup>9</sup>, Christian Personalism<sup>10</sup>, Marxism<sup>11</sup>, and Hegelianism<sup>12</sup>, calls for dialogue and ultimately conscientization as a way to overcome domination and oppression among and between human beings. Paolo Freire uses the term conscientization to describe a new level of awareness that exists when individuals become cognizant of the fact that they have options and can make choices about things that they had formerly seen as beyond their control (Freire, 1970). Freire believes that individuals are able to

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<sup>9</sup> A philosophy that emphasizes the uniqueness and isolation of the individual experience in a hostile or indifferent universe; regards human existence as unexplainable and stresses freedom of choice and responsibility for the consequences of one's acts.

<sup>10</sup> A philosophical movement that stresses the value of persons.

<sup>11</sup> The economic and political theory and practice originated by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels that holds that actions and human institutions are economically determined, that the class struggle is the basic agency of historical change, and that capitalism will ultimately be superseded by communism.

<sup>12</sup> An interpretive method in which the contradiction between a proposition (thesis) and its antithesis is resolved at a higher level of truth (synthesis).

challenge hegemony and overcome the naturalization of a habitus when dialogue on issues of oppression is opened and conscientization is given the opportunity to form.

In his review of the Dalit movement, Prahlad Jogdand (2000) supports the successful attempts by the movement to build conscientization and enact change, while others, such as L. G. Sibylle Gray-Rosedale (2000), insist that still more dialogue is needed. Either way, scholars who adhere to pedagogy of the oppressed see change as possible when it originates in dialogue and conscientization.

Personally, the researcher resonates with the position that dialogue and increased conscientization lead to social change. It is for this reason that the researcher has undertaken this research project. Through an increased awareness of the unique plight of female Dalit cobblers it is hoped that a wider dialogue on oppression in India will be opened and that greater conscientization among both Dalit and non-Dalit populations will be formed.

### Summary

This chapter has attempted to examine academic literature that connects to the study of the oppression of Dalit women in India. It provides the theoretical context for inquiry on the Dalit female cobbler's experience of social struggle and development.

This study frames itself around an exploration of the way caste, class, and gender coalesce to influence the lives of Dalit female cobblers. The literature presented in this chapter has illustrated that multiple levels of oppression are at work in determining the lives of this subjugated population. It is argued that recognition of the influence of multiple power structures on the lives of these people contributes to the research by providing significant categories of exploration and analysis. For instance, the influence of caste on social traditions and the way that certain occupations influence the lives of workers are two examples of the multiplicity of oppressions at work in Indian society.

In addition to examining the interconnectedness of caste, class, and gender, the literature has also helped the researcher to understand and talk about indigenous responses to subjugation. For example, Joan Mencher's and Pierre Bourdieu's discussion of the process by which an oppressed population grows to accept their position in society is extremely beneficial in understanding the cultural phenomenon of acceptance in the face of oppression. Bourdieu's notion of cultural habitus offers a way to analyze the attitude of the Dalit in terms of lack of

expectation for change in the future.

This review of the literature also illuminates the lack of research that exists concerning the lives and specific experiences of Dalit female cobblers. How the Dalit female cobbler views her role as a female and if she sees her future role changing in terms of her aspirations and functions, are the unanswered questions that are addressed in this study.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS OF RESEARCH

#### Introduction

This chapter provides detailed information on the design of the study, the bounds of the study, and the data collection and analysis process. The data collection component further details the setting, participants, and the unique focal point of this study.

The research design outlined here addresses the following questions through a qualitative case study approach:

1. What has the Dalit female cobbler experienced in terms of economic, personal, and social struggle?
2. How does the Dalit female cobbler manage to get through her day-to-day struggles?
3. Where does the Dalit female cobbler see herself in the future?

The focus of these research questions is to better understand the oppression of the female Dalit cobbler in rural India. Because of this population's unique status at the bottom of three distinct but interconnected forms of oppression, this population offers a glimpse into how oppression functions in India. It is hoped that this research will make the Dalit female of India visible, as well as promote further knowledge of what daily life is like for her.

#### Design of the Study

Qualitative inquiry, through the use of a case study, is the research method of choice for this dissertation. This method has been chosen, as it seeks to answer central questions concerning the life ways of human beings and address the link between culture and behavior. The database for this research is a descriptive characterization of the daily experiences of a Dalit female cobbler. The data for this characterization were obtained through one case study. Specifically, the researcher observed the daily life and struggles of one Dalit female cobbler within a village setting in rural India. The researcher made observations and visited this woman, her family, and her village over a two week period. In addition to the information obtained while in the field, background research<sup>13</sup> on Indian social life and culture was used as a supportive backdrop to the

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<sup>13</sup> Prior to going into the field, a literature review was executed, as well as discussions with relevant individuals having personal experience and knowledge of the imminent topic.

research. This background research was also used to substantiate the analysis of observations during field work.

Observation was a major component in the design of this study, as it was important to view the local daily life of this individual. Through observation, the researcher was able to record detailed field notes, conduct interviews based on open-ended questions, and gather site documents that might be available in the setting as data. Only through observation was the researcher able to witness social interactions between the informant and the people around her. This research approach allowed the researcher to view first hand how the informant's life was affected by class, caste, and gendered hierarchies and how those levels of oppression were displayed through her social interactions with others.

During the field research, great pains were taken not to impose personal frameworks onto the data that was recorded. Although the researcher's perspective on local life is a unique and critical part of any study, it may be quite different from the native point of view. What the researcher attempted to do was enter the research process with an emic perspective. An emic (native-oriented) approach investigates how a population thinks, categorizes the world, expresses thoughts, and interprets stimuli. In opposition to this, an etic (science-oriented) approach emphasizes the categories, interpretations, and features that the scientific observer considers important. The researcher has attempted to understand the life of a Dalit female cobbler from the emic or insider's point of view. Therefore, the researcher relied heavily on the informant's categorization of her life (i.e. areas that are of concern to her and are important to her) in order to generate topics of investigation.

That being said, the researcher has not entered the research without my own interests in particular subjects. For example, the researcher's focus on the interrelatedness of class, caste, and gender oppression is an etic (science-oriented) component to my study. However, the research is overwhelmingly emic in that the researcher did not enter the field with preconceived notions of where or how the informant's life would be affected by these social forces. The researcher allowed those spaces of oppression to materialize out of my observations and conversations with the research population. In that way, the content of the research was generated while in the field and relied on the native's point of view for formulation.

Harry Wolcott (1995), an anthropologist and an expert on ethnographic research, has recommended several helpful categories of consideration for those pursuing a qualitative

approach to research that is based on ethnographic methods. They include showing your population “courtesy and common sense,” the notion of “being there,” the fact that in the field you are “getting nose” to acquire information, and the benefit of “looking over other’s shoulders.” Wolcott has placed the utmost emphasis on the category of “getting nose,” since query is such an integral part of the observation process. He discusses some of the major types of questioning formats that a researcher might engage in: casual or conversational interviewing,<sup>14</sup> life history/life-cycle interviewing,<sup>15</sup> semi-structured interviewing (i.e., open-ended),<sup>16</sup> and structured interviewing.<sup>17</sup> He also includes formal eliciting techniques such as the survey,<sup>18</sup> household census, ethnogenealogy,<sup>19</sup> questionnaire (written or oral), projective techniques, standardized tests and various other measurement techniques.

The researcher designed this research to be minimally structured. Therefore, relying heavily on casual and conversational interviewing, as well as semi-structured interviewing. All interviewing took place within the village setting, with the majority occurring in the multipurpose room of the family under investigation. The researcher did not utilize any written interviewing techniques due to the time constraints of the research.

Because the researcher relied heavily on interviewing as a form of data collection, the researcher found Wolcott’s discussion on better or more sensitive interviewing skills useful as well. Wolcott suggests that fieldworkers should talk less and listen more, make questions short and to the point, anticipate and discuss the level of formality planned for the interview, and invite informants to help the individual become a better researcher by asking them to volunteer additional information that might not have been addressed in the interviews.

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<sup>14</sup> Casual and conversational interviewing relies on information gained through undirected conversation that occurs during everyday interactions.

<sup>15</sup> Life history interviews are intimate and personal collections of an informant’s life experiences and can be used to illustrate diversity within a given community.

<sup>16</sup> Open-ended interviews use a general outline of topics to be addressed as a guide for the interview.

<sup>17</sup> Structured interviews use a predetermined list of questions during the interview process and usually do not deviate from the list.

<sup>18</sup> Survey involves drawing a study group or sample from the larger study population, collecting impersonal data, and performing statistical analyses on these data.

<sup>19</sup> Anthropologists use genealogy to identify types of relatedness, such as kinship, descent, and marriage.

While conducting casual and semi-structured interviews, the researcher attempted to utilize all of the suggestions mentioned above. By offering a participatory approach to the informant, the researcher attempted to create a more accessible communication between myself and the interviewee. Ultimately, this resulted in a more accurate and sincere response by the primary and secondary informants.

One potential difficulty associated with the qualitative method of inquiry is that the method can be considered an interpretive endeavor taken on by the researcher. In other words, the researcher's background and identity can affect the questions asked and the data gleaned in the field. James Clifford (1996) refers to the fact that the researcher should be reflexive, therefore providing the reader with a clear picture of how the research is affected by what the researcher brings to the study. For the researcher's own part, the researcher believes the own personal interest and concern for human rights has made the researcher more open to recognizing oppression among the Dalit population of rural Indian. While being open to recognizing oppression against female Dalit cobblers on many levels (class, caste, gender), the researcher has also tried to discuss oppression from the point of view of an insider. For this reason, the dissertation addresses the coping strategies and rationalizations of oppression, as well as oppression itself. For example, one of the major themes addressed by this research is how the primary informant viewed oppression as a part of life that is unavoidable, something that cannot be changed or challenged. Despite the researcher's own beliefs in human rights and the necessity of social activism to enact change, the researcher has tried to portray oppression as it is experienced and rationalized by female Dalit cobblers. This includes coping techniques that many western readers may see as fatalistic and unprogressive. Although the researcher's western, liberal background is bound to be present within the research, the researcher has tried to keep my presence as a biased observer to a minimum. The researcher's previous fourteen trips to India proved helpful in thi acculturation process.

#### Bounds of the Study: The Setting

This study has been conducted in one location and investigated one industry engaged in by members of the indigenous population being explored. Although there are many Dalits scattered throughout the nation of India, there are particular pockets of Dalit female cobblers who exist in self-contained villages. These females, in particular, represent a diversified

illustration of ages within the leather industry. Some of these women are employed by micro-enterprises (on and off-site), some are owners of micro-enterprises, and some are part of a family system that supports the micro-enterprise.

Particular village settings have been characterized as being comprised of such a population. These villages consist of Dalit cobblers and tanners and the majority of workers are female. One of the researcher's initial contacts in India, Dr. Bosale,<sup>20</sup> had identified these communities as the most informative in terms of providing knowledge that cogently responds to the research questions set forth in chapter one. Therefore, the setting for this study was a specific village in which the dominant economic activity of the Dalit population was a cobbling industry owned by men and operated by local village women and men, all of whom are Dalits.

#### Bounds of the Study: The Research Population

The participants in this research are individuals who have been identified as Dalit cobblers, along with others who can provide information that will support this study. Although the entire village is of interest, one woman was selected for an in-depth, systematic observation and interview. The woman's family, work, tasks, and daily living were carefully observed and interviewed as required.

The criteria for selection were based on the following requirements. The family unit had to consist of a female with a husband and children and the woman had to be engaged in the cobbling industry. An observation of the family unit through one woman's perspective provided needed information for the backdrop of this study. Discussion with one designated female, as the primary informant, provided pertinent information concerning her support network, her life, and everything that affects her.

#### Ethical Considerations

Qualitative research takes place among real human beings. Before the researcher begins a proposed study, there must be a definite awareness of special ethical concerns. Making research goals clear to the members of the research community and gaining the informed consent of the

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<sup>20</sup> He is a Dalit sociologist and professor at the University of Mumbai and has had the opportunity to rise through the social ranks.

participants is mandatory to the research prior to its inception. Identifying the individuals also plays an integral role in learning whether or not they prefer to be named in the written report or given an alias. The results of the research should be offered if informants would like to read it. Most importantly, researchers must be sure that the research does not harm or exploit those among whom the research is being done.

In order to ensure that exploitation does not occur, the researcher responsibly obtained the informed consent from all affected parties. The research informants were told about the purpose, nature, and procedures of the research, as well as the potential costs and benefits of the research. Finally, the primary and secondary informants were provided with pseudonyms and the researcher has attempted to mask the identity of the particular village in which the research was conducted. These steps have allowed my informants to give their informed consent to participate in the research and have ensured that their anonymity and confidentiality remain protected.

#### Data Collection Procedures

Fieldwork is the process by which qualitative researchers collect information about a particular phenomenon and context. It is a segment of the data collection process that occurs in the community, region, society, or culture being investigated. This was my primary method of data collection. The fieldwork was conducted in a small, bounded village in rural India over a two-week period of time.

One of the major methods of data collection employed in this research was direct observation. As part of this process, the researcher often sat in the small, stifling, and dimly-lit multipurpose room along with the translator, Trupti, while the researcher's primary informant prepared meals and concurrently shared some of the innermost confidential and intimate details of her life. The process, as well, incorporated discussions with the primary informant's husband as he displayed his leatherworking expertise while diligently producing sandals. Walking throughout the village also provided powerful information that was rich in details and facts concerning days present and past. Speaking with the prevailing generation of young Dalits in the village, as well as my primary informant's children, provided wonderful insights about how they view themselves now and in the future. Finally, other contributions such as those coming from people outside the village, people in the leather industry, and numerous people within the village and city settings provided insights that cannot be found in any journal or text book. Observations

made in these settings generated the bulk of the data for this research.

In addition to observation, the interviewing process helped the researcher better understand the setting and the group under investigation. During the interviewing process, the researcher attempted to establish an effective rapport and trust with the informants by being a good listener. Displaying sincerity and interest in the interviewee by doing whatever is possible to make the other person socially at ease was a major priority. Choosing a setting where the informants could speak openly was also a major consideration. The interviews, for reasons of confidentiality, were usually conducted in a private place.

Open-ended questions were utilized in order to gain information that might retrieve knowledge beyond the initial quest. The preliminary and topical areas incorporated during these interviews included some of the following:

Convey the tone of Dalit village life: especially in terms of Dalit women.

Portray the daily routine.

Explain your work.

Describe the level of happiness experienced by the primary participant.

Discuss any noticeable changes expressed by the primary participant.

Note any changes in the village as viewed by the primary participant.

Tell us about your husband and children.

Discuss your relationship with your husband and children.

Information concerning quality time between husband and wife.

Available private space for the husband and wife.

Decision-making in the family.

Money-handling within the family.

Description of social interactions.

The above mentioned topics served as a general guideline to be used during conversation. the researcher used the individual topics above to stimulate the interview process. The process of active listening was then used to help generate many more specific questions regarding gender, class, and caste.

All interviews were audio taped with the respondent's consent. Hand written notes were also taken. It was extremely helpful to have a true report of exactly what was said and how it was said. This approach allowed m the researcher to listen to the interview over and over again,

gaining new insight each time. By taking notes, the researcher was able to speak to peculiarities that might not be revealed on a tape, i.e., substantiating understanding, nonverbal indicators, etc. Taping and transcribing in conjunction with detailed notes, created an opportunity for the researcher to scrutinize the interview at a later date.

Although it is believed that some firsthand knowledge of a language (when called for) is necessary to conducting good research, it is acceptable to use interpreters if they are available. Because the researcher did not know the dialects and intricacies of the language the informants spoke, a translator was engaged from Pune, India, who was willing to participate in this endeavor.

Ms. Trupti Patole served as the interpreter and guide and is a member of the Dalit community. She holds a B.A. in Business Administration and is presently pursuing an M.A. degree in Hotel Management. At the time of this research, Trupti was employed as an assistant manager at a major hotel in Pune. Her English skills are well-honed, as she has studied English for years and has interacted through the use of English on a daily basis at her work site. Recently, Trupti has obtained a teaching position at a local college in Pune, instructing classes in hotel management.

Besides her English translation skills, Trupti brought numerous other talents to this study. She spent some years living in a village setting similar to the rural community of the study and, as a college graduate, she has also experienced the challenges and tribulations of the reservation system. Her insights have been invaluable and her ability to create a bond with the participants of the village allowed this study to flow in directions that were inconceivable initially.

#### Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis is a process that usually takes place through the course of the venture. It is an unremitting process, as we continue to learn from each encounter. Cultivating ideas continues to occur as the research moves forward. It was important to understand how the data could best be analyzed as it was collected.

Initially becoming familiar with the information gathered was extremely helpful. The process of reading through field notes, notes on interviews, interview transcripts, site documents, and data that had been gathered contributed to the data analysis procedure. Marking data, paying attention to patterns, connections, similarities, or contrastive points contributed tremendously to

the process. It was also important to pay special attention to unusual occurrences and their purpose. Such attention clarified questions that arose later on in the research process.

A thematic approach was used to manually code the collected data. Programs such as Ethnograph<sup>21</sup> were not necessary for this particular study. Identifying the various themes generated by the data was sufficient in terms of assembling the subject matter. The coding material was based on the research questions, which included gender, class, caste oppression, daily personal issues, economic and social struggles, and how the future was viewed. More specifically each separate piece of data was separated and placed into thematic categories. These categories included the following: marriage and family structure, family economics, the role of the state, the leather industry, gender issues, abuse, caste and religion, the main village, the reservation system, education, daily routines, kinship, class economics, family profiles, friendships, and interaction between castes and non-castes. One piece of data was placed in more than one category many times because the importance of information tended to overlap. Once all the data were coded into the appropriate thematic category, each category was color coded to help in the organizational process. From this very simple data coding technique, the researcher was able to discover more detailed meanings from the data.

In analyzing the data from interviews, the researcher found discourse analysis to be a useful way of uncovering layers of meaning in what my informants said. Discourse analysis is a term used for the close inspection of a text, such as an interview. In addition, transcribing interviews opened up enormous potential for learning from respondents through paying close attention to detail. It was certainly a challenge to find ways to present interviews scientifically on paper since voice inflections, physical expressions, etc, can be difficult to represent on paper. The greatest challenge involved in employing discourse analysis was being able to effectively communicate voice inflections and physical expressions through translation. Subsequent to the interview, the researcher wrote down notes about what was learned. The researcher later found these extremely useful in the analysis of the data collected.

### *Verification Process*

Roger Sanjek (1990) recommends that there should be some method for verifying the

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<sup>21</sup> A computer software program designed to make the analysis of data collected during qualitative research easier, more efficient, and more effective.

accuracy of explanations concerning the application of theory to the actual data. Events can then effectively be connected when forming conclusions. The reviewing of transcripts by the researcher supported the verification procedure. This process was implemented daily with the translator, who was able to validate the collected information. Each evening the researcher would go through the notes of the day with the translator, and would elaborate on the events of the day through recollection. Prior to beginning this journey, the researcher had established a listing of specific questions that needed to be asked of the participants. As the researcher went through these questions with the translator, she was able to help add to this list. As the researcher embarked on the observation and began asking these questions, active listening took place and pertinent questions were added to the list. The 'active listening' process was extremely helpful in terms of building the information base.

It is essential for the researcher to have a number of ways to illustrate how conclusions of the research are reached. Triangulation is a process that combines techniques such as field notes, interviews, and site documents that usually work together to support claims. Support from those individuals situated in India who have assisted in pulling together this study,<sup>22</sup> has also been an essential contribution to the validity of this research.

### Summary

This chapter has included a discussion of the overall study design, the setting, the participants, ethical considerations, the procedures for data collection, methods for analyzing the data, and verification procedures that were implemented in this study. More specifically, this research is a qualitative inquiry using a case study approach as the medium of the study. Through direct observation and intensive interviewing, this researcher was able to depict a portrayal of the primary participant.

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<sup>22</sup> The following people provided essential information towards the successful completion of this study: Sujata Parmita, Dr. A. Bosale, Trupti Patole, Mr. Patole, Mr. and Mrs. Lal, Mr. Singh, Aamir, Rashid, village Sarpanche, and various community members who were supportive of our visit and research needs.

## CHAPTER 4

### BACKGROUND FOR OPPRESSION

#### Introduction

This chapter begins with a discussion of the researcher initial days in India and the process by which the primary informant was discovered. The difficulties encountered and the unforeseeable adjustments that needed to be made during these first days illustrate the challenges of conducting research in the field. The researcher has chosen to address them here because they impart valuable information on Indian society, as well as give insight into the way the research project was initially received by members of the Indian community with whom the researcher came into contact.

The remainder of the chapter addresses the social, political and economic background of the primary informant and her family. It describes the intricacies of her familial relationships, the social setting of the village in which she lives, and the failing leather industry in which she works. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a backdrop for the analysis of caste, class and gender oppression discussed in the following chapters.

#### *The Journey Begins*

On November 31st, 2002, my *A Italia* carrier landed in Mumbai at approximately 10:00 a.m. The eight-hour trip from Milan, Italy was exhausting and I was eager to get to my hotel. This odyssey to Maharashtra would entail much energy and I had opted to have a stopover in Milan so that I would be somewhat rested before this vast undertaking.

I chose to do my research during the beginning of December for several reasons. First, the climate would be more conducive for work as this was not the monsoon season. I would be able to move about within a dry climate. Monsoons usually occur between the months of June and August and it could turn out to be impossible to get around in the often-torrential rains.

Second, the temperature during December would not be as oppressive as in the summer months. We were focusing on villages bordering the city of Kohlapur, which was hilly and situated at a higher level than most of the surrounding territory. This would make for cooler temperatures and would allow us to move around the village and make observations in close quarters.

After settling into my hotel room, I immediately sought out Sujata Parmita to let her know that I had arrived safely in India. Sujata Parmita lives in Mumbai and is an Indian businesswoman and social activist. She is exceptional in many ways. Sujata is Dalit and has been able to rise above the stigmas attached to her Dalit heritage. She is a proud woman who understands the tribulations of being a Dalit and has fought over the years to help this population overcome their oppressed status.

I first met Sujata in 1998 while participating in a special study trip to India. The focus of the trip was a comparative analysis of adult education and continuing education in North America and India, with an emphasis on socio-economic and political issues. Due to harsh weather, I was grounded and was left behind to catch a flight back to Washington, D.C. on the following day. One afternoon I wandered through the shopping arcade of the hotel and meandered into Sujata's store. Her employee was running the shop while she ran out to take care of an errand. As I was preparing to leave the store, Sujata returned and asked if I needed any assistance. Sujata and I bonded immediately when she discovered my interest in the Dalit population and cottage industries. I have always been a student of human rights (holding Master's degrees in International Trade Law and Regulations and International Adult Education) and Sujata enlightened me further on the topic of the Dalits.

I sat for hours listening to Sujata's fervent and passionate accounts of the oppressions of her people. I was intrigued by her devotion and commitment to a rampant transition for the Dalit population. During our discussion, she alluded to the fact that the Dalit leatherworkers were a group that had been ostracized and disempowered for as long as anyone could remember and often by Dalits of other jatis. As explained earlier, Dalit leatherworkers are considered the lowest category of a non-caste formerly known as the untouchables. They are degraded both from within and outside of the Dalit population.

After leaving India in 1998, I thought pensively about my discussion with Sujata. We kept in continuous contact from that time on and I made three more trips to see her since our first meeting. Sujata is responsible for helping me recognize the need to address the plight of Dalit female leatherworkers. She has directed me and fed me pertinent information that was helpful in synthesizing the problems of this population.

Sujata was also responsible for introducing me to Dr. B. H. Bosale, Ph.D., an Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Mumbai. Dr. Bosale was central in helping me

formulate my research focus. Similar to Sujata, he was born a Dalit and had been able to elevate himself above his socially proscribed status. Dr. Bosale was particularly helpful to the formulation of my research agenda because he was from a cobbling family and provided me with first hand information regarding the population.

As time went on and my plans to collect my data were solidified, Sujata offered to make the trip to a village with me in order to provide direction and serve as a translator. She had identified a region of Maharashtra where Dalit cobblers resided. Due to circumstances, Sujata fell ill and was not able to accompany me. She rendered the services of a friend's daughter who knew the region well. Her name was Trupti Patole and she was able to take the time off to accompany me to serve as a guide and principle translator.

Despite her illness, Sujata insisted on coming to see me at the hotel on the day that I had arrived. She brought Trupti and her father, Suresh Patole, to meet me. Trupti and Mr. Patole are Dalit, very perceptive, and very well educated. Mr. Patole is a retired banker and is very much interested in advocating for the Dalits. He is an old friend of Sujata and accompanied his daughter to Mumbai to meet with me.

When Sujata, Trupti, and Mr. Patole arrived at my hotel, we discussed the overnight train arrangements that had been made for me to travel from Mumbai to Kohlapur. During my initial meeting with this group, they offered constructive suggestions concerning how we might address the sojourn. We spoke about my research questions, what we should be looking for, and how best to ascertain the information needed. It was important for Trupti and me to discuss these matters as soon as possible. After all, she was serving as my principle interpreter and also needed to make me aware of certain significant situations that I might not immediately be cognizant of during the observation. Trupti and I also discussed protocol and the fact that, as a foreigner, I would have to allow Trupti to take control of many of the situations during the early segments of my observation period. Since she had the knowledge and familiarity of the village, her leadership during this initial period of contact was crucial.

After the group discussed all the details of the research, I received the train tickets and prepared to leave the following day. It was arranged that Sujata and Mr. Patole would pick me up at the hotel and then drop Trupti and me off at the station. They also made sure that I had the supplies that would be needed for a field study: a reliable tape recorder, camera, plenty of paper, and writing utensils. I decided not to bring a computer with me, as there was a computer

available at the hotel for a minimal cost.

The train ride to Kohlapur took approximately fourteen hours. Trupti and I had a sleeper car which was quite comfortable. We brought some food for the train ride and as we ate we discussed how we would orchestrate our time. I possessed some names of possible contacts in the villages that Sujata had provided me with and we would begin making phone calls as soon as we arrived. We would have to arrange for a driver and begin laying the groundwork for this project as soon as we settled in the hotel. Trupti felt that she might initiate the telephone calls, as people might be more receptive to her, and I agreed.

The most unnerving part of these first days in India was that a village had not been located for me prior to my arrival. Since Sujata had taken ill, it was difficult for her to make arrangements. Dr. Bosale, who was also supposed to assist with locating a village, was on travel to Germany for a few months and would not be available to assist either. These unforeseeable changes in my research plans left me feeling somewhat apprehensive about the journey. However, we arrived safely in Kohlapur at 6:00 a.m. Our journey had begun.

### *In Search of a Village*

Mr. and Mrs. Lal were friends of Sujata and were to meet Trupti and me at the train when we arrived in Kohlapur. They reside in Kohlapur and Sujata called to let them know that we were coming to the area. Somehow our paths crossed and we missed them at the train station. Trupti and I caught a taxi to the hotel and later the Lals came to the hotel to greet us.

Mr. Lal was an interesting individual. He appeared to be very uncomfortable in my presence and only addressed Trupti during conversation. He had some problems making eye contact with me. His English was very limited and he spoke predominantly in Marati. He and his wife told Sujata that they would assist us with locating a village. However, Mr. Lal was insistent on also showing us the leather industry within the city. I explained that I would be interested in seeing the industry as it exists within the city; however, my research interests lay primarily within the rural Dalit community. After multiple explanations, Mr. Lal continued to ask what our interests were in the rural Dalit community. We explained the focus of the research to Mr. Lal again, yet he remained quite resistant and said that we would benefit greatly from looking at the sandal manufacturers of the city instead of the rural villages.

I was a bit taken back by Mr. Lal's insistence on changing my research focus. His

manipulative manner concerned me. I telephoned Sujata to let her know our predicament. She explained that Mr. Lal was a retired military man from the Brahman caste. Sujata's familiarity with Mr. and Mrs. Lal was initially a result of an interaction with Mrs. Lal, a congenial individual with a mild manner. As Sujata was at first unfamiliar with Mr. Lal's personality and military background, she did not anticipate such an extreme response. She recommended that we not have any dealings with him if he was trying to sway us. I decided that beyond this first day we would proceed on our own in identifying a village and family.

While I considered our options in identifying a village to observe, Trupti accompanied Mr. Lal to take a look at the leather industry in the city. I advised her that while touring the city she should also speak with people and try to locate a village suitable to the research. I was determined to use the side trip as an opportunity to possibly make some connections, as Trupti might run across someone who was familiar with the surrounding area and would be able to suggest a suitable village.

While in the city, Trupti observed the city leatherworkers. There were many families working in the leather industry. Most of these families had little or no education. While the majority of the adults had not gone beyond the sixth or seventh educational level, they understood the importance of an education and seemed prepared to see their children through the complete process.

An interesting aspect of life in the city was the fact that if these families did not live in the city, it would be extremely unlikely that they would be able to afford to keep their children in school. This was one advantage to city life. In the city individuals can make a little more money and do not have to pay the taxes required for living in the village. They also do not have to pay the cost of commuting to the city each day.

In general, life in the city tended to be a little more economically rich than in rural settings. For example, homes in the city tended to have more conveniences than those of the village. Trupti observed a television, telephone, and some conveniences in a large portion of the homes she viewed. Electricity was more accessible in the city as well. In the village this was not necessarily the case.

The morning after Trupti's visit to the city, she and I were scheduled to meet with a man who had been recommended to us by Mr. Lal. We decided to keep the appointment since we still did not have any leads concerning villages. Trupti had not had any luck with her queries the

previous day and Mr. Lal's friend supposedly knew the villages and would accompany us that day in order to help us identify a village and locate a family. Unfortunately, the man never showed up. We tried calling him but we were not able to make contact.

Although this situation did not materialize, the Lals were very accommodating in that they were able to recommend a driver for our daily excursions. We were pleased to hear that we could hire this driver for eight hours at \$12.00 per day. The Lals told us that the driver spoke English. His English, however, was very minimal. He was a wonderful driver and Trupti was able to communicate with him when his English failed. He was extremely informative as he had lived in the area for his entire life.

Our driver's name was Aamir. He was twenty-four years of age and of Muslim decent. He had attended the university for one semester; nonetheless, he dropped out before the onset of the second semester. He decided that he was not cut out for school and opted to go into the travel business. He came from an educated family and his father was the principal of a local elementary school. Although the family was unhappy with his decision to terminate his studies, they were receptive to the additional income. Aamir was not married, but he was presently looking for a wife. He was very adamant about the fact that he is interested in a love-marriage, as opposed to an arranged marriage.

Aamir arrived to pick us up at 8:00 a.m. Since the gentleman we were to meet never showed up, we asked Aamir if he knew of anyone who could help us find a village. He stated that he had a friend who worked in pharmaceutical sales and knew the villages well. He called his friend, who said that he would be willing to take us to a village that day. We went by his place and picked him up. His name was Rashid and he was also of Muslim descent. Rashid was a pharmaceutical salesman. He sold to physicians and hospitals and was working on his MBA. He was pursuing this degree through an online university program. This seems to be a very popular way of completing educational programs in India, if one has access to the needed technology.

Rashid suggested visiting a village that was approximately thirty kilometers outside of the city. The village was called Karvir. Aamir and Rashid took pleasure in trying to make our trip interesting. We took the long route, which took us past many institutions of higher learning. Rashid told us that one of the colleges, of which he was an alumnus, had an extensive and well-known human rights department. He offered to take us to see the college before our departure

from Kolhapur. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, we were unable to take advantage of this offer.

As we left the city limits, we passed many educational institutions. We observed a myriad of students attending classes and I was surprised and impressed with the number of colleges in the area. As we proceeded, the landscape became very serene, hilly, and dry with sparse green patches of land. The area surrounding the village was somewhat isolated with a commercial area not too far off.

Along our journey to the village we passed some women at a stream who were washing clothes in the traditional way of beating the clothing against the rocks. They had their brightly colored saris lying out to dry. The wash area looked like a canvas filled with brightly colored medium. Many women along the way were also carrying what appeared to be cumbersome bundles in the traditional way atop their heads.

As we approached the village we passed the main water source, a well which was approximately one kilometer from the main village. Rashid explained to us that, at one time, Dalits were not allowed to draw water from this well. The Dalits have now been allowed to use the well for the past fourteen years. Because it is now possible for Dalits and other castes to use the well at the same time, one can see that some progress has been made.

We drove up to the village and Rashid began to ask people about some possible families. We were introduced to the former *Sarpanche*, director of the village, who escorted us throughout the village. He was very gracious and was also very pleased and interested in what we were doing. The village was ideal for research. We observed many families as we wandered throughout the village.

Rashid explained our requests to the former Sarpanche. We were escorted to a few prospective homes. The former Sarpanche was made aware of the profile that we were seeking: a typical family that lived modestly and would also be typical of the majority of Dalit leatherworkers in India. The desired profile consisted of a husband and wife with at least two children who would be willing to let us into their home to observe their daily lives and assist us in understanding their culture and traditions. I was chiefly set on a home that had a young daughter because of my interest in the female role in this society. I was curious to see how a daughter would be treated as opposed to a son. Religion was not a factor in my search for a family. Many of the Dalit population have denied the Hindu religion due to the fact that

Hinduism advocates the caste system. Regardless of this formal denial of the religion, most individuals of this population continue to be identified as such and adhere to the given standards.

As we drove through the village, we noticed that the homes were made of an assortment of items: bricks, mud, straw, branches, and donkey dung floors which dry to form an extremely hard surface. Donkey dung is often spread on the ground in front of the home for it prevents the land surface from becoming muddy during the monsoons. Some of the homes were connected to each other and some had small sections of ground between them.

All of the Dalit homes were located on the periphery of the village in clusters of five or six. This physical separation was due to the unwritten law that Dalits are not allowed to live within the village walls. There is nothing material to stop a Dalit family from moving into the village, yet they would most probably be ostracized and shunned for making such a bold move. Such a situation has never occurred in this village.

The first home we were taken to was located within a cluster of five Dalit huts. It was an extremely small hut. A wife and husband were present. They worked within the home, but there was no space for us to sit and observe. The couple, who were only in their forties, looked well beyond their years. They had only one son living at home. He was sixteen years of age and attended school for the majority of the day. Their other children were grown and living out of the home. Needless to say, this family did not meet my desired profile.

The second family we were taken to lived only a few huts down from the first. They lived on a corner and had a larger and more accommodating space. This family actually had more conveniences than most other Dalit leatherworkers, such as electricity, a bed, television, radio, and a CD player. These items are a very rare anomaly amongst this group. Again, I was looking for the basic, indigent, striving family.

The third family we visited suited my research requirements for the family profile. The family consisted of a wife, husband, daughter, and son. The husband worked predominantly within the home environment and sometimes worked on a nearby farm when the leather industry reached a slump. The wife and husband produced handmade leather sandals on the premises of their home. When they completed twelve pair of sandals, the husband went to the city to sell them to the wholesaler. The wife was not in the home on the day we arranged for the observation. She was working a second job at a nearby farm.

As we drew near to the home that would ultimately be my research site, we drove down

an unpaved road that was on the periphery of the village. The former Sarpanche was driving with us and directed us to the residence. It was very dusty and there was little foliage surrounding this area. As we disembarked from the jeep, the former Sarpanche led us down a dirt pathway. There were homes along the way that looked as though they could be easily swept away by a heavy rainstorm. These homes provided the most minimal shelter from the elements. There were a few small stores along the road and many animals, such as the usual cow, chickens, goats, dogs, cats, etc., were wandering throughout the various properties. There were many puddles of water leading to our destination. These puddles resulted from a water tap that was connected to the well and was located at the beginning of the path.

The home we visited was the last structure in the cluster of homes. The dirt pathway was hard and uneven and one had to look as they walked for fear of falling over something. There were also many bricks piled up in front of the home. These bricks were left over from building the home and were kept there in case more building or mending needed to take place.

The home was very small and consisted of two rooms. The first room was the work area where all of the sandals were made. It was approximately twelve feet by twelve feet in dimension. A roof made of twigs, straw, and mud covered the house. There were three walls surrounding the room. The fourth wall, which served as the entrance to the home, was only a half-wall so that one could see who was approaching the home from the work area. The floors of this home were made of donkey dung which was practical in the sense that it dried to an extremely hard surface.

The inner room of the house was an all-purpose room. It was the actual living area. It served as a kitchen, eating-place, social area, and sleep area. Everyone ate and slept together in the same space. There was no furniture in the room, only mats to be placed on the floor for sitting, eating, and sleeping. Although the family had no furniture in this room, they did have one white plastic chair. This chair was offered to me whenever we visited. It was made apparent to me by Trupti that Indians believe westerners are not able to sit on the floor and cross their legs, a definite misconception.

The multipurpose area of the home was approximately nine feet by nine feet in dimension. It was considerably smaller than the work area. There was only one window in this room and it was usually covered. The room was extremely dark and some external light was usually required in order to see. There was no electricity in this home. One light bulb in the

kitchen was wired from a neighbor's home. The light bulb was not always available to the family. It was brought in on occasion and was attached to an extension cord. The usual means of light was through the use of one kerosene lamp. There was almost an amber aura that filled the room when the kerosene lamp was lit. The smoke from the cooking fire created a haze as it reflected the amber glow. It made the room mesmerizing and chilling at the same time. Sometimes the fumes of the fire had a choking effect and our eyes began to tear from these fumes. This reaction would require a brief respite of fresh air out in the work area in order to regain one's breath.

Although everything seemed to have its place in the multipurpose room, there were items piled up against the walls because there were no closets. The only noticeable shelves were occupied by some of the pots and pans, although there were also many pots and pans (and food stuff) stacked on the floor. This was a bit unsettling because we could see mice as they made their way through the maze of items.

There were no bathroom facilities in the home we visited. Instead there was a small shack in the back of the home where the females could change their clothes. However, if one must relieve him/herself then they had to walk across the road to a field. This appeared to be the village way.

As illustrated above, the third family fit the family profile for my research perfectly. They had very little economic conveniences. They had a daughter and a son. The husband and wife were leatherworkers who worked in the home and had a large enough space that made observation of their daily activities possible. I had found my family.

#### *Family Profile: Sana*

Sana is the matriarch of the family I chose to observe. She is a thirty-five year old wife and mother of two. She is approximately four feet, eight inches tall. She is of a dark complexion that is common for the Dalit population. Sana always dresses in a sari that displays her feminine shape and finesse. She carries herself in a proud and noble manner.

Sana is a hard worker and her work is demanding and requires skill. And yet, she has a way of making her work look simple. She seems to be adept at everything she does, from leatherwork to carrying bundles of straw on her head for miles. Life has not been easy for her, yet her smile lights up a room. She has an excellent sense of humor and seems to have an insight

that makes her old before her years.

Sana is exceptionally clean. She is continuously washing out pots after their use. One must, in this environment. The family owns seven chickens. Sana keeps the chickens in the house at night because she is afraid that the stray cats will eat them. She seems to have a bond with the chickens. She is quite committed to feeding them in a timely manner. I often teased her about having nine children instead of two. She responded by smiling in a very endearing way. She wants to increase the number of chickens so that she can sell eggs at the fair. She sells the large eggs for one hundred rupees per dozen and the small eggs for fifty rupees per dozen. Sana is really quite resourceful and industrious and is always thinking of ways to increase the family's income.

Sana is one of four daughters. Two are married and one has been studying. The sister who was able to go to school has received a BA degree in commerce and is presently working for the Exam Board as a clerk. She was able to get a degree as a result of the reservation system legislated for Dalits. We asked Sana how she felt about her sister having a degree when she was not able to go past her fourth level. She expressed that she felt badly about her limited education but explained that, "this is my life and I have to accept it."

Sana further explained that her sister was allowed to attend school because she insisted to her parents that she wanted to go. She was very much interested in completing her studies. The area that Sana and her sisters were brought up in was comparatively developed and there was much support within the surrounding environment that made it easier to send the younger children to school. At this time the leather industry was not as questionable an endeavor as it is today. You could still support a family through working as a cobbler. In fact, many of Sana's sister's friends also attended the university. So the village where she grew up had a good support system during the period when Sana's sister was attending school.

Sana's generation, however, did not attend school. Sana was an older sibling and was not able to go beyond the structural boundaries that were in place during that time. It was not until later, when Sana's sister was the age to attend school, when many people from the village began to seek out education. Had Sana been a younger sister, it is possible that she would have been able to attend university as well.

In addition to three sisters, Sana has one brother as a result of her father's second marriage. Her father presently has two wives. Her brother is a fisherman and farmer. He helps

his father with the family fishing business and hopes to own his own shop one day. Sana's son Aadi, who is living with her father while he attends electronics school, helps her brother with the fish business. Her brother decided to go into fishing with his father, as he realized that cobbling would not support his family. There is a nearby lake where many of the fish are caught. The fish are sold at sixty to eighty rupees per kilogram. This amounts to approximately 1.25 U.S.Dollar to 1.75 U.S.Dollar per fish.

*Family Profile: Bibek*

Bibek is Sana's husband. He is forty years of age. He is slight in build, wears a thin mustache, and dons a Nehru-style white cotton hat known as a *Ghandi Topi*. The hat is named after Ghandi because he invented and wore it. Topi is a Marati word that means hat. Bibek normally wears a short-sleeved cotton shirt with knee-length khaki shorts. He is missing several teeth at the front of his mouth. He is slightly taller than Sana, maybe five feet in height, and has a slight potbelly that probably results from middle age. He has dark, thinning hair with whispers of gray running through it. He is extremely quiet and wears an occasional smile. He is a difficult person to read. For the most part, he is expressionless. When he works, he seems to be completely focused and on-task. He appears to persevere tirelessly and sits for hours in a lotus position on the floor until it is time to break for lunch, dinner, or an occasional trip to the lieu in the field.

Bibek begins his daily routine of sandal making at about 7:00 a.m. each day. These days, when Sana decides to work on the farm, Bibek will work alone until she returns in the evening. Occasionally he will ask Savita, his daughter, for some minimal assistance. His leather making responsibilities are long and tedious: soaking the leather, banging out the leather to make it even and flat, taking measurements, sharpening the instruments, etc.

While working, Bibek chews *pan* on a regular basis. Pan is a leaf that produces a thick red syrupy material, blood-like in appearance, which is expectorated often. Both men and women partake. It can probably be referred to as the eastern version of chewing gum. Bibek will occasionally get up from his workplace on the floor to expectorate the residue from the pan over the side of the house.

### *Family Profile: Savita*

Savita is Sana's youngest child and only daughter. She is fifteen years of age. She is a lovely young lady who could easily pass for eighteen. Savita dresses in brightly colored traditional clothing worn by the village girls. The clothing is called *Parkar Jhampar* and it consists of a long tunic-like top with pants. Jhampar refers to the top and parkar refers to the pants. This is something that she can wear while she is unmarried. I also observed Savita wearing a long dress from time to time.

Savita does not appear to take much joy or find much motivation in the work that she does. She completes the chores that are required of her but with little initiative and ambition. When her friends are present her fifteen-year-old personality manifests. She is extremely shy and is very much like her mother in that she has a smile that lights up the room.

Savita has been taken out of school this year. She only reached the seventh standard. She was taken out of school because her parents are preparing her for marriage and are in the process of seeking out the right match for her. They cannot afford to keep her in the home and finding an appropriate marriage partner will alleviate this financial stress. Currently, Savita has greater responsibilities at home now that she is not in school. Since Sana works at the farm, cobbles, and cooks the major meals of the day, Savita takes care of the wash, cleaning the house, and most of the minimal chores that need to be completed during the course of the day while Sana is away.

Savita seems a bit bored with her new responsibilities. She has expressed the fact that she would prefer to be in school with the rest of her friends. Within a short period of time, however, these other girls will probably be removed from school in order to begin their preparation for marriage as well. There is one other local girl who is presently in the same position as Savita. They do some of their chores together, such as drawing water from the well, washing clothes, etc. This is the only company Savita keeps until her friends from school stop by to see her.

Savita's school friends stop over to see her every day after class. Savita, who appeared gloomy and bored during most of the time that I observed her, seemed to transform (almost a metamorphosis) when her friends came by. She became jovial, not at all reticent, and extremely talkative. It was as though a void in her life had been filled.

In the midst of all this change within her life, she seemed to be cognizant of the fact that her life will never be the same as it once was. This time next year she will probably be married

and with child. Although she is physically mature for her age, it is worrisome when considering her ability to give birth at age fifteen. Her mature exterior gives the impression that she might be able to physically handle a birth, yet emotionally she is only fifteen.

Savita shared the fact with me that she enjoys sewing and is hoping that she can take a sewing class that is run by the government at a nearby village. After she completes the course, she stated that they would supply her with a sewing machine so that she could begin to work at home. Later we found out that this was not true and she would have to purchase her own machine. We also found out that the materials needed for class would be an additional cost. This was disillusioning for Savita, however, her parents said that they still would be willing to try to send her. Through this class, she would obtain a skill that would allow her to contribute to her parent's home, as well as the home of her husband when she gets married.

Although Savita's primary interest is in sewing, she will help her father with the making of sandals if she is told to do so. Savita showed us some of her leather work that consisted of stitch work and some crocheting. Savita is very talented and she was extremely proud of her skills. In the afternoon Savita often had free time and would go to a friend's house to watch movies on a video player. She told us that her favorite singer/actress is Pretty Zinta. This is a common choice for a typical Indian teenager. She showed us pictures of Pretty that she has pasted on the wall and was extremely proud of these.

When first questioned, Sana stated that her daughter would not be married until age eighteen. Two days after we originally inquired about the marriage issue, however, we questioned her outside of the home and she stated that they were looking to have Savita married by next year. We eventually found out that her parents actually began looking for a husband for Savita when she was thirteen years of age. They had found a boy for her but it eventually did not work out. The boy had no assets and was of poorer quality (less money) than her family. Economics is always at the core of finding the right mate.

#### *Family Profile: Aadi*

Aadi is Sana's eldest child and only son. He presently lives out of the home, is eighteen years of age, and is extremely good looking. He is taller than the rest of his family, about five feet, eight inches. He is very shy but extremely responsive and likeable. His parents allowed him to complete all of his levels in school and have sent him on to a two-year program in electronics.

The program is located near his grandfather's home, so the family arranged for him to live with his grandparents until completion of the program. He has a bicycle to get back and forth from his grandparents home to school.

Aadi has a desperate will to obtain a job in a company so that he can help financially in the home. Aadi is not very happy living with his grandparents and he misses his parents and sister. He understands that he has to be there for his studies. This also saves his parents money, as they do not have to support him. They are burdened by Aadi, however, because they struggle to take care of his tuition.

Aadi will complete his course shortly and will attempt to obtain a job at the Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC). If he is able to secure a position, he will get paid at the end of each month and will work on a contractual basis. He explained that he would work on a provisional basis for six months. If he is adept at his job, then he will secure a permanent position. He has had one month of training at MIDC through an internship program, so he thinks that this will be helpful in obtaining a job.

Aadi is not interested in the leather business and his parents have discouraged him from going into their line of work. They want him to have a skill. He is seeking a job in a private company so that he can make enough money to help support his parents. If he cannot find work in his specialization, then he stated that he would not mind working on the farm. Aadi's parents, however, will see to it that he is persistent in terms of finding work in electronics. They consider this to be an investment in their future as well because Aadi will be able to help them out financially. Both parents expressed the fact that they wanted Aadi to work in his specialization.

#### *The Role of the State: Maharashtra*

The village in which Sana, Bibek, Savita and Aadi live was located in the Maharashtra state of India. Maharashtra is located in the north center of Peninsular India. The name itself first appeared in the seventh century and may have originated from *rathi*, meaning "Chariot driver." This name probably referred to the builders and drivers of chariots who formed Maharathis or "a fighting force" (Ghosh, 1999).

Maharashtra is the third largest state in India and Marathi is its state language. In population it ranks third after Uttar Pradesh and Bihar with eighty million people. It is also the most industrially and commercially developed state and home to Mumbai, which is India's

version of Hollywood (Bhoite, 1977). Hundreds of films are produced in Mumbai every year.

Maharashtra has also been said to be the New York City of India. The capital of the state is Mumbai (formerly Bombay) and is the commercial capital of India. Mumbai contributes ten percent of factory employment in India, thirty-three percent of income tax, sixty percent of customs duty, and forty percent of foreign trade (Guru, 1992). Mumbai also is the biggest harbor in India. Although the most industrialized state in India, still seventy percent of the people in Maharashtra depend on agriculture. The main crops are wheat, *bajra*<sup>23</sup>, *pulses*<sup>24</sup>, cotton, sugarcane, onions, and various fruits (Ghosh, 1999).

Maharashtra has a long history. In the great epic *Mahabharata*, the Vidarbha, which is a region of the state, was mentioned many times. During the Maurya empire (circa 200 B.C.), the entire state was under their rule. Until the thirteenth century A.D., the state was ruled by many Hindu dynasties. After that it fell to the rule of the Muslim sultans. During the seventeenth century the Marathas themselves recaptured power under the Great Shivaji. After Shivaji, the Peshwas ruled the vast kingdom. But they were defeated in 1761 at Panipat by an Afghan ruler. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the state came under the control of the British. At present, a regional party known as *Shiva Sena*<sup>25</sup> is ruling Maharashtra along with the *Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)*<sup>26</sup>. The Chief Minister is Manohar Joshi. The Governor is Dr. P. C. Alexander.

#### *The Role of the State: Kolhapur*

The major city associated with the region of our village is Kolhapur. Kolhapur is situated along the banks of the Panchaganga River, which is east of the Sahyadri mountain range. It forms a part of the southwestern Maharashtra. Rivers come in from all directions and surround this city. Kolhapur is known as "The Varanasi of The South" (Ghosh, 1995). Varanasi is located in northern India and is settled on the banks of the Ganges River.

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<sup>23</sup> A millet that can be grown in sandy soils, under rain fed conditions.

<sup>24</sup> Peas, beans and lentils are collectively known as pulses. There are many varieties with a host of different flavors and textures. Pulses work well in soups and stews and are an important source of protein and iron for vegetarians.

<sup>25</sup> A right-wing political party of present day India.

<sup>26</sup> A political party of present day India. This party is unique among India's political parties in that neither it nor its political predecessors were ever associated with the Congress. It grew out of an alternative nationalist organization - the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).

Kolhapur was the capital of the former Princely State, the Kolhapur branch of the Chatrapatis, and seat of the British residency for the Deccan States. It is known for ancient artifacts and Roman coins that were discovered there. It was also an early center of Buddhism. In 1945, archaeological excavations near a hill in Kolhapur revealed the ruins of an ancient town dating back to the Roman civilization (Omvedt, 1990).

The history of Kolhapur can be roughly divided into three periods: the Hindu period up to 1300 A.D., the Muslim period from 1300 A.D. to 1700 A.D., and the Maratha period from 1700 A.D. onwards. The city is believed to have flourished in art and trade during the regime of the Satwahan dynasty. Unfortunately, the city was devastated due to earthquakes later in the eighth century A.D. The Rashtrakuts and Shilahars, who re-established the city, did much of the subsequent restoration.

#### *The Role of the State: Karvir Village*

According to village legend, seven hundred years ago a priest named Talat sat under a particular shade tree where he would meditate. He owned twenty cows that would graze while he meditated. During this time, a man by the name of Sarkor was looking after the villages of this area. Sarkor's *maharaja*<sup>27</sup> came to the area to hunt. He observed the twenty cows and the priest and had many questions about this strange sight. What perplexed Sarkor's *maharaja* the most was that there was no water to be found in the area and yet the priest retrieved water from some location to sustain his cows. The priest would not reveal the location of the water, so the *maharaja* told one of his people to follow the priest everywhere he went in order to find out this secret.

This servant for the *maharaja* learned that there was a waterfall down the hill and it was discovered that there was a well that the priest brought his cows to on a daily basis. The servant informed the *maharajah* of this finding. As a result, the *maharaja* sent a collector to survey the area. After some duration, the collector brought six to seven families to the area for settlement.

It is also told in village legend that the initial six to seven families to settle the area were of different castes. Slowly, they developed this village. Over the years, the village grew.

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<sup>27</sup> A king or prince in India ranking above a rajah, especially the sovereign of one of the former native states. Used as a title for such a king or prince.

Eventually it prospered into the village it is today. Today the village consists of approximately 1,900 residents. The major crops of this village are peanuts, sugar cane, corn, and *jawar*<sup>28</sup>. The village has basically been a self-sustaining community, with minimal need to go elsewhere for products and services.

The Village Development Officer, who oversees four villages, was present during our time at the village. He was kind enough to provide us with a history and political structure of the village. He began our orientation with the fact that the term Sarpanche was the title for the leader/administrator of the village. The Sarpanche of our village was currently a female Dalit. This position was rare for a woman to hold and even rarer for a Dalit. This was strictly a political appointment. She was designated Sarpanche through legislation requiring a female Dalit to take on the responsibility. This affirmative action based regulation came to be as a result of government legislation regarding the reservation system.

As we became more familiar with village politics it became obvious that the current Sarpanche was a Sarpanche only in name. She made no decisions and barely commented on anything. In actuality, her husband headed the community. He had a very good job in the dairy industry and they had a very large home with many rooms. The Sarpanche's name was Ina. Her only responsibility was signing her name to documents. Her husband handled all of the village business for her and accompanied us on our tour of the village.

During our tour we went to see the various attractions of the village, such as the Hindu Temple, carpet makers, food shops, barber, and the many other services that help to sustain this community. There is no dentist in the village; therefore, one must go to the city for this service. There is, however, a doctor of the village. There is also an herbalist in the village that dispenses remedies to those more inclined to use spiritual and natural based healing methods. The use of an herbalist instead of the doctor is based on a long traditional belief that links spiritualism with healing, an idea which is many times at odds with western ideas of medical practice. The herbalist is also known as a sorceress/magician. The Dalits are skeptical of western doctors and usually cannot afford to visit the physician. In India the use of herbalists is quite prevalent among many Indians living in the rural communities.

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<sup>28</sup> An organic crop similar to soy.

The area in which the Dalits live is called *Mahar Wada*. This area is always located on the periphery of the main village. Although the village fancies itself as a casteless village, an unwritten distinction does exist. An obvious example of this distinction is reflected in the fact that Dalits do not live within the bounds of the main village. They are allowed to enter for a service but are expected to leave when their business is finished. The village consists of many different sub-castes or jatis including *Mahar* (Dalit), *Mang* (Dalit), *Chambhar* (Dalit), *Changhar* (transient), *Nhavi* (barbers), *Maratha*, and Brahman. The differentiating factor between these different jatis is caste status and/or occupation.

#### *The Role of the State: Structure of the Gram panchayat*

The political structure of the village is as follows: state, district, *taluka*<sup>29</sup>, and the village. The department that looks after the states is called the *Zilla Parishad (ZP)*. The person in charge of the Zilla Parishad is called the *Gramsevak*, also known as the Village Development Officer. This person has been sent by the government to supervise the nine members of the Gram panchayat.

Each village has a Department of the Gram panchayat, which is the official name for the village government. This department supervises the person who was elected by the people and who is a member of the Gram panchayat. This official stays in office for three years. Meetings are held once a month in order to discuss village business and issues. Those in attendance are the following: President of the Council (Sarpanche), Block Development Officer, Secretary, Building Inspector, Health Officer, Director of Water Supply, Director of Education, Director of Farming-Agriculture, the former Sarpanche (ex-officio), and a guest member (a member of the community who was invited to sit on the council for input from the village). All decision making occurs through this legislative body.

Among the duties of the Gram panchayat are full judiciary powers and privileges. If a crime occurs in the village, the Gram panchayat and the police solve it. In addition, if a crime such as theft occurs, the accused must go before the Gram panchayat and the police for punishment. If the crime is serious, such as a murder or a rape, then the case is taken to the city police. Thus far, there has been no record of serious crimes in this village.

In addition to judicial duties, the Gram panchayat serves as the legislative body of the

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<sup>29</sup> Duly elected presidents of a certain number of villages constitute the taluka panchayat.

village as well. The Gram panchayat adheres to specified rules and regulations as dictated by the Mumbai Gram panchayat Act of 1958 (Anitha, 2000). These regulations contain 27 articles, which can be referred to when questions arise concerning legislation. For example, the act of 1958 stipulated that one rupee per square foot must be paid in taxes for a mud hut. A building that is considered solid would cost three hundred rupees per month. More examples of annual tax payments as dictated by the Gram panchayat would be the following: sanitation is ten rupees annually, water taxes run ninety rupees annually, and electricity might run ten to twenty rupees annually. Housing taxes for a mud home are .25 paise to one rupee per square foot, per annum. A cement home would be .40 paise to 1.5 rupees per square foot, per annum.

The Gram panchayat receives twenty-five percent of these taxes, which is based on the size of the population. If the villagers do not pay any taxes, then all services are suspended until the debt is paid. This money is designated to help enhance the village. For example, there was a former Sarpanche present while we spoke with the Development Officer. He noted that the village had been granted sixty-five Lahks<sup>30</sup> for development of the village for 2002. This money was distributed amongst the various departments of the village for deficient areas and enhancement.

### *The Cobbling Industry*

Sandal making is an extremely tedious process. The village cobbler typically makes everything by hand. It normally takes two to three days to produce two pair of sandals.

Bibek is the embodiment of a typical village cobbler. On a neatly placed mat, Bibek sits in a lotus-type position in an organized corner of his workroom. He soaks the leather in order to soften it. This is leather he has purchased in the city. With a primitive looking iron utensil he hammers out the leather in order to make it flat, even, and flexible for cutting. He then measures the soles with a pattern made of a coarse-like paper. He measures for the base of the sandal and the heel. As he measures and traces the pattern, he begins to cut the pieces of the sole. He then scrapes the leather in order to create a smooth surface. He achieves all of this with great confidence, ease, and skill.

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<sup>30</sup> Used to describe the number of rupees in India. Lahk is used to refer to one hundred thousand rupees or greater.

The sole of the sandal is composed of two pieces of leather that perfectly match in measurement. Bibek pastes the two pieces of leather together with mud from an anthill. This type of mud is extremely adhesive and keeps the leather in place permanently. The two pieces of leather are then stitched around the periphery of the sole. Bibek next hammers the leather over the stitching in order to make sure that the stitching is secure and fixed to the leather. He then provides a final measurement and adds decorative work that Sana has made for the sandal. This decorative work varies from sandal to sandal.

After these steps are completed, a thong is made for the sandal which will be placed where the large toe will fit. It is then fixed to the sandal base. Holes are made on either side to secure the thong, which is then stitched to the base of the sandal. Bibek then makes slits on either side of the sandal to fix the belt, also known as the strap. The belts are then inserted in the holes and affixed to the sandals. Sometimes extra belts are made, if required, in order to hold the thong. At this point, Bibek will do a final touch up of the sandal and polish, if necessary.

Traditionally, men perform the more difficult labor in the leatherworking business. This requires tanning, stitching, shining, cutting, etc., and the actual making of the sandal. Bibek does not do the tanning. Most of this work is done in the city. Then the cobbler who has purchased it from the city brings the leather back to the village. Women are responsible for the decorative work on all leather items. This is so because the tanning, cutting, and stitching are considered too difficult for a woman to handle. Normally the man handles all of the business and the woman handles the management of the daily household activities. Sana, however, does assist Bibek with the *chappals* or sandals.

The men in the cobbling industry have expressed the fact that the money is very minimal in comparison with the amount of work that is required. The amount that the manufacturer in the city makes in the market is also very low. The village producers cannot afford to own their own shops because they make so little in the market and the overhead would be too expensive. They are forced to deal with wholesalers who purchase from them and sell to the retailers. These cobblers are not especially happy with their work because they get so little back in return. It costs sixty to seventy rupees to purchase raw material for one pair of sandals. They must sell it to the wholesaler for eighty to one hundred rupees, in order to make a profit that is worthwhile. On average a village cobbler will only make twenty rupees per pair and it takes approximately two to three days to make two pair. The retailer, in turn, sells the sandals for one hundred to one

hundred thirty rupees per pair.

On our first day in Kolhapur, I received a phone call from a Mr. Singh concerning my interest in leatherworking. Mr. Singh works for the Government of India. For the purposes of this dissertation, Mr. Singh's agency will be referred to as F.L.I. This agency is responsible for the production of leather goods (specifically footwear) for government agencies. Mr. Singh had received a phone call stating that we were seeking information on India's leather industry. He was most engaging, and Trupti and I arranged to meet with him the following afternoon.

Mr. Singh's office was located adjacent to several rows of shanty huts and was situated in a modest government building. Mr. Singh was most gracious as he offered us seats and refreshments. He began discussing privatization and the cobbling industry and stated that privatization has proven to be an ongoing problem for the government. For instance, F.L.I. has received no funds for six years. There have been no contracts from the government organizations for products and, therefore, F.L.I. is no longer making footwear for them. With this lack of movement within the agency, Mr. Singh is most concerned about its future. Presently, he is using his time to obtain funding so that they can resume their purpose.

Mr. Singh explained that economic problems are wide spread due to a recession and the leather industry is suffering as a result. At one time, the government agency was making all of the chappals and shoes for all of the government employees. The private agencies have their own suppliers. His agency was the official supplier for the police department of Maharashtra, but now that has stopped due to the recession.

Part of the problem with the current industry is the fact that the police and other government employees must purchase their own shoes. Workers purchasing their own boots are doing so through private firms that offer cheaper prices. Presently, the latest trend is for all of the government organizations to privatize. All of the private dealers are now obtaining these contracts. The marginal profits are now lower, as pure leather has increased in price.

According to Mr. Singh, the life of the leather industry will be short lived. He was most informative about the village cobblers, stating that there is minimal marginal profit and the raw materials are becoming more expensive. It is becoming harder and harder for the leatherworkers to stay in business. Also, the new generations are getting out of the business and are trying to work at something that is more marketable. They want to improve their standard of living. The organization in which Mr. Singh works tried to increase the payment per pair of sandals from

twenty rupees to thirty-seven rupees in order to better the economic situation under which leatherworkers produce their goods. However, they still could not attract more people to enter the field of leatherwork.

According to Mr. Singh, the leather industry has changed substantially in the last few years. For example, today there are two different types of materials found in the marketplace, pure leather and an artificial material known as Rexin. Rexin is considerably cheaper than leather, however, there is a down side to Rexin. Rexin is not as durable as leather and the lifespan of the sandal is far less. Handmade leather sandals, for example, are known to last for five years with some refurbishing along the way. The Rexin might only last for five or six months. The benefit to Rexin is that it is cheaper.

The manufacturers' percentage of leather goods is now considerably less than those produced in Rexin. By using Rexin the manufacturer can make ten pair of sandals in two days at ten rupees per pair. Sandals made of leather would take two days for two pair at thirty-seven rupees per pair. Rexin would pay one hundred rupees every two days and pure leather would pay seventy-four rupees every two days. The Rexin requires more work, but pays more in the long run. The Rexin does not require as much skill as the leather however, so many of the manufacturers are leaning toward producing artificial sandals, as well as pure leather sandals.

According to Mr. Singh, the handmade leather sandal business is spiraling downward. All of the products are becoming too costly to make with leather and machine-made, artificial materials are replacing handmade leather items. This is true for the city and the village. The plus side is that the artificial items can be mass-produced whereas the leather items take much longer to complete. Handmade leather items involve a long and time-consuming process. It is additionally time-consuming because of the decorative work that is involved. Leather sandals are made of the following types of leather: lamb, calf, and sheep. All these leathers tend to be soft and flexible whereas buffalo and cow are very strong leathers. The decorative design of these sandals is what ultimately sells the item.

I asked Mr. Singh about the wholesaler's relationship with the village cobbler. I also asked if there was a chance that we could meet with a wholesaler. He stated that this would not be possible. He went on to say that this is a very sensitive area in that the wholesalers are not registered. They are considered cottage industries and in this respect they are able to avoid paying taxes. This is why the wholesaler does not give out any information. If they are registered

they have to pay government taxes.

The manufacturers often do a very basic market analysis before mass-producing sandals. For example, one manufacturer might make different designs of sandals (samples) and then he promotes these in the market to see what the demand is for each item. He then fills orders based on these projections. If there is an excess of items, then he discounts the price so that he can still cover his raw material cost.

The retailer is always ready with capital. He purchases the sandals in bulk but must wait for customers in the city. The manufacturer's profit is always less than the retailer. The manufacturer in the city makes sandals in bulk so that his expenses are less. Alternatively, the cobbler spends more in supplies, and therefore sells his products to the middle man or occasional customer at a twenty percent increase over his total cost.

The cobbler at the village level might possibly see one customer in a month, so there is not enough capital to open a shop in the city. He has to wait for the customer in the village, as does the retailer in the city. Being in the village, he does have some flexibility in terms of bargaining with the customer.

The industry in Kolhapur suffered greatly fifteen years ago when companies were producing goods that were not as good as the samples that were used as a basis for the purchasing orders. The manufacturer had exported high-quality samples. However, the actual sandals that were exported were not of good quality. The companies are no longer exporting from Kolhapur. This was an unfortunate turn for the area and has hurt the industry tremendously, as it has never quite recovered.

The leather industry, according to Mr. Singh, needs to modernize. He sees the need to upgrade the quality of the leather in order to produce a better product. Modernization is essential in order for the leather industry to compete. The next generation of workers will be more progressive, in that they will not be interested in pursuing the leather making business. Currently, the leather industry population is thirty percent of what it was ten years ago. The diminishing status of the leather/cottage industry is rapidly becoming a reality.

It is these changes that have affected Sana's life dramatically. As will be seen in the following chapter, economics dictates many of Sana's decisions within the home and will ultimately determine the future of her family. Aadi's education, Savita's marriage, the relationship between Sana and Bibek, the family's social position within the village – all of these

are shaped by the repercussions of a failing cottage industry; an industry which can no longer support or sustain the life of a modern Indian family. For those individuals who are living on the cusp of these changes, such as Sana and Bibek, the situation is particularly precarious. These individuals find themselves locked into a dying industry with little or no chance of escape.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE EFFECTS OF CASTE, CLASS AND GENDER OPPRESSION

#### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explore in detail the varying ways caste, class, and gender hierarchies coalesce to influence Sana's life choices, expectations, and her day-to-day struggle to survive. The life of a rural Dalit female leatherworker is and has been complicated by various levels of oppression. Dalit women stand at the bottom of three dominant power structures: caste, class, and patriarchy. It is, therefore, imperative to understand and address the interaction of these three structures, as they have caused Dalit women to suffer from a form of oppression that is repeatedly different from both upper-caste women and Dalit men.

In order to explore the multiple ways that class, caste, and gender impact Sana's life, the following chapter is separated into six thematic sections entitled: Sana's Initiative, A Struggle to Survive, The Service of a Husband, A Hope for Their Son, The Marriage of a Daughter, A Tense Situation, and A Place within Society. Each of these themes emerged from data generated by observations and discussions with Sana concerning her fears. They represent topics that consume her on a daily basis: her struggle to survive, her relationship with her husband, the future of her son and daughter, and her place within her extended family and her village. I have used themes generated by Sana because they are useful in understanding her life from an emic perspective. They correspond to concerns that she, herself, acknowledges. In this way, they represent the spatial and social locations where Sana experiences caste, class and gender oppression on a daily basis.

I have utilized thematic sections for this chapter as a way of organizing the data I obtained from my personal observations of Sana's daily activities and from interviews<sup>31</sup> with Sana, her family, and members of the village. Each section is rich in ethnographic data and has been analyzed to illustrate the way in which class, caste, and gender create a multilayered experience of oppression.

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<sup>31</sup> It should be noted that all interviews were conducted through a translator and, therefore, all quotations within this chapter are Sana's words as expressed through translation.

As stated earlier, this study in no way claims to speak for all female Dalit cobblers. The Dalit population is not a homogeneous mass that can be easily simplified into a uniform group, but is rather a diverse and disparate collection of individual personalities and life histories. It is the goal of this study to highlight the life experiences of one of these individuals - Sana.

I am very fortunate to have connected with a participant such as Sana. Her willingness to partake of this study and to allow herself to develop a trust with Trupti and myself made us feel that this opportunity was as beneficial to her as it was for us. Hopefully the contents of this research will bear that out.

### *Sana's Initiative*

According to Western, as well as Indian, normative gender expectations, Sana's femininity in terms of her movements and the way she carries herself is not indicative of her inner tenacity. This seemingly less than powerful exterior masks the determined woman underneath<sup>32</sup>. Sana is the center of her family unit; the heart. Without her ingenuity and willingness to seek out new opportunities, the family may be hard pressed to function with any success.

As a petite and graceful woman, Sana stands at a possible four feet, eight inches in height. Sana's slight physique reflects a paltry ninety-eight pounds, even though she is able to manage tasks that entail enormous vigor. Sana's straight black hair trails loosely down her back and comes to a halt somewhere past her waist. Occasionally she will twist it in a fashion that allows it to stay put until she has finished her chores. On one particular day, I noticed that she had washed her hair before we arrived. She sat in the multipurpose room combing the long strands until they were smooth and twisted the hair into a comfortable configuration before it had the prospect of drying. By doing this, Sana is able to complete tasks without the burden of hair in her face and eyes. In many ways Sana's physical appearance is dictated by her lifestyle and the daily chores she must complete.

Numerous years of agony and desperation seem to have been responsible for crafting Sana's portrait. Her face is elongated in shape with a small, straight nose, high cheekbones, and an exceptionally focused expression. Sana's eyes are a deep brown; almost black. Although she

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<sup>32</sup> There is the possibility that Sana wears this pretense so as to not call attention to some of her unorthodox approaches to survival. In the end, she must remember to blend into the community so that people do not take notice of her untraditional and independent means of existence.

is only thirty-five years of age, her eyes articulate a certain omniscience, potency, and compassion. They appear chronologically older than the remainder of her appearance. Adversity and ill treatment can be seen in the lines that envelop her eyes; eyes that have seen the world as a victim of exploitation, oppression, and an unpromising outlook. When Sana smiles, which is often, her face forms a somewhat different appearance. She has beautifully straight white teeth and she lights up the room with her beam.

Sana's appearance is distinct from many women in the village in that she wears very little jewelry. Most of the women noticeably adorned themselves with various accessories that enhanced their appearances<sup>33</sup>. Sparkling gold necklaces of assorted lengths, bangles that chime pleasingly at the slightest twirl of the wrist, and earrings that sparkle and glitter from the light of day or the amber glow of a lantern are visible on the women as evening sets in the village. Sana did not wear earrings during our visit and only decorated herself with the traditional wedding necklace, a *mangalsutra*, which was presented to her by Bibek. All married woman in the village sport such a necklace. An occasional traditional tattoo and piercing amongst the women might also be seen, however, this was not amalgamated into Sana's look. Sana is an extremely conservative individual who does not utilize ornamentation to augment her womanliness.

Of all her physical attributes, it is Sana's hands that convey her story - they exhibit hard work. Unquestionably, the complexity of leatherworking and the cuts and scrapes of utilizing a machete in the fields have contributed to the coarse and parched exterior of these seasoned hands. Curiously, Sana's hands still maintain a certain grace as she prepares meals, mends clothing, and provides the decorative ornamentation for the sandals that dictate her life. Her hands progress swiftly during the complex braiding of the ornamental pattern for the sandals. She is at ease with this procedure. She produces an exceptional product as her delicate fingers swiftly stitch and braid ornaments that enhance this very basic sandal. One can see, by the constant look on Bibek's face, that he is eternally pleased with Sana's work. She manipulates these experienced hands in an exceptionally rapid manner as she plots the leather designs. While she does so, she makes this process appear effortless even though it is not.

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<sup>33</sup> This jewelry, primarily, has been passed down through the dowry custom.

Sana is quite characteristic of the traditional Dalit Indian women in her appearance. She often wears brightly colored saris of dazzling emerald green – a color which is indicative of her marriage to Bibek. Her conservative appearance creates no challenge to her Dalit status. She wears no ornaments, with the exception of her necklace, and mainly stays within the boundaries of the customary look of the typical female Dalit.

Sana is extremely shy and initially seems to keep a deliberate physical and emotional distance between herself and people she does not know. She initially kept an obvious distance from me until a certain level of comfort was accomplished. Oppression often promotes emotional distance from others (Freire, 1994). Due to her repressive situation, Sana has stated that she is frightened of candor and approachable contact with others in her life. She stated, “I do not speak to people I do not know. It takes some time for me to know them. Sometimes I trust people too much. Such people have hurt me, so now I am careful about whom I speak with.” Watching her actions, it is evident that she deliberately thwarts communication and familiarity with other people. Sana rarely appears to approach anyone who is not familiar to her. This behavior, in itself, generates a semblance of aloofness.

Alternatively, this physical and emotional barrier can be eradicated if she allows herself to establish a trusting bond. We were able to create such a connection with Sana and it was astonishing to see this metamorphosis unfold. For instance, when we first met Sana, she was extremely shy and scarcely acknowledged us. As we returned each day to make our observations, she let down her defenses and began to converse and share information. As the days moved forward our connection seemed to increase and tighter bonds began to develop. The fact that Trupti is a Dalit certainly assisted with our ability to bond with Sana. I realized that we had established a certain level of comfort with Sana when she actually began to ask me questions about my family and myself and wanted to know about my husband and children. Sana was very curious about where I lived and was surprised to hear that I owned an apartment and a car. A woman owning such items is unheard of in Sana’s world.

Sana is very intelligent, insightful, and has ample knowledge of day-to-day affairs. She is quite verbal once a level of trust has been ascertained. The inner strength that exhorts from

within Sana's slight external facade cannot be disputed. Sana is the matriarch and moral fiber of her family, given that she has separated herself from Bibek's mother, the actual matriarch<sup>34</sup>. As such, she dons many hats: mother, wife, daughter, sister, stepsister, cook, housekeeper, breadwinner, leatherworker, farmhand, matriarch, and the like. Her modesty unfurls a sense of purpose that manifests persistence.

In conversation, Sana will tell you that she is only doing what she must do in order for her family to survive. Her actions indicate that this is true. She continually functions for the good of her family and pursues whatever it takes to make sure that the essentials of life are provided to her children and husband.

Sana adheres to the needs of her family in every way possible; however, she does expect some assistance in the home. Since Savita is now at home and preparing for marriage, Sana has her prepare some meals, wash the clothes, fetch water, and perform minor duties that must be done in Sana's absence at the farm. Bibek is busy with the leather making all day and does not have time to contribute to the home. He will, intermittently, prepare a basic repast when Sana is at the farm. This usually consists of a rice dish with some vegetables and bread. Savita and Bibek are not accustomed to helping out at home, as they have always depended upon Sana for their needs. Sana basically told her family that in order for them to survive on a day-to-day basis, it would be necessary for them to uphold her efforts.

It is puzzling, yet captivating, to observe Sana in the midst of the turmoil of her existence. Her outwardly feminine facade has a fervent and unyielding approach to life that is not initially apparent to others when viewing her for the first time. As a Dalit female, she understands her role within the home, community, and the traditional Indian society. Sana is mindful of the fact that, although she lives in a village that is less restrictive than others, she still must be careful not to overstep the social boundaries dictated by her non-caste, Dalit status. Sana is fully aware of the unwritten laws that preside over her life and is more than willing to act in accordance with the prospects of the community composition and the conditions of the system.

Furthermore, as a Dalit female within the leatherworking community she has experienced

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<sup>34</sup> Traditional Indian residence patterns are based on patrilocality, the practice of residing with the husband's lineage in an extended family system. In India, the household is administered by the mother-in-law and all daughters-in-law must adhere to her domination. As will be discussed later in this chapter, Sana convinced Bibek to leave his extended family network so they could set up their own autonomous nuclear family. This was an extremely bold move, as it greatly diminished their financial stability.

the hardships of being at the lowest extremity of her economic, as well as caste, layer. Kathleen Gough (1981) underscores how caste and class, as authority configurations, unite to hinder societal advancements for female Dalits. This consideration is relevant to Sana in that she is only able to partake in specific and limited employment opportunities. As Gough indicates, the class-based hierarchies of India that are influenced by the Hindu religion impede any possibility of advancement for people like Sana. As will be seen in the following section, Sana's continued relegation to the leatherworking industry is dictated, in part, by her status as a Dalit. She is a leatherworker today because her family followed the traditional Dalit practice of maintaining an occupation from generation to generation and, unfortunately for Sana, she had passed school age before the reservation system opened up opportunities for young Dalit females in education. In this way, Sana's caste status and continuing class oppression have been mutually reinforcing. Poverty and untouchability have gone hand-in-hand.

### *A Struggle to Survive*

When Sana was asked to describe how she viewed her life she stated,

This is the way things are for my family and me.... I must do the best that I can with the little that I have. I work at the farm to bring in more money and it helps to take care of our needs. Sometimes it's not enough and I'm afraid that we won't be able to pay for the house and the taxes. We usually have enough food. Our friends and family will give us some food if we don't have enough.

Sana realizes that she has very modest material wealth and expects little more than day-to-day survival for her family. Every conversation with Sana gradually came back to one common thread - the foundation of their very existence was centered on day-to-day survival with money as a recurring theme. As Sana disclosed her innermost fears of failing her family, she shed tears saying the following,

I go to work on the farm because my family will not survive. The sandal making is a very bad business. It takes a very long time to make one pair of sandals. We make very little money. The farm helps to bring food and pay for Aadi's school. We bought a cow for milk (to use at home and sell for profit), but we had to sell the cow for money. The money was to pay for our home, but we had to use it for food. Now the government will take our home if we don't pay soon. We took Savita out of school to prepare for

marriage because we have no money to keep her. She wants to go to school to learn to sew better, but there is no money for that. I worry sometimes about what will happen, but there is nothing I can do. It must be so.

Sana has stated that her fear over the survival of her family is a major worry for her. Being from a Dalit leatherworking family, Sana truly understands the hardships of this casteless, lower class layer.

The existence of Dalit women and especially female Dalit cobblers in rural areas is full of destitution and ill fortune. They have to confront the dilemma of hunger on a daily basis. In addition, due to excessive poverty, many Dalits must collect fuel for cooking. The months of March and May are considered the slow season in agriculture and often the tribal and village family units depend more or less on forest products for their source of fuel and revenue. Sana, unlike many of her equals, merely collects fuel in the form of wood for cooking. However, she explained that,

In the early hours of every morning many groups of women go from the village to the woods. The women work by themselves and gather (non-timber) things like tendu patta, char and sal seeds, palesh, sarai, mahua/dori, harra, kusum, sisal, bamboo, chind, mango, jamun, and ber<sup>35</sup>. This is hard work because it is very hot; (pauses, and smiles) very hot temperatures. There is only a little water for them, and they get many wounds on their hands from the thorn bushes. It is good work because they [the women] can get money from the work. Also, they get fruits, oils, and medicines as pay for their work.

According to Sana, products from the forests and jungles are also raw materials that can be used for making objects for the dwelling. Such items might include *bidi*<sup>36</sup>, brooms, baskets, mats, rope, homemade toothbrushes, and leaf plates. Yields such as *char*<sup>37</sup>, *lac*<sup>38</sup>, *dataoon*<sup>39</sup>, leaf plates, and *marula*<sup>40</sup> are sold for a small cash income. This income is often used

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<sup>35</sup> Forest products/raw materials for making a number of items for the home.

<sup>36</sup> An herb used for non-tobacco cigarettes.

<sup>37</sup> Combustible residue.

<sup>38</sup> Forest product sometimes used for jewelry and other ornamental objects.

<sup>39</sup> A fruit found in the forest.

<sup>40</sup> A fruit found in the forest used predominantly for its oil and pulp.

to purchase clothing, oil or spices.

In addition to economic hardships, Dalits endure relentless social bigotry. They are viewed as existing beneath the lowest classification of the collective caste structure in India (Vincentnathan, 1996). The Dalits are dissuaded from living near or marrying those born into high-caste families, although this does infrequently transpire (Deshpande, 2001). Dalit cobblers throughout India have been suppressed by upper-caste villagers for skinning dead cows<sup>41</sup>, even though this is their principle means of support (Chakravarthy, 1993). Throughout my observations, Trupti made it very clear that these types of incidences embody the caste strain and continuing caste discrimination that is predominantly characteristic of rural life in India.

Sana has revealed that her situation, in terms of caste and class oppression, is not as critical as others. She feels secure with the fact that she has a home and a livelihood, even though the minimal income barely provides an existence. Additionally, as long as she and her family adhere to the unwritten rules of the community, there is a certain flexibility that is tolerated by the village residents. Dalits, through their experiences, become aware as to what these unspoken rules of social engagement are and learn interesting methods of negotiating these boundaries independently, as in Sana's case.

During one interview session, Sana spoke of her father's struggles to overcome the hardships associated with this casteless social level. Her father went into the fish business after many years of leather making. He currently owns a small shop near his village. He catches fish during the daylight hours and cleans and sells the fish in the evenings. For Sana's father, this was an essential move. He saw that leatherworking was a wilting business and he needed to be sure that he could sustain his family.

Sana views this as an audacious transition considering the cultural barriers. She stated, "My father is a brave man. Too many men would not do this. I hope Aadi will be brave like his grandfather." Sana truly admires her father for this dauntless approach to his continued existence and it appears that possibly Sana has inherited some of her rationale and courage from watching her father struggle to enhance his economic status.

During the field research, Sana and Bibek took us to the home of Sana's father. The home was located on the side of a main road sandwiched between a cluster of other homes and

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<sup>41</sup> The cow in India has sacred significance and therefore is highly valued in Indian society.

some businesses. People from the village immediately followed our party as we approached the home. Upon entering, we were introduced to Sana's father, mother, and another woman. I later found out that the other female was her father's second wife.

The taking of a second wife is not legal in the Hindu religion (Shanti, 1995). Nevertheless, the situation is accepted, although unspoken. Sana's father took a second wife because his first marriage had produced three girls and no sons. In India it is considered shameful to have not borne a son. Therefore, Sana's mother advised her husband that he ought to take another wife so that she might produce a male offspring, which she did. The three parents now live together with the second wife's son and Sana's son, Aadi, who is attending the nearby electronics' school.

The decision to open a fish business seems to have paid off economically for Sana's father. The family seems to have enough money to subsist. I also noticed a television set and some audio equipment. There were some chairs to sit on and a bed in the corner. I did not get past the main room, but I could see that there were several rooms in this home. All these features of the home indicate that Sana's father has been somewhat successful in escaping the confines of the leatherworking industry and heightening his class level<sup>42</sup>. When compared with Sana's and Bibek's modest home and furnishings, the poverty of leatherworking in contemporary Indian society is starkly vivid.

According to Sana, she and Bibek are effusively aware of the fact that there is no future in the leatherworking industry. As Sana spoke, Bibek shook his head in agreement,

The leatherworking is no good. There is no future in leather sandals. Soon there will be no business. Leather is too expensive to buy now. We cannot afford to move to the city.

There is more money there but we cannot move.

They have both lived the life of a cobbler and can see the business diminishing as the years advance.

In many ways, Sana's and Bibek's present economic situation has been dictated by birth. Bibek was born into a family of leatherworkers, as was Sana. Because of the Dalit practice of continuing an occupation from father to son, Bibek is only experienced in this one trade and has no other skills that would generate revenue. He comes from a poor family that had no

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<sup>42</sup> Although his class status has risen through his ability to slightly emerge above the poverty level of most Dalits, socially he will always maintain his Dalit status.

opportunity and no incentive to send him on for auxiliary education. He, like Sana, was born too early to take advantage of the opportunities offered to Dalits by the reservation system. Being a Dalit cobbler, Bibek is rather limited in terms of shifting vocations. Casteless individuals of a low socio-economic status are usually bound to the cultural vocation of their fathers and forefathers (Gupta, 1991). Subsequently, this was Bibek's destiny.

On average, Bibek can only make two pair of sandals at a time and it is difficult for him to compete with the city manufacturers who can produce in bulk. In a cottage industry such as Bibek's, he uses traditional methods to create the sandals. He does so because he cannot afford the machinery that would expedite the work. For example, he uses the upper crust of a coconut to scrub the leather. Mud can also be used if a coconut is not available. Machines cost ninety U. S. dollars (4,000 rupees) and are not reasonably priced for the majority of rural cobblers.

Ironically, Sana and her family cannot even afford to wear the leather sandals that they make for revenue. They wear sandals made of Rexin<sup>43</sup> that costs very little to purchase. Although these sandals do not hold up as well as leather, there is no option for footwear as the leather sandals are only for sale purposes.

Because of Bibek's limited economic resources, he is dependent on the wholesaler and his relationship with the retailer. Bibek sells to the wholesalers, who in turn sell to the retailers. These wholesalers are not registered with the government. They are considered cottage industries and in this respect they are able to evade paying taxes. They expect the cobbler to produce various sizes of sandals: children size one to two; ladies size three to six; gentlemen size one to twelve. These sizes are promoted in the market place and all sizes are completed in one standard design. The ladies sandals may vary in design due to the decorative aspect. When pieces do not sell out at market, they are then discounted. Bibek consistently ends up losing money when the wholesaler discounts these remaining items.

On one particular day, Bibek was making sandals for me to take back for my future presentations. He was crafting two pairs. One pair was red with intricate decoration and the other pair was of a natural color and more functional. Initially, Bibek stated that each pair would run eighty rupees. Upon completion, Bibek asked for two hundred forty rupees per pair. This amounted to three times the original estimate. We told him that we would pay him the next day,

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<sup>43</sup> Rexin is a simulated material made of plastic.

but we felt that he was taking tremendous advantage. When we questioned as to why he was charging so much, he stated that he had put extra time into the production.

I was quite taken back by Bibek's boldness. Sana eventually told us to pay whatever we wanted for the sandals. I gave Bibek one hundred eighty rupees for each pair. I think that Sana was rather embarrassed by this incident. Bibek's actions are indicative of the desperation that besieges this population. He appeared to be somewhat taken back by our response to the cost of the sandals. Nonetheless, he did not rescind the price. Sana, in her customary and tactful manner, resolved the situation in a resolute and skillful style.

A rural cobbler, such as Bibek, might not see a customer for one month. He essentially has no capital and no labor. He has to wait for customers and is able to bargain with them when they turn up, as is illustrated by the case above. Bargaining is not an option for Bibek when he sells to the wholesaler. Unfortunately, Sana and Bibek cannot afford to wait for customers and are forced to deal with the wholesaler in order to endure financially.

According to Mr. Singh, the future outlook for the leather making industry is not positive. As there is less of a need for animals<sup>44</sup>, there is not as much natural leather available for cobbling. Furthermore, raising animals is expensive because the chemicals that are used to feed the animals are no longer affordable for the common farmer. As a result, the higher quality leather is now used only for exports. These include all of the expensive items such as jackets, purses, and wallets. Only the cheapest quality of leather is available to the cobbler.

An added factor that affects the cobbling industry is increased urbanization. Many of the population are moving from the villages to the city, making a large labor pool available to city manufacturers (Omvedt, 1990). Additionally, villages have experienced increased development and are growing into small cities and bringing large scale manufacturing industries with them (Wilson, 1999). These changes make life for small-scale leatherworkers, such as Bibek and Sana, increasingly difficult.

It is apparent that the next generation of Dalit youths will not be encouraged by their parents to remain in the leather industry. It appears that this industry promises very little stability. The next generation has many more choices regarding their future, in terms of industries in which to work. The standard of living is increasing and the new generation is trying

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<sup>44</sup> Tractors are being used in place of oxen and this has negatively affected the leatherworking industry.

to work for established companies because they are promised a certain level of security (Fernando, 2001). The cottage industries are very erratic in terms of business and many multinational companies are hiring people to mass-produce. There is little hope for the future of the cottage industry.

In addition to leather making, Bibek also owns two acres of land where he farms peanuts. These peanuts are used only for family consumption and they are not sold or traded for items or food. When company arrives at their home, Sana will always serve tea and will bring out a bowl of peanuts for the guests. March through May is the peanut season and it is a fifteen minute walk to the property. The two-acre property reaps one hundred kilograms of peanuts. Half of the peanuts go to Bibek's younger brother, even though he does not farm the land. This is an area of contention for Sana and she stated,

Bibek's brother is lazy. He wants the peanuts but he does not work for them. My husband works hard. Bibek should keep all the peanuts and should not share with his brother.

Bibek is a good man, but his brother is not fair when he asks for peanuts.

Bibek does not argue over this issue. He complies with his parent's wishes and gives his brother half of the profits. We were never able to extract a reason for his brother's noninvolvement with the land. We only understood that there was much tension within Bibek's family.

Because her husband's earnings are insufficient and unreliable, Sana has implemented ways in which to supplement Bibek's minimal income. These innovations represent Sana's skill at negotiating the power structures that affect her life. Sana is able to simultaneously overstep the traditional boundaries of her class, caste, and gender without directly challenging the established social order. This skill has been Sana's primary tool in ensuring the continued survival of her family.

The primary innovation Sana has employed to sustain her family economically, is her work on the farm. Nearly each day Sana walks 45 minutes to the east of the village, uphill, to a leveling off of a sizeable flat terrain that looks out over the village and the dale. Trupti and I met Sana early one morning and accompanied her to this location. This was the farm. The view from this pivotal position displayed an area comprised of rich green and yellowish hues. There were occasional tinges of bright pink, red, and purple, which represented the innate flowery patterns that adorn this region. Sana calmly gazed out over the spectacular panorama. She stated that,

It is this beautiful land that makes hard work easier. I feel sick from the heat and pain but

the mountains and colors help me to go on with my work. I look at the mountains when I need help. It helps to look and have a little beauty in life.

The landscape seemed to make her painstaking and tiresome labor tolerable outside of the heat and injuries that accompany this job.

Sana left for the farm every day at 8:00 a.m. and returned by 7:00 p.m. On the farm Sana cut grass with a machete and the grass was later sold in the market for the animals. There was a nonstop twisting and turning of the fragile bodies of the women as they worked that created unison of synchronization as they attempted to hack the grass at its very core. Sometimes there were snakes and scorpions in the fields. In addition to these dangers, a lack of shade and water made the work treacherous. Sana stressed that,

It is important to be careful because there are no trees on the farm. There is only one. We use it for shade. It is very hot and sunny and sometimes we [workers] get sick from the heat. We must drink a lot of water to keep working.

The women brought water from the village, which was a tedious task since they must walk uphill for approximately forty-five minutes.

The grass that was cut by the women on the farm was approximately one foot in height. Because of the fashion in which the sari was worn during work, the women's knees often became scratched from the grass. Sana explained,

After work I go home and bathe with cold water. It makes me feel better. After working a whole day, I have many cuts from the grass. I have cuts all over my legs and arms. Cold water makes them feel better. It is hard. There is no time for rest. After I bathe, dinner must be prepared.

Sana worked on the farm with women from different castes. While one would never find a female of the highest Brahman status working in such a position, it was not unusual to find females from the Sudra castes and other Dalits working in the fields. The women blended well at the farm, yet they were fully aware of the fact that there were different rules that they must adhere to when they returned to the village each day.

About mid-day, at approximately 1:30 p.m., Sana and the other women stopped work and ate lunch. The women carried their lunches with them and had thirty minutes to eat their meager servings. According to Sana, during these lunch respites the women gossiped about village issues and any sordid events that might be occurring.

Many things happen in the village. I hear of them from the women at the farm. Many good things happen but some bad things too. It is good to talk. It makes the day go fast. There are some funny stories that make us laugh but some of the bad things upset me. One woman spoke about a girl who has not found a husband yet. The girl is seventeen and everyone is speaking badly about her. This makes me worry about Savita. What if we do not find a good husband for her? People will talk badly if we do not.

Sana and the other women were paid for their work per stack and each stack usually brought five rupees. For all of her efforts, Sana made a nominal one hundred rupees per day. Some of the workers were also paid in rupees but others were paid in stacks of grass if they owned animals. Fortunately, Sana did not have to pay the farmers for working the land because they did not own the farm, they simply supervised the work. However, every now and then the owners would deduct additional money from the workers' daily pay for stacks.

Sana alleged that throughout her marriage to Bibek, he has never been the one who takes on additional work or brainstorms to develop better ways of supporting his family. It is Sana who ultimately makes the decisions and sacrifices. Of the two, Sana is the creative thinker. The wheels of her mind are forever turning and developing resourceful ideas that will earn meager revenue. Purchasing chickens for home-use and selling, along with purchasing a cow for milk are additional novelties commenced by this matriarch to help support her family.

When devising new methods to generate revenue, Sana is still bound by the social expectations of her gender. For example, Sana is cautious to present any innovations to her husband first. She understands that he must be included in all decision-making endeavors. She explained to us that,

Bibek does not think about things. I have the ideas and then I tell him because he is my husband. I must. He agrees with me most of the time. I explain things to him so that he understands. Then he agrees with me. I have only a little education but it is more than Bibek.

It is interesting to hear how Sana views her husband in terms of decision-making. She makes it very clear that she is the one who comes up with the ideas. She also implies that her education is more advanced than his. It appears that she might be trying to tell us that she is in a better position to make decisions than he is. Since the society is a patriarchal one, it is compulsory for her to discuss matters with her husband. Society would frown upon Sana should

she make decisions in an autonomous manner (Kanungo, 1993).

In addition to decision making, money is an issue of concern that also has gendered implications. When we first asked Sana about the issue of who handles the money in the home, she was somewhat timid regarding her response. She presented us with the impression that she maintained more control over the finances than Bibek. Essentially, she was telling us that she had control of the money, but that she would not spend money without Bibek's consent. According to Sana, if she wanted to make a purchase she could usually convince Bibek that it was important. For example, Sana told us that,

Bibek does not always like what I say. He is a good man because he listens to me. If he does not like what I say, then I keep telling him until he understands that what I say is good for the children and us. He is always happy when he sees that I am right.

Sana was pleased with the fact that Bibek respected her recommendations and she believed that he was content to allow her to direct their lives. According to Sana, Bibek was aware of the educational gap between them and knew that she had the ability to effectively address situations of urgency.

We later found out that Bibek physically held all of the money. This was a point of contention with Sana because sometimes he squandered it on liquor. She explained further by saying,

In the village, the man keeps the money. I want to keep the money but I am not allowed to keep it. If I kept it, then I think that we would have more money. Sometimes Bibek will buy drinks with the money. We cannot afford for him to drink.

According to Sana, the family would be better off financially if she maintained complete control of the money. However, Indian patriarchy precludes this from happening.

Female subjugation has an extensive history in south Asia and men's supremacy over women began in the family and extended kinship group. Patriarchy is a significant progression shaped by men and women. The patriarchal family serves as a fundamental component of the organization (Gnanadason, 1990). For these reasons, according to Sana, such a participatory approach to decision making within the household, as well as Bibek's physical control over the money, lessens the tension that would manifest if she independently took on these problem-solving tasks. A woman would be spurned, for instance, if she took it upon herself to make significant decisions or a major purchase autonomously, without the authorization of her

husband. It would be a mortifying embarrassment to a husband, should others witness her commanding the events of the home. The husband might sense that his only recourse would be to dispense maltreatment on his wife in order to create a semblance of control over her (Khare, 1984).

Sana admitted that she would never expect her husband to take on additional responsibilities. She had no justification for her lack of expectation. She only stated that,

This is the way my life is. I do not know what else there is. I know what I must do to take care of my family. My husband works hard, so I have to do extra work. If there is a problem, then I will work more to help make more money. I must do this. There is no other way.

Male power structures and a tradition of patriarchy continue to dictate many male/female interactions, such as these between Sana and Bibek. In this way, Sana's economic oppression coalesces with Indian expectations of gender to influence what she can and cannot do to ensure the survival of her family. Sana is able to pursue inventive sources of revenue such as work on the farm, the purchasing of chickens and a cow. However, she is only allowed to do these things with the consent of her husband. She actively seeks out his support of her ideas. To make any purchases or take on any decision making independently would be a direct challenge to Indian patriarchy and Sana would have to suffer the consequences of her actions.

Because the family's resources are so precarious, Sana is greatly concerned about the possible incapacitation of either her or Bibek in terms of not being able to contribute to the home. Thus far, they have not encountered any problems. However, Sana does acknowledge that,

If I get sick or Bibek gets sick, then we will have many problems paying for the house, food, and leather for the sandals. I can make sandals but not as well as Bibek. Bibek would never have enough time to work at the farm. If there was only one of us, then there would not be enough money to live on.

Fascinatingly, several days before we were to leave Sana shared the fact that she was having some severe pains in her abdomen.

I am not feeling well. I have pain in my stomach. I have had this for many days now. I will go to the Mantrik. The doctor is too much money. The Mantrik is good. She will make it better.

Upon receiving this information, we implored her to go to the doctor. She refused and said, “The pain will go away.” We explained the importance of a diagnosis and of medication. We asked if it was only the money that was keeping her from going. She stated that it would cost one rupee. I offered her the one rupee and made her promise that she would go to the doctor the next morning. We returned the following day and to our surprise she had not departed for the doctor's office in the village. Sana continued to complain of intense pain to her abdomen area, but continued to refuse to go to the doctor.

Fear and denial appeared to dictate Sana's behavior with regard to the doctor and there was nothing more that we could do. Unfortunately, this is the type of behavior that often leads to an incapacitation of one or both of the parents. The necessity of visiting the doctor and obtaining a diagnosis was something that Sana was not willing to discuss.

This approach to health care is reasonably universal amongst indigent populations because the individuals cannot afford treatment (Anitha, 2000). At the same time these individuals cannot afford the luxury of becoming ill and leaving all the expenses to the remaining parent. This conundrum, therefore, weighs heavily on the majority of the Dalit population, including Sana. In her mind, she knows that she is responsible for the home and most of the income. She also knows that she cannot afford the expense of falling ill.

This section has illustrated the way in which economic and class factors, dictated primarily by the failing leatherworking industry, have left Sana's family in need materially. One can begin to see the connections between class and caste when acknowledging the fact that both Sana and Bibek are leatherworkers because they were born into this casteless, low class occupation. Sana's and Bibek's families both originated from the leatherworking class and due to Dalit cultural traditions this became their fate as well. In this way, class and caste work as dependent but interlocking factors of oppression.

Class and gender also interact to oppress Sana. Because of the minimal returns on leather goods produced, Sana supplements the family's income with work on the farm, as well as raising chickens and a cow. None of these activities are a direct confrontation to gender expectations in India. For example, farm work is a task that is held chiefly by women (Omvedt, 1980). Her desire and willingness to endure the long hours and difficult labor fit within the boundaries of acceptable behavior for an Indian woman. However, Sana is constrained in pursuing these opportunities because she must first present her innovations to her husband and gain his

approval. Indian patriarchy insists on male superiority in decision making processes and money issues. If Sana would pursue these opportunities without her husband's approval, it would be in direct conflict with Indian gender expectations.

Sana's life is extremely complex, with multiple levels of oppression interacting simultaneously to determine her opportunities. I want to stress, however, that Sana's attitude of accepting life as it is (i.e. statements like, "This is the way my life is. I do not know what else there is."), is not due to ignorance or laziness. Sana's outwardly indifferent stance with regard to hardships caused by class, caste, and patriarchal power structures is an endurance strategy utilized by her to manage oppression. She has learned through life-long experience that she cannot control her milieu, but that she can control her individual actions.

Goldberger's conjectures on *silence* fit perfectly into this venue. Silence, in Sana's case, could be viewed as a positive response to daily obstacles. Her subdued approach to survival deflects from her rather extreme, yet subtle, methods of endurance. This development of silent 'knowing,' according to Goldberger, seems to occur through life's challenges. Certainly, Sana's progression in addressing daily survival strategies, falls within this realm of 'knowing.' Sana has learned, directly, about using her instincts to uncover ways of silently thwarting the system that imposes its dictates on a population that does not overtly question their fate (Goldberger,1997). This creates an intense self-reliance, which is perhaps why she tries so hard and unremittingly devises novel and innovative methods for making money. Experience and know-how have taught her to rely on her own abilities and not to expect anything to come devoid of problems. So, while Sana asserts that, "This is the way my life is. I do not know what else there is," it is obvious that she is doing everything in her power to make the situation better for herself and her family.

### *The Service of a Husband*

The kitchen area, which serves as a cooking, sleeping, and socializing location, was the one comfort zone where Sana appeared to be most at ease. As we sat in this small, confined space, Sana revealed some of her innermost secrets over roti and boiling broth. Cooking was her anchor. Vast self-confidence emanated from Sana whenever she entered the multipurpose room that served as the kitchen. Sana would find solace in the routine of measuring, kneading, and stirring spices and grains. During these encounters in the kitchen area, our eyes would begin to tear and burn from the incessant smoke. This daily ritual would beguile anyone's olfactory

senses, creating a blindness that allowed mice and other unidentifiable creatures to intermittently dart across the room so quickly that only one's peripheral vision could catch an obscure glimpse.

It was in this atmosphere where Sana spoke most cautiously about her relationship with Bibek. Bibek's and Sana's conjugal relationship was based on an arranged marriage, as are most. When we asked Sana if she loved Bibek she was somewhat embarrassed by the question, but did not hesitate to answer that she did indeed love her husband. She explained that initially, in an arranged marriage, one has not had any opportunity to get to know one's spouse until the actual wedding day. Sana stated that her love for her husband had grown over the years and that economic hardship drew them closer together.

I first saw Bibek on our wedding day. I did not see him before this. He seemed like a nice man. Both our families were leatherworkers, so we got along. He was young, I think twenty-one. I was sixteen. There was no love in the beginning of our marriage. We had some problems. I couldn't get pregnant for three years. I started to love him more when the children came. He is a good father. We had many family problems and worked hard together. I am happy with him. He is a good man.

Once there was a certain level of trust established between Sana, Trupti and I, Sana indicated that things were not always good between her and her husband. One particular problem discussed by Sana was alcoholism among males who are involved in the leatherworking industry. Through discussions with individuals involved in the leather industry, specifically Mr. Singh<sup>45</sup>, it was clearly stated that the reason for increased consumption of alcohol by male leatherworkers is that the work is extremely difficult and demanding and the pay is acutely minimal. Sana and her close friends agreed with this. Sana was quite adamant and assertive about this, saying,

The men are tired from hard work and they have no energy. They drink so that they can keep working. Drinking makes them forget about the hard work and the little money they make.

In addition to hard work for minimal pay, Indian standards for the ideal male are extremely influential in alcohol consumption. Traditionally, the male is expected to be the

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<sup>45</sup> Mr. Singh is a government employee working for F.L.I., a government agency that specializes in finding cobblers work in the leather industry. From this connection with the population, he has become aware of many social issues affecting Dalit cobblers in rural areas of India.

breadwinner within the family (Bary, 1988). However, in reality this does not appear to be the case. It is Sana who works several jobs to supplement their income and her proceeds surpass those of Bibek. Because many households must now rely on the work of women to support the family, Indian men have begun to feel increasingly inferior. This feeling of inferiority and failure has led many to consume alcohol as an avoidance mechanism.

As a result of excessive drinking among Indian males, there are many domestic fights that result in physical and emotional abuse against the women. A vast number of Dalit women live in an environment of continuous violent behavior in their homes (Punalekar, 1995). Inebriated husbands and at times other members of the family are responsible for this odious behavior (Rege, 1995). In spite of these abuses, many women continue to slave at home and in the fields to maintain peace and to prevent their children from starving.

According to Sana, her family is no exception. With tears in her eyes and a bleak expression on her face, she depicted how Bibek drinks alcohol approximately one to two times per month. He will typically go out after dinner and then drink excessively. According to Sana, We do not like it when Bibek drinks. We know it will be bad for us. It happens sometimes, not all the time. He hits us [Sana and Savita]. He is not a bad man. He just drinks too much. He acts like someone else. Not Bibek.

The alcohol tends to bring out Bibek's frustration with his life and he reverts to beating Sana and Savita as an effect.

Sana stated that Bibek is typically very angry when he drinks. However, she also mentioned that he sometimes drinks when he is happy and celebrant.

There is a lot of drinking at the festivals. Not for everyone, just the men. At the festivals, the drinks make Bibek happy. He does not hurt us during festival time. We are happy at the festivals. There are no problems.

At these times, he does not become abusive. The abusive behavior seems to be the result of a combination of the alcohol and personal frustration. The alcohol itself, as indicated by the quote above, was not a sole indicator of abuse.

Sana stated that this abusive behavior is not uncommon. Many of the women throughout the village and India in general are abused by their husbands. Sana explained that,

Some men in the village hit their wives. It happens all the time. Some men hit their wives and do not drink. Some men are angry at their wives all the time. Some men make

their wives sick when they hit them. It is not good.

According to Sana, most of the women at her same class and casteless level experience abuse from their husbands due to their economic poverty and inability to overcome caste boundaries. Once again, Sana's experiences indicate that class, caste, and gender discrimination are interlocking forces of oppression that affect her life.

In addition to violence, many cultural proscriptions also exist which increase the oppression of females and support the supremacy of husbands. On one particular evening the following events occurred that vividly illustrate the cultural imbeddedness of female servitude in marriage relationships among the Dalit population in India.

It was evening time. There were shadowy images of women gracefully stirring through the darkness of the village carrying large bundles of dried grass resting calmly atop their heads. They had just returned from the farm. They were scurrying home to prepare the evening meals for their families and to take care of chores left undone during their hours of toil at the farm. Among these women was Sana. She did not feel well that day and the excessive heat of the sunlight hours on the farm's plateau made her feel even poorer. The excessive warmth of the sun magnified her previously existing illness.

As Sana entered the house, she moved to the back room to prepare the evening's meal. She asked us to join her. Bibek continued his day of work by the dim amber glow of a kerosene lamp. We quickly learned that Sana was fasting today for her husband. This is a common custom - women fasting for their husbands (Mitter, 1991). Sana fasts every Monday and Thursday. This custom is called *Bengali Raja* and is practiced to ensure that her husband will be kept happy and he will continue to do only good things (in other words, not beat her).

In the evening of each fasting day, Sana prepared a special dinner of chicken and roti to break the fast. On a day of fasting, she did not abstain entirely from eating. She only abstained from eating rich foods. For example, Sana made special provisions to help sustain energy during the fast. These provisions were called *Sabudana Thichadi*. This is a grain that is soaked in water. As it soaks, it expands. Potatoes, peanut powder, and green chilies are added to the grain. This concoction nourished Sana until she was able to eat dinner and break the fast.

During the process of participant observation, it appeared that the fasting custom imparts an appearance of servitude on the part of the female to the male. My guide, Trupti, validated the fact that there is no response on the part of the male to this rite, as the male does not reciprocate

to the female with a similar ritual.

Despite social traditions such as the one described above and a legacy of abuse within the home, Sana has shared the fact that there is a good deal of reliance and trust between herself and her husband. She stated that,

I have learned to trust my husband. When I first met him, it was difficult to put my trust in him. I was very young and inexperienced. Now we have been married for almost twenty years. He has been good to me and I cannot complain about him. We have shared many experiences together; some good times and some bad times. My trust in him has grown over many years.

Bibek also seemed to trust Sana completely. There appeared to be a strong emotional attachment, as there was visibly something engaging about the way they related to each other in terms of verbal and non-verbal exchanges. I did not observe this kind of intense relationship with other couples in the village.

This section has once again illustrated the way that class, caste, and patriarchy coalesce to influence Sana's life and her relationship with her husband, Bibek. Culturally, the female gender in India plays a submissive role to the male. Some of the complexities that countless Indian women confront include poverty, female infanticide, sexual harassment, lack of education, limited job skills, and HIV infection (Wilson, 1999). These issues are foremost amid the preponderance of females residing in rural regions. Certain problems confronted by Indian women may be similar to the oppositions experienced by other women throughout the world. There appears to be a distinctive Indian national factor, however, that constructs and enhances the confrontations and makes the domination more forceful and deep-rooted (Tripathy, 1994).

As seen in this section, some of these hardships are experienced by Sana and some are not. For example, class issues such as poverty, lack of education, and limited job skills have affected Sana's life while gender based issues including female infanticide, sexual harassment, and HIV infection have not. In Sana's situation, this state of affairs takes on a slightly different direction. The circumstance is complex since Sana and Bibek are Dalit leatherworkers and are working within a failing industry. Being a Dalit leatherworker is tremendously overwhelming. Bibek often feels the weight of not being able to provide sufficiently for his family. Not unlike other Dalit males in the same situation, Bibek eases his sense of failure by drinking excessively. He drinks as a means of easing his emotional grief with regard to this sensitive issue. His

drinking, subsequently, leads to abusive behavior towards Sana and Savita. In this way, we can see how class hardships can affect gendered relationships such as the one between Sana and Bibek. The failing nature of leatherworking greatly contributes to Bibek's drinking and beating of Sana and Savita. It is the combination of alcohol and personal frustration that leads to this abuse.

Although Sana's status as a woman makes her subservient to Bibek in many respects, Sana is still the individual that the family members rely on most. Although Sana shows respect for her husband by discussing all matters with him and allowing him to physically control the money, she reveals that she can always prompt the outcome of a situation by reasoning with him. Sana's matriarchal nature is often suppressed within the patriarchal environment that commands her life, but only temporarily and only on the surface. Sana negotiates the gender expectations of her relationship with Bibek so that she can continue to support her family without challenging the traditions of Indian society. Her ability to negotiate these power structures is necessary for the continued existence of this family.

#### *A Hope for Their Son*

Aadi, Bibek's and Sana's first child, was living out of the home during the time of my fieldwork. His parents allowed him to complete all of his levels in school and had sent him to live with his grandfather (Sana's father) while he completed a two-year program in electronics. At the same time as he attended school, he was also working for his uncle and grandfather in the fish market as a sales person.

Sana was exceedingly pleased with her son and his aspirations after he completed electronics school. Although Aadi missed his family and felt badly about being away from them while he studied, he was anxious to finish school so that he could work and help out his family. Aadi explained that,

I must finish school. My parents say that I must finish and so do I. I will have more money to help them. They are very poor and have helped me to go to school. I miss being with them. I will finish soon and go home.

All decisions concerning Aadi's future seemed to be based in part of the very real economic needs of the family. It was not only a desire for knowledge that fueled Aadi's drive for an education, but it was also his ability to help support the family in times of trouble. This

benefit of increased education was not lost on Sana or Bibek and, in fact, was a motivating factor in their decision to send Aadi to a trade school. Should Aadi complete the program and find work in the electronics field, then Sana's instinct will have paid off for Aadi and her family in general. Sana viewed Aadi's new vocation as an additional means of supporting herself and Bibek, since traditionally Aadi will be expected to live at home when he marries.

I asked Sana and Bibek why they did not have Aadi stay in cobbling and continue the family business and they responded by saying that there was no money in the leatherworking industry. Sana stated,

There is no money in leather. It is a bad business. It will be very bad soon.

Leather is too expensive. The factories have the business and business is also slow for them. Aadi has no chance in the leather business. He needs better work so that he can take care of the family. Soon he will marry and have children. This work (leather) is not enough to take care of the family.

Sana and Bibek wanted Aadi to have an opportunity to make a stable living. As a result, Aadi was never required to learn the intricacies of leatherworking. He was unskilled at stitching and only knew how to polish.

Sending Aadi to electronics school was a major additional expense for the family. Despite this, Sana was committed to ensuring that Aadi attended and completed his electronics program. She found ways to negotiate her situation in order to save money while Aadi was in school. By having her son stay at her father's home, she was saving money by not having to pay transportation costs. She was also saving on food and miscellaneous expenses that she would have to take care of if he were living at home. In addition, Sana juggled their expenses and cut corners wherever possible. For example, to generate extra income to pay for Aadi's schooling the family purchased a cow. The purpose of the cow was to provide milk for the family and milk to sell for revenue. In order for the purchase to transpire Sana and Bibek had to submit an application for a loan. Subsequently, the loan had to be taken out against their home. As time went on, the family became further impoverished and could not afford to make the payments on their investment. They were forced to sell the cow and now the loan is due in full.

There is at present a lien on the home and 4,000 rupees were due (approximately one hundred U.S.D.) by the end of December 2002. If this amount was not paid, then the family could face losing their home. Because of Sana's inventiveness, I felt that she would probably find

a way to pull together the needed funds. Sana expressed the fact that she might be forced to ask the parents from both sides to lend a hand, but was not sure if they would have the funds. She stated,

I might have to ask our parents for help, Bibek's and mine. We do not like to ask but we must if we cannot pay for the house. I will not live with Bibek's family. Not any more. Maybe I can work more. The house is important. We live and work in our home. I will find a way. I don't know if our parents can help. I hope that they can.

A major worry for the family was that Aadi may be unable to find work in his specialty after graduation. Aadi stated that if this occurs, then he will most likely revert to working in the fields.

I pray that I find work in electronics. It is my dream and my parents' dream. I studied hard to learn. There are many people looking for work in electronics, so I hope that I get a job. If I don't, then I will work in the fields. But my parents will be hurt if I do. They have spent a lot of money for me to go to school. I live with my grandparents. Everybody is trying to help. For me, working in the fields will be OK if there is no job in electronics for me.

Sana is steadfastly against Aadi working in the fields. She sacrificed her time and health in order to send Aadi for this training. She continued to encourage him to pursue employment in electronics. She even tried to expand her son's chances of employment within the field of electronics by staying in touch with a local company where he previously trained as an intern during his schooling. Sana has been informed that often these companies will hire former interns and she is hoping that this opportunity will materialize for Aadi.

Sana's uncertainties about Aadi not completing school are quite valid. During the period of my fieldwork, the family was very low on monetary funds and had to continue to pay Aadi's tuition in addition to their other obligations. Unfortunately, they had fallen behind in their payments to Aadi's school. Combined with the continued threat of losing the house, Aadi's future remains uncertain.

The family has not yet discussed the possibility of Aadi marrying after school and beginning a family of his own. Aadi admitted that he has not thought much about getting married except for the fact that he would want a wife who was two years younger than him. He felt as though he was not yet ready to be married and did not want to marry a girl of fifteen.

My mother married young and my sister will marry young. I want my wife to be two years younger than me. But I don't know. Fifteen is too young. I would like a wife with some education. My parents want me to take a wife. I do not want to. Not now.

Aadi really has no options when it comes to marriage. If his parents choose a girl for him, he will have nothing to say about it and will have to act in accordance with his parent's desires. When asked about his sister marrying at age fifteen he did not want to comment. He stated that it was his parent's decision. He stated that even if he were to go to his father and tell him that he likes a girl, if his father denies the connection then he must respect his father's wishes.

If I find a wife, then my father must agree to the marriage. If my father does not agree, then it will not happen. The girl I choose must come from a good family. If it is a love-marriage and my father does not agree, then it will not happen.

Aadi stressed the fact that whatever the outcome he will go along with his parent's decision concerning marriage.

Sana's and Bibek's plans for Aadi's future illustrate how economic based class issues once again coalesce with caste and gender. For example, Aadi was being sent to school for a variety of reasons. First, Aadi was attending electronics school because the traditional occupation of his family's caste, leatherworking, was failing. Sana was cognizant of the fact that the leatherworking field not only produced minimal revenue but was becoming obsolete. Sana and Bibek were barely making a living from leatherworking and wanted to see something better for their son. It took little to convince Bibek that Aadi should seek another vocation. Aadi had previously expressed an interest in electronics, so this was the direction he undertook.

If Aadi did not come from a Dalit family or a leatherworking background, he would not be in the situation that he finds himself now. His family's future would not be put in jeopardy by sending him to school and they would not have had to sacrifice in order to make his education a reality. They also would not need to rely so heavily on Aadi's future to ensure the success of their own. It was the combined effects of caste and class oppression that dictated the decision to send Aadi to school and pursue employment in the electronics field.

Second, gender was also an influential factor in Aadi's schooling. Simply stated, Aadi was able to attend school because he was male. Traditionally, male children are sent for higher education while the females are trained at home for marriage (Chanana, 1993). While this is not always the case, it is a general trend within rural Dalit communities because of the tradition of

patrilocality. When Aadi marries, he and his bride will become part of Sana's and Bibek's household. Therefore, Aadi will contribute monetarily to the household's survival; Savita will not. In other words, male children bring wealth to the parents' household, female children do not. This economic rationale is what prompts most male children to be sent for schooling instead of females.

### *The Marriage of a Daughter*

Savita was Sana's and Bibek's second child. During the fieldwork for this dissertation, she was fifteen years of age and her parents were in the process of looking for a husband. Sana informed us that they could no longer afford to keep her at home and had recently taken her out of school. It was too expensive to allow Savita to finish her levels and they could not afford her tuition, transportation, or books. Sana further explained the situation by saying,

I would like Savita to go to school but there is no chance. She is excited about school. She is a smart girl. Savita knows that we cannot afford to send her. She is sad but understands. It hurts to do this. She knows that she must marry. It is her life.

When Savita marries she will move out of her parents home and go to live with her husband's family. This will mean one less mouth to feed, clothe, and shelter for Bibek and Sana.

When Sana first responded to our questions in relation to her daughter and marriage, she was adamant that Savita would not marry until she was eighteen years of age. Some days later we were discussing the situation again and Sana affirmed that she and Bibek were actually in the process of looking for a husband for Savita so that she would be married by next year. We were somewhat curious as to why Sana had initially told us that Savita would not marry until the age of eighteen. Sana explained that she believed that fifteen years of age is very young to be married, yet the family honestly could not afford to keep her at home. She stated, "I want her to marry at eighteen. It would be better. But people will talk and maybe no husband will want her. Maybe people will think that she is too old."

Once a daughter is officially removed from schooling, there is a very strong social pressure to get her married as soon as possible. If she stays home for too long without a planned marriage, then often the family and the girl will be subjected to extreme criticism and dishonor. The daughter, in particular, will be considered to be promiscuous. Sana does not believe in such a young marriage, yet she feels that she has little choice.

One common theme addressed by Sana with regard to Savita's marriage was the desire to find an appropriate mate. This would mean finding a man and a family that met the criteria of the child's family - therefore being a socially acceptable match. For Sana and Bibek, it was important that they try to find a marriage partner for Savita who came from a background equal to or slightly better than their own. Sana also preferred that the man had some education.

In the thousands of years of Indian culture, the supposition of marriage for love has rarely manifested. The Hindu religion dictates that it is the duty of the parents to recognize viable and reasonably solvent mates for their children. The wedding vows are considered to be written in stone. Therefore, the couple is bound forever (Bary, 1988). This binding relationship is not only steadfast for this lifetime, but for seven more incarnations as well. The concept of a divorce does not exist in Hinduism (Wolf, 1992); however, there are exceptions to this rule for Dalits. According to Trupti, there are permissible and legal grounds for divorce. For instance, if a woman has been forced or defrauded into a marriage, then the marriage can be voided if the fraud is exposed within one year. Other grounds for divorce would be the act of bigamy or if a wife is impregnated by a man other than her husband prior to the marriage (Clifford, 1996).

Due to the powerful nature of these traditions, marriage trends are changing slowly in India. Approximately ninety-five percent of marriages are still prearranged. No more than five percent of the marriages end in divorce, although the law allows for divorce (Mann, 1987). The parents do their best to ensure that the mate they select will be one who will be suitable for their child and will be able to perpetuate the family lineage. Sana and Bibek are not any different from other parents in their situation. They need to find a mate for Savita that will provide her with a decent home and income. Marrying their daughter into an economically solvent family can also be beneficial to them if they should experience hard times. It is also important for Savita to marry into a family that is reputable. Even if the money is not emanate, the reputation of the family plays a significant role in the union's future success (Jain, Jain, & Bhatnager, 1997).

One evening, while in her favorite area of the multipurpose room, Sana expressed the fact that she will be extremely comforted when her daughter gets married. She stated that there were so many 'incidents' involving young girls.

Too many girls have been hurt. She will not be touched if she is married. Men will not bother her. I worry about Savita. She goes to the market in the village for me. I worry that she will speak with the men of the village. She is a pretty girl. I will feel better when

she marries. Her husband will take care of her.

When asked, Sana would not specify the nature of these 'incidents'. Commonly, Dalits will not mention such acts for fear of the contemplation becoming a reality. Through conversations with others in the village it appears that some of these incidents might have to do with rape or rumors that are spread about young girls her age.

On another occasion, while Sana prepared dinner, she expressed again her apprehension about the marriage of her daughter. Sana explained that while she was away working the fields or making sandals she would often have Savita go to the market for her. Sana told us that, "Savita goes by herself because all of her friends are still in school. I tell her not to speak to people. She needs to go and come back right away." Apparently, in recent weeks there was some talk in the village about Savita. When going to the market in the village Savita was seen with a boy. They often talked with each other and this was frowned upon by many of the villagers.

The village is rich with rumors over Savita's behavior and Sana is not comfortable with the possibility of further condemnations. Furthermore, the young man is not Dalit and therefore (despite claims that caste no longer exists) he clearly would not be considered a candidate for marriage. Male-female socialization at this age between a caste member and Dalit is considered reprehensible by community members, especially within the village setting (Ganesan, 1991). Even though this village prides itself on being casteless, the reality exists that there is an unrecorded understanding that each individual has his or her place within the collective configuration of this rural community. Sana adheres to these unwritten laws for fear of further expressions of disapproval by the village community.

Despite the ongoing stresses associated with Savita's marriage possibilities, Savita was cheerful and extremely talkative with her friends and family. Beyond this facade she admitted that she had stress about the future and she knew that her life would never be the same. She told us that,

I will be married soon. My friends will also be married soon. I don't want to marry now but my parents want me to. They are looking for a husband. I don't know who they will find. I hope he is young and looks good. I hope he is nice. I am afraid when I think of being a wife and mother soon.

This time next year she will probably be married and pregnant.

Savita's life is not necessarily the life of all young female Dalit women. There are numerous differences between the city-dwelling and rural Dalits. My translator Trupti, a Dalit female who has experienced Dalit village life first-hand, spoke of one major distinction between the Dalit women living in the city and those in the village that is evident in Savita's life as well. For the most part, the city women make certain that their daughters have an education (Deliége, 1997). Women in the village do not always think in these terms. If the money is not available, then the daughter will not have the option to go to school. Even if there are some funds available, the son normally takes priority over the daughter (Sreedhar, 1999).

This is the usual experience of a rural Dalit female. Sana was also not permitted to go to school and was married at a young age. Savita has expressed the fact that she would like to take up sewing. She is a gifted sewer and this trade would help to ensure future economic stability when she marries. However, there are no funds for this. Any money laid out for education will go towards Aadi's schooling.

Here once again it is visible how caste, class, and gender interconnect to influence the lives of Sana and her family. In the case of Savita, once again the poverty caused by the family's caste and class background impact her future and Sana's expectations. Specifically, they prevent Savita from remaining in school and continuing her education. The family does not have enough money to continue paying for her school books and supplies and they do not have the money to send her on for higher education. Further, the economic situation allows Sana only one option for her daughter – marriage. If Savita is married, she will be provided for by a husband and Sana and Bibek will no longer need to feed and clothe her.

In addition to economic class influences, gender hierarchies have affected Sana's choices with regard to her daughter's future. For example, Savita is not receiving money for an education because she is a female and the son takes priority over the daughter. Additionally, the desire to quickly find a husband for Savita is prompted by the village's condemnation of a young female who is not in school and not yet married. The fear that young women can be corrupted or harmed if they are not married or occupied with school is a gender based stigma that directly affects Sana's and Bibek's desires for a speedy marriage.

Finally, caste factors have also figured significantly in Sana's concerns over the marriage of her daughter. For example, the most important factor in marriage is finding an acceptable mate. In other words, it is important to find a mate who matches the caste expectations of the

family and of society. The importance of caste in regard to marriage was evidenced in Sana's fear that Savita was seen talking to a boy from a different caste level. While it was inappropriate for a boy and a girl to be seen conversing in public, it was even more disturbing to witness a boy and a girl from different castes talking together. So, once again, caste, class and gender hierarchies coalesce to influence Sana's decisions and the future of her family.

### *A Tense Situation*

Over the years, Sana has endured continuous mistreatment from her mother-in-law and Bibek's brother. This unending and evolving conflict has proven to be a continuous source of unease for Sana. It has caused many of the hardships suffered by Sana and Bibek early on in their marriage, including financial dilemmas that have never quite been resolved.

Based on Sana's negative experience with her mother-in-law and Bibek's brother, she is especially concerned about making a proper match for Savita. She does not want Savita to experience the same abuse that she endured after marrying Bibek, as she was disparaged to the point where she felt compelled to find a new home for her family.

We met Bibek's mother during one of our visits to Sana's home. She was extremely talkative and wanted to greet us by shaking our hands. It appeared that she wanted to show some savoir-faire by greeting us in a Western mode. She was wearing the accepted green-colored Sari that epitomized her marriage. She informed us that her name was Surina and she was quite proud to tell us that she was 60 years of age. She must have been informed by word of mouth that we were there and could not endure staying away.

During the visit Sana brought out tea and peanuts. She served her mother-in-law, but no words were exchanged. We were attentive to the fact that there was great rigidity between the two. We understood that Bibek's mother and brother would visit on occasion, but Sana would never visit her in-law's home. Sana explained the situation by saying,

I see Bibek's parents only when they come to our home. Bibek's father cannot walk, so he stays in the house. His mother and brother sometimes come to our home. We do not speak. I give them tea and food but we have no relationship. Bibek goes to their home but I do not. I do not like Bibek's mother. She treated me poorly, so I left her home for this house that we live in. It is better to be away from her. She told lies about me that she heard from the neighbors. She said that I was lazy and did not work around the home.

What she said was not true. There were also problems with his brother and the peanut farm. He wanted Bibek to work the farm, but he wanted half of the produce. Bibek gives him half, but I do not agree with this. It is better to be away.

Sana, out of reverence for her husband, will serve food to Bibek's mother and brother. However, no dialogue is ever exchanged or attempted. The relationship between Sana and this family is a bittersweet connection that has turned sour. Tenuous and often unexceptional circumstances appear to have dictated the course of this relationship.

When Sana and Bibek first moved in with his parents many problems existed. Initially Sana had difficulty conceiving a child. There was a gap of time before she gave birth. Sana was married at age sixteen and did not birth Aadi until nineteen years of age. Perhaps this was the reason as to why there was tension early on between Sana and her mother-in-law.

In addition to this, the neighbors in the village told her mother-in-law that Sana was lazy and was not doing her work. This continued on after she finally had her first child. According to Sana, her mother-in-law beat her for this supposed behavior.

I am a hard worker but Bibek's mother believed the villagers. She believed that I did not work the entire day. She would beat me. I did not like this. I told Bibek that I was unhappy. He said we could leave. I had my first baby and we found our own house. It is better. I am happy to be away from Bibek's mother.

These untruths caused tremendous problems for Sana, as her mother-in-law believed the neighbors. From various discussions, with Sana and other Dalit women in the village and throughout the country, I understand that Indian mothers-in-law are prone to find fault with their daughters-in-law. This was the point at which Sana decided that she could no longer take the abusive environment and persuaded Bibek to seek other accommodation for her nuclear family.

Most family units in India are extended families that consist of brothers, sisters, parents, grand-parents, and the children of everyone living together under one roof. Some of these households are exceedingly large, reaching fifty to one hundred people residing in one home. Only rarely do people tend to move out and start their own families. Sana and Bibek were quite innovative when they made their decision to leave the home of Bibek's parents.

Once the couple had set up their own household and given birth to their second child, Sana decided that she wanted to have her tubes tied. She had heard about this procedure through idle talk. Sana had the insight to further explore this course of action. She realized that they

could not afford to feed and support another child. Bibek was not pleased with the idea at first, but Sana persuaded him that it would be in their best financial interest to move forward with the procedure. He reluctantly agreed to this. In any case, she did give him a son for which all Indian families strive.

Interestingly, Sana turned to her mother-in-law for assistance during this difficult time. She expressed her concerns about having more children and her mother-in-law stated that she would pay for the procedure to prevent this from happening. Surina even took Sana to the doctor and had her admitted to the hospital. Sana was admitted to a hospital near her parents' home so that she could recuperate at her parents' home after the surgery. The relationship between Sana and Surina was still somewhat strained when this took place and has become even more so over the years.

Sana's relationship with Bibek's younger brother, Naveen, is also strained. During our field research, Naveen also came by to visit. He has one son and one daughter. He is also in the leather industry. However, he is in the sales end of the business and works in a shop in the city. Sana does not have a relationship with Bibek's brother. There is tension between them over the property on which Bibek grows peanuts. During his visit to the house Sana was a courteous host but did not exchange a word with Naveen.

In addition to Naveen and Surina, Sana does not speak to Bibek's father either. His father is currently in a wheelchair and is mostly confined to the home. At this point in time, Sana does not speak to anyone in her husband's family. The relationship is extremely tense.

Sana's experience with her mother-in-law and Bibek's family has been directly influenced by gender, caste, and class. Indian patriarchy and the practice of patrilocality dictate that a new wife must go to live with her husband's parents when she is married. Because of this strong cultural tradition and the combined affect of economic poverty, many young wives cannot set up their own households. To move out of the mother-in-law's house and set up an autonomous nuclear family requires stable income. In Sana's case, she did not initially have this due to her and her husband's Dalit status and their involvement in the leatherworking industry. Caste, class, and gender determined that Sana would have to remain in the home of her mother-in-law if she wanted to survive.

Sana's passionate need to leave her mother-in-law's home, however, eventually outweighed the traditional importance of patrilocality and the economic benefits of living in an

extended family system. This decision to set up an autonomous nuclear family, in spite of cultural and economic proscriptions against it, is perhaps the boldest negotiation of traditional power structures that Sana has undertaken. In many ways, it was this one decision that has shaped the nature of Sana's life today. Her struggles to survive, the stress Bibek experiences because of their dire economic situation, the family's reliance on Aadi's future for stability, and the urgent need to find Savita a marriage partner are all due, in part, to Sana's decision to leave the economic stability of her mother-in-law's home. Whether that decision will eventually result in the family's survival or decline has yet to be determined.

### *A Place within Society*

After leaving the home of Bibek's mother and father, Sana and Bibek set up their own autonomous household in the village of Karvir. Karvir village prided itself on being casteless. It tried to give the impression that social and economic equality between the castes had been achieved and that caste discrimination no longer existed. As I spoke with and observed Sana's life, however, it was evident that caste proscriptions continued to exist and that uncomfortableness about mingling with Dalits remained.

Interestingly, even the Dalit population voiced their predispositions about mingling with those out of their rank. In the privacy of Sana's home, an occasional comment would imply that everyone within the Indian caste system (locally and globally) had his or her predetermined place within the society. It was further suggested that it was each individual's duty to follow the rules of that predetermined social location. For instance, Sana accepted her life as a Dalit. She admitted to using creative means to help her family survive, yet she also claimed that she did not question her status and probable fate as a Dalit. Sana accepted that life would proceed as it had for generations before within the Dalit community and she appeared to have no expectations other than what she anticipated. In this way, Sana still adhered to and internalized many of the normative values of Indian society.

An interesting aspect of Sana's life within the village was that she had many friends who were not only Dalit but were also from the upper castes. During the course of fieldwork, many of these friends came to visit Sana. In part, these visits were prompted by an interest in my presence. As an outsider and American I served as a source of curiosity for the village occupants. Despite the fact that many visits were prompted by curiosity, the visits that occurred from the

villagers are indicative of the social base in which Sana moves and the interactions which are typical of these encounters. These calls on Sana's home are a sign of the diversity of her exposure within the social strata of the village and the respect that she has earned from caste members. Sana is aware of this impression that she has worked so hard to uphold, as she has made sure that her family continues to maintain a positive role within the village setting.

Among the non-Dalit members of the community with whom Sana socialized was Geeta. Geeta was of the Sudra caste and lived in the small cluster of huts which made up the immediate space surrounding Sana's and Bibek's home. She was twenty-eight years of age, with only one child. Fortunately her child was a son. She had been trying to conceive again for the past twelve years but to no avail. The fact that she gave birth to a son freed her from any negative undertones that could follow her and her family indefinitely. Geeta and Sana were fast friends and there appeared to be a definite comfort level between the two.

Early one afternoon, as I observed Sana preparing lunch for the family, Geeta came by the house to visit. She crossed the doorstep of the multipurpose room in an exceedingly reticent manner, gradually edging her way through the entry with an expression on her face asking, "may I join you?" Sana welcomed her with an affectionate smile and offered her tea and a seat on the hardened ground. Sana was, at present, preparing dinner. Geeta straight away began to assist her. Sana did not refuse her help and they worked in sync to finish the job. I have observed on many occasions that when females enter Sana's home they immediately lend a hand with any task she is finishing. This appears to be a common formality amongst this group. The lunch consisted of beans, rice, japati, and grain.

As the women were working, Geeta's husband peeked in for a moment to see what she was up to. He appeared to be curious about my presence in the village, but also wanted to keep track of the movements of his wife. He stayed for approximately thirty minutes during which time he chatted with the women about the food that they were preparing and then went out to the porch area to converse with Bibek about village politics. After he left, Geeta proceeded to share the fact that her husband sometimes drinks hard liquor and beats her after drinking in the evening. She said,

He beats me a few times a month. I expect it every time he drinks. I know that it will come. My father also beat my mother the same way. He beats me in front of the children. I don't like this. They should not see this. It makes them unhappy and they cry. I cry

when they cry. I just close my eyes and take the pain. Then he makes me fix dinner. It is hard to cook after the beating because I hurt so badly. The next day we try to forget what happened, as though it never happened. But I never forget.

From all outward appearances this does not seem to affect her. She explained that this is her life and she must accept it. She has no choice.

He is my husband. He gets mad sometimes. I think it is the drink, not him. Nothing can be done. I am happy when it is over. Only, sometimes he hits me very hard. One time I had to go to the doctor. My arm was broken. It was hard because I still must cook and clean. My children are too young to help. It is not good for the children or me.

As she shared her thoughts with us, it was evident that she was mindful of the fact that other's lives might not be subjected to such abusive behavior. Although she did not inquire about Trupti's or my rapport with our spouses, she appeared to realize that we were troubled by this behavior. At that juncture she began to change the subject and asked me about my family and what my life was like. She wanted to know if I lived in a home with only my immediate family or if I lived with my in-laws. It appeared that she was taken back by some of my responses and was surprised by some of the liberties women have in the United States.

Sana differs from Geeta in many ways due to her social roots. Sana, as a Hindu Dalit, is casteless. Geeta is from the Sudra caste. Despite some of the derogatory implications of this caste, it still surpasses, in terms of strata, that of the Hindu Dalit status. Sudra, the fourth caste of the hierarchy, represents the service communities. This group includes manual and agricultural laborers, artisans and masons, among others. The significant difference between the Sudras and the Dalits is that Sudras are viewed as working at non-polluted occupations. The Dalits are considered a polluted population, living on the periphery of the Indian society, cleaning up after funerals, killing or hunting animals for food, and working with leather and other materials that are considered to be unclean (Krishnan, 1993).

In numerous other ways Sana and Geeta are similar. Although Geeta is in a caste, albeit the lowest caste, they still appear to be expected to take on the majority of responsibilities around the home such as cleaning, preparing meals, washing clothes, shopping in the marketplace, and bringing in additional income for the household. So, although the women come from different caste levels, they both come from parallel economic surroundings.

Both women also have a common link in that they are mutually victims of bodily abuse

by their husbands. Because of this, the women must be careful not to do anything that will cause humiliation or shame to their husbands or the family. It seems that gendered violence crosses over caste boundaries, creating links between women who may otherwise be separated by distinctions of social status.

Another good friend of Sana's from the village who came to visit was Sibani. Sana and Sibani work at the farm together each day and share many experiences because of this shared occupation. Sibani, however, is not a Dalit and therefore the lives of these two women are separated in some respects.

Sibani's husband is a barber. Because of her caste status, Sibani is able to live in the center of the village. Sana has been to her home twice, on special occasions or holidays, and yet these visits have taken place over a span of fifteen years. Sana does not regularly visit Sibani but, according to Sana, Sibani visits Sana several times a week.

Sibani is a good friend. It is better for her to come here. If I go to her home too often, then people will talk about a Dalit being there too much. It is better for her to come here. She is a good friend. We work hard together in the field. We laugh together and help each other like good friends should. We cook together. Bibek likes her and she treats Savita like a daughter. She is my good friend and I am also her good friend.

Sana is always welcome at Sibani's home, yet her instincts tell her that others may shun these visits. In her heart, she does not want to cause problems for her friend or herself because others in the village might dishonor these visits.

Sibani, like Geeta, also belongs to the Sudra caste. This is the largest varna and it has the largest number of communities. Although we did not enter Sibani's home, we did pass by it one evening. We accompanied Savita to the market and she pointed out the home. It was obvious that the quality of the home was somewhat better than that of Sana. According to Sana, Sibani has a home with three rooms instead of the two rooms that Sana possesses. They also have some electricity. It is obvious that there is some difference between their living arrangements from an economic level.

Despite traditional caste differences, Sibani comes to visit Sana often and also relies on Sana's intellect for protection in the work place. Sana shared with us the fact that one day when she was not present at her job in the fields, Sibani came to Sana at the end of the work day appearing very agitated. Sibani said that she wished that Sana had been at work because she

thought that the person in charge was dishonest about paying the women working at the farm that particular day. Sibani cannot count and therefore relied on Sana to ensure proper payment for her work.

Sana told Sibani that she would advocate for the women the following day and that they needed only to provide her with the details. The next day she wrote down all of the amounts and hours provided to her by the women farm workers and confronted the manager of the farm regarding the incorrect payments. Sana stated that it was evident that the farm boss took advantage of her nonattendance that day.

The boss knew that I was not there. He knows that the women do not know how to count. He will count incorrectly so that he can keep the extra money. This is wrong. I must be there on the days that we get paid. He does this every time if he can. He is not a good man.

He did at the end of the day rectify the blunders and Sana's skills came to the salvage of her coworkers.

This situation illustrates the minimal educational level of the populace and the fact that it is not only affecting the Dalit population. Sana is actually one of the few women in the village who can count and the only worker at the farm that is able to calculate what is due at the end of the workday. This is clearly advantageous for the others, as Sana is able to tally for them. They trust Sana to ensure that they are receiving the proper amount of money for their day's work. Sana's ability to assist her friends elevates her status within the group and has contributed to her position within the community. Sana appears to have developed a rapport with individuals at all levels of the spectrum due to her abilities.

Women from various castes have been able to lessen the gulf between themselves in recent years. For example, in the past there was little chance of the higher caste population drinking from the same water source as the Dalits (Khan, 1995). Twenty years ago the Dalits were not allowed to draw water from the village well. They would have to travel many kilometers each day in order to obtain a reasonable portion of water for their families. Now there is a water tap located in various areas of the village. Additionally, the original well is now open to all villagers regardless of caste level.

The fact that access to water sources has been made more egalitarian means that this village has taken a progressive move. Slow increases in equality are visible elsewhere in the

village as well. For instance, the very first day of our visit we were shown the village by the former Sarpanche. He spoke some English and was rather articulate even through translation. As we walked through the streets, he directed us to a well-maintained building that stood out from all the others. He explained that this was the village Hindu temple. He further clarified the fact that approximately twenty years prior, the original temple needed refurbishing, however, the town could not afford this. He explained that, "The temple needed some work. The people love the temple. Many people spend time there. The villagers were too poor to help to fix it. This was a problem for the village." Approximately fifteen years later, the village was recognized by the government for a special development endowment to be granted to the Dalit population of the village. At the same time, a Dalit female was appointed as Sarpanche of the village. The Hindu Dalit population wanted to contribute something to the village and wanted to be able to pray with the others of the village. They contributed the endowment to the village for the purpose of restoring the temple. Appropriately, and due to the Dalits' generosity, the people of the village could not refuse them prayer in the temple and to this day all castes utilize this same temple for prayer.

Sana revealed that the family is now invited to attend some religious functions in the village that are comprised of the various castes. She stated that she would never attend if they were not invited.

We get some invitations to go to celebrations. There are many celebrations. I do not go unless I'm invited. Sometimes my friends from the village invite us. That is good. Bibek and Savita also enjoy going to the festivities. There is food and dancing. People are very nice when we come. It is good when the village has a celebration. We talk to many people during a celebration. They do not talk to us in the village much but they talk to us at the celebrations.

One example of the village festivals which the family attends is an annual fair called *Gawacha Urus*. This is a fair that is celebrated by the entire village. A goat is sacrificed to the God Shiva. The custom is to take the blessing by slaughtering a goat before the presence of the god. The ritual is called *devacha naivadya*, which means God's blessings. The goat is then prepared for a meal that is held at the temple for the entire village. Due to the fact that both Hindus and non-Hindus attend, this is both a vegetarian and non-vegetarian feast. The feast is a positive event for the reason that all castes from the village sit together and share in the

festivities. Such a mingling of villagers would have been prohibited some twenty years ago, yet now this type of gathering is occurring more frequently.

One particular day during our field research, Sana was asked to be present at a ritual in the village. Sana, in turn, asked if we would like to attend. The ceremony was called *Pot Haldi-Kum Kum*. It is restricted to the participation of married women in the actual ceremony. Onlookers can observe and it can be attended by various castes. Nevertheless, only Dalits attended this particular ceremony. People are very supportive of each other within the village and when a person breaks ground for a new home the married women go to the site and pray for peace for the home. This ceremony occurs whenever a new home is being built and is also done periodically for all homes.

On the day of the event, the women were dressed in brightly colored saris of green, gold, pink, and yellow. The colors were radiant and it was a breathtaking sight. This particular home had the foundation built but needed to be completed. Many of the men had assisted with the building of this home and would continue to do so until the finishing point. During the ceremony, Sana again revealed the fact that she is often invited to these functions and many other functions within the village.

This is a good ceremony. It is good to help the people. The ceremony brings them good luck for the home. It is good when the women get together and help. Some men come but mostly women. I am always invited to this. I like this ceremony the best. Many of the same women go to this celebration. Sometimes different castes come but mostly Dalit women.

Sana seems proud of these invitations, as this implies something about Sana and the subtle respect she receives from friends and acquaintances within the village.

Another interesting aspect of the Pot Haldi-Kum Kum ceremony is its illustration of Indian beliefs. During Pot Haldi-Kum Kum it is believed that the ritual will prevent evil from entering the house. Such beliefs are an integral part of the Dalit community. For example, the use of magicians was found to be extremely common and will be discussed in greater detail later in this section. Also, the removal of a female from the home during her monthly menstruation period, while not very common these days throughout India, was adopted by the community. In addition, there were various tales told throughout the village including one assertion that a common black and yellow bird known for its menacing scream is a harbinger of death. Dalits are

particularly mindful about keeping this bird off of the premises.

Sana is not dissimilar from her community in this way. For Sana, her belief system permeates her daily existence. For example, Sana ties a lime and green chili to the door in order to prevent her family from having evil thoughts. On one particular afternoon during field research, a man came by selling decorative knick-knacks to position over the entry for luck. They were quite pretty and were made of diversely tinted shapes of paper made of an aluminum-type material strung together by twine. I offered one to Sana for her home. She was quite thrilled and positioned it across the door that led to the multipurpose room. Sana felt that good luck would come to them now that they had obtained this ornament, called a *toran*. According to Sana and Trupti, the elaborate decoration and bright colors of the toran makes it a blessed item that embodies happiness and decency. They believe that the toran forces out all stress and irritation that might exist within the home and only peace will subsist. Sana also stated that she felt that, “luck will come to us because you are here. “

According to Bhimrao Ramji Gokhale, retrogression, illiteracy, and economics appear to be the predominant reasons for the power of such belief systems (Agrawal, 1991). The educational system of India tends to disempower the Dalits by not making education readily available and by not communicating the advantages of education (Dunn, 1993).

This lack of education overflows into the area of health education, as people do not understand the importance of going to a licensed doctor and taking prescribed medicine. Although what some may term superstition is prevalent within the Dalit population, this also affects other castes. For example, many of the villagers will go to the *Mantrik* (magician) rather than the doctor. The Mantrik, in this particular village, is a female Dalit. She uses such substances as bark, lemon, herbs, and leaves to treat people. These materials are homeopathic by nature and have been used for centuries by this population. Sometimes they are successful and other times they are not. Should this method fall short, then the patient normally goes to the doctor if they can afford it. Due to the absolute destitution of many Dalit families, a doctor is usually never sought out. This in turn leads to a reliance on the magic of the Mantrik.

We first learned about the Mantrik when Sana told us about a skin condition that Bibek had developed over the past year. He had been going to the Mantrik for an herbal treatment (bark from the Neem tree), which had not cured him. He refused to go to the physician. The fee of the Mantrik is far less than that of the doctor. When we met with the Sarpanche's husband, he stated

that, “there is no such person as the Mantrik. There is no one in the village like that.” However, other villagers validated the fact that she does exist. It is not difficult to understand why the husband of the Sarpanche wanted to conceal the existence of the Mantrik. He is very western in his outward appearance and ideology and it appears that he wanted to generate a more modern idea of the village community that would gain our approval.

Besides visits from non-Dalit members of the village community, Sana was also visited by two Dalit friends, Adrika and Trinayani. Adrika lives a few huts down from Sana, is twenty-two years old, married, and has four children. Trinayani also lives in the same section on the outskirts of the village, is twenty-seven years old, married, and has three children.

On the evening of their visit, the two women sat on the hardened donkey dung floor of Sana's kitchen as Sana prepared the family's dinner and we asked them questions about life in the village. When the topic of castes arose, the women stated that there is no caste system in this village.

Adrika: I see no caste system in the village. This is not a problem for us. We go and shop each day and we visit many people. This is not a problem for us.

Trinayani: I have never had a problem. I am treated like the others. We are lucky in this village. Everyone is the same here.

They admitted that members of various castes live within the village, but that there is an egalitarian approach to life. These women are Dalit, yet shared the fact that upper caste women allowed them in their kitchens, interfaced with them for certain religious functions, and occasionally came to visit their homes. Interestingly, Sana did not share very much information during this conversation. Previously she shared the fact that she felt there was a caste system in place. It appeared that she did not want to utter this in front of her friends. Earlier Sana revealed that although she had many liberties within the village, such as freedom to move about without limitations, she still saw a difference in the treatment of Dalits and caste members. For instance, if Sana were to go to the village to shop at the market for some essentials, she would normally return to her home right after completing her business. People would notice if she should decide to delay leaving the village for some time without a particular purpose in mind.

Although she would never be asked to leave, people would begin to speak poorly about her. If she were to visit Sibani, for instance, people would notice but would not make an issue of it. Her visits would be more noticeable if she began to visit Sibani on a daily basis. Again,

people would not ask her to leave, but the situation would create quite a stir amongst the villagers. Moreover, there might also be some consequences for Sibani, as she has allowed such a situation to occur.

When we inquired of the women if they were happy with their lives an adamant “yes” peeled from the group in unison. The women stated that they fully recognized their roles as Dalits and had little prospects for the future. They stated that they saw no place for change within the system and would make the best of their situation because there was nothing they could do. Trinayani expressed the following,

I am happy if I have enough food for my family. My children are most important to me. I have hope for their futures; good marriages for both. I hope that my sons will work and give money to us. They should go to school like Aadi and learn skills and something new. I don't think about the future. I can only think about each day to get by.

Trinayani was resolute about not wanting any adjustments in her life. Culturally, the expected role of the Dalit female is fundamentally the equivalent to that of every Indian woman, although magnified by her casteless status. Indian scriptures view females as the goddess, the incarnation of compassion, provider of food, and destroyer of evil (Kaul, 1993). However, in reality, women must survive and be content with a submissive position inside the home. This tradition has subsisted for many centuries and there appears to be little expectation for change in the near future.

As our discussion with Sana's friends resumed, we intrepidly asked these women about quality time with their husbands. This topic is rarely brought up in this social order. The women, apart from Sana, were shocked at the question and refused to respond to it. They did, nonetheless, state that no decisions would be made within the home without the approval of the husband. Sana was most adamant about this, saying,

I always ask Bibek before I make decision. He is my husband and must know everything. It would not be right to do anything without his permission. Bibek would be very angry if he were not asked.

The women further explained that they are not permitted to recommend any suggestions on their own. Sana was respectful as she listened to the women and agreed with their responses, regardless of her personal feelings or experiences. She later expressed the fact to Trupti and me that she must represent herself to her friends in a particular mode for the sake of her character

and her family's standing within the community. If the other husbands became aware of her autonomy inside her family unit, there might be a lot of gossip that could cause dishonor to the family.

Interestingly, during our visit with Sana's friends, the husband of Adrika kept peering into the room to see what was going on. He finally exhibited some bravado by actually entering the room and questioning as to what was being chatted about. I asked his wife to tell him that I requested that he leave the room and that she would be returning to prepare his dinner shortly. I asked him to leave for the sole purpose of retrieving an unbiased response from Adrika. Because abuse is so prominent among Dalits and the castes, I thought she might feel intimidated by his presence. My purpose was to gain untainted responses. Therefore, asking her husband to leave appeared to be my only option.

Adrika's husband appeared to be quite confused by my proclamation and proceeded to leave with an extremely contorted expression on his face. After he finally left the room Adrika seemed somewhat distraught. We asked her if she was all right and she stated that her husband abused her physically. With tears in her eyes she told us, "My husband hits me when he gets mad. I think he is mad now. He looks that way. I will explain. I hope it will be good. I will pray." We quickly became alarmed that there might be some possible retribution for my asking the husband to leave the room. I explained to the women that I was just trying to get a female point of view on the village and the presence of a male (especially one of the husbands) might affect the discussion. I asked the woman to please provide this explanation to her husband and inquired as to whether or not there would be a problem. Adrika stated that she did not know whether there would be a problem and seemed to have already accepted the fact that she might have to be subjected to some abusive behavior as a result. At this point we decided that it would be best to disband the group, so as to not jeopardize the safety of the women. It never became known if any physical abuse occurred as a result of this incident.

### Summary

As has been shown, female Dalit cobblers such as Sana must deal with the traditionally inferior role of women within the Indian society and additionally accede to their low class and casteless status. The life choices that Sana has made and continues to make are impeded by cultural and patriarchal ideologies that determine one's ability to gain admission to educational

opportunities, social resources (i.e., mobility within the village, interaction with castes), and avenues toward economic stability (i.e., income, possessions, employment, wealth, property). Despite recent government attempts to lessen the plight of the Dalit population, as well as the conversion of many Dalits from Hinduism to other religions such as Buddhism and Christianity, oppressive ideologies of the past have become ingrained in the minds of the Dalit population and remain a part of their daily cultural proscription.

The caste system of India has a profound and deep-rooted origin within Indian history and appears to be a prolonged and persistent component of Indian civilization and social order. Those who live and observe it, whether in practice or as a means of survival, appear to hold fast to this conduct through learned behaviors and perceptions. There have been some changes in attitudes. However, there is a fundamental blueprint that appears to remain constant.

According to Pierre Bourdieu, a cultural habitus such as that of the Indian caste population is evident in the way Dalits behave, sense, and experience existence. Dalits acquire beliefs about the habitus through adaptation into particular societal groupings such as caste distinctions, genders, class levels, families, peer groups, and communities. Each individual's habitus is a composite of diverse *habiti* simultaneously interacting and each with particular and separate idiosyncrasies (Wilkes, 1990).

From the perspective of the individual living within the specific habitus, these cultural norms and values become naturalized as though an inherent part of nature. It seems that these rules are the accepted order of events. Ultimately, when a condition seems natural to someone, it becomes problematical to question or challenge the situation. For instance, each time I posed a question that was change-oriented to Sana or others in the village, the answer avoided any outward challenge to the system. No one questioned his or her existence, nor did anyone propose even minimal change. If this village is typical of the majority of the Dalit population, then this behavior seems to illustrate why the current system is not being challenged. Sana outwardly accepted her life and never protested.

A precise illustration of this from Sana's life is the physical abuse she endures from Bibek. Sana quite obviously understands that this is negative conduct. On the other hand, she accepts this behavior as a cultural enigma. She does not question it. Bibek is her husband and she accepts the tacit law. In other words, this is an accepted behavior that has become naturalized and no one questions it. According to Sana,

My husband is a good man. Sometimes he gets very angry when he drinks. I do not agree with this but it must be. I am strong and it doesn't hurt as much as it did in the beginning. I don't like this for Savita but she knows that her husband will also do this to her. It must be.

This type of response to questions concerning change is why Sana has been, thus far, somewhat successful at the game of survival. Survival in this respect means overtly complying with sometimes negative and undesirable behaviors in order to avoid confrontation that could lead to more serious crises. Let us take an example of a Dalit being treated in an ill favored manner by a member of the Brahman caste. A confrontation by the Dalit against the Brahman could lead to much more serious circumstances than those created by the initial infraction. The path of least resistance seems to be the safer choice for most Dalit individuals. The avoidance of confrontation is a survival strategy that ensures their continued existence.

Interestingly, this chapter has also shown that Sana prudently challenges the system in an understated way by being creative in terms of getting what she needs in order to uphold her family. Her work at the farm and her moneymaking exploits are creative ways of negotiating the class oppression that affects her life. Her covert control of the money and decision making process within the family is a subtle negotiation of traditional gender roles in Indian society. She, herself, stresses that she must be cautious to not let other people in the village know how much power she exerts over her husband in these situations. If people from the village were to find out, the family would be sanctioned socially and Sana would most likely be beaten by Bibek for the infraction. Finally, caste boundaries are negotiated by Sana on a daily basis while at the farm. Her role as an unofficial representative for the multi-caste group of women, with whom she works, sets her off as unique from many other individuals in her same class and caste status.

It is evident from these and multiple other examples discussed throughout this chapter that Sana experiences and negotiates multiple levels of oppression on a daily basis. She has learned to balance her acceptance of traditional social regulations with her negotiation of them. Sana continually walks a fine line between acceptance and resistance and it is this ability to simultaneously cope with and subvert class, caste, and gender oppression that has ensured the survival of her family in the past. Hopefully, it will continue to do so in the future.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

#### Introduction

My intent in this dissertation was to explore in detail the varying ways caste, class, and gender hierarchies coalesce to influence Sana's life choices, expectations, and her day-to-day struggle to survive. It has been the object of my research to understand and address the interaction of these three structures, as they have caused Dalit women to suffer from a form of oppression that is frequently different from both upper-caste women and Dalit men.

An understanding of class (economic), caste (social), and gender (patriarchy) helps the reader to better understand the research questions addressed in this study: what has the Dalit female cobbler experienced in terms of economic, personal and social struggle; how does the Dalit female cobbler manage to get through her day-to-day struggles; and where does the Dalit female cobbler see herself in the future.

In order to revisit the conclusions and possibilities for future research generated by this study, the following chapter will be separated into six sections. Section one (Background) provides a synopsis of Sana and the life of her family. It includes general information on the individuals highlighted in this study and the economic, social, and political context of their lives. Section two (Caste, Class, and Gender) encapsulates the analysis of the oppression Sana experiences and provides conclusions on how these three power structures interweave to determine her life choices and expectations. Section three (Acceptance and Compliance) highlights a major theme that emerged during the research process – the acceptance of life for what it is and the lack of overt challenges against dominant power structures. This section explores the survival strategies used by Sana to respond to oppression. Section four (Change and Empowerment) illustrates the fact that social, political, and economic situations in rural Dalit communities is slowly changing. This section investigates these changes and the potential future empowerment of Dalit female cobblers. Section five (Future Research) discusses areas of interest for future research generated by this study. Hopefully, this dissertation brings to light the experiences of Dalit female cobblers and will make this population a visible population for future research. Finally, section six (Reflection) is devoted to a discussion of personal experience with fieldwork and the research population. This section provides a space where the researcher

can reflect on the experiences and impart knowledge of challenges and tribulations to future researchers.

### Background

Sana is a thirty-five year old female Dalit cobbler, who is married to a forty year old Dalit cobbler named Bibek. They have two children named Savita and Aadi. Savita, their fifteen year old daughter, has recently been withdrawn from school in order to prepare for marriage. Aadi, their nineteen year old son, is presently studying electronics at a nearby school and is living with Sana's parents, as the school is closer to his grandparent's home. He will be graduating within the next year and plans to obtain employment and move back home with his parents.

Sana participates in the cobbling business with Bibek, yet is also employed at a nearby farm during the daytime hours. This ancillary work helps to supplement the family's income. At this time, Sana and her family are feeling the strains of economic pressure, as the failing cobbling industry in the village continues to plummet downward.

Many of Sana's and Bibek's economic problems are due to their establishment of an autonomous household based on their nuclear family. Sana and Bibek initially lived with Bibek's parents after their marriage. This tradition of patrilocality<sup>46</sup> is expected of all married couples within this culture. Due to increased tensions within the family unit, Sana convinced Bibek to move to their own home shortly after she gave birth to Aadi. Sana's poor relationship with her mother-in-law propagated this radical move and created the difficult economic conditions that have haunted Sana and Bibek for years.

It is unclear as to whether or not Sana regrets this move, as its repercussions had such a major effect on the family. Bibek maintains a relationship with his parents, yet it is limited to his visiting their home. Occasionally his mother will visit their home. However, while Sana is gracious in terms of offering refreshments to the mother, there is no interaction. Currently, Bibek's father is ill and is confined to the home. Bibek's brother will sometimes visit Bibek, yet Sana also has some issues with his lack of responsibility concerning a piece of land owned by the two brothers.

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<sup>46</sup> Residence pattern where the new couple moves to live with the husband's extended family network.

Sana and Bibek maintain a stable relationship with her parents, which include a second wife taken on by her father. Sana's mother suggested a second wife, as she could not produce a son for her husband. The second wife resulted in a son. There are also three sisters, of which the youngest has been college educated.

Village life for Sana and Bibek is not as restricted as other such villages in the area. Being Dalit places automatic constraints on the family, yet this village prides itself in being casteless. According to Sana, there are silent restrictions, and the hierarchy does exist. However, there have been advancements which will be discussed later in the section on Change and Empowerment.

### Caste, Class and Gender

Caste, class, and gender intermingle to create the oppressive atmosphere that inhibits every aspect of Sana's existence. It is important to recognize the way these power structures coalesce in Indian society, so that the complexity of struggle and everyday survival experienced by Sana is not lost. Sana faces many challenges not only because she is a woman or a Dalit, but because she is simultaneously a female Dalit cobbler. This triple oppression of gender, caste and class is what makes Sana's experiences significant and worthy of further research.

Indian society is noticeably oppressive to the female gender. Although this is by no means isolated to the Indian society, India emerges as one of the more extreme illustrations of a patriarchal society. The exclusion of women from the functions that have been traditionally selected for men has purged women from most opportunities that would allow them to elevate their status (Chakravarthy, 1993).

In a traditional patriarchal society, men possess all of the authority. Men are considered to be at the top of the hierarchy, as they are viewed to have the most astuteness and are, therefore, the most likely decision makers. The doubting of a patriarchal leader by a female is a rare occurrence and is considered an extremist societal action that often results in a chastisement that is characteristic of the society. In brief, such a social order is firm and forcefully protected.

The effect of patriarchy on Sana's life is most visible in her relationship with Bibek. For example, Sana takes an understated lead in sustaining her family without stripping Bibek of his dignity. She is cognizant of the fact that it is necessary to maintain the appearance that Bibek is in charge of the decision making process. Sana knows that her community would socially

sanction her and Bibek if they became aware of the power Sana holds over her husband and the affairs of their family. She has lived her entire life within the patriarchy of Indian society and adheres to the gender expectations of her role within that society.

As argued throughout this dissertation, however, gender does not act alone. Gender has combined in various ways with class and caste oppression to create the unique situation of Sana's life. For example, Sana experiences regular abuse from her husband and has come to expect this as part of her role as an Indian woman. In addition to the gendered significance of this abuse, Sana also recognizes the influence of class oppression in creating the abuse she experiences. Because of the collapsing economy and the failing leather industry, Bibek has not succeeded at providing a sustainable environment for his family. Based on discussions with Sana, it seems that Bibek's frustration and disappointment in his inability to provide for his wife and children is a major cause of his abuse of alcohol and his corresponding abusive behavior toward his wife and daughter. In this way, class and gender oppression interact to foster the abusive environment in which Sana lives. She is not only abused by her husband because she is a woman. She is also abused by Bibek because of his feelings of failure and emasculation.

In addition to gender, Sana also experiences the effects of her casteless status in various ways. The fact that Sana and her family must live on the outskirts of the village and not linger too long inside the village limits or inside a caste member's home are significant social sanctions against their caste. These sanctions have little to do with her gender or her class. They are enforced due to a legacy of caste discrimination. These sanctions are experienced by all Dalits, regardless of their gender or economic class standing.

In the midst of the constant challenges facing Sana on a daily basis, she understands the village's core approach to Dalits. While it is true that this village presents a liberal exterior to the outside world, Sana and her equals are cognizant of the realities of the silent oppression that surrounds them. They know their place and they accept their position within the social division of the culture.

Behind closed doors, intermingling between castes is limited. However, as this research has indicated, Sana does have numerous friends of other castes. Unfortunately, even with these friends, she rarely goes to their homes, as she knows that others would gossip if she were seen visiting too often. Alternatively, it is more suitable for her friends to visit her. This is more acceptable, as the caste-affiliated friends have the status to make a conscious decision to visit a

member of the Dalit community. As a caste member, these women have entrée to such options without contempt from the community. The Dalit community does not protest such visits from caste members in this village and almost appear to welcome visits from caste members as a rite of passage and acceptance.

Similar to gender, however, caste does not always function as a distinct and separate power structure. Caste also intertwines with class and with gender to create multiple levels of oppression in Sana's life. For example, due to the relegation of Dalits to occupations defined as dirty or unclean, Sana and Bibek have had little opportunity to pursue various occupations. Continued caste discrimination and poor education prevented both Bibek and Sana from accessing avenues toward class development, such as the reservation system. Both Sana and Bibek were born into cobbling families and, therefore, became cobblers themselves. In this way, the class oppression experienced by Sana and Bibek has been amplified by the occupational proscriptions of the caste system, as well as the economic discrimination of Dalit populations who were unable to access the reservation system.

Finally, Sana and Bibek are also confronting class oppression and the likelihood of absolute economic collapse as a consequence of the failing leather industry in the villages. In struggling to survive the hardships of her low class status, Sana has devised numerous revenue generating schemes that have saved her family time and time again. For example, her work on the farm is wearisome and laboring, but necessary if the family is to endure. In addition, Sana has also endeavored to support the family through sending her son, Aadi, to vocational school. Once graduated, Aadi will return to live with his parents and will, therefore, be able to contribute to the home and the continued survival of Sana and Bibek.

The decision to send Aadi to vocational school was motivated by gender, as well as class concerns. In rural Dalit communities, it is usually the male child who receives education. It can be argued that if male children receive an education, then female children do not need to be educated because the females will eventually marry and reap the benefits of their husbands' educations.

Sana definitely agrees with the economic logic behind an argument such as the one above. She has realized that if both of her children cannot be educated due to their meager class standing, then it is more important for Aadi to be educated so that he can find a good job and help support the family. Savita, on the other hand, does not necessarily need to be educated

because the family will try to marry her off to a man who has an education and can provide for her. Additionally, Savita's marriage will relax the family's financial strain because Indian tradition dictates that after marriage a wife must move to live with her husband's family. Savita's marriage will mean one less person to feed, clothe, and provide for within Sana's and Bibek's household. In this way, Sana views Aadi's schooling as an investment; a means to an end. Savita cannot contribute to the home and is seen as an economic liability as a result.

Silence plays a major role here. We know that Sana did not take any extraordinary measures to ensure an education for Sana, as she did for Aadi. This is an obvious decision based on gender dictates. She has voiced the fact that she would like Savita to continue on, but she cannot afford to keep her at home. In Sana's eyes, Aadi had to be her means of relief. Sana, however, does personally question whether or not this was a positive or negative approach to this situation; yet, nothing was said. Sana remained silent and accepted her daughter's fate. Sana's decision not to take extemporaneous actions for Savita only reinforces how patriarchy and silence inhibit progress.

#### Acceptance and Compliance

Throughout this study there has been one universal theme that has constantly re-emerged - the recognition of life being what it is and, therefore, acceptance on all levels. This perception was not only expressed by Sana, but was conveyed by all of those with whom the researcher came into contact during this study. There was never a mention of change and each individual interviewed agreed that life was basically not to be questioned.

Unconditional acceptance appears to be a key issue within the Dalit population. Countless impending discords never develop, as those involved most often come to the deduction that the conditions are not harsh enough to necessitate a clash. If one party deems they have been ill treated, they are capable of either choosing to speak to the dilemma or let it go without confrontation. Resolving the conflict by forgiving the disagreement often occurs among low dominance groups when they do not feel they have the resources available to confront the opponent (Zelliot, 1992). In some cases, they may not even define the situation as a problem because they have come to characterize the situation as normal, even though it might not appear this way to an outside observer. Additionally, Hindu doctrines play an integral role in the internal thought processes of Sana and other Dalit Hindus, by encouraging the power of

patriarchy.

Many family conflicts often entail one person withdrawing from the disagreement and, therefore, accepting a less desirable outcome. Such is the situation with Sana and her mother-in-law. Sana challenged the patriarchy when she blatantly decided to remove her family from her in-laws' home. Sana became the matriarch of her family when ill-treatment and disrespect for Sana by her mother-in-law forced her to move out of her in-laws' home. Sana's mode for speaking to this dilemma was to withdraw from the disagreement, therefore, accepting a less desirable outcome. This audacious move came at a tremendous loss. She no longer has a positive rapport with her in-laws and brother-in-law's family. Additionally, her children do not have a healthy relationship with their patriarchal grandparents. She and her family have also suffered economically as a result of this decision to abandon the custom of patrilocality, yet she is not sorry that she took the opportunity to move. According to Sana, peace of mind overpowered the prospect of a more secure financial situation and family ties.

In so many facets of her life, Sana has found herself submitting to the higher domination. This is due in part to the cultural standards of the Dalit population that have played such a fundamental component of her life and the lives of other Dalits of India who suffer the same injustices. Additionally, having retained her Hindu affiliation (unlike so many Dalits who found solace in converting to other religions), Sana is adhering to the acceptance of a caste system that is acknowledged and recognized by the Hindu faith.

The central value of this complex cultural response is called *officium* (Blair, 1987) or "duty." *Officium* states that it is the responsibility of an individual to perform the functions into which that person has been born, to the best of the individual's ability. This action implies that one's job is not to pick the role one plays, but to play whatever role one has been tendered, to the best of one's abilities. Each station in life has its duties and every situation in life has duties or obligations incumbent on it. According to the concept of *officium*, the primary duty one owes is to the state, or in this case, Hinduism. Since Hinduism uses the Indian state to further law and civilization, performing one's duty is considered a religious act (Shanti, 1995).

According to the Roman orator Epictetus and his views on *officium* and duty, perhaps the single most important idea the Romans incorporated into their culture from the Greeks was their concept of the *logos*. The universe is ordered by God and this order is the *logos* (i.e. meaning or rational order of the universe). Each and every event, physical and historical, has a place within

this larger rational order. Since the order is rational and meaningful, then nothing happens which is not part of some larger reason or good (Anant, 1979). Because most Dalits find themselves as followers, the most important aspect of duty is to obey and respect authority that ultimately gains its meaning and value from the order of religion.

The interfacing notions of officium and logos have a cohesive connection to Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural habitus and Michel Foucault's notion of how societies delineate and systematize their collective worlds as hegemonies. The Indian caste system is visible in terms of shaping behaviors, sensing, and experiencing survival through specific methods. The social order becomes naturalized, it becomes a habitus or hegemony when individuals acclimate into social categorizations, genders, families, peer groups, and nationalities. For Sana, patriarchy, Hinduism and the leather industry coalesce to form the cultural habitus and hegemony in which she lives. It feels natural to her and, for the most part, Sana abides by the visible rules dictated to her.

As Foucault points out in his works, however, rarely do individuals conform to all of the cultural standards of a habitus or hegemony. Individuals negotiate their lives by bending the rules of their given situations. In Sana's case, she can negotiate money issues with Bibek (a negotiation of patriarchy), or she can go to work on the farm (a negotiation of class), or she can form socially acceptable relationships with members of higher castes (a negotiation of caste). None of these actions by Sana directly challenge established cultural habitus or hegemonies, but they do illustrate the way in which individual actors can negotiate their places within those situations.

The concept of 'deaf and dumb' (Goldberger, 1986) describes the actual *experience* felt by women in repressive societies. The term 'dumb' refers to women who feel voiceless, which relates directly to Sana's dilemma. She is restricted by the patriarchy, and feels as though it is not within her ability to express herself verbally without the possibility of retribution. Her society, after all, has reacted to such objectionable behavior (in terms of a patriarchal social order) in disapproving and malevolent ways. The term 'deaf' refers to the supposition that one cannot learn from others. This, however, does not appear to be the case for Sana. She emerges as a good listener and observer, and appears to have learned survival through these skills. Her developed language is more than adequate, yet she does not explore the power of words due to cultural barriers; therefore, selectively choosing her occasions for expressive discourse.

Although she may feel incapable or unwilling to engage in dialogue that challenges the patriarchy, her `silence' is not meaningless. The absence of `voice' in Sana's life is, indeed, significant.

The term *silence* refers to a stage of knowing (Goldberger, 1996) where one may believe that he or she has no voice, and that learning, thinking, and clear reasoning is not an option that can be observable. Although Sana does not express her ability to endure blatantly, it appears that she does have an awareness of her potential and intelligence. One might ask, in the end, if she would even attempt many of her survival plans if she didn't believe in the possibility of success.

When confronted with any authoritative situation, Sana reverts back to her passive, reactive, and dependent disposition. This temperament reveals her outer facade. However, she responds to authority by discovering other ways to subsist. This blind submission is of maximum importance. Sana's behavior in response to cultural norms reflects a radical sex-role typecast that Sana, as silent a woman accepts, and reflects the powerlessness that she has experienced outwardly.

Goldberger (1996) in *Knowledge, Difference, and Power*, illustrates that one's learning of when not to speak is central to the structure of culturally suitable conduct. Receiving directives from all-powerful sources is not necessarily cursory and mechanical. In Sana's case, she appears to listen at all times, and takes notice of her surroundings. Sana's issues of power and powerlessness within her environment are complex. Although she may feel incapable or unwilling to engage in dialogue that challenges the patriarchy, she is not inevitably silent. Sana attains a sense of choice, and speaks when she chooses to speak. Underneath this veil of silence there is diversity of life, as Sana experiences ways of `knowing' in her own personal fashion.

#### Change and Empowerment

Although Sana rarely opposes existing power structures in a direct manner, her life is not static. Change may come slowly to Sana and others who are in a similar social and economic location, but change does come. Life in the village is drastically different from what it once was. Occupational opportunities are changing rapidly as technology and industry change and political legislation has begun to open up education to wider segments of the population. These changes are slow and many times inconsistent, but they have a major impact on people's lives when viewed from a local level.

The discrimination of Dalits in the village where Sana lives has changed tremendously over the past twenty years. Generally, this village is considered to be more liberal than other villages in the vicinity. Members of the community expressed that they pride themselves on the fact that untouchability does not exist within their village. The findings from this study show that this is not altogether true, yet there appears to be more flexibility in this village than in other similar communities.

Life in the village is not static. Dalit populations now have a wider presence and influence in all aspects of village life. Politically, there have been some visible increases in equality within the village. For example, the government appointed a Dalit female Sarpanche as the leader of the village. Religiously, the Dalit population is also no longer separated from the village. Many village festivals are now open to individuals of all castes. Unfortunately, this is not always the case and, as a rule, Dalits are notified if the celebrations are open to all villagers. There has also been a major endeavor on the part of the Dalit population to contribute funds to build a new temple for the village. To complete this task, the money from a special government endowment, specifically for the purpose of elevating the Dalit status, was used. The Dalits of the village made tremendous advancements through this contribution and to this day all castes utilize this same temple for prayer.

Additionally, many everyday aspects of village life have changed due to decreased caste discrimination. For example, until twenty years ago Dalits were not allowed to use the village well. Formerly, they would have to walk five miles each way to retrieve water. Today, Dalit members of the community are allowed to use the village well and have also been given access to spigots at various locations that spout water at certain times during the day.

Employment in India has also changed drastically in the past twenty years. This dissertation shows evidence of the failure and ultimate downfall of the cobbling industry in the village. According to cobblers and government employees involved with the production of leather sandals, there is little hope for the future of cobbling as a cottage industry. Mr. Singh of F.L.I., has stated that there has been an increasing tendency for the production of sandals to move from rural based manual endeavors to urban based mechanized operations. As technological advances reach India, the nature of industry and production has changed.

The increase in technology has not only changed the nature of industry and production, but it has altered the range of employment opportunities available to Indians in general. As rural

based cottage industries tend to decline, people are being forced to seek new work opportunities. Many are finding work in newly created jobs in technical fields such as electronics. As the technological revolution continues to impact India, employment possibilities have changed to reflect this transformation.

People are also changing vocations as new opportunities are opening up through reservation legislation. Reservations have helped some Dalits achieve more stable and prosperous employment. There is now more access and emphasis on schooling among Dalits, especially for males. However, Trupti (my translator) and Sujata (my initial contact) are both Dalit women who have been able to access and benefit from government reservations. For some Dalits, access to government reservations has even extended from generation to generation. For example, Trupti's parents and grandparents were also a result of the education system.

As people change vocations and uplift their skills, oppression still prevails - especially for the female Dalit. The concept of empowerment<sup>47</sup> manifests among rural females in a subtle and unassuming way. Empowerment is a term that might not be fully understood by this population. There is the question of whether or not Sana views her day-to-day accomplishments as empowerment. There appears to be a sense of accomplishment, yet it seems to manifest as relief rather than achievement. Sana appears to take pleasure in providing 'band aids' for the daily foibles confronting her, yet the ability to translate these feelings into an understanding of empowerment seems yet to be established.

Some might question if Sana experiences futility in her life, as she is bounded by a culture that determines her external actions. In terms of western values, she might be viewed as a prisoner of the established gender roles. If she does undergo a sense of concern regarding the obstacles she confronts as a Dalit female cobbler, then these apprehensions appear to be repressed. Dialogue is almost certainly the best way of expressing apprehension, yet this is not a viable option for a female in a patriarchal society. In this respect, Sana has explored novel ways of overcoming these impediments. It is challenging for Sana, as a powerless person within this society, to access resources and address needs that will enable her to survive life at the most basic level. She does not overtly question the class distinction within the hierarchy, and the fact that her accessibility is limited as compared with those of the castes.

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<sup>47</sup> The researcher uses empowerment to mean a social practice that endorses increased individual and community control, political efficacy, and improved quality of community life and social justice ..

Is her freedom limited? Only Sana can say, as her views of her personal freedom can only be defined through her eyes. If Sana is entirely accepting of her destiny, then she will most probably accept her position. However, if she views herself as a prisoner of her own fate, then she will continue to pursue alternatives for improvement or mere survival. In retrospect, this research demonstrates how Sana has been able to circumvent societal expectations through her actions. In her own way, she is interdependent, as she has gone beyond the silent directives of the societal beliefs.

Furthermore, does Sana look into the future? From appearances, it seems that her response is to devise a strategy to remedy the imminent crisis. However, Sana was apparently looking at the future when she decided to have her tubes tied. This was a blatant and deliberate decision to take some control of her future. Additionally, when Sana decided to move from her in-laws' home, she knew that this decision would affect the future of her family. This was a bold move and a definite risk as, customarily, the wife and husband reside with the husband's family. So while Sana's daily activities are dictated by immediacy, there has been some indication that she contemplates and plans for the distant future as well. But has this prompted a feeling of empowerment?

Many females, worldwide, appear to understand the notion of empowerment as a result of the voids in their lives. Many of these changes in the developing world have occurred under the auspices of development (Aranha, 1991). Although, specific terms have been regulated in the Constitution of India for the empowerment of women through the reservation of jobs in the administration, legislatures and local bodies, like the municipal corporations and the panchayats, it is very limited and the appointees often act in the capacity of figureheads. For example, the Sarpanche of Sana's village is merely a figurehead whose husband takes on all of her responsibilities. She is only required to sign documentation, as she is the legal Sarpanche. Among patriarchal views, there is the belief that women are not suitable community leaders. Movement for women is highly limited and often prohibited, despite the dictates of the constitution.

Education of Dalit girls and women is necessary for their full participation in all aspects of society. Despite multiple obstacles and oppression, many Dalit females are struggling continuously to gain access to educational opportunities. Their resistance and determination to obtain access to information is but one aspect of their agency and power. However, for any of

these attempts to be successful, the programs these women access must address issues important to Dalit women and be accompanied by other social and economic reforms. Increased literacy and education without advancements in sanitation, health, childcare, income, and land reform, will do little. Change must be achieved in multiple arenas because Dalit female cobblers, like Sana, do not only experience oppression because they are Dalit or women or cobblers, but they experience multiple levels of oppression based on class, caste, and gender. Therefore, a solution to their poverty and disenfranchisement must be multifaceted as well.

### Future Research

Having completed this study, it has become clear that there are other areas that merit future exploration for the purpose of contributing to this research. Two probable topics for future research are: the effect of the reservation system on the lives of the Indian people and the further decline of the leatherworking industry.

Although the reservation system of India has offered educational and professional opportunities to the Dalit population, only a handful of individuals are provided with such a prospect. Further research on this topic would provide legislative updates that would reflect the progression of the Indian government in following through with its commitment to assist this group. Legislation that has been recently codified is not necessarily implemented in a systematic and effective manner. Therefore, future research on the actual effect of the reservation system on the lives of Dalits would be beneficial.

Additionally, research on the reservation system is necessary because it could potentially lead to further friction between the castes and Dalits. There is much discussion as to whether reservations should exist at all, as all individuals should have the right to available services as citizens of the state. As debate on this issue continues, it will be necessary for researchers to assess whether this debate will be a determining factor in the direction of the reservation system in India.

Finally, the future of the leather industry is a major factor regarding the feasible prospects of this group. It appears that this cottage industry will inevitably be wiped out and overcome by the manufacturers. Further research concerning the future of this population will demonstrate the unavoidable extinction of the village cobbling industry and if this group will be able to survive such a loss.

## Reflection

On a personal level, this study has provided the researcher an opportunity to explore a topic that has been of special interest for several years. The fifteen visits to India since 1987 have afforded the researcher with many promising themes, yet human rights and women's empowerment have been particularly significant to the research endeavors.

The greatest challenge for the researcher during the field work process was trying to eliminate any western biases, so that an emic perspective to the research could be maintained. The emic approach to ethnographic research reflects how the inhabitants of a particular culture recognize their humanity. Alternatively, the etic approach to ethnographic research reflects how outsiders recognize and construe performance and events that are linked to a particular group. The emic approach is usually the approach of choice where fieldwork is employed, as was the case with this research.

As an American female, it was imperative for the researcher to view this group from an insider's perspective. Numerous visits to India in the past had helped the researcher to acclimate to the Indian society; however, this village experience was quite different from previous encounters. The researcher had never experienced this type of personal connection with a village Dalit family. As a level of intimacy was reached with Sana and the researcher began to care about her and her family, it became difficult for the researcher to accept certain aspects of her life that did not fit the western standards. For example, it was difficult for the researcher to tolerate Sana's refusal to go to a doctor for her abdominal pains, or to listen to her tales of abuse by Bibek, or to acknowledge the fact that her fifteen year old daughter would soon be married and with child. There were many aspects of Sana's life that to a western eyes seemed avoidable.

Throughout the field work process, the researcher did their best to constantly keep these personal opinions and feelings at bay. Fortunately, Trupti's presence, support, and knowledge helped the researcher tremendously with the struggle to maintain an emic, non-western perspective on Sana's experiences. Trupti was not only a translator, but she also helped with the acculturation process and culture shock that was experienced in the field. Trupti's experiences as a Dalit and her past familiarity with having lived in a similar village added to my understanding of the complexities of Sana's existence and the choices she made for herself and her family.

The researcher felt fortunate to be surrounded by excellent resources, especially Trupti. The researcher was fortunate to have linked up with individuals who were pleased to assist at various points along the way. Being an American and a female, the researcher was uncertain as to how their presence would be viewed by the villagers and was initially unsure of what would materialize from this study. Surprisingly, the researcher was embraced by all and was able to come back with more information and insight than ever imagined.

### Summary

This research has attempted to reveal class, caste, and gender issues as they impinge on the life of Sana, a female Dalit cobbler of India. The findings that have manifested throughout the observation of Sana's life-routine have steadily exposed one constant theme in particular: one must accept his or her station in life without question. This dissertation, however, has shown how acceptance does not mean that one stops trying to succeed. On the contrary, Sana's life illustrates the ingenuity and perseverance of people who are not members of the dominant social structure. It illustrates how one individual can negotiate multiple levels of oppression and succeed in sustaining herself, her family, and her community.

It is the researcher's hope that this dissertation communicates the information provided in this study to a wider audience. It is also hoped that other academics will be stimulated by this research to ask further questions and conduct further explorations on the Dalit population as it continues to change.

## POST-SCRIPT PONDERINGS

### Introduction

The preceding chapters have presented key information and understanding supporting the plight of Sana, a female Dalit leatherworker. The intent of this postscript is to provide specifically conceptualized scenarios concerning the potential future in order to create some possible and rational outcomes for Sana and her family. At the end of chapter five, the reader is left with many unanswered questions that can only be resolved through further future observation. Until follow-up examination can be accomplished, the presentation of future scenarios might be useful in responding to questions such as the following. Did Savita marry and what were the circumstances? Was Aadi able to pursue his career goals? How did Sana and Bibek endure as a result of the life directions they cast for their children?

The concept of scenario building deals with demonstrating how unlike influences have the capability to maneuver the future in numerous and diversified ways and how the rationale for each scenario embodies a clear and believable situation. The point of scenario building is to consider the potential influence of factors that affect one's day-to-day life. Furthermore, its purpose is to foresee possible events and modifications that might not otherwise have been predicted. Considering which scenarios will be most valuable is the challenge of such a presentation, as one identifies those developments that may indicate the direction of the future.

Several possible prospects for Sana and her family are proposed in order to provide some possible outcomes until further exploration can be conducted. Three possible scenarios will be presented in this chapter, projecting over a six month time period: best possible scenario, worst possible scenario, and most likely scenario. Three themes will be addressed in each of the scenarios: the marriage of Savita, the future for Aadi, and Sana and Bibek's future together. These three themes appear to be significant driving forces that may help to envisage plausible outcomes for Sana and her family.

Proposing these scenarios will assist us in understanding the uncertainties that lie ahead. However, there are no positive or negative implications projected in this implementation. This is simply an exercise that will help the reader view the possibilities for Sana and her family as their life continues to unfold.

*Savita's Preparation for Marriage: Introduction*

Savita is fifteen years of age and has been taken out of school for the purpose of preparing for marriage. Her parents can no longer afford to keep her in school and can no longer meet the expense of supporting her at home. She has now been gone from school for three months and it is time for her parents to set in motion the search for a spouse. They must do this because village custom dictates that a girl must marry shortly after being removed from school. People from the village will start to question why Savita is not yet married. Sana and Bibek are seeking out a decent and good family that will ensure a fine match for their daughter.

*Savita's Preparation for Marriage: Best Possible Scenario*

Savita is adept at sewing. She is very pleased with her talent and continuously practices her stitching. She has asked her parents on frequent occasions to allow her to go to school in order to acquire a vocation and improve her skills as a seamstress. At fifteen she is perceptive in the sense that she understands that her skills can be put to good use in terms of bringing in additional revenue for her family. Still, after she marries, this skill might be able to carry her family through hard times.

Savita attends a six-month vocational program in a neighboring village, as Sana and Bibek pursue their search for a mate for Savita. It was not easy for them to get the tuition together, but they understand the importance of this schooling and how it will contribute to the family.

Sana and Bibek have finally identified a family in a nearby village that appears to suit their marriage requirements. The family's background is that of leather workers, yet this family is on the same track as Sana and Bibek. They opted to send their son to school for vocational preparation in another field, that of carpentry. Sana and Bibek were attracted to this family because they appear to have similar aspirations for their children. Both families agree that the leather making industry leaves little hope for revenue that will support a family. Sana and Bibek have very little to contribute to Savita's dowry, yet this family is willing to accept Savita with her meager offerings. The wedding date is arranged and the families begin the preparations.

*Note: This is considered the best possible scenario, as Savita will be training to sew in order to ensure that she will be able to contribute financially. Additionally, her family has been able to identify a husband for Savita who comes from a leather working background, but has been educated in another vocation.*

### *Savita's Preparation for Marriage: Worst Possible Scenario*

Savita has expressed her wishes to attend vocational school for sewing. She has been told that the family is unable to afford to send her to school to pursue this vocation. She tells her parents that she will pay them back after she completes the program, but they make it clear to her that their priority is helping her brother through school. They cannot afford to educate both children. They explain to Savita that as a female it is not necessary for her to go to school. It is only essential for her to prepare for marriage.

Savita is quite disappointed. She never wanted to be taken out of school, but she had to respect her parent's wishes. She is now feeling very bored with her chores around the house. Savita is an intelligent girl. She enjoys learning and she enjoys the socialization that she experienced in school. At this time, only one other of her friends was taken out of school to prepare for marriage. When school is dismissed each day, her friends from school come to her home and they all chat about the latest news. She misses getting up in the morning and preparing for a day of learning. Reality has hit her full force and life will never again be as she once knew it.

Sana and Bibek pursue their search for a mate for Savita. They are having problems finding a suitable husband for her. It appears that there has been some hearsay in the village concerning Savita. Sana would often send Savita to the village market during the day while she was working at the farm. It appears that Savita would stop to talk with a Sudra boy who lives in the village. People said that she was behaving in a playful manner with this boy. Furthermore, it appears that this information was spreading throughout the village and other nearby villages. Many of the families that were approached by Sana and Bibek were not interested in the likes of Savita.

Sana and Bibek were hoping to marry off Savita to a family with a higher stature than themselves; however, this gossip has created a difficult situation. The families of appeal have no interest in Savita as a daughter-in-law. Sana and Bibek are now restricted to families with the same social status as themselves or possibly lower. They have located a Dalit leatherworking family in a village that is a bit further away than anticipated. The boy works as a cobbler and his family has many questions about Savita. They are requesting a more superior dowry as a result of the gossip that has been conveyed. Sana and Bibek must now go to their families for help with

the dowry. This may be their only opportunity for a marriage for Savita at this time. Possibly Sana's family might be able to contribute a cow or some chickens. Her mother might have some jewelry that can be passed down to her granddaughter and surely Sana will contribute some of her jewelry (limited as it is) to the dowry.

The boy's family has two other sons that they will soon be marrying off. One of the boys works in the fields and the other works with his parents at leather making. The prospective in-laws are very pleased, as they will be expanding the family with three new daughters-in-law. Although it will cost them to have these new additions to the family, they will also have much help around the home. The women might also be able to assist with the sandal making. This means that Savita will have to participate in the leather making industry of which she has had little experience.

This is her worst nightmare. She was hoping to marry into a family that would afford her a new direction. Sana is also quite disappointed that things have gone astray. She had hopes for her daughter marrying into a family that would provide her with some upward mobility. Sana feels guilty over having to take Savita out of school and having to redirect her life in a negative direction. This appears to be their only choice.

The wedding of Savita will be extremely scanty, as Sana and Bibek have no money and the in-laws also have nothing to contribute. They will be forced to accept contributions from people in the village which is something that is very troubling to Sana.

*Note: This is considered the worst possible scenario. Savita will be married off to a family of similar stature to that of Sana and Bibek. Savita will be forced to work in the leather working industry and might have to additionally take a job in the fields. She will not have an opportunity to pursue her training in sewing. Savita appears to be going full circle in terms of her life. She is moving into an environment comparable to her current situation.*

#### *Savita's Preparation for Marriage: Most Likely Scenario*

Savita's proficiency for sewing is not enough to convince her parents to send her to vocational school. They do not have the funds to send her and they have very clearly stated that her brother's education takes priority. After all, Savita will not be able to contribute anything to the home as she will be living with her husband's family after she is married. Therefore, Sana and Bibek would not be able to reap anything from the investment even if they were to come up

with the money. Savita is unhappy with their response, but she understands that she must accept her parents' decision.

Savita continues to prepare for marriage by learning how to manage the home while Sana is at work. She is bored with this preparation, but forges onward. There is some question as to how she will manage her own home. She will have to work hard to please a new mother-in-law, as this is the expectation of a Dalit female.

As Sana and Bibek pursue their search for a mate for Savita, they try to seek out families that are at the same level as themselves, if not a notch higher. Sana and Bibek are well liked within the village. Although people are aware of the fact that Savita needs much preparation, she is a nice girl and is very respectful. She is physically fit and should be able to bear children. Additionally, any family could easily assume that they will be able to get a good deal of productivity from her, work wise.

Sana and Bibek have finally identified a family in a nearby village that appears to suit their requirements. The family's background is that of leather workers. However, the family has acquired some property which increases their status. This land is farmed, which means that Savita will most likely become involved in farm work. This is their only son, so Savita will have major responsibilities around the home since she will be the only daughter-in-law. Their two other daughters are already married.

Savita's dowry is minimal, yet the boy's family seems pleased to bring Savita to the family. The family knows Sana and Bibek and they are aware of Sana's integrity and perseverance. They respect these qualities and this has helped with their decision. Savita also knows this family, which eases some of the tension. The wedding date is arranged and the families begin the preparations.

*Note: This is considered to be the most likely scenario. Sana and Bibek cannot send Savita for training and will not make any attempt to help her pursue this goal. She is becoming a liability to the household and marrying her off will save them money and will help them protect Savita's reputation. They are content with their choice, as the family is reputable and owns some land.*

### *The Future for Aadi: Introduction*

Aadi is nineteen years of age and has completed his level four education. Being the only son in his nuclear family, he has been given priority in terms of receiving an education. Although

he was brought up in a leatherworking scenario, his parents always discouraged him from a life as a cobbler. They are cognizant of the fact that leatherworking is being monopolized by the manufacturers and is on the verge of obliteration.

Aadi's parents have sacrificed practically everything to send him to school. Sana and Bibek are counting on Aadi to develop a new skill. His interests lie in electronics, so they have striven to send him to a vocational school that will prepare him well in this field. Aadi is in his second year and he will be finished at the end of this term.

In sending Aadi to school, Sana and Bibek gave up the option of having Aadi contribute to the family business. This has been a tremendous hardship for them over the years. If he completes the course and finds employment, then Sana and Bibek are hopeful that he will be able to contribute to the home and therefore elevate the family's social status.

#### *The Future for Aadi: Best Possible Scenario*

Aadi has completed his vocational program in electronics. He did his very best to excel, as he knew that his parents had forfeited much in their lives to ensure that his education would come to pass. The summer before his graduation he interned at a local electronics firm in Kolhapur. He was well liked and had gained a tremendous amount of experience. Towards the end of the semester, just before completing the program, he applied to this same company for full time employment. On the day of his graduation, he received word that he would be offered full time employment. Since he worked previously for this company and they were familiar with his excellent record, they were willing to start him at a higher salary than the usual entry level wage.

At this point in time, Aadi has moved back into the home. Sana is now able to leave her job at the farm, since she now has additional income through Aadi's employment. Sana and Bibek are now in a position to begin paying off the loan they took out for Aadi's education and their survival.

Sana and Bibek are ready to search for a wife for Aadi. Their home consists of only two rooms, with one of the rooms fairly exposed to the outside. Before seeking a wife for Aadi, they will have to add another room to their home. Now that Aadi is earning a decent living, they will be able to afford to build an addition. At some point they might be able to seek out a larger home.

Sana and Bibek will not be hard pressed to find a wife for Aadi. He is now very marketable because of his new employment and skills. His job has helped them to elevate their status within the village. Aadi has given his parents certain specifications for a wife (within five years of his age and educated) and his parents have agreed to try to adhere to his wishes.

*Note: This is considered to be the best possible scenario. Sana and Bibek have sent Aadi to school to pursue an education and he is able to obtain a good job from this investment. They will be able to begin to pay off their loans, as Aadi has moved back home and is contributing to the household. Sana is now able to leave the farm and attend to her household responsibilities. Sana and Bibek will have no problem finding a suitable wife for Aadi, since he is well employed with a marketable skill. Aadi is pleased with himself for he has reached his goals and has realized his parents' dreams.*

#### *The Future for Aadi: Worst Possible Scenario*

Aadi is in his last semester of electronics school. He has found out from his parents that they are about to lose their home because of their continued expenditures on his education. Aadi and his parents agree that he will have to leave school before completing the program. Aadi feels guilty about his parents' financial dilemma. He understands that they sacrificed much to see him through school. Now he must leave before completion in order to work and contribute to the home.

Aadi will have to get a job working in the fields and he will assist his father with the leather making. He is not skilled at leather making, so he will have to assist his father until he learns the needed skills. Unfortunately, however, there is very little call for sandal making these days and materials are expensive. In due course, there might not be enough work for both Bibek and Aadi. Sana will have to remain at her job at the farm.

Aadi hopes to return to school at some point, but there is no indication of this happening in the near future. Additionally, Sana and Bibek will have to put off the search for a wife for Aadi. Their hope is to see Aadi complete his schooling prior to finding a bride for him, as a new vocation would attract a family of better stature.

*Note: This is considered to be the worst possible scenario. Sana and Bibek have had to take Aadi out of school for financial reasons. They are about to lose their home and they need him to contribute financially. He will be forced to work in the fields and assist his father with the*

*leather making. Aadi feels guilty about their financial state and he understands his responsibility as the only son. He feels as though he has disappointed his parents and hopes to go back to school at some point. He realizes that this may not happen for a long while. His marriage plans are also on hold until their financial situation is rectified.*

#### *The Future for Aadi: Most Likely Scenario*

Aadi has completed his electronics program. He has been applying to various companies within the Kolhapur area. He must move back to his parents' home, as they will require him to help support the household. Aadi has obtained a position with a mediocre electronics' company in Kolhapur. He was actually hoping for employment with a company he interned with the summer before. This company is familiar with his work and he has received excellent recommendations from several of the managers there. The employment market is competitive at this time and it appears that Aadi might have to wait a few months to become hired by the company of his choice. Until this occurs, he will continue on with his present position.

Although he will make more money at the other company, he is bringing in a salary and is getting valuable experience. Aadi knows that he will eventually be hired by this other company and he must be patient until this materializes. He is also working closely with the school, as they try to assist their graduates with seeking out employment opportunities. There was an opportunity for Aadi at an electronics company located in Mumbai. Unfortunately, Aadi cannot relocate. He is committed to his family and must stay in the village to ensure their survival. Aadi is pleased to have acquired employment upon graduation and is contented that he has accomplished his goals in a timely manner.

Sana and Bibek are pleased that Aadi has completed his program and they are hopeful that he will soon acquire employment with his company of choice. For the time being, Aadi will do what is necessary to assist his family. Sana and Bibek had hoped to seek a mate for Aadi, however, they have agreed to wait until he is gainfully employed. Once they see how much he will be able to contribute, they will then set out to find a bride for Aadi. Aadi's employment will play a major role in the search for a wife, as he will be highly valued as a husband once he is gainfully employed.

*Note: This is considered to be the most likely scenario. Aadi has completed his program and is employed by an electronics company. Although not his company of choice, he is able to*

*contribute to the family and is still waiting to be hired by the company he interned with during his schooling. Once he is employed with this other company his wages will increase and he will be able to pursue a marriage partner.*

#### *Sana and Bibek: Introduction*

Sana and Bibek have based their lives on the future of their children; Aadi, specifically. They have pulled Savita out of school at age fifteen so that she can prepare for marriage, as they can no longer afford to keep her in the home. They have placed all of their energy into educating Aadi so that they will be able to benefit from his contribution to the home both financially and in terms of social position. Sana and Bibek have struggled for many years to survive and their financial situation is one of urgency. There is a chance that they might lose their home due to a loan that had been taken out against their house. The following scenarios will present a vision of how Sana and Bibek might endure and continue as a result of the life choices they have devised for their children.

#### *Sana and Bibek: Best Possible Scenario*

Sana and Bibek have finally found some relief in their subjugated lives of toil. Aadi has graduated from electronics school and is home contributing to the household. Currently, they are seeking a wife for Aadi. Savita has already been married off to a leatherworking family whose son pursued a career in carpentry. Sana and Bibek were also able to struggle and send Savita to school for sewing. This made her a more desirable bride since she will be able to contribute financially to her new family.

Sana is pleased, as she is finally able to leave her job at the farm. She was becoming ill from this tedious work. It took tremendous strength working under the strain of the brutal sun and exposure on a daily basis to whatever Mother Nature chose to set free each day.

Sana also now feels more liberated in terms of her extended family. She sees her accomplishments as an endorsement of her resourceful nature and survival abilities. She has now demonstrated to her abusive mother-in-law that she has been able to supersede numerous obstacles that have prevented her ability to prevail in the past.

Sana and Bibek feel proud of their accomplishments. Eventually they will find a bride for Aadi and might possibly move to a larger place or extend the present home. Sana was pleased at having pushed Bibek to invest in Aadi's education and now Bibek realizes how her innovation

succeeded.

Bibek's frustration with the leatherworking industry has also subsided. He no longer drinks excessively. In effect, he is no longer physically abusing Sana. The decisions made for their children have essentially brought them financial security, which has ultimately led to peace of mind for the couple. The eventual collapse of the leather industry for the village cobbler no longer poses a threat to Sana and Bibek. Their investment in Aadi's education will provide them with the security that they were hoping for.

*Note: This is considered to be the best possible scenario. Aadi has completed his program and has secured a good job in his field. Savita has been married off to a good family and has also accomplished her training. Sana and Bibek are pleased with their choice of a husband for Savita and financial security has brought a sense of stability to this home. Sana and Bibek are experiencing a certain inner peace, knowing that their struggle has accomplished something positive.*

#### *Sana and Bibek: Worst Possible Scenario*

Due to financial strains, Sana and Bibek have had to take a different approach to the initial plans designated for their children. Savita has been married off to a leatherworking family of somewhat lower stature. They were not able to afford to send Savita to vocational school for sewing, so she has moved on to her marriage with no marketable skills. Sana and Bibek are concerned that Savita will have to work in the fields and learn the leatherworking business. Sana was especially hoping for a better life for Savita.

Sana and Bibek also reluctantly had to withdraw Aadi from his last semester of electronics school. Bibek and Sana had made it very clear to Aadi that he was now needed at home to help support the family. They are about to lose their home, as they have not been able to pay off the loan that was taken out for Aadi's education and their survival. They hope that Aadi will be able to return to school, however, there is no telling when this might occur. This also postpones any plans they had for finding a spouse for Aadi at this time. They cannot afford to bring a new wife into the home. It would require more space, which would not be an option at this time.

Sana will have to continue her work at the farm. She was hoping that Aadi's new profession would relieve her of this almost intolerable duty. Sana and Bibek are pleased to

finally have their son at home, yet there is a tremendous amount of disappointment concerning the direction that fate has taken. Bibek's frustration with his life has magnified and his drinking has increased. As a result, he is more abusive to Sana on a continual basis. This has taken its toll on the family. Sana has been contending with some physical problems that have been neglected due to their financial problems. The increased physical and emotional abuse has had a dreadful effect on everyone. Aadi now keeps his distance from his father. He also feels a sense of guilt about his parents' problems since his schooling contributed to their financial destitution.

Aadi's contribution to the home is not enough to save their home. The family is forced to move back with Bibek's family until they are able to manage independently. This was Sana's worst fear, as she did not want to go back to the abuse she was subjected to from his mother when they first resided there. Bibek will be forced to depend on the declining leather industry. The future looks dismal and there appears to be little hope or alternatives for this family.

*Note: This is considered to be the worst possible scenario. Aadi has been taken out of school for financial reasons and Savita was married into a family of lower stature. Sana's dreams for her family and her future have failed. Pulling Aadi out of school did not save her home and there is tremendous pressure within the nuclear family as a result of Bibek's drinking. She has been forced to move back to the abusive environment that she initially lived in with her mother-in-law. The meager leather industry is their only means of income and that will inevitably terminate. Life has gone amiss for Sana and her family.*

#### *Sana and Bibek: Most Likely Scenario*

Sana and Bibek have achieved what they set out to accomplish. Savita has been married off to a leatherworking family that is acceptable to Sana and Bibek. They could not afford to send Savita to school for sewing, so she will most likely have to work with the family as a cobbler or in the fields. Aadi has graduated from his vocational school and has acquired a job that will be able to assist the family. Sana and Bibek will now begin to search for a wife for Aadi.

Sana feels as though her life is beginning to level off. She will continue to work at the farm until they become financially stable. She sees that Bibek is less discouraged and their relationship has improved. He has not had any alcohol in months and this has eliminated the problem of abuse.

Sana is now attending to her physical health. She has been to the village doctor and he is attending to her ailment. Luckily, she does not have to be hospitalized. Sana and Bibek are planning to add on an addition to their present home once they have repaid their debts. Sana is relieved at the prospect of being able to remain in her own home. She was fearful of the possibility of having to become dependant on her in-laws for shelter. This is no longer a choice, since Aadi is now contributing to the home. Although Bibek will continue on as a cobbler, he understands that when the industry can no longer provide him with an income (as paltry as it is), he will be able to survive with the aid of his son.

*Note: This is considered to be the most likely scenario. Aadi has completed school and has acquired employment in his field. Savita was married into a family that was acceptable to Sana and Bibek. Sana's hopes for her family have now materialized. She will be able to keep her home. Her relationship with Bibek has improved significantly. Life is moving in a positive direction and Sana knows that she made the right decisions concerning her family.*

#### Summary

It seems that in the future, Sana and Bibek will accomplish what they set out to achieve because of Sana's ability to negotiate the systems of oppression that affect her life. Savita will most likely be married off to a leatherworking family that is acceptable to Sana and Bibek. It is doubtful that they will send Savita to school in pursuance of a vocation. After all, she has been a financial liability to her family and the purpose of marrying her off is to have more available money for the family.

Aadi will, in all probability, graduate from his vocational program. Depending upon the economy, he will either obtain employment in his field immediately or will have to wait a short period of time for employment opportunities to materialize. Either way, he is now in a position to work and contribute money to the home. Because of his schooling, Sana and Bibek will have no problem in identifying a bride for Aadi. For Sana, her son will bring needed revenue to the household, as well as an extra hand to assist with household duties when he marries.

As Sana's goals are realized and life reaches a certain level of comfort that is more tolerable than the previous years of toil, Sana will hopefully recognize that her years of labor may finally come to an end. Although Sana and Bibek will most likely retain their employment situations, the fundamental stress will be lessened. Sana will most likely be able to concentrate

on her physical health and will not experience the dishonor of losing her home. The decrease of stress in Sana's life will in all probability affect Sana's bond with her husband, as well. As pressure seemed to be a principle factor contributing to the abuse that Sana was subjected to at the hand of Bibek, it might very well be that this difficulty will be removed from their lives.

As the lineage continues on, Sana's grandchildren (from Aadi's marriage) will produce a new generation that will most likely not pursue cobbling as a vocation. Being employed in the field of electronics, Aadi will undoubtedly seek to educate his sons (and possibly his daughters) in other fields that will ensure marketability.

Savita's case might differ, depending on whom she marries. If she is married to a farmer or possibly another cobbler, then there is always the possibility that her children might continue on in that vocation. However, if she has inherited her mother's disposition and initiative, she just might forge ahead with creative ways to pursue an education for her children. It should be remembered that Savita, herself, had an interest in pursuing her education. It is uncertain as to whether or not Sana will be the last of her generation to cobble in the village. Nonetheless, she might be last in her family.

The abovementioned scenarios have offered some formulated and unambiguous settings concerning the future and have generated some potential and rational outcomes for Sana and her family. The intent of this chapter was to exhibit contrasting vignettes, illustrate how they might have the capacity to fashion the future, and how the justification for each has the ability to create a plausible condition.

What has materialized for Sana and her family in reality can only be discovered through future investigation. It is my intent to return to India within the next year in order to determine the fate of this family. While scenario building can provide plausible possibilities for the future, only further research can determine what has actually manifested for Sana.

As this dissertation has illustrated, life as a female Dalit leatherworker in rural India is dynamic, harsh, and somewhat unpredictable. Life is filled with complexity and is constantly being negotiated as powerful hegemonies (caste, class, and gender) act to influence individuals' lives. As Sana has shown, perseverance and strength can be powerful attributes in the continued struggle to survive oppression and disenfranchisement.

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## APPENDIX A

### THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA

#### PART III-FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

##### GENERAL

**12. Definition.-** In this part, unless the context otherwise requires, "the State" includes the Government and Parliament of India and the Government and the Legislature of each of the States and all local or other authorities within the territory of India or under the control of the Government of India.

**13. Laws inconsistent with or in derogation of the fundamental rights.-**

(1) All laws in force in the territory of India immediately before the commencement of this Constitution, in so far as they are inconsistent with the provisions of this Part, shall, to the extent of such inconsistency, be void.

(2) The State shall not make any law which takes away or abridges the rights conferred by this Part and any law made in contravention of this clause shall, to the extent of the contravention, be void.

(3) In this article, unless the context otherwise requires.-

"law" includes any Ordinance, order, by-law, rule, regulation, notification, custom or usages having in the territory of India the force of law;

"laws in force" includes laws passed or made by Legislature or other competent authority in the territory of India before the commencement of this Constitution and not previously repealed, notwithstanding that any such law or any part thereof may not be then in operation either at all or in particular areas.

(4) Nothing in this article shall apply to any amendment of this Constitution made under Article 368.

#### RIGHT OF EQUALITY

**14. Equality before law.-** The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India. Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.

**15. Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.-**

(1) The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them.

(2) No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them, be subject to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to-

(a) access to shops, public restaurants, hotels and palaces of public entertainment; or

(b) the use of wells, tanks, bathing ghats, roads and places of public resort maintained wholly or partly out of State funds or dedicated to the use of the general public.

(3) Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making any special provision for women and children.

(4) Nothing in this article or in clause (2) of Article 29 shall prevent the State from making any special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes.

#### **16. Equality of opportunity in matters of public employment.-**

(1) There shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State.

(2) No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth, residence or any of them, be ineligible for, or discriminated against in respect or, any employment or office under the State.

(3) Nothing in this article shall prevent Parliament from making any law prescribing, in regard to a class or classes of employment or appointment to an office under the Government of, or any local or other authority within, a State or Union territory, any requirement as to residence within that State or Union territory] prior to such employment or appointment.

(4) Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making any provision for the reservation of appointments or posts in favor of any backward class of citizens which, in the opinion of the State, is not adequately represented in the services under the State.

(5) Nothing in this article shall affect the operation of any law which provides that the incumbent of an office in connection with the affairs of any religious or denominational institution or any member of the governing body thereof shall be a person professing a particular religion or belonging to a particular denomination.

**17. Abolition of Untouchability.-** "Untouchability" is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of "Untouchability" shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law.

#### **18. Abolition of titles.-**

No title, not being a military or academic distinction, shall be conferred by the State.

No citizen of India shall accept any title from any foreign State.

No person who is not a citizen of India shall, while he holds any office of profit or trust under the State, accept without the consent of the President any title from any foreign State.

No person holding any office of profit or trust under the State shall, without the consent of the President, accept any present, emolument, or office of any kind from or under any foreign State

## **RIGHT TO FREEDOM**

**19. Protection of certain rights regarding freedom of speech etc.-** (1) All citizens shall have the right-

- (a) to freedom of speech and expression;
- (b) to assemble peaceably and without arms;
- (c) to form associations or unions;
- (d) to move freely throughout the territory of India;
- (e) to reside and settle in any part of the territory of India; and
- (f) omitted
- (g) to practice any profession, or to carry on any occupation, trade or business.

(2) Nothing in sub-clause (a) of clause (1) shall affect the operation of any existing law, or prevent the State from making any law, in so far as such law imposes reasonable restrictions on the exercise of the right conferred by the said sub-clause in the interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, decency or morality or in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence.

(3) Nothing in sub-clause (b) of the said clause shall affect the operation of any existing law in so far as it imposes, or prevent the State from making any law imposing, in the interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India or public order, reasonable restrictions on the exercise of the right conferred by the said sub-clause.

(4) Nothing in sub-clause (c) of the said clause shall affect the operation of any existing law in so far as it imposes, or prevent the State from making any law imposing, in the interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India or public order or morality, reasonable restrictions on the exercise of the right conferred by the said sub-clause.

(5) Nothing in sub-clauses (d) and (e) of the said clause shall affect the operation of any existing law in so far as it imposes, or prevent the State from making any law imposing, reasonable

restrictions on the exercise of any of the rights conferred by the said sub-clauses either in the interests of the general public or for the protection of the interests of any Scheduled Tribe.

(6) Nothing in sub-clause (g) of the said clause shall affect the operation of any existing law in so far as it imposes, or prevent the State from making any law imposing, in the interests of the general public, reasonable restrictions on the exercise of the right conferred by the said sub-clause, and, in particular, nothing in the said sub-clause shall affect the operation of any existing law in so far as it relates to, or prevent the State from making any law relating to,-

(i) the professional or technical qualifications necessary for practicing any profession or carrying on any occupation, trade or business, or

(ii) the carrying on by the State, or by a corporation owned or controlled by the State, of any trade, business, industry or service, whether to the exclusion, complete or partial, of citizens or otherwise.

**20. Protection in respect of conviction for offences.-** (1) No person shall be convicted of any offence except for violation of the law in force at the time of the commission of the act charged as an offence, nor be subjected to a penalty greater than that which might have been inflicted under the law in force at the time of the commission of the offence.

(2) No person shall be prosecuted and punished for the same offence more than once.

(3) No person accused of any offence shall be compelled to be a witness against himself.

**21. Protection of life and personal liberty.-** No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law.

**22. Protection against arrest and detention in certain cases.-** (1) No person who is arrested shall be detained in custody without being informed, as soon as may be, of the grounds for such arrest nor shall he be denied the right to consult, and to be defended by, a legal practitioner of his choice.

(2) Every person who is arrested and detained in custody shall be produced before the nearest magistrate within a period of twenty-four hours of such arrest excluding the time necessary for the journey from the place of arrest to the court of the magistrate and no such person shall be detained in custody beyond the said period without the authority of a magistrate.

(3) Nothing in clauses (1) and (2) shall apply (a) to any person who for the time being is an enemy alien; or (b) to any person who is arrested or detained under any law providing for preventive detention.

(4) No law providing for preventive detention shall authorize the detention of a person for a longer period than three months unless- (a) an Advisory Board consisting of persons who are, or have been, or are qualified to be appointed as, Judges of a High Court has reported before the expiration of the said period of three months that there is in its opinion sufficient cause for such

detention:

(5) When any person is detained in pursuance of an order made under any law providing for preventive detention, the authority making the order shall, as soon as may be, communicate to such person the grounds on which the order has been made and shall afford him the earliest opportunity of making a representation against the order.

(6) Nothing in clause (5) shall require the authority making any such order as is referred to in that clause to disclose facts which such authority considers to be against the public interest to disclose.

(7) Parliament may by law prescribe-

(a) the circumstances under which, and the class or classes of cases in which, a person may be detained for a period longer than three months under any law providing for preventive detention without obtaining the opinion of an Advisory Board in accordance with the provisions of sub-clause (a) of clause (4);

(b) the maximum period for which any person may in any class or classes of cases be detained under any law providing for preventive detention; and

(c) the procedure to be followed by an Advisory Board in an inquiry under sub-clause (a) of clause (4).

## **RIGHT AGAINST EXPLOITATION**

**23. Prohibition of traffic in human beings and forced labor.-** (1) Traffic in human beings and begar and other similar forms of forced labor are prohibited and any contravention of this provision shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law.

(2) Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from imposing compulsory service for public purpose, and in imposing such service the State shall not make any discrimination on grounds only of religion, race, caste or class or any of them.

**24. Prohibition of employment of children in factories, etc.-** No child below the age of fourteen years shall be employed to work in any factory or mine or engaged in any other hazardous employment. Provided that nothing in this sub-clause shall authorize the detention of any person beyond the maximum period prescribed by any law made by Parliament under sub-clause (b) of clause (7); or such person is detained in accordance with the provisions of any law made by Parliament under sub-clauses (a) and (b) of clause (7)

## **RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF RELIGION**

**25. Freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion.-**

(1) Subject to public order, morality and health and to the other provisions of this Part, all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practice and propagate religion.

(2) Nothing in this article shall affect the operation of any existing law or prevent the State from making any law -

(a) regulating or restricting any economic, financial, political or other secular activity which may be associated with religious practice;

(b) providing for social welfare and reform or the throwing open of Hindu religious institutions of a public character to all classes and sections of Hindus.

Explanation I.- The wearing and carrying of kirpans shall be deemed to be included in the profession of the Sikh religion.

Explanation II.- In sub-clause (b) of clause reference to Hindus shall be construed as including a reference to persons professing the Sikh, Jaina or Buddhist religion, and the reference to Hindu religious institutions shall be construed accordingly.

**26. Freedom to manage religious affairs.-** Subject to public order, morality and health, every religious denomination or any section thereof shall have the right-

(a) to establish and maintain institutions for religious and charitable purposes;

(b) to manage its own affairs in matters of religion;

(c) to own and acquire movable and immovable property; and

(d) to administer such property in accordance with law.

**27. Freedom as to payment of taxes for promotion of any particular religion.-** No person shall be compelled to pay any taxes, the proceeds of which are specifically appropriated in payment of expenses for the promotion or maintenance of any particular religion or religions denomination.

**28. Freedom as to attendance at religious instruction or religious worship in certain educational institutions.-** (1) No religion instruction shall be provided in any educational institution wholly maintained out of State funds.

(2) Nothing in clause (1) shall apply to an educational institution which is administered by the State but has been established under any endowment or trust which requires that religious instruction shall be imparted in such institution.

(3) No person attending any educational institution recognized by the State or receiving aid out of State funds shall be required to take part in any religious instruction that may be imparted in such institution or to attend any religious worship that may be conducted in such institution or in any premises attached thereto unless such person or, if such person is a minor, his guardian has given his consent thereto.

## **CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL RIGHTS**

**29. Protection of interests of minorities.**- (1) Any section of the citizens residing in the territory of India or any part thereof having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same.

(2) No citizen shall be denied admission into any educational institution maintained by the State or receiving aid out of State funds on grounds only of religion, race, caste, language or any of them.

**30. Right of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions.**- (1) All minorities, whether based on religion or language, shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.

(1A) In making any law providing for the compulsory acquisition of any property of an educational institution established and administered by a minority, referred to in clause (1), the State shall ensure that the amount fixed by or determined under such law for the acquisition of such property is such as would not restrict or abrogate the right guaranteed under that clause.

(2) The state shall not, in granting aid to educational institutions, discriminate against any educational institution on the ground that it is under the management of a minority, whether based on religion or language.

**31 Repealed**

## SAVING OF CERTAIN LAWS

**31A. Saving of laws providing for acquisition of estates, etc.** (1) Notwithstanding anything contained in Article 13, no law providing for

- (a) the acquisition by the State of any estate or of any rights therein or the extinguishment or modification of any such rights, or
- (b) the taking over of the management of any property by the State for a limited period either in the public interest or in order to secure the proper management of the property, or
- (c) the amalgamation of two or more corporations either in the public interest or in order to secure the proper management of any of the corporations, or
- (d) the extinguishment or modification of any rights of managing agents, secretaries and treasurers, managing directors, directors or managers of corporations, or of any voting rights of shareholders thereof, or
- (e) the extinguishment or modification of any rights accruing by virtue of any agreement, lease or license for the purpose of searching for, or winning, any mineral or mineral oil, or the premature termination or cancellation of any such agreement, lease or license, shall be deemed to be void on the ground that it is inconsistent with, or takes away or abridges any of the rights conferred by [Article 14 or Article 19]:

Provided that where such law is a law made by the Legislature of a State, the provisions of this article shall not apply thereto unless such law, having been reserved for the consideration of the President, has received his assent:

Provided further that where any law makes any provision for the acquisition by the State of any estate and where any land comprised therein is held by a person under his personal cultivation, it shall not be lawful for the State to acquire any portion of such land as is within the ceiling limit applicable to him under any law for the time being in force or any building or structure standing thereon or appurtenant thereto, unless the law relating to the acquisition of such land, building or structure, provides for payment of compensation at a rate which shall not be less than the market value thereof.

(2) In this article,-

(a) the expression "estate", shall, in relation to any local area, have the same meaning as that expression or its local equivalent has in the existing law relating to land tenures in force in that area and shall also include-

(i) any jagir, inam or muafi or other similar grant and in the States of Tamil Nadu and Kerala, any janmam right;

(ii) any land held under ryotwary settlement;

(iii) any land held or let for purposes of agriculture or for purposes ancillary thereto, including waste land, forest land, land for pasture or sites of buildings and other structures occupied by cultivators of land, agricultural laborers and village artisans;

(b) the expression "rights", in relation to an estate, shall include any rights vesting in a proprietor, sub-proprietor, under-proprietor, tenure-holder, raiyat, under- raiyat or other intermediary and any rights or privileges in respect of land revenue.

**31B. Validation of certain Acts and Regulations.**- Without prejudice to the generality of the provisions contained in Article 31A, none of the Acts and Regulations specified in the Ninth Schedule nor any of the provisions thereof shall be deemed to be void, or ever to have become void, on the ground that such Act, Regulation or provision is inconsistent with, or takes away or abridges any of the rights conferred by, any provisions of this Part, and notwithstanding any judgment, decree or order of any court or tribunal to the contrary, each of the said Acts and Regulations shall, subject to the power of any competent Legislature to repeal or amend it, continue in force.

**31C. Saving of laws giving effect to certain directive principles.**- Notwithstanding anything contained in Article 13, no law giving effect to the policy of the State towards securing all or any of the principles laid down in Part IV shall be deemed to be void on the ground that it is inconsistent with, or takes away or abridges any of the rights conferred by Article 14 or Article 19 and no law containing a declaration that it is for giving effect to such policy shall be called in question in any court on the ground that it does not give effect to such policy:

Provided that where such law is made by the Legislature of a State, the provisions of this Article shall not apply thereto unless such law, having been reserved for the consideration of the President, has received his assent.

**31D Repealed**

## **RIGHT TO CONSTITUTIONAL REMEDIES**

**32. Remedies for enforcement of rights conferred by this Part.**- (1) The right to move the Supreme Court by appropriate proceedings for the enforcement of the rights conferred by this Part is guaranteed.

(2) The Supreme Court shall have power to issue directions or orders or writs, including writs in the nature of habeas corpus, mandamus, prohibition, quo warranto and certiorari, whichever may be appropriate, for the enforcement of any of the rights conferred by this Part.

(3) Without prejudice to the powers conferred on the Supreme Court by clause (1) and (2), Parliament may by law empower any other court to exercise within the local limits of its jurisdiction all or any of the powers exercisable by the Supreme Court under clause (2).

(4) The right guaranteed by this article shall not be suspended except as otherwise provided for by this Constitution.

### **32A Repealed**

**33. Power of Parliament to modify the rights conferred by this Part in their application etc.-** Parliament may, by law, determine to what extent any of the rights conferred by this Part shall, in their application to,-

(a) the members of the Armed Forces; or

(b) the members of the Forces charged with the maintenance of public order; or

(c) persons employed in any bureau or other organization established by the State for purposes of intelligence or counter intelligence; or

(d) persons employed in, or in connection with, the telecommunication systems set up for the purposes of any Force, bureau or organization referred to in clauses (a) to (c), be restricted or abrogated so as to ensure the proper discharge of their duties and the maintenance of discipline among them.

**34. Restriction on rights conferred by this Part while martial law is in force in any area.-**

Notwithstanding anything in the foregoing provisions of this Part, Parliament may by law indemnify any person in the service of the Union or of a State or any other person in respect of any act done by him in connection with the maintenance or restoration of order in any area within the territory of India where martial law was in force or validate any sentence passed, punishment inflicted, forfeiture ordered or other act done under martial law in such area.

**35. Legislation to give effect to the provisions of this Part.-** Notwithstanding anything in this Constitution,-

(a) Parliament shall have, and the Legislature of a State shall not have, power to make laws-

(i) with respect to any of the matters which under clause (3) of Article 16, clause (3) of Article 32, Article 33 and Article 34 may be provided for by law made by Parliament; and

(ii) for prescribing punishment for those acts which are declared to be offences under this Part; and Parliament shall, as soon as may be after the commencement of this Constitution, make laws for prescribing punishment for the acts referred to in sub-clause (ii);

(b) any law in force immediately before the commencement of this Constitution in the territory of India with respect to any of the matters referred to in sub-clause (i) of clause (a) or providing for punishment for any act referred to in sub-clause (ii) of that clause shall, subject to the terms there of and to any adaptations and modifications that may be made therein under Article 372, continue in force until altered or repealed or amended by Parliament.

Explanation.- In this article, the expression "law in force" has the same meaning as in Article 372.

## APPENDIX B

### THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA

#### PART XVI-SPECIAL PROVISIONS RELATING TO CERTAIN CLASSES

**330.Reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the House of the People.-** (1) Seats shall be reserved in the House of the People for-

- (a) the Scheduled Castes;
- (b) the Scheduled Tribes except the Scheduled Tribes in the autonomous districts of Assam; and
- (c) the Scheduled Tribes in the autonomous districts of Assam.

(2) The number of seats reserved in any State [or Union territory] for the Scheduled Castes or the Scheduled Tribes under clause (1) shall bear, as nearly as may be, the same proportion to the total number of seats allotted to that State [or Union territory] in the House of the People as the population of the Scheduled Castes in the State [or Union territory] or of the Scheduled Tribes in the State [or Union territory] or part of the State [or Union territory], as the case may be, in respect of which seats are so reserved, bears to the total population of the State [or Union territory].

(3) Notwithstanding anything contained in clause (2), the number of seats reserved in the House of the People for the Scheduled Tribes in the autonomous districts of Assam shall bear to the total number of seats allotted to that State a proportion not less than the population of the Scheduled Tribes in the said autonomous districts bears to the total population of the State.

Explanation.- In this article 332, the expression "population" means the population as ascertained at the last preceding census of which the relevant figures have been published:

Provided that the reference in this Explanation to the last preceding census of which the relevant figures have been published shall, until the relevant figures for the first census taken after the year 2000 have been published, be construed as a reference to the 1971 census.

**331.Representation of the Anglo-Indian community in the Hose of the People.-** Notwithstanding anything in Article 81, the President may, if he is of opinion that the Anglo-Indian community is not adequately represented in the House of the people, nominate not more than two members of that community to the House of the People.

**332.Reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the Legislative Assemblies of the States.-**

(1) Seats shall be reserved for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, [except the Scheduled Tribes in the tribal areas of Assam, in Nagaland and in Meghalaya], in the Legislative Assembly of every State.

(2) Seats shall be reserved also for the autonomous districts in the Legislative Assembly of the State of Assam.

(3) The number of seats reserved for the Scheduled Castes or the Scheduled Tribes in the Legislative Assembly nearly as may be, the same proportion to the 'total number of seats in the Assembly as the population of the Scheduled Castes in the State or of the Scheduled Tribes in the State or part of the State, as the case may be, in respect of which seats are so reserved bears to the total population of the State.

(4) The number of seats reserved for an autonomous district in the legislative Assembly of the State of Assam shall bear to the total number of seats in that Assembly a proportion not less than the population of the district bears to the total population of the State.

(5) The constituencies for the seats reserved for any autonomous district of Assam shall not comprise any area outside that district.

(6) No person who is not a member of a Scheduled Tribe of any autonomous district of the State of Assam shall be eligible for election to the Legislative Assembly of the State from any constituency of that district.

**333.Representation of the Anglo-Indian community in the Legislative Assemblies of the States.-** Notwithstanding anything in Article 170, the Governor of a State may, if he is of opinion that the Anglo-Indian community needs representation in the Legislative Assembly of the State and is not adequately represented therein, [nominate one member of that community to the Assembly].

**334.Reservation of seats and special representation to cease after forty years.-** Notwithstanding anything in the foregoing provisions of this Part, the provisions of Constitution relating to -

(a) the reservation of seats for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes in the House of the People and in the Legislative Assemblies of the States; and

(b) the representation of the Anglo-Indian community in the House of the People and in the Legislative Assemblies of the States by nomination, shall cease to have effect on the expiration of a period of [forty years] from the commencement of this Constitution:

Provided that nothing in this article shall affect any representation in the House of the People or in the legislative Assembly of a State until the dissolution of the then existing House or Assembly, as the case may be.

**335.Claims of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes to services and posts.-** The claims of the members of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes shall be taken into consideration, consistently with the maintenance of efficiency of administration, in the making of appointments to services and posts in connection with the affairs of the Union or of a State.

**336.Special provision for Anglo-Indian community in certain services.-** (1) During the first two years after the commencement of this Constitution, appointments of members of the Anglo-Indian community to posts in the railway, customs, postal and telegraph services of the Union shall be made on the same basis as immediately before the fifteenth day of August, 1947.

During every succeeding period of two years, the number of posts reserved for the members of the said community in the said services shall, as nearly as possible, be less by ten per cent than the numbers so reserved during the immediately preceding period of two years:

Provided that at the end of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution all such reservations shall cease.

(2) Nothing in clause (1) shall bar the appointment of members of the Anglo-Indian community to posts other than, or in addition to, those reserved for the community under that clause if such members are found qualified for appointment on merit as compared with the members of other communities.

**337.Special provision with respect to educational grants for the benefit of Anglo-Indian community.-** During the first three financial years after the commencement of this Constitution, the same grants, if any, shall be made by the Union and by each State for the benefit of the Anglo-Indian community in respect of education as were made in the financial year ending on the thirty-first day of March, 1948.

During every succeeding period of three years the grants may be less by ten per cent than those for the immediately preceding period of three years:

Provided that at the end of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution such grants, to the extent to which they are a special concession to the Anglo-Indian community, shall cease:

Provided further that no educational institution shall be entitled to receive any grant under this article unless at least forty per cent of annual admissions therein are made available to members of communities other than the Anglo-Indian community.

**338.Special Officer for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes etc.-** (1) There shall be a Special Officer for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes to be appointed by the President.

(2) It shall be the duty of the Special Officer to investigate all matters relating to the safeguards provided for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes under this Constitution and report to the President upon the working of those safeguards at such intervals as the President may direct, and the President shall cause all such reports to be laid before each House of Parliament.

(3) In this article references to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes shall be construed as including references to such Other Backward Classes as the President may, on receipt of the report of a Commission appointed under clause (1) of Article 340, by order specify and also to the Anglo-Indian community.

**339. Control of the Union over the administration of Scheduled Areas and the welfare of Scheduled Tribes.-**

(1) The President may at any time and shall, at the expiration of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution by order appoint a Commission to report on the administration of the Scheduled Areas and the welfare of this Scheduled Tribes in the States. The order may define the composition, powers and procedure of the Commission and may contain such incidental or ancillary provisions as the President may consider necessary or desirable.

(2) The executive power of the Union shall extend to the giving of directions to a State as to the drawing up and execution of schemes specified in the direction to be essential for the welfare of the Scheduled Tribes in the State.

**340. Appointment of a Commission to investigate the conditions of backward classes.-** (1)

The President may by order appoint a Commission consisting of such persons as he thinks fit to investigate the conditions of socially and educationally backward classes within the territory of India and the difficulties under which they labor and to make recommendations as to the steps that should be taken by the Union or any State to remove such difficulties and to improve their condition and as to the grants that should be made for the purpose by the Union or any State the conditions subject to which such grants should be made, and the order appointing such Commission shall define the procedure to be followed by the Commission.

(2) A Commission so appointed shall investigate the matters referred to them and present to the President a report setting out the facts as found by them and making such recommendations as they think proper.

(3) The President shall cause a copy of the report so presented together with a memorandum explaining the action taken thereon to be laid before each House of Parliament.

**341. Scheduled Castes.-** (1) The President may with respect to any State [or Union territory], and where it is a State after consultation with the Governor thereof, by public notification, specify the castes, races or tribes or parts of or groups within castes, races or tribes which shall for the purposes of this Constitution be deemed to be Scheduled Castes in relation to that State [or Union territory, as the case may be].

(2) Parliament may by law include in or exclude from the list of Scheduled Castes specified in a notification issued under clause (1) any caste, race or tribe or part of or group within any caste, race or tribe, but save as aforesaid a notification issued under the said clause shall not be varied by any subsequent notification.

**342. Scheduled Tribes.-** (1) The President may with respect to any State [or Union territory], and where it is a State, after consultation with the Governor thereof, by public notification, specify the tribes or tribal communities or parts of or groups within tribes or tribal communities which shall for the purposes of this Constitution be deemed to be Scheduled Tribes in relation to that State or Union territory, as the case may be.

(2) Parliament may by law include in or exclude from the list of Scheduled Tribes specified in a notification issued under clause (1) any tribe or tribal community or part of or group within any tribe or tribal community, but save as aforesaid a notification issued under the said clause shall not be varied by any subsequent notification.

## APPENDIX C

### THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA

#### PART IX-THE PANCHAYATS

##### **243. Definitions.-**

In this Part, unless the context otherwise requires,—

- (a) 'district' means a district in a State;
- (b) 'Gram Sabha' means a body consisting of persons registered in the electoral rolls relating to a village comprised within the area of Panchayat at the village level;
- (c) 'intermediate level' means a level between the village and district levels specified by the Governor of a State by public notification to be the intermediate level for the purposes of this Part;
- (d) 'Panchayat' means an institution (by whatever name called) of self-government constituted under article 243B, for the rural areas;
- (e) 'Panchayat area' means the territorial area of a Panchayat;
- (f) 'population' means the population as ascertained at the last preceding census of which the relevant figures have been published;
- (g) 'village' means a village specified by the Governor by public notification to be a village for the purposes of this Part and includes a group of villages so specified.

##### **243A. Gram Sabha.—**

A Gram Sabha may exercise such powers and perform such functions at the village level as the Legislature of a State may by law, provide.

##### **243B. Constitution of Panchayats.—**

- (1) There shall be constituted in every State, Panchayats at the village, intermediate and district levels in accordance with the provisions of this Part.
- (2) Notwithstanding anything in clause (1), Panchayats at the intermediate level may not be constituted in a State having a population not exceeding twenty lakhs.

##### **243C. Composition of Panchayats.—**

(1) Subject to the provisions of this Part, the Legislature of a State may, by law, make provisions with respect to the composition of Panchayats:

Provided that the ratio between the population of the territorial area of a Panchayat at any level and the number of seats in such Panchayat to be filled by election shall, so far as practicable, be the same throughout the State,

(2) All the seats in a Panchayat shall be filled by persons chosen by direct election from territorial constituencies in the Panchayat area and, for this purpose, each Panchayat area shall be divided into territorial constituencies in such manner that the ratio between the population of each constituency and the number of seats allotted to it shall, so far as practicable, be the same throughout the Panchayat area.

(3) The Legislature of a State may, by law, provide for the representation—

(a) of the Chairpersons of the Panchayats at the village level, in the Panchayats at the intermediate level or, in the case of a State not having Panchayats at the intermediate level, in the Panchayats at the district level;

(b) if the Chairpersons of the Panchayats at the intermediate level, in the Panchayats at the district level;

(c) of the members of the House of the People and the members of the Legislative Assembly of the State representing constituencies which comprise wholly or partly a Panchayat area at a level other than the village level, in such Panchayat;

(d) of the members of the Council of States and the members of the Legislative Council of the State, where they are registered as electors within—

(i) a Panchayat area at the intermediate level, in Panchayat at the intermediate level;

(ii) a Panchayat area at the district level, in Panchayat at the district level.

(4) The Chairperson of a Panchayat and other members of a Panchayat whether or not chosen by direct election from territorial constituencies in the Panchayat area shall have the right to vote in the meetings of the Panchayats.

(5) The Chairperson of—

(a) Panchayat at the village level shall be elected in such manner as the Legislature of a State may, by law, provide; and

(b) a Panchayat at the intermediate level or district level, shall be elected by, and from amongst, the elected members thereof.

**243D. Reservation of seats.—**

(1) Seats shall be reserved for—

(a) the Scheduled Castes; and

(b) the Scheduled Tribes,

in every Panchayat and the number of seats so reserved shall bear, as nearly as may be, the same proportion to the, total number of seats to be filled by direct election in that Panchayat as the population of the Scheduled Castes in that Panchayat area or of the Scheduled Tribes in that Panchayat area bears to the total population of that area and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat.

(2) Not less than one-third of the total number of seats reserved under clause (1) shall be reserved for women belonging, to the Scheduled Castes or, as the case may be, the Scheduled Tribes.

(3) Not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat shall be reserved for women and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat.

(4) The offices of the Chairpersons in the Panchayats at the village or any other level shall be reserved for the Scheduled Castes the Scheduled Tribes and women in such manner as the Legislature of a State may, by law, provide:

Provided that the number of offices of Chairpersons reserved for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes in the Panchayats at each level in any State shall bear, as nearly as may be, the same proportion to the total number of such offices in the Panchayats at each level as the population of the Scheduled Castes in the State or of the Scheduled Tribes in the State bears to the total population of the State:

Provided further that not less than one-third of the total number of offices of Chairpersons in the Panchayats at each level shall be reserved for women:

Provided also that the number of offices reserved under this clause shall be allotted by rotation to different Panchayats at each level.

(5) The reservation of seats under clauses (1) and (2) and the reservation of offices of Chairpersons (other than the reservation for women) under clause (4) shall cease to have effect on the expiration of the period specified in article 334 .

(6) Nothing in this Part shall prevent the Legislature of a State from making any provision for reservation of seats in any Panchayat or offices of Chairpersons in the Panchayats at any level in favor of backward class of citizens.

**243E. Duration of Panchayats, etc.—**

(1) Every Panchayat, unless sooner dissolved under any law for the time being in force, shall continue for five years from the date appointed for its first meeting and no longer.

(2) No amendment of any law for the time being in force shall have the effect of causing dissolution of a Panchayat at any level, which is functioning immediately before such amendment, till the expiration of its duration specified in clause (1).

(3) An election to constitute a Panchayat shall be completed—

(a) before the expiry of its duration specified in clause (1);

(b) before the expiration of a period of six months from the date of its dissolution:

Provided that where the remainder of the period for which the dissolved Panchayat would have continued is less than six months, it shall not be necessary to hold any election under this clause for constituting the Panchayat.

(4) A Panchayat constituted upon the dissolution of a Panchayat before the expiration of its duration shall continue only for the remainder of the period for which the dissolved Panchayat would have continued under clause (1) had it not been so dissolved.

**243F. Disqualifications for membership.—**

(1) A person shall be disqualified for being chosen as, and for being, a member of a Panchayat—

(a) if he is so disqualified by or under any law for the time being in force for the purposes of elections to the Legislature of the State concerned:

Provided that no person shall be disqualified on the ground that he is less than twenty-five years of age, if he has attained the age of twenty-one years;

(b) if he is so disqualified by or under any law made by the Legislature of the State.

(2) If any question arises as to whether a member of a Panchayat has become subject to any of the disqualifications mentioned in clause (1), the question shall be referred for the decision of such authority and in such manner as the Legislature of a State may, by law, provide.

**243G. Powers, authority and responsibilities of Panchayats.—**

Subject to the provisions of this Constitution the Legislature of a State may, by law, endow the Panchayats with such powers and authority and may be necessary to enable them to function as institutions of self-government and such law may contain provisions for the devolution of

powers and responsibilities upon Panchayats, at the appropriate level, subject to such conditions as may be specified therein, with respect to—

- (a) the preparation of plans for economic development and social justice;
- (b) the implementation of schemes for economic development and social justice as may be entrusted to them including those in relation to the matters listed in the Eleventh Schedule.

**243H. Powers to impose taxes by, and funds of, the Panchayats.—**

The Legislature of a State may, by law,—

- (a) authorize a Panchayat to levy, collect and appropriate such taxes, duties, tolls and fees in accordance with such procedure and subject to such limits;
  - (b) assign to a Panchayat such taxes, duties, tolls and fees levied and collected by the State Government for such purposes and subject to such conditions and limits;
  - (c) provide for making such grants-in-aid to the Panchayats from the Consolidated Fund of the State; and
  - (d) provide for constitution of such Funds for crediting all moneys received, respectively, by or on behalf of the Panchayats and also for the withdrawal of such moneys therefrom,
- as may be specified in the law.

**243I. Constitution of finance Commissions to review financial position.—**

(1) The Governor of a State shall, as soon as may be within one year from the commencement of the Constitution (Seventy-third Amendment) Act, 1992, and thereafter at the expiration of every fifth year, constitute a Finance Commission to review the financial position of the Panchayats and to make recommendations to the Governor as to—

- (a) the principles which should govern—
  - (i) the distribution between the State and the Panchayats of the net proceeds of the taxes, duties, tolls and fees leviable by the State, which may be divided between them under this Part and the allocation between the Panchayats at all levels of their respective shares of such proceeds;
  - (ii) the determination of the taxes, duties, tolls and fees which may be assigned to, or appropriated by, the Panchayats;
  - (iii) the grants-in-aid to the Panchayats from the Consolidated Fund of the State;
- (b) the measures needed to improve the financial position of the Panchayats;

(c) any other matter referred to the Finance Commission by the Governor in the interests of sound finance of the Panchayats.

(2) The Legislature of a State may, by law, provide for the composition of the Commission, the qualifications which shall be requisite for appointment as members thereof and the manner in which they shall be selected.

(3) The Commission shall determine their procedure and shall have such powers in the performance of their functions as the Legislature of the State may, by law, confer on them,

(4) The Governor shall cause every recommendation made by the Commission under this article together with an explanatory memorandum as to the action taken thereon to be laid before the Legislature of the State.

**243J. Audit of accounts of Panchayats.—**

The Legislature of a State may, by law, make provisions with respect to the maintenance of accounts by the Panchayats and the auditing of such accounts.

**243K. Elections to the Panchayats.—**

The superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of electoral rolls for, and the conduct of, all elections to the Panchayats shall be vested in a State Election Commission consisting of a State Election Commissioner to be appointed by the Governor.

(2) Subject to the provisions of any law made by the Legislature of a State the conditions of service and tenure of office of the State Election Commissioner shall be such as the Governor may by rule determine:

Provided that the State Election Commissioner shall not be removed from his office except in like manner and on the like ground as a Judge of a High Court and the conditions of service of the State Election Commissioner shall not be varied to his disadvantage after his appointment.

(3) The Governor of a State shall, when so requested by the State Election Commission, make available to the State Election Commission such staff as may be necessary for the discharge of the functions conferred on the State Election Commission by clause (1).

(4) Subject to the provisions of this Constitution, the Legislature of a State may, by law, make provision with respect to all matters relating to, or in connection with, elections to the Panchayats.

**243L. Application to Union territories.—**

The provisions of this Part shall apply to the Union territories and shall, in their application to a Union territory, have effect as if the references to the Governor of a State were references to the Administrator of the Union territory appointed under 239 and references to the Legislature or the

Legislative Assembly of a State were references, in relation to a Union territory having a Legislative Assembly, to that Legislative Assembly:

Provided that the President may, by public notification, direct that the provisions of this Part shall apply to any Union territory or part thereof subject to such exceptions and modifications as he may specify in the notification.

**243M. Part not to apply to certain areas.—**

(1) Nothing in this Part shall apply to the Scheduled Areas referred to in clause (1), and the tribal areas referred to in clause (2), of article 244.

(2) Nothing in this Part shall apply to—

(a) the States of Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram;

(b) the Hill areas in the State of Manipur for which District Councils exist under any law for the time being in force.

(3) Nothing in this Part—

(a) relating to Panchayats at the district level shall apply to the Hill areas of the District of Darjeeling in the State of West Bengal for which Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council exists under any law for the time being in force;

(b) shall be construed to affect the functions and powers of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council constituted under such law.

(4) Notwithstanding anything in this Constitution—

(a) the Legislature of a State referred to in sub-clause (a) of clause (2) may, by law, extend this Part to that State, except the areas, if any, referred to in clause (1), if the Legislative Assembly of that State passes a resolution to that effect by a majority of the total membership of that House and by a majority of not less than two-thirds of the members of that house present and voting;

(b) Parliament may, by law, extend the provisions of this Part to the Scheduled Areas and the tribal areas referred to in clause (1) subject to such exceptions and modifications as may be specified in such law, and no such law shall be deemed to be an amendment of this Constitution for the purposes of Article 368.

**243N. Continuance of existing laws and Panchayats.—**

Notwithstanding anything in this Part, any provision of any law relating to Panchayats in force in a State immediately before commencement of the Constitution (Seventy-third Amendment) Act, 1992, which is inconsistent with the provisions of this part, shall continue to be in force until amended or repealed by a competent Legislature other competent authority or until the

expiration of one year from such commencement whichever is earlier:

Provided that all the Panchayats existing immediately before such commencement shall continue till the expiration of their duration, unless sooner dissolved by a resolution passed to that effect by the Legislative Assembly of that State or, in the case of a State having a Legislative Council, by each house of the Legislature of that State.

**243O. Bar to interference by courts in electoral matters.—**

Notwithstanding anything in this Constitution—

(a) the validity of any law relating to the delimitation of constituencies or the allotment of seats to such constituencies made or purporting to be made under article 243K, shall not be called in question in any court;

(b) no election to any Panchayat shall be called in question except by an election petition presented to such authority and in such manner as is provided for by or under any Law made by the legislature of a State.

**Election Process (Gram Panchayats)**

**PART IX A-THE MUNICIPALITIES**

**243P. Definitions.-**

In this Part, unless the context otherwise requires,—

(a) ‘Committee’ means a Committee constituted under article 243S;

(b) ‘district’ means a district in a State;

(c) ‘Metropolitan area’ means an area having a population of ten lakhs or more, comprised in one or more districts and consisting of two or more Municipalities or Panchayats or other contiguous areas, specified by the Governor by public notification to be Metropolitan area for the purposes of this Part;

(d) ‘Municipal area’ means the territorial area of a Municipality as is notified by the Governor;

(e) ‘Municipality’ means an institution of self-government constituted under Article 243Q ;

(f) ‘Panchayat’ means a Panchayat constituted under Article 243B;

(g) ‘population’ means the population as ascertained at the last preceding census of which the relevant figures have been published.

**243Q. Constitution of Municipalities.—**

(1) There shall be constituted in every State,—

(a) a Nagar Panchayat (by whatever name called) for a transitional area, that is to say, an area in transition from a rural area to an urban area.

(b) a Municipal Council for a smaller urban area; and

(c) a Municipal Corporation for a larger urban area,

in accordance with the provisions of this Part:

Provided that a Municipality under this clause may not be constituted in such urban area or part thereof as the Governor may, having regard to the size of the area and the municipal services being provided or proposed to be provided by an industrial establishment in that area and such other factors as he may deem fit, by public notification, specify to be an industrial township.

(2) In this article, ‘a transitional area’, ‘a smaller urban area’ or ‘a larger urban area’ means such area as the Governor may, having regard to the population of the area, the density of the population therein, the revenue generated for local administration, the percentage of employment in non-agricultural activities, the economic importance or such other factors as he may deem fit, specify by public notification for the purposes of this Part.

**243R. Composition of Municipalities.—**

(1) Save as provided in clause (2), all the seats in a Municipality shall be filled by persons chosen by direct election from the territorial constituencies in the Municipal area and for this purpose each Municipal area shall be divided into territorial constituencies to be known as wards.

(2) The Legislature of a State may, by law, provide—

(a) for the representation in a Municipality of—

(i) persons having special knowledge or experience in Municipal administration;

(ii) the members of the House of the People and the members of the Legislative Assembly of the State representing constituencies which comprise wholly or partly the Municipal area;

(iii) the members of the Council of States and the members of the Legislative Council of the State registered electors within the Municipal area;

(iv) the Chairpersons of the Committees constituted under clause (5) of article 243S:

Provided that the persons referred to in paragraph (i) shall not have the right to vote in the

meetings of the Municipality;

(b) the manner of election of the Chairperson of a Municipality.

**243S. Constitution and composition of wards Committees, etc.—**

(1) There shall be constituted Wards Committees, consisting of one or more Wards, within the territorial area of a Municipality having a population of three lakhs or more.

(2) The Legislature of a State may, by law, make provision with respect to—

(a) the composition and the territorial area of a Wards Committee;

(b) the manner in which the seats in a Wards Committee shall be filled.

(3) A member of a Municipality representing a ward within the territorial area of the Wards Committee shall be a member of that Committee.

(4) Where a Wards Committee consists of—

(a) one ward, the member representing that ward in the Municipality; or

(b) two or more wards, one of the members representing such wards in the Municipality elected by the members of the Wards Committee,

shall be the Chairperson of that Committee.

(5) Nothing in this article shall be deemed to prevent the Legislature of a State from making any provision for the Constitution of Committees in addition to the Wards Committees.

**243T. Reservation of seats.—**

(1) Seats shall be reserved for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes in every Municipality and the number of seats so reserved shall bear, as nearly as may be, the same proportion to the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in that Municipality as the population of the Scheduled Castes in the Municipal area or of the Scheduled Tribes in the Municipal area bears to the total population of that area and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Municipality.

(2) Not less than one-third of the total number of seats reserved under clause (1) shall be reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes or, as the case may be, the Scheduled Tribes.

(3) Not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Municipality shall be reserved for women and such seats may be allotted by

rotation to different constituencies in a Municipality.

(4) The offices of Chairpersons in the Municipalities shall be reserved for the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and women in such manner as the Legislature of a State may, by law, provide.

(5) The reservation of seats under clauses (1) and (2) and the reservation of offices of Chairpersons (other than the reservation for women) under clause (4) shall cease to have effect on the expiration of the period specified in article 334 .

(6) Nothing in this Part shall prevent the Legislature of a State from making any provision for reservation of seats in any Municipality or offices of Chairpersons in the Municipalities in favor of backward class of citizens.

**243U. Duration of Municipalities, etc.—**

(1) Every Municipality, unless sooner dissolved under any law for the time being in force, shall continue for five years from the date appointed for its first meeting and no longer:

Provided that a Municipality shall be given a reasonable opportunity of being heard before its dissolution.

(2) No amendment of any law for the time being in force shall have the effect of causing dissolution of a Municipality at any level, which is functioning immediately before such amendment, till the expiration of its duration specified in clause (1).

(3) An election to Constitute a Municipality shall be completed,—

(a) before the expiry of its duration specified in clause (1);

(b) before the expiration of a period of six months from the date of its dissolution:

Provided that where the remainder of the period for which the dissolved Municipality would have continued is less than six months, it shall not be necessary to hold any election under this clause for constituting the Municipality for such period.

(4) A Municipality constituted upon the dissolution of a Municipality before the expiration of its duration shall continue only for the remainder of the period for which the dissolved Municipality would have continued. under, clause (1) had it not been so dissolved.

**243V. Disqualifications for membership.—**

(1) A person shall be disqualified for being chosen as, and for being a member of a Municipality—

(a) if he is so disqualified by or under any law for the time being in force for the purposes of

elections to the Legislature of the State concerned:

Provided that no person shall be disqualified on the ground that he is less than twenty-five years of age, if he has attained the age, of twenty-one years;

(b) if he is so disqualified by or under any law made by the Legislature of the State.

(2) If any question arises as to whether a member of a Municipality has become subject to any of the disqualifications mentioned in clause (1), the question shall be referred for the decision of such authority and in such manner as the Legislature of a State may, by law, provide.

**243W. Powers, authority and responsibilities of Municipalities, etc.—**

Subject to the provisions of this Constitution, the Legislature of a State may, by law, endow—

(a) the Municipalities with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as institutions of self-government and such law may contain provisions for the devolution of powers and responsibilities upon Municipalities, subject to such conditions as may be specified therein, with respect to—

(i) the preparation of plans for economic development and social justice;

(ii) the performance of functions and the implementation of schemes as may be entrusted to them including those in relation to the matters listed in the Twelfth Schedule;

(b) the Committees with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to carry out the responsibilities conferred upon them including those in relation to the matters listed in the Twelfth Schedule.

**243X. Power to impose taxes by, and funds, of, the Municipalities.—**

The Legislature of a State may, by law—

(a) authorize a Municipality to levy, collect and appropriate such taxes, duties, tolls and fees in accordance with such procedure and subject to such limits;

(b) assign to a Municipality such taxes, duties, tolls and fees levied and collected by the State-Government for such purposes and subject to such conditions and limits;

(c) provide for making, such grants-in-aid to the Municipalities from the Consolidated Fund of the State; and

(d) provide for constitution of such Funds for crediting all moneys received. respectively, by or on behalf of the Municipalities and also for the withdrawal of such moneys therefrom,

as may be specified in the law.

**243Y. Finance Commission.—**

(1) The Finance Commission constituted under article 243-I shall also review the financial position of the Municipalities and make recommendations to the Governor as to—

(a) the principles which should govern—

(i) the distribution between the State and the Municipalities of the net proceeds of the taxes, duties, tolls and fees leviable by the State, which may be divided between them under this Part and the allocation between the Municipalities at all levels of their respective shares of such proceeds;

(ii) the determination of the taxes, duties, tolls and fees which may be assigned to, or appropriated by, the Municipalities;

(iii) the grants-in-aid to the Municipalities from the Consolidated Fund of the State;

(b) the measures needed to improve the financial position of the Municipalities;

(c) any other matter referred to the Finance Commission by the Governor in the interests of sound finance of the Municipalities.

(2) The Governor shall cause every recommendation made by the Commission under this article together with an explanatory memorandum as to the action taken thereon to be laid before the Legislature of the State.

**243Z. Audit of accounts of Municipalities.—**

The Legislature of a State may, by law, make provisions with respect to the maintenance of accounts by the Municipalities and the auditing of such accounts.

**243ZA. Elections to the Municipalities.—**

(1) The superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of electoral rolls for, and the conduct of, all elections to the Municipalities shall be vested in the State Election Commission referred to in article 243K.

(2) Subject to provisions of this Constitution, the Legislature of a State may, by law, make provision with respect to all matters relating to, or in connection with, elections to the Municipalities.

**243ZB. Application to Union territories.—**

The Provisions of this Part shall apply to the Union territories and shall, in their application to a Union territory, have effect as if the references to the Governor of a State were references to the

Administrator of the Union territory appointed under article 239 and references to the Legislature or the Legislative Assembly of a State were references in relation to a Union territory having a Legislative Assembly, to that Legislative Assembly:

Provided that the President may, by public notification, direct that the provisions of this Part shall apply to any Union territory or part thereof subject to such exceptions and modifications as he may specify in the notification.

**243ZC. Part not to apply to certain areas.—**

(1) Nothing in this Part shall apply to the Scheduled Areas referred to in Clause (1), and the tribal areas referred to in Clause (2), of article 244.

(2) Nothing in this part shall be construed to affect the functions and powers of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council constituted under any law for the time being in force for the hill areas of the district of Darjeeling in the State of West Bengal.

(3) Notwithstanding anything in this Constitution, Parliament may, by law, extend the provisions of this Part to the Scheduled Areas and the Tribal Areas referred to in clause (1) subject to such exceptions and modifications as may be specified in such law, and no such law shall be deemed to be an amendment of this Constitution for the purposes of article 368.

**243ZD. Committee for district planning.—**

(1) There shall be constituted in every State at the district level a District Planning Committee to consolidate the plans prepared by the Panchayats and the Municipalities in the district and to prepare a draft development plan for the district as a whole.

(2) The Legislative of a State may, by law, make provision with respect to—

(a) the composition of the District Planning Committees;

(b) the manner in which the seats in such Committees shall be filled:

Provided that not less than four-fifths of the total number of members of such Committee shall be elected by, and from amongst, the elected members of the Panchayat at the district level and of the Municipalities in the district in proportion to the ratio between the population of the rural areas and of the urban areas in the district;

(c) the functions relating to district planning which may be assigned to such Committees;

(d) the manner in which the Chairpersons of such Committees be chosen.

(3) Every District Planning Committee shall, in preparing the draft development plan,—

(a) have regard to—

(i) matters of common interest between the Panchayats and the Municipalities including spatial planning, sharing of water and other physical and natural resources, the integrate development of infrastructure and environmental conservation;

(ii) the extent and type of available resources whether financial or otherwise;

(b) consult such institutions and organizations as the Governor may, by order, specify.

(4) The Chairperson of every District Planning Committee shall forward the development plan, as recommended by such Committee, to the Government of the State.

**243ZE. Committee for Metropolitan Planning.—**

(1) There shall be constituted in every Metropolitan, area a Metropolitan Planning Committee to prepare a draft development plan for the Metropolitan area as a whole.

(2) The Legislature of a State may, by law, make with respect to—

(a) the composition of the Metropolitan Planning Committees;

(b) the manner in which the seats in such Committees shall be filled:

Provided that not less than two-thirds of the members of such Committee shall be elected by, and from amongst, the elected members of the Municipalities and Chairpersons of the Panchayats in the, Metropolitan area in proportion to the ratio between the population of the Municipalities and of the Panchayats in that area;

(c) the representation, in such Committees of the Government of India and the Government of the State and of such organizations and institutions as may be deemed necessary for carrying out the functions assigned to such Committees;

(d) the functions relating to planning and coordination for the Metropolitan area which may be assigned to such Committees;

(e) the manner in which the Chairpersons of such Committees shall be chosen.

(3) Every Metropolitan Planning Committee shall, in preparing the draft development plan,—

(a) have regard to—

(i) the plans prepared by the Municipalities and the Panchayats in the Metropolitan area;

(ii) matters of common interest between the Municipalities and the Panchayats, including co-ordinated spatial planning of the area, sharing of water and other physical and natural resources, the integrated development of infrastructure and environmental conservation;

(iii) the overall objectives and priorities set by the Government of India and the Government of the State;

(iv) the extent and nature of investments likely to be made in the Metropolitan area by agencies of the Government of India and of the Government of the State and other available resources whether financial or otherwise;

(b) consult such institutions and organizations as the Governor may, by order, specify.

(4) The Chairperson of every Metropolitan Planning Committee shall forward the development plan, as recommended by such Committee, to the Government of the State.

**243ZF. Continuance of existing laws and Municipalities.—**

Notwithstanding anything in this Part, any provision of any law relating to Municipalities in force in a State immediately before the commencement of the Constitution (Seventy-fourth Amendment) Act, 1992, which is inconsistent with the provisions of this Part, shall continue to be in force until amended or repealed by a competent Legislature or other competent authority or until the expiration of one year from such commencement, whichever is earlier:

Provided that all the Municipalities existing immediately before such commencement shall continue till the expiration of their duration, unless sooner dissolved by a resolution passed to that effect by the Legislative Assembly of that State or, in the case of a State having a Legislative Council, by each House of the Legislature of that State.

**243ZG. Bar to interference by courts in electoral matters.—**

Notwithstanding anything in this Constitution,—

(a) the validity of any law relating to the delimitation of constituencies or the allotment of seats to such constituencies, made or purporting to be made under article 243ZA shall not be called in question in any court;

(b) no election to any Municipality shall be called in question except by an election petition presented to such authority and in such manner as is provided for by or under any law made by the Legislature of a State.

## GLOSSARY

**Adivasi:** The *Adivasi* is a nature worshipping society where there is no concept of God, there is no idol worship, and there are no temples. *Adivasis* do not fit into any religious principles and receive separate identification.

**Anaryas:** A former name for untouchables.

**Antyaja:** Those who lived outside the village (in ancient times) were called *Antyaja*.

**Antyavasin:** Living in separate quarters required a new terminology. This expresses the conditions of the people to whom it applied, namely those who were aliens.

**Aryan:** *Aryan* represents a particular group of people. In the classical view of the *Aryan* invasion the *Aryans* are a particular ethnic group, speaking a particular language. However in Vedic literature *Aryan* is not the name of the Vedic people and their descendants; it is a title of honor and respect given to certain groups for good or noble behavior.

**Avama bhaya:** To look down upon in fear.

**Bajra:** A millet that can be grown in sandy soils, under rain fed conditions.

**Bengali Raja:** A fasting ritual performed by wives for their husbands. It is practiced to ensure that the husband will be kept happy and he will continue to do only good things.

**Ber:** forest product/raw material for making a number of items for the home.

**Bhakti Movement:** Historically, the *Bhakti* movement of the sixth and fourteenth centuries is the earliest known controversy over caste and gender structures in India. It embraces devotion and an intense personal attachment to God.

**Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP):** A political party of present day India. This party is unique among India's political parties in that neither it nor its political predecessors were ever associated with the Congress. It grew out of an alternative nationalist organization--the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).

**Bidi:** An herb used for non-tobacco cigarettes.

**Brahmans:** In Indian society *Brahmans* are placed at the top of the social hierarchy. The Brahmans are often described as light-skinned with longish noses, as opposed to the darker skinned Dalits. However, there is no proof of any anthropological distinction.

**Casual or conversational interviewing:** Relies on information gained through undirected conversation that occurs during everyday interactions.

**Chambhar:** A section of Dalits whose traditional occupation is cobbling.

**Changhar:** Transients; a village sub-caste.

**Chappals:** Name for the traditional Indian sandals.

**Char:** Forest product/raw material for making a number of items for the home.

**Chind:** Forest product/raw material for making a number of items for the home.

**Cobbler:** One who mends or makes boots and shoes. In India, the cobbler (who predominantly works with sandals, boots, and shoes) also produces other leather products.

**Code of Manu:** The Code of Manu is an ethical code maintained by classical Hinduism. It teaches that the caste system is divinely ordained and the only means of transcending the caste system is through repeated incarnations.

**Conscientization:** Paolo Friere uses the term conscientization to describe a new level of awareness that exists when individuals become cognizant of the fact that they have options and can make choices about things that they had formerly seen as beyond their control.

**Cultural habitus:** A cultural habitus is attained through adaptation to specific collective groupings which include social categorizations, genders, families, peer groups, and nationalities.

**Dalit:** A contemporary term which refers to oppressed and depressed classes, in particular the lowest castes.

**Dalit Movement:** Dr. Ambedkar, known as the father of the Dalit Movement, coined a slogan, "Educate, Unite, and Agitate." This slogan represented Dr. Ambedkar's message to the Dalits of India. He tried to communicate the need for Dalit education in order to fully understand the predicament of the so-called fifth caste. Uniting meant converging in numbers. Agitate represented the perseverance needed to fight for egalitarian status within the Indian society.

**Dasyus:** *Vedic* literature classifies India into the *Aryan* race and the *Anaryas* or *Dasyus* race.

**Dataoon:** A fruit found in the forest.

**Devacha Naivadya:** A goat is sacrificed to the God Shiva. The custom is to take the blessing by slaughtering a goat before the presence of the god. The ritual is called *devacha naivadya*, which means God's blessings. The goat is then prepared for a meal that is held at the temple for the entire village.

**Discourse analysis:** Discourse analysis is a term used for the close inspection of a text, such as an interview.

**Emic:** This is a native-oriented approach that investigates how a population thinks, categorizes the world, expresses thoughts, and interprets stimuli.

**Endogamy:** The requirement to marry someone who belongs to his or her own social group,

family, clan, or tribe.

**Ethnogenealogy:** This is how anthropologists use genealogy to identify types of relatedness, such as kinship, descent, and marriage.

**Ethnograph:** A computer program designed to make the analysis of data collected during qualitative research easier, more efficient, and more effective.

**Etic:** A science-oriented approach emphasizing the categories, interpretations, and features that the scientific observer considers important.

**Fifth caste:** There is one other group that is sometimes referred to as the fifth caste, but technically has no caste standing at all. Traditionally, this population is referred to as untouchables or out-castes. Today they are better known as Dalits, Scheduled Castes (SC's), or *Harijans*.

**Gawacha Urus:** An annual fair that is celebrated by the entire village. Due to the fact that both Hindus and non-Hindus attend, this is both a vegetarian and non-vegetarian feast.

**Ghandi Topi:** A Nehru-style white cotton hat. The hat is named after Ghandi because he invented and wore it. Topi is a Marati word that means hat.

**Government of India (Scheduled Castes) Order of 1936:** The second piece of state legislation enacted concerning the Dalit populations was in April of 1936 when the British Government issued the Government of India (Scheduled Castes) Order of 1936. This legislation identified specific castes, races, and tribes as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

**Government of India Act of 1935:** The Government of India Act of 1935 defined the term 'Scheduled Castes' for the first time. This act stated that Scheduled Castes were defined as untouchables who accepted the caste system. The act of definition established by this document was the first step to opening up a dialogue on enhancing the social, economic, and political opportunities for Dalit populations. This act of definition made Dalits a unique and separate population that was worthy of individual consideration and eventual legislation.

**Gram Panchayat:** The elected body at the village level which carries out local government functions; official name for the village government.

**Gram Panchayat Act of 1958:** The Gram Panchayat adheres to specified rules and regulations as dictated by the Mumbai Gram Panchayat Act of 1958. These regulations contain 27 articles, which can be referred to when questions arise concerning legislation.

**Gramsevak:** Also known as the Village Development Officer. This person has been sent by the government to supervise the nine members of the Gram Panchayat.

**Harijan:** Defined literally as "People of God"; a word coined by Mahatma Gandhi to refer to the Dalit castes.

**Harra:** Forest product/raw material for making a number of items for the home.

**Hegemony:** The predominant influence, as of a state, region, or group, over another or others.

**Household Census:** Survey that involves drawing a study group or sample from the larger study population, collecting impersonal data, and performing statistical analyses on these data.

**Jamun:** Forest product/raw material for making a number of items for the home.

**Jatis:** Subcastes or *jatis* in India. Every jatis is an element of the four varnas or the Dalit non-caste. They are differentiated by region and are based on inherited occupation, religious convictions, and social proscriptions. While members of a jatis are able to subsist in agreement beside one another, extensive interaction on social and religious planes is firmly disallowed.

**Jawar:** An organic crop similar to soy.

**Kshatriyas:** Warrior castes; one of the four divisions of the caste system.

**Kusum:** Forest product/raw material for making a number of items for the home.

**Lac:** A forest product mostly used for jewelry and other ornamental products.

**Life history/life-cycle interviewing:** Life history interviews are intimate and personal collections of an informant's life experiences and can be used to illustrate diversity within a given community.

**Logos:** The universe is ordered by God and this order is the logos (i.e. meaning or rational order of the universe). Each and every event, physical and historical, has a place within this larger rational order.

**Mahabharata:** A great epic of Indian history.

**Mahar:** One of the largest of the Dalit castes; a large section of this caste converted en mass to Buddhism, under the leadership of Babasaheb Ambedkar.

**Mahar Wada:** The area in which the Dalits live is called *Mahar Wada*. This area is always located on the periphery of the main village.

**Maharaja:** A king or prince in India ranking above a rajah, especially the sovereign of one of the former native states. Used as a title for such a king or prince.

**Mahua/dori:** Forest product/raw material for making a number of items for the home.

**Mangalsutra:** Traditional wedding necklace.

**Mantrik:** A sorcerer or magician who often acts in lieu of a doctor in terms of remedying medical issues. Many Dalits see the Mantrik, as the cost is very minimal.

**Manusmriti:** In an effort to preserve caste structure, the ancient Code of Manu (*Manusmriti*) details thousands of rules describing acceptable social intercourse among different castes.

**Maratha:** A member of a Hindu people inhabiting Maharashtra in west-central India.

**Marula:** A fruit found in the forest used predominantly for its oil and pulp.

**Micro-enterprises:** Small businesses or cottage industries.

**Misplaced abjection:** Maintains and perpetuates chains of violence between genders, and passes them on from one generation to the next.

**Naturalization:** A system itself is seen as something that always was and always will be and is, therefore, unchangeable.

**Nhavi:** The barber caste.

**Occupational theory:** This argument states that untouchables have become connected with impurity because they have historically been relegated to low status, manual occupations associated with dirt or unclean tasks.

**Officium:** "Duty"; officium states that it is the responsibility of an individual to perform the functions into which that person has been born, to the best of the individual's ability.

**Other Backward Classes (OBC):** The Other Backward Classes (OBC) include former caste members who belong to the Sudra Varna and also former untouchables who have switched from Hinduism to numerous other religions and, therefore, are no longer officially bound by caste doctrine.

**Outcastes:** Sometimes referred to as the fifth caste but technically has no caste standing at all. Traditionally, this population is referred to as untouchables or outcastes. Today they are better known as Dalits, Scheduled Castes (SC's), or *Harijans*. Membership in these groups is determined by birth and, as a result, cannot be amended.

**Palesh:** Forest product/raw material for making a number of items for the home.

**Pan:** A leaf that produces a thick red syrupy material, blood-like in appearance, which is chewed and expectorated often. Both men and women partake. It can probably be referred to as the eastern version of chewing gum.

**Parkar Jhampar:** Brightly colored traditional clothing worn by the village girls. It consists of a long tunic-like top with pants. Jhampar refers to the top and parkar refers to the pants.

**Patrilocality:** When a male marries, he and his bride will become part of his parents' household.

**Pedagogy of the oppressed:** Activities that impart knowledge in an unstructured and informal setting; an approach often used in developing nations.

**Pot Haldi-Kum Kum:** A ceremony that is restricted to the participation of married women in the actual ceremony. Onlookers can observe and it can be attended by various castes. Nevertheless, only Dalits attended this particular ceremony. People are very supportive of each other within the village and when a person breaks ground for a new home the married women go to the site and pray for peace for the home. This ceremony occurs whenever a new home is being built and is also done periodically for all homes.

**Protective Discrimination:** Protective Discrimination was instituted by the British colonial government so that untouchables would be allowed some upward mobility within the Indian educational system and government.

**Pulses:** Peas, beans and lentils are collectively known as pulses. There are many varieties with a host of different flavors and textures. Pulses work well in soups and stews and are an important source of protein and iron for vegetarians.

**Rathi:** "Chariot driver"; this name probably referred to the builders and drivers of chariots who formed Maharathis or "a fighting force."

**Reflexive:** Having respect to something past.

**Reservation system:** The term reservation refers to a small percentage of specified slots reserved for oppressed populations in various government agencies and institutions of learning. The concept allows qualified individuals to enter places of higher learning and maintain government employment. Individuals become qualified for a reservation through a written test that assesses educational levels, abilities, and skills. Determinations are then made based on test outcomes. These reservations exist: (a) in the state legislatures and the union legislature or parliament, (b) in services under the states, and (c) in educational institutions. Reservations constitute the core of affirmative action for the uplifting of these groups.

**Rexin:** An artificial material. Rexin is considerably cheaper than leather, however, there is a down side to Rexin. Rexin is not as durable as leather and the lifespan of the sandal is far less. Handmade leather sandals, for example, are known to last for five years with some refurbishing along the way. The Rexin might only last for five or six months. The only benefit to Rexin is that it is cheaper.

**Round Table Conference:** Discussions on the content of India's Constitution took place at the Round Table Conference in London from 1930 to 1931. This conference included primary agents representing a variety of communities in Indian sub-continent, including Dr. Ambedkar. They assembled to confer and form a union on the major issues that needed to be incorporated into the constitution. These issues would allow for an independent and autonomous India.

**Sal:** Forest product/raw material for making a number of items for the home.

**Sarai:** Forest product/raw material for making a number of items for the home.

**Sarpanch:** An appointed leader of a village.

**Scenario building:** The concept of scenario building deals with demonstrating how unlike influences have the capability to maneuver the future in numerous and diversified ways and how the rationale for each scenario embodies a clear and believable situation. The point of scenario building is to consider the influence of undetermined variables that affect one's day-to-day life. Furthermore, its purpose is to foresee possible events and modifications that might not otherwise have been predicted.

**Scheduled Castes (SC's):** The Scheduled Castes are those individuals who retained religious affiliation with Hinduism and were previously members of the untouchable caste.

**Scheduled tribes (ST):** The Scheduled Tribes (ST) include communities that did not accept the caste system and preferred to reside deep in the jungles, forests and mountains of India away from the main population.

**Semi-structured interviewing:** Open-ended interviews using a general outline of topics to be addressed as a guide for the interview.

**Shiva Sena:** A right-wing political party of present day India's social structure.

**Shudra:** The untouchables who were placed at the lowest rung of India.

**Sisal:** Forest product/raw material for making a number of items for the home.

**Structured interviewing:** Structured interviews use a predetermined list of questions during the interview process and usually do not deviate from the list.

**Survey:** Involves drawing a study group or sample from the larger study population, collecting impersonal data, and performing statistical analyses on these data.

**Taluka:** Duly elected presidents of a certain number of villages constitute the Taluka Panchayat.

**Tendu patta:** Forest product/raw material for making a number of items for the home.

**The 'other':** A theoretical framework used by academics to explain the process of oppression and struggle within societies is otherizing or the creation of an "other." The concept of otherizing refers to the establishment of a pair of opposing counterparts or binary oppositions.

**Toran:** An ornament, called a *toran*. The elaborate decoration and bright colors of the toran makes it a blessed item that embodies happiness and decency. It is believed that the toran forces out all stress and irritation that might exist within the home and only peace will subsist.

**Triangulation:** A process that combines techniques such as field notes, interviews, and site documents that usually work together to support claims.

**Uniform Civil Code:** The Uniform Civil Code debate has disputed the unfairness inflicted on women. The Directive Principles of State Policy, under Article 44 of the Constitution, affirms, "The state shall endeavor to secure for the citizens a Uniform Civil Code throughout the territory

of India.”

**Untouchables:** Dalits (formerly known as untouchables) are relegated to the bottom. The origins of this hierarchy have often been argued, yet scholars have generally agreed that the system did not fully solidify until approximately 700 A.D. Academics argue that around this time Hinduism supported a social hierarchical system, therefore allowing the ensuing social structure the ability to achieve justification based on religious values.

**Vaishyas:** Trading and artisan castes.

**Varnas:** The caste system in Indian broadly divides the population into four major groups, known as Varnas.

**Vedic literature:** *Vedic* literature classifies India into the *Aryan* race and the *Anaryas* or *Dasyus* race.

**Zilla Parishad (ZP):** The department that looks after the states is called the *Zilla Parishad (ZP)*.

## BIOGRAPHY

Gale Ellen Kamen

I am a native New Yorker, who spent my first eighteen on Long Island. At a very early age I displayed artistic abilities, and my parents almost immediately signed me up for art classes. Throughout the years I studied at my own pace, including a few years at the *Art Student's League* in New York City during my high school days. I had considered an art major, yet while attending *Franklin Pierce College* in Rindge, New Hampshire, I developed an interest in Asian studies and therefore pursued a BA in Asian History along with a minor in Elementary Education. Subsequent to graduation, I returned to New York and immediately entered a Master's program in Elementary Education at *Hofstra University* (with a specialization in history). I pursued this degree while working simultaneously for the State of New York in the field of mental health as a rehabilitation specialist. Two other Master's degrees followed. One was from *Antioch School of Law* in International Trade Law and Regulations, and the other from the *University of the District of Columbia* in International Adult Education. My completion of the Ph.D. program in Adult Learning (International) and Human Resource Development from Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University (Virginia Tech) has now further honed my appreciation for and understanding of the scholarly process. My work experience has entailed government positions within the field of mental health, having been employed by the Federal Government and the District of Columbia Government. I presently reside in Washington, D.C.

My interest in international topics, especially those attached to human rights issues, manifested many years ago. I have traveled globally, yet my enthusiasm lies with journeys to third and fourth world states. My numerous visits (fifteen) to India resulted in conducting my research on a Dalit female cobbler of India. I plan to explore further topics concerning this population, and hope to establish research endeavors concerning human rights issues in other developing nations.

My passion is writing, and I have published 14 magazine and newspaper articles. The topics have ranged from *autism*, to *Abraham Lincoln's depression*, to *horticultural therapy*, and beyond. I plan to continue my writing endeavors in order to communicate my experiences and visions to those who share my commitment to human rights issues throughout the world.