

## Migration and the Making of a Village

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### Introduction

The paper tries to bust the myth that only cities are made by migrants. Based on the author's fieldwork in a village in Bihar, it shows how migration has also been crucial to the making of the village, and how the historical conditions and processes of the making of the village influenced, and continue to influence even today, the sense of home and belonging. A great deal of focus is on land, the most important resource from the point of view of both the living and the leaving, for early residents as well as late 'settlers'. Hence, administrative processes such as survey and settlement operations, *chakbandi*<sup>1</sup>, land distribution, adjudication of land conflicts etc. have been vital reference points in the life history of local communities. The cross-sectionality of migration with land and caste as crucial socioeconomic factors has been creating the "othering" within the village. The fieldwork, conducted in Jitwarpur village in the Araria district of Bihar in early 2010<sup>2</sup>, combined a household survey using Census approach with ethnography. This paper mainly uses oral narratives to understand the making of the village, and to further explore subjectivities in migration and intercommunity relationships by studying historical and material entanglements in the village.

The opening section of the paper introduces the village, with particular emphasis on its spatial geography, land-ownership patterns and the occupations of different social groups. In the next section, the paper traces the spatial movement of different communities that contributed to the making of the village. This includes their subjectivities about their spatial movement. The paper explores the long history of the village, spanning over a century, while taking note of events that people perceived as life changing. In the process, it specifically records narratives centred around land, labour and culture. Finally, it records people's reflections on their present outmigration that has proven to be equally crucial to the making of the village.

### The Village and Its Social Ecology

The village Jitwarpur is located in the Kismat-Khawaspur Panchayat of Araria Sadar block in Araria district, 22 km to the north from the district headquarters. Surprisingly, when I was

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in the field in 2010, there was no single habitation by the name of Jitwarpur. In Araria, people knew the village by the name of its prominent hamlets – Palasi or Tegachhia – or the local market Patengana which was a kilometre away from Palasi. The village was spread over 2 km from north to south and no less from east to west.

Our household survey enumerated 950 households in Jitwarpur revenue village, with a population of 5,600. Of these, 847 households belonged to Hindus and 103 to Muslims. Out of the 103 Muslim households (HHs), 101 belonged to the Dhuniya (Momin) community and two belonged to the Ansari community. The Hindu HHs belonged to the following twelve castes, with the number of households given in parentheses — Brahmin (284), Noniya (186), Kewat (9129), Godhi (125), Musahar (37), Yadav (31), Baniya (14), Chamar (7), Barhai (7), Halwai (2), Sudhi (1), and Nai (1). Besides, there were twenty-three Santhal households in the village.<sup>3</sup>

The village was spread over ten *tolas* (hamlets); the following are their names, with the number of households they comprise mentioned alongside in parentheses – Tegachhia (323), Palasi (194), Godhi (115), Mansoori (103), Puraini (84), Musahari (37), Yadav (31), Jhaua (20), Paschim (19), and Santhal (24) which was also known as Panchavati. There was another small *tola* known as Gilahbari that was adjacent, almost contiguous, to the Musahari *tola*. Administratively, a few households of Gilahbari were part of the Musahari *tola* and the rest were part of Khwaspur village which was more than a kilometer from the *tola*. I followed the administrative division for the household survey, but for this paper, I have also included some narratives from Gilahbari. A river stream called Bhalua – a branch of the river Kosi – flowed through the northern part of the village from the east to the west between Puraini and Musahar *tolas*. Bhalua usually almost dried up between January and May but was in full flow during the rainy season.

Palasi was basically a Brahmin *tola* but there also were a considerable number of Kewat households, and some Barhai, Chamar, Nai, Sudhi and Baniya households as well. The Jhaua *tola* was inhabited by Kewats. Tegachhia was practically divided into two separate *tolas* – Tegachhia Brahmin *tola* and Tegachhia Noniya *tola*. The Brahmin *tola*, located near the Tarabari market, had ninety-eight Brahmin households. The Noniya *tola* had 185 households. Other castes in Tegachhia were Barhai, Halwai, Nai and Baniya. Puraini *tola* was inhabited by Kewats, Brahmins and Chamars, and Paschim *tola* by Brahmins. Other *tolas* were almost single-caste habitations and known by their caste name.

There were three local markets – one each at Patengana, Palasi and Tarabari. The one at Patengana, a kilometer away from Palasi, was the biggest amongst them: a weekly *hatia* (market) was also held here every Friday. The Tarabari market had an oil mill. People from Tegachhia, Musahari, Paschim and Jhaua *tolas* used this market. Every *tola* had at least one small grocery shop run from someone's home, and some *tolas* also had a flour mill.

As per government records, the total land area of the village was 1484.8 acres<sup>4</sup>, a little less than half of which was under cultivation. Landlessness, small holdings and highly uneven distribution of land were the chief characteristics of the landholding pattern in Jitwarpur. Overall, 42 percent HHs did not own land for cultivation. About 8 percent (seventy-four HHs) were without homestead land. Landlessness was very high among Musahars (78 percent), Godhis (71 percent), Muslims (71 percent), Chamars (57 percent) and Kewats (54 percent). In contrast, only 19 percent of the Brahmin households were landless; 35 percent of them owned less than one acre and 15 percent had holdings up to 2.5 acres. Only ten families, all Brahmins, owned more than 10 acres of land, and the largest landholder family, an extended joint family, owned 39 acres. Overall, the Brahmins, with 30 percent HHs, owned 57 percent of the total land. All orchards and ponds were owned by the Brahmins. Since orchards were the main source of dry leaves and wood for cooking, the non-Brahmins were heavily dependent on them. Caste-wise landholding was expectedly on the lines of traditional socioeconomic hierarchy. The average landholding size was the largest for Brahmins, followed by OBC-II, OBC-I, STs, Muslims and SCs.

The Brahmins had diverse occupations – self-cultivation, leasing out of land, government and private jobs, small trade and business activities in the locality (grocery shops, chemist shop, private school, grain trading etc.), business in Araria and Purnia towns, and also migration in the capacity of professionals or skilled/ semi-skilled workers. Some worked as quacks, brokers in government offices, money lenders, rentiers, priests, and local agents; some operated or rented out thresher machines/ pumpsets/ tractors, ran NGOs, gave tuitions and even indulged in smuggling. Some very poor Brahmin families worked in their own field, and some in the fields of other Brahmin landholders as wage labourers. Brahmin women did not work outside their homes except in jobs like teaching and running Anganwadi Centres. Clearly, the Brahmins as a community enjoyed the highest social status, were largest in number, possessed more than half of the land in the village, had more money, education, jobs and external connections, and continued to influence local politics.

The Noniyas and Kewats were mostly lessee, agricultural wage labourers and cultivators. Some of them also reared cattle. A few had jobs, ran PDS outlets and ICDS centres, and did money-lending. Some Kewats were engaged in fishing, their traditional caste occupation. A couple of Noniya migrants had become petty contractors and purchased small plots of land in the village. Two Kewat families had become well-to-do and had started businesses in Araria town. The Yadavs were into cultivation, animal husbandry, and selling milk and milk products. The Godhis were lessee and agricultural wage workers. Fishing, their traditional occupation, was taken up as principal activity only by 4-5 families. The Baniyas were mostly into local petty business. The lone Sudhi family was into microbusiness activities – mostly making rice from paddy and other processed agricultural products to sell in the local market. The Barhai (carpenter) families were into traditional work but also worked as agricultural labourers and lessee. The Halwai families had eateries and sweets shops in the market but

their main income came from contracts as cooks during marriage and other social ceremonies. The lone Nai family still worked under the *jajmani* system<sup>5</sup>. The Santhals, Chamars and Musahars worked as agricultural labourers. The Santhals and Muslims were largely into non-agricultural wage work. Muslim migrants were mainly working in cities.

Non-Brahmin women worked in agriculture. While Sudhi women were engaged in the processing of agricultural produce, such as the making of white (*arva*) rice, boiled (*usna*) rice and flattened rice (*chura*), Godhi women (and some Kewat women too) supplemented their family incomes by making *murhi* (dry rice roasted over a sand base), roasted gram, puffed rice and roasted maize (a kind of pop corn, called *lawa* and *thuri* in the local language). Some women from Noniya, Kewat and Musahar communities prepared mud walls for kutcha houses and plastered grain *kothis* (storage) with mud. A few women worked as maidservants in Brahmin families. Chamar women worked as traditional birth attendants. Some Santhal women worked in tractor trolleys at a brick kiln.

### Facets of In-migration

During the British Raj, the area was part of the Banaili estate and was gradually brought under cultivation after the clearing of jungles around the late nineteenth century. Lands in the surrounding areas were settled with several petty estates such as the Khamgarha, Batwari and Gilahbari estates. The initial cultivators in the village were Brahmins. The conversion of waste land into cultivable land picked up during the last decade of the nineteenth century and continued into the early decades of the twentieth century. In the 1905 settlement, a large number of Brahmins were recorded as raiyat (a tenant under a landlord). Chitradhar Jha, a Brahmin from Palasi, was recorded as the biggest landholder in the village, owning approximately 900 acres of land.

In accordance with their caste practices, the Brahmins did not work in the field. They therefore required labourers to cultivate their land and rear their cattle, and a service class to do other odd jobs. Early agricultural labourers came from neighbouring areas. Gradually, seasonal migrants started coming. The Musahars were the first migrant labouring community to settle in the village, probably a hundred years back. They came from the other side of the river Kosi in the west. Their original habitations had been destroyed by changes in the river's course. They settled on *gair majarua malik*<sup>6</sup> land. During land Survey and Settlement in 1952-54, they were issued *pattas* (a deed of lease specifying the conditions on which the lands are held) of 5 to 6 decimals of homestead land but the landholders forcibly took away those *pattas*. They could never access old records and continued to live on the Brahmins' land without any record of rights; repeated attempts were made to evict them.

Ramcharittar Singh, eighty-one years old and a Noniya by caste, claimed that the Noniyas came from two different, distant places to this village. His family had come from a place

called Baltharwa which was on the other side of the river Kosi in Darbhanga district. His sister was married in the village and he used to come here to work as a wage labourer in the post-harvesting operations of the *patua* (jute) crop. Later, when Kosi changed its course and eventually swallowed his village, three Noniya families, including his, decided to settle in this village. Thus, around 1949-50, his part of the Noniya *tola* came into existence. At the time of the Survey and Settlement in 1952-54, there were 80-85 Noniya families in the *tola* including the three families in his side of the *tola*. Gradually, as more families settled in, their numbers grew. He recalled:

“That was the time of abject poverty. We could barely manage one time meal. Land belonged to Brahmins. Any family willing to settle here had to agree to work on their field. We had to beg them to allow us take residual dry plants from their field to thatch our hut. Then wages were low – just two annas<sup>7</sup> a day, but money had value as one could buy 16 kg of rice for one *taka*<sup>8</sup>. The land on which my family had settled belonged to a Brahmin lawyer, Makkun Jha. He was a large-hearted person. He owned large tracts of land and allowed Noniyas to settle on his land and work as his sharecropper. In those days, Noniyas were dependent on Brahmins’ land even for answering nature’s call. In the 1954 Survey and Settlement, some of the Noniyas got *sikmi*<sup>9</sup> rights and some *kayami*<sup>10</sup> rights on his land. Thus, several Noniya families, including mine, became landed.”

Ram Prakash Singh, the husband of the village *sarpanch*, lived in the same *tola*. He was an educated person and claimed that he had passed the Bihar Public Service Commission entrance examination but could not join the service due to a delay in the declaration of graduation results. According to him:

“Noniyas first came to the village in 1905. At that time, like the Musahars, we too used to eat rats, consumed liquor and did all odd works in the field. We are descendents of Prithvi Raj Chauhan<sup>11</sup>. When Muhammad Ghori defeated Prithvi Raj, the Chauhans fled to distant places to save themselves. One of the groups reached Azamgarh. My clan migrated to this village from the Azamgarh-Jaunpur region.”

He cited the influence of Azamgarhy accent in the Noniyas’ Maithili, the local spoken language of the region. He also cited the design of their women’s blouses, with the sleeves extending little below the elbow. He said:

“In Azamgarh, we had to hide our identity. We did not use our Chauhan title. We were well-built, hence preferred as labourers. Gradually we got accommodated in the local caste structure at a lower level. Our fate had ordained that from a warrior Rajput we became a lower caste Noniya. Resisting subordination is in our blood, that’s why we have always been in conflict with the local Brahmin landowners.”

The phenomenon of lower castes claiming higher-caste status by linking their genealogy to a higher caste clan is well-known. My interest was not in ascertaining the authenticity of the Noniyas' claim or that of the several other stories that I was told in the village. I was interested in knowing what memories had been produced and sustained, how they were expressed and how they continued to influence, if at all, the subconscious of the communities.

The Godhis and Kewats came from Champanagar and Srinagar – part of the Banaili estate in Purnea district. They were fishing communities living on the riverside and bore the brunt of the frequently changing course of the various small branches of Kosi. The Kewats of the Jhaua *tola* were the last of the Kewats to settle in this village. The lone Nai family, and the Halwai and Barhai families, had come from the neighbouring Madanpur village which seemed to have come into existence before Jitwarpur. They claimed to have originally come from Champanagar. The Yadavs claimed that their forefathers were originally from Banaili but when the area was ravaged by floods some 150 years back, they migrated to Basgaraa along with the Banaili estate's *raja* (proprietor of a large estate). The *raja* further moved to a new place but they remained in Basgaraa for decades. However, that area increasingly became uninhabitable because of frequent outbreaks of diseases. When they heard about this new village under the same estate, they decided to move in. Gradually their *tola* came into existence. The Momins claimed to have been living in the neighbouring areas in the radius of 15-20 km before moving here; they gradually came to settle near Patengana when the lands were cleared for cultivation. The Ansaris were late entrants and came from Araria.

That the making of the village was a dynamic process and was yet to be over was illustrated by two rather recent incidents, one of out-migration of a group of Musahars and another of in-migration of a group of Santhals. In the making of this village, both 'in- and out-migration' exhibited strong intersectionality with land, caste and class. Together, they largely worked in favour of the Brahmins and gave them the power to decide whether or not the 'others' were desirable. At times, these 'others' internalised subjugation but at other times they demonstrated a will to withstand their 'othering'. Sometimes they eventually succumbed too. I prefer to call these settling and unsettling processes. The first instance was of a habitation of Musahars which until sometime back was situated by the side of the river Bhalua. Some thirty Musahar families had been living there for several decades. They had settled on a plot that had originally belonged to Brahmins, and were therefore subject to harassment from them. Finally, the Musahar families decided to leave the plot and shifted to a village called Rangdaha, some 8 km away towards Forbesganj. After the Musahars left, the plot, measuring 58 decimals, was captured by a Brahmin, Baskinath Jha. One of the Musahar families had been conferred sikmi rights over eight *bighas*<sup>12</sup> of land; that land too was taken into possession by family members of the original landowner. The motive behind the evicting of Musahars was to usurp the land under their possession. There was another case of land grab some ten years ago. Ramphal Sadai, belonging to the Musahar community, had 28 decimals of land. After his death, his wife along with their small children went to visit her mother's village. Meanwhile,

Jetsur Jha of the neighbouring village of Madanpur captured that land. He demolished Ramphal's house. The family never returned.

The second instance was related to a clan of Santhals who had migrated into the village as recently as 4-5 years before my fieldwork. Earlier they were living in Golabari village in the Khwaspur Panchayat in Forbesganj as part of a large community of Santhals. There was a dispute between two Brahmins over a *gair majarua* plot of land in Jitwarpur. One of them, Buchchu Jha from the Rahatmeena Panchayat, having failed to capture the land himself, enticed the Santhals to do so. One night, twenty-four families put up their huts on the plot and started living there. They could not be evicted as it was known that a section of Brahmins was behind them, and also because the Santhals were known to be a militant community. Except for the other sulking party, Brahmins in general welcomed the entry of the Santhals as this increased the availability of labourers in the village. The Santhal habitation, which was surrounded by a green cover of trees, was given the name Panchvati by Brahmins. Such a Sanskritised name was otherwise highly unusual for a Santhal habitation.

### **Land and Migrants**

Shrisasti Singh lived in the Noniya *tola* of Tegachhia. When I met him, he was rather busy making arrangements for an auspicious bath in the river Ganga to be taken by his extended family the next day, on the occasion of *poornima* (full moon). But he readily agreed to discuss the issue of land and also called a few knowledgeable persons from the *tola*. He had a peculiar habit of making some sort of concluding remarks even before starting his narration. Thus went his conclusion, "Except for Brahmin zamindars and *kashtkars* from their caste, the story of all others is that of landlessness and land conflicts for generations and this story will not end soon. It may continue for hundreds of years." And then came his punch line, "Without land "*solkans*<sup>13</sup>" have no future."

In 1904-05, the British Government conducted a Cadastral Survey<sup>14</sup> in this area and a *khesra*<sup>15</sup> was prepared. Lands were settled in the name of the Brahmins. Besides the fact that the Banaili estate's raja was a Brahmin, was there any other reason why land *pattas* were issued only to the Brahmins and not to the lower castes in the village? People cited the traditional relation between land and caste and how the lower castes were never imagined as *kashtakars* (cultivator-cum-landowners). In the upper castes' view, they said, lower castes were created for labour (serving others) and living with abuses and humiliation. They did not even have homestead land in their name. Soon after Independence, zamindari was abolished. A new land survey, called Revisional Survey, became imperative in order to identify the erstwhile tenants and tillers of zamindars' lands so as to settle the lands in their name. In this area, the Revisional Survey was carried out during 1952-54. This was a once-in-a-lifetime chance for the landless to get land in their name. The process was highly contested and strife-stricken. Shrisasti Singh pointed out:

“Brahmin landlords and other landowners did not want to part with even an inch of their land but for us this was our first chance to get hold of some land. We were not sure if we would ever in our lifetime or in the next fifty years get another opportunity. Our first attempt was to secure our homestead land. Many of us were indeed able to secure at least right of possession on our homestead land. Some of us got *sikmi* rights and some *kayami* (ownership) rights over our tenanted land.

“We got *khatiyani*<sup>16</sup> in 1959. Since then we have been paying land rent according to the new *khatiyani*. Overall, the Noniyas gained a considerable amount of land, up to 10-15 acres, from the Survey & Settlement operation – either as *kayami* or *sikmi*. Some lands belonged to landlords from other villages. Radha Jha’s family succeeded in saving their land completely. Nobody could lay claim over his land because of his firepower. In 1972, the *Chakbandi* survey started. By the late 1980s, a new *khatiyani* was ready. But Laloo Yadav, soon after becoming the Chief Minister of Bihar in 1990, declared it invalid otherwise we would have got some more land.”

According to the villagers, Laloo Yadav feared that the new land records would cause great unrest in the rural areas, thereby creating a big governance challenge at the very beginning of his tenure.

All migrant labouring families had been landless when they settled down in the village and many of them continued to be landless. As mentioned earlier, several of them were without a single decimal of homestead land of their own. They resided on the land of landowners (originally *gair majarua malik*). A considerable number of land-poor households had only the right of possession over their homestead. They continued to live in a situation of perpetual conflict with the landowners. Besides homestead land, 15 to 20 percent of cultivable land was *sikmi*. Barring the land used for homestead and another 2 to 3 percent of cultivable land, all other *sikmi* lands had been forcibly reoccupied by the landowners.

The 1952-54 Survey and Settlement gave importance to the *khewat*<sup>17</sup>, and those mentioned in the *khewat* as lessee were, after verification, conferred *sikmi* right wherein they could not be evicted from the land, even though they were not conferred the ownership right. However, landlords kept harassing the lessees and tried to evict them. In Gilahbari, a *tola* of about sixty Musahars, the erstwhile landowners had been trying to recapture the land that the government had redistributed. Several inhabitants of the *tola* reported that landowners had implicated them in false cases – accusing them of cutting their trees, theft of crops etc. Baskinath Jha had laid claim over a *banswari* (bamboo orchard) belonging to Dinesh Sadai and had implicated him (Dinesh) in false cases. Ram Lakhani Sadai was a sharecropper of Raja Jha on 10 bighas of land but 5-6 years back, after the conflict and false cases, Raja Jha changed his lessee.

But how did several non-Brahmin households, who had settled in the village as landless migrants, come to own land, howsoever small those holdings were? In the course of my fieldwork, I could enumerate at least ten ways in which several landless migrants came to acquire some land: i) entry of tenants in the *khewat* which gave security of tenure of the leased-in land; ii) Survey and Settlement operation that conferred either complete ownership or occupancy rights over leased-in land, land under possession and land plots that were received by an attached labour for tilling as long as he continued as attached labour; iii) land redistribution (ceiling surplus land, *bhoodan* land, *gair majarua khas* land, *kaiser-i-hind*<sup>18</sup> land and other types of government land); iv) encroachment of either government or private land; v) distribution or occupation of land reclaimed from river ; vi) purchase of land through land market; vii) court intervention giving verdict in favour of the landless; viii) land auction when a borrower failed to repay loan amount; ix) forcible capture of land; and x) long-term mortgage of land in lieu of borrowing.

Some of the Godhi families living on *gair majarua malik* land had purchased the land from the original owner. The original owners were mostly absentees who had realised that they could never ever be in a position to evict them, and had therefore chosen to sell the land, though at a much cheaper rate than prevailing market rates.

A prominent example of access to land through adjudication by court was related to a case, well-known in this area, that also highlighted the relation between land and caste violence. Shrisasti Singh narrated the case as follows:

“It was sometime in 1926. My grandfather’s cousin was a charwaha for a Brahmin landlord. One day, while grazing, a cow stepped in Chitradhar Jha’s land. Someone reported this to him [Jha]. His men came to threaten my grandfather’s cousin. They had a quarrel. This flared up. Chitradhar Jha decided to teach the Noniyas [then called *Chauhans*] a lesson. One night, he led his men to attack the Noniya *tola*. They encircled the *tola*, set houses on fire, looted property and fatally attacked people. Three Noniyas were killed and several injured in the incident. My maternal uncle, Lalji, was among the deceased.”

Ram Prakash Singh added:

“The case went up to the High Court. Chitradhar Jha and several other Brahmins were made accused. The Chief Justice himself came to the village. However, no Brahmin was given any physical punishment. The High Court identified ten affected Noniya families and, as compensation, ordered distribution of Chitradhar Jha’s 110 acres of land among them. One Harikrishna Jha became intervener in the case, claiming that he was an equal portioner in Chitradhar Jha’s land. The court upheld his claim and awarded him half of Chitradhar Jha’s land. To fight the case, Chitradhar Jha borrowed heavily from a

local *Marwadi* trader, Govind Ram Sancheti<sup>19</sup>. The same was the case of the other accused. When Chitradhar Jha and others failed to repay their loans, Sancheti went to court and got a considerable amount of their land auctioned to recover his loan with interest.”

Harikishun Jha saved most of his land from land ceiling by transferring his land to fictitious names (called *benami* transaction) and his close relatives. This was told to Sancheti in good faith. Later Sancheti filed a case in the district court for settlement of Harikishun Jha's *benami* lands with their actual tillers. The court conferred *sikmi* rights on the tillers of the land. Sancheti himself succeeded in getting 5-6 *bighas* of land. However, during Laloo Prasad's rule, when abductions were at their peak, the Sancheti family decided to permanently migrate out of Bihar and moved to their ancestral place in Rajasthan. His was a complex case of the unsettling process that was involved in the making of this village. Though Sancheti was not an inhabitant of Jitwarpur, his presence had influenced the village in many ways. As a moneylender he had helped Chitradhar Jha, the biggest landlord of Jitwarpur, fight against the Noniyas in local courts and the High Court but that had also proved to be a decisive factor in his, and several other local Brahmins', decline. He also weakened Harikishun Jha by continuously giving him loans on high interests to meet his political ambitions and fund his lavish lifestyle, and by exposing his fraudulent ways of saving his lands from ceiling laws. As a moneylender and also as a monopolist over grain trade in the area, he ruined several families and local producers.

### Migration and Labour Relations

The migrant labour families, by settling in the village, had entered into a feudal agrarian relationship with the Brahmin landowners. The latter were their employers whom they would call *zamindar* (*zimdar*) irrespective of their holding size (the term *zimdar* was still in use at the time of my fieldwork). On the one hand, their social relationship was governed by Brahminical notions of purity and pollution, and on the other, their economic relationship was based on exploitation of labour by the landowners. Political power too was vested in the *zamindars*. Hence, labouring families had no option but to give free service (called *begaar*) to the *zamindars*, work for meagre wages, and to tolerate all sorts of humiliation in the form of beating, verbal abuses and sexual exploitation of women. There was no question of saying *no* to the *zamindar*, howsoever unreasonable his demands were. Gradually, a local form of labour employment, called *lagoria* developed in the area. Remnants of the system still existed at the time of my fieldwork. *Lagwas* (agricultural workers) belonged to poor Musahar, Mandal (Kewat) and Yadav families. They had taken loans from their landowners and, in return, had to give priority to the work of that particular landowner. They repaid the loan in the form of their labour. No interest was charged from them on the loan amount. *Lagwas* were also expected to do *begaar* (unpaid labour). However, regular seasonal outmigration helped the *lagwas* to escape *begaar* to a great extent.

Permanand Singh, a Godhi by caste, narrated his own experience of *begaar* in the past:

“As soon as a landowner sighted us, he would immediately ask to do some work. Purely as *begaary*! He would say – *bhains kholkar ghas khila de; bhains ko khunta par bandh de; peene ka pani bhar de kuan se (ya) chapakal se; bojha dho de; bora utha ke machaan pe rakh de; pinjwa lagane mein madad kar de; darwaje par jhadu lage de; bari mein kamthauni kar de; patta chun de; bari-jhari mein do balti pani dal de; lakadi chir de; aata piswa ke la de*<sup>20</sup> – how many one can recall? Their demands were endless. Some 25-30 years back, we were required to share fruits – banana, mango, jackfruit – from our trees, and bamboo. Those days there worked a system of *dafadari*<sup>21</sup>. We feared [them]. There was no question of saying no. We were living on their land and were dependent on them. Had we said no, they would have retaliated by stopping entry of our cattle in their field for grazing, fuel wood, and even giving loan to us. Until 15-16 years back, all Godhi families were required to offer free service for a few days in a year. At least fifty of our hundred and a quarter families resided on their land. Now, we avoid going to them. Now we use *santhi*<sup>22</sup> as our fuel. This is one of the reasons we cultivate *patua*. Even today Brahmins use swear words for those taking fuelwood from their orchards, they humiliate us even when we take *bhanti* or *karchi*<sup>23</sup> from their land. But we cannot avoid them fully. We are their sharecroppers, hence, have to give some free labour and accept less wages.”

The Musahars were paid lesser wages because the land of their homestead was *gair majarua malik* or *sikmi* and had originally belonged to Brahmins. While other labourers got 50 to 60 rupees, sometimes even 70 rupees, as cash and one and a half kg of grain, the Musahars got 20-30 rupees less than others. The Musahars too were dependent on the Brahmins for their daily existence. Only those few Musahar households who owned land and were not dependent on Brahmins, got full wages and could resist demands for free labour.

Md. Sajjad of Mansoori *tola* was doing sharecropping on seven *bighas* of a Brahmin's land. He narrated his experience:

“Free labour has reduced due to migration as we are not always present in the village. But even today I have to give 5-6 days of free labour in a year. I am asked to do odd works like *puaal ka taal lagana; dhan ke bakhar ke liye taat bana dena; taat chhaa dena; khet mein apna hal-bail leke jotaye kar dena; chana ke khet mein spray kar dena*<sup>24</sup>. At least one day for each of the three crops. During such work the landlord gives one meal only. Being a tenant, I am paid just Rs. 50 a day whereas non-tenants are paid more, up to Rs. 70 during peak period. Now that grazing land has shrunk due to growing wheat cultivation, we are forced to reduce the number of cattle. Landlords do not allow grass-cutting even on *aar-dhur* (edge of a field). The terms and conditions of sharecropping are lopsided and favour the landlord.”

One day, when I was interviewing a Brahmin landowner, a Musahar labourer, along with his 10-12 year old daughter, was waiting to collect his wages. He sat on the *chowki* (a wooden cot). Meanwhile the Brahmin asked him to serve fodder to his two cows. The girl was asked to do some minor household work. Later I met the labourer in his *tola*. He mused:

“Taking *begaar* is ingrained in the psyche of the Brahmins. We cannot completely avoid visiting their house. We have seen how our parents and grandparents were humiliated, even beaten up. Now they cannot do it to us, particularly to the younger generation. I sit on his *chowki*. He may not like it but would say nothing. Mukhiya and sarpanch, both are from backward castes. Our MLA is from a *gadedia* (shepherd) community<sup>25</sup>. Even a few Musahars have land. Sometimes Brahmins borrow money from them. *Sab kuchh ek dam pehle jaisa nahi chal sakta hai* (the past cannot be repeated in the same manner).”

Ram Lakhan Sadai pointed to one big change that, according to him, would not have been possible without migration: “Earlier the labourers would flock around the landlords for work. Now the landlords come to our door when they require labour in agriculture or otherwise.” He told me that among Musahars, he and one Bharat Lal Rishidev did moneylending. Some 5-6 years back, he had mortgaged-in five *bighas* of a Brahmin’s land for 40,000 rupees. In the case of mortgage, the moneylender did not charge any interest but retained the right to till the land. The landowner repaid the loan after three years. Earlier, many Brahmins used to sell their land to meet daily expenses as their men and women did not work in the field. Bharat Lal had in the past purchased their land for 700 to 1100 rupees for a *bigha* while working as an attached labour, along with his brother. According to him, purchasing land had now become almost impossible for a labourer due to sky-rocketing land prices.

The general opinion among the labouring community in the village was that the Brahmins’ hold had weakened but would weaken further if work opportunities expanded outside agriculture in the area, or if wages increased, or earnings from migration went up. This was also expressed by almost all the Brahmins I met, of course sometimes as a complaint, sometimes with a sense of loss and at other times in the tone of reconciliation. Krishnakant Jha, whom everybody considered the most systematic and efficient farmer in the village, complained that despite his strong personal preference for self-cultivation, he had to lease out some land to keep hold over labourers and ensure labour supply to his field. He brought his diary, in which he had meticulously noted down cultivation-related expenditure, production and income, and explained that self-cultivation was more rewarding than leasing out:

“Earlier you call five labourers, ten of them would come rushing to your door. Now nobody comes unless called four-five times. Rather we go to their door and request repeatedly. Even when they say they would come, you can never be sure. *Delhi-Punjab bhi bigada hai aur yahan bhi kheti ke bahar kaam badh gaya hai* [migration to

Delhi and Punjab has spoiled them and also more non-agricultural work is available locally]. From 2008 onwards, I stopped the cultivation of *patua* because it was labour intensive. Instead I cultivate *moong* and *chana*. Moreover, I have to keep giving cash loans to my tenants on which I do not charge any interest. I also allow them to collect *jalawan* [fuel wood] from my orchard.”

Yet, I also came across some extreme cases of labour practices embedded in poverty. Two minor children, around 12-13 years, worked as *charvaha* (cattle grazers). They stayed at their employers’ house. Each child tended to 4-5 cattle. There were conflicting claims about their wages. While the children reported that they were paid three meals every day and Rs. 3000 a year, their employers claimed that they paid 14000 rupees a year as salary and took care of their meals and other requirements such as clothes, soap and oil. The children belonged to completely landless families from the Momin community in Mansoori *tola*. Another example was of an old Brahmin in Puraini *tola* – Tek Narayan Jha, a widower. He worked as a *charvaha* for Brahmins. When I asked him the reason, he broke down and narrated his story of landlessness, and how his sons had left him unattended. Unable to migrate at his age (he looked around 60-65 years old), he took up this job.

### **Dignity and Cultural Capital<sup>26</sup>**

In Jitwarpur, migrants carried a huge burden of indignity, particularly because they were perceived as lacking ‘cultural’ capital. Only the Brahmins were considered to be practising ‘knowledge’ as a social class. Gaining cultural capital through material possessions was also ruled out in the case of ‘lower’ castes. Their clothing, taste, manners, ornaments, songs, dances, pastime favourites, rituals etc. were viewed as inferior, with ‘*nanh jat*’ (low caste) characteristics. They ‘lacked’ exhibitionist values for establishing class positionality. These laid a solid foundation for ‘othering’, which continuously nurtured the social practices of distancing, untouchability, discrimination and humiliation. Migrants’ memories were replete with stories of ‘othering’. At the same time, as it would have been anywhere else, the ‘others’ strived to create their roots and proof of belongingness. They created stories that voiced their deep quest for dignity, and redefined their collective identity and their relationship with their ‘others’.

It would be wrong to attribute the awakening entirely to the recent rise of backward politics or earlier socialist politics. It seemed inherent and expressed itself in myriad ways, even before the country became independent. One strategy for claiming social equity was Sanskritisation; it laid emphasis on adopting symbols that would grant them the credentials to build cultural capital. The case of the Godhis was an example. Earlier the Godhis used ‘Bahardar’ as their surname. But a teacher in the Patengana middle school, Bhimlal Pandit (‘Pandit’ was not a caste surname, teachers at that time used to be called ‘Pandit’) influenced the Bahardars to change their surname to ‘Singh’ which was considered a Kshatriya surname.

This happened some 70-80 years back. During my fieldwork, I could list twenty-seven villages in the vicinity where the Bahardars changed their surname to Singh, including the village Dooba to which Bhimlal Pandit belonged. The Bahardars of Jitwarpur village belonged to the Kurin sub-caste among Godhis. Kurins widely adopted the new surname to raise their social status. They went on to adopt the 'sacred' thread (yajyopavit, called *janeu* in local language), though they hardly used it, reserving its use for special occasions like marriage or religious functions. For them, maintaining the sacredness of the thread in their day-to-day life as per the norms laid in the scripture was difficult. In the post-Mandal era, for the first time, there were signs of reversal of Sanskritisation. In many villages in the vicinity, the Godhis had started reverting to their original surname, Bahardar. By using 'Singh', some of them said, they stood the risk of losing their distinct OBC identity and a sense of larger solidarity. Jadeshwar Bahardar questioned why the community should feel ashamed of their surname when they had seen people outside the state having weird and amusing surnames that they did not try to hide.

Godhi, Chaudhary, Bahardar, Mukhia, Mallah, Kewat and Kewot Mandal belonged to the same caste. Within Godhis there were nine sub-castes: Khunot, Kurin, Banpar, Tiar, Sahni, Bind, Kol, Chabhi and Chaudhari. I heard several sayings about this caste. One oft-quoted saying was, "*Kewot kuti mahaapradhi, bhel-bhat mein gare kathi*", roughly meaning that one cannot trust the words of this caste: they speak different things at different times. This saying shed light on the strategies that the community had to adopt to negotiate their living in the village. The entire community was settled on *maliks'* land (here the reference is to *gair majarua malik* land) and their male folk, in particular, had no specific occupation. Even for selling *murhi* and *kachari* in the local *hatia*, they had to please the *malik* (landowner) on whose land the *hatia* was held. The male workers did not want to get attached to one *malik*; they had to keep all of them (the landowners) in good humour as their dependence on *maliks*, for both land and labour, was critical. Communities had to be adaptable to survive and shrewdness was one such adaptation. Bare truth did not work. People participating in the discussion agreed that this applied to other castes too. No caste was spared in these sayings. For example, about the Yadavs the saying was, "*Ganwarak Dosti, puvarak chhavani saale bhar*", meaning a Yadav's friendship was short-lived. The choicest sayings, however, were about the Brahmins – "*Brahman bhookha, Brahman haath sookha*" or this slayer "*Brahman ke chahuo mein chhal*", meaning that deception is so ingrained in the Brahmins that they even carry it in their teeth. Though such sayings are generic and part of the day-to-day lingo in the entire Hindi belt, I was interested in knowing how communities interpreted them. In people's opinion, the sayings were less about the real attributes of the communities and more about their social relations. Brahmins and others oppressors had contempt for lower-caste people and their sayings demeaned them. But the lower castes too had contempt for their oppressors. Hence, in scriptural Hinduism, a Brahmin might be the epitome of knowledge, created by Brahma from his top upper limb, but in sayings he was a mean, greedy and cunning creature.

Shrisasti Singh recalled how the Brahmins used to treat them badly in the past:

“We did not have any respect. Even a small boy from the Brahmin community would talk in derogatory language with our elders. We had to sit on the floor in their presence; we were not allowed to sit on a cot. We were forbidden to use slippers even when entering their *bakhaar* (grain store), leave aside their home. Untouchability was practised and the Brahmins would not take water from us. They would call us and other lower castes *solkans*. Now the situation has changed for the better. The Brahmins accept food and water from us. They do not dare to assault us. Earlier we used to call them *Malik* (master), now we call them *bhaiji* (brother) and *chacha* (uncle). There are several Brahmin families who have money and land, but there are also many who borrow money from us in case of need. Our women work and earn. Their women do not work. This is an important reason why we are progressing and they are declining. Gradually, the Brahmins are forced to work in the field. They plough, milk their cows, participate in harvesting and engage in wage labour. However, the Brahmins work only in other Brahmins’ fields. Still, they do no work in the sowing of paddy, though they participate in removing the seedlings.”

One important milestone in the struggle for dignity was the offer of rapprochement that came the Noniyas’ way after years of animosity between them and the Brahmins, following the pogrom mentioned earlier. The story narrated by Ram Prakash Singh and some others, in a nutshell, was as follows: in an effort to end caste hostility in the area, in 1952 the former rajas of Champanagar and Banaili organised a big *yajna*<sup>27</sup>, called *Shrikunj*<sup>28</sup>. Thousands of people from the area attended it. The Noniyas were specifically invited to the *yajna*. On this occasion, a 72-hour non-stop *kirtan* (devotional songs) was held. One *kirtan mandali* (singing group) of the Noniyas was allowed to participate. The Brahmin priests who had come from Madanpur, Balua and Banaili, were pleased with the way the *Shrikunj* was organised. The Brahmins agreed to end untouchability against the Noniyas. They performed *Upnayan*<sup>29</sup> for the Noniyas, conferring on Noniya men the right to wear the sacred thread, *Janeu*. Practically, the Noniyas seldom performed *Upnayan* ceremony because of the cost involved and the difficulty in maintaining the thread’s purity. They clubbed *Upnayan* with the marriage ceremony of their boys. They wore *Janeu* only on certain occasions. The Brahmins never refused to perform rituals for them, though there were instances where they (the Brahmins) were unwilling to visit families that were very poor.

While the *Shrikunj* did help the Noniyas by reducing untouchability, discrimination and social isolation, it did not end the hostility between the two communities. People recalled how, within ten years of the *Shrikunj* – at the behest of Radha Jha, one of the descendents of Chitradhar Jha – several Noniya men were implicated in a criminal case following a dacoity in a trader’s house in Tegachhiya and were sent to jail. The case went on for more than a decade. It was in 1972 that the court finally disposed the case and exonerated all accused Noniya men.

Ram Lakhan Sadai from Gilahbari narrated one incident which played an important role in arousing the self-esteem of Musahars. Laloo Prasad, the then chief minister of Bihar, during one of his visits to the area, addressed a gathering of Musahars. He said, Punjab, Haryana *ya jahan kahin kaam mile jao aur jab lauto to jeet se raho* (if you do not find sufficient work locally, migrate to Punjab, Haryana or wherever you can find work. Earn well and when you return then live in style, not in tattered clothes). He exhorted them, *pothi, puranas, jala do aur chandan-tika mita do* (burn Brahmanical scriptures and wipe off the sandalwood paste worn on the forehead, which are symbols of Brahmanism). Ram Lakhan believed that the Musahars discovered their own voice in the words of Laloo Prasad. The word *jeet* was particularly remarkable and caught their imagination. Before their return journey from Punjab and other places, migrants would buy heaps of clothes that were sold on the footpath by weight. These clothes would be resized by the local tailors to fit the family members. The usual scene of mud-splattered naked children running around changed, women started wearing blouses and houses looked neat and clean. Cheap plastic chairs found their way into Musahar houses. The Musahar and Yadav *tolas* were indeed the cleanest habitations in the village.

### Reflections on Outmigration

Wheat was the main crop in the *rabi*<sup>30</sup> season; *garma* paddy (paddy grown during *rabi* season) was cultivated on a very limited scale. The *kharij*<sup>31</sup> crops comprised paddy and *patua* (jute). Paddy was sown in the month of *Asadh*<sup>32</sup> and *Sawan*, and harvested in *Agahan*. In between, weeding was done in the month of *Bhado*. One round of irrigation was done in the month of *Bhado*, particularly if there were less or no rains. Wheat was sown in the month of *Poos* and harvested in the month of *Chait*. In between, after about a month of sowing one round of irrigation was done. Weeding was usually not done in wheat fields. The same field was used for the cultivation of *patua* which was sown in the month of *Vaishakh* and harvested in *Sawan*. *Patua* required complete weeding which was done during the entire month of *Jeth*. After the harvesting of *patua*, the field was used for the sowing of paddy. The harvesting of *Patua* slightly delayed the paddy-sowing.

My household survey found that the average number of days of employment per labouring household per year was 134 days, clearly establishing that the number of days of employment (wage as well as self-employment) in a year was less than the number of days of unemployment. In fact, employment days were much less in the case of irregular wage earners. In particular, there was no work during *Asin*, *Kartik*, *Magh* and *Phagun*. Migration in itself was an evidence of surplus labour. Low mechanisation in agriculture was another evidence of presence of surplus labour as a considerable area was being tilled using bullocks. However, some labour scarcity was experienced during the sowing of paddy and, to some extent, also during wheat harvesting. Labourers would leave for Punjab before wheat harvesting was completely over in the village. Use of the mobile thresher (fitted in a tractor in such a way that it ran on the tractor engine) was a relatively new development but had

rapidly replaced manual labour. Low wages were also contributing to the scarcity of labour. For example, an attached labour was paid only Rs. 1000 per month and food. The same labour, had he migrated, would have saved Rs. 2000 in a month.

The magnitude and importance of outmigration from the village could be understood by considering the following four facts. First, out of the total 950 HHs, 67 percent (636 HHs) reported having at least one member who was a migrant, in the last one year. Second, male migrant workers accounted for 52 percent of the total male labour force. Third, migrant workers constituted 40 percent of the labour force in the case of Scheduled Caste workers and 30 percent of the relatively poorer OBC I. And fourth, 62 percent male migrant workers belonged to landless HHs and another 52 percent to HHs owning less than 1 acre of agricultural land. We will discuss outmigration in detail in the last section of the paper.

Migration was by and large circular. All local works – agricultural and non-agricultural combined – were not sufficient to sustain them in the village, whereas at the destinations low wages and inaccessible family housing did not allow permanent or long-term migration with family. People did not see any alternative to this situation. In 1972, the Forbesganj rail line, which linked this area with Punjab, became operational, and with that the route to the Green Revolution hotbeds of Punjab and Haryana opened up. For non-agricultural works, Karnal, Kurushetra and Khoda (a place between Gaziabad and Noida) were the destinations of choice.

People recalled how, even in the distant past, they were occasionally forced to migrate when local landlords had no work for them or when they faced extreme scarcity due to failure of rains or severe floods. Raghu Sharma, a carpenter living in the Noniya *tola*, recollected how, in earlier times, people used to migrate to Nepal and Bengal, “In Nepal, we used to work in *Dhankuti* (dehusking of paddy) and take up soil cutting, *ghar-gharghatti* (building or repairing *kutcha* house) and other works that came our way. In Bengal, we used to go to Dinajpur to work in the agricultural field of *tori*, paddy, *patua*. Earlier we also used to travel up to 10-15 kms for work.” According to Raghu Sharma, the introduction of wheat cultivation to this area led to more work being available locally. There was also a demand for labour in the neighbouring Panchayats during the sowing of paddy and harvesting of *patua*. Big landowners from Jamua and Phulwari used to come in their tractors and take away labourers from Jitwarpur. Wages were negotiated beforehand. “There is definitely a slight improvement in our economic conditions. But migration is still required. A small episode of illness, floods, drought, crop failure – and we become indebted. Peak period in crops is declining. In recent years, cultivators have started using weedicide which is affecting labour use, particularly of women,” said Raghu Sharma.

Ramlal Jha, who owned 52 decimals of land, used to cultivate Harikishun Jha’s land on lease. But the landlord ensured that his name was not recorded in the *khewat*. He did not

benefit from the Survey and Settlement. After his death, for a few years his son worked as a lessee as well as a wage labourer in the landlord's land before deciding to migrate out of Bihar for work. He was just nineteen years old at that time. He recalled, "I did not want to work in the field of the local landlords as they would always seek *begaar*." He along with his brother worked in a flour and oil mill in Karnal (Haryana) while their family members lived in the village. He proudly said that he earned Rs. 2250 for ten days of work in the mill, whereas he would make just Rs. 900 in a month if he worked in the village. They saved money to purchase one acre and 10 decimals of land in the village. In 2005, they mortgaged 84 decimals and sold 60 decimals of land to meet the cost of their sister's marriage. Though they were almost landless again, he declared, "Whatever we have today, even the hut with a tin shed, is all because of our own efforts from migration. We do not work under the local landlord even for a day."

In the Noniya *toला*, I came across several households where women had also migrated to Delhi or Haryana along with their male counterparts and worked as maid servants. I met Dhaneshari Devi whose story defies any simple understanding of migration. She recounted:

"In 1993, I migrated to Delhi with my family. We used to stay in Malviya Nagar. Then my son Manoj Singh was twelve years old. My husband (Ujagar Singh) used to do *beldari* (carrying headload of bricks) at construction sites. He earned Rs. 100 a day though on some days he would not get work. I worked as a domestic maid in *kothis* [it might have been bungalows or flats in housing societies]. Sometimes my daughter, Beena, accompanied me. I used to work in five houses. At that time the payment was Rs. 150 for *jharu, pochha aur bartan* (floor and utensil cleaning) and Rs. 500 for washing clothes. Overall, I used to earn about 2000 rupees in a month. Manoj was admitted in a school. But on 14 August 1994, he fell from the roof while flying a kite. Both his hands were fractured and it took them about a year to heal. Thus, his education was disrupted. After recovery, he started to learn painting in construction work. During his apprenticeship he used to earn Rs. 30 a day. After his apprenticeship, he started working. He was supposed to get at least Rs. 50-55 a day but the employer cheated and paid at the rate of Rs. 35 only. Then, Manoj left for Himachal Pradesh along with a relative. It was in the year 2000. He used to work on daily wages of Rs. 80. Then he got a job in a furniture shop where he learnt to polish wood. When the owner of the shop constructed his house, he gave the contract of painting and polishing to Manoj. As this was his first contract he had no idea of the contract market. Hence he had taken the job on below-market rates. He worked for six months and saved Rs. 5000 to send back home. Manoj stayed in Himachal for 5-6 years. Once he shifted to Himachal, we decided to return to the village. My husband resumed agriculture on our 15 *kattha*<sup>33</sup> family land and 15 *kattha* of mortgaged land.

“In 2005, Manoj was married. However, after three-four years, Manoj developed mental illness. He had got addicted to the smell of paints. He returned to the village. To meet the cost of his treatment, my husband, our younger son and I again shifted to Delhi. My younger son was in Class IX but he had to leave his studies. He worked in a shop where starting from Rs. 1500 gradually his salary increased to 3000 rupees a month. My husband became a security guard. Later, he returned to his previous job of headloader in construction work in Sonipat. Our elder son, Kanchan, also joined him. They work through a contractor who ensures that they get job every day. However, the contractor pays them less than market wages; still they prefer the contractor as there is no guarantee of getting work in the open job market. I too returned to working as a maidservant. Sometime back, when I heard about my son’s deteriorating condition, I came back to the village to be with him. My husband and sons send money every month. My husband is also planning to come back but both sons will continue working there.”

Of all the stories I heard about outmigrations, the common conclusion was that the destinations were inhospitable and life was tough for working-class people. Yet they continued to leave their village. Whosoever I spoke to seemed convinced of its benefits – remittances had helped to bring about improvements in their food, clothing etc.; their debt-burden had reduced; cash income had increased; the dominance of the Brahmins had reduced; the unemployment period had come down; more work was available locally as excess labour was migrating out and *begaary* had reduced. Then why did they not migrate permanently, with family? “Not possible”, “earnings are not sufficient for a family to survive” (“*khayenge kya aur khilayenge kya*”), “how can you leave your ancestral place” were common answers. Yoganand Mandal, a Kewat who survived on fishing, said, “There is no belongingness at the destination town (*shahar apna nahi hai*). Permanent migration is a luxury. A few Brahmin families have migrated but they are doctors, engineers. They may have land in the village, but that is *property* for them. Their sense of belongingness ends with the death of their parents whom they leave behind.”

### **Coda**

The cases cited in the essay demonstrate the dynamic nature of the spatial movement of people that contributed to the making of a village. Almost all communities now settled in the village came from somewhere else, during a period extending from last five years to almost hundred years. The village came into existence through a process of settling and unsettling which was mediated through land, labour, power, violence, oppression, resistance, subversion, social mobility, physical movement and also certain events that deeply influenced the lives of settlers. Evidently, the socioeconomic conditions of the people were still crucially embedded in their migration history, and the prevailing social relations, agrarian relations and power

dynamics in the village were outcomes of a complex interplay of caste, class, migration and the modern institutions of democracy. Gradually, particularly in the last two decades, outmigration is being used by the historically subjugated communities to challenge, resist and subvert the dominance and oppression practised by upper castes.

In my ethnography, the village lived in its memories. The past seldom appeared as a collection of happy memories in the narratives of the labouring poor, the in-migrants to the village. Their narratives frequently exuded their memories of struggle, their indomitable will to survive and to change. The past is a long history of struggle to create belongingness. Their ancestors came from somewhere else and adopted the land as their own, without legally owning it. Legal ownership was to become a point of conflict and struggle, something to live for. Staying in the village might have been extremely difficult and painful, but they did not leave, except temporarily. It did not matter today whether they had opportunities to leave or not. Living was prosaic, leaving was palliative. Living defined them, leaving did not. Living created a sense of ancestry in the village. Genealogy mattered but only for knowing their origin, for establishing the identity of their social being. Ancestry mattered for belongingness. Leaving might have been disruptive but did not cause a rupture in living. On the contrary, it deepened the idea of living. Living, however, is incomplete as long as the agenda of land, dignity and freedom remains unfinished – that is, as long as the painful past lives on in the present.

### Notes

1. Also called the land consolidation programme, aimed at rearranging the parcels of land in a holding or in different holdings for the purpose of rendering such a holding or holdings more compact.
2. The fieldwork was carried out during March-early June 2010. The field notes have so far been unpublished. Parts of field notes, which dealt with the past – the making of the village, crucial events and changes majorly influenced by migration – have been used to write this paper which, in my view, remain relevant irrespective of the long gap between the fieldwork and writing of this paper. At some places, narratives have been supplemented with quantitative data to give background information about the village.
3. In terms of caste and community groups, while Brahmin belonged to the general category of castes, Noniya, Godhi, Kewat, Nai and Halwai belonged to the OBC-I (also known as the extremely backward castes); Baniya, Yadav, Sudhi and Barhai belonged to the OBC-II; Chamar and Musahar belonged to the Scheduled Castes (SC) and Santhal belonged to the Scheduled Tribes (ST). Among Muslims, both Momin and Ansari belonged to the OBC.

4. Of the total land area, 94.74 acres belonged to the state government. Of these, 45.06 acres was *gair majarua khas*. Some of these lands had been settled but some had been lost to due to change in the course of Bhalua. 42.14 acres of land had been classified as *gair majarua aam* which was under public use. 7.54 acres belonged to the erstwhile District Board. 28.35 acres were declared ceiling surplus which were distributed among the landless families. Some *bhoodan* land was also distributed among the landless but the descendants of land donors recaptured the land.
5. A system of patronage where certain social services were provided by a professional class that was remunerated not with instant cash or kind payment but summarily with a fraction of gross agricultural produce or with a parcel of land free of rent or bearing a reduced rent. The Nai family in the village had a *jajmani* of forty-five families in the Noniya *tola* who would each pay 10 kg per crop (wheat and paddy crops only).
6. Private waste and uncultivable lands of the proprietors.
7. Anna was the smallest unit in the then used anna-rupee system of currency. Sixteen annas were equivalent to one rupee. Anna was minted in the form of a coin. It was subdivided into four (old) paise or twelve pies (thus there were 192 pies in a rupee). When the rupee was decimalised and subdivided into 100 (new) paise, one anna was therefore equivalent to 6.25 paise.
8. Here taka refers to the Indian Rupee. Colloquially, people used to call a rupee a taka. It should not be confused with Bangladesh's currency.
9. A tenant of a tenant, a sub-partner; when the tenant's holding was of considerable size, sub-letting was practised.
10. Denotes tenant's rights in land signifying a "permanent occupancy holding".
11. A 12<sup>th</sup> century ruler of Ajmer whose territory was spread over the vast expanse of north-west India.
12. One acre is equal to 1.6 bighas.
13. *Solkans* is a derogatory term for lower castes.
14. Public register of ownership of parcels of land. In fiscal terms, it meant a register of properties according to their value. Cadastral Survey succeeded Revenue Survey undertaken by the British in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Cadastral Survey was based on the plots prepared in the traverse survey.

15. *Khesra* (also known as *khasra*) is a written record of the particulars of a rough map of a village in which different plots of land are numbered and their numbers which are known as *khasra* are entered in book along with the area and the crop; list of fields serially numbered according to the map showing occupants, area and class plot by plot.
16. A record of tenants' rights including the identity, extent, quality and possession of land.
17. Register of proprietors, under proprietors and perpetual lessees with their interests and share of revenue payable.
18. All lands utilised for public purposes, e.g., lands occupied by the railways, canals, etc.
19. Govind Ram Sancheti was a wealthy businessman who traded in grain and one of the biggest moneylenders in the area. Technically he was not from Jitwarpur as his house was near Patengana market.
20. Give fodder to the buffalo, peg the buffalo, bring drinking water from a well/handpump, carry the bundle, put the sack on the loft, help in preparing rick of plant residual, clean the open yard of the house, weed the kitchen garden, collect the dry leafs, water the plants in the kitchen garden, cut a wood log into small pieces for use in kitchen, take the wheat for grinded in a flour mill.
21. Dafadars were village level part paid staff of the police who were supposed to keep records of village level events and report crimes to the police. The post was handed over from generation to generation.
22. The residual dry plant of *patua* (jute) is called santhi. A layer of cattle dung is applied over the santhi and dried in the sun. This fuel is also called santhi.
23. There are wild plants with stem. Not used for any other purpose than fuel for cooking.
24. Building rick of plant residual, preparing bamboo-made structure of grain storage on which mud plaster is applied, thatching the grain storage structure, ploughing the field with own bullocks, and spraying pesticide in black gram crop.
25. Later, I came to know that the then local MLA, Mr. Pradip Kumar belonged to a caste called *Gangai*. According to the Purnea's Gazetteer by P.C. Roy Chaudhary, 1963, the Gangais migrated to to Purnea from the borders of Nepal in Terai region. They are included in the OBC-I list.

26. Cultural capital consists of a set of assets usually associated with information, knowledge, abilities, skills and motivation. Poor and 'low' caste people are characterised by their lack of these assets, thereby being unable to utilise available opportunities of social mobility or to guard themselves from discrimination and humiliation.
27. *Yajna* literally means sacrifice. It is a type of Hindu worship usually lasting for several days in which the essential element is the ritual fire which is kept alive at a temporary altar for the entire duration of the *yajna*. Oblations are poured in the fire and it is believed that everything that is offered into the fire reaches God. During the entire period of *yajna*, priests and singer groups offer chants and devotional songs.
28. *Shrikunj* is one of the three forms of *yajna* practised in this area, the other two being *Vishakha Kunj* and *Lalita Kunj*. Together they form the *mahatrikunj yajna*.
29. This is a Brahminical ritual in which an upper-caste boy, usually under the age of twelve years, receives the sacred thread (known as *yagyopavita* or *janeu*) in a ceremony and continues to wear the thread across his chest throughout his life.
30. Crops grown in winter and harvested in the spring after their ripening in the beginning of the hot season.
31. Crops sown before the commencement of the rains and harvested before winter.
32. The English equivalent of the Hindi Calendar is as follows: Asadh: June-July; Sawan: July-August; Bhado: August-September; Asin: September-October; Kartik: October-November; Agahan: November-December; Poos (Pausha): December-January; Magh: January-February; Phagun: February-March; Chait: March-April; Vaishakh: April-May; and Jeth: May-June.
33. 20 *kattha* constituted one *bigha* of land.