

Analysing Discrimination in Rural Development through the Saansad Adarsh Gram Yojana: A Case Study

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Abstract

This paper seeks to study the implementation and impact of the Saansad Adarsh Gram Yojana in the village of Islamgarh in Haryana, specifically the differential treatment afforded to different caste groups. In the absence of any infrastructural development under the scheme, we analyse discrimination in the formulation of the developmental strategy, village administration, as well as some pre-existing form of discrimination in the village. Finally, we look at some of the reasons for the failure of the scheme, as well as provide a roadmap for future development.

Introduction

Discrimination has long been one of the enduring spectres on the Indian landscape. Any scheme aimed at development through community mobilization must in its purview also focus on integration of community, through positive action for the upliftment of those historically discriminated against. In the Indian context, an equalising of public amenities and opportunities, irrespective of religion, ethnicity, gender, caste and other such social identities, is a must for the success of any grassroots development project. No true rural development project can now choose to ignore the pervasive discriminatory structures present on many of these fronts in an Indian village. Moving away from purely economic development models to those such as Amartya Sen's capabilities model, intra-community discrimination has been ignored for a long period of time, despite commitments in the constitution to end the same is a notable detriment to the goals of development.

The Sansad Adarsh Gram Yojana (SAGY) was launched by Prime Minister, Narendra Modi in October 2014, to serve as a model of rural development and empowerment. Under this scheme, each Member of Parliament (MP) was to adopt a rural village in his constituency, and develop it into an *adarsh gram*, or model village, by 2016. The goal was for each MP to develop their first village by 2016, and two more by 2019. Thereafter, they were to identify and develop five more *adarsh grams* over the next five years, for a total of 8 model villages by 2024.

The objective of the Sansad Adarsh Gram Yojana is twofold development: firstly, 'holistic development' of the identified gram panchayats, which includes social mobilization, trying to inculcate a sense of community and an ethic of community-driven, grassroots development. The scheme aims to co-opt the different village communities into the development process, blurring dividing lines in the community, uplifting the poor and the downtrodden, and trying to encourage the

spread of morals and culture through the villagers. The goal is to generate a model of local development and effective governance—where the adopted *adarsh grams* serve as catalysts for the development of the area by motivating and training neighbouring villages to emulate the *adarsh gram's* ethos of development. ("Saansad Adarsh Gram Yojana (SAGY) Guidelines" 11)

Secondly, the scheme concentrates on the infrastructural and administrative development of the village. This includes ensuring adequate road connectivity, water and electricity supply, complete and effective implementation of various schemes (such as the IAY, the NREGA, etc.), and effective functioning of governmental services (health, education, the public distribution services, and the like).

A curious quirk of the SAGY is that no separate developmental funds have been allotted for this plan, *per se*; it emphasizes the MP's capacity in leveraging the pre-existing schemes, along with effective utilization of their Member of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLAD) funds to facilitate development, as well as raising money through public-private partnerships.

As for the structure of the plan, the MP's were to adopt the first village by November 2014, and in the following few months, conduct a baseline survey of the village, as well as prepare a Village Development Plan in consultation with, and involving extensive participation from, the gram panchayat, villagers, as well as marginalized groups in the village. The plan was to have specific recommendations, as well as an itemized budget for village development, with timelines stated clearly in order to ensure development by the 2016 deadline. All the plans, for all the villages, as well as the baseline surveys were to be made available to the public, to ensure adequate transparency.

Research Objectives

Our *a priori* objective was a two pronged analysis of the scheme. Firstly, to analyse the role of primary stakeholders, i.e. the inhabitants of the village, in the construction of the village development plan. We wished specifically to look at the process of formulating the plan, as well as look into discrimination when it came to participation in the planning process. Secondly, to analyse the implementation of the plan proper, and see if it catered to the needs of the village, and if it favoured certain sections over others in its implementation.

Unfortunately, we found no *prima facie* evidence that the plan has been implemented. Everyone we spoke to, including the *sarpanch* (elected chief of the village, head of the lowest administrative unit called the *panchayat*, or village council), as well as the *panchayat* members, assured us that absolutely no work had been done. The primary reason cited was usually a lack of funds.

In the face of this, we have modified our second objective to study discrimination in the intangible aspects of the scheme, as well as any pre-existing discrimination we could find evidence of. Since the plan is not only about throwing money at infrastructural projects, but also about the MP using his heft to ensure efficient administration—a reform which, if effected, might go unnoticed in the village at large. This is because while the construction of a flyover is likely to be noticed immediately by the village at large, a marginal increase in the efficiency of the police force, or a marginal increase in the efficiency of administrative functions, such as the issue of health cards, might be less perceptible to the man on the street. Since an individual infrequently interacts with these services, it would take a more aggregated approach to identify increases in efficiency.

We have therefore chosen to analyse the village from an administrative point of view—namely the issue of Below Poverty Line (BPL) cards, as well as beneficiaries of

certain government schemes, etc. We also look at it from the point of view of dissemination of information—mainly through knowledge of the planning process, as well as attendance and participation in the *panchayat*.

We are looking at the treatment of different caste groups in this regard, as well as looking at those issues which can be remedied with little monetary cost. We then look at the spread of information from the *panchayat* and the administration through the villages, and attempt to look at the political and social environment of the *adarsh gram*.

Finally, we hope to provide guidelines for a more reasonable, and less expensive, plan for village development, which equitably caters to the needs of the stakeholders.

Methodology

Study Area

For our study, we chose the village of Islamgarh, also known as Chhuchhakwas, in the Jhajjar district of Haryana. The paucity of adopted villages posed a hurdle for selection. Of the hundreds of villages selected, only four had uploaded development plans on the website as of May, 2016—namely Tinvong and Kittam Manpur, in Sikkim; Sellipet, in Punducherry; and Islamgarh in the Jhajjar district of Haryana. We focused our study on Islamgarh, known locally as Chhuchhakwas, in Jhajjar. This was primarily due to the lack of access to the Sikkim villages and the language barrier in conducting household surveys in the south of India. Islamgarh was adopted by Deependar Singh Hooda, an Indian National Congress MP from Rohtak, in late 2014.

The village itself sits on a crossroads, at the intersection of the Dadri-Jhajjar road and the Jahajgarh road. Consequently, the narrow roads seem perennially gridlocked, usually with large trucks and lorries interspersed with pedestrians, vendors pushing carts, and cyclists. There are no street lights, and there are uncovered drains beside large sections of road. Islamgarh is served by both a public school and a Primary Health Centre (PHC), although some villagers found their functioning to be less than satisfactory. While electricity and piped water connections do exist in several houses, their supply remains intermittent and unreliable. A substantial number of people, including those with water connections, have to buy water from private sources (mainly tankers) and pay market rates.

The primary occupations of the village include agriculture, both as landholding farmers and hired labourers; zamindars (landowners); as well as manufacturers of iron implements. Regarding irrigation, less than half the farms receive water from the Jawahar Lal Nehru canal, and thus dependence of bore wells is high. This is problematic because of the salinity of groundwater, which has been a slowly

escalating issue in Islamgarh for some time.

Islamgarh has a population of 4063, residing in 725 households, out of which 111 (15.3%) are classified as BPL. In terms of caste, 429 households are categorized as Other Backward Castes (OBC), 242 households as Scheduled Castes (SC), and the remaining 54 households classified as general category (GEN). Islamgarh is exclusively Hindu, and contains no Scheduled Tribes whatsoever.

Most of the villagers live in two or three blocks, with narrow, almost alley-like pathways between houses. The SC households, on the other hand, constitute a separate hamlet, situated around the perimeter of a large, brackish pond. This area has several poorly maintained houses, as well as some shacks and improvised shelters constructed of whatever was at hand. Roads in this area are more uneven, and some roads have been completely closed off due to flooding from the pond.

Questionnaire

We conducted semi-structured interviews of 47 households, and the sampling was done on the basis of two criteria. Initially we selected households randomly based on a map of households, obtained from village records, but this proved unreliable. The map had been prepared along with the development plan, but was out of date.

The village itself is quite self-contained, with five long alleyways, along which almost all the residences are located, and two main roads, along which almost all commercial establishments are housed. We therefore visited every third house down the five residential roads of the district, and then sampled the shops along the two main thoroughfares. Lacking a female team member, we were advised not to interview women without a male member present. Due to this, and the fact that the men often co-opted the questionnaire, our respondents are almost completely male.

As we conducted our surveys throughout the day, we could only interview the main breadwinner either early in the morning, or in the evening. Thus, grown children, elderly parents, and the unemployed (as respondents) are overrepresented in our sample. While our questions were less to do about them personally, but rather to do with the household, it is possible that they were less informed than the head of the household might have been.

In addition, we conducted informal talks with both the *sarpanch* as well as the heads of some local communities, in order to get a better idea of both the extent of development under the plan as well as specific problems facing a particular community.

Unreliability of reported income proved a significant problem. While most respondents did provide us with an estimate of their annual income, they were usually not very forthcoming. The range of their estimates was often also quite large, with respondents often making statements like 'I make 1 or 2 lakhs a year'. Often, they readily accepted a friend or onlooker's estimation, and at other times reported their entire family had earned nothing over the past several years, despite outward evidence to the contrary (livestock, a house, a car, motorcycles). Their responses thus seemed a little arbitrary, with low correlation even to BPL status, or asset ownership.

In terms of caste, of our 47 households, 21 (45%) were OBC, 14 (30%) were SC, and 12 (25%) were GEN.

The ratio of SC's in our sample is identical to their ratio in the population, at 30%. OBC are underrepresented (30% in the sample vs. 62% in the population) while GEN was significantly overrepresented (25% in the sample vs. 8% in the population).

Results

When it comes to actual implementation, the plan has achieved very little. Of our 47 respondents, only one reported any work done—the installation of about 10m of drainage along one side street. Despite this, we have reports of aadhar cards and government health cards being issued to the public since the inception of the plan, though of course we cannot draw a causal relationship between this and SAGY itself, we shall regardless look at any evidence of discrimination we can find regarding this facet.

Despite the SAGY guidelines requiring “consultations with the different stakeholders, particularly women self-help groups (SHGs)¹ and farmer groups and (...) Gram Sabha discussions”, as well as the formulation of an official plan document, we found only 3 respondents in our entire sample—a rich OBC farmer, an OBC shopkeeper, and the head of the SC community—who claimed to have participated in the identification and prioritization of developmental objectives any way whatsoever. Furthermore, the extent of their participation was limited to having attended a meeting where the *sarpanch* informed them of what would be done.

village. Curiously, the *sarpanch* himself claimed that no plan document had been prepared.

We have therefore elected to look at several things. As we mentioned before, participation in the planning process was negligible. We therefore look at knowledge of

- The contents of the plan document
- How the content was decided upon.
- The existence of a plan document
- The existence of the scheme

While this information is almost certainly second-hand, and might not necessarily show discrimination in the planning process, it is indicative of the informal information networks of the village, and the dissemination of information and participation from the *panchayat* or the *sarpanch* to the rest of the village.

Furthermore, we are looking at how the castes have been treated in terms of the administration. Specifically, though no infrastructural development has been done under the plan, it is possible that the plan sped up the process of issue of BPL cards, or Health cards, and the like, which could be done costlessly, and wouldn't necessarily register among the respondents as a 'benefit of the plan'.

Table I: Descriptive Statistics

	<i>Sample</i>	<i>GEN</i>	<i>OBC</i>	<i>SC</i>
<i>Mean HH Income (lakhs of Rupees p.a)</i>	1.88	1.45	2.69	1.05
<i>Per capita daily income (Rs.)</i>	87	72	121	49
<i>Plot Size (Acres)</i>	2.23	2.67	2.41	1.53

Source: Calculated by Authors

Of even these three, only one could relate anything concrete that was said at these meetings, and he could only recall a single item—the construction of a bypass for the

We had initially planned to compare these indicators against the results of a baseline survey conducted during the preparation of the plan. Due to bureaucratic delays, as of August 2016, the results of this survey,

¹ A voluntary association, usually composed of 10-20 women/men, who come together either to make regular savings contributions, which are then

used to lend funds back to the members; or, in the case of farmer's collectives and such, to economise on fertilizer/seed costs through bulk purchase.

which were due to be made available to the public four months prior, are unavailable.

A further caveat: due to the small size of our subsamples, it is important to take the following inferences with a grain of salt.

The Planning process

In addition to asking respondents if they participated in the formulation of the agenda / personally attended any meetings to do with deciding developmental targets, we also questioned them as to whether they had any secondary information about the same, perhaps through a family member, friends, or neighbours.

Firstly, literally none of our respondents, nor anyone else in the village including the *sarpanch*, or the *panchayat* members, had any idea that a plan document was made and put up regarding their village.

Many of them knew of the scheme's existence, and a few knew one or two of the projects which were outlined in the plan, but none knew of the existence of the plan itself.

A majority of our respondents (55%, or 26/47) were either completely unaware of what was planned or had no idea how it was decided. A quarter (12/47, or 26%) had heard that it occurred through meetings, and this category was high in zamindars (5/12, or 41%). A minority were under the impression that the proposed agenda was decided upon by the district and village officials (8/47, or 17%).

Looking at the figures by caste, one can infer what seems to be an interesting trend we find time and time again in this paper, one which might reflect the apathy on the part of the GEN respondents. Three quarters (9/12) of surveyed general respondents were unaware of the planning process, and indeed the plan itself, compared to just under half (17/35) the SC and OBC respondents.

Could this reflect apathy on the part of the GEN respondents, or does it rather reflect marginalization, either in terms of

transparency and/or flow of information? The data is insufficient for a reasonable answer. While the income statistics would suggest they are less well-off, both in household and per-capita terms, size of their landholdings suggests that they are the largest plot holders (Table I).

Unfortunately, the former (income) is fabricated at worst and prone to underreporting at best, and the latter (plot size) makes inference unreliable due to small sample size (there are precisely 6 GEN respondents who were both farmers and reported plot size).

The other two caste groups had broadly similar results, with about half not knowing the origin of the plan (17/35), a third having heard that it occurred through meetings (10/35, or 28%), and the final fifth (7/35, or 20%) postulating that it had been decided by the village officials.

Knowledge of the MP and of SAGY

We also collected data to measure social inclusiveness, and the level of political participation. Attendance in, and knowledge about the occurrence of, panchayat meetings; knowledge of the MP; knowledge of the fact that their village was adopted under SAGY, and the like.

The majority of respondents were aware of who their MP was (80%, or 38/47) and the fact that their village had been adopted under the SAGY (90%, or 42/47). Again, these rates were much higher for OBC (19 and 20 out of 21, respectively) and much lower for SC (10 and 11 out of 14, respectively). This again reflects the relative preponderance of OBC, but is also influenced by the fact that the MP, as well as his father, are considered 'local boys' and 'one of our own' by the OBC respondents. Thus, we found that among the OBC, the failure of the plan and the lack of development was seen to as a result of a political tussle, of the village's 'golden boy' being foiled by the machinations of the local government and being starved of the requisite funds to effectuate development.

Panchayat Attendance

From our conversations with the sarpanch and panchayat members, we gathered that panchayat meetings had taken place approximately every three months in the last year.

We found that a remarkable 34% (or 16/47) of respondents who claimed that panchayat meetings never took place, a figure which jumps to 43% (6/14) for SC. We think this unlikely, and possibly an expression of dissatisfaction with the local government, due to the high number of rather extreme reports we received. This is because many individuals went as far as to claim that there had not been a panchayat meetings in the post-independence history of the village, along with other demonstrably false claims, such as that there had not been any infrastructural development or maintenance in the past fifty years

Of those who said that meetings did take place, both OBC and SC respondents seem to have a fairly good idea as to when and how often panchayat meetings take place, while GEN respondents seemed somewhat more unsure. Looking at panchayat attendance rates, we found that a quarter of our respondents (12/47) regularly attended panchayat meetings, with a high of 33% (7/21) for OBC and a low of 16% (2/12) for GEN. SC's were in the middle with 21% (3/14).

While shopkeepers were approximately correct as to the frequency of panchayat meetings (estimating them to be held every 3.15 months, on average), we found both zamindars as well as manual labourers to significantly overstate the frequency of these panchayat meetings (with figures of 1.8 and 1.5 months, respectively). The former is possibly explained by the fact that many of the members of the panchayat are zamindars, and overstated their perceived frequency to make themselves look good.

Self-Help Groups

An item on the plan agenda was the establishment and funding of self-help

groups. While our interviewees didn't believe that their establishment was precipitated by the scheme, the fact nevertheless remains that about six of them were set up since the inception of the scheme, as well as some pre-existing ones. They were primarily farmer's collectives, and women's self-help groups, or ~~micro~~micro-credit groups. About a third of our respondents (14/47) were aware of the existence of self-help groups. Membership, though, fluctuated significantly by caste. While the pan-village membership rate was 10% (5/47), 20% (4/21) of OBC households reported membership of (and benefitting from) a SHG. This stands in contrast to the fact that no GEN category, and a single SC (7%), reported membership. Again, though, it is important to know that our sample sizes mean that this might not be very representative of the village, but from discussions with the local populace, we believe these results to be indicative, if nothing else. Additionally, while relatively many GEN respondents knew of the existence of the various SHG's, none actually participated.

By occupation, we find that nearly a third (28%) of manual labourers were members of self-help groups, followed by a fifth of zamindar HH (20%), and a minority of shopkeepers (8%). This is somewhat expected, as the zamindars are most aware of the SHGs, with 46% knowing of the existence of SHGs, contrasted with only 22% of manual workers. The reason for the latter's higher enrolment rates is likely because of the fact that that group includes farmers, who are one of the primary targeted beneficiaries of the SHGs present in the village (the other being women). The difference between shopkeepers and zamindars is somewhat surprising, as one would expect a higher proportion of shopkeepers to be enrolled in SHGs. But this result may be due to small samples.

PDS & Government Grain Scheme

One notable scheme benefiting the village is the allocation of grains and pulses to APL families from the PDS. Of our entire

sample, 30% (14/47) were beneficiaries of this scheme. Of these, 4 were of BPL status, though of these 4 only 1 had a BPL card. One household, that reported its status as APL had a BPL card.

Table II: Percentage of respondents with a BPL Card

	<i>Sample</i>	<i>GEN</i>	<i>SC</i>	<i>OBC</i>
<i>APL</i>	15	0	12.5	22
<i>BPL</i>	38	25	17	100

Source: Calculated by Authors

We found that GEN households benefited disproportionately from this scheme, with 41% (5/12) of our respondents being beneficiaries, while SC's lagged behind at 21% (3/14).

The data are indicative on the marginalisation of SC. In terms of income, as well as regarding other indicators such as electricity connections, and water supply, SC households are far behind the rest. Despite this, however, their utilisation of relevant schemes is the lowest in the village.

We find a similar story regarding BPL status. For the sample as a whole, we have 13, or 28% of households with BPL status. Breaking this up by caste, we find that 14% (3/21) OBC, 33% (4/12) GEN and 43% (6/14) of SC HH's have BPL status.

In terms of occupation, we find that all our occupation groups are below average in terms of the percentage that is BPL. This is expected in for both zamindars and shopkeepers, but it is a curious result for manual workers (a category that includes both farmers, as well as manual labourers). We find that the while day-labourers (**excluding farmers**) have very high proportion of BPL HH (3/6), but the inclusion of farmers (with only 14%, or 2/14, farmers falling BPL) in the category 'manual' deflates these numbers.

Looking at the distribution of BPL cards is also instructive. First and foremost, BPL card allotment is remarkably low, with less than half (5/13) the families with BPL

status being allotted a card. Secondly, we find that while all (3) BPL OBC families have been allotted a card, the proportion of GEN (1/4, or 25%) and SC (1/6, or 16%) families in that category is significantly lower. In fact, the percentage of APL OBC families with BPL cards is higher than the percentage of BPL SC families with BPL cards.

In addition to the above, we received reports from SC that obtaining rations from the PDS has proved difficult for them. One of our respondents stated that BPL cards had not been renewed for a number of eligible SC households. Additionally, he claimed that those who protested against the corruption and inefficiency in the PDS would be denied rations. He also informed us that such practices occurred only regarding the SC community.

The same respondent also noted that the distribution of rations could be arbitrary—often, beneficiaries received only part of their allotment, or experienced significant delays.

Again, we can see evidence of discrimination towards SC, especially in light of the difficulties in acquiring rations that these individuals relayed to us. Another curious thing was the willingness of respondents to disclose that they had illegal BPL cards, though this is perhaps influenced by the fact that these two questions were at opposite ends of the questionnaire. Furthermore, the problems were not isolated to either the PDS or the card issuer. Of all the BPL HH, more than 50% (7/13), which is more than the proportion being served (5/13, or 38%), agreed that the PDS was well run, and pointed out the administration responsible for issuing cards as the primary stumbling block. On the other hand, we have reports from the SC households of the PDS withholding grains in retaliation for complaints against corruption, and flat out refusing certain sections of the populace when there were (supposed) grain shortfalls.

We found the highest rates of illegal cards among manual labourers, with one in five (21%, or 3/14) APL manual labourer HH's having a BPL card, and just under twice that many (40%, or 2/5) BPL manual labourer HH's having a BPL card. Strangely, BPL zamindars had the lowest (33%, or 1/3) rate of card issue.

Health Cards

Health cards issued by the government have several benefits that allow patients to receive better care. These include quicker admission to hospitals, cashless admission, as well as discounts on procedures and medicine (even in private hospitals).

Health Cards are an interesting break in the trend. The health cards were agreed to be, from every single cardholder we spoke to, utterly useless. They claimed their only use was that they initially did a blood test to determine blood type, and that this was how many of the beneficiaries found out their blood type. Other than that, they insisted that it was just something issued to placate them in the absence of any real reforms.

Was this the case? It might well have been. About 40% (19/47) of our sample had been issued a health card, but the caste based numbers are quite skewed, and interestingly, in the opposite direction. 57% (8/14) of SC respondents reported having a health card, and this number jumps to 67% (4/6) for BPL SC respondents. Meanwhile, only 38% (8/21) of OBC respondents reported having a health card. GEN respondents had an even lower rate, of 25% (3/12).

All in all, 62% (8/13) BPL families reported having been issued a health card, versus 32% (11/34) of APL families. The BPL families we spoke to felt this was a transparent attempt by the government to placate them, in light of the inadequate issue of BPL cards and the corruption in the PDS system.

Credit

We also measured usage of credit by our respondents. 32% (15/47) of our sample had taken a loan in the past year. We attempted to measure interest rates, but most couldn't or wouldn't divulge that information, and we couldn't even reliably get estimates of the principal and the amount repaid to calculate it ourselves. The major sources of loans were the Grameen bank, the Kisan Credit Card scheme, with a few loans obtained from either SHG's or banks. We found no evidence of informal sources of credit. Most of the loanees were either manual labourers, who comprised 47% (7/15) of total loanees (especially farmers, who accounted for 33% (5) themselves); or zamindars, with 40% (6).

Looking at caste, we find GEN has the highest proportion of loanees, with 42% (5/12) of GEN respondents having taken a loan in the preceding year. The corresponding figures for OBC and SC respondents was 30% (7/21) and 35% (5/14).

This is an interesting result. Since OBC's generally have higher incomes than average (in both absolute and per-capita terms; also, they have the lowest percentage of BPL families: 14% (3/21) of OBC, compared to 33% (4/12) of GEN and 43% (6/14) of SC), it is possible that they have less need for loans compared to GEN respondents. However, on almost every economic indicator, SC respondents are the worst-off amongst all the communities. They also form a large proportion of the manual labourer category, which, a priori, one would expect to have a large percentage of loanees (which is indeed the case). Thus, there is evidence of need, as well as fitting the profile of the loanee (which also implies eligibility for things like the Kisan Credit Card, and such).

Thus, for whatever reason, we find evidence to indicate that SC's either have no access to, or are reluctant to take, advantage of existing credit systems put in place.

Electricity

The village as a whole has 94% (44/47) electrification, with only 3 HH without a domestic electricity connection, all of which are OBC. Average hours of electricity are 8 hours a night and 2.8 hours in the day. Looking at average hours of electricity supply, we find GEN the highest with almost 13 hours/day, followed by OBC, with 11 hours/day, and SC last with 9 hours/day. This is corroborated by the average monthly cost of electricity for the three groups, with OBC paying Rs. 660, GEN paying Rs. 830, and SC paying Rs.495.

This is consistent with the reports we received from SC households about how a few electricity poles providing their hamlet seem to have been damaged in a storm several months ago, and lie like that still. They alleged that the panchayat has turned a deaf ear to their requests, and left the members of the SC hamlet to pay for repairs themselves, as reported by our respondents.

They also alleged that when demand was high, and supply was inadequate, their locality was the first victim of load shedding. This, combined with the damaged electricity poles, further limits their hours of electricity, consistent with our findings.

We found four households with solar power connections, two of whom were OBC, one each SC and GEN. All of the households reported no government aid or initiative in their construction, and all of them had high incomes. They also reported significant up-front costs as a hurdle to the wider adoption of solar power in the village. 45% (9/20) of shopkeepers, a category that notably includes metalworkers, reported using electricity in the course of their work. No manual workers or zamindars (who were not also shopkeepers) reported using electricity use for work. Notably, we found that the farmers who irrigated their fields by tube well used exclusively diesel pump sets.

Irrigation

We also looked at access to irrigation facilities for the village. Problems included the salinity of groundwater, which almost everyone who irrigated by tube well reported. Canal access was limited, mostly due to deterioration of access points, as well as irregular, though the main advantage of canal water was that it did not suffer from the salinity problems that plagued tube wells. Some farmers reported that farmers upstream (well, up canal, really) had installed pumps and were diverting much of the water to sell privately. In our sample, we could only find a lone respondent who reported purchasing irrigation water from a neighbour's pump. Most residents agreed that a canal water connection would both increase the quality of irrigation water as well as cut down on the considerable cost of diesel for their pump sets. 22% (5/23) of field owners (this includes farmers, as well as zamindars) reported using canal water for the purposes of irrigation, and the majority of the rest (65%, 15/23) reported using tube wells. Only 9% (2) of our respondents did not have access to any irrigation facilities whatsoever.

Looking at the caste breakup, we find that GEN has the highest proportion of canal users (2/3), though the fact that there were only three GEN cultivators erodes at the importance of this finding. Of the rest, we find 23% (3/13) of OBC cultivators and 14% (1/7) of SC cultivators have access to canal water.

Qualitative Aspects of the SC Hamlet

The problem is all the more pernicious considering that most of these families are relatively poor compared to the rest of the village, and relied on the PDS to a greater extent than the other communities. The relative poverty of the SC community also reduced the support networks the community could offer.

Water connections seem to be hard to come by for the SC community as well. While other parts of the village do largely have water connections (even if they are

unreliable), the SC hamlet seems to be unusually bereft. While 33% (7/21) of OBC and 30% (4/12) of GEN reported not having a piped water connection at home, half the SC (7/14) we surveyed reported the lack of even a basic water connection. Respondents explained that most inhabitants in that hamlet resorted to private sources of water, most notably tankers, which was especially taxing for the already marginalized BPL individuals. Multiple respondents informed us that about 10 years ago, when government water connections were even scarcer, the local pond and well could be purposed as a source of clean drinking water. However, the diversion (whether accidental or deliberate, they were unwilling to comment on) of the village's sewage lines into the pond have drastically reduce its potability. Furthermore, villagers (mostly the inhabitants, see below) have been dumping both liquid and solid waste into the pond, which has cut off an important source of water for the community, especially with the dearth of water connections.

Since the pond has been a literal cesspool for years, it has become a breeding ground for disease and pests. Since the entire community is built around the pond, the stench of the pond was omnipresent. Respondents said that they feared for the health of their children, considering the severe spread of insects in the area—particularly mosquitos—which could spread harmful diseases.

Additionally, a wall of the pond had apparently broken a year or so ago, flooding one of the roads from the SC hamlet to the village proper, and rendering it impassable. Thus, access was limited, with many folk having to take a significant detour in order to get to the main road.

While most of the villagers we spoke to disposed of solid waste in the farms, or in specially designated composting 'holes' in a particular plot in the village, the SC hamlet had no such provision. Combined with the detour needed to go into the city, in the past year, the inhabitants themselves have been

disposing of much of their waste in the pond.

In Islamgarh, as is the case with most rural villages, animals for an important resource for any family's livelihood. This is equally true for the SC community, as well. Respondents informed us that the pond once served as a source of drinking water for the animals. However, with the new putrefaction of the pond, they must now constantly be vigilant that none of their animals wander off to have a drink. Considering the value of animals, especially to low-income farmers, this added risk poses another headache for the community at large.

Furthermore, despite the concentration of poverty it displays, there is no Anganwadi centre in the SC hamlet, though there are two in the rest of the village. An AWC continues to remain an important source of meals for children of relatively poorer families in rural villages, and the lack of an AWC in the SC hamlet is likely to pinch their respective budgets even more.

Respondents from the SC hamlet informed us that they have voiced their demands loudly and often in the past as well, but that it did no good. They went on to tell us that every time they raise these issues the panchayat and other concerned authorities, they are promised and assured that change will come soon, but to no avail. The same seems to be the case with the SAGY, as they say. The plan document clearly mentions the need to clean the pond and make it usable to nearby households (though again, none of the villagers were aware of this). All the same, the reiterated that no work has been done and the problems with the SC hamlet persist.

Conclusion

Some Alternative Proposals for Development

Many respondents, while remarking upon the lack of implementation of SAGY, highlighted political apathy towards the people as the driving factor. However, many, especially in the OBC community, defended the MP. They explained that he was a member of the Indian National Congress, rivals to the party in power at the state level and the national level i.e. the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

They said that this created friction and prevented any work from being started in earnest. While this is certainly not unheard of, it is also possible that a Congress MP may not be too keen on successfully implementing a BJP designed program, though this begs the question of why he would go through the trouble of preparing a plan in the first place, given that almost no one else did.

Others said that the Sarpanch himself couldn't get any work initiated simply because he was hampered by lack of funds. They claimed that funds may have been held up by other authorities, or possibly that the MP was blocked from releasing funds by the government, and may have thus precluded any development in earnest.

The plan, itself, is voluminous. It outlines not just the building of roads, and schools, but includes everything from environmental beautification to the establishment of youth clubs and community centres. It is long, bloated, and remarkably expensive. While construction of a bypass would certainly help reduce congestion, there are far cheaper and more pressing investments that need to be made.

Based on our research, and the specific needs of the different groups, we can offer a much more parsimonious plan, which, though it would hardly solve all the problems of the village, would be a good

place to start, and permit a look into the less glaring problems of the village.

Firstly, a major requirement in the village is to fix the ills of the PDS system. Misuse of cards is rampant, rations are irregular and often incomplete, and the targeting of the scheme is wanting.

Secondly, the water situation. Piped private water supply, averages 1.8 hours a day. Government water connections splutter to life once every three days, for about 20 minutes, and disgorge fetid, brackish water. Extending the canal, though a significant investment, would kill two birds with one stone. It would also solve the problems faced due to groundwater salinity, which almost all farmers who use [tubewellstube wells](#) complain about.

Finally, electricity is a major stumbling block for the community. The fixing of the electricity lines in the SC hamlet is something that would cost almost nothing, and yet the animosity it generates, and the feeling of marginalization it engenders among the SC community is severely disrupting the social fabric of the village. There was nary a household in the hamlet we interviewed that did not mention a certain tree breaking the power lines. Furthermore, electricity supply, or lack thereof, was one of the constants in our interviews. With one aberrant exception, few people reported more than six hours of daytime electricity.

And finally, the pond is a major problem for the SC community. It is a health hazard, a hazard to their livelihood, reduces their quality of life, and takes away an important resource. While this too would require a onetime payment, it would cost significantly less than any construction of new water lines. Furthermore, the well near the pond could become accessible again, and may prove to be a source of water for daily use, if not as a source of drinking water. And frankly, there is a certain casteist symbolism in the waste of an entire village being dumped in the heart

of the SC community, and it is unlikely to be something that has escaped them.

Caste Based Inequality

When it comes to the SC community, we have found that they are, by almost every metric we looked at, the most disadvantaged group in the village. This is to such an extent that they have been, for lack of a better word, almost ghettoized, corralled far from the village centre, and their demands and situation well ignored. Their rates of political participation are lower, and they seem to benefit the least from the various schemes we looked at, schemes which, indeed, they should be the prime beneficiaries of. There are reports of rampant maladministration of the PDS, and specific discrimination by the concerned officials, though of course we have nothing to corroborate this. But even in terms of indicators we looked at, such as BPL card availability, and the like, as well as the state of their hamlet, the SC of the village certainly seem to face a certain amount of discrimination. This can lead to a vicious cycle: since the members of this community have to resort to the market (and pay market prices) for food and water—things that rightly should be provided, at the very least, at subsidized rates to people at their income level. It is thus not unlikely that they have savings of note. Those savings could be utilised to send their children to private schools, which seem to do better than the nearby public school, or in some productive investment that may bear returns in the future. This could include purchasing livestock, better farm equipment, or even saving up to start a small business. An absence of these options is one primary reason that members of this group may not be able to improve their standard of living. A lack of a capacity to save could also open up households to other risks. Health issues could lead to households being compelled to shell out huge sums of money on private healthcare, given what we found as to the inadequacy of the local PHC. Even if a loan could be obtained, debt may cripple those

who are not able to make daily ends meet without saving anything. Thus, their situation is unlikely to improve without breaking this vicious cycle, something that they have as of yet still to do.

In stark contrast, we find the GEN category presents an interesting quandary.

First, we find evidence of what could be construed as political apathy on their part. We find GEN is the lowest category in terms of knowledge of village reforms, as well as panchayat meetings. In terms of attendance, as well, they are disappointed. Many knew of the SHGs, but few were members. The fact that they were the highest beneficiaries, despite the above, of the government grain scheme, when contrasted to the fact that they had only low BPL card rates for BPL families is curious.

A possible explanation for this could be that the middle income GEN households, while not politically active, or particularly rich, still command some respect, because of either their caste or some pre-existing status, and thus are able to take advantage of things like the Government Grain Scheme, which richer OBC households do not feel the need to patronize.

This would also explain their propensity to take loans, as their middling incomes and social status would afford them such opportunities. And while it might be a bit of a stretch, if their history/status was the driver, this might explain the fact that on average, they get the most hours of electricity—perhaps their locality is the last to be victimized by load shedding.

BPL GEN families, on the other hand, perhaps simply do not have either much clout, or much political participation. Or perhaps there is something else that is correlated with GEN category HH and the grain scheme, which is driving our results. We cannot definitively say, but it seems plausible.

The Saansad Adarsh Gram Yojana: A Summary

First and foremost, the SAGY seems to have been a complete failure, both in general and in this village in particular. From the get go, the initial formulation of the plan, we found practically no villager participation. Even of those interviewees who had heard of the proposals being formed by consultation with villagers insisted that, at most, it had been formed in consultation with *some* villagers, namely the sarpanch's favourites, and were adamant that it did not reflect their needs, or the needs of their community, adequately. The

plan has proved an unequivocal failure, and has not met any one of its goals, from its execution of the planning phase to the execution of the scheme proper to its accountability and transparency measures to its review mechanisms. And while paucity of funds might explain this, there is still much room for nigh-costless reforms, reforms which are the primary demands of marginalized communities in the so called *adarsh gram*.

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