A Search for Village Community in Deori

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Is the search for village community in a caste-dominated society of rural Rajasthan, a seductive mirage? In the rural areas, the caste and gender based identities, to a very large extent (although, not solely) determines not only the social relations among people, but also their economic status (particularly in terms of asset ownership, mainly arable land) and the educational opportunities potentially available to them. Social untouchability is a legally punishable crime in India, however in the villages it is still commonly practiced and is accepted as a norm. Ironically, these societal discriminations are well supported and further enhanced by state's populist and piecemeal policies (like, the reservation policy as well as numerous 'welfare' schemes for the poor). The recent announcement relating to the inclusion of the Jat community living in Rajasthan, within the ambit of OBCs category is yet another step in the same direction. These actions of the state sometimes give a violent and conflictual character to these societal identities like, in Bihar. In Rajasthan, however the degree of politicization of caste by the political parties is not as severe as in many other states, particularly in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

In such a context, how are the relations among people belonging to different caste groups, at the village level? Can they work collectively on the issues of mutual concern? To answer these questions, the paper firstly, attempts to empirically analyze the nature, dynamics and performance of the formal as well as the informal norms, networks and institutions for encouraging and actively involving the villagers participation on the issues of mutual concern, among the three caste groups in village Deori. Secondly, it attempts to answer a significant question, i.e. is the presence of a vibrant and an effective village community enough in itself, to make state responsive? Here, the impact of State's response, on the village community of Deori is analyzed. The theory of Social Capital is used, as the conceptual tool, in the search of village community in Deori.

Village Deori is located in the declared core area of the proposed Sariska National Park, in Alwar district of the Indian State of Rajasthan. Here, villagers are harmoniously co-existing with the wildlife of the region, for generations. Deori is a biomass based society and villager's are directly dependent on the forests for their daily requirements of fodder, fuelwood, fruits (like, Khajoor, Ber and Tendu), khajoor leaves to make brooms, medicinal plants and stones as well as wood for construction purposes. Thus, it is natural for the residents to have a vital stake in conserving a variety of biological resources. The conservation and management of natural resources necessarily requires an active interest and an ability among the people of the area to act as a collective unit, irrespective of their individual differences. Thus, offering a significant opportunity and scope for understanding their community-based efforts and actions in conserving these resources; and, probably to move beyond – to other issues, which may not just be related to their basic survival.

The paper is divided into the four sections, which are – Section 1, introduces the conceptual and methodological framework of analysis. Section 2, begins by drawing the physical and geographical characteristics

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of village Deori; followed by a detailed potrayl of the village society in its all possible hues and colors, while analyzing the social relations between the three caste groups. Section 3, begins by understanding the nature and dynamics of the villager's relationship and interactions with their surrounding environment; and, then the various dynamics of the transforming state-society relations, on the issue of bio-diversity conservation vs. local's livelihood are analyzed. The discussion in this section clearly demonstrates the flawed perceptions on which the state's policies are based upon, particularly the one's affecting the common Indians. And, Section 4 presents an analysis of the factors and processes leading to the formation, effective functioning and erosion of the village community in Deori.

Section 1: Conceptual and Methodological Framework

The concept of 'village community' in the paper refers to the self-governing norms, networks and institutions crafted by the individuals, for providing goods and services, for mutual benefits (measurable in economic and/or non-economic terms). Locally, such institution is known as gram sabha. It is district from the caste panchayats, which are essentially organized on vertical solidarity's of the social structure, with the membership restricted to the people belonging to that particular caste group only. Gram Sabha is based on horizontal solidarities. It can be located in two forms, viz. structured and un-structured. The former is characterized by meetings, which are organized at regular intervals; written records of the proceedings are maintained; attendance of the members is compulsory and the defaulter's normally have to pay fine; gram khosh (village bank) is also maintained. In Rajasthan, such meetings are generally organized in the evenings of the 'no moon day', every month. However, this structured gram sabha's are a rare phenomenon, as they are not easy to sustain. Unstructured gram sabha's are relatively easy to trace. The concerned villager's as and when the need arises, to discuss an issue, at the village forum organize them. The membership in both these forms of gram sabha extends to all the adult males of the village, only. Here, the women's participation is generally restricted to the indirect form, i.e. they can speak through the male member's of their respective households. Both the institutions follow the tradition of persuasion and consensus–building among the members, while taking decisions; rather than opting for the majoritarian voting system, which they strongly believe ---- potentially, divides the villager's. The decisions taken at this level normally enjoy a wider social acceptance and compliance.

The gram sabha is not a legally recognized body. It functions independently of its state's counterpart – the gram panchayat;[2] and has the potential of enhancing the bargaining power of the villager's, during their interactions with the state. Thus, this distinction doesn't aim to negate the significance of state's policies and institutions, because the sustainable survivability of these self-governing institutions is necessarily nested within, and is conditioned by a broader institutional framework. (Ostrom, 1992 and 1996; Lam, 1996) With the implementation of the 73rd constitutional amendment act, this distinction has been negated in many villages, particularly in the one's which are not grouped together with other village(s) (on the basis of their population strength), to constitute one gram panchayat. However, many villager's still consider gram panchayat a 'state' institution, and such perceptions brings in the feeling of alienation and an attitude of apathy towards its functioning and performance, among the people. According to A. Damodaran, although no systematic account of the history of panchayats in India exists, the analysis of the available records reveal that, "while the traditional panchayats were based on a total identity with the community of user's of common resources and impliedly for the

[2] Gram Panchayats are constituted, as the result of the 73rd Constitutional amendment act 1992, which provides the basic framework for the extensive and genuine decentralization of powers and functions to panchayati raj institutions – by extensively increasing their decision-making powers, ensuring mandatory elections to panchayats every year and by providing compulsory representation for women and the weaker sections of the society. It is important to note, that PRIs comes under the state subject

discharge of community–oriented functions; the present day panchayat institutions are functionally oriented to the dissemination of standardized services of the state (largely, based on the piecemeal schemes) in the realms of education, public health and rural technology – all aimed at effacing the community identities and promoting instead a 'non-community identity'. In the scheme of functions which devolved on these panchayats, community management of the common natural resources did not find a place, as compared to the traditional period when it was practiced as the most significant function". (Damodaran: 421).

Generally, villagers do not participate in any other form of associational life, besides in gram sabha, gram panchayat and caste panchayats; except for, in few villages where folk music societies do exist. These societies are not usually registered. They are like, 'dormant volcanoes', with a significant potential of mobilizing the villager's, on various issues.

Thus, gram sabha provides a scope to study the mutually beneficial community action, at the micro level. The presence of the structured institution indicates a relatively higher degree of trust among the villager's, a strong shared belief in the utility of collective action, and the net benefits accruing from participation are positive, at the individual level. These three indicators are inter-linked and inter-dependent on each other. Deori has experienced the functioning of both the forms of gram sabha's, since 1986 onwards. Thus making the analysis of both the forms of institutions, essential for this study.

The dilemma of collective action can be studied from different perspectives, like the Game theory, Hardin's prisoner's dilemma, the Rational Choice approach and others. All these conceptual tools have their own merits and demerits, in which I won't go into. The theory of Social Capital, as conceptualised by James S. Coleman (1988) is being used here, to analyze the village community in Deori. His conceptualization, unlike that of R. Putnam's (1993) provides a comprehensive framework of analysis with varied choices, which can be easily adapted to the Indian rural scenario.

The social life in India is regulated by a set of norms, which are essentially exclusionist in nature, and are 'religiously' practiced by the villager's during their interactions with different caste groups in the society. These norms, normally restricts inter-caste marriages and dinning with the lower castes. However, these restrictions tend to become exploitative if they are extended beyond these aspects of social life. Unlike Coleman or Putnam's actors, in Deori people are living together in the same neighborhood (caste–based) for generations. They personally know each other. Moreover, it is significant to note, that with the implementation of the Rajasthan Zamindari and Biswadari Abolition Act, 1959 – the relations between the various caste groups in the village were redefined, atleast at one level. The lower castes instead of working for the upper castes (under the functionary caste system) are now working with the latter, on the issues of mutual concern, in Deori.

J. Coleman's conceptualization introduces the social structure into the rational action paradigm, while rejecting the extreme individualistic premise that often accompanies it. The concept of social capital parallels the concepts of financial, physical and human capital; and can be located only in the relations between and among the actors in the social structure, facilitating their certain specified actions. Irrespective of the origin of the concept of social capital, its significance as a resource for actors lies in the fact, that "if people can't trust each other or work together, then even improving their basic material conditions of life becomes an uphill battle". (Evans, 1996) In this context, R. Wade's analyses (1987) on why some village's in Andhra Pradesh cooperate? seems incomplete! As his analysis, relates this differential performance primarily with the net benefits accrued at the individual level, while completely ignoring the role of norms and values in mobilising and enhancing cooperation. The situation of scarcity and risk does provides a starting point for cooperation; and, if there is some form of collective action or an institution is functioning effectively and responsively, than it indicates, that the actor's in that social structure are sharing certain beliefs and preferences, while also agreeing to follow certain rules backed by sanctions; and, in the process generating a certain level of familiarity and trust among themselves. As Coleman says, "Social capital

comes about through changes in the relations among persons, that facilitates action". (Coleman: S100) This is the primary assumption with which I move forward in the analysis of the village community in Deori.

Trust, norms and networks among actors (here, they are the villager's, non-governmental organization and the state forest department) forms the essential component of social capital. According to Coleman, "the value of the concept of social capital lies first in the fact that it identifies certain aspects of social structure by their functions, just as the concept of 'chair' identifies certain physical objects by their function, despite differences in form, appearance and construction. The functions, thus identified becomes the resource available to the actors, that can be used to achieve their interests". (Coleman: S101) Thus, providing a scope to look for social capital among the villager's who relate and interact with each other, without associating themselves in secondary associations, like the one's referred by Putnam.

Krishnan and Uphoff in their recent work on Watershed Development Programs in Rajasthan (1998) have extended J. Coleman's conceptualization, by specifying the two forms in which social capital can be located in societies, like India. The structure form of social capital is objective and visible, in the form of roles, social networks that are supplemented by rules, procedures and precedents. While, the cognitive form of social capital is subjective and is matter of how people think and feel; and can be traced on the basis of shared norms, values, attitudes and beliefs. (Krishnan and Uphoff: 6).

In Deori, I begin by tracing and explaining the variation that has come about in the form of gram sabha, since its formation in 1986. And, how has this variation reflected itself both in the kind and performance of the activities taken up by the villagers. Then, an attempt is made to explain the formation of structured gram sabha, its successful functioning for 6-7 years, and its disintegration into the present unstructured form – by analyzing the changing nature of the relations between the actors involved, at two levels. At the first level, the relations among the villager's are analyzed. M. Taylor and S. Singleton have identified four characteristics, which provides a standard for testing the strength of relations among villager's, irrespective of the form their collective action takes. These characteristics are stability of relations, multiplex relations, direct relations, and shared belief and preferences among the villager's. The role of Tarun Bharat Sangh (TBS), a non-governmental organization is significant, in not only acting as the information channel and a neutral leader for the villager's; but also by cooperating in terms of financial and technical resources for repairing their water conserving structures, during the initial period, of the functioning of the formal gram sabha. Gaining access to the correct information relating to the state laws, policies, fund allocation and an account of there utilization is almost an impossible task for the villager's – as they are not only illiterate, but also the cost of accessing such information is high, with no promises that their efforts will ever succeed. Here, it becomes crucial to analyze the impact of the changing relations between the villager's and TBS, in explaining these entire phenomena, since 1986.

At the second level, I will be analyzing the impact of the state's response to explain the nature and variations in the village community, in Deori. The instrumental purpose of the existence of an effectively functioning self-governing institution is to enhance the developmental performance by demanding the state to be more responsive and accountable. Putnam assumes a direct and positive relationship between the dense networks of civic engagements and effective government and democracy. As M. Levi rightly points out, this analysis is "resolutely society-centered, neglecting the important actors, notably those in government". (Levi, 1996: 50) State's negative response can severely affect the lives of the people, like in Nigeria (as Ostrom shows, while analyzing the functioning of schools) or in Deori. The nature of state's response is to a very large extent determined by how they perceive people – for whom they are legislating. If the villager's are viewed as passive, irresponsible or lazy, then the state intervention will probably take a top-down approach, where benefits are 'targeted' at them, as in India. If on the other hand, the villagers are viewed as active contributors to the making of their societies, then state's intervention will take a quite different approach. (Beck, 1994:2) These perceptions are manifested in the policy

statements, and for the villager's in the interpretations and attitudes of the implementing officers. Both the forms of the manifestations will be analyzed.

In Deori, I began by conducting a socio-economic survey, at the household level which was supplemented by the information collected by the Sariska administration, about 3-4 years back. Followed by an interactive open-ended discussion with the villager's, worker's of TBS and administrative as well as field officials of Sariska Tiger Project. As a forest guard, accompanied me during my field visits to Deori (due to difficult terrain), I was able to observe and understand many aspects of state-society's interactions and relations.

Section 2: Village And Village Society In Deori

(i) Village Deori

Deori is one of the eleven revenue villages located in the declared core area no. 1 of the proposed Sariska National Park. However, it is the only village in the core area where villagers are pursuing agriculture alongwith animal husbandry, as their occupation. In Deori, the land under plough falls under the jurisdiction of the state's revenue department, whereas the residential area of the village belongs to the state's forest department. This is the only reason, why villagers are still allowed to cultivate land within the core area.

According to the forest settlement commissioner Michael F.O'Dwyer's report (1922), "Deori is a very remote estate of the few. It is a large narrow strip between the high and the oldest ranges of the Aravallies", spreading over the tract beginning from Mount Abu in Rajasthan and culminating at Delhi Ridge. The hills surrounding the village are the haunts of a variety of wildlife and birds, especially of tigers, panthers, jackals, hyenas, sambhars, chitals, nilgais, wild boars and many more. Wild animals sometimes destroy the standing crops or kill the domesticated animals, for which the villager's generally receive no compensation. However, the villager's and the wildlife has been peacefully co-existing with each other, for centuries; unlike in the societies of the Northern Hemisphere. Every society has an inherent attitude and perceptions towards nature, which tones up their relationship with nature. And, the state's policy should reflect an understanding of this relationship, in order to be effective, for both nature as well as humans. Section 3, takes up the analysis of these relations and there impact, in a greater detail.

Deori is still not easily accessible, although in 1988 the villager's themselves constructed a non-metallic road going to the neighboring village, Nandoo – covering almost a distance of 5 Kms. This has facilitated the movement of goods, by tractors and the like vehicles – thus, considerably reducing the discomfort beard by the villagers. Earlier, they used to either carry the burden themselves or used to hire donkeys. The balia families still use donkeys to carry their goods from the market. In 1995, the forest department also constructed a non-metallic road, leading to another neighboring village. However, as villagers do not possess any means of communication, except for one meena family – who owns a motorcycle, the rest have to travel by foot, to the nearest point which is almost 9 kms away (from Deori) to catch a bus for their respective destinations.

According to the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 the legal status of the villagers living in the core area of a national park is that of encroacher's, who need to be relocated after the due settlement of their rights and claims. This generates an attitude of apathy among the state officials, towards the provision of even the basic amenities, like medical care, education, electricity etc. Deori does have a school building, which was constructed by the villagers themselves. The forest department detected this construction when it was halfway through, and had to allow its completion under the pressure from the residents. However, this infrastructure is not in use, as the teacher who draws his salary from the state, on a regular basis for teaching the children of Deori, only visits the village once or twice a month, to complete the technicalities. The difficulty in commuting, on a daily basis is the reason why classes are not held regularly. The teacher is not willing to stay in the village, during the weekdays. And, no amount of complaints by the villagers to the concerned authorities has provided any solution. The girls and boys

(especially, from the Gujar community) are suffering the most, as their counterparts (only boys) from meena and balia communities usually attend the regular school, while living with their relatives, outside the park premises.

Incase, if some one falls seriously ill, then s/he is carried by the villagers, irrespective of their castes, on the cot, to the village Nandoo on foot, from where the person is being carried to village Talab – where, the nearest medical care is available, almost about 17 kms away from Deori. The attitude of the field officials is determined by the state's conservation law, which directs them to make the life of villagers tough, so that they are compelled to leave on their own.[3]

Villagers are also encountering a growing societal tension. Due to the inaccessibility factor, the villagers living outside the park premises do not even consider marrying their daughter's in Deori. According to an elderly woman Sampati Bai, brides in the village generally comes from either the neighboring village, situated within the park premises; or from the poor families, who are unable to arrange large dowries?

Despite, of all these hardships and plenty more, these villagers, especially the one's belonging to the Meena and Gujar communities are strongly opposed to the idea of their relocation.[4] They do want facilities, like the one's they see existing in other villages; but the issue of their basic survivability and economic uncertainty compels them to continue living a life, which is marked by hardships, uncertainty and stagnation.

Deori has a total geographical area of 375 hectares, and only 75 hectares of land is arable. The subtropical climatic characteristics prevail in the region. The average annual precipitation is about 600 millimeters, mainly from the monsoon rains, which generally break in late June and can last till September. In summer's, the temperature goes upto 45°C to 47°C; and in winter's, it comes down to as low as 0°C. Deori is completely dependent on rainwater harvesting and conservation to meet its annual water related requirements (ranging from the drinking purposes, for both humans and animals to irrigation), as there is no perennial source of water. Till 1986, even the 75 hectares of arable land was unirrigated, as water-conserving structures were not in a useable form. However, since then the situation has improved remarkably. Now, even in the month of June, when I visited the village, the water level of the wells was at 30-35 feet. According to the Tiger Project's management report, this improvement in the situation has led to the practice of encroachment of common and forestlands for agricultural purposes, especially during the rainy season.

Village Deori is relatively less politicized, and the outside influence is limited, due to its physical location. A natural and legal restriction makes it, at least economically viable for the residents to act as a collective unit.

(ii) Village Society in Deori

In Deori like, in most of the Indian villages the basic unit of social organization is the caste system, followed closely by the joint family institution (which is facing slow erosion). In this kind of social structure it is the group that counts, while the individual occupies the secondary position.

According to the Forest Settlement Commissioner's Report (1922), the people from the Meena Zamindar, Gujar, Brahmin, Baniya and Balia communities then inhabited the village. However, at present only Meena Zamindars, Gujars and Balias form the ethnic composition of the village. Guwara[5] Deori, Baaka Bala Guwara and Guwara Baas Chamaran together constitute the revenue village Deori, which inhabits about 750 people in almost 100 family units. The 20 families of the Meena Zamindar community inhabit Guwara Deori. About 53 families of

[3] Field officials do help villagers, whenever they are approached. According to the forest guard, Ramu Singh posted at Umeri – few years back, he saved many human lives in village Umeri from a spreading epidemic, by quickly calling for medical care.

[4] The relocation of Deori is not on the immediate agenda. According to the village elders and some state officials, Deori is one of the two villages, which took up arms – on the issue of their relocation, during Maharaja Jai Singh's period.

[5] Guwara means cluster of houses, situated at a distance from the rest of the houses, but within the same revenue village. Guwara's can be constituted on the basis of caste identity or on the need to live near the fields, for easy accessibility.

the Gujars constitute the Baaka Bala Guwara, and Guwara Baas Chamaran houses 20 families of the Gujar community alongwith 7 families of the Balia's. Rests of the Balia families have migrated to a downstream village, Nayagaon – where they have purchased arable land, under a government's scheme. In Deori, the economic opportunities available to their community are limited, to working as agricultural laborers on 'batai'.[6] Since 1960 onwards, they have been working in the unorganized sector in cities, like Jaipur, Ahmedabad and Delhi; to supplement their meagre incomes. The average land holding among the Meena's and the Gujar's is about 1.5 to 2 and 1 to 1.5 hectares, respectively. Commercial crops are not grown. The farmers commonly use tractors and diesel pumpsets. Meena's and Balia's have relatively less number of goats, as compared to the gujars. Meena and Gujar's both own about 10 to 15 cows and/or buffaloes, per household. Whereas, only one Balia family owns about 15 buffaloes, while the rest have only few goats. The owners of cows and buffaloes sell milk to the Alwar State diary. Few Gujar families still produce `khoya' for commercial purposes, although the forest department has banned it.

In Deori, the arable land is widely spread over a large tract. And, it is a very common practice among the cultivators to settle down near their fields, for easier accessibility. This is the reason, why the village is distributed into three Guwara's. However, in Deori like in any other Indian village, neighbor's essentially belongs to the same caste group. Every village or guwara has well-marked and recognized pockets of houses, belonging to a particular caste group – which is, perhaps one of the basic reason for the stubborn persistence of social untouchability in rural India. In urban India, caste is not the factor that determines one's neighborhood. In Deori, the movement through these pockets is not restrictive; it is open for all. In the village, the post is not distributed on the basis of house numbers (because they don't exist), but on the basis of person's name, and caste identity provides the needed specification.

At present, Meena zamindars are socially and economically stronger than other caste groups in the village. Their tribe is known as the 'ruling elite' of Rajasthan. The congress party has provided the maximum opportunities for their mobility in the political arena, due to the presence of a strong non-congress option lead by the ex-princes, in the initial years of the formation of the state of Rajasthan. Meena's are listed under the Scheduled Tribes Act. Thus, in accordance with the state's policy of positive discrimination, they are generously supported by various states' schemes like, MADA etc. However, these benefits have not reached Deori, as yet. Among the Meena's there are three broad divisions[7] - zamindar or khetend meena, chowkidar meena and parihar meena. Here, I restrict the analysis to the study of zamindar meena's only. They occupy the top slot on this three-tier hierarchy. Their primary occupation is agriculture. Meena zamindar's claim kshatriya descent, with as many as eighty four clans. They also claim to be the original ruler's of the region, until the Rajput's defeated them. However, under feudalism Meena's did not suffer from any social stigma, on account of their tribal ways of life. They alongwith other tribes enjoyed a much higher social status, than in any other parts of India. (Narain and Mathur, 1990:27) Meena's were the biswadar's of village Umeri and Deori, till 1960. The family of the erstwhile biswadars still lives in the village Deori, and is one of the richest families in the village.

Meena's profess Hinduism and have been influenced by the Vaishnavite ideas. Their caste panchayat is effectively protecting and promoting their social interests. The decisions taken by the panchayat enjoy an indisputable compliance among its members, irrespective of their age, educational or economic differences. In the recent past, this panchayat unit has extended beyond the village level boundaries, to the district and state level.[8]

[6] Batai is an arbitrary system of land revenue collection. In Deori, the agricultural worker's receives 1/3rd of the produce from the farm, they have worked upon.

[7] These divisions are based on the traditional occupations, as defined under the functionary caste system. Sub-castes relate to the genetic heterogeneity within a caste group.

[8] The trend of forming the caste based associations with characteristics of a pressure group began in Rajasthan, probably with the re-modeling of the Rajput's "Kshatriya Mahasabha, which was initially founded in 1888 to institute social reforms within the community – to cope with the immediate prospects of land reforms", after independence. (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1984: 53).

And, one positive result of this extension has been the curtailment and regulation of the enormous and undue expenditure incurred in the gatherings organized in the honor of the departed. As a custom, when relatives and friends visit the grieved family to pay their condolences, they tie a turban and give some cash to the head of the household, this ceremony is locally known as `Pagri Rasam'. Earlier, the amount of cash given by a person was determined by the amount given by the person standing before him, as the former was under the compulsion from the society, to give more than his predecessor, irrespective of his economic status. But now the amount has been fixed to Rs.101, and anyone violating this norm can be fined upto Rs. 1100 alongwith the prohibition on attending community functions. Meena's caste panchayat is also attempting to regulate the expenditure spend on marriages.

Among Meena's, in Deori the women have a significant role to play in the social and the ritual spheres. They don't seek outside employment. They work extremely hard on their family farms, besides doing the entire household work. The work burden is heavily tilted against them. And, the only time they are relatively free is when crops are not standing in the field. They generally spent their free time while chatting, relaxing and smoking. About ten years ago, both men and women used to consume 'afeem', later they switched over to tobacco. Women have no right to inherit their parental property. A son is preferred over a daughter. The child marriages are very prominent. The level of awareness and interest in female's education is negligible. Further, they are not allowed to attend the village level meetings, themselves – their grievances or views (which are rarely sought as well as rarely expressed) can be conveyed through the male members of their respective households.

Meena's do not accept water and cooked food from the lower caste – the Balia's. A Balia cannot enter their kitchen, however the Balia's can be served food – but only in the utensils made up of mixed metal (cooper and aluminum) called "kaasi", in the local language. A Balia cannot sit on the same cot or share the same "Hukka" (smoking pipe) with either the Meena's or the Gujar's. These kinds of social discriminations show no sign of dilution in village Deori.

Meena zamindars usually take a non-vegetarian diet, but in Deori they claimed otherwise, due to economic compulsions. Their daily diet consists of buttermilk, wheat (in summers), bajra and jowar (in winters), gram flour, clarified butter and red chili chutney that are occasionally supplemented with vegetables. Gujar's and Balia's also consume the same diet, in Deori.

The Gujar's claim to be Suryavanshi's or Raghuvanshi's – descendants from the family of Lord Surya (Sun). They consider themselves as the middle ranking community, lower to Brahmins, Rajputs and Baniya's; and higher in status to all the artisan castes and scheduled castes. God Deo Narayan is their community deity and twice a year, in the month of August and in January grand celebrations are organized in his honor. They don't sell milk, during these festivities.

Its "nyat panchayat" or the council of elders regulates the Gujar community's social behavior and actions. Its pattern of functioning is quite similar to that of Meena's caste panchayat. Both, Meena's and Gujar's occupy the same position on the caste hierarchy. Gujar's also practice social untouchability. They don't accept food from those castes, to which they themselves give – like, the Brahmins and the Balia's. The sub-division endogamy and clan exogamy governs their martial alliances. The child marriages are relatively more prominent among the Gujar's – although, in Deori they strongly denied it! The Gujar's welcomes the birth of a girl child. However, this positive attitude does not positively enhance her status. In fact, their lives and status in the family and society are on par with that of the Meena women.

The Balia's were occupationally related to the chamar's and bhambi's – engaged in the tanning and carrying of hides and skins of the dead animals – and, because of the nature of their work, they were considered as lower castes. Presently, though they have switched over to the other professions like, agriculture, craftsmanship etc. – however, the attitude and behavior of the other castes towards them remains unchanged. As they are listed in the Scheduled Castes list, they are entitled for the preferential treatment by the state. In Deori, three of the balia

families have benefited from the Indira Awaas Yojana and the fifteen families were able to relocate to Nayagaon, only after purchasing arable land under a government's scheme. Though, the economic condition of this caste group has improved remarkably, however it still remains the weakest section of the village society, in socio-economic terms.

Balia's also have a number of exogamous clans, but there are no hierarchical differences among these clans. They pay special reverence to the Hindu goddess Durga, as their chief deity. The literacy level among the Balia's is low. Although, unlike Gujar's and Meena's, they do understand the significance of education for both, the girls as well as boys. However, like Meena's they are also educating their boys (atleast one from each family, due to economic constraints) only, while keeping them with their relatives in Nayagaon. The Balia women do not remain confined to their kitchens and homes, as they have to actively work as agricultural laborers in the village or outside the village, to supplement their family's meagre income. This in return, has given them an invaluable opportunity to think about themselves, their families, their neighbor's, the behavior and actions of other sections of the village towards them – unlike, Meena or Gujar women, who were generally unconcerned. Most of the Balia women, I spoke to, have a brilliant sense of clarity and an ability to analyze and express themselves, almost fearlessly, even in the presence of their menfolk.

Women are the backbone of the workforce in home and in the family-owned farms – first to rise and last to sleep. And, still they don't have the right to think about themselves and their lives. The men in their families decide everything for them. They constitute almost half of the village's population and yet their role in society is unequal and remains unappreciated.

Although, the customs and norms relating to the caste system are changing in accordance with the collective perceptions and decisions of its respective member's, however the basic frame that holds the caste system is firmly placed as ever. Caste is the DNA of Indian society, according to J. Ramesh (1999). Each person's last name denotes his/her caste or sub-caste group. However, as pointed out by Dr. S. Mitra, the "caste system in India is not confined only to the Hindus. All-important communities, including Muslims, Christians and Sikhs have some sort of caste scheme. These schemes are patterned after the Hindu system, since most of them originally came from Hindu stock". (Mitra, 1994:56) Caste is a source of social identification for the people of India, providing a sense of belongings in a multi–cultural society, in a manner that no other source of identity could; and, it is increasingly used as a resource for promoting vested interests.

In Rajasthan, the feudal mode of social relations (which continued till the eve of independence) dominated the caste hierarchy. In order to establish their dominance, the Rajput ruler's while accepting the "classical pantheon of Hinduism" and respecting the Brahman purohits; kept the brahmanical purity – pollution rituals subordinated to the task of ruling, unlike in other parts of India. People, in general emulated the cultural norms and ritual forms, as adopted by their princes and jagirdar's. The dominance of folk culture and beliefs, and constant military warfare – further resulted in the loosening of the ritual bonds of Hindu religious orthodoxy. (Narain & Mathur, 1990) Thus, "the caste system was determined by the feudal mode of production, in terms of their actual functioning". Feudalism blurred the distinction between caste and class, with its system of land grants and taxes. (Sharma, 1995) The pattern of feudalism in the nineteen Rajput ruled princely states was not uniform. However, the condition of the lower caste was bleak as they were economically dependent on either the twice–born castes (like, Rajputs, Brahmins, Vaishyas) or on various functionary castes. According to I. Narain and P.C. Mathur, "the Balia's did not have to face the rigors of untouchability to the same extent, as did their counterparts in other parts of the country. Although, here also several sumptuary restrictions on ornamentation (including, the prohibition of the use of silver and gold as body decorations) were imposed". (Narain and Mathur, 1990: 36) The challenge mounted by the lower castes to the continuation of these kinds of societal restrictions, even after the formation of the state of Rajasthan – have resulted in several well-cited oppressive and exploitative incidents, further widening the gulf between the

lower and the upper caste groups in Rajasthan.

In Deori, according to Baba Ram Balia, a resident the social untouchability is restricted to inter-caste dinning and marriages. This discriminatory behavior has never been questioned or challenged by either of the caste groups, everyone takes it "as it is"! Balia's do feel humiliated, but caste system is an institution, which they cannot change. Moreover, they have more crucial matters to attend to like, earning their livelihoods, keeping provisions for their foreseeable future (as they are not supported by any social security scheme), educating their children, etc. – for which they are now, not solely dependent on the upper castes in the village.

Indian State's adherence to the secular modernist perception of caste[9], has lead to the adoption of the positive discrimination policy – from which Balia's in Deori have benefited, at some levels. However, they still feel unequal and humiliated; and, then there is a growing trend among the "dalits of Rajasthan and elsewhere, who are changing their names and surnames to escape their caste tags. And, at the same time, some upper caste (who are already not included in the OBCs category) people are adopting fake SC or ST identities to usurp jobs reserved for those groups", as reported by an eminent journalist, P.Sainath (1999). These ground realities raises doubt on the feasibility of this policy, in the longer run. Dr. S. Mitra rightly argues, that "the continuation of an essentialist (or a secular modernist) perceptions of caste serves only to drive a wedge between the state and society. It gives rise to the stigma which prevents law, bureaucracy and media from doing those things that would help transform castes into social organizations available for the creation of a plural and multi–cultural nation". (Mitra, 1994: 49)

In Deori, Balia's are accepted by the upper castes as the active participants in the village–level activities. They are not given order's to implement like, in the feudal era – but are now consulted on issues of mutual concern. However, the upper castes are still not ready to accept a Balia in the leadership role – representing the entire village, at the gram panchayat level.

Deori enjoys a good degree of harmony, coherence and stability at the societal level. The villager's trust each other, more than they would trust an outsider. All the caste groups insisted that caste does not hamper the community level works or actions – because they benefit one and all. The people of the neighboring village, Umeri – who belong to the same caste group, i.e. Gujar's, also, supported this view. Animal husbandry is their sole occupation. Their successful efforts of forest conservation have suffered a serious setback, in the recent years. In Umeri, the net benefits from mutual cooperation among the resident's are negligible – since, they have finally agreed to accept the relocation package of the department. So now, as a woman said, "although, we cut the trees, but they (department) suffers the pain". To cite, yet another instance – the breakup within the Rajput's Kshatriya Mahasabha to form a new Rajput's association, Bhuswami Sangh – was on the class lines, "as the small Rajput jagirdar's, who lacked the income and status, which larger estates could bestow…believed that they had been abandoned by their feudal and lineage superiors within the caste community". (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1984: 59-61) Thus, caste based identity is a significant, though not the sole determining factor in enhancing/hampering community action for mutual benefits. There are other determining factors which can hamper cooperative action like, lack of opportunity for individual advancement (on economic or non-economic interests), ego, jealousy and absence of a leader – village elders, headman or cultural intermediaries (like, teacher, doctor, priest and others). Today, the village society of Deori is discriminatory in nature, but has not assumed an exploitative character.

Section - 3: Conservation and State-Society Relations in The Changing Scenario

A society's strong dependence on the natural resources is not as readily apparent as in the rural areas. About

[9] Dr. Mitra explains the three different views of caste in India, i.e. the essentialist view, secular modernist view and the instrumental view of caste -- to suggest that caste may help in the formation of the nation and the state. The secular modernists view "caste as synonymous with underdevelopment, hierarchy and prejudice – and, to be abolished altogether." (Mitra, 1994 :50)

70% of the India's population live in the rural hinterland, drawing sustenance from the productive biomass and biomass-related activities. In Deori, this dependence on nature is absolute. However, the state initiated developmental efforts, over the last 52 years have chosen to completely disregard this vital relationship between the conservation of biological wealth and ensuring the livelihoods of the rural Indians.

Indian history clearly shows, that the conservation and management of natural resources was never the sole responsibility of the state, but was substantially and effectively shared with the local society. According to Poffenberger and Singh, "the rulers from the Ashokan period, through the Gupta and Mughal periods, often left forest dwellers in peace.... While, recognizing and respecting the importance of biodiversity for communities". (Poffenberger & Singh, 1996:57) Besides, the state sponsored schemes (which I will discuss, a little later); the grass root efforts based on voluntary participation were widely prevalent. Thus, over the generations, the villagers have developed certain beliefs, norms and practices – primarily based on their experiences, for the prudent use of the natural resource. M. Gadgil (1993) rightly denotes these local knowledge systems as the `cultural capital' of our society. Villager's have linked some of these norms and practices with the aspects of either the caste system or that of religion, to secure a wider acceptance and compliance among the varied sections (in terms of, literacy levels, age etc.) of the population. The number of species to which the villager's relate to, in the religious or cultural contexts are relatively small; and in many regions, most of these systems are facing a threat of extinction – due to, increasing demographic pressure, economic expansion and an unsupportive state. The logic of economic change can easily hamper the efforts for an open and equitable system of governance. However, these indigenous knowledge systems must be understood, as even today in villages like, Deori – caste and religion have been relatively more effective in conserving the biodiversity of the region, than any of the state's efforts.

M.Gadgil (1985) shows the `positive role' of caste in conservation, after historically analyzing the functioning of various societies in India. And, in Deori Bansi Meena, an elderly resident fully supports the argument, that before the abolition of the Biswadari System in Rajasthan, 1959 - the socio-economic organization of the village(s) was based on the functionary caste system, which was partly responsible for the prudent use of the natural resources. In Deori, the meena's were exclusively involved in agriculture and Gujar's cheif occupation was cattlerearing. M.Gadgil suggests, that 'the emergence of the Hindu caste society was a response to the saturation of the capacity of land to support the human population at the level of technology then prevalent and the consequent strong competition for the resources of the land." He further explains, that "there were members of only one caste each of carpenter, potter, barber etc. in any group of village. And within each such caste, the competition was regulated through the devise of ... each household of artisan/service castes having the exclusive rights of dealing with a specific set of households." (Gadgil, 1985:1913) However, the prudent use of natural resources under this system does not imply, that the different caste groups shared the available resources equitably. In Rajasthan, according to E. Haynes, the combination of harsh arid environmental conditions and the historical elite domination of access to scarce resources determined the pattern of resource sharing, which was widely agreed upon, until the middle of the 20th century. (Haynes, 1998)

The basic difference between the indigenous and modern knowledge systems is the way, both perceives human relationship with nature. According to the former, humans are the part of the natural world; whereas, the latter upholds the view, that human is apart from and above the natural world. Thus, while indigenous knowledge systems encourage humans to respect and co-exist with nature, the modern knowledge system encourages an attitude of domination, domestication and destruction of nature, among the humans. The blind faith placed by the colonial and the post-colonial Indian state in the modern knowledge system, while framing their policies is the root cause of the present state of India's environmental crisis. The kayapo Indians of Brazil, aborigines of Australia and the Bishnoi's of Rajasthan are among many others, who have been successfully conserving and managing the bio-diversity of their regions, by adhering to the indigenous knowledge systems, which are culture-specific. According to M.Gadgil, "these are not isolated societies, many have an ongoing trade and social relationship with more complex societies." (Gadgil et.al 1993).

Various aspects of the indigenous knowledge system are also adhered by the people of Deori. "Dharari Pratha" is a

caste-based system of forest conservation. Most of the castes and their sub-castes have a religious association with a particular species of tree or plant, which is known as their Dharari. They never use the branches or leaves of that particular tree. Incidentally, in Deori all the three caste groups share the same Dharari, i.e. the tree of kadamba (Anthocaphalus indicus). In Hindu theology,[10] the nature has been recognized as indispensable in the life of humans. According to Dwivedi and Tiwari, "as early as in the Rig Veda period, tree worship has been popular. During the period of the great epics and puranas, the Hindu concept of flora further expanded...trees were considered as being animate and having life, feeling happiness and sorrow... Hindu ancestors considered it their duty to save trees; and thus, they attached religious sanctity to most of the trees, on the basis of their utility." (Dwivedi and Tiwari : 175-6) Thus, many Hindus consider many trees and plants as the abode of various gods and goddesses.[11] Kadamba is considered as the abode of Lord Vishnu.

Sacred Groves (locally, known as Dev bani) is another finest form of the traditional conservation practices. They hold a significant place in the cultural lives of the locals and also preserve the biological diversity of that particular region. Even today, all along the Western Ghats and in the Bishnoi village in the desert of Rajasthan, the locals maintain sacred groves. The groves in Deori are at the origin of the temple of Rupnathji – a local deity. Every year, in the months of May (Baisakh) and September (Bhadon) a festive fair is organized, here. Villagers visiting devbani usually don't carry an axe with themselves, as they firmly share a belief, that who ever even takes a branch from devbani is cursed with bad luck. And, various real life experiences narrated by the villager's explained, why the compliance to this belief system is absolute, among them. Although, the domain of this belief system may seem riddled with superstitious beliefs, however it has a crucial ecological significance – which is indisputable.

The attitude of the villager's towards wild animals in the reserve like, tigers and panthers is of co-existence. This view is also supported by the research of Joao Pedro Galhano Alves (1999), who did a comparative study of the people's attitude towards the large carnivores in the Montesinho National Park in Portugal [12] and in the Haripura village, in Sariska Tiger Reserve. His study shows that the villager's of Haripura understand the role and significance of large carnivores like, tigers to maintain the ecological balance of the region. He explains that, "this empirical knowledge of ecology among the villager's has been further strengthened by their mystical and aesthetic attitudes.... Developing a healthy respect for wildlife. And they have adapted and integrated their society and production systems to the biodiversity of the region, unlike in Portugal. The relocation of the villager's may just precede the extinction of tiger culture." (Alves: 31) In the town of Itarsi, in Hoshangabad district of Madhya Pradesh, the traditional `tiger dance' is performed on the occasion of Dussehra. The locals consider tiger dance as integral part of their culture and recognize tigers as an important symbol of Eco-balance like, people of Deori and Haripura. The aesthetic attitude of the villager's is primarily based on the principle of the sanctity of life – according to which, even animals and birds have a soul. This understanding has provided a foundation for the doctrine of non-violence against animals; particularly the one's which are worshipped. In Hindu theology, different species are associated with the spiritual reincarnation and deities -- as a result, they receive reverence in

[10] Here, I am exclusively concentrating on the conservation-related beliefs and practices as advocated by Hindu theology, because the people of Deori are the follower's of Hinduism.

[11] Besides, kadamba the other trees and plants associated with gods and goddesses, are the plant of Tulasi, abode of Lord Vishnu; tree of Bela (Aegle Maimelos), abode of Lord Shiva; tree of Ashoka, abode of Indira; tree of pipal (Ficus Religiosa), abode of Lord Vishnu; among many others. These are even worshipped by many Hindu's, living in urban areas, especially on religious occasions.

[12] In Montesinho National Park, the attitude of locals towards the wolves is studied. He argues that villagers have a troubled relationship with the wolf, as they know very little about the habits of the animal and persecute them needlessly. According to M.Rangarajan (1995), Indian villagers also share a troubled relationship with the wolf, because they are often in direct conflict with the interests of herder. However, the villager's have never aimed to destroy the entire species of wolf. According to many other studies, the wildlife in Europe at present is one, which is basically introduced by the man himself. The species of wild boars, wild bears, wild bulls (now domesticated) and wolves have been completely exterminated in Germany, France and England. Until recently, a `monarchic culture' prevailed, which served the interests of one species, i.e. the humans. (Excerpts from the program, Wild World on BBC World, in Oct 1999).

the Hindu society. The sanctity of cow has been maintained, since the time of Rig Vedas. In Deori, even today the villagers consider selling cow's milk as equivalent to selling their own child. The villagers consider the tigers and lions as the vehicle of Goddess Durga. But without idealizing this relationship, it is significant to note, that the Indian villagers have killed tigers and lions in self-defense – as a last resort and not as a first response. The villager's usually don't kill large carnivores for the fun of hunting [13] or for commercial purposes. Moreover, under the princely rule, "except for the rulers and their VIP guests, no one was allowed to shoot in Sariska. Punishment for killing animals included, the seizure of their property and exile from the state of Alwar." (GOR, 1979: 25) The residents of Deori have never killed a tiger or a panther, till date.

According to M.Rangarajan, "villagers had often killed and continue to eliminate animals like, wolves that threaten livestock, without campaigning to destroy the entire species." (Rangarajan, 1995:20) E. Haynes, while drawing evidence from the Eastern Rajputana State Gazetteer shows, the two different ways in which the locals reacted to the excessive wildlife intrusion in the early 1880s. In the first case, "when the herds of wild cattle made cultivation difficult.... The people prevented by the religious scruples from taking the lives of the sacred animals, retreated before the increasing inroads... moving into pastoralism", in the present district of Bharatpur. However, in the same district (also in Kota and Dungarpur) the locals with state assistance undertook "the extermination operations against the blue bull, black buck and wild boar when they became an increasing nuisance to cultivation." (Haynes, 1998: 754-6) It is clearly evident, that the villagers are quite capable of striking a balance between their sensitivity to the wildlife and protecting their lives and livelihoods. Gandhi believed that maintaining such a balance is essential, as “a narrow notion of co-existence can be damaging, as the consumerist notions of development that it seeks to displace.” (Rangarajan).

Generally, the traditional beliefs, norms and practices are passed off as folk tales – of no practical use today, probably because of two reasons – firstly, the indigenous knowledge systems usually belongs to and are narrated by people, who are generally poor and illiterate. Illiteracy is often wrongly equated with irrationality. Secondly, only the negative aspects and practices (which are undoubtedly deplorable) as prevalent in our society has been concentrated upon, at almost every level – be it media, academics or state's policy making circle; while, these positive and relevant aspects of our cultural capital have been overshadowed and neglected. These practices and stories are the living oral traditions, which were narrated by the people of Deori with pride and reverence; whereas, the state measures were considered as ‘impositions’ and were described with annoyance and disgust.

Some other forest conservation practices, traditionally followed in Alwar region were like, Rakhat bani and Kakad bani.[14] They have become extinct, primarily due to two reasons – firstly, the continuation and the further strengthening of the state regulations, since 1872 have curtailed and hampered the resource-use rights of the locals – while, strengthening an attitude of apathy, conflict and destruction of these resources among them. Secondly, according to M.Gadgil (1993), "as traditional people are integrated into the global economy and come under trade, acculturation and population pressures -- they lose their attachment to their own restricted resource catchments."[15] (Gadgil et al: 156) Here, it is significant to note that the conservation practices with cultural backing have a relatively higher degree of sustainability, at the societal level; whereas, under the same circumstances other practices like, Rakhat bani and Kakad bani have disappeared.

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[13] At the Simlipal Tiger Reserve, in Orissa, the "tradition of `akhand shikar' - an annual tribal ritual, sanctions hunting of wild animals. The ritual continues for a month. Come April and tribal hunters armed with bows, arrows and spears descend on the sanctuary for their annual hunting spree. Hundreds of animals are sacrificed at the altar of this tradition." (CSE, 1999:343).

[14] Kakad bani system was applied to those forests, which were on the common geographical boundary of two or three villages. And, the responsibility of conserving them rested with these villages. The area was used for controlled grazing and harvesting `minor forest products’; tree lopping was only allowed, on the basis of the joint decision taken by these villages. In Rakhat bani, on the other hand, the forest area belonged to a single village. This forest was used only during the periods of scarcity, famine or droughts. (Singh, 1998:394-5).

[15] The apathy towards the sustainable development of pastures, especially in the villages, not supported by natural forests is hampered primarily due to these two inter-linked reasons.

It is significant to historically trace and analyses the nature of the changing dynamics in the state's perception of the villagers – nature relationship; and to examine the impact of this change, as reflected in its policies and structures, on the lives and livelihoods of the villagers like, in Deori. In the north - eastern Rajputana State of Alwar, before Major Powlett carried out “the 16 years land revenue settlement” in 1872, the official forests, irrespective of the class of vegetation were maintained as runds and banis. The runds consisted both of hilly as well as plain tracts; whereas the banis chiefly comprised of the forest on the hill slopes and hilltops. The rounds served as the grazing reserves for the state’s cavalry. And, there was an informal agreement between the state and the locals, according to which the latter were allowed to take grass, at a fixed quantity per rupee, after the needs of the state had been met. (GOR, 1947) The forests surrounding village Deori were classified as the rund reserves. (1922) Banis, on the other hand, not only provided the fuelwood to the locals, but were also maintained as the sporting grounds for the ruling elite. Besides, depending on rounds and banis, the locals had the village land (also known as the banjar land) to meet they’re grazing and fuelwood requirements. According to E. Haynes, the villagers were allowed to take wood for plough and deadwood for fuel, without any payment. And, the state officials were allowed to take dhak (Butea monosperma) leaves, used to manufacture red dye – used in marriages and other ceremonies. (Haynes, 1998: 756) The state's sharing of the forest produce with the locals and the field officials – reflected its understanding and recognition of the direct and positive relationship between the local's livelihood and the conservation of biological wealth; while, substantially controlling the corrupt practices among its officials.

In 1872, the first regular settlement of the state’s land revenue demands and the first systematic mapping of the village lands and boundaries was carried out, which delineated the village borders with the state-owned lands.[16] It was claimed that all land not actually under farming belonged to the state. The revenue orientation of the land policy worked towards the unbalancing of the region's Eco-system. Over the following years the runds and banis had encroached onto the village lands. The official forest boundaries were extended, under the pretext of controlling the trespassing of the grazing cattle’s into the state reserves. "The banjar area of each village was reduced to such an extent, that people were compelled to graze their cattle in the enclosed area and to pay grazing fees for the privilege of doing so." (GOR, 1947: i) Now, even the seized cattle’s were not returned until the due fine was paid. Further, as the "state possessed an exclusive rights to kikar (Acacia arabica) tree, wherever they were found, whether on cultivated or uncultivated lands.... To assert this right, state had exercised the right of entry of its camels, cattle’s and other livestock onto these lands, causing a greater damage to the cultivator’s." (Haynes, 1998: 757) Thus, during this period the "issue of ownership was introduced in the equation of Alwar's land use ... based on the European tenurial concept, which holds forests to be crown land." (Haynes, 1998:767) The priorities of the British instigated forestry were essentially commercial in nature. With the result, the attitude of the forest officials towards the locals and their cattle’s changed dramatically, now both were considered as a big nuisance – thus, creating a big gulf between the officials and the locals, which continues to exist even today.

In 1885, Maharaja Mangal Singh declared Sariska as the famous hunting reserve, followed by the strict control on the vehicular and pedestrian traffics. Between 1897-1901, when Michael F. O'Dwyer carried out the second regular forest settlement, popularly known as the “20 years revenue settlement", major changes took place. The Forest Boundary Commission was appointed in 1899 to determine the future boundary line of the villages, and to finalize the rights of the local inhabitants therein. However, local's forest rights were often changed at the discretion of the local bureaucrats. "In 1901, the first separate forest department was established, under the leadership of an officer `loaned' from Punjab...and efforts were made to bureaucratically and commercially manage forest and `waste' areas and with the open assumption that those areas might better be converted into arable land." (Haynes, 1998: 759&767) This bureaucratic pattern of scientific management of natural resources was brought in, by replacing it with the local kinship based system of resource management, with disastrous results for the local inhabitants, which continues till date. This situation was further aggravated by the fact, that the "knowledge of forest rights and legal procedures in rural communities tended to be in the

[16] In demarcating the village boundaries, the principle of `Pani Dhal' was adopted -i.e. "the slopes of the hills adjoining the village were shown in the fieldmaps, while the table land on the summit and all clusters of hills not abutting on the village were demarcated and shown as state runds." (GOR, 1947: 7).

hands of the economic elite's and landowning families, who used the information for their own advantage." (Poffenberger & Singh, 1966:60).

Further, under the pretext of forest conservation, "various villages comprising the Sariska valley were depopulated and their inhabitants were turned out without hardly a penny as compensation." (GOR, 1947:5). In 1927, the Sariska Circle was formed and special rules were imposed. The rules affecting the local inhabitants, were – firstly, "the revenue laws of the state shall not apply to this circle and no rights of biswedari or zamindari can be acquired, whether by contract or by lease; secondly, only three village will be allowed to exist in the circle, they are - Indok, karna ka baas and Deori; and finally, strict restrictions on the grazing of the cattle's were laid out". (1927)

Thus, as E. Haynes rightly summarizes the argument, that the "extension of Governmental control over forests was but one example of a trend in Rajputana States towards entering into areas and among peoples who had traditionally been outside the sphere of intimate governmental control over their lives. For elite's [17] as well as the locals, this intrusion contributed not only to a major alteration in their relationship to their natural surroundings, but also to a redefinition of their `Political ecology' as well.... This change came in a period when the co-equal status with the Rajputana states was replaced with a more interventionist view of British paramountcy."[18] (Haynes, 1998: 752&767)

The year of 1872, thus marks the beginning of a legacy characterized by environmental degradation and destruction, marginalisation and ruthless exploitation of the local communities, and an ever widening gulf of mistrust, apathy and confrontation between the state and society in Alwar. Although, this legacy has changed forms over the years, however it's destructive and painful onslaughts on the nature and locals remains intact.

Till mid 1960s, the issue of biodiversity conservation and its significance in the lives and livelihoods of rural Indians did not receive any attention from the higher ranks in the government. This negligence, when combined with factors like, the continuities in the attitudes and lifestyles of the elite's, the disillusionment of the biswadars and jagirdars who lost their land to the state government, and awareness of the commercial value of these resources – strengthened the nexus between the politicians, business people and some foresters causing an alarming increase in the intensity of commercial exploitation of the natural resources.

In the first Indian Board of Wildlife meeting (1952), "even the attempts to control the shooting of tigers in the breeding season in Rajasthan were shot down...because, virtually all members of this advisory board were keen hunters". (Rangarajan, 1996:2392) In this context, it is not surprising, that on the one hand, in 1955" the forests, within Sariska were notified as reserved forests, wherein it was unlawful to hunt, shoot, net, trap, snare, capture or kill any kind of wildlife." And, on the other hand, "regular shooting permits were issued, but hardly any returns were filed. The area was open for shooting wild animals and birds. It was a paradise for poachers, until 1958 when the reserve was upgraded to a sanctuary." (GOR, 1979: 25) However, "till the abolition of privy purses in 1969, many rulers retained shikar rights in their former princely hunting reserves." (Rangarajan, 1996: 2392).

The decisions of the Forest Boundary Commission of 1899 continue to form the basis of the forest settlement, till

[17] The conflict between the jagirdars / biswadars, and state administration were not severs in Alwar, as their forests were not brought under the centralized management. (Haynes, 1998).

[18] At the time, British's (Europeans) came in contact with India, they were themselves experiencing a significant transformation in the patterns of natural resource use, since the beginning of the industrial revolution. This transformation was the result of the growing realization, "of the enlarged possibilities of transforming resources from one form to another, and of transporting them over large distances. With the technological advancements a great range of objects became commercial commodities". (Gadgil and Guha, 1997 : 114-5) And, for the sustained functioning of their industries and to maximize their economic benefits – they intruded, disrupted and colonized human societies and their natural resources. In an altered form, these kinds of colonial disruptions continue, even today. For instance, the present tariffs barriers (WTO) aims at restricting the developing countries to the production of raw material only. Because, the imports of processed goods from these countries face a heavy tariff regime in the industrialized countries. In other words, it is profitable to import coffee beans or tomatoes but not the coffee or the processed tomatoes.

date. Immediately after independence, the state-owned forests of Sariska region "were leased to private contractors for manufacturing charcoal and firewood. Till 1967, systematic felling was organized, but not on any principles of forestry. After 1968, forest felling was conducted according to the working plan prescriptions. These felling too have been stopped now (1978) Even the collection of dead dying wood has been discontinued." (GOR, 1979: 24) The dead dying wood is primarily collected by the locals, as firewood. This unnecessary step further eroded the essential forest use rights of the locals, while encouraging corrupt practices among the field officials – as experienced by the people of Deori, till 1986.

In 1966 and 1968, the contracts for marble mining were issued within the sanctuary region. These contracts were revised in 1975 and then in 1986. Despite, of the Supreme Court's order and Union Ministry of Environment and Forests notification, that activities like, mining will not be allowed within the protected areas, without the due approval of the central government –fresh no objection certificates were issued for marble mining in 1992. It was only in 1994, that a prolonged court battle between the state government of Rajasthan, working on the behest of politically powerful mining lobbies and TBS ended, with the closure of almost 474 mines in the protected area. (TOI, 1992 and Pioneer, 1994)

Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi's personal interest and awareness of the need for wildlife conservation brought the issue on the Center State. This interest is however lacking among most of the politicians, may be because trees and tigers don't constitute their vote bank; but they do constitute a crucial component in the lives of the forest dwellers – a fact, which has been continuously ignored by the policy makers. However, the late 1960s does signify a crucial turning point in the history of Indian conservation; and, as M.Rangarajan suggests, "Indira Gandhi was perhaps symbolic of a new generation of Indians (urban and in the state department) who related to nature not through the barrel of a gun, but with binoculars and field guides." (Ranjarajan, 1996: 2392).

The wildlife conservation mainly relied on the setting up of Protected Areas, either as wildlife sanctuaries or as national parks – covering almost 4.3% of the country's land mass, inaddition to the 23% of the state-owned forestlands. (Kothari, 1997) Between 1969-73, a ban was imposed on the hunting of tigers and other large carnivores, and on the export of their skins and other body parts; [19] the promulgation of the Wildlife (Protection) Act in 1972 (and, amended in 1991); and, the launch of Project Tiger, "to establish a network of reserves, where the tiger, its prey species and the habitat could be protected". (Rangarajan, 1997: 152) Sariska was declared a tiger reserve in 1978. In 1982, the primary notification to declare part of the core area as National Park was issued. Final notification is pending since then, in view of the need to relocate eleven villages from the core area of the proposed national park.

Wildlife conservation, while relying on a justified approach, [20] is rooted in a premise which is mythical and false, i.e. – only state with its bureaucratic and technical experts can sustainable preserve the bio-diversity in the selected tracts, after

[19] "The most insidious and immediate threat to the tiger is from the illegal trade in its bones and other parts of its body.... Is both difficult to detect and hard to suppress." In India, tiger skins are still valued by tantrics as a seat. But it is the demand from the Chinese community, whether in china or in East Asia, USA - which causes a major drain on numbers of tigers. (Rangarajan, 1997:149) The Chinese have traditionally identified a score of tiger parts such as skin, brains, bones, blood and bile as useful to produce anything from fur coats to aphrodisiacs. (HT, 25 Dec 99) They use their bones as an essential component of their tradition medicine, which cures bad Ulcers, rheumatic pains and typhoid or malaria fever. For non-physical ills, they believe in putting tiger bones on the rooftop to keep the devils sway, to cure nightmares." Then, there are tiger bone wines - 50 bottles of wine is produced from some one kg of tiger bones. In 1992, a kg of tiger bones costed as cheap as US $370. (TOI, 1992) However, the Japanese Government's decision to ban the distribution of tiger products and the new findings showing that the world tiger population has not only stabilized but is actually growing in some parts of Asia like, Eastern Siberia, Nepal and India – enlightens the hope of the survival of this beautiful animal. (HT, 1999).

[20] Tiger and their prey species require a measure of habitat protection to survive. Then, growing urbanization economic change, commercial exploitation and the hunting enthusiasts – are significant reasons, justifying the setting up of Protected areas. Another significant reason is cited by M Gadgil, that "locals usually give high priority to the species of utility to them." (Gadgil, 1998:120) Sariska Tiger Reserve preserves biological wealth as well as the temples and structures of historical significance. The 9th and 10th century ruins of shivite temple of Garh Rajor, 10 meter single piece statue of Mahavir and a few Jain temples, Palace of Sariska with scattered shooting Odhies - relics of the princely state alongwith the ruins of Kankwari fort, Talvriksh, Pandupole, Bharthari and Neelkanth temples are duly preserved.

the necessary exclusion of the local inhabitants from these tracts. Local inhabitants are treated as trespassers and their free movement and the use of the forest produce has been restricted or stopped. As, "by waiting for their (locals) educated response towards wildlife preservation, the entire process would be delayed." (GOR, 1979:53) Therefore section 24(2) (c) of the Wildlife Act provides for the relocation of the locals, after the due settlement of their rights and claims.

The Sariska administration has following complaints against the villagers, on the basis of which they want to relocate them. Firstly, over the years, the population of the domesticated animals has increased many folds, causing a grazing problem. Wild animals like, cheetal and sambhar have to increasingly compete with the cattle's for fodder. Secondly, villagers are steadily increasing the number of goats in their domestic stock, which seriously interferes and disrupts the regeneration of rich fodder and plants. Villagers consider goats as a source of fluid cash. Moreover, the risk factor involved and the maintenance cost in possessing goats is relatively lower, as compared to buffaloes or cows. Thirdly, domestic stock acts as a medium of communicable disease to the wildlife. Fourthly, though administration agrees, that villager's don't kill wild animals, but they do provide an easy access to poachers. Villager's on the other hand claim, that they alert the field staff against any such activity. Finally, the practice of tree lopping is increasing among the villager's. This allegation is not even refuted by the villagers, themselves.

All these complaints are significant, and can be resolved without the relocation of the villages, which have co-existed, with the bio-diversity of the region, for generations. This is not an attempt to undermine the fact, that the rate at which the deforestation is taking place near and around the two villages, I visited – Deori and Umeri is alarming. However, this attitude of destruction among the villager's is not inherent, as they are well aware of the act, that their lives and livelihoods are directly dependent on the conservation of forests. Local inhabitants have been pushed to a corner by various legislations, since 1872; and, since the promulgation of the Wildlife Act in 1972, state has been preparing to take away even that corner also, on the pretext of bio-diversity conservation. The Act imposes restrictions on the provision of even the basic living amenities to the locals – it seems, as if law and administration is literally waiting for the locals to default. [21] The state–supported commercial exploitation of natural resources (whether, it was tree felling for the timber industry or continuance of marble mining till 1994 in Sariska) has been the root cause of this destruction. [22]

Here, it would be unjustifiable to entirely blame the field officials, because they are just implementing the state's policy. Moreover, they themselves are working in a hostile environment, due to the following reasons – the nature of their work, lack of proper facilities and poor working conditions, under equipped to deal with poachers (to use their guns against the poachers, they have to first seek permission from the higher authority), [23] political pressure from above and are viewed as enemies, by the local inhabitants – as a result, the field staff avoid confrontations with the locals and are sometimes not even able to control the incidents of tree lopping. [24] This ongoing antagonism between the state and society

[21] This argument is also supported by the research conducted by CSE (1999) in eight Protected Areas in India namely - Rajaji, Nagarhole, Gir, Simlipal, Pench, Periyar, Manas and Kaziranga.

[22] "Since 1991, with the ongoing economic liberalization program many sanctuaries have been denotified to facilitate the location of extractive industry, tourist resorts, manufacturing plants and other development projects." (Rangarajan, 1996 : 2391) A glaring example in this regard, is the denotification of about 1/3rd of the Melghat Tiger Reserve in Maharashtra, which was designated as project tiger reserve in 1974 and is a home to a wide variety of plants, wildlife and over 250 varieties of birds. However a stay was issued, when the Bombay environmental action group and others contested the denotification. In Kudremukh National park in Karnataka, "Kudremukh Ore Company Limited has been issued a prospecting license in the Protected Area, which comprises of the finest evergreen shola forest, rich in flora and fauna and supporting host of endangered species, including tigers." The commercial and industrial projects are rarely rejected on the environmental grounds. (TOI, Jan 1997).

[23] In Sariska, only in last 2-3 years guns are made available at the divisional level. To use these guns in situations of emergency like, while fighting with poachers, the divisional office has to seek a prior permission from the chief wardens office, in Jaipur. Thus, in this Gun vs. Danda fight between the poachers and the forest officials - it is the former who holds the position of advantage.

[24] Unlike in Sariska, Ranthambore Tiger Reserve faces a total revolt against the conservation laws of the country. The villager's do not hesitate to indulge in violence against the field officials. "Some of them were beaten up by the villager's, when they tried

is "the weak spot" in the entire conservation program.

The National Forest Policy, 1988 marks a major turning point in the state's conservation perspective, in the post-independence era. For the first time, state recognizes the crucial relationship between the local inhabitants and the forests. While, emphasizing on the need to share the benefits of conservation with the locals; it provides for a joint and participatory association between the state and the locals – in protection, regeneration and development of forests as well as to provide gainful employment to the people living in and around the forest. [25] (Krishnan, 1996) In Sariska Tiger Reserve, the administration tried to organize the `village forest protection committee's", in accordance with the new legislation, but without any success. The contradictory issues like, the local's relocation and seeking their participation in forest conservation cannot be harmoniously integrated. Thus, this new state's understanding doesn't extend to the people living in either the wildlife sanctuaries or in the national parks.

On 22nd August 1997, the Supreme Court of India issued an interim order in the case filed by Center for Environmental Law, WWF-I vs. Union of India Ors. Notifying, that "the concerned state governments/union Territories are directed to issue the proclamation under section 21, in respect of the sanctuaries/national parks within two months and complete the process of determination of rights of land or rights as contemplated by the Act, within a period of one year." (Court Order, 1997) In other words, relocation is firmly on the agenda, and locals are continued to be considered as a negative factor in the wildlife conservation. While, recognizing the flaws in the past relocation efforts, the Sariska's and Ranthambore's administration have formulated a lucrative `Beneficiary Oriental Scheme' for the relocation of the villages.[26] This scheme is a proposal, at present, waiting an approval from the Office of the Chief Conservator of Forests and Wildlife Warden, Rajasthan. To enhance the transparency in the implementation process, there is a proposal to include an NGO, as project implementing agency for individual villages, on the lines of Watershed Development Project.

Ironically, in Indian democratic system of governance, the local inhabitants don't even have the right to decide – whether they want to stay or want to relocate? More guards, more guns or lucrative rehabilitation schemes are unlikely to succeed in preserving the wildlife reserves; until, the locals are made to feel, that these reserves belongs to them, and that they are a part of their heritage.

The continuing disjunction between politics and culture in the state's policy-making arena strongly indicates, that colonialism never ended in India with the granting of formal political freedom, 52 years ago. As A. Nandy says, "its sources lies deep in the minds of both the ruler's and the ruled.... Perhaps which began in the minds of men must also end in the minds of men." (Nandy, 1997: 174) This disjunction is the primary reason behind the inability of the state's developmental policies to respond effectively to the needs of the common Indians. Amiclar Cabral while explaining the primacy of culture in national liberation (1970) rightly said, that "culture allows us to know the dynamic synthesis, which have been developed and established by the social conscience to resolve these conflicts (between society, polity and economy) at each stage of its evolution, in the search for survival and progress." Here, it is significant to note, that India

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to stop them from cutting down trees. One forest guard was hit on the leg by an axe, another was badly beaten up and his wireless set was snatched. We (the field officials) got no help from either our bosses or the police." (Roychowdhury, 1993: 7).

[25] In West Bengal, over the last ten years, "state has pioneered the involvement of locals, mostly tribal communities of Midnapore and Purulia districts in protecting local forests to encourage natural regeneration." (Gadgil et al, 1993 : 154) Wildlife and forests are in the concurrent list of the Indian constitution, which implies that state's have the power to make significant changes in the national level policy, before implementing it in their respective states.

[26] The proposed relocation strategy provides a choice between two approaches, i.e. transplantation (of the entire village) and individual settlements. The Land Ceiling Act will govern the maximum amount of land to be given, while taking family as a unit.

land for housing	1.5 times the area of present house
Agricultural land	original landholding + 1 ha. additional land (land Quality is the same).

For landless, the land allotted will be 1 hectare, per member of the family - as per guidelines under DRDA schemes for the landless. Besides, land various economic and community benefits are also proposed. (1999).

was not born in 1947, as assumed by our policy makers -- but is an ancient civilization with a glorious and a prosperous past, and this should not be remembered as just a historical fact.[27]

Evidently, the neglect of the local cultural capital by the state results in their inability to establish a base, that could facilitate trust and coproduction [28] with the member's of society. At present, the nature of relationship between the state and society is based on the patron-client format, with an attitude of -- you cooperate and we will operate. This attitude and "the expansion of the formal bureaucratic organization of the state, according to some theorists of social capital, "crowds out" the informal networks without providing the same range of value and functions, leaving communities worse off. " (Evans, 1996) This is exactly what happened in Deori -- where, since 1872 due to the changing state and society relations on the pattern of forest resource use and the abolition of the biswadari system as well as the moving in of the forest department and the DRDA, drastically reduced the village's ability as a community to absorb shocks, by 1984-85. Under biswadari system, the Patel used to take care of the basic necessities of the village, especially repairing the water conservation structures annually, while also acting as the link between the state and villager's. Undoubtedly, this system was exploitative at many levels, however its replacement by the moving in of the forest department and the DRDA with their narrow perceptions and own agendas proved relatively more exploitative for the people of Deori.

Section - 4: Village Community in Deori

In 1984-85, the circumstances prevailing in Deori were seriously threatening the very survival of the villager's. They were facing an acute water scarcity, due to the ongoing deforestation, mining and the inability of the water conserving structures to sustain the resource for a longer period of time -- as there repairs were long overdue, because of inadequate funds. The scanty annual rainfall further worsened the situation, during this period. The forest department which is funded by the Central and State government's schemes to regularly repair these structures, did not came forward to help the villager's. According to the forest officer of that area, the repairing or construction of johads (ponds) or other water conserving structures within the village premises was not part of their duty, and such works around and near the village could have increased the potential threats of wildlife poaching. In the village, even today every caste group draws water from the pre-assigned wells, and during the period of acute scarcity these rules were not relaxed. According to Teja Balai, they were not allowed to draw water from the wells of either the meena's or the gujar's.

According to Bhambu Gujar, in 1984 the intensity at which deforestation was going on --was alarming. He alongwith many other villager's claimed, that the forest guards posted in the area, during that period allowed the villager's to collect fodder and fuelwood, on the payment of Rs. 50-100 or clarified butter (produced by the villager's). The lack of awareness about the grazing rules among the villager's created a situation of uncertainty for them. With the result, they started extracting more from the forest than their daily requirements -- resulting in the degradation of the resource and a growing individualistic attitude among the villager's, that enhanced the practice of hoarding among them. Thus, without realizing they were themselves facilitating the destruction of the source of their lives and livelihood -- as, they perceived forests as only "sarkari" property. The forest officials never gave any receipts for the payment, they received from the villager's Another occasion of collecting bribes for the officials was, when the villager's used to pass through the check post, on their way home from the market. Furthermore,

[27] In Peru, the village communities falling within the range covered by the 500 years old Inca civilization, have been able to experience a sustainable improvement in the ground water tables and in their agricultural yields, by simply reverting back to the Inca's water engineering techniques, which were ruined with the Spanish colonial conquest. The assumption facilitating this move was that if these systems worked 500 years ago in the similar harsh environment, than why not today? These techniques combined with the local practice of "feena" - i.e. regular community work by the locals enhanced their socio-economic fortunes. Thus, elements of their cultural capital provided the respite from the scarcity-survival situation they were facing, while providing a base to build upon. (Excerpts from Earth Report on BBC World in 1999)

[28] Coproduction is the term introduced by E.Ostrom (1996), implying that citizens can play an active role in producing public goods and services of consequence to them.

sampati meena alleges that officials also used to misbehave with the village women. Villager's then, were not in the position to either oppose or confront the officials, as they were dependent on the latter's permission to collect fodder and fuelwood from the forest.

The above circumstances and the willingness to change them, brought the villager's in contact with a local NGO -- Tarun Bharat Sangh (TBS), marking a significant watershed in the lives of the people of Deori. This association, while redefining the relationship between various sections of the village society, also empowered the villager's to determine the nature of their interactions with the forest department -- rather than being the other way round.

In 1984-85, TBS began working with the villager's without initially informing the department. Sh. Gobardhan Sharma, a TBS worker started a regular school for the children, while staying in the village. He used this activity as an entrypoint to establish contacts with other villager's and to understand their problems and concerns. And, with time he alongwith other workers were able to enlighten the villager's of their position and rights. For instance, when the villager's used to pay the land revenue to the patwari, he in return used to give them receipts for the payments made. Whereas, the forest officials never gave them any receipts. This simple, yet powerful argument made the villager's realize, that the payments made to the forest department were infact bribes, as the amount collected was not going to the state treasury. As a result, of this understanding they began their action against the state, by collectively demanding the receipts for the payments henceforth made, without which they refused to give them anything. This became the cause of resentment among the officials for the villager's as well as TBS workers -- and, they responded by filing almost 200 alleged cases of poaching against both of them. However, these cases were withdrawn after a high-level state inquiry looked into the matter. Villager's still had a clear memory of those uncertain days. Today, the forest officials do silently accept, that those were the forged cases, which were wrongly filed --, as the department was not aware of the intentions of TBS.

The withdrawal of these cases brought another significant turning point in the lives of the people of Deori. The department withdrew, while adopting an attitude of apathy and alienation -- in other words, sit and watch. This attitude, which was welcomed by both the villager's and TBS alike, further widened the rift between the state and society -- proving to be a major source of hindrance in their future advancements, particularly from 1993 onwards.

In 1986-87, the unstructured gram sabha gave way to the constitution of the structured gram sabha, with the primary task of forest regeneration and conservation. This institution functioned effectively and responsively for almost 6 years, with an active assistance and participation of TBS. In the initial period, the rules formulated by the gram sabha were primarily related to the forest protection and restricting the forest departments entry into the village. It was collectively decided, that if a person were found lopping a living tree, s/he would be fined -- which could range between Rs. 11 and Rs. 101, depending on the severity of crime. And, if a person, who has witnessed this act of lopping fails to immediately report the matter to the gram sabha, then s/he would be fined Rs. 21 Further, if any of these wrong acts are repeated by the same person, than not only the amount of fine will be doubled but also s/he could be alienated from both the village and his/her caste communities. The fine, thus collected was deposited in the gram khosh, and along with other regular contributions was used for village's developmental works. Water harvesting and conserving structures were repaired and constructed with gram khosh contributing 25% of the total cost, and the rest of the contributions came from TBS.

During this period, as villagers were extremely wary of the forest department's involvement, they banned their entry into the village. It was decided, that if any household, either facilitated their entry into the village or even offered them water, would face an alienation from both the village and his/her caste communities, irrespective of the person's socio-economic standing in the village.

The formation of the structured gram sabha and the kind of activities taken up, were the direct result of the positive change in the villager's perception of themselves, other villager’s across the caste divide and their pattern

of use and conservation of forest resources. Villagers took up the task of their development in their own hands, while recognizing and mobilizing collective action across different caste groups. This is the reason, why social untouchability in Deori is restricted to inter-caste dining and marriages. The villager's attitude towards the forest also changed -- instead, of perceiving it as the sarkari property, they started treating it as their own property, which needs to be regenerated and conserved for the present as well as future generations. Water harvesting and conservation structures were repaired and constructed by incorporating their knowledge and experiences of -- how the terrain changes during the rainy season, the intensity of pressure with which the water flows and at which points it can be harvested, checked and collected, what should be the depth and thickness of these structures -- so, that they can work effectively during and after the rainy season is over.

This positive change in the perceptions of the villager's was largely facilitated by TBS -- who not only provided the much needed financial, technical and information-related assistance, but also supported and enhanced the villager's belief in their own abilities and in their indigenous conservation practices (as mentioned in sec 3). The life-threatening circumstances, the physical - legal location of the village, the perceived positive net benefits from cooperation, the active role of the village elders (who acted as cultural intermediaries), presence of a strong joint family institution, a good degree of familiarity among the villager's across the caste divide and the shared hatred for the forest department -- all these factors together facilitated in the formation and its successful functioning for almost 6 years, on the basis of mutual consensus. Deori's water and forest conservation efforts, during this period, are still praised even by the forest officials.

All these factors together enhanced the elements of trust, harmony and solidarity in the interactions and relations among the villager's, while facilitating their developmental initiatives. The manifestation of this changed relationship among the villager's can be seen at two levels. Firstly, in the ability of the gram sabha to move beyond the addressal of mere survival issues to mutual developmental issues like, the construction of non-metallic road in 1988, school building and raising of numerous demands for a regular school teacher in the BDO's office. The work on the non-metallic road was initially started by the meena's, and later the entire village joined them. Secondly, while crossing the caste and class divide, villager's helped each other. As Teja Balai remembers that when the foundation of her house collapsed -- the villager's belonging to the upper caste actively assisted her and her sons, in the completion of their house. Villagers also share a norm of helping a sick person, reach the nearest medical facility, which is almost 17 kms away. These attitudes and norms are based on moral and mutual obligations. Inspite, of the harmonious relations among the villager's at some levels, they continue to 'religiously' practice social untouchability, though in a restrictive form.

It is significant to analyze the nature and strength of the relations among the villager's during this period, in accordance with Taylor and Singleton's conceptualization. Villagers did share strong beliefs and preferences, while enjoying a stable relationship -- this is evident from their movement towards the mutual developmental activities. In the initial period, their interactions with the state were usually mediated by TBS. In the gram sabha meetings, although the TBS workers actively participated, but they didn't enjoy the privilege of vetoing the decisions collectively taken by this institution, on the basis of consensus. Infact, TBS never tried to impose its thoughts, solutions or decisions on the villager's, but always worked with them. And, this is the principal reason -- why NGO's initiated grassroot developmental efforts have a relatively high success rate, as compared to the state's performance. Villagers don't share multiplex relations, in Deori in Indian rural society, where social life is defined and regulated by exclusionist norms, such relations are difficult to trace.

In the past 3-4 years, the structured gram sabha has diluted, while also setting in the growing trend of erosion within the village society of Deori. According to Babu Meena, one of the main reasons for the meena's disassociation with the structured institution was that when they approached the gram sabha for funds to repair their johad, they were refused. However, both the gujar and balia communities deny this charge. The reason which

was supported by all the villager's (I spoke to), irrespective of their caste and gender identities was the inability of gram sabha, to control tree lopping by a section of population. Forest conservation was the primary task that brought them together. During these years, the active and direct participation of TBS has also substantially declined, due to their own commitments. According to TBS, the construction of the forest check post in the village and the excessive dependence of the villager's on them are the principal reasons behind this dilution They added, that villager's never considered it as their own sangathan, therefore its disintegration didn't made much difference to them! Not surprisingly, the forest department also shares this argument. Although, they still praise Deori's efforts towards water and forest conservation, however they attribute all these achievements to TBS. This dilution has given them an opportunity to forcefully argue that villager's presence in the National Park is a negative factor adversely affecting their conservation efforts!

This line of reasoning doesn't take into account the following crucial factors like -- firstly, the state's perception of the relationship between local's livelihood and the conservation of biological wealth remains unaltered. Thus, inspite of acknowledging Deori's conservation works, they attribute its entire success to TBS's interests and initiatives. Their attitude of apathy and neglect towards the locals continue, and the relocation of the village(s) from the core area remains as a crucial part of their management plan to conserve biological wealth. Secondly, for villager's the spheres of and benefits from cooperation, for mutual benefits have considerably narrowed down. Their efforts to secure a regular schoolteacher have also failed; as a result now they are doing whatever they can, at their individual levels. Some of the meena's and balia's are educating their boys, while keeping them with their relatives living outside the reserve premises. Further, the villager's are continuously denied even the basic living amenities. In 1984-85, villagers saw an opportunity for individual as well as collective advancements, which has now reached a saturation point with declining marginal returns. This is the reason, why some balia families have moved to the downstream village; and, why the practice of tree lopping is once again gaining strength among the locals – with only one major difference, i.e. now they are well aware of what they are doing and its consequences for them and the environment. They ask a very simple question, i.e. "Why should we protect the forest?" Even village elders are incapable of providing a convincing response to their question. The younger generation is much more expressive in showing their anger and resentment -- and, tree lopping is the best mechanism of protest available to them. This relationship between resource degradation and social unrest threatens not only the environment, but also the nation's socio-economic stability.

During this period, although Deori still remains a single revenue village, however guwara Deori is separated from the other two guwara's, who alongwith the neighboring village Umeri form a separate ward within the Losal gram panchayat.[29] Villagers were not even informed about these changes, till they actually took place.

Few years back, the sapphire studded idol of Lord Krishna was stolen from the village temple, which has not been recovered. Villagers are using the main hall and the temple premises to store the animal food. Further, they used to play the game of 'Kabadi' together, irrespective of their caste identities, during the festive occasion of holi. However, this practice has been discontinued, recently - due to the growing attitudes of envy and suspicion, especially among some sections of the meena and the gujar communities. These two instances are indicative of the increasing trend of erosion, which has set in the relations among the villager's -- and, no one seemed interested in reverting this destructive trend.

At present, gram sabha is informally organized, whenever the need arises. And, if consensus is not reached on an issue, than the entire matter is dropped, at the village level. The maintenance of water conserving structures is now done, at the individual guwara level; whereas, for the annual maintenance of the non-metallic road, they either collectively provide shram dan or monetary contributions, as the circumstances permit. Moreover, even today, the villager's honors the norm of helping a sick person in the village. In 1998, they started village milk

[29] This grouping is done to facilitate the implementation of the developmental schemes, through DRDA.

cooperative in association with Alwar State Diary. Although, the diary's van has been coming in the region (till talab gram panchayat, which is almost 17 kms away from Deori) for past 20 years, according to Bhola Ram Gujar, the secretary of the village cooperative-- however, due to transportation problems, the villager's were not able to avail the benefits of this service. The Alwar State Diary encourages and only allows village as a unit to sell milk. The decision of forming this cooperative and appointments to the post of chairman, vice-chairman and secretary were taken at the gram sabha level, on the basis of mutual consensus. The position of chairman and secretary is occupied by the gujar's and meena's occupy the position of vice-chairman. Except for one family, no one else has enough milk to sell, from the balia community. The quality of milk supplied to the diary is strictly maintained by the cooperative. And, the quality of milk supplied by the households, irrespective of their socio-economic status in the village is the only eligibility condition, determining their continued membership of the cooperative.

The lives of the people in Deori have been significantly changing, since 1986. They have experienced a substantial improvement in their economic standards of living; semi- mechanization of the farms has reduced the work load of the village men and they spend this free time by generally playing cards and smoking hukka; further, the villager's dependence on the market economy is increasing. The setting up of the milk cooperative reflects their changing emphasis on the sale of the varied diary products, i.e. from clarified butter or ghee (till 1997-8) to khoya (till 1990) to milk (from 1998 onwards). The positive impact of this change is reflected in the reduced wastage of milk, a small degree of reduction in the women's workload, and easy accessibility of liquid money. At the same time, the protein intake among the villager's, especially among the women and children has substantially declined. Earlier, when they used to prepare ghee, the member's of the household consumed the buttermilk. Moreover, only a limited amount of ghee was sold in the market to purchase the commodities actually needed by the household. It is significant to note here, that there is no pre-determined link between the sale of milk by the villager's and their declining nutrient intake. A conscious choice has to be made by the villager's, between their need of wealth and health, especially when diary products constitute a major and an irreplaceable source of their daily protein intake. In Deori, the villager's have not been able to strike a balance, as yet.

Deori's relationship with the state institutions, whether it is the forest department or the DRDA – remains troubled. Villagers reluctantly approach the state institutions, only when no other option is left before them. During these 3-4 years, the attitude of the villager's, especially from the meena and the balia communities towards the forest department has slightly changed. With meena's support the department was able to construct its check post in the village. Villagers have started emphasizing on the need of the state and society to work together. This change in the position is the result of a realization, that though organizations like, TBS are helpful and effective – but upto a point. Whereas, their association with the department is on a permanent bases. Most of the gujar's don't share these views. However, all the three groups emphasized, that even today they could restrict or ban the entry of the corrupt officials in their village, as and when they decide. The attitude of the forest officials has also changed, at one level – i.e. they avoid a situation of confrontation or conflict with the villager's, because now the latter are not afraid to retaliate. According to the forest officials, villager's have learnt how to use and manipulate the rules and regulations, by bringing local politicians, NGOs and media into the picture, for their own advantage.

Their association with the DRDA's office, especially on the issue of schoolteacher has left them believing, that it is a powerless institution working in a polluted environment. Babu Meena, who represented village Deori at the ward level (before the village was divided into two different wards), doesn't want to work in that environment again. Although, now he himself cannot contest for the position, as under the system of rotation, the ward position for the ongoing term is reserved for the women candidate. Meena's in guwara Deori were not keen on encouraging their village women to contest for the position, and a woman candidate from village Losal was elected unopposed. Moreover, while sending the annual proposal of developmental works, guwara Deori was left out – they were not even informed about the meeting in which these proposals were approved and finalized. The ward panch of the separated ward is from guwara Baas Chamaran. According to the villager's, he has done nothing for the village.

Section 37 and 38 of the Rajasthan's Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 empowers the villager's with the right to recall their elected representatives, by passing a non-confidence motion and initiating a state enquiry. (Tiwari et al, 1998) However, the villager's were not interested in using this right, as they don't want to create an ill-will in the village, by inviting a state's initiated enquiry into their matters. They are rather patiently waiting for his term to end, so that they can remove him by exercising their voting rights. The root of this apathy partly lies in the fact, that the set of potential opportunities available to them are limited, i.e. neither they themselves are interested in contesting and working in the polluted environment nor do they believe, that a change of the candidate would substantially enhance their fortunes. These reasons along with the fact, that the villager's generally search for consensus, while taking village-level decisions – probably explains their continued belief in the system of voting and democratic form of governance.

Villager's acknowledge and praise the significant role played by TBS in the regeneration of their village. Even today, TBS continues to partly contribute in the funding for the annual repairs of the water conservation structures. Villagers believe, that they could; now maintain the most significant contributions of TBS in various arenas, – which is definitely a positive sign. The level of trust between the villager's and TBS is relatively higher, when compared with the former faith in the state's administration.

The analysis of the nature and strength of the relationship among the villager's, during these last 3-4 years, in accordance with the parameters laid down by Taylor and Singleton clearly reveals, that the villager's still have the potential of cooperating for mutual benefits, by effectively balancing the transaction cost involved. The geographical and the legal position of Deori, to a very large extent provide ground for the residents to cooperate. The relations among the villager's are direct. During this period, even TBS's workers have not attended the informal gram sabha's. Their views and position on the issue of their relocation remains unaltered, especially among the people from the meena and gujar communities – thus, providing stability to their relations. The migration of most of the balia families from Deori, in search for better economic opportunities, did raised doubts in the minds of other sections, on the balia's sense of community belongings. However, the remaining balia families are treated as the active member's and participants in the village level activities. The trend of individualism is gaining strength among the villager's. And, the frequency of contacts among them as well as things they used to do together have significantly narrowed down. The present status of the village community in Deori can probably be best summed up in the words of Prof. MN Srinivas, i.e. "the village unity is normally not visible, but some incident suddenly and strikingly reveals its existence". (Srinivas, 1977)

Concluding Remarks

I did find a village community in a caste–dominated society of Rajasthan, and analyzed its rise, fall and potential in facilitating local level governance for responsive development.

What we generally assume as the attitude of apathy or patience among the villager's is infact the result of the rational choice consciously made by them, to survive and earn their livelihoods, after weighing the set of potential opportunities available to them. They do need an encouraging and participative support from both the state as well as non-governmental organizations in enhancing and sustaining their community–based actions. And, in a developing country with a deeply fragmented society, the role of the state gains an extra significance. In Deori, their negative response has hampered the enhancement and sustenance of the horizontal relationships and social capital among the villager's. What can the villager's do, if state chooses to ignore their well-acknowledged forest conservation efforts? However, it is certain, that people like, in Deori can positively contribute in the conservation of their surrounding bio-diversity, only if the state genuinely decides and learns to trust them – the formulation of the new National Forest Policy is a positive beginning.

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