

Are Masculinities Changing? Ethnographic Exploration of a Gender Intervention with Men in Rural Maharashtra, India

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Abstract Samajhdar Jodidar is a community-based intervention with men in rural Maharashtra in India that is aimed at reducing gender disparities at the family and community level. The intervention is based on the results achieved from earlier work done in Uttar Pradesh where 'role model-activists' were found to be a crucial inspiration for gender-related changes among men. Through participant observations and in-depth interviews in one village, the article explores the changes that have taken place among men, focusing on the 'animator' who has been trained as the role model-activist. The article compares the changes in the animator with the masculinity of 'wrestlers' in two neighbouring villages, who form an idealised masculinity for the region. The article argues that such interventions can lead to substantive improvements in women's status without compromising men's 'masculinities'.

1 Introduction

The last two decades of the twentieth century provide an interesting contrast in terms of the key issues of concern within the rubric of women's empowerment in the West compared to the non-West. On the one hand, second-wave feminism in the West challenges the images of vulnerabilities and 'disempowerment', and projects the re-representation of radical gender identities, lesbian feminism, and so on (Cornwall 1997). On the other hand, this period highlights the interconnectedness of vulnerabilities of women of the non-West. They are subject to male violence, abuse, rape, harassment in the home and, at the same time, they are entangled in a web of economic discrimination at the workplace with low wages and higher degrees of physical labour (Kabeer 1995). However, during this period, gender discourses also start including references to the participation and voices of men. The Programme of Action (PoA) of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD, Cairo 1994) explicitly included reference to male participation even though its agenda was strongly influenced by feminist concerns (Chant 2000). At the same

time there were also some concerns raised about men's vulnerabilities in their economic, social and personal lives (Cornwall 2000). Inspired by feminist movements, and recognising the importance of men in the development process, development discourses in international agencies have begun to rethink and introduce men and masculinity issues. There are now discussions on the need to engage men in the rhetoric of policymaking and gender equality programmes (Greig *et al.* 2000). Another approach suggests that understanding men and their vulnerabilities and anxieties may allow for a deeper understanding of gender disparities and women's subjugation in society (MASVAW 2004).

Gender and development (GAD) discourses since the 1990s have sought to establish an alternative perspective on women's empowerment through shifting the emphasis from a women-centric approach to one which is more relational and includes men and their roles and responses within the conceptual framework (Cornwall 2000; Chant and Gutmann 2002). In the context of this approach Sylvia Chant (2000) has drawn attention to the importance of men's

engagement in gender and development because it leads to the resolution of other social issues like population control, and various public and reproductive health problems, especially in the non-Western context. A number of post-GAD initiatives have highlighted the need to rethink gender discourses and review the implications of engaging men in gender equality projects. At the same time there have been a few initiatives that have attempted to deconstruct patriarchal social relations through programmatic approaches. In India, such an intervention to engage men in gender equality and address violence against women was started in the state of Uttar Pradesh (UP) in 2002. This initiative, called Men's Action for Stopping Violence Against Women (MASVAW), focused on the historical and cultural roles of men as hegemonic, patriarchal, and authoritative subjects (SWSJU 2010; Lusher and Robins 2007; Osella and Osella 2006; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Srivastava 2004, 2012), and attempted to find ways in which men could reflect upon their use and abuse of patriarchal power to move towards gender equality.

The MASVAW initiative, which has been ongoing for over ten years, includes different ways of encouraging men to reflect upon gender–power relations to understand masculinity and interpret gender dominance. These interventions include workshops, trainings and participation in community action followed by reflection in groups. This intervention was able to develop a cadre of 'role model-activists' who then become vehicles for creating awareness among men about the different ways men express their masculinity, and how this affects women's lives and social status. These interventions have led to the formation of men's groups in different parts of the state of UP, and a larger community of 'role model-activist' men who called themselves 'MASVAW men'. These are men interested in stopping violence, creating awareness on the sexual and reproductive health of women, promoting education for girl children, addressing equal opportunity and property rights for women, and so on. Thus the changing dynamics of men's behaviours for violence prevention and gender equality achieve the dual purpose of improving women's status without significantly compromising the 'masculinity' of the men involved (Das *et al.* 2012a; SAHAYOG 2007; MASVAW 2004).

This article is based on an ethnographic study of men and masculinities in a cluster of villages near the town of Sangola in Solapur district of Maharashtra state in India, where the MASVAW experiences are being replicated through a development intervention called Samajhdar Jodidar (Marathi phrase meaning 'understanding partner'). This project is working with men in the community with the objective of reducing domestic violence and gender discrimination and increasing women's decision-making and autonomy. The project is being implemented in 20 villages by Astitva (Marathi word meaning 'existence'), a local NGO based in Sangola. The implementation is coordinated by the Centre for Health and Social Justice (CHSJ), based in Delhi, and receives financial support from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), India. CHSJ includes in its team two persons who were earlier involved in setting up MASVAW, and Samajhdar Jodidar was initiated to understand how men from a somewhat different cultural context responded to a similar set of interventions. The 'gender equality' initiatives of the Samajhdar Jodidar project have led to considerable changes in men's behaviour and roles in some of the villages in Sangola. Men in these villages narrate how the trainings and workshops have increased their understanding of the nuances of gendered relations, and how it has shaped changes in their behaviour and roles, with respect to both women and children. This article further explores aspects of their domestic relationships that are associated with the changes in their behaviour in relation to their roles, responsibilities, gender relations, decision-making, division of labour at home and workplace, sexual relationships and ownership of property. The article draws attention to the fact that such programmatic interventions have the potential to achieve the dual purpose of improving women's status without significantly compromising the 'masculinity' of the men involved.

This article also examines men and masculinities in a separate cluster of villages in the same area, where the Samajhdar Jodidar processes failed to elicit any response. These villages have a culture of wrestling (*pehalwaani*) and the article explores how the tradition of wrestling leads to an idea of hegemonic masculinity where the male identity is related to body-building, which creates a sense of dominance and gender superiority. The article compares the existing cultural paradigms in the

two areas and how the construct of ‘masculinities’ in these two neighbouring areas responds to change.

2 Narratives of change: symbolic and cultural subversion of masculinity

This section introduces Mahadev, a farmer from Tippehari village near Sangola, who participates in the Samajhdar Jodidar initiatives and has attended gender workshops in Sangola. Mahadev represents the men who have begun to change their attitudes and behaviours as a result of their participation in the gender equality intervention. He narrates how these trainings have enhanced his perceptions and ideas about gender and discrimination. He also recounts how changes in his behaviours have improved domestic relationships, which in turn has led to changes in his work–life balance, making him a better farmer.

The first author met Mahadev several times in the Astitva office, and visited his village a few times as well. He is from the OBC¹ community and lives with his wife Lata, mother and four children aged between two and nine years in a semi-constructed mud house that he shares with his brothers, cousins and other members of his extended family. Pomegranate cultivation is common in the area and Mahadev grows this fruit on his farm. He says both he and his wife are involved in the different agricultural activities, which include caring for and watering the plants, then picking and selling the pomegranates at the nearby city market. During the summer this part of western India suffers from extreme drought, when Mahadev has to buy water from tankers to water his plants. However, the profit generated from selling the fruit is good and is now equally divided between Mahadev and his wife. He adds that he values his wife’s hard work in contributing to the profit and that she should be legitimately rewarded for it.

He says that the changes in his perception about gender relations are a result of his participation and involvement in the trainings and campaigns. During these workshops there are discussions on stories or case studies from the village nearby; talking about these stories helps the men to understand the discrimination that women face, and makes them want to create new relationships with the women in their lives. This helps them define gender in a different way and forms the basis of the gender equality programmes.

Mahadev says that before his involvement in these gender workshops his behaviour was very similar to that of other men in the village. He was aggressive, violent and abusive to his wife and children and had little or no interest in domestic affairs. He elaborates that he would physically abuse her every night after he returned home drunk close to midnight. He also spoke about coerced sex with his wife because he never asked her for her consent. He also had no interest in the welfare or education of his children.

Mahadev shares that his perceptions about women, and more broadly about society, have changed following his participation in the programme. He had been given the responsibility of being the ‘animator’ of his village for this project and was expected to lead the ‘gender equality’ programme through creating solidarity among other men in the village. Initially Mahadev had to face huge criticism from other men in the village, who argued that gender equality and women’s empowerment would lead to shame for the village. These men also said if women were empowered, they would not listen to their fathers and husbands, and would lead their lives independently.

Despite these challenges, Mahadev went ahead and became part of the Samajhdar Jodidar initiative and started visiting the Astitva office in Sangola for the trainings. In the beginning his interest in the training was mostly because of the 1,000 rupees honorarium he received for being an ‘animator’. But, as he gradually got involved in the discussions in the workshops, he started developing genuine interest in the kinds of issues that were being discussed. He developed an affinity with the other ‘animators’ from nearby villages who were involved in the same programme. They formed an informal group that debated issues related to gender equality, and the prospects for and challenges of engaging men in the project.

Mahadev has recognised his ‘mistakes’ in neglecting his children and disregarding his wife’s needs. Now he takes his children to school every morning, and plays games with them. He also takes his family to visit their relatives or to the *mela* (fair). He no longer returns home drunk. His relationship with his wife has become more cordial and friendly. All household decision-making is now done jointly and he has registered

his house jointly with his wife, making her a co-owner. He has also been successful in encouraging other men and families in his village to do the same.

Mahadev added that previously he had little information about the reproductive health of women, but that the trainings have given him a greater awareness of women's sexual and reproductive health. He feels he now has a better understanding of and sensitivity about women's health issues. He has now become aware of his wife's menstrual cycle and sensitive in terms of their sexual relations at that time. While talking about this he recalled with a sense of regret an instance a few years earlier when, despite his wife's refusal, he had sex with her and later his wife became pregnant and started bleeding and eventually had to undergo an abortion. As a result of his new knowledge of gender relations and women's reproductive health Mahadev had decided to undergo vasectomy but he was 'advised' against it because of his poor health. He then encouraged his wife Lata to undergo tubectomy.

3 Negotiating 'masculinity' in the shift from hegemony to gender equality

Mahadev's story illustrates ways in which he subverts the 'traditional' or the conventional system of hegemonic masculinity, and turns towards a gender relationship based on equality. The narrative demonstrates the changes among men and their perception and use of power in relationships from violent, abusive and aggressive husbands, to non-violent and collaborative partners who are sensitive to the needs of their wife and to the importance of equality within their relationship (Das *et al.* 2012a; MASVAW 2004). It highlights the importance of developing a 'social movement' as mobilised men and young boys participate and take action to address violence against women (Crooks *et al.* 2006). The prime objective of the Samajhdar Jodidar intervention is to create a social environment where men can freely talk about their doubts and confusions. These reflections allow them to share their 'conventional' ideas about gender relations, and the stereotypical notions of what it means to be a 'man' while they discuss some 'unpleasant' real-life stories and events and discuss the limitations of their conventional belief systems and their views and ideas on 'masculinity'. These workshops subvert their traditional ways of thought, stimulating a process through which

these men redefine their masculinity and their concepts about gender relations and the use of power. Consequently they build awareness about violence against women and gender discrimination, and stimulate thinking around new conceptions of gender equality and respect towards women (Casey *et al.* 2013; SAHAYOG 2007).

The MASVAW workshops have helped to foreground ideas of gender equality within a collective, leading to a sense of shared empowerment which, in turn, creates a supportive environment for social transformation in the village. It allows for the creation of men's support for and understanding of women's issues, but also helps in establishing women's voices in seeking their rights and justice. Mahadev shares his income with his wife, acknowledging her labour in the field. Providing her with this opportunity also creates awareness among other village men, leading to a shared sense of gender(ed) empowerment based on the recognition of women's participation in a (gender-) inclusive labour force, which contributes to economic growth in the longer run. The workers of Astitva mentioned that MASVAW ideologies have spread beyond the project villages, and some men in these villages are also registering their property jointly in the names of both the husband and wife, leading to a politics of economic 'possession' as outlined by Bina Agarwal (Agarwal 2013), who has asserted that acquisition of land is a way of furthering women's rights and the aims of equality and justice.

These profound changes are probably facilitated by the use of indigenous techniques, comprising the use of local stories and 'local idioms' and local discursive practices to create new knowledge within a 'local' context, rather than the imposition of external ideas and concepts (White 2000). While the discussion begins with stories that are 'exceptional' and relate to violence and abuse, the discussions proceed further to problematise the 'everyday' issues and relationships between women and men in the villages. The solutions that emerge are also context-specific and then constitute the core messages that animators like Mahadev then take back to their own villages to discuss with their own group members. This mechanism of reflecting on the 'everyday' practices and developing solutions that will work in the same

context is a form of indigenous capacity building 'by these men', 'among these men' and 'with these men' (Uphoff 2002; Cornwall 2000). This process of locally generated new practices allows for the development of new masculine roles for these men that they can negotiate within their existing environment while allowing for the empowerment of women at the same time. Thus the changing dynamics of men's behaviours for violence prevention and gender equality achieve the dual purpose of improving women's status without significantly compromising the 'masculinity' of the men involved.

Another context within which this change in men needs to be considered is the existing work of Astitva on violence against women in the area. Ethnographic evidence suggests that there was an existing process of women's empowerment in the area, but not in the villages where the work with men was being implemented. Women were being organised into groups and, through their collective voices, seeking accountability and interrogating their discrimination and abuse. There was increased reporting of domestic violence and abuse of women by their husband and in-laws to the nearby police stations. These women were also encouraged by the women activists of Astitva to report any sort of domestic abuse, with the assurance that Astitva would support their action through legal and other means. This environmental context could provide a new sense of vulnerability for some men, where their existing hegemonic power over women is challenged by women who come together as a collective and also use the power of law and the police. In order to negotiate this perceived future challenge, men could be assuming new roles and behaviours that allow them to maintain their primacy as authorisers of change, rather than become subjects of change under some form of compulsion. Mahadev's initiative to get his property registered under joint ownership is not a uniquely thought-out solution towards gender equality but was the formalisation of a longstanding government order that was not being implemented.

Mahadev shows exceptional concern for his wife in being sensitive to the rhythm of her menstrual cycle, and being sensitive to her sexual needs. However, in the ultimate analysis he did not undergo vasectomy, which is often confused with semen loss anxiety and loss of libido (Srivastava

2004; Alter 1997), power and potency, which are often considered a defining feature of men's masculinity in India.

4 Body-building, masculinity and notions of gender

Not far from Tippehari are the villages of Kombadwadi and Sonalwadi, which are dominated by the culture of *pehalwaani*, or wrestling and body-building practices. The Astitva team shared that they had tried to include these villages within the gender equality project but the *pehalwaans* (wrestlers) did not show any interest in engaging with it. The Astitva team said that in these villages the men fear that if the women are empowered they would no longer value and respect the men's masculinity. The *pehalwaani* culture is so overwhelming in these villages that women's issues are not really discussed. Most of the men have been associated with the *kusti* (wrestling) trainings from their early childhood and youth, and their masculinity is shaped by a sense of men's power and authority that prohibits women's visibility in the public domain.

During an early visit to the village of Kombadwadi, the first author met groups of *pehalwaans* in their *akhara* (the indigenous fitness centre that is housed in a specific physical space like a room). This space also serves as a leisure centre for the boys and young men and is an important place where they can socialise. The young men said that they virtually live in the *akhara*, religiously performing their body-building exercises in both the mornings and the evenings using different indigenous body-building apparatus. Besides this they did meditation, free-hand exercises, and workouts. The *vastaad* (fitness trainer who is also a *pehalwaan*) visits the *akhara* to train his students. The *pehalwaans* start their training when they are about ten years old and continues until they are 25, when they are expected to get married. The younger boys live in their homes and visit their village *akhara*, but at 16 years of age they are expected by the *vastaad* and their *akhara* peers to live on the premises. Their passion for body-building is so intense that once they move into the *akhara*, they rarely visit their own homes, spreading out their bed rolls to sleep on at night. Their cooking arrangements are in one corner of the room.²

The culture of body-building and wrestling in these villages has existed for the past few

generations. Becoming a *pehalwaan* is a matter of family pride and respect. The *pehalwaans* said that they participate in local and national *pehalwaan* competitions, and this is also a source of income. Besides this, they earn respect and fame by representing their village in the competition. When a *pehalwaan* wins a competition he becomes the village 'hero', and his victory is celebrated with great pride, with villagers claiming it to be the collective victory of the village.

It is also said that nobody tries to challenge a *pehalwaan's* family. Their families are treated with respect and honour, and the female members of the family are always well regarded and respected in public spaces. Unlike in other villages in the Sangola area where harassment of women is common, in Sonalwadi and Kombadwadi it is much less apparent. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, due to the *pehalwaan* culture in the village, women are treated with respect, and men feel it is their duty to 'protect' women. Secondly, the *pehalwaans* are warned by their *vastaad* that the man-woman relationship distracts the mind from the more important task of body-building. And this is one of the important reasons why the *pehalwaan* live away from their homes and in the *akhara*.

During their training, the young *pehalwaans* are always under the moral and sexual scrutiny of the *vastaad*, who keeps a close eye on his students' expressions of sexual desire. The *pehalwaan* is required to wear a cotton under-garment called a *langot*. The *vastaad* scrutinises the boys' *langots* every morning to check for erection and semen stains. The loss of semen is a matter of concern because it is associated with lack of sexual restraint and self-control, indicating loss of masculinity. If the *vastaad* notices semen stains, the student is given even more rigorous exercises to divert his sexual energy towards physical fitness and body-building (on masculinity and ascetism, see Chakraborty 2011).

5 Body-building and chauvinism: A challenge to the gender equality approach

Joseph Alter's (2000, 1997) study of the Indian wrestling culture had drawn attention to 'cultural nationalism' and the nationalistic ideologies that are symbolised by the *pehalwaan's* body and identity. The *pehalwaan's* body becomes the site of pride for the society to which he belongs. The hyper-masculine image of the wrestlers becomes

associated with and represents the pride and heroism of the entire community. The *pehalwaan* culture also prevents men from reflecting on the vulnerability of women because they are the guardians of their safety, and any efforts to acknowledge and then change women's vulnerable status would imply their failure and become a threat to their masculinity.

The *akhara* and the *pehalwaan* culture symbolises the physical dimensions of manhood that reinforce ideas of nationalism through these men's bodies – associating it with the values of 'courage', 'bravery', 'honour', 'sacrifice' and 'strength', thus creating a gendered notion of the hyper-masculine image based on strength, pride and protection (Mosse 1996). This is similar to Abhik Roy's (Roy 2006) investigation of nationalist masculinity that identifies a hyper-masculine image imbued with an extraordinary sense of 'bravery' but restrained and overcoming material desires, devoted to 'national' interests. In his exploration of Shiv Sena's³ Hindu (masculinist) regime, Roy finds the sense of nationalist chauvinism is related to an understanding of religious dogma, where nationalist chauvinism is symbolised by bravery and (Hinduised) valour to safeguard *bharat mata* (Mother India), with *bharat mata* being understood as a symbol for women. And manliness is proven through the effective safeguarding of women (Roy 2006; Sarkar 2001; Chatterjee 1986).

This form of nationalist masculinity resonates with the *pehalwaan* culture in Sonalwadi and Kombadwadi villages where a sense of 'nationalist' pride is associated with the hyper-masculine *pehalwaan* and his achievements. There is a vicarious fulfilment of honour through the bodily power, strength and aggression that is constructed through the culture of *pehalwaan* contests and the *pehalwaan's* success represents and augments the masculine image of his village, where he becomes the representation of collective strength. This is what Abhik Roy refers to as the 'national hero' (Roy 2006).

The *pehalwaan's* interpretation of women is similar to that of the concept of the female body in the nationalist discourse as interpreted by Partha Chatterjee (1990, 1989). In his writings on Indian nationalism, Chatterjee talks about the representation of female bodies as passive agents who are domesticated, and become the

'honour' of the home – symbolising the 'pure' and the 'virtuous'. Even spaces become gendered, with the public domain becoming the arena for men and the private the world where women live embodying virtue and the honour of the family as well as society at large. This, Chatterjee says, has significant links with the nationalist ideology of masculinity.

The hyper-masculine image of thick and muscular arms and chest creates an anxiety and fear among those men who feel physically inferior to the *pehalwaans* (Brighenti 2007; Carden-Coyne 1999). Women in the *pehalwaan's* family feel protected in their village because the *pehalwaan's* bodily image and masculinity reinforces a sense of hegemony and becomes a symbol of protection for the woman. This sense of women's safety in these villages resonates with the nationalist ideals of Shiv Sena masculinity – the masculine image of the *pehalwaans* becomes the ideological representation of bravery and also the obligation to defend women. It was often remarked that women's harassment is not that common in these villages partly out of fear but also because of respect for the *pehalwaan's* obligations.

The *akhara* inculcates value in the acts of celibacy, restraint and control for the *pehalwaan*, creating a model of morality that is linked to sexual and bodily self-control and abstinence (Alter 1997). In this context, the cultural panic around *pehalwaan* celibacy and the fear of semen loss, as indicated by his master's surveillance, points to two important issues. On the one hand, it is driven by concern for physiological wellbeing, where loss of semen would indicate loss of energy and hinder the body-building practices. But on the other hand, it points to a morality where the *pehalwaan* is the embodiment of nationalist aspirations and celibacy is the metaphor for 'nationalistic' ideals (Alter 2000). This is similar to the nationalist ideological understanding of 'celibacy' that is related to the Gandhian principles of self-restraint, leading to good health, and then to a 'good' nation-state.

6 Masculinities, gender interventions and change: some reflections

The ethnography of the two different sets of villages shows two sets of realities. In one case, as a result of the application of an intervention that had been successful elsewhere, we see changes that seem to be going in the desired

direction, while in another there is resistance to the intervention and resistance to change, and a whole set of cultural–ideological underpinnings appear to explain this resistance. This situation begs a few questions about the practice of gender interventions with men. Do the two contextual realities provide sufficient clues about situations where gender interventions can and cannot be successful – that is, provide a modicum of predictability in terms of outcomes, which is often the holy grail of development practitioners? Is our assumption that the two contexts are substantially different tenable or true? Does the change we see in Mahadev represent a fundamental change in cultural–ideological moorings and, if so, why did this happen? A useful framework to discuss these questions is the context-, strategy- and outcome-based analysis suggested in realist evaluation practice for understanding complex social interventions (Pawson *et al.* 2005).

The story of Mahadev in Tippehari highlights the change process, while the story of the *pehalwaans* in Kombadwadi and Sonalwadi typifies resistance to change most likely due to the cultural–ideological notions of masculinity linked with nationalistic and other chauvinisms that perceive women in a particular way. The respect that the *pehalwaan* enjoys in society is earned through long years of rigorous discipline. The training that the *pehalwaan* receives while creating a sense of awareness about his power also engenders him with the responsibility of 'protecting' women. Mahadev, on the other hand, neither has the self-awareness nor the notion of respect. It would thus seem that the two sets of villages and the 'visible' masculinities in them are different. However, is this sufficient reason to assume that the cultural–ideological underpinnings of society are different in these two sets of villages? Probably not. Physically located close to each other in the same region, the *pehalwaani* culture probably provides vicarious pride and merit to other villages in the region as well. It is possible that Mahadev may also admire the rippling muscles of the *pehalwaan*. That we do not know, but what we do know is that Mahadev was not the sublimated symbol of nationalistic pride for his community and did not carry the burden of their expectations. He drank, was violent and abusive to women, and did not harbour notions of 'woman as honour' that he had to protect at all

costs. He also probably carried some guilt, an example of which clearly shows up in his story around coerced sex that he thinks led to an abortion. In the case of the *pehalwaans*, their initial response of rejection stems from their current notions about themselves and of women and their roles in the community. But the intervention did not stay around in their environment after this rejection to test whether such *pehalwaans* can actually change if they are part of the intervention. Experiences elsewhere suggest that body-building cultures can coexist with alternative conceptions of masculinity (Das *et al.* 2012b).

Some reasons for the gender-related perceptions and behaviours among men like Mahadev have been discussed earlier. Mention has been made of the process that allows it to be imbued with local meaning and an 'everyday' context to analyse gender power relations and to generate locally appropriate solutions. However, in order to engage in this process of reflection it is necessary to have a reflective nature and a reason to reflect. In Mahadev's story, references to 'regret' and 'mistakes' provide clues to an individual who acknowledges mistakes and reflects when faced with an adverse situation. These findings are consistent with the earlier findings in UP (SAHAYOG 2007) and a study with men in alternative roles and professions (Das *et al.* 2012b). However, the intervention did not last long enough in the two other villages to test whether the same assumptions regarding change are true in the case of at least some *pehalwaans*. It also remains to be seen what the long-term effects will be of the changes that have started through Mahadev and similar men in the 20 villages of Astitva's project area. Experiences in UP (Das *et al.* 2012a) suggest that there can be an environmental effect of such interventions in a favourable context.

While Mahadev's story is incontrovertibly one of change, it certainly does not indicate a complete rejection of the values attached to 'masculinity'. Mahadev's decision to undergo vasectomy can be a grandstanding of the 'virtue' of being the protector of women, and taking on the burden of contraception. But the fact that he actually did not undergo the operation may actually indicate that he is still unable to resolve the 'masculine' anxieties around libido loss and impotence. However, Mahadev can count very practical benefits from his change. Now he has greater income even after sharing his profits with his wife, who does not in a true sense indicate a separate economic unit. For many of the changes within the family he is the authoriser, and thus the prime mover. He possibly anticipates greater participation of women in the public domain through legally mandated processes that are under way. Mahadev displays leadership within his community through the joint ownership of property, an action that has been repeated by many others in the community. Mahadev's leadership in the change process is also acknowledged by others in the community who are members of the group of which he is the 'animator', providing him a primacy in his community that he did not have earlier. This is also consistent with the experiences of MASVAW in UP (SAHAYOG 2007). In giving up some masculine 'privileges', Mahadev may have actually ended up reaping some additional 'virtues' that are cherished within masculinity – income, leadership, authority. However, a crucial difference in his use of power that is part of male privileges is that he has not used his power to accumulate more power for himself but has instituted mechanisms to share it. This is probably a more sustainable pathway to gender equality because it does not necessarily 'dis-empower' the man for greater empowerment of women.

Notes

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