

INFRASTRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENT'S EFFECTS ON RURAL WOMEN'S  
LIVELIHOODS IN TEHRI-GARHWAL, NORTHERN INDIA

by

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## THESIS ABSTRACT

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Title: Infrastructural Development's Effects on Rural Women's Livelihoods in Tehri-Garhwal, Northern India

This thesis investigates the effects of change and modernization on rural women's livelihoods in northern India. Infrastructural development projects have been identified by research agencies and scholars as beneficial to people in rural areas. I reconceptualize infrastructural development – which here consists of a road, electricity, and irrigation – to act as a lens in which to define and understand the processes of change and modernization. Grounded in feminist methodology, this research is based on interviews with fifty women from six different villages in Tehri-Garhwal, India. I found that while infrastructural development did increase the quality of life for women, women did not experience empowerment. Rather, I argue that the changes brought upon by infrastructural development restructure and redefine the gender inequalities that exist in a region. Infrastructure development acts as a catalyst in a liminal space.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

An hour's drive from the town of Chamba sits a valley that is obscured by the foothills of the Himalaya. The valley lies in shade until late morning – the sun slowly makes its way over the ridges, eventually illuminating the terraced agriculture, the clay and cement houses, the goats and the buffalo, and the little girl chasing them. It shines on the new paved road, and the tractor at the end of the road digging into the hillside. The power lines and satellite dishes strategically placed on several rooftops of the village shine brightly.

This is Saur. This is a village of a dozen families that has, in the last twelve years, become connected to the neighboring “upper village”, as it will be referred to in many interviews during my field work, by a road, electricity and irrigation pipes. Women from Saur and surrounding villages offered stories of their lives as I explored concepts of modernization and women's livelihoods in this remote region of the Himalaya. This is a modernizing world, with technology and new roads providing connectivity of rural areas to connecting regions. Development agencies should consider how these changes affect women and gendered power relations in rural areas.

The marriage traditions in North-West India are gender centric. Once women are married, they leave their birth village and move to their in-law's village. At this time, a woman's social role changes. In essence, the woman moves into the ‘man's’ village. She is a guest, and must adhere to the social rules of his family. It is for this reason that more frequently, anthropologists have considered the male perspective of the village, as

women's lives remain private and domestic (Sharma 1980). My research takes into account the perceptions of women whose lives have changed as a result of infrastructural development and critically analyzes the processes related to change and modernization in rural areas.

In my research, I explore women's experiences with the modernizing landscape of the Tehri-Garhwal region of Northern India. I do this by interviewing fifty women from six different villages. It is important to note that although the interviews were entirely composed of women, men's perspectives may have still been prominent in the discussions, as their positions of power might dominate certain societal ideals and values. I use infrastructural development, which in my research sites consists of a road, electricity, and irrigation, as a lens to understand and define modernization. In my research I present existing literature which supports the notion that infrastructural development is a legitimate form of rural development which affects rural livelihoods. In this research, I use following terms: private sphere, standards, gender inequality, empowerment, liminal, catalyst, restructuring, and redefining. It is necessary that I define these terms within the context of my research.

When I discuss the private sphere, I am referring to a woman's geographic and internal place. There is remarkable literature about women and their relationship to the private versus public sphere. The fault that I find with this literature is that it is so literal and does not account for the space within.

Standards is the term that I have chosen to refer to women's expectations, behaviors and performances, as they relate to societal values and norms. These are maintained and expressed by both men and women in my research sites.

Gender inequality is the discrepancy between men and women's access to and control of resources, decision making and power, and mobility. Gender inequality exists as a result of deep patriarchal processes. In my research I define empowerment as women maintaining equality in these three categories.

Infrastructural development creates liminal space. By liminal space, I am referring to a region that is undergoing change as a result the development process. This term is significant because it characterizes the in-between standards of regions, not only in my research site, but globally. In my results chapter, you will see certain women's statements at odd with each other, or women referring to a 'before and after', indicating something that is not complete. This is characteristic of being in a liminal space.

Roads are a catalyst of change. I use this term because the term describes something that promotes change while itself remaining unchanged. In this instance, infrastructural development is unchanged, while it creates significant change throughout gendered power relations in my research sites.

Throughout my results chapter I discuss the restructuring and redefining of gender inequalities. The restructuring of gender inequalities means that gender inequalities still exist, but these inequalities are experienced and performed in different ways. The redefining of gender inequalities, on the other hand, refers to women's internal perceptions of themselves regarding their values and expectations of womanhood in these spaces.

In this thesis, I argue that infrastructural development restructures and redefines gender inequality. Infrastructural development is a catalyst for the redefinition of standards in a liminal space.

Chapter One includes a historical and cultural background of the region. It is necessary to understand how the societal and cultural factors that exist in the region shape gendered relations. In this chapter I also include a background of infrastructural development in rural areas. It is a fascinating time to study the impacts of infrastructural development in rural areas, because the phenomena that I investigate in my research transcends to many regions of the world. In this chapter I also discuss the juxtaposition of tradition and modernity. I argue that fundamental and historical patriarchal forces maintain power over developing regions.

Chapter Two introduces the current scholarly discussion of gender inequality in India. Feminist scholars, as well as development practitioners are concerned with the pervasive inequalities that exist in India and the barrier to women's human development as a result of these inequalities. The United Nations Development Program's (UNDP) Human Development Report (HDR) states, "Gender equality and women's empowerment are fundamental dimensions of human development. Because half of humanity is not enjoying progress in human development, such development is not universal" (2016: 12). The literature review in this chapter will explore these issues of human development and women's empowerment that the HDR addresses. In addition to the exploration of issues regarding gender inequality, I combine existing definitions of empowerment to define empowerment as a woman's ability to experience decision making and power, access to and control of resources, and mobility (Kabeer 1999;2001, Rowlands 1997). In this chapter, I explore current research relevant to those themes.

In Chapter Three I demonstrate my methods. My decision to use feminist methodology in my work was necessary to understanding issues that Indian women

faced. In this section I include a detailed description of my research process and research sites, to better help the reader understand the scene of my field work.

My methodology section is followed by a discussion of my findings in Chapter Four. Here, I present and comment on the oral testimonies of the women I interviewed. I discuss how their experiences relate to the existing literature in the field, and present my own conclusions on women's lived experiences in relation to decision making and power, access to and control of resources, and mobility.

Finally, in Chapter Five, I present my conclusions and provide recommendations for further work in the field of rural women's livelihoods.

### **The Tehri-Garhwal Region of Uttarakhand**

Uttarakhand is a state in Northern India. Formally known as Uttaranchal, Uttarakhand became the 27<sup>th</sup> state of India in 2000. With Tibet to the north and Nepal to the east, this is a Himalayan state that is about 86 percent mountainous. That the region is so mountainous speaks to the geographic isolation that exists for many communities.

Uttarakhand is divided into the Garhwal or Kumaon region, with its inhabitants known as Garhwali or Kumaoni. Within these two regions consist thirteen districts, including Tehri-Garhwal, the site of my research. The majority (87.95 percent) of Uttarakhand speaks Hindi, although regional dialects do exist. The economy of Uttarakhand is the second largest in India, with a per capita income 1.5x greater than the national average (Gusain 2014). Agriculture is the largest contributor in the economy, with basmati rice, wheat, soybeans, apples, oranges, and pears being some of the largest exports (PHD Profile 2011). Following agriculture, tourism and hydropower significantly contribute to

the economy of Uttarakhand. 82.97 percent of the population are Hindu, 13.95 percent Muslim, followed by Sikh, Christian, Buddhist, and Jain.

There are approximately 10,086,000 people in the state of Uttarakhand, and about 4,950,000 of the population are women. The literacy rate in Uttarakhand is 87.4 percent for men, and 70.01 percent for women. Of the approximate 10 million people in Uttarakhand, 69.77 percent of the population, or about 7 million people, live in rural areas. In rural areas, the literacy rate for men remains close to the state averages at 86.62 percent. Conversely, women's literacy drops to 66 percent (Indian Census, 2011). The gender gap in literacy is greater in rural Uttarakhand than in urban Uttarakhand. This is consistent with global development trends.

### **Infrastructural Development in India**

India's basic infrastructure, such as roads, electricity, telecommunications, housing, health, water and sanitation, is essential for progress and prosperity of the urban and rural population of India (Ghosh 2017). 24 percent of India's urban population lives in slums (World Bank 2014), without proper connections to electricity and water and sanitation. Infrastructural development is of growing importance in a country with a population of over 1.3 billion people.

Increasing connectivity has led to globalization throughout the subcontinent. The development of infrastructure is responsible for a decrease in poverty and economic growth. While there are many types of infrastructural development projects in existence, I focus primarily on road development in rural areas, although I cannot ignore the

significance of growing connectivity of electricity and irrigation in these regions, as the topics of electricity and irrigation were frequently brought up by my participants.

Until the year 2000, 40 percent of India's 835,000 villages lacked access to all-weather roads. While there is great connectivity, with 3.3 million kilometers of roads, 2.7 million kilometers of these roads are in poor condition. 74 percent of Indians rural populations are not included in the national economy, as a result of lack of road access (World Bank 2011). In response to these road conditions, the World Bank launched the National Rural Roads Program in 2000. Over the next decade, this program established connectivity to 73,000 rural communities in Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh (World Bank 2011). The success of this program allowed for the continuation of the Rural Roads Program. The World Bank declared, "The new project will benefit an estimated 6.1 million people in Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Meghalaya, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh where it aims to provide 91% connectivity on average by constructing 24,200 km of all-weather roads" (2011). Under this plan, it is the Government of India's plan to connect all of India's villages by road by 2019 (India Brand Equity Foundation, 2018). Road development in rural areas can be witnessed frequently, as these regions are undergoing rapid growth. The literature asserts that rural roads are the most important category of infrastructure that contributes to rural development (Ghosh 2017).

In addition to rural road development projects, there is a demand for urban road development because of India's fast growing economy. The government of India established a program called the National Highway Development Program to increase the quantity and quality of highways in the country (India Brand Equity Foundation, 2018).

The priority of the Indian Government was cemented in developing the State and National highways in order to support and increase economic growth, but there is growing movement toward supporting rural infrastructure development projects.

In conjunction with India's growing road network, rural India's connection to electricity is expanding. Although connectivity has been gestating, there remain 230 million people in India without access to electricity (Jena 2017). The government of India hopes to bring 500-megawatt mini-grid solar systems to a fifth of India's population over the next five years. While this is an improvement, researchers have noted that for electricity to really make an impact on people's wellbeing, more than a few hours a day of electricity is needed, which is more than what the megawatt mini-grid solar systems can provide (Jena 2017). Increased amounts of regular electricity allow for an overall higher quality of life. I will expand on this in my results section.

Finally, in addition to roads and electricity, providing irrigation to rural areas has improved people's wellbeing. In 1972, the Indian government began to focus their energy on the water supply. In the 1980's, it became a national priority that the Indian government provided access to water. In 2011, "95 percent of India's rural population had access to some form of water supply infrastructure" (World Bank 2016). Although the report indicates that most of the population has access to a water supply, the report fails to define 'access' in this context. In many instances, women must walk long distances or wait in lines to benefit from this infrastructure.

Of India's population, 68.84 percent lives in rural areas, and infrastructural development to rural areas has been shown to decrease poverty, stimulate the economy, and increase wellbeing. Several government initiatives have been established to support

rural infrastructural development. These include the Rural Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF), Accelerated Irrigation Benefits Program, Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (Rural Roads Program), Rajiv Gandhi Grameen Vidyutikaran Yojana and National Rural Employment Guarantee Act of 2005 (also known as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) (Ghosh 2017). The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act supports the rural poor by guaranteeing 100 days of unskilled jobs per rural household, boosting economic security in that household. However, in 2014-2015, only 40 days of employment were offered to each household, on average (Ghosh 2017), questioning the success of this program. Half of India's rural population works in the agricultural sector. The presence of infrastructure in rural areas contributes to agricultural growth because productivity increases when access to markets is more easily available to farmers. This contributes to an increased demand in rural areas and integrates rural economies with the rest of the economy (Ghosh 2017).

As of 2013, 94.5% of the villages were electrified, 59.8% of the roads were surfaced and as of 2007–08, only 44.6% of rural areas were irrigated (Ghosh 2017). Infrastructural development has drastic impacts on people's livelihoods, and the lack of infrastructure is seen as a major barrier to human development.

### **Effects of Roads on Rural Areas: The Case of Shimshal**

There are numerous studies which highlight the effect of roads on rural areas. Perhaps the most studied region of road development and rural connectivity is along the Karakoram Highway (KKH). The KKH is a road development project in Pakistan which has spanned hundreds of miles and several decades (Kreutzmann, 2002). Kreutzmann analyzed the

KKH's creation of economic and social change in multiple villages across rural Pakistan. In his work, he found that the KKH had many drastic impacts on rural areas.

In the many villages he studied, he found that primarily, the road allowed for the cheap importation of goods. While this can be seen as a positive effect of road development, local farmers suffered because it suddenly became more cost effective to buy imported wheat, jeopardizing the livelihoods of those in rural areas (Kreutzmann, 2002). As a result, Kreutzmann found that the inhabitants of mountain communities began working in non-agricultural, more urban communities. In turn, the agricultural work in the mountain communities became the responsibility of women and children. School enrollment for girls dropped as a result, as girls assumed the responsibilities abandoned by men. When the men returned home, they could afford cars and tractors, changing the agricultural lives of those in the villages. I present Kreutzmann's study to illustrate vast and significant changes associated with road development in rural areas. He touches on myriad topics, including employment, gender roles, and effects of migration and return migration. One of the most studied areas of road development on rural areas, and certainly in the KKH region, is Shimshal, Pakistan (Butz 1996;2001, Cook and Butz 2002;2011;2017, Hussain 2015).

Shimshal is a farming and herding community in the mountains of Pakistan. At 9,000 feet, it is the most recent village to be connected to the KKH. Unlike other timelier road development in the region, the road to Shimshal was built over the course of eighteen years, which allowed for many long term studies. By the time the Shimshal road opened to traffic in 2003, the travel time to the provincial capital of Gilgit took four hours round-trip, instead of one direction taking one week on foot. This road has provoked

discussion among scholars about the transformation that roads generate in mountain communities. In their study, Cook and Butz gathered oral testimonies from villagers in Shimshal in order to understand the impacts of roads on rural people. Embedded in these testimonies are themes of resistance to change, tradition in modernity, and finally, the theme of cultural and self-identity.

Resistance to change in the name of maintaining tradition is a common theme that I identified in the oral testimonies from the villagers in Shimshal. These ideas regarding a break from tradition are reflected in the testimonies in more specific ways. One testimony conveys the benefits and downfalls that will come with the establishment of the Karakoram Highway. The testimony is as follows:

When the road links the village it will bring with it prosperity, opportunities and earning sources ... But it will bring prosperity at the cost of disunity and destruction of moral values. It will facilitate multiple sources of income and then people will not care for each other. The poor will get closer to God as a result of prayers, and wealth will drive the rich to luxury and arrogance. The road will provide several facilities, and then people from different backgrounds will come to the village and possibly destroy our peacefulness, and that would create problems (Cook and Butz 2011: 358).

This testimony articulates the villager's anxieties surrounding the impending deconstruction of the comfort that goes hand-in-hand with tradition. That is to say, the fear of outsiders entering the village, the belief that the road will dismantle previously existing social relationships from an investment in one's family and community, to a concern only for oneself.

Cook and Butz touch on this idea of change when they observe, "The road allows Shimshalis who live outside the village to return home for visits more easily and frequently. Their baggage includes new ideas about clothing, Islamic practice, appropriate life goals, and leisure activities. Villagers worry that external influences

undermine local customs and ignite tensions about what constitutes ‘indigenous culture’” (2011). The key point to take away from this passage is the comment regarding the uncertainty about what qualifies as ‘indigenous culture’ post-transition into modernity. This fear regarding identity, especially the fear of a total loss of indigenous identity, is a prominent theme here. This reflects the strong sense of societal and cultural values that exist, and an unwillingness for change of these values. While the villagers in Shimshal reflect themes of ‘resistance to change’ and ‘tradition and modernity’, respectively, the road also incites discussion of cultural and personal identity. Cook and Butz observe in the following testimony:

When the KKH linked Hunza to down-country, people established communication links and got access to markets. But Shimshal remained in isolation. This was the time when Shimshalis felt discrimination for their inaccessible location. There developed social and economic differences [from other communities], which created our feelings of deprivation and discrimination; people felt as if they were lacking something (Cook and Butz 2011: 359).

In this testimony exists a clear effect that the road had on villagers in Shimshal. The villagers only feel like they are lacking something once they have increased exposure to other villages. They are only aware of what they “have not” when they bear witness to “have.” As Kreutzmann writes, roads allow men to leave and work in cities, often returning with an increase in material goods, changing perceptions of poverty (Kreutzmann 2002). People might inadvertently compare themselves to the return-migrants, changing their own self-image of what it means to be rich or poor. Villagers of Shimshal experienced a similar phenomenon.

This emergence of the us/them mentality that villagers experience in Shimshal one that is prevalent in Nanda Shrestha’s article, “Becoming a Development Category.”

Shrestha opens his essay by establishing ‘undeveloped’ and ‘lacking human dignity’ as analogous terms. He writes that the presence of development, or *bikas*, in his town of Pokhara, Nepal created an ‘us/them’ mentality among families and in communities. This is particularly apparent in Shimshal with the existence of the new road when the villagers express “social and economic differences... created our feelings of deprivation and discrimination” (Cook and Butz 2011). Shrestha argues that “development fortified the existing class hierarchy” (Shrestha 1995). Suddenly, he writes, Nepali cultures and values that were previously considered honorable become reserved for the poor, as those who could afford it became ‘Western,’ deepening inequalities that were already in place in Nepal (Shrestha 1995). According to the subjects of his story, to adhere to Nepali tradition indicated adherence to a certain class, or lack thereof. In this sense, Shrestha argues that as a result of *bikas*, he and his community lost ‘indigenous economic systems and values’ as foreign aid colonized the minds and actions of Nepali people (Shrestha 1995). Historically, government and development organizations spend significant resources on roads and that roads, in a sense, serve to access and govern rural areas. In Shrestha’s experience, development that he experienced had serious and lasting effects on his culture and community. For example, Nepali livelihoods that were once valued, such as subsistence farming, became considered ‘less than’. This devaluing of subsistence farming occurred when youth in the communities learned about Western practices, in the same way that Shimshalis experienced ‘feelings of deprivation and discrimination.’

Moreover, in Shimshal, women have distinctly unique reactions to how the road changes gender roles. Ibraz opens his discussion of gender roles in relation to the perceived levels of production in Pakistan by explaining that a majority of households in

Pakistan are supported by men, even though women account for half of the population. This is not limited to any specific area, rather, this fact encompasses households in both rural and urban areas (Ibraz 1993). This fact is made more complex by Ibraz's assertion that women do contribute to their households in terms of sustenance production. What is so complex about this idea is that this contribution to the household on the part of women in no way elevates their status. Cook and Butz examine differing testimonies among women in Shimshal as they observe:

Nowadays, men spend most of the time outside the village earning an income for their families. And the women then have to play all roles, such as watering the fields and forests, which were previously performed by men... Women are taking care of their kids, cleaning their homes, herding, and now are helping their husbands in agricultural activities (Cook and Butz 2011: 33).

As a foundation for this idea that the roles that women do play in rural Pakistan are of lesser value than those of men, Ibraz discusses the western concepts of the public sphere versus the private sphere and the way that they translate over in Pakistan, and are understood instead in terms of culture versus nature. Ibraz explains that women are closer to nature in terms of physiology—that is to say, their ability to bear children. Further, Ibraz understands women as being linked with nature a disadvantage to them because this connection to nature means that they are literally restrained to the home. The changing gender roles that women experience in Shimshal echo Shrestha's discussion about cultural identity. He shares in his memoir that development changed his culture, and it is evident that development in Shimshal is changing the daily livelihoods of women.

Moving away from the discussion of perceived limitations of Pakistani women, Haq and Ali attempt to quantify Pakistani women's happiness in relation to autonomy. They suggest that "it is generally believed that autonomy brings happiness and

satisfaction to women's lives" (Ali and Haq 2006). The authors have found that although women do report having less autonomy in spheres of education and decision making, still 71% of women say that they are quite happy with their present lives (Ali and Haq 2006). The authors hypothesize that perhaps the teachings of Islam may help explain how these numbers reflect the internalized complacency of these women, as Islam instructs followers to be patient and content (Ali and Haq 2006). More specifically in relation to Shimshal, women in the village experience the road in differing ways. That is to say that, while some women believe that the road provides them with freedoms, others are afraid because they believe that the road brings concerns of safety.

As the road has approached, it has eased our lives. It will remove the load from the backs of our men. But the freedom of life that we are enjoying today will no longer exist when the road is linked. At present, wherever women want to go within our territory, we can move without fear. But when the road link is completed we will even have to lock our doors, which we keep unlocked today, as there is no fear and risk of theft from outsiders. It seems to me that we will lock our doors and will not be able to move without men (Cook and Butz 2011: 33).

When the authors write "it is generally believed that autonomy brings happiness and satisfaction to women's lives" (Ali and Haq 2006), the use of 'generally' presumes that there is a shared belief that is held across a certain group of people. Further, the assumption that women need to be autonomous in order to be happy is one that seems to be a western ideal. Moreover, the authors conclude that "not all established indicators of autonomy bring about happiness in the lives of Pakistan." (Ali and Haq 2006). This research is relevant because it supports the notion that Western and Pakistani criteria for happiness are in conflict with one another, which can be particularly problematic with the 'seductive power' that the West holds on the rest of the world (Said 1995), because with this logic, Pakistani values might be undermined in some way. Western ideals have a

tendency to be more captivating to those in rural areas, because of what Shrestha calls an “entrenched culture of imperialism” (2005).

Shrestha offers the following statement to those who have experienced Western development, “Let us free ourselves from the trappings of Westernized development fetishism; let us unlearn the Western values and development thinking which have infested our minds” (1995). Shrestha would argue that rural communities must be prepared for the sociocultural change that their communities will encounter, especially as road development becomes more and more common in a globalized world. The themes of resistance to change, tradition and modernity, and the changing of cultural identity are reflected in the testimonies Shimshal, Pakistan, which is just one example of a changing region as a result of modernization.

### **Women’s Status Everywhere**

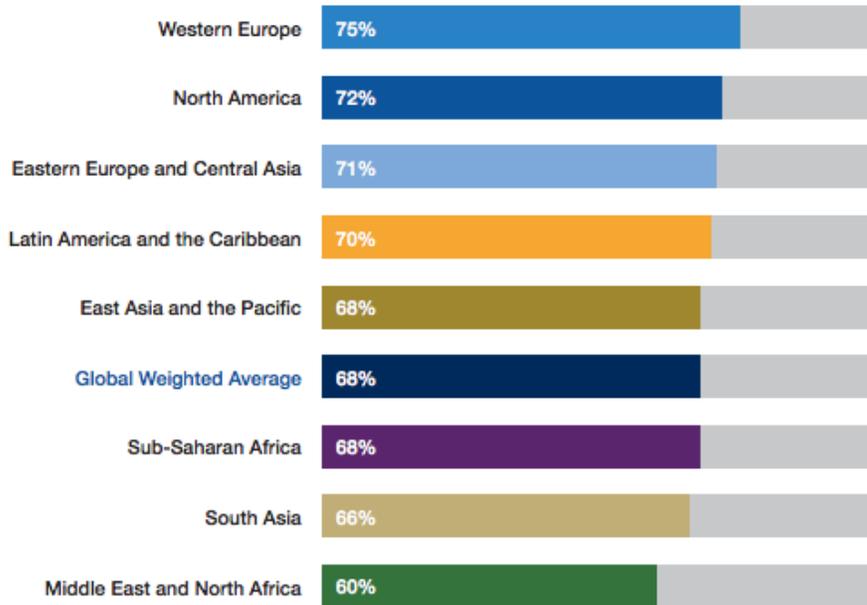
Amartya Sen defines development as a practice of broadening freedoms equitably for all people (Sen 1999). Although this should apply equally among genders, there are stark inequalities between men and women. This obvious inequality has been the catalyst of numerous plans. The Millennial Development Goals (MDGs), established by the United Nations (UN), announced support for gender equality in Goal 3: *Promote gender equality and empower women*. The MDGs were followed by the Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs, which also direct their energy and resources to issues of gender inequality. Goal 5, *Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*, consists of nine target points using straightforward language. Finally, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), is an international treaty which was

developed by the United Nations in 1979 and has established a structure for the advancement of women, and to date, 189 countries have ratified (including India, in 1993). Despite the efforts of the MDGs and SDGs, global gender inequalities persist.

Globally, women experience inequality in various and significant ways. As UN Women published in 2015, 23 percent of parliament and 9 percent of peace negotiators between 1992-2011 were women. Women earn 24 percent less than men. 1 in 3 women experience sexual or physical violence. Only 4 percent of CEO's are women. Gender inequality is only portrayed in the media 9 percent of the time, suggesting a lack of public acceptance and awareness. 830 women die every day in preventable complications during childbirth. Girls are not enrolled in school as often as boys. Women disproportionately lack access to clean water. Women account for 60 percent of worldwide illiteracy (UN Women 2015).

These statistics represent only a few ways in which women experience inequality. There has been little progress in these areas in the past 20 years (Beijing Declaration, UN Women 2015). Figure 1 demonstrates the distance to gender parity, as measured by the Global Gender Gap Index. The measurement of gender parity takes in consideration economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment (World Economic Forum 2017). This chart illustrates the experiences of women across the globe, and puts into perspectives the gender inequality in South Asia.

Figure 1: Distance to gender parity, by region. Source: Global Gender Gap Index (2017)



In India, a woman’s status is reflected in the way she ought to behave. There exist very clear definitions of the ideal woman. For instance, Indian women do not, and ‘should not’ exercise primary control and access to resources. Sharma provides an example of women’s roles in regards to control of land. She blatantly states, “A good wife participates in the control which her husband exercises over any land he may own, but does not command rights in land independently of his family” (1998: 40). This quote illustrates a woman’s role in relation to her husband. Additionally, this quote is prescriptive in nature. It claims that, a woman may make suggestions to her husband, whom may choose to acknowledge or ignore them. The quote also prescribes what the wife should not do. In this case, the wife should not assume any rights over land, as she has none. On a larger scale, this quote points toward how women contribute to their own standards and expectations. The way that women behave, and the reception of that

behavior by the people around them, creates guidelines for what is appropriate and inappropriate behavior. They literally create their own definitions of womanhood by embodying ideals and perpetuating standards.

Moreover, by participating in the perpetuation of these standards, women are complacent in their own disempowerment. By participating in her husband's control over land, she is submitting that she has none. On power, Naila Kabeer suggests that power is the "ability to make choices" but that *choice* is complicated by its own nature. Choice is only entwined with power if one had the power to choose otherwise. In this light, the "good wife" that Sharma describes is inherently disempowered, but maintaining her own disempowerment.

In regards to control of land specifically, it is important to note that land is a significant commodity and source of income. The implication of this is that, if women do not exercise primary control of land, then we can understand that women experience inequality of other matters of gendered power. There is one item that women certainly maintain primary control of, and that is jewelry. At marriage, a bride is gifted jewelry, and this jewelry remains hers and is in her control throughout her life. The significance here is that a woman has control over something that was gifted *to* her, further demonstrating her ultimate reliance on others. This is not something that she earned or purchased.

In rural Northern India, a girl's childhood is defined by preparation for marriage. Her impending marriage takes her from being the "daughter of the village" to being the "bride of the village" (Jeffery 1996). This is a rhetorical and geographical transition. Throughout her childhood, she learns from her parents how to please future in-laws. She

learns how to cook and care for animals, and how to answer to demands. She grasps an understanding of what is required to act 'tamed' and domesticated' (Jeffery 1996). Once she marries, her most important job will be to birth and raise children. There is a certain preference to having sons, because sons take care of parents during their old age. Sons are valued more than daughters, and this preference is well-known in families. Girls are raised knowing that they are valued less than men. This is cyclical cycle that results in women's internalized oppression, which expresses itself in a myriad of ways. Because women know that their parents want boys, they are also aware that they do not want girls. Girls are raised with the guilt of feeling burdensome. These girls eventually become mothers and continue the cycle of preferring sons over daughters. Providing sons is challenging in this region, considering that the infant mortality rate (IMR) in Uttarkhand is 38 deaths per 1,000 births, which is greater than the national average of 34 per 1,000 births (Government of India 2018).

### **Tradition and Modernity**

When discussing the juxtaposition of tradition and modernity, it is crucial to establish a definition of modernization. It is a term that carries judgment, which modernization theorists have established. Donald Donham, the author of *Marxist Modern*, writes rather humorously, "Have anthropologists or historians yet appreciated the consequences that flow from the apparently simple fact that some actors view their society as "behind" and therefor in a need of a way to "catch up"? (Donham 1999). In other words, some societies feel that movement within societies is linear. In these terms, catching up, or modernizing, is the ultimate goal. The concept of "tradition and modernity" are at the core of the

development discourse and as such, these terms must be defined.

My concern is that the binary thinking of tradition/modernity is one that implies hierarchy and value, suggesting that one is better or more right than the other. The term ‘modernization’ gained popularity during the 1960’s in the United States when the modernization theory was offered as an alternative to Marxist social development. More contemporary definitions of modernity are being contemplated by scholars. As one of the founders of modernist discourse, Giddens (1998) defines modernity as “a certain set of attitudes towards the world; a complex of economic institutions, especially industrial production and a market economy; a certain range of political institutions” (94). I do not entirely disagree with Giddens’ definition of modernization, but I do think it assumes Western superiority.

W.W. Rostow’s modernity thesis is one that is still influential to theorists. As Germond-Duret (2016) notices, Jeffrey Sachs refers to economic development in terms of a ladder. This implication that developing countries go through a system of linear development is the type of binary thinking that is employed by some development thinkers. This type of linear thinking positions societies as ones that, according to Western development models, must be developed and modernized.

Another way of understanding this dichotomy is in Stuart Hall’s (1996) work. Hall begins his article titled “The West and the East: Discourse and Power” by defining the West as a “society that is developed, industrialized, urbanized, capitalist, secular and modern” (Hall 1996). By defining the West, he establishes non-Western as the opposite of Western. He writes that by defining the West as developed, or good, it can be reasoned that the non-West is underdeveloped, or bad. This definition allows people to understand

difference in each other (Hall 1996), or to define oneself against another culture. In agreement with Shrestha, when Hall writes that “the idea of ‘the West,’ once produced, became productive in its turn,” he is suggesting that certain power dynamics and positionalities emerged once the West was defined. Because the West defines itself against the non-West, Hall suggests that Westerners will inevitably position themselves as the dominant civilization (Hall 1996). Those who are ‘undeveloped’ start to associate themselves as ‘bad’ because the West is ‘good’ and they are not the West. This position of power has been repurposed to justify colonialization, and, more recently, to justify concepts of development, as those in power considered Western ideals to be superior to non-Western ideals.

Modernization theory emerged into the development discourse in the 1960s to explain and discuss the change of societies from ‘premodern’ to modern. The theory assumes that with development assistance, societies can undergo the linear process of becoming modern, mirroring the values of Western states. Many theories have emerged that criticize modernization theory, precisely because of its linear approach. Dependency theorists discuss countries as developed, or ‘the core’, and underdeveloped, which is ‘the periphery’. Dependency theorists assert that modernization theory justifies oppression and exploitation of the ‘peripheral’ countries, reinforcing post-colonial notions. Additionally, many feminist scholars have criticized modernization theory. Catherine Scott (1996) provides an excellent argument regarding the impacts of applying modernization theory into gender and development practice.

In “Rereading Modernization and Dependency Theory,” Scott explores concepts of gender and modernity. She writes that modernization theory makes arbitrary

distinctions between tradition and modernity and argues that these distinctions between tradition and modernity are obsolete because of the modernization theory (Scott 1996). It is problematic that the West sees itself as an example for modernist development work because of the undermining of 'traditional' values. She highlights the relationship between empowerment and modernization. According to Scott, modernization theory requires the "emergence of a rational and industrial man, an individual who is receptive to new ideas, acknowledges different opinions, is punctual and optimistic, and believes that rewards should be distributed on the basis of universalistic rules" (Scott 1996). From this quote, we can discern that modernization theory places women as barriers to progress. Modernization theorists understand the public sphere as the space in which men have entered, as compared to the private sphere of the village where women remain (Scott 1996). This gendered division of space can be reconceptualized as the 'core vs. peripheral', in which the 'core' asserts more power. The 'core' holds more power than the 'peripheral'. One is progressive while the other is stagnant. This dichotomy between private/public spheres in relation to gender is one that I find rather archaic, although it is one that was at the center of modernization theory as it related to gender and is a concept that has been used many times since then. Modernity is often seen as synonymous with urbanization, compared to the tradition of rural areas. Scott writes that tradition is often depicted as that which should be overcome and that modernization theory views women and tradition as a part of the past (Scott 1996). Again, modernization theory undermines preexisting notions of value and tradition and suggests that one is more valuable than the other. In modernist literature, the terms 'development' and 'empowerment' are often

used interchangeably, implying that to be empowered is to be developed. The implication here is that if you are not developed then you are not, and cannot be empowered.

The dangers of this mentality are explored in observations of Edward Said's work. Said (1948) defines the study of Orientalism as "Anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient--and this applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian, or philologist--either in its specific or its general aspects, is an Orientalist, and what he or she says or does is Orientalism" (2). He notes that scholars in this field prefer not to consider themselves as Orientalists because of the negative connotations of colonialism (Said 1948). He suggests in his work that Europeans gained in power and strength by studying and defining themselves against the Orient. The language in which the West uses to discuss the Orient in turn defines the Orient. This places the West in a powerful position. It was possible for Westerners to define the Orient because Westerners had the privilege of being able to study the Orient.

Said's conversations about the Westerners and the Orient are about power. Similarly, these definitions of tradition and of domestication of Indian women are dictated foremost by those in power. Referring back to Kabeer's discussion of power, she claims that "People who exercise a great deal of choice in their lives may be *very powerful*, but they are not *empowered*...because they were never disempowered in the first place." This is significant because it points to the way that gendered power relations in India mirror power relations between the Westerners who create the definitions and the Orient that is the subject of the definition. In the same way that the Orient, in Said's case, lacks the autonomy to define itself, so too do rural Indian women. Lack of agency is key

to Kabeer's definition of disempowerment, and is vital to understanding the way that women in rural Indian continue to maintain and have maintained their disempowerment.

In another text titled *Queer Phenomenology*, Sara Ahmed discusses the Orient and positionality. Ahmed connects the term Orient, or East, with orientate. She states, "It is not incidental that the word "orientate" refers to both the practices of finding one's way by establishing one's direction (according to the axes of north, south, east, and west) and to the east itself as one direction privileged over others" (Ahmed 2006: 113). Literally, the West orientating toward the east allows for the Orient to become *the* East. This does two things; it allows the west to remain in a position of power and it categorizes the East as homogenous. This sentiment is supported in Said's work as he argues that this position of superiority allows for the Other to be made Oriental, which in turn justifies and supports the West's identity and culture (Said 1948).

As is clear, there are many ways in which modernity has been discussed and misunderstood. I hesitate to use the word 'modernization' in my research exactly because of the linear, biased and binary rhetoric that is associated with it. I offer an alternative definition of modernization within the framework of infrastructural development. When I examine modernization in my research, I am referring to any new or changing effects that people in a region experience. Road development to rural areas is generally understood by development agencies and governments as a method to connect rural populations to the greater markets of goods and capital (Wilson 2004). By being agents of change, roads act as a symbol of modernity. Ultimately, roads serve as a 'material and symbolic vector of socio-cultural transformation that [are] literally in the making' (Cook and Butz 2011).

In conceptualizing roads as a symbol of modernity, I frame my research and discuss the concept of modernization.

## **Conclusion**

I began this chapter by explaining the global gender inequalities, in terms of education, employment, and access to healthcare. The global pervasiveness of gender inequality is one that is particularly evident in India. I presented a historical and cultural background of North India to provide context for rural women's livelihoods and gender relations in that area. I brought together studies of infrastructural development in rural areas and highlighted the many ways that regions change as a result. The juxtaposition of tradition and modernity was discussed in depth, by including works from influential scholars in the field. I discussed modernization theory and its faults. Modernization theorists assume that modern is 'good' and tradition is 'bad'. We can view modernization theory through a gendered lens which describes men in terms of progress, with the feminine a barrier to this progress. I begin to explore the nuances of power in this section, and how power has been used among the West, drawing comparisons between the West as 'man', and the Orient as the 'woman.' Reframing the discourse of power and the West with a gendered perspective helps understand more carefully the deep patriarchal systems that exist in the world.

## CHAPTER II

### EMPOWERMENT: DECISION MAKING AND POWER, ACCESS TO AND CONTROL OF RESOURCES, AND MOBILITY

#### **Decision Making and Power**

Women's empowerment has long been considered by development agencies to be an issue that is worthy of attention. While many definitions of empowerment exist, there is not one agreed upon definition of empowerment. Instead, empowerment is regarded as a changing and dynamic process (Rowlands 2008; UN Women). Decision making and gendered power relations are considered to be crucial to women's empowerment and a considerable amount of literature exists in this field of study (Rowlands 1997, Weiss 1992; 2001, Scott 1996, Karl 1995, Kabeer 1999;2005).

Jo Rowlands begins her article titled "Power and Empowerment" by theorizing that there are different definitions of power. Power not only has many definitions, but power has many forms. Rowlands posits that power exists as power over, power to, and power within. Kabeer argues that 'power to' refers to people making their own life choices in the face of opposition from others. 'Power over' is the ability for stronger forces to take over somebody's agency, often through violence or threat (1999). Finally, 'power within' occurs when an individual achieves agency in their own life (Kabeer 1999: 438). This theory that power takes three different forms supports the complexities and subjectivities of empowerment.

In her work, Anita Weiss (1992) argues that "Power, therefore, cannot be conceived solely in terms of women exercising control over other women as their

destinies are intrinsically tied up with the actions and decisions of the men in their lives. Power is constantly being negotiated and renegotiated, through notions of respect, rights, obligations and requirements” (114). This suggest that although power is constantly changing, it does so with the priorities of the men in women’s lives.

Rowlands further defines empowerment by suggesting that empowerment is the process of bringing people from outside of the decision making processes into these processes. She argues that understanding empowerment requires that those who seek to empower others recognize the receiving party’s internalized oppression, or “include the processes that lead people to perceive themselves as able and entitled to make decisions” (Rowlands 1997: 14). Rowlands writes that empowerment is experienced in three dimensions. These dimensions include personal; in which empowerment develops a sense of self and confidence in the individual, rational; the individual can influence decision making in relationships, and collective; individuals work together to achieve maximum impact (1997). Rowlands theorizes that women’s empowerment begins at the core, that is, women’s ability to maintain a sense of self-worth and dignity. Without self-worth, Rowlands argues, women cannot experience empowerment. In congruence with Rowland’s notion that empowerment begins from within, Kabeer (2005) asserts that decision making and agency only relate to empowerment if in their decision making action, women challenge power relations. In other words, challenging the men in women’s lives is necessary in the empowerment process. However, due to a multitude of societal factors that exist globally, this is a difficult task to accomplish because of patriarchal systems that are in place.

The foundational argument of this theory is that the unequal balance of decision making power and control of resources is a barrier to women's empowerment. In most aspects of a woman's life, men maintain power and decision making authority. For example, women are largely responsible for domestic duties, but this does not mean that they have decision making power in the household. This is an important distinction. Women are maintaining the standards of these gender roles themselves, by their performance. Another important distinction to be made, is that according to Kabeer's discussion of power in conjunction with Said's examination of the Orient and the West, I reached the conclusion that women were not the party that created the standards and expectations of their gender. Rather, this was established by the more powerful party, the men. It has been *maintained* and *perpetuated* by women based on their performances of their own gender to date. This is exemplified in son preference, such as feeding the sons first or more readily providing healthcare for them, among other ways of reinforcing societal patriarchal standards.

Marilee Karl, in her book *Women and Empowerment: Participation and Decision Making* argues that women's empowerment will be realized once men and women maintain equal balance in decision making power and control (1995). She says that this must occur in the "household, the workplace, in communities, in government, and in the international arena" (1), essentially requiring that women have equal status in public and private spheres. Certainly, the public and private sphere cannot be defined in the same terms for all women, but this will be discussed in coming sections. Karl also makes a distinction between participation and decision making – to participate does not at all guarantee her decision making power. She identifies that this is a problem in some

development work. In development programs and projects, participation has been measured incorrectly – that is, women have falsely been considered to be participating in these programs and projects without achieving decision making power. She suggests that the focus has moved to prioritizing women's *access* to decision making power. This implies that if a woman has access to a development program or project, she has a *choice* to participate in decision making and demonstrate power. Access and choice are concepts that I will explore further. Karl argues that by addressing the gender imbalance and unequal decision making power in the home, a woman will eventually be more involved in society. This assumes that we are adhering to the archaic definitions of the public and private sphere.

### **Access to and Control of Resources: Women and Their Work**

The global labor force participation rate is 76.2 percent among men and 49.6 percent among women (HDR 2016). In India, 27 percent of the adult female population (15+ years) participates in the labor force, down from 35 percent in 1990 (World Bank 2017). By comparison, 79 percent of the adult male population (15+years) participates in the labor force. These striking patterns make sense, considering India ranks 131 on the Gender Inequality Index (HDI 2015). This downward trend suggests that women's conditions are not improving and also provides a rather shocking comparison to women's conditions in relation to men.

Much of the work that women do partake in is in the informal sector. In India, 90 percent of women work in the informal sector (UN Women 2012). The implications of working in the informal sector are lack of access to fair wages, social security, and

protective labor laws. Indian women in the informal sector are often socially marginalized and experience cultural exclusion, as a result of having low economic status. This ultimately limits women's social and economic security (Hill 2001), perpetuating systems of poverty and gender inequality. It is unfair to speculate whether or not this is born out of choice, as it is systematic, but Kabeer does discuss this element of disempowerment as well. She states, "There is a logical association between poverty and disempowerment" (1999: 2). Kabeer continues by explaining that an individual simply cannot make any significant choice, one that would indicate empowerment by being meaningful, if the individual must focus on meeting basic needs. In this way, poverty is a barrier to empowerment because it prevents women from making life choices, like the choices wealthy people might enjoy.

The choice that indicates whether or not an individual is empowered is not a simple one. The literature is quite specific that choices should be meaningful if they are to be considered indicative of an individual's empowerment status. With that in mind, I would like to be clear that rural Indian women cannot simply choose to become empowered. They cannot decide to stop participating in the system of gender roles that have been existing in their entire lives. Conversely, their empowerment would not be indicated by a simple choice. On the complexity of the matter of choice, Kabeer states, "While agency often tends to be operationalized as 'individual decision making', particularly in the mainstream economic literature, in reality, it encompasses a much wider range of purposive actions, including bargaining, negotiation, deception, manipulation, subversion, resistance and protest, as well as the more intangible, cognitive processes of reflection and analysis. Agency encompasses collective, as well as

individual, reflection and action” (Kabeer 1999: 31). This quote lends itself to the complexity of agency and decision making, and makes an important distinction between the two. A woman’s ability to make decisions does not mean that she has agency.

Traditionally, work has been defined by an activity that garners ‘pay or profit’ (Raju 1993). The Indian census does consider cultivation of crops to be work, even for self-consumption (Raju 1993). These agricultural activities in India are largely undertaken by women. On the other hand, other common activities for women, such as collection of wood or water, is not considered to be work. This is problematic for women because activities in this informal sector of work require so much time that women rarely have the opportunity to engage in the formal sector, limiting women’s opportunities. According to a study by Kundu and Premi (1992), 90 percent of the women in their study said that lack of time was the reason they did not engage in the formal sector, while only 3 percent of women reported that non-availability of work was a barrier. This highlights an important repercussion of the high amount of time that women spend in domestic work. Perhaps this is one reason that explains why 79.1 percent of males participate in the labor force, while only 26.8 percent of women do (HDR 2016). Women do not have the time because they are performing the tasks that men are not, because men have the luxury of participating in the formal sector. The Global Gender Gap Report (2017) further supports the gender inequalities that exist in the workforce, as it ranks the labor force participation at 136 out of a possible 144. With such a booming economy, it is shocking that gender inequalities in India’s labor force results in a ranking that is 8<sup>th</sup> from the bottom, globally.

The patterns of global inequality that exists in the labor force extend to many global regions. The economic empowerment of women is another area that has received attention in many development publications throughout the past few decades. Some of the most recent and reputable publications that discuss the economic empowerment of women include the *UNDP's 2016 Human Development Report*, the *World Economic Forum's 2017 Global Gender Gap Report*, and *UN Women's Annual Report 2016-2017*, to name a few. That these publications have emphasized the inequalities of women speaks to the significance of the global issue.

Women's economic empowerment is an issue that is very much prioritized in the development world, not only because equality *should* exist, but because the empowerment of women benefits the global economy. Theorists argue that empowering women will improve the 'economic and social development of countries' (Karl 1996). According to a UN Women Economic Empowerment report, "If men and women played an identical role in labor markets, as much as USD 28 trillion, or 26%, could be added to the global GDP" (2). This report also states that "An analysis of Fortune 500 companies found that those with the greatest representation of women in management positions delivered a total return to shareholders that was 34% higher than for companies with the lowest representation" (2014: 2). I am less interested in the numbers, and more interested in the concept that women's economic empowerment appears to be supported by development agencies for the purpose of benefitting the global economic community. The point here is that although women's participation in the economy can benefit the global economy, the global economy does not necessarily benefit the same women.

According to Kabeer, there are two schools of thought regarding the relationship between women's work and empowerment. Liberal and Marxist scholars, including feminist scholars, believe that women's inclusion in the labor force is the basis of their empowerment. Dependency theorists and radical and social feminists are entrenched in more pessimistic critiques of this relationship (Kabeer 2011). I adhere to the latter school of thought. I do not think that women's participation in the market leads to her empowerment. I will explore this further in the coming sections.

### **Gender and Mobility**

In the Department for International Development (DFID) report about women's economic empowerment, the authors observe that "Improvements in transportation infrastructure can have significant... effects on women's physical mobility, leading to more, higher paying jobs for women and new opportunities for business expansion. It also has the potential to increase social mobility when combined with skills training, capacity building and social norm change" (Mohun and Biswas 2006: 2). While the authors are certainly not incorrect in this statement, the language used in this development report, and reports like this, fail to acknowledge the varying effects of mobility on women's lives. The negative experiences that women experience are not as readily expressed in development reports.

Hanson (2014) defines mobility as "the movement of people from one place to another in the course of everyday life" (7). In their work, Cook and Butz (2017) discuss the politics of mobility, including villagers' awareness of the effects that roads and access have on members of the community. Cook and Butz (2017) posit that;

Men are normatively highly mobile, moving afield to access opportunities for money making, excitement, and personal challenge. Women's association with home and domesticity often limits their movement, spatially circumscribing their lives to the private sphere and sometimes leading to the problematic presumption that women's empowerment is necessarily enhanced by their movements beyond the confines of home (3).

Here, the authors present the familiar comparison of the private v. public sphere while also acknowledging that it is indeed problematic. In agreement with their assertion, I add that the private sphere in terms of the 'brick and mortar' home is archaic. Rather, the idea of the home is perpetuated by the values and traditions that men and women perform. While women are still limited in terms of mobility and space, they are also limited in terms of ideas and values. The private sphere is less literal than it is figurative.

Gender and mobility is most often discussed as a binary of occupying private versus public place. Scott (1996) states that gender is embedded in perceived differences between women and men and to the unequal power relations based in those perceived differences. Previous studies of gender and mobility explain the typical polarity between women/femininity with the home, domestic, restricted spheres, and with men/masculinity in public, urban areas with bountiful movement. In agreeance with Cook and Butz's observations, Scott suggests that the former leads to experiences which are routine and familiar, while the latter allows men to experience excitement and new challenges. Women are disadvantaged by not having the privilege of movement.

Mobility is not its own entity, devoid of other societal impacts and circumstances. A Geographer named Susan Hanson argues, "I want to stress that mobility is not just about the individual (as so much of the literature would have us believe), but about the individual as embedded in, and interacting with, the household, family, community and

larger society. That is, it should be impossible to think about mobility without simultaneously considering social, cultural and geographical context – the specifics of place, time and people” (2010: 8). Feminist geographers have long recognized that gender and mobility are issues that necessitate the other. For Indian women, this reveals the complexity between women’s autonomy and mobility as a result of deep patriarchal values. Weiss contends that “there is one domain where men wield power over women within a family: In their absolute control over women’s mobility” (2001: 68). The complexity of issues of mobility is rooted in societal and cultural values in India.

Mobility allows for increased access and freedom for some privileged people, inherently creating the opposite for the rest. Regarding this concept, Creswell and Uteng, the authors of *Gendered Mobilities* state (2016) “On the one hand it is positively coded as progress, freedom or modernity itself; on the other hand, it brings to mind issues of restricted movement, vigilance and control” (1). This concept is one that focuses on the gender’s effect *on* mobility, as opposed to the more common studies of mobility and its effect on gender. The preexisting power structures already in place in a region are often mirrored in the use of new mobility technology, for instance, in the construction of a new road.

An Economist named Nite Tanzarn further supports this notion when she discusses gendered mobility in urban Uganda. On Tanzarn’s work, Creswell writes, “... transportation structures and systems create, reproduce and sustain systemic differences in material circumstances between women and men and reinforce women’s exclusion and subordination” (2016: 9). This reinforcement of pre-existing social inequalities is discussed in other studies as well. As a result of an increase in mobility, gender roles

change as women take men's responsibilities. The authors state, "Mobility and immobility are relational, power-infused processes occurring simultaneously among different social groups, creating complex and uneven mobility landscapes" (Cook and Butz 2017: 7). Men and children have been able to move to different regions for school or work, effectively keeping women in their place. "Men's and children's intensified vehicular motilities have relationally reshaped women's capacity to move, fixing them in place" (Cook and Butz 2017: 17). The more mobile men are, the less mobile women can be. Women must take more responsibilities, so they simply cannot leave. Who would milk the buffalo? Also, when there are limited financial resources, men are the ones to use those resources to leave the village, even for just a day. In this way, the expansion of the private sphere from the home to the village is more limiting than it is empowering. Geographers named Yeoh and Ramdas further support the notion that movement is gendered (2014). They suggest that there is a gendering of 'those who wait' as feminine, and 'those who move' as masculine. One is a force that acts upon, while the other is a force that is acted upon. This could also be understood as subject v. object. This lies in conjunction with Cook and Butz's theory, that women are 'fixed' to the village to take care of domestic and agricultural work.

In contrast, some scholars do argue vehemently about the empowerment of mobility. Francis Willard's goal in her work is to establish that mobility – in her case, the ability to ride a bike – is empowering (1895). She asserts that mobility leads to greater self-worth and confidence, which Rowlands argues is the basis of the empowerment process. If we take this to be true, then mobility for women does lead to empowerment (1997). If a woman suddenly has access to a road, this does not guarantee her

empowerment, because of the societal standards that will become more pressing in her life. If, we assume for a moment that a woman does have equal access to the road and equal opportunities as the men in her life, then mobility could lead to her empowerment. Mobility as empowerment is one that is a contested issue among scholars.

Ultimately, the increase in mobility leads to greater freedom and empowerment for some, while it restricts others (Hanson, 2010, Urry and Sheller 2004, Tanzarn 2008). The restriction of other's mobility is a barrier to empowerment. This is worthy of exploration because globalization and infrastructural development are increasingly changing the global landscape by creating and restructuring mobilities.

My research examines the changes that take place in rural areas as a result of infrastructural development. Considering that change is such a prevalent theme, it is necessary to examine the reactions of men and women in the face of change.

There is substantial research about the correlation between women's employment and an increase of domestic violence against them. Men perceive a threat to their authority as a result of women's participation in the labor force (Krishnan 2010). A husband is expected to provide economically for his family. Therefore, a change of power dynamics in India threatens a man's masculinity. When a woman gains access and control of resources, this can question against Indian societal values, triggering domestic violence (Kabeer 1997). Change can threaten masculine identities, potentially resulting in violence against women. Of course, not all reactions to change are violent. Sometimes reactions take on the form of tightening pre-existing standards.

**Conclusion:**

The nebulous concept of empowerment is not easily measured. It is for this reason that there are so many definitions of empowerment. Empowerment can be understood in terms of a women's agency, or the 'power within', or in a woman's ability to make choices and decisions and carry them out. However, a woman's ability to make decisions does not necessarily lead to her agency or empowerment. Further, not all choices that women make are empowering.

Infrastructural development's presence in a region creates mobility, in the most literal way, as it creates roads. Mobility, however, increases inequalities as it allows for greater mobility for those in power, and less mobility for the oppressed, by strengthening and expanding existing power dynamics. Further, women gain more responsibilities as a result of gendered mobility, effectively fixing them in place. Because men are in power and women are disempowered, in this case, the more they are free to move about as they please, the more restrained women are in return, as their burden grows.

Development agencies focus on economic empowerment, but at times these agencies do so without addressing the pre-existing issues of gender inequality. The movement from disempowered to empowered is complicated, certainly, but to attempt to address it specifically by the intention of introducing women to the formal sector ignores the complexity of the issue. Development agencies argue that women's economic empowerment is the 'smart' thing to do, in terms of benefitting the global economic community, but women do not enjoy the benefits of this because their contribution to society is not returned in kind. To move women from the informal sector to the formal sector, is conceptually similar to the movement from the private sphere to the public

sphere. Again, to dismiss the complexity of the issue is a grave mistake. This type of rhetoric ignores the fact that the private sphere is no longer a set of four walls, it is not a physical space.

Women cannot be empowered solely economically, they cannot be empowered just in the home, women cannot be empowered only from within. All of these aspects of empowerment rely on one another and work in tandem.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS

#### **Personal Standpoint**

In conducting fieldwork in a developing country, I had my own hesitations and discomfort that I faced regarding issues of privilege. I recognize that I come from a place of privilege, as an educated woman from a middle class family in the United States. My background and experiences effect my perceptions of the world, and while I will never understand the experiences of the women I interviewed, my goal is that I objectively share their experiences. I was an outsider inquiring, sometimes quite personally, about the daily lives of these women. I had the opportunity and privilege to enter their villages and leave as I pleased, and I was acutely aware of this as I entered and left these women's lives, whose mobility was very limited. I entered my research sites, both geographically and mentally, with this awareness. This attitude informed my methodological process which I believe allowed for stronger research practices.

#### **Limitations of Study**

Although I was in India for six months, I was only able to spend one month at my research site. I had intended to spend more time in the field, but I ended up at the site for only one month. The other months were spent studying Urdu in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh. Urdu is a language more commonly spoken by Muslims. I also lived with a Muslim family during my five months of language study. Had I lived with a Hindu family, I might understand more of the intricacies of Hindu culture. Further, while I was able to

develop some rapport with women in my interviews because of my speaking skills in Hindi, there were some language barriers because at times Garhwali, the local dialect, was spoken. For this reason, I had two research assistants help with the Garhwali. Finally, at times, my approach required that women form their own groups. This could account for lack of diversity in class and caste in some group interviews, potentially excluding women who might have dissimilar experiences and backgrounds.

### **In the Field**

Again, the goal of my research was to understand the impact of infrastructural development – specifically roads, electricity, and irrigation – on the livelihoods of women in rural areas. I chose to engage in group interviews, several individual interviews, and participant observation to gain an understanding for this issue. I was driven to utilize group interviews because I was curious about how women’s ideas and concepts might build off one another’s. I also interviewed four women individually, I interviewed one woman individually after she arrived to a group interview late. Another woman owned a small shop in Saur, so I wanted to talk to her more specifically about that. The third woman I interviewed one-on-one was working in the fields at the time of the group interview. The fourth woman I interviewed separately from the rest was an old woman who was unable to attend the group interview, so we interviewed her in her home. Including individual interviews was beneficial in my research because it helped me to understand more carefully if there were any instances of ‘groupthink’ in the group interviews.

Finding a site was challenging. I determined two main requirements: my site would have to be a rural area that was connected to a road in the past 15 years, and it had to be an Urdu or Hindi speaking region. I established these requirements because I was trying to understand experiences of change, and it was necessary that women recount the differences in their lives during a timespan they could remember. I reached these conclusions during the four months I spent in Lucknow. This time was spent studying Urdu at a language institute. During those four months, I hoped to make connections with people in Lucknow and get leads about a potential research site. Unfortunately, the four months ended and I left without direction. As my Urdu program came to an end, I happened upon a newspaper about a village in Northern India that was the recent site of a project in which villagers' life stories were painted on walls. This village is Saur, and the goal of the project was to bring life into a village that had experienced rapid out-migration.

I contacted one of the partners of this project, appropriately titled *DueNorth*, and expressed my interest in conducting my research in Saur. They were enthusiastic about my idea, and allowed me to work with two Indian fellows, Lipi and Revati, who were already in Saur working on the project. They had been in Saur for four months by the time I arrived, and were working there as English teachers. There is no school in Saur, so they taught the local children in the evenings. During the time that I was there, I taught as well. This, of course, helped develop rapport with women in Saur and in surrounding villages, because we were teaching their children. Lipi had ancestry from Saur and surrounding villages, and this helped immensely in establishing trust with women during the short time that I had there.

In the mornings we set off on foot to neighboring villages. Sometimes, if we had a phone number of a person from a neighboring village, Lipi or Revati would call the night before and explain my project and ask for an assembly of women. Usually, they talked to a man, who would organize the meetings. I noted this as men as gatekeepers to women's decision making and mobility. If a contact was not available, we would just walk into a village, and approach women who we saw at random. I aimed for 4-6 women per interview, and it was never difficult to fill this quota. On the contrary, women would come in during interviews and join out of curiosity. While I did not ask them to leave, I did not count these women toward my final number of 50 – only the women who sat through the entire interview and contributed in some way were counted. Sometimes there was a daughter-in-law in the group, and if her mother-in-law was also there, she remained silent. Certainly, she had their own contributions to the topics being discussed, but to speak in front of her mother-in-law about many of the issues regarding decision making and power would have likely revealed the multitude of ways in which her mother-in-law might establish dominance over the daughter-in-law's life. For a woman to be counted in the interview toward my goal of 50 women, a criteria was that she had to participate verbally. Considering the daughter-in-law's silence in the interviews, even I am inclined to ignore them, even though their silence speaks volumes. Although the villages were very small, with less than 100 men, women and children, each village had its own social circles, and surely caste was a factor here. I allowed women to organize their own groups, which likely meant that they called their friends – which I believe led to groups of women in similar caste and class. While this was not always the case – I certainly talked to women across caste and class – I feel that it is important to discuss this error in my

methodological practice. Interviews composed of women in different classes or castes could lead to different results than interviews of women in the same caste or class. Both types of interviews would contribute to the research, but I lacked the foresight to organize the groups in relation to class or caste, or a combination thereof.

Once the groups were formed, I introduced myself in Hindi, and had my field assistants explain the more technical details – ensuring their confidentiality, and assuring them that I was not part of the government or media. Even though they were informed that I was a student, and that this research was for my own knowledge, some women were shy to share their stories. A few women remained quiet and said “I don’t have any knowledge”, but we reassured them that I was hoping to hear *their* experiences and that being formally educated was not a factor. Another woman, when asked about her job, replied “Nothing is there, we get nothing out of farming” in which her friend replied, “Why are you lying to them, just tell them the truth!” and the first woman responded with “The things are getting recorded!”. I remember this moment as a fun-loving one, and I sensed from her laughter that the woman was not in fact fearful, but it does illustrate some barriers in relation to trust and being an outsider.

After explaining my purposes there, I asked all of the women their names, and we went around a circle noting this down. I made sure that everyone participated, which sometimes meant directing questions to women who had not had a turn to speak in a while. I did not write their names down, and I do not use pseudonyms in my research. Rather, in my results, I refer to women as ‘a woman from Saur’, or ‘participant’. During the interviews, I kept track of women by assigning them a number. For clarification, I have included a page from my field notes:

INTERVIEW ONE: 4 WOMEN: SAUR: 12/2/17: IN FRONT OF TEMPLE

- 1: two kids. Husband stays abroad. He is in the hotel industry. She only does farming.  
2: 60 years old. Came here after marriage. She is from Tehri-Garwal. Pipil|Gao. Only agriculture. She has been here for 40 years.  
3: She is from Janpaur Gao. She has been here for 30 years. She is 44. Agriculture and animal rearing. Her husband is a drummer for the temple and does some priest work. She has 7 kids. 2 daughters in law. 8 people in her house.  
4: 50 years old. She used to do tailoring but now she does agriculture. 4 people in her house. Husband, daughter and daughter in law.

(Most people here do agriculture and animal rearing.)

**How have the ways of farming changed over the years?**

- 4: "now almost everything has changed"  
1: "Hasn't it changed today? Today most of the fields have been left barren. This only has changed. Earlier people used to do extensive farming and now most of the fields have been left empty. Only these few surrounding fields are being used – that's it. Now there is a road, now there is electricity. Earlier people used to suffer a lot more because of the lack of it but now there are facilities. People have left farming and the fields have been left like that."

I audio recorded every interview. At the end of every interview we were almost always offered (and accepted) *chai*, and we were asked for pictures. For these reasons, the end of the interview remains my favorite part of the fieldwork.

During my month at site I visited six villages, including Saur, Dhungali (the upper and lower parts of this village), Jaripani, Kakwardi, Khurait, and Pujiyadi. In these villages, I spoke to fifty women in semi-structured interviews. Although many other questions arose throughout the interviews, in all the interviews I asked:

- Can you please tell me about your life before and after the road, electricity and water came?
- What is your daily routine? What is your husband's daily routine?
- What is your occupation? What is your husband's occupation?
- Have you experienced any changes after the road, electricity and water came?
- Do you feel isolated in your village?
- How often do you leave your village? How often does your husband leave your village?
- Who makes decisions regarding control of money in your household?
- Who makes other decisions in your household?
- Do you have a *panchayat*?

The interviews were open ended and participants were free to respond accordingly, and many times follow-up questions were asked. Sometimes women felt very passionately about a topic, and I allowed them to speak on it for as long as they wished. I had no time constraints except for getting back to Saur before dusk, as the threat tigers and leopards were a real concern in the region.

### **Feminist Research Practices**

Feminist research places gender at the center of the research process, and gender is repurposed as a lens through which to investigate social issues (Hesse-Biber 2014). Typical feminist research frequently focuses on intersectionality. The goal in feminist research is often to uncover “subjugated” knowledge, which Foucault discusses in his book *Knowledge/Power*. Subjugated knowledge is the idea that certain knowledge can be oppressed by those in power (Foucault 1980). Revealing subjugated knowledge is particularly relevant in my research, as I try to understand complex patterns of gendered power relations. I situate myself in feminist methodology by believing that women’s life stories are valuable forms of knowledge.

It was important to me that my research derives from feminist research practice. Feminist research practice primarily means that I am responsible for recognizing the historical and social conditions that place women in the positions that they are in. It also means that I maintain a keen awareness of my own background and privilege, and how these factors impact the actual field work, while also accounting for personal biases. Feminist researchers refer to this process as reflexivity. I was under no assumptions during my field work that the participants were not starkly aware of the substantial

difference in their lives, and their perceptions of mine. That I had this awareness was a crucial anchor for me, personally, as I continued my field work practices. Indian women are certainly excluded from circles of power because of the complex and deep historical and societal processes that shape power relations in India. That women are not within circles of power makes sense, as India, especially rural India, is a patriarchal society. Because of this reason, I rely heavily on oral testimonies. Oral testimonies amplify voices of those whose socio-economic position has excluded them from circles of power (Bennett 2003). While I wholeheartedly agree with Bennett in that oral testimony is of great value in listening to voices of people typically excluded from circles of power, the title of Bennett's book, *Giving Voice: Practical Guidelines for Implementing Oral Testimony Projects*, is problematic. The language acts in a way that values power, and from the title I can induce that 'giving voice' to somebody results in oral testimony, or their participation. I am not in favor of this language as I did not wish to 'give voice' to the women I interviewed. To assert that they can participate as a result of being handed something from a person in power is inherently contradictory to my values as a researcher.

Finally, in analyzing my work, I maintained adherence to feminist methods by being aware of my own biases and background. I believe that this helped eliminate, or at least minimize, subjective results. Clifford Geertz's "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture" is a segment of his anthropological theory, which explains best practices in studying culture. Achieving a "thick description" while conducting research requires heavy interpretation of the structures and meanings that are at play, compared to a "thin description", which is simply the collection of facts (1973). I

agree with Geertz in that it is necessary to understand the complex social structures that exist in women's lives. I maintained consideration of this throughout the analyzing process of my work.

## **Research Sites**

### *Saur*

Saur is the village in which I resided while doing my field work. There are twelve families who live in Saur. There is an 'eco lodge' in Saur, which attracts occasional tourists. Saur was the only site of my research sites that had any sort of tourism infrastructure. From an informal assessment, I found it had a minimal impact on the surrounding areas. As I previously mentioned, there is no school in Saur, but my research assistants were there to teach English and computer skills to the village's children and adults. In Saur I held two separate group interviews and 3 individual interviews. The 10 women in Saur ranged from 32-75 years old, and all of them moved to Saur after marriage. The women work in agriculture and some sell milk. One woman has a small shop which she runs in addition to farming and pastoralism.

As I was entering Tehri-Garhwal in my taxi, I became increasingly excited by the steady rise in elevation into mountainous territory. Once we arrived in Chamba – the largest market near my research sites – I was enthralled by my first glance at the Himalayas. This was certainly a region that felt very different, geographically, from Lucknow. I admit that I was slightly disappointed when the taxi driver drove past Chamba and turned on a small, one lane road that curved its way down into a valley, because I was hoping for regular Himalayan views. The road to Saur was terrifying at

times – the previous monsoon sent the cement road sliding down the steep cliff to my left, which narrowed the road, only allowing for the width of a small car to continue. Once I arrived at Saur, I was struck by the sight of a very small village which looked like nothing more than a collection of stone houses. I stepped out of the taxi and I looked straight up out of the valley and saw buildings along the ridges, far away which I learned was the town of Jaripani. I positioned myself, disoriented by the long and windy road that took me to this village.

I spent my days in interviews with my participants, but in the evenings I walked down a rice terrace which led to my neighbor's cement roof, carefully stepped past the drying red peppers, and met my neighbor by her fire. I enjoyed this immensely. We talked to each other about our days, and I was thankful for all the work that I put in to learning Urdu. She would usually make me tea, using milk that she collected that day from her buffalo. I would watch her make food, handing her small pieces of wood for her fire from the small pile next to me. I asked her questions about the ingredients of her dinner and where they came from. This was my favorite experience in Saur because I learned so much about women's lives, without having to formally conduct an interview.

### *Pujyadi*

Pujyadi is a village at edge of the valley. The road was completed to Pujyadi in 2008, and water has always been in Pujyadi because of its easy access to the rivers. There are three parts of this village. In one region, electricity came in 2008. In another region, electricity arrived in 2013. The third region, the one farthest away from the 'center' of town, is not connected to electricity. There is a government school in Pujyadi. In Pujyadi, there were

8 participants ranging in age from 36-69 years old. They all moved to Saur after marriage. There are three rivers in the valley, and the women primarily grow rice, *mandva*, and *jangora*, relying greatly on these rivers. The main occupations in Pujyadi are agriculture and culture rearing.

To get to Pujyadi, my research assistant and I walked from Saur on the concrete road, and followed the road down the valley to its end. The road ended in a cul-de-sac, where one car was parked. The road then turned into a small cement path, which after a few switchbacks, ended at a school. The school was a small primary and secondary school. We walked inside the school to speak with the director about their English curriculum – something my research assistant was interested in learning more about – and he ordered a cup of tea from the cook. She brought out some *chai* a few minutes later. We were about to take our leave as recess was beginning, so we played a few games with the students and left.

We continued downhill, crossed a river over some small stepping stones (which were occupied by monkeys for a few minutes) and continued uphill into the village of Pujyadi. Pujyadi felt bigger than Saur, and there were remnants of abandoned businesses. We walked down a dirt path and came across a woman teaching numbers to several

young children. We asked her if she could find some women for an interview. Thirty minutes later, I was joined by a group of women sitting in a circle on a cement roof. They had all come from the fields, which was made obvious by the tools in their hands.

### *Khurait*

In Khurait, I spoke with nine women in total, ages 33-75 years old. This is a village that is further away from the other villages that I visited. The road is



*Figure 1: Road development to Khurait, while on a motorcycle from Saur. The men and women carrying rocks are residents of Khurait, working under the government's Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. Photo by author*

currently being extended to Khurait, but is not yet paved. At the time that I was there, there was road construction to Khurait (see Figure 2). It is in Khurait that hardship seemed most prominent. The conversation regularly went back to the lack of a school and hospital in their village. The women told me that the school in the neighboring village is not a good one, and that after passing the 5<sup>th</sup> grade their children cannot write their names. The women in this interview indicated that agriculture is the primary source of income, and most people have one buffalo. In this village, cattle rearing is not common.

To get to Khurait, I sat on the back of a man's motorcycle and winced as he sped through the paved road (the same road that led to Pujyadi). About half way to Pujyadi, he veered right, onto the dirt road which was under construction. He kept his speed and

bumped over rocks, kicking up dust. When we met a tractor, he squeezed his way through the small space between the tractor and the cliff. I managed to look down the cliff and



*Figure 3: Drinking tea after interviews in Khurait. Photo used with participant's permission. Photo by author, 2017*

saw people carrying loads of rocks and helping to build the road in this way.

I did not have an interview arranged in Khurait, but like Pujyadi, I only had to wait about 30 minutes while friends called friends and assembled a group of women. The women spoke of their hardships, and of all the research sites, the struggles here seemed more apparent.

At the end of the interview, the women apologized that they could not make us tea, because resources were low. One woman,

however, decided that she wanted to make us tea, so we waited as she ran to her home which was far from the center of town, and came back with tea. Of all my experiences, this was one that highlighted the women's generosity. She did not have a lot to give, but she still went out of her way to make us tea.

### *Dhungali*

Dhungali is technically one village of 60-70 families, but the women in Dhungali referred to the 'lower area' and the 'upper area', so in my research I treated it as two separate villages. Upper Dhungali was a village about an hour uphill from Saur. I walked through steep terraced fields to get there. I went to Dhungali for interviews on two separate

occasions. In Upper Dhungali I spoke to five women, ages 32-46 whose main occupations are agriculture and animal rearing. Geographically, they are right in between the main state highway (about a 30-minute walk uphill), and the new road in the valley. In Lower Dhungali, I spoke with 9 women, ages 33-85, who all moved there after marriage. The women who participated in this interview were all in the agricultural or pastoral sector. Lower Dhungali is fairly close to the new road. Although it is close to the road, we used mountain paths to get to Lower Dhungali, because they were effective shortcuts. There is a school in Lower Dhungali.

I made two separate trips to Dhungali, and both times, the interviews were arranged by a man from Saur, who was also the cook at the eco-lodge. The first interview was in the upper region of the village. It took about an hour to arrive to this village, straight uphill through the terraced agriculture. On the way, I noticed half a dozen crumbled, abandoned houses. Finally, we reached Dhungali. The interview was held in a woman's house, in her living room. There was a secretive tone to this interview, because I told them that the men were not allowed to be a part of it. This was my first interview and I did not know how to ensure that this would be a women's only space. I was concerned that women would not speak freely in the presence of a man. I did not intend for this to result in discomfort, but there was discomfort in the beginning. The interview picked up pace once the women realized the content of the interview.

The second interview in Dhungali was my most successful interview, in part because the women knew that this would be a space for only them (I presume they had heard about the first interview from the other women in Dhungali). Initially, I was concerned that there were 9 women in one interview, but all women contributed

wonderfully. There was a fascinating generational dynamic as well. Of all the interviews, this one appeared to have women who were most passionate about the issues being discussed. We stayed for a while after the interview, and enjoyed tea, walnuts, and stories.

### *Kakwardi*

Kakwardi is a village about an hour from Saur. Kakwardi is a larger village which received a new road around the same time as Saur, but to get to Kakwardi, an entirely different road is used from the main Chamba-Mussoori Highway. In Kakwardi, I interviewed 7 different women in two separate interviews. Like the other women in the region, they work in agriculture and pastoralism, and moved to the village after marriage. Kakwardi has a school. There is electricity in Kakwardi, but not for the houses across the river, away from the road.

I reached Kakwardi, by accident, by following a narrow dirt trail out of Saur along the bend of the pine forested mountain. To my right, for the entirety of the hike, was a drastic cliff that fell hundreds of feet, to a river (the same river that the women of Pujyadi utilized). The first time my research assistant and I went to Kakwardi, we did not interview any women, but we did get called over onto several different properties. Their curiosity about our presence led to friendly meetings while drinking tea. We told the women about my research, and that we would return to have an interview. They were enthusiastic about this, and we told them we would see them in a few days. When we did return, we found that they were not home (presumably in the fields), but we saw a group of three women walking down Kakwardi's paved road. I initiated a conversation with

them, and they allowed us to follow them along a dirt path. They were returning home from the fields for lunch. We asked them if they might be interested participating in my research, and a few minutes later, we were sitting down together on one of the woman's front yard. Her front yard was along a busy footpath, so a lot of women came in and out of the interview (I only actually interviewed four women here – the women who remained throughout the duration).

After the interview, they fed us a fantastic Garhwali lunch. The women commented on my septum nose piercing and showed me that they had the same one for their marriage, pulled my shirt back to look and laugh at my tattoos, and commented on the ugliness of my clothes. It was all in good humor and the generosity and outgoingness of these women led to a very positive experience. As I was leaving, one of them yelled after me and asked that I take

a picture to post in my research, and to show my family.

### *Jaripani*

The last place I went for an interview was the town of

Jaripani. I decided to take a car to Jaripani,

rather than walk, to experience the road after hearing so much about it during the interviews. To get to Chamba from Saur, I hailed down one of the few Jeeps that drive through. Jeeps drive through this road about twice a day, taking people and their goods to



*Figure 4: Four women from Kakwardi. In the foreground, you can see that a somebody was washing clothes prior to joining the interview. Photo by author.*



*Figure 5: Mountain path used by women from Saur, Dhungali, Pujiyadi, and Khurait, to get to the 'upper village' of Jaripani. This is still in use even though there is a road, but women do not use this to carry their goods to the market – rather, they give their goods to drivers.*

Chamba. The drive from Saur to Chamba took about an hour (in a very crowded Jeep) and from Chamba, it took another hour. The drive itself was not nearly that long, but the Jeep driver would not leave until his Jeep was full. In all, it took about 2.5 hours to reach Jaripani.

The interview for Jaripani was prearranged, and I met a shop owner who had migrated from Saur. The interview was conducted in her shop, and we drank tea which we bought from the next stall. In her shop, she sold school supplies, beauty products, house cleaning supplies, and among other things, I saw some lingerie for sale. She also had a

sewing machine so that she could provide tailoring services in her shop. After the interview, I walked back down to Saur using the mountain path.

As can be discerned in Figure 6 (bottom), the villages are in a mountainous region. In this picture, you are looking into the valley at Saur. Khurait is behind the hills on the right, Pujiyadi is straight ahead, and Kakwardi is behind the hills on the left. Dhungali and Jaripani are behind me, several hundred feet up in the rice terraces. We can clearly see the road in front of Saur, and follow it as it weaves its way through the hillside on the right. From there, the road splits into two, continuing as a cement road almost to

Pujyadi, and turning into a dirt road which is under construction, to Khurait. We can also



Figure 6: Saur and surrounding villages. Photo by author

see the mountain path which I followed to take this picture. Even with the roads, mountain paths frequently used by people who live here. One of my students takes this trail to get to her high school in Jaripani, about a 2-hour walk (which she told me in a

matter-of-fact tone that she can do in 45 minutes). At the time of this picture, a woman was to my right, herding her goats through the terraces. The terraces were mostly empty when I took this photo in December. Some terraces were entirely abandoned as a result of out-migration.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I detailed the processes of arriving at my research site. I justified my reasons for choosing the research methods that I did – that the use of oral testimonies is a

method that includes people typically excluded from circles of power. I wrote that the significance of conducting feminist research practices essentially reveals subjugated knowledge. My goal is that these feminist epistemologies contributed to the quality of my research. I also included in this chapter a detailed description of my research sites to assist the reader in being able to ‘connect’ more to the women’s testimonies that are soon to follow. I also included a map of my research sites to clarify their position in relation to the road.

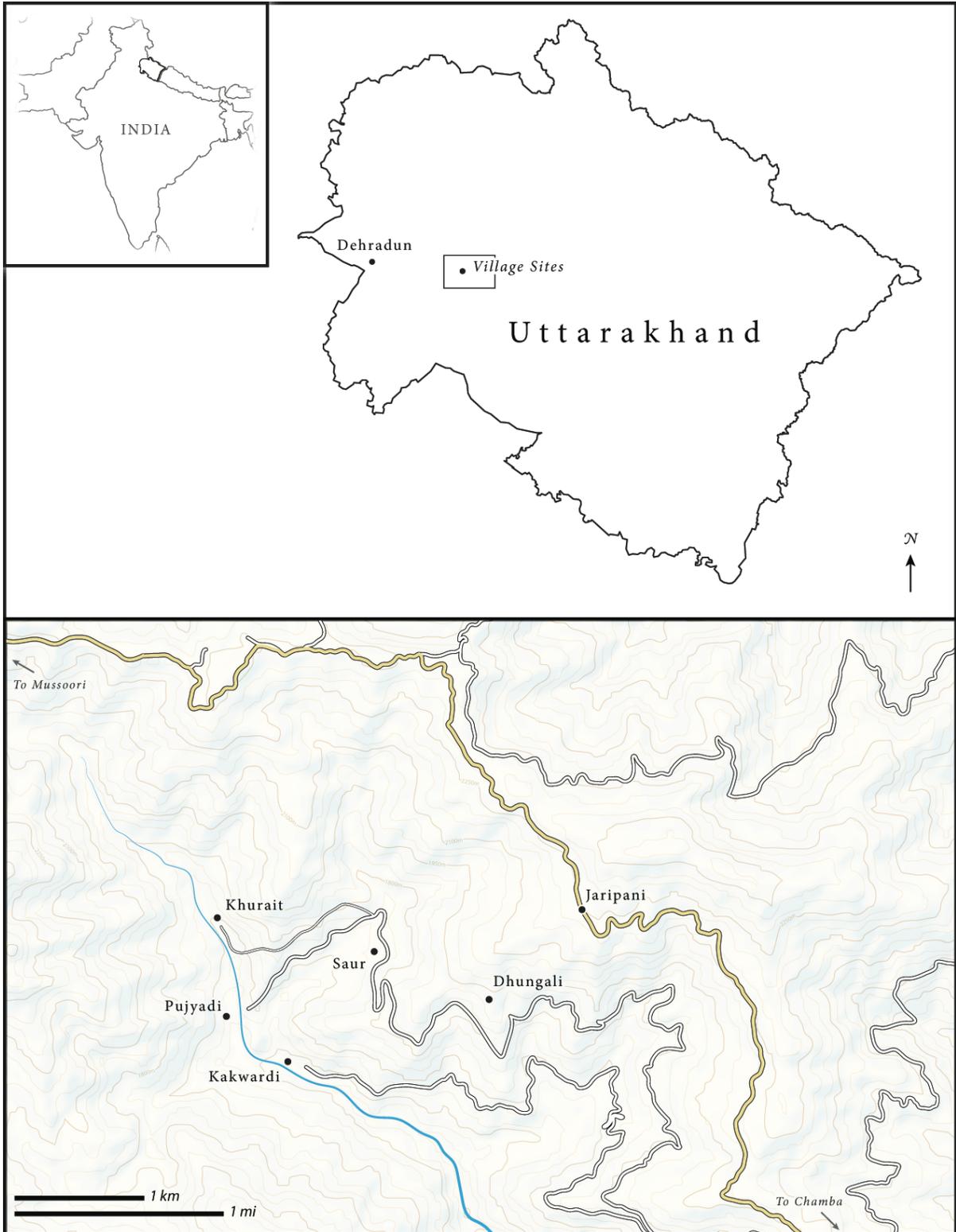


Figure 7: Research sites. Source: Nathaniel Douglass 2018

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

My goal was to understand how ‘change and modernization’, or the development of infrastructure, affected women’s lives in rural areas. To investigate this, I began each interview with a broad question about the change that they experienced in their life before and after the road came. Women used the word *savidha* to talk about the new road, electricity, and water pipes. *Savidha* translates to accommodation, but also translates to words such as benefit, comfort and opportunity. In this section, I frequently mention the town of Jaripani. This is the nearest and biggest town for the women who live in the valley villages of Khurait, Saur, Kakwardi, Pujiyadi, and Dhungali. Jaripani is an important location for the women in these five villages because Jaripani offers services that do not exist in the villages, such as a hospital, a market, and better schools than the three government schools that exist in the valley. In the interviews, women shared stories related to decision making and power, access and control of resources, and mobility. In this section, I argue that infrastructural development restructures and redefines gender inequalities.

#### **Daily Life and First Impressions**

During the interviews, women reported that they spend most of their time in the fields, cutting wood for the *chulha*<sup>1</sup>, or cutting grass for the buffalo. The women in this region practice subsistence agriculture, keeping the majority of the produce for themselves and

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<sup>1</sup> A *chula* is an earthen stove that women use for cooking.

their families, instead of selling it in the market. Late spring and summer are the most bountiful for farming, but even in the winter, the women can be seen in the fields and jungle cutting wood. Cutting wood in the winter allows for it to dry out before the wet monsoon season. There did appear to be some change in how women spent time, depending on their geographic location. For example, two women in Jaripani<sup>2</sup> (the ‘upper village’ along the Chamba-Mussoorie Highway) shared:

“I wake up at 5:30 in the morning, take a bath, make breakfast, and I come at 6 am in the shop, then I do the work in the shop and then I go and make lunch. In the evening I have some *chai* and then attend to some customers and then I go home and make food. I am very fond of TV, very fond of it. Right from 5 am I switch on the TV and I listen to devotional songs on it and in the evening I watch my programs.”

And,

“I have 2 kids so I wake up in the morning and I get them ready for school and in the day when there is time I do my own work – stitching work and everything. When the kids are in school, these days I go nearby from here to learn stitching. And then I go home and the kids come back from school and I take care of them. After that in the evening we have food. I am busy during the whole day.”

The above explanations of these women’s days contrasts greatly with women from the more rural villages in the valley, a 90-minute walk downhill from Jaripani<sup>3</sup>:

“We wake up at 5 am and have our field work, milk the buffalo, go the jungle and fields. We are busy until 9:00 – 9:30 (pm) in our work. From morning to night we are busy with our work.”<sup>4</sup>

And,

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<sup>2</sup> Jaripani is the largest of the sites I visited. It is directly on the Chamba-Mussoorie Highway. This was the last town I visited. This is the town that women in the villages constantly referred to when discussing going the ‘upper village’ to sell milk or vegetables, go to the hospital, or go to school.

<sup>3</sup> By road, the distance from the villages in the valley to Jaripani is quite long. It is about 10 miles (or an hour) by road to Chamba, and from Chamba it is another 20-minute drive. The road allows women to sell good more easily because they can give their goods to the Jeeps that drive through, but mountain paths are certainly more direct.

<sup>4</sup> Participant from Saur

“We wake up and make chai, then feed the buffaloes, milk the cow. We then deliver the milk. Then we make our breakfast and by around 10am we leave for our chores. Some collect wood, some collect grass, some work in the fields. After 10am people are busy. Nobody really stays at home during the day. Everybody has their individual animals so we have to work for them.”<sup>5</sup>

Another woman says,

“We get grass from down the hill, near Saur. We come back after getting the grass and give it to the buffalo. Then the evening comes and we make food and eat.”<sup>6</sup>

The women from the more infrastructural developed town, Jaripani, experience more variety in their days, in terms of work. One woman owns a shop, and the other just started learning stitching. Apparently, the women from Jaripani are able to diversify their work.

The women in the villages in the valley reported that they spend their days both in the fields and doing domestic housework. This is typical among women in rural Tehri-Garhwal. Although the women reported being busy throughout the day, one woman from Dhungali observes,

“Our workload has been reduced since the road has come to the village. We had to go up/down from Jaripani to Dhungali on foot if we had to buy anything for our daily purposes. Whether we had to sell milk or buy something for ourselves, we had to go to Jaripani. Since the road has come we have the mode of transportation to go to the city. Our lifestyle is changing and the working style is changing. Earlier we had to work for the whole day and get wood from the village and cook food but now we have gas, so now that burden has been reduced. The women’s workload has been reduced.”

This woman from Dhungali<sup>7</sup> speaks to the changes she has experienced in her life as a result of the road. In one instance when I asked the women about their daily routines, one woman from Khurait replied, “Nothing. Nothing, we do nothing.” Others interrupted

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<sup>5</sup> Participant from Dhungali

<sup>6</sup> Participant from Dhungali

<sup>7</sup> Of the 5 research sites in the valley, Dhungali is the closest in proximity to the Chamba-Mussoorie highway. It is about a 5 or 10-minute walk to the new road into the valley, which is representative of the distances between the other villages to the road. The only exception is Khurait, which at the time of research was being connected to the new road. See map on page \_\_ for clarification.

“How can you say we don’t do anything, of course we do! We do work, we do agriculture, even though the animals destroy it, we are still doing our work. Of course we do things. We do agriculture, but it’s not a fixed source of income for us so it’s not guaranteed work.” Another woman added, “Of course we do work like washing clothes, utensils, cleaning the house, taking care of the children cooking food, cutting the grass, taking care of the cattle.” This conversation not only indicated what women consider to be work, but it also told me that women consider work to constitute value in their daily life. It also revealed women’s frustration of being in the informal labor sector, where their work is not recognized. The woman who said “Nothing. Nothing, we do nothing” reveals that she devalues her own work. This could be because she finds men’s work to be more valuable. Exemplified in these testimonies is the degree to which these women were divided in terms of what constitutes work and what is valuable. This is characteristic of a liminal space.

What is implied in the above exchange is that women are questioning the value of their contribution to their society. This is related to my argument that infrastructural development redefines gender inequalities because it puts women in a place where their identity is in question.

### **On Mobility**

In my research I found that women experienced less mobility than their husbands when it came to leaving the village. This discrepancy in mobility is what I expected to find.

Women reported that they left their villages twice a month, once a month, every other month, to once a year. They were more likely to leave if it was for a special occasion like

a wedding, or to visit their native village. It was not common for women to leave their villages for work. One woman reported that she visited Chamba, the main market about 10 km by road, once or twice a year. When I asked women about their husbands and their mobility, it was clear that men leave the village much more frequently than women. When I asked a woman if she felt more connected to other towns as a result of the new road, she replied with “where could we go, if our husband is here sitting at home?” Her mobility is dependent on her husband’s. I found this quote to be quite telling of the relationship between gender and mobility, in which women experience much less freedom with geographic mobility than men (Salon 2010, Mumtaz 2005). And in fact, a woman’s mobility hinges on her husband’s proximity.

Other women noted that men went to the cities more frequently for more practical reasons. She shared, “It depends, once a week, once every 15 days. The main market is in Chamba so if we have to buy something or have some work then we go. But mostly, men go to buy provisions because they buy big sacks of goods and they offer to carry it on their heads.” She also mentioned that because of the road, buying in bulk is not that necessary and that these days, they go to the market more frequently. In this interview, I learned that the men leave the village every third or fourth day, or whenever there is work. This sentiment is echoed in the testimonies of other women from different villages. One group of women agreed that they leave the village 2-3 times a month, but that their husbands “leave in the morning and come back in the evening.” When I asked why they thought this pattern was the case, one woman replied “Even if they don’t have any work in the city, they still go because there is nobody to stop them.” Clearly, this implies that there is somebody stopping her. She continued to say, “We don’t have any restrictions on

going to the city, but we have to tell our husbands why we want to go to the city. Without permission, women cannot go out of the village.” These two quotes suggest that women’s freedom and mobility is entirely dependent on men’s approval. Weiss contends that “Freedom is intimately linked to power” (1992: 118). Men have more power so they have more freedom, and women have less power and have less freedom. This relationship will be discussed more thoroughly in the coming sections.

One woman, who used to live in a slum in the village connected to the main road, moved back to the village of Saur after her wedding. When I asked her about leaving the village she said, “I don’t get things, my husband does. I don’t go now because it requires money. There is no money, so where would I go?” This suggests that when there are resources available for travel, the resources go to the men, which further devalues women and limits their mobility.

There was one woman who lived next door to me in Saur. I would visit her at the end of the day and make *rotis*<sup>8</sup> with her on her *chula*. She told me about her daily experiences, and those of her husband. “I wake up at 5 am and work in the field, milk the buffalo, and go the jungle. We would be busy until 9:00 or 9:30 (pm) with our work. From morning to night we would be busy with our work.” When I asked about her husband’s routine she said, “In the morning he leaves at 7:00 – 7:30 and goes to Chamba on his Jeep and comes back in the evening. Even if there are no passengers, he still goes.” This woman’s husband is a Jeep driver, one of the only drivers that makes regular trips out of the valley to Chamba. The point here though, is that he still has the choice to leave

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<sup>8</sup> A *roti* is a flat bread that is cooked on a stovetop.

as he pleases, but women are confined to the village. He does not need to justify why he leaves.

In many of my interviews, women referred to an ‘upper village’ called Jaripani – a place in which they felt most connected. Many women reported that this is where they would go to sell vegetables. On my last day of interviews, I decided to go to Jaripani and talk to women about their experiences of living in a more developed and modernized region. I thought it would be beneficial to hear about women’s experiences from this town that I had heard so much about in other interviews. I took a Jeep (I had interviewed the driver’s wife) to Chamba, which took about an hour, and then from Chamba I took another Jeep to Jaripani. The entire trip took about 90 minutes. Once I was in Jaripani I met with a storeowner who had moved to Jaripani from Saur many years ago.

Immediately, I noticed that she was not in the agricultural sector – she owned and managed her own small store. When I asked her about the frequency of leaving the village, she said “I leave quite often. My maternal house is in Chamba. In one month I go to Chamba at least fifteen times.” In this women’s case, perhaps her own economic independence has allowed her more freedoms. The passage to Chamba from Jaripani is not a difficult like it is for other women. This woman does not experience the restrictions in mobility that many of the women from the valley experience. It is possible that there is connection between her having her own shop, and her ability to leave Jaripani as she pleases. During her interview, she mentioned nothing about restriction, while comments of restriction were prevalent in interviews in other villages.

In my research sites, there was no main public artery such as a bazaar, rather, the villages were organized as clusters of houses throughout the hillsides. From my

observations, I saw that the mothers-in-law typically left the house to go to the jungle or to work in more faraway fields, while the daughters-in-law tended to the more domestic duties of the households. Another pattern that I noticed in my observations was that the ‘daughters of the village’ are granted more freedom and mobility than daughter in laws, or ‘brides of the village’. The increased mobility of mothers-in-law indicates the power of mothers-in-law over daughters-in-law.

Women regularly expressed difficulty in leaving the villages, and in all of the villages I interviewed, women repeatedly remained in the village more frequently than men. Women tend to be confined to the work of the village, changing the scale of the public and private spheres. As a result of modernization, the ‘private sphere’ extends from domestic realm to the parameters of the village. This does not mean that women experience greater liberties or freedoms – on the other hand, women work harder, as they are responsible for both domestic and agricultural work. Women are just as limited and are responsible for more, while they do not have any additional gains. Road development increases mobility for some, while decreasing it for others, ultimately creating greater inequalities than what existed prior to road development. More specifically, road development increases mobility for those who have the economic liberties to enjoy it, thus deepening the divide between genders.

An aspect of my argument is that infrastructural development restructures gender inequalities. In relation to mobility, the assumption is that men did not leave the village as frequently as they do now. In this way, men represent modernity while women represent tradition. Men represent modernity because they are performing change. Conversely, women represent tradition because they are stagnant. Infrastructural

development also restructures gender inequalities in that it expands the sphere of women to encompass the village. This is detrimental rather than empowering because the only reason that the sphere has expanded for these women is to accommodate the loss of men in terms of their workload. Therefore, women are more restricted than they were before. Additionally, women are only allowed to leave the village with permission from their husbands for a special occasion. With this in mind, is the trip out of the village, for these women, just another form of gifted jewelry?

### **Change in Economic Activity as a Result of the Road**

The building of the road has directly affected women's livelihoods in my research sites. One group of women told me about their experiences with the construction of the road "The first time that they came to build the roads, we thought, what is happening? Everybody from the village came to see what was happening. We have an old lady here in the neighborhood and we used to say to her 'come with us, come see that our village is getting a road!'. We thought that now we have everything now that roads have come (*laughter*).” I found that as a result of connectivity to the road, women experienced a diversification of economic activity. I asked if most people in the villages keep their produce for themselves. A woman responded with “Right. After the roads came, it is easier now to send milk. After the roads came, people started selling milk. We sell it from the road here (she pointed to the road).” For some women, like the woman previously quoted, the road provided an opportunity for her to begin selling excess milk in the neighboring larger city. For others, the road made selling milk much easier.” This woman shares, “Now if we have to sell milk then we just sell it from here. The car comes to the

door and we just give it to them. We used to have to wake up at 4 am in the morning and go uphill to Jaripani, be it winter season or snow, but we had to go with the milk. Today we don't have these difficulties.” This woman was the only woman in this group to regularly sell milk to Chamba. The other participants informed me that she has less people to feed – only two kids – allowing for a surplus of milk to be sold. These women are not selling large quantities of milk. Most women have one or two buffalos, so the amount of milk that they have is small.

Another woman shared, “Since the road has been introduced, the vehicles come by road and this is convenient for us because we can give the milk and vegetables to the driver who can carry it to Chamba market.” The driver is undoubtedly a man. Therefore, these women are still reliant on a man for money and entrusting him with their labor. She continues, “Earlier, we had to carry our vegetables to Jaripani on foot. We would carry 25-30 kilos on our heads to Jaripani.” In nearly every interview, a woman shared stories about life before the road. Women recounted the struggles of getting to and from Jaripani to sell food.

“It was really difficult for us, the tough conditions that we lived in. There was nothing. No light, no road. From the top of the mountain we used to get grass. We used to leave in the morning and come back by evening. And then in the darkness we would try to find the wood and then we would burn it and the fire would be good and we would make *rotis* on it. And then we would give them to the older people [in laws] of the house in a *thali*<sup>9</sup>. We had to give it to them like this or they would berate us. We had so many issues... The kids and I used to come falling, barely making it, from Jaripani carrying very heavy loads on our heads and holding the kids' hands. The kids were crying and struggling but we had to get them downhill somehow. Sometimes a lot of thick snow would come while coming downhill and the path used to be filled with snow as well. Kids used to cry so much while walking down. We have faced so many difficulties getting to and from Jaripani ...”

Two older women turned to each other and said,

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<sup>9</sup> A *thali* is a round platter used to serve food.

“Earlier, if somebody was sick they had to walk to Jaripani. People have died from going on the way. They used to give up their life half way, on horseback to Jaripani because there was no *sudhiva*.”

She gestured to an elderly woman next to her.

“We are the earlier ones in this group. She and I are of the earlier time. We are the ones who have come before. The other ones don’t know so much.”

This woman’s story clearly expresses the fatigue that women experienced before the road was built while simultaneously demonstrating women’s task in the domestic and agricultural spheres. I particularly like the last quote, because it describes women’s experiences as *before and after* the road came, placing significant temporal value on the road. What is peculiar, though, is that the road came during the younger women’s lifetimes, and they also remember the difficulties of life before the road, although the older women suggested the opposite. I found that the older generations often referred to the younger women as weak and lazy, and enjoyed comparing the lives of women in their 30s to their own lived experiences, in such a way that vilifies the young women of today. The older generation is asserting that the younger women enjoy more luxuries than they did when they were young, and therefore believe that the younger generation’s quality of life is better. The infrastructural development has created a space in which women can identify these perceived differences. In recognizing these differences, women are evaluating and establishing how women *should* behave, further defining their own rules of what it means to be a woman. That there exists an intergenerational component of vilification suggests internalized oppression. The presence of infrastructural development, in this way, redefines gender inequalities.

Women regularly discussed the sale of vegetables in relation to the road. I found that the sale of vegetables has increased, from selling small amounts to being able to sell

vegetables in larger quantities. Although the road has provided a market for the milk and vegetables, women reported that they still faced struggles in making money. When I asked where the vegetables are being sold, a woman replied “They are sold in Chamba, not Jaripani, and are also sold in Dehradun. Vegetables are given to the transport people and are then given to the vegetable market sellers. The transport money is cut from vegetable sellers here. The people who actually get a profit out of it are the people sitting in Chamba. Farmers don’t get anything. Only the people who buy and sell in the market get an income.” Another woman echoed this statement, “Our vegetables don’t go at the right price. The market is not close by, so we have to pay more for transport costs.” The women express clear frustration regarding the transaction of milk and produce. When they give their produce to the taxi driver they do so with an awareness that they have no power in the transaction. He can do what they cannot, like set the price for the milk, just by the nature of being a man. Women have no choice regarding the value or outcome of their produce or goods. Again, women find themselves in a position where they lack control and power.

Although these women lose money through the selling process, an opportunity still exists to sell milk or vegetables. For other women who live far from this road, the opportunities are much more limited. I spoke with two women who lived in a very remote part of the village of Pujyadi.<sup>10</sup> They both expressed similar sentiments, that the road was so far that they felt that their ability to sell their goods was jeopardized. These women

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<sup>10</sup> Pujyadi is at the end of the new road in the valley, and on the other side of the river. It takes about 10 minutes to walk from the center of Pujyadi to the road. In Pujyadi, there are three sections, defined by women as sections connected to electricity. The two women I spoke with came from the farthest part of Pujyadi, down a small trail.

reported that they did not experience some of the economic benefits of the road that other women did. While talking about access to the new road, one of the women said:

“Of course there would be a difference if there was a road because when we grow vegetables in our field, sometimes it goes to waste. Because there is no road, there is no way to sell it. If there was a road, we could just put it in the vehicle and tell the driver to take it to the city and sell it. But there is no road so it ends up getting wasted. If the vegetables are not of a large quantity, then we don’t feel like taking it to the market. Who is going to go all the way to the main road to carry such a small quantity? Also, we have to pay for the vehicle as well. It is not worth it to sell a small quantity. If the quantity is large then we will carry it on our heads and take it to the driver and to the market, but if it is only 5 or 10 kilograms then we don’t feel like going all the way to the road to sell it. In this case, we either keep it for ourselves or share it with others in the village. Who is going to carry it so far? The entire day will be wasted. If there was a road, we would sell milk and small quantities of vegetables. We wouldn’t have a doubt of whether or not to sell it. Since the road is too far, sometimes we don’t even reach the road by the time the vehicle leaves. We live so far that sometimes we are late and our work is wasted.”

These women continued to express difficulties of living at a distance from the road:

“Our main concern is that there is no road in the village. We have gas connection but because the road is so far we have to carry the gas cylinders on our head. That is a hassle to ultimately we rely on wood to cook food. We can’t benefit from gas cylinders because the road is too far. If we want to get gas cylinder from the driver then we have to pay someone, and who wants to do that. We face problems to even marry our daughters and that’s because the village is so far from the road. The groom’s side of the family says to get married in Chamba because our guests can’t walk to our house.”

As we can see from the above testimony, access to a road not only makes women’s lives easier in terms of economic growth, but it also allows for an elevation of status.

Being close to the road also brought up the discourse of money. In an interview in Saur, two women talk about the changes they’ve seen as a result of the road.

Woman 1: Earlier we didn’t have money. Because of farming we used to grow everything and we used to eat that itself. That is how we managed our existence. Sometimes, if at all, we would get some daily wage or labor work. So with that money we used to buy sugar and tea and oil. That time there was no money because people didn’t have jobs.

Woman 2: Now everything works on expenses.

Woman 1: Now everybody [the kids] have gone out and because of that money has come in. It was very hard for us to earn [see] money.

Woman 2: The person who had 1000 rupees used to be considered the richest.

Woman 1: Vegetables used to not be sold as much. We would only sell small amounts of vegetables. If money was so hard to come by then where would be buy things from? Now what has happened is people are also doing daily wage/labor work. Now even vegetables are getting sold. Now we are getting more money and from that money we are getting things from Chamba. Now we are eating well. Now it shows that there is money. But earlier it was difficult to get money.

Money signifies value. These women are identifying the fact that money did not always carry the same value. Their perceptions of money have changed. In that way, infrastructural development has deconstructed their perceptions of value. Later on in the same interview, a woman added;

In today's time money has become important. Earlier money wasn't that much of an issue. Earlier people were more poor. Today the kids have gone here and there to study and do work. So because of the sons going out people have some money now. So now those who have money will think 'yes my kids will study in a good school, get a good education and have a bright future.' Earlier we didn't even have any money to pay the fees. Maybe a little bit of money was there and we would just give what we could. And the school fees weren't that high during that time. How can people afford a private school education? In today's time people want to take their kids to a private school. By now even the government has given more things – food subsidies, education. When I was as old as my son I used to go really far for school and our kids today just walk a small distance to go to school. Their school is so close by. The kids will come all tired and exhausted from school and somewhere they will bruise their hands or their legs. The kids in earlier times were really responsible, really responsible about their home as well. Today's children are very careless.

What these testimonies reveal is that money has become a part of daily life, because now there are ways to make money. Before the infrastructural development, people relied on their own agricultural plots. Children went to the public schools because that was what was available. Currently, as a result of a number of factors, including increased access to the national economy and migration, there is more money in the village. These areas are

still very impoverished, but there is greater access to outside income. These testimonies reveal that when there are resources available, the priority is to send children to better, private schools. Similar to the way that older women talked about the relative ease in young women's lives, the young women talk about children's relative ease in close proximity to schools, saying that children cannot even walk to school without in some way harming themselves. There is a clear generational component here. As change manifests itself over time, older generations think that certain aspects of life become more convenient. At the same time, they ridicule the younger generations for exhibiting struggle.

There is an awareness of working in the informal sector. One woman said:

“Now whoever has more money will build better houses for themselves, people without money can't even make toilets for themselves. For those people with 4-5 kids, how can they manage feeding them? Because there is no employment. A person who makes a hand to mouth existence can't think about building a bigger house. We get seeds from the market, 1 kilo of seeds of peas costs 300-400 rupees. And we sow them. And if it doesn't yield anything then we go into a loss because we don't even get daily wage for the work we do on our farms. So in this way we are suffering. In this way we poor people are suffering. In the cities whatever meager work you do you still get paid.”

This woman is aware that her farming is not employment. She knows that she is not part of the labor sector. She says that not having a guaranteed income means that she suffers.

On the contrary, another woman speaking about her husband shares, “Because he is earning money, he has more power. Whatever work we [women] are doing from the morning to the evening has no monetary value.” In the first quote, the woman clearly writes about suffering and not being recognized for all of the work that she does. In the second quote, a woman acknowledges a clear link between earning money and power. The irony here is that women are performing the work that had once been the responsibility of men, yet they are suffering while men remain in power.

The road is very close to Dhungali, and of all the villages, I heard the most positive remarks about the road in regards to their economic participation. One woman said, “Whatever we produce we can easily sell it. We sell the milk, we sell the vegies. Earlier whatever we used to produce we used to just consume by ourselves, but now we sell it.” After this, many women agreed that there has been a significant amount of change. A different woman continued, “Nobody can die of hunger, everybody can fulfill their needs because we have a market to sell whatever we produce (vegetables and milk). Now we have a market and we can sell our products. Before it wasn’t this easy.” Everybody agreed with that last statement. Economic ease does not translate to economic empowerment. A few minutes later a woman added, “All the efforts women put in, but when it comes to taking the money, the men take the first seat. They have the first right to keep the money.” In this conversation the women express greater ease as a result of being able to move away from subsistence farming as a result of the road, but they still lack power when it comes to monetary decision making. Women experience a slight decline of living in self-sufficient households, because goods are available in the market. Regarding this topic, Sharma writes, “The decline in the self-sufficiency of the household has actually increased the dependence of women upon their husbands and sons” (1980). Instead of women being self-sufficient in their homes, men are able to go to the market to diversify the goods of the home, which in turn makes women more dependent on men because men are the ones that buy the necessities of the home.

### **Conveniences of Infrastructural Development**

The residents of the villages I interviewed used to go to the ‘upper village’ of Jaripani for entertainment, besides only for monetary purposes. As previously mentioned, Saur is a village that has been painted by an outside organization, *Project Fuel*, in order to try to bring life into this village that was emptied by outmigration. On one house, there is a painting of a television (see Figure 8).



Figure 8: House in Saur. Text reads “This house owned the first TV of the village bought for 5000 rupees 60 years ago.”

This was the first house to own a television. The house is now vacant, so I asked a neighbor about how it was possible to have a television, if power only came ten years ago. She replied that

the owner of the television would carry it up to Jaripani, a two hour walk, where they would use the electricity to watch television. I found this story to be very amusing, as surely a large television would have been difficult to carry on such a strenuous journey.

Women also talked about the convenience that electricity has brought. In one conversation, they said, “We have experienced a big difference since electricity came. Earlier when there was no electricity in the village, we used to cut the pine trees and burn it so that the children could study. Even when we went to Jaripani for weddings, as a natural torch, we would burn this and carry it.” Many women talked about burning the

*lissa*<sup>11</sup>, and using this as light for early morning work, or for children studying at night. Many women burned the *lissa* so that they could see in the dark as they carried vegetables to Jaripani early in the morning. Other women expressed gratitude towards electricity because of the reason that it makes enjoyment possible. “Now there are sources of entertainment, like televisions and phones because we can charge our phones. But the part of the village up there has no electricity so they face a lot of difficulty because they have to come down to charge their phones, or torch. Whatever they need to charge, they bring it down to our house to charge.” This woman pointed to a more distant part of the village, where people did not get to enjoy the benefits of electricity.

With increasing connectivity, people are finding that they need to travel shorter distances to find electricity, and many are hoping that soon their part of the village will be connected as well.



Figure 9: 'Digital Dadi' and her phone. Photo by author.

When talking about modernization of their villages, women often talked about the appliances that they had. They told me that they had a gas stove, so they used their *chula* less and eat warm food in the middle of a busy day. They had refrigerators, televisions, phones and radios. Many of these women received these appliances as a dowry. A majority of the women

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<sup>11</sup> A *lissa* is a natural torch made from parts of a pine tree.

had a cell phone, which was made very apparent by the regular interruptions of phone calls during the interviews. One woman, who the village calls ‘Digital Dadi’ wears a phone around her neck in a pink pouch that she knit and never takes it off, waiting for her sons to call her. This is what she says about having a phone:

Me: When did you buy a phone?

‘Digital Dadi’: “My son gave it to me. It will be four years in March. I don’t know much about this device, but my son calls. When I get a call I just say “hello!” and my son will say “mom, It’s me” or my grandson will say “grammy, it’s me”. And then I will speak to them. But I don’t call many people or anything. But you know for if for many days there has been no call, I take my phone to Shubraz [a boy in the village] and he makes a call to my son for me.”

For ‘Digital Dadi’, having a phone connects her to her son and grandson. I include her testimony because I enjoy witnessing how valuable this phone is to her. The presence of electricity has allowed for her to have and charge her phone, and feel connected to her family in the city. Electricity has certainly increased quality of life, as is evident in the previous testimony. Electricity has also allowed for the use of appliances.

These modern appliances have made our life easier. Earlier we used to wake up at 4:00 in the morning and we used to cook food for all the meals and at 6 am we used to leave for the jungles and fields. But now we make fresh food during the day. At 10 am we have breakfast, at 1:00 we have lunch at 8:00 we have dinner. Earlier we used to come back at 9:00 or 10:00 and then we had to light a bonfire and everything. Our kids were also younger and we had to do more work. There was no water in our house and we had to procure that as well. Now we have taps everywhere. Before we had to go so far to get water, even for drinking water. In Suun Gao [a village in a different region] we had a lot of water problems, but not so much in Saur because there is a stream here. We used to have many problems there. We used to steal water at night.

This woman discusses the conveniences that ‘modern appliances’ have provided, which is made possible by electricity. She discusses the burden of taking care of her children, in addition to cooking and working in the fields, before water and electricity came. The conveniences of water taps seem to be saving her time during the day as well. Indeed, electricity has allowed for a better quality of life,

and irrigation has saved time, but it is important to note that quality of life is not the same thing as empowerment.

### **On Migration and Change in the Community**

Saur is one of my research sites, and the village where I lived during my fieldwork. Saur is a village that has experienced rapid outmigration in the past few decades. As a result, the village of Saur is called a ‘ghost village’. A walk around the village would reveal signs of its past – crumbling, deserted homes and dried up wells. Out-migration has occurred throughout the entire valley, in all of my research sites. The women in Saur were very vocal about migration. Women shared a few stories that expressed how the change in the village has changed their perspectives on their own lives. One woman said,

“There are no good schools in the village, that’s why people migrate to the cities, to give their kids better education. There are government schools here but the quality of education isn’t as good as private or city schools, although there are good teachers at this school. The school is really good and the teachers are really cooperative and they really pay attention to the students. These days, we see more people going to private schools, so others want to go. That’s why the village is becoming empty.”

It is curious that she initially devalues what she has by talking about the low quality of the local school, but then later retracts her statement. In this case, the option for a private school is one that was not always available. She asserts that the village is becoming empty because people are seeing what they *could* have, and that this is a phenomenon that exists with development of the region. Another woman talks about the differences in life now, compared to how it used to be. She shared,

“Earlier, everybody used to have their own land and used to grow on it, and everyone used to have their cattle. Now it’s not like it. These days, people rely on shops to buy goods. Earlier everyone used to live here but now people have migrated. Now their land is barren. We all used to live together.”

It seems as if this woman is nostalgic for a life before the road came. One woman said “soon it will become like a town. The older houses were made of mud. Now people are thinking that they will make their houses of concrete and then everyone will die of the cold. The change has already come. Now you see all these abandoned half broken houses. People of these houses have left and people have gone to Jaripani and built concrete houses.” For the women of Saur, change expresses itself in the migration out of Saur. There is a comical moment when the woman says “Now people are thinking that they will make their houses of concrete and then everyone will die of the cold,” mocking the newer house-building methods. And she is right. The concrete houses get very cold, and the earth houses stay warm during the cold winter months. I lived in a concrete house during the month of December and needed three blankets after sun-down.

Women expressed the importance of the road in terms of return migration. One woman said, “Since the road has been built, everybody is saying that they want to come back to the village now. They are saying that we want to build a house in the village now.” This statement underscores the perceived significance that the road has on people’s livelihoods and is an apparent pull factor for return migration. Women are reacting to people leaving and are hopeful that people will return to the village. As I discussed in Chapter Two, men have been represented as synonymous with modernization, and women with tradition. This is feminine call to bring people back to tradition.

### **On Decision Making and Power, Control of Resources**

During the interviews, stories of power and decision making emerged. As Sharma

discloses in her book *Women, Work and Property in North-West India*, decision making processes are difficult to study because of their private nature (Sharma 1980). I found this to be very true while trying to talk to women about these issues. When talking to women about power, I asked questions like “Who makes decisions about what food to make?” or, “Who makes decisions about your children’s education?” At times, I directly asked them, “Who has the most power (or upper hand) in your household?”

The following conversation in Kakwardi is one that was fairly representative of interviews about power in the household:

Me: In your house, who decides about children’s studies, or about what food to make?

Women: (Laughter)

Woman: It depends on who wishes to eat what, according to each person’s wishes. If someone says make *daal*<sup>12</sup>, we make *daal*. If someone says make *roti*, then we make that.

Me: Who makes the decisions in your house?

Woman: (amongst laughter). The husband takes the decision. The women who don’t have a husband make the decisions. Our father makes the decisions. The ones who are elder will make the decisions. According to time and circumstance, if the man goes somewhere else, then the woman will make the decisions.

The dialogue depicts that discomfort that arose in some interviews about issues of decision making and power. The women responded here with a lot of laughter, which I encountered in many of the interviews, on this topic in particular. The only time that a woman has power is in the absence of a man.

Women without husbands have the decision making power in their households. However, some women with husbands did express that they held power in the household. One woman, a 50-year-old farmer, and former tailor, who lives at home with her

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<sup>12</sup> *Daal* is an Indian dish made of lentils.

husband, daughter, and daughter-in-law, sticks out as perhaps the most passionate about conversations of power. When I posed “For those of you whose husbands stay at home, who makes the decisions? I want to understand more about the power dynamics that are at play at home.” She was the first to respond by saying, “In my house I have the power.” In some cases, women expressed a disinterest in wanting power. The following conversation about control of money alludes to this:

Woman 1: We make the decision together, he takes my suggestions, and he makes the ultimate decision.

Me: Who has more control over money?

Woman 2: Men have more control over money because he has to go to the market to buy stuff. We don't want control of the money.

Me: You don't want it?

Woman 2: I don't want it. It is also because we don't leave the village that often.

Woman 3: When there are men in the family, then he goes to buy the stuff, but when there is no man then the women go buy the stuff.

Woman 2: I don't even know the rates of sugar and tea.

Woman 1: Only he gets the provisions.

Woman 4: Since I am a widow I have to do all the things. I have all the responsibilities.

These conversations illuminate connections between several aspects. First of all, it reveals information about control of resources. As we have seen from other oral testimonies, women spend the entire day collecting fodder for the buffalos, cutting grass for them in the fields, milking them and preparing the milk to be sold. The men are the ones that handle the money generated by the women's efforts, and are also the ones to decide about buying a buffalo. This conversation also reveals issues of gendered power relations and mobility. For this group of women, mobility and financial power are directly related. When the woman said “I don't even know the rates of sugar and tea,” it reveals a connection between the lack of knowledge and lack of power. It seems as

though these women do not want more mobility because they do not want control of money because that is what men or women without husbands do. To want the opposite would be a betrayal of gender roles.

There is a generational component to decision making and power. In a conversation about who controls the money, the following conversation ensued. The oldest woman of the group said “We have to take permission from our husband to do anything. We are not allowed to eat food without their permission.” After she said this three other women replied with “No, no, no this isn’t the case for us,” “This only happens with old people” and “This doesn’t happen with us. Ours is a different generation. This only happens with old people.” In a different interview, when I asked who has power in the decision making process, two women remarked that men have more power. When I asked them about why they felt men had more power than women, one woman replied, “We Garhwali women, for our husband’s respect and dignity, we listen to them. If our husband tells us to do something, we listen to him because we respect him. It’s not like we have a fear of our husbands, but we respect him. That’s our culture. It’s with our mother in laws and fathers in laws also. If they tell us to sit, then we have to sit. If they tell us to stand then we have to stand because we respect them.” The other woman added, “If we don’t respect our husbands, then who will? Then outsiders will not respect him.” Respect for her husband is her role.

One woman offered an explanation as to why men have more decision making power. She said, “The men have more decision making power in the house because they earn money, and the return from the agriculture is unpredictable and not a fixed source of income so that’s why we don’t have that much power.” Another woman interjected, “It’s

uncertain if we will profit from the agriculture. But men have the responsibility to earn money and feed the family. The first woman continued, “Because he is earning money, he has more power. Whatever work we are doing from the morning to the evening has no monetary value.” This woman was determined and confident in her voice. At this point, a woman disagreed, “Whatever amount of money we want, we keep it.” She was met with resistance at this statement. Women responded with “The men get to keep the money. It’s their money, it’s not our money. The men have the power to keep the money and give it to us if we need it,” and “It’s our job to do the hard work and carry the sack on our head and take it to the road to sell the vegetables, but when it comes to taking the money then the men do it. Our responsibility ends at selling the vegetables.” The women agreed that women put in the effort, but men control the money. It was clear to me from the facial expressions and the tones being used that this is a normalized practice that they are not happy about. Yet, they are performing these roles, explaining the clear boundaries of where women’s work ends and men’s begins. Once again women are divided on these issues of money – who keeps and controls it – and the divisive nature of this conversation is only possible because of the changes that the road has brought. These women are in a liminal state. As the road develops, so too do these ideas regarding fiscal autonomy and if it has a place in the gender identities of these rural Indian women.

Throughout most of the interviews, women reported that men are the decision makers. One woman summarizes this point nicely. She said, “When it comes to big decisions, then men take it. First they take our suggestion but ultimately they make the decisions. We tell them, we don’t want to interfere in this, you decide what to do.” Some

women reported that their husband's permission was required before coming to the interview.

The notion that men have power and control of resources was not unanimous. Of all my research sites, Khurait was the village that was farthest removed from the new road. As I demonstrated in previous conversations, women typically agreed that men had more control of the money. However, in Khurait, the group of women had a different experience. Observe the following conversation:

Woman 1: If our husband's earn, they give us the money. And if he spends the money, he tells the women how much he spent and where (kind of like receipts).

Me: It's not like men have more control of money?

Woman 1: No, not at all. If I have to go to Chamba and asked my husband about money (e.g. how much should I spend?), the husband says, why are you asking me? Just spend what you want.

*Everybody agreed. Many voices chimed in:*

“They don't suppress us.”

“Women keep the money.”

“Sometimes we have money, sometimes we don't have money, but whenever we have it the husbands give that money to us.”

In this village – due to its removal from the road -- perhaps some women have yet to experience the inequalities that mobility creates and men have yet to experience the privileges. Their experiences with power and control on money are quite different from the stories of women who are more connected to the road. This is a place where gender expectations and performance as remained unchanged because the road is too far away to react to it in a way the others do. In this village, the women are not experiencing an expanding private sphere. In turn, men are not reacting, their masculinity is not being threatened, and they are not asserting fiscal power over women.

### **Negative Aspects of the New Road**

Although women recounted many positive aspects of the road, such as easier access to water and markets, some testimonies surfaced which suggested that there are some negative aspects of the road as well. There seemed to be a decrease in community kinship. In two villages, Pujyadi and Kurait, women spoke of negative impacts of the road. When I asked about any negative impacts, one woman enthusiastically replied “Wait I will tell you. Everybody used to live together, everybody used to do agriculture. If they had to go to Jaripani, along with that person, ten more people would go. Or we would get things for each other if one person was going to the village. Unity and love. But now, when they go, other people don’t even know about it.” This disappearance of community and sense of rising individualism is one that is clearly tumultuous for the women and is expressed within the parameters of access and mobility. It is ironic that something that is supposed to bring people together has the opposite effect.

In addition to a loss of community cohesion, women also remarked about the loss of mountain paths as a result of the road. Women explained that they were saddened that some of their old mountain paths were destroyed during the making of the road, and commented that the mountain paths were quicker and more convenient at times. As a result of the road, some of the mountain paths became neglected and disappeared. One woman said, “Some paths are connected to the road, and the old paths are disappearing. Earlier we used to go way down the hill to the mountain paths, but now there’s no point in going there. Now the pigs or leopards or tigers might harm us.” The road in theory makes their preferred options impossible, robbing them of choice.

There was extensive conversation, in every village, about the increase of wildlife as a result of the road. The relationship between infrastructural development in wildlife areas is one that presents regular problems throughout India. There is a real fear among people in this region of leopards and tigers, and all of the participants voiced that the road has allowed for a growing presence of wildlife in their villages. One woman remarked, “We feel scared of animals because the houses are far apart. There is more jungle here. It’s forested area so sometimes we feel scared of animals and think that if we go to the jungle then they will attack us. We are scared of the fact that if our children go out alone then the animals will attack them, because the houses are so far. There is a constant fear of the presence of animals.” Some women were also frustrated about the wildlife because of the destruction of their agriculture. “Whatever agriculture we do is only for our consumption and even if we try to do more, the animals destroy it all. There are pigs and rabbits who destroy the crops. When the harvesting time comes, the animals destroy everything.” This was a frustration voiced by many women. In Saur, this issue was so severe that a man was designated the full-time job of scaring off monkeys. Wildlife encroaching on the villages is an effect of an increase in urbanization, and the women in this region attributed the wildlife to the new road.

### **On Being a Woman**

I return here to Sharma’s discussion of what makes a “good wife”. Being a wife is an incredibly important in women’s identities. Women constantly referred to their wedding as a marker of time, saying things like “there was no electricity at my wedding.” For many women, it appears as if the wedding serves as the ‘before’ and ‘after’ in terms of

thinking about time. Jeffery further supports the significance of the wedding, by establishing that after marriage, women become the “wives of the village” instead of the “daughter of a village”. Every single woman that I interviewed moved to their villages after marriage, to the “man’s” village, a man’s space. Throughout my interviews, I investigated women’s roles as wives. Observe the following conversation about work:

In the village of Dhungali, towards the end of the interview, the conversation switched to what it meant for them to be a woman. The conversation was more among the women than directed at me. One woman shared:

“I don’t like being a woman because we don’t have freedom. We are not allowed to work in the cities. Still, people differentiate between men and women in the village. Men have no restrictions and can go out whenever they want to, but women don’t have the liberty to work. And even if the men don’t work, they have the freedom to just roam around. Still, they differentiate between sons and daughters. The sons have the liberty to go out and leave the village if he wants to, but the daughter doesn’t have that liberty. For the daughter, get her married send her to the in-law’s house. Since the beginning the parents teach their daughters to talk less and not roam around, but the son has all the liberties. The woman’s condition has improved but still the problem prevails.”

In the last sentence, she makes it clear that there is a difference between quality of life and empowerment. The two are not the same. Infrastructural development can make women’s lives easier and improve their quality of life, but this does not mean that they are empowered. Another woman added to this and said, “We don’t give as much freedom to our daughters as we give our sons.” They maintain the standard, even though they do not like it. A few women turned to the most elderly woman in the group, who is 75 years old and came to Dhungali when she was 18, just after marriage. They asked her “Do you feel any privilege of being a woman?” Her response was “If I was a man today I don’t know where I would be, but I am a woman so I have to be in the village.” The women paused, and finally one added, “Our life is just limited to the four walls.” The women

continued to talk amongst themselves about being women. They told us after the interview, that they really valued the time to come together and talk about these issues, and that this was a rare opportunity. My research assistants and I asked if they had any questions for us. They asked us if we felt proud to be women. My research assistants responded that they felt proud to be women, and I chose to remain silent, because I am clearly an outsider and have a completely different reality and privileges than the women I was interviewing. The women in the interview responded to my research assistants and said “You feel proud to be a woman because you are free and have a chance to be educated. You have not done the work that we have done, you have not seen the life that we have seen so of course you feel proud to be a woman.” This was an emotional and fascinating comment. It is one that placed me, as well as my research assistants, as outsiders, and it was one of the few times that the subject matter created an ‘us versus them’ mentality among the group. It revealed the complexities of the many different levels of gender inequalities within India, and also revealed a certain level of these women’s self-awareness. The encounter was a positive one, as they made us tea, gave us walnuts, and made us promise to return.

## **Conclusion**

Women shared stories about the change they have experienced and the way they spend their time. The argument in my thesis is that infrastructural development restructures and redefines gender inequalities. This is made apparent in this section. The criteria for empowerment are equality in decision making and power, access to and control of resources, and mobility. In this section, I include oral testimonies on these three topics.

It was clear from the oral testimonies that infrastructural development has made women's lives much more convenient. Women expressed in enjoyment in entertainment, made possible by electricity. We can recall the shop-owner in Jaripani who loves to keep her television on throughout the day, and we remember Digital Dadi's story of using her cell phone to stay in touch with her son. However, while these conveniences are abundant, women also expressed negative aspects of infrastructural development – primarily the road.

In some instances, it was made clear by women during the interviews that the road has decreased an overall sense of community. The road appears to have led to an increased sense of individualism, and resulting in a decrease of community togetherness. In addition to this, many women attributed an increase in wildlife to the road. They claim that wildlife eating their crops is an issue that is worsening. Infrastructural development has, in different ways, increased and decreased quality of life for the women in my research sites. It is important to remember that quality of life and empowerment are not the same thing.

In my section called 'Daily Life', the women are questioning their value and contributions to society. Infrastructural development has brought into question the women's identity, and that is because the space is liminal. The fact that women are questioning their identity and the value of the work suggests the value of the work is gendered. Women are examining gender inequalities in their lives, because of the introduction of infrastructural development.

In 'On Mobility', I conclude that women are more restricted than they were before the road came into the village. The expansion of the private sphere, as a result of

the road, has only restricted their mobility further, as they are regularly reminded that they are fixed to the village. They have more responsibilities because they are taking on the responsibilities that the men left behind. This is a clear restructuring of gender inequality.

In the section called 'Change in Economic Activity', I investigated the relationship between money, power, and mobility. Women identified that money is synonymous with power, and in order to experience mobility, one must have power. Women are more reliant on men because of men's mobility. Women expressed that they could sell milk and vegetables more easily. This did not lead to economic empowerment, however, because their roles in the process ended at selling the goods.

During 'In Migration', I aimed to remind the reader about the theory that men are represented as modern, progressive and forward, while women represent the opposite. This is important because this an element of patriarchal thinking. Patriarchy has defined women's place in rural India, and continues to do so in different forms. Even development agencies are less concerned about women, and more concerned about what women can do for the world.

In 'Decision Making and Power' I concluded that the distance from infrastructural development indicates the severity of gendered reactions. For instance, in Khurait – the village farthest from the road – women exercise equal decision making power and control over money. The full breadth of the consequences of infrastructural development have not yet reached Khurait.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

One could expect that women would experience privileges from the road and other infrastructural developments. It could be presumed that the road would give them mobility. We might ascertain that a road would allow women to participate more in the economic sector. The road does not detract from women's status, but it does alter it. Because of other changes that may occur, the road may well have an impact on cultural interactions and local values and expectations as well.

There are three main conclusions to my thesis. Foremost, women's private sphere has expanded because of the absence of men. In once rural areas that are now connected to a road, women's private sphere is expanding from the household to the village. In this way, I redefine the parameters of the 'private vs. public sphere.' Although women's private sphere is expanding, this does not equate to more freedoms. In fact, women are more restricted than before, because their husband's freedom curtails their own.

Secondly, the presence of the road supports the gender inequalities that are already in place in a society. When there is an option to leave a region, in most cases, it is the men who leave. Women stay behind to care for the fields or the animals, often taking their husband's responsibilities. Women are generally burdened by their husband's absence.

Finally, infrastructural development certainly increases the quality of women's lives, but it does not lead to their empowerment. For example, women may experience more free time by not having to collect water from a river, but this convenience does not

give them more decision making and power, access to and control of resources, or increased mobility. Quality of life and empowerment are not interchangeable terms.

As I wrote in my introduction, I have compiled many different definitions of empowerment to conceptualize empowerment as a woman's ability to experience decision making and power, access to and control of resources, and mobility. To do this, I conducted interviews with fifty women in rural northwest India. In my research, I found that women's lives had changed considerably as a result of the infrastructure that permeated the valley in the past decade. Many of the experiences that women shared conformed to the expectations presented in the scholarly work. For example, I was not surprised to find that women experienced less mobility, or that they spent much of their time on domestic work. However, there were some surprising results.

In areas that still have less access to infrastructure, women enjoy equal power and control over money as men. This does not mean that these women are empowered. That the discourse about money was different in Khurait, as compared to the rest of the villages, is a testament to the road as a catalyst for change. The effects of the road had not yet reached the men, therefore the men had nothing with which to react or change what they had been doing.

The presence of a road led to greater power imbalances regarding women's mobility, suggesting that the presence of infrastructure disempowers women. Roads can disproportionately affect women, as they must remain fixed while their children and husbands leave, which means that their workloads increase. The presence of the road in my research sites led to negative outcomes such as a lack of community as well as perceptions of learned poverty.

I primarily utilized the methodology of oral testimony. I found that the use of oral testimony was a particularly beneficial tool for women, as was noted in the conversation about 'being a woman.' The ability for women to commiserate on their experiences is one that allowed for deep introspection. This conversation is what Rowlands (1997) and Kabeer (2011) argue is 'power within,' or the core and basis of empowerment. I argue that the use of oral testimony should be central when establishing programs or projects related to empowerment of women. This notion is supported to some extent, in the form of collectives. "In moving toward a state of empowerment, the formation of collectives is emphasized because collectives provide a platform to women where they can speak up and discuss matters that concern them individually as well as collectively and in the process relate to others in their struggle" (Raju 2005). This sentiment is supported by Hill (2001) when she states, "Collectives such as SEWA led to self-realization" (Hill 2001: 458). This, however, brings up more questions. How should women be included without access to collectives such as SEWA? How are women supposed to address complex issues of empowerment if they are in a space of oppression or disempowerment? The cultural and societal forms of patriarchy which are responsible for women's oppression must be addressed and challenged. If we agree with Rowlands that empowerment begins at 'within', then we need to encourage opportunities for all women, regardless of access, to talk about issues surrounding empowerment. Development agencies should employ bottom up techniques that provide women the opportunity to discuss these issues, as a regular part of development programs.

My intention in writing this thesis was to highlight the experiences of women in rural areas. Although I chose to investigate issues in India, similar patterns exist in many

regions of the world. The themes and issues presented in this thesis are in no way confined in geographical terms. I hope to have clarified some misconceptions about empowerment and wellbeing – the two are not interchangeable terms. I argued that infrastructural development, while it is a huge force in rural development, restructured and redefined gender inequalities in my research sites.

That is to say, women have not become empowered as a result of the road. I discussed concepts of gendered reactions to change.

In my research, women came together to discuss concepts of power and change in their lives. They joined me in the middle of the day to provide me with stories of their lives. A women's space – a space not centered on work – was created during these interviews. Women told me that they sincerely enjoyed and valued the conversations we were having – with myself often in the background as these women shared and debated experiences. Many development agencies focus some component of their work on “women's empowerment” and I argue that the facilitation of the women's spaces in my fieldwork, and the use of oral testimony, is a step toward empowerment for women.

### **Significance**

My research demonstrates that the presence of a road does not necessarily mean that women are experiencing its benefits. One way in which a woman could greatly benefit from a road is by using the enhanced mobility to go to school and gain an education.

When women have more access to education and are able to participate in the economy, their world becomes healthier and wealthier. Women's education influences life expectancy, infant and maternal mortality, total fertility (King and Hill 1997:19), and

overall wellbeing in a community. Women's education also enhances women's economic productivity (King and Hill 199: 27). It also advances the educational attainment of her children.

It is important that development agencies realize that women's mobility does not necessarily increase simply with the presence of new roads. This could be addressed by establishing more educational outreach programs. Instead of expecting women to use the road to become educated in the next village, more efforts should be made to offer education throughout rural areas. The Indian government could incentivize girls' education, so that both schools and girls' families get some sort of monetary compensation for sending girls to school.

My research also establishes that in places with a road, women's private sphere expands from beyond the four walls of the home to encompass the village. This means that women's responsibilities increase, which detracts from their potential to pursue an education. In this instance, development agencies could work closely with women to support them in the work that they are already doing so that they can receive some sort of benefit. This can be by way of micro loans or entrepreneurial programs. Again, considering the remote nature of many of these regions, development agencies should focus on outreach programs.

Finally, this research argues that although infrastructural development does benefit rural livelihoods, women are not necessarily being empowered as a result. Women's quality of life generally increases. For example, they save time by using running water and appliances and can enjoy the convenience of a flashlight instead of relying lanterns. Women did not usually experience more decision making power, access

to or control of resources, or increased mobility as a result of the road, so roads do not necessarily empower women. Development agencies must not assume that providing a society with a tool, such as a road, will enact change.

### **Lessons Learned**

It would have been preferable to have more time at my research site. Ideally, I would have spent months in this region, really getting to know the societal standards and the women in the community. I lived in a large Muslim city in India as a language student, and moving from urban Muslim India to rural Hindu India was a big change. Had I conducted research in a Muslim community, I anticipate I would have had a better understanding of the cultural intricacies at play. In addition, as I was going through my results, I wish that I had more information about men's and women's daily routines before the road came. This would have allowed for a better comparison of my results, and a greater understanding of the questions that I was asking.

I also learned so much about myself during the research process. I have spent a lot of time in other countries, but I never tried to extract specific kinds of information from women. This was a concept with which I initially struggled. I learned through this process how to explore relationships of power and privilege in my own academic life, and in my life beyond academe.

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