The Indian State and the Micropolitics of Food Entitlements

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This thesis titled
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ABSTRACT

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The Indian State and the Micropolitics of Food Entitlements

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The objective of this research is to understand, how people in different socio-economic groups access food, the role of the state in facilitating or hindering access to food, and what constitutes the ‘politics of access’ to food for people. The data for this research was collected from interviews conducted among four socio-economic groups, and was analyzed using descriptive statistics and qualitative analysis. This research identified market-based entitlements as the most significant form for all the groups to access food, and identified indigenous laborers as lacking access to major endowments and entitlements, amongst all the groups. Finally, this thesis points to the significance of transfer entitlements across the socio-economic groups, and in doing so details the nature of politics, especially those practiced by the state, that help people gain access to the schemes or denies access to them.
DEDICATION

To the memory of the late Dr. Atmaram Gawande, former Chief of Staff, O’Bleness Memorial Hospital, Athens, Ohio, and to Dr. Sushi Gawande (Athens, OH) and Meeta Gawande, Esq., (Boulder, CO), whose unswerving philanthropic efforts have helped bring college education to thousands of students in a deprivation-affected region of India, where the research for this thesis was carried out.
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I am indebted to my family and my small group of friends – they have been with me, at all times.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations stated in a recent report (2008) on global food insecurity that in 2007, more than 923 million people were chronically hungry. During the period from the early 1990s to the middle of the first decade of 21st century, the number of people suffering from hunger increased by 50 million in South Asia and by 44 million in sub-Saharan Africa (Ghosh, 2010). Further, according to the World Bank’s World Development Indicators report, during 1990 - 2004, while world population grew by 21 percent, the world food production grew by around 36 percent (Sundaram, 2010). Therefore, one can notice that while there has not been a relative shortage in food production, and the ratio of growth in world population remains below that of food production, there is a clear problem with access to food, and not with the supply of the same. Further, Essex (2012) argues that the intensive neo-liberalization of food systems during the previous two decades has led to restructuring of food security that has resulted in increased vulnerability to hunger and a stark geographic reordering of life chances for the hungry.

Studies of famines and their causes would be incomplete without an adequate understanding of the great Bengal famine of 1942–43, which was almost made paradigmatic by the publication of Poverty and Famine. Amartya Sen, a Noble laureate in Economics, has been credited with reinterpreting understanding of famine causation, and helping move the hitherto dominant emphasis on the “availability” of food, to an understanding of the impact of malfunctioning of markets on exchange entitlements, or on people who were buyers of food, instead of being producers (Gráda, 2011). The theory
of “Exchange Entitlements” was one of the most noteworthy contributions of Amartya Sen. According to Sen (1981), a famine occurs when a large number of people in a region lose their means (or “entitlements”) to access commodities. Entitlements include wages earned from an occupation, crop or livestock, gifts, donations, investments and inheritance (Devereux, 2001). One of the most important contributions of Sen, therefore, was to look beyond decline in agricultural production termed Food Availability Decline, and towards failure of entitlements called Food Entitlements Decline or FED. Watts (1991) credits *Poverty and Famine* for its contribution in highlighting the centrality of power and enforceable rights. Watts and Bohle (1993) suggest that the entitlements theory brings together two related approaches to hunger: one being food security and coping strategy, and the other being social security or social welfare theories. In case of the former, food security is understood in terms of food availability at different social and spatial scales – individual, household, sub-national, national, and global (Alamgir and Arora, 1991), while Kates And Millman (1990) choose to understand food security by distinguishing between different hunger situations, viz. food shortage, food poverty, and food deprivation. In case of the latter, Watts and Bohle (1993) suggest that the concerns of lawyers, economists, and policy analysts, and the worlds of legal and economic anthropologists are brought together in order to closely understand social security and welfare. Des Gasper (1993), while finding nothing “new” in Sen’s arguments, argues that the “cool, precise, and lucid arguments of a distinguished economist” has a potential to influence the academia and donor agencies. While the literature review in this thesis will engage extensively with the criticism that Sen’s theory/framework received from several
researchers, it is important to briefly outline the theoretical paradigms that existed prior to Sen’s framework, and that Sen, by proposing the centrality of ‘access’ to food, departed from.

On the note of theorization itself, de Waal (1997) suggests that there may not be a direct relationship between famine theory and practice given that famine relief and prevention are often shaped by urgent political considerations, and the process of theorization of famines is rather slower and develops on its own pace. De Waal further argues that famine theory and practice have become institutionalized and use specially created technical professions and institutions to exercise power. Hence, there is a necessity to understand the historical process of theorization of famines, their causes, and human responses to them. Modern English anti-famine practices that date back to the Elizabethan-era included instructions to local authorities to respond to famine threats by controlling grain markets, providing work for the able-bodied employed, and giving free assistance to the poor who were ‘deserving’ (Leonard, 1985). These mechanisms, though, were enacted to control unrest and disease. Yet another theoretical work that had a significant impact on policies that concerned famines were those of Thomas Malthus, who identified famine by a shortfall in the supply of food in a given area, and death by starvation of a substantial proportion of the inhabitants (Malthus, 1926). It was in this backdrop of theorization in classical economics that Sen proposed the entitlements framework.
1.1. Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

The objective of this research is to understand how people in different socio-economic groups access food, what the role of the state is to facilitate or hinder access to food, and understand what constitutes the “politics of access” to food for people from different social groups. It may be noted that India already has a “targeted” Public Distribution System in place since 1997 that broadly entitles certain kinds of food commodities to households in possession of a government-issued ration card.

This research attempts to map the process through which people in four socio-economic groups, viz. agricultural laborers, non-farm laborers, landed peasants, and members of indigenous communities convert their endowments to entitlements. Further, building on the foundational understanding of the field site’s political ecology and political economy of food, I will aim at exploring the nature of politics that underlies people’s access to food.

The empirical information to answer the research questions raised in the next chapter, partly comes from analyses of quantitative and qualitative data I collected in and around a small village, Marsul, in the deprivation affected Yavatmal district of the state of Maharashtra in India, during July – August, 2012. In reviewing the information I collected from the village, and reading criticisms that Sen’s Entitlements framework received, I will present an understanding of both the legalistic background and moral economy that influence people’s access to food.
1.2. Presentation of the Research

This paper is organized into five chapters. In Chapter Two, I discuss Sen’s Entitlements Framework, understood from his work in Poverty and Famines (1981) and the broader discussions he engages with regarding the centrality of states in reducing hunger, along with Jean Drèze in Hunger and Public Action (1991). Further, I have summarized a body of literature that constitutes at least some of the critiques that Sen’s framework received, right from de Waal (1990) to Rubin (2009), and have followed it up with an extension of this criticism by discussing the role of power and politics that in fact problematizes centrality of state.

The third chapter discusses the research study area, and briefly introduces the political economy of food insecurity in India. Chapter Four outlines the methods used to collect the data, and describes the process of data interpretation. Chapter Five and Six are the “results” chapters of this thesis that discuss the data obtained in the context of each of the research questions, respectively, that this thesis seeks answers for. Chapter Seven presents the discussion, which reads the results in the context of the theoretical framework that underlies this thesis, in particular, and development scholarship, in general. The final chapter also briefly outlines possible future research directions that this work may take.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, I present literature on the development concerns of famines and hunger. My emphasis is to bring together academic work that understands and critiques the seminal contribution of Amartya Sen to famine theorizing, who, it is understood, chose to emphasize the natural (availability of food) along with the social (access to food) as causes for concern.

This chapter is divided into four major sections. An introduction to the entitlements framework will be presented first, followed by criticisms that the framework received from several scholars. The third section will narrate various relationships between politicization, power, and access to food that Sen’s framework was critiqued for not paying sufficient attention to.

2.1 Introduction to Entitlements Framework

2.1.1 Food Security – Definitions, Concepts, and Criticism

The World Food Conference defined food security as “availability at all times of adequate world supplies of basic food stuffs …to sustain a steady expansion of food consumption…and to offset fluctuations in productions and prices” (UN, 1975). A fair conclusion to draw from this definition and similar ones that were proposed later is that the focus on food security has been largely on the availability or supply of food (Valdes, 1981). However, Amartya Sen is credited with bringing about a paradigmatic shift in food security analysis, by focusing on the concern of access (Maxwell, 2000). This change in the approach to our understanding of food security was seen in the policy
documents that were brought out after publication of Sen’s classic, Poverty and Famines. One of the most cited definitions of food security is taken from a World Bank policy study, published in 1986: “Food security is access by all people at all times to enough food, for an active, healthy life” (World Bank, 1986, Maxwell, 2000).

Broadly, since the World Food Conference in 1974, three shifts have been identified in the framework of thinking about food security: (1) from the global and the national, to the household and the individual, (2) from a “food first” perspective to a livelihoods perspective, and (3) from objective indicators to subjective perceptions of food security (Maxwell, 1996). Amartya Sen’s work quite neatly fits into this change in thinking about food security from broad quantitative understandings, such as from national food availability to actual access that individuals have to food. Further, to understand vulnerability to hunger and famine, Sen chose to begin at the household level with explicating “entitlements” (Ribot, 1995).

2.1.2 Sen’s Entitlements Approach and the Role of the State

This section will introduce Sen’s Entitlements Approach, its centrality and significance in food security research in the social sciences, its critiques, and a discussion on the role of “public action” or the state in provisioning of these entitlements for people. While the rest of the literature will critically address the differences between access to food and availability of food, it may be necessary to differentiate the two at this stage. Food availability is understood to mean “sufficient availability of food with the nation through domestic production, net imports (commercial or food aid) and carry-over of
stocks.” On the other hand, an “individual’s capacity to purchase food and to be able to procure food through safety nets or availability’ is understood as food access (FAO, August 2008).

Sen (1981) argues that it is not sufficient to ensure the presence of food in the economy or in the market, because it would not directly “entitle” food to an individual. Entitlements, according to Sen, in fact, “are a set of alternative commodity bundles, over which a person can establish command, given the prevailing legal, political and economic arrangements.” He explains this by referring to the endowments that a person owns and those that she acquires through exchange – of labor, for instance, for a wage. In simpler terms, for Sen, a person’s “effective legitimate command” is their entitlements (Gasper, 1993). Interestingly, Sen also refers to exchange with nature as a form of entitlement – that a person could use her land and labor, to exchange it with the produce (crop). Of course, this produce has to be exchanged in the market for another commodity or cash.

The entitlements approach aims, meticulously, to describe all legal sources of food, which Sen (1981) reduces to four categories: “production-based entitlement” (growing food), “trade-based entitlement” (purchasing food), “own-labor entitlement” (working for food) and “inheritance and transfer entitlement” (being given food by others). Individuals starve, if their full entitlement set does not provide them with adequate food for subsistence. Famine scales this up: occupationally or geographically related groups of people face famine, if they concurrently experience disastrous declines in their entitlements.
Among other researchers, Devereux (2001), in his critique and counter-critique of Sen’s work, and Osmani (2005) have quite eloquently established the significance of Sen’s research, which is that the entitlement approach to famine theorizing shifts the analytical focus away from a fixation on food supplies - the Malthusian logic of “too many people, too little food”— and on to the inability of groups of people to acquire food. Irrespective of food availability, food insecurity affects people who cannot access adequate food. Sen (1981) investigated the famines that Bengal, in India, and Sahel region, in Africa suffered through, and established that the cause of famine lay in entitlements decline, rather than availability decline. To interpret Sen’s argument, a famine can occur even if there is adequate supply of food and if markets are functioning well. Sen (1981) argues that there is no technical reason for markets to meet subsistence needs—and no moral or legal reason why they should. An equally important insight is that famine can be caused by “exchange entitlement decline” (that is, adverse shifts in the exchange value of endowments for food, e.g. falling wages or livestock prices, rising food prices) as well as by “direct entitlement decline” (for example, loss of food crops to drought).

In a later publication, Drèze and Sen (1989) refer to “extended entitlements” that acknowledge the existence of actual, social relations that take the broader form of accepted legitimacy. In that regard, they cite the example of male heads of households commanding more share of the family’s food consumption. They also refer to “cooperative conflicts,” which refer to coexistence of congruence and conflict of interests that provide grounds for both cooperation and for disputes and battles. The authors
understand the conflict of command over food within a household, in an atmosphere of cooperation, in the same sense exploitation of laborers is understood in a factory, where the works, while resisting exploitation also cooperate, by selling their labor. Finally, the authors emphasize, providing the example of India, that sufficient politicization at the grassroots, presence of active media, and vibrant party politics are important tools to ensure avoidance of famines. India has, since Independence, never suffered through a single famine, and the authors give the credit for the same to the mentioned pillars of the civil society.

2.1.3. The Philosophy of Entitlements

Amartya Sen was not the first academic to employ the term “entitlements”. The term was used in a moral sense by Robert Nozick in his famous book, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. Sen’s work was a reaction against Nozick’s (Sen, 1984). In fact, the roots of the moral usage of the term do not start with Nozick, but go back to the moral philosophy of John Locke (Gasper, 1993). Nozick (1974) advocated a set of values of moral entitlement that secure complete sanctity to individuals’ acquisitions – whether due to chance, inherited talent, bequest, acquired skill, or effort – as long as the acquisitions do not infringe on the principles of agreed contracts and voluntary transfers. Nozick also resisted from letting the subsistence needs of other people matter, should the question be of parting away from a person’s acquisitions against their will. Des Gasper (1993) argues that the retention of the term “entitlement” by Amartya Sen is intentional because it provides two motivations – first, to use the term for positive analysis and second, to
provide “an indirect moral critique of possessive individualism.” While Sen does clarify that his usage of the term is descriptive (Sen, 1981), it is argued that in practice, there is an influence of normative associations with the term (Gasper, 1993).

A sentence written in Poverty and Famines that is often quoted is: “the law stands between food availability and food entitlement. Starvation deaths can reflect legality with a vengeance” (Sen, 1981). Sen’s work analyzed the degree and consequences of the legal entitlements of poor and vulnerable groups in order to allow us to draw our own conclusions on a set of normative principles that could legitimate the fatal starvation of millions (Gasper, 1993). There is indeed a danger that the term “entitlements” may be confused with the notion of moral rights (Gore, 1993). When Sen clarifies that he is using the term for descriptive purposes and not prescriptive purposes, entitlement relations come to be understood as rights enforced by the state (legal rights) “that exist, and not what should exist” (Gore, 1993: 432). As Dreze and Sen (1989: 23) themselves confess, “Unfortunately, the gap between law and ethics can be a large one.”

Sen’s project critiques both libertarianism, and utilitarianism, including its welfarist and consequentialist components, and constructs an “alternative ethical basis for economic analysis” (Gore, 1993:439). Libertarianism is a form of rights-based ethics, where, rights are identified as constraints that need to be obeyed, regardless of the consequences (Sen, 1981). Sen instead advocates for a “consequence-sensitive, rights-inclusive approach” to the evaluation of ethics, where, while consequences are accounted for, they are not supposed to be the only things that matter.
2.2 Criticism of Sen’s Entitlements Approach

Sen’s original work in 1981 that introduced the Entitlements Approach met with several criticisms, for instance, by de Waal (1990), Nolan (1993), Bowbrick (1986), Rangasami (1985), Fine (1997), and Devereux (2001). Devereux extends a concern that Sen himself identified in his original work. Briefly, Devereux (2001) interrogates Sen’s concept of “entitlement” as an analytical construct, and argues that Sen himself admits to four limitations or shortcomings in his theory, which are (1) that people sometimes choose to starve during famines as a coping mechanism against famines, (2) that people do not necessarily die during famines because of starvation, but mostly due to the spread of epidemics, intensified by weak immune systems of people during famines, (3) that rights over resources that are held collectively are incompatible with the entitlements approach, and (4) that people acquire food through “extra-entitlement transfers,” such as by non-legal means. Further, Sen acknowledges that his work is a “general framework for analyzing famines rather than one particular hypothesis about their causation” (Sen, 1981). Clearly, Sen did not see his framework as the only unique explanation of entitlements decline, or an explanation for all the causes of a famine (Gasper, 1993). Sen also very clearly recognized that his approach excludes an understanding of factors, such as illegal transfers that violate the rights of the poor, failures to use entitlements on account of one’s ignorance, apathy or fixed food habits, and disinclination to sell productive assets (Sen, 1981). Des Gasper (1993) indicates though that by making the broad hypothesis that these factors are not typically the main ones in famine, Sen highlights the need to stress the study of entitlements. Some other criticisms of Sen’s
work include the lack of theorization of “economic mechanisms by which social
determinants give rise to individual or class-based entitlement outcomes” (Fine, 1997).
Further, Sen’s work is criticized for showing little sensitivity to the politics of
redistribution and recognition, and for not elaborating on the “demanding standards of
food-enhancing entitlements are rarely met in the real world” (Fraser, 1995; Watts,
2003).

Action* (1989), was clearly written for a broader readership, and is credited with
elaborating on and introducing new concerns that did not get sufficient attention in
*Poverty and Famines*, especially the many different ways in which relief and prevention
are understood as involving protection of food entitlements (Gasper, 1993). In their work,
food is not the only point of concern in analyzing hunger: “the capability to be nourished
depends crucially on other characteristics of a person that are influenced by such non-
food factors as medical attention, health services, basic education, sanitary arrangements,
provision of clean water, eradication of infectious epidemics, and so on” (Dreze and Sen,
1989:177). They, therefore, advocate for broadening our concern from food entitlements
to more general entitlements (1989:178). In discussing the need for development of
capabilities, Sen provides an example, “if there is no hospital in the neighborhood or no
school within easy reach – or if there are hospitals and schools but with highly limited
capacity-the income (or constitutional rights) of the would-be purchaser may not give
much of an idea as to whether a person can or cannot acquire these commodities” (Sen,
1984:520). Gore (1993:435) interprets this argument of Sen and Drèze as an indication
that entitlement to services such as health and education, depends on the location of the facilities in relation to the population of potential users. Gore concludes that people’s entitlements to public goods are not merely dependent on income, and that it is insufficient to limit rules of entitlement to legal rights, ownership rules, contractual rules governing exchange, and social security and employment benefits.

Alex de Waal, coming from a close understanding of the 1980s famine in Sudan and Ethiopia, emphasizes the gaps that Sen had himself acknowledged in his entitlements theory. He does so, especially, to explain the famines in Africa (de Waal, 1990). De Waal’s criticisms may be summarized as following: Sen’s definition of famine and his theorization, in general, focus on the rather extreme cases of famines that involve virulent starvation causing widespread death. Further, leaning too much on the case of the Bengal famine, Sen’s presents famine victims as “passive” – this, de Waal argues, is not applicable in the African context. As was pointed out by Devereux (2001) later too, people often die of diseases during a famine, rather than starvation. In doing so, de Waal pointed towards the “processes of change” during a famine, in that diseases have their own processes (Gasper, 1993). Sen is blamed for neglecting the dominant role of violence and associated social disruption in initiating and excavating famines. Finally, Sen does not look at the broad understanding of well-being, choosing instead to focus on the economic criteria of access to food, perhaps because for Sen, the model case is of virulent starvation, as in the case of the great Bengal famine.

Alex de Waal (1990, 1991) and S.R. Osmani (1991, 1993) engage in interesting discussions about Sen’s framework, with de Waal questioning Osmani’s claim that every
famine involves failure of food entitlements. De Waal presents the case of RENAMO bandits reducing the command on food that peasants have – claiming that peasants’ legal entitlements were not reduced by seizure of food. Osmani maintains his claim that every famine involves a collapse of food entitlements. The act of violent removal of access by the RENAMO took away from the peasants their ability to acquire food through legal means, and therefore, “if such disruptions do cause a famine, they can only do so by causing a failure of food entitlements” (Osmani, 1991).

There is also a need to clarify if Sen’s thesis is a theory or a framework. In synthesizing the arguments of de Waal and Osmani (against each other), Des Gasper (1993) suggests that the entitlements theory is a “conceptual organizing framework,” and not so much a complex model of famine causation, or for that matter a broad general theory. Sen himself refers to it as a “general framework,” which may be interpreted as a framework that has wide applicability, and is helpful for the analysis of many cases, but not for all (Sen, 1981; Gasper, 1993).

One of the more recent critiques of Sen’s Entitlements Approach is by Rubin (2009), which is a response to sharper rejection of Sen’s “philosophy” by Elahi (2006). Rubin, while rejecting the criticism raised by Elahi (2006) points to some of the shortcomings in Sen’s work: Rubin, and to some extent de Waal (1993), points us to the fact that Sen’s approach steers clear of looking at famines that have co-existed during times of conflict. It can only be partially included, while referring to “entitlements collapse”.
Watts and Bohle (1993) claim that entitlements are not externally given but are constituted and reproduced through conflict, negotiation, and struggle. An example to understand that would be the intentionally created famine in Matabeleland, Zimbabwe that was intended to strangle an uprising by the anti-government ZAPU movement (de Waal, 1997). Further, in Zimbabwe, the Mugabe regime encouraged war veterans to raid the farms of white-owned farmers that drove down the food production in the country. Mugabe also not just distributed the food to his supporters and withheld it from his opponents, but disallowed international aid agencies to enter his country to help those suffering from food insecurity. Similarly, during the Ethiopian famine of 1981-1985, the US obstructed food aid to the left-leaning, Mengistu government (Shephard, 1993). In South Asia, on the other hand, Alex de Waal points to how politicians from the Communist Party of India (Marxist) extensively used the efficiency that was created in the functioning of the public distribution system to remain in power, while political parties in Bihar have plundered this system due to corruption.

In yet another classic, Sen and Drèze (1989) argue about the role of public action (food or cash distribution and public works projects) in battling famines. In the context of South Asia, they pick the example of the drought that the state of Maharashtra faced in early 1970s, and how the Indian state helped ensure that it does not turn in to a famine. Maharashtra is a state located on the western coast of India. As per Census 2001, the area occupied by the state is ~307,713 square kilometres, which is close to the size of New Mexico, and has a population of 46.4 million, which is almost equal to the combined populations of Ohio and California. Sen and Drèze (1989) report that during 1970-3, the
region experienced agricultural decline and environmental degradation. However, Drèze (1988) argues that the Maharashtra drought was considerably confined and did not worsen in to a famine. This was ensured by generation of employment for cash wages for nearly five million women and men. Also, private trade was used to attract food in the region from other parts of the country. Sen (1981) in his discussion on the entitlements approach talks to the need for presence of democratic institutions as a tool to help reduce the risk of famines. Luthra and Srinivas (1976) report that the state legislative assembly and council witnessed answering of close to 700 questions posed by opposition party members about the drought, and that local newspapers carried out the task of launching sharp, critical attacks on the government, to highlight the loopholes in its strategies. They also report the common trend of marches, picketing, and rallies being unleashed by the people to keep the government on its tows during the drought period.

2.3 Politicization, Power, and Access to Food

2.3.1 Power, Politics, and State: Introduction

At various points, the many criticisms of Sen’s entitlements framework seem to suggest that Sen’s thesis does not provide sufficient theoretical ground to explore the questions of political economy of access. Akhil Gupta (2006) suggests that the distinction between “entitlement” and “empowerment” could be a starting point to explore the dichotomies of applied/ activist, inside/ outside, policy analysis/ class struggle, and developmentalism/ revolution. James Ferguson (1990), in the same vein, theorizes that with its elaborate but repetitive logic, the “machinery” of development focuses on the
goal of delivering entitlements. Further, Ferguson, in *The Anti-Politics Machine*, suggests that the “machinery” of development delivers entitlements in order to remove all discussions of empowerment from the many discourses. This leads one to view entitlements – at least, transfer entitlements or the broader role of welfare that Sen emphasized – from the lens of governmentality and hegemony that may be helpful to understand the creation of willing development subjects that the welfare programs create and sustain. Following Li (2007) would specifically enable us to understand the imagination of environmental resources, such as food, as sites in need of intervention, through welfare programs. Although, it is of relevance to point towards Gupta and Sharma’s argument that the welfare programs implemented by developing countries do not automatically make the states “welfare states” (2006). In specifically talking about India and its welfare program called Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), Gupta and Sharma (2006) argue that given the large numbers of vulnerable people that may need to be provided for, the logic of the program was not to be a safety net, but as one that would answer to the need to invest in human capital for the development of the nation-state.

In reading Gramsci, Tania Murray Li (2007) explores the ways that “power relations underpinning various forms of inequality are produced and reproduced” and are resisted through the decentralization of environmental governance. Scott (1985) explains that the operation of power, understood in Gramscian sense, is fluid and is visible in everyday practices that produce consent or resistance. The state engages itself in obtaining both consent and coercion (Gramsci, 1999) – and the two lie at two ends of a
spectrum (Crehan, 2002). In differentiating Foucault’s and Gramsci’s approach to understanding power, Birkenholtz (2009) explains that Gramsci focuses on the sources of power, such as the state or dominant groups, while Foucault analyzes power in its effects and notes it as capillary and diffuse. Gidwani (2008) brings the two together, by suggesting that consent must be secured prior to self-conduct taking hold.

Governmentality, on the other hand, is the direction towards specific ends of conduct, whose objects are individuals and populations, and which brings together techniques of domination and discipline with technologies of self-government (Dean, 1999). Further, governmentality provides a way to understand the consolidation of rule and the exercising of power in a society through “social relations, institutions, and bodies that do not automatically fit under the rubric of the ‘state’” (Gupta and Sharma, 2006).

2.3.1 Legal Rights and Everyday Practice of Law

In reading Sen’s many papers on famine, Gore (1993) identifies that Sen talks about the rules of entitlements in the language of legal rights – these include, right to property, contractual rules of exchange, and social security and employment benefit. What needs explaining is the meaning of “the law.” Specifically, in this regard, Gore’s concerns are twofold: (a) possible complications in the practice of law that may require application of legal principles or unclear social conventions, are noted in passing, and (b) the problematic status of property rights in pre-capitalist societies is also recognized with the note that doing so will lead to ambiguity in the specification of entitlements.
Sen, in specifying entitlement relations, also seems to identify that practice of law may see the inclusion of social conventions. In his discussion of production-based entitlements and underscoring of the importance of “legal rights to apportioning the products,” Sen comments, “Sometimes the social conventions governing these rights can be very complex indeed – for example, those governing the rights of migrant members of peasant families to a share of peasant output” (Sen, 1981: 46). However, Sen’s work is questioned for the “legal positivism” on which his work is based (Gore, 1993; 443). Gore, especially, points us towards “rule-skeptics”, who argue that courts apply rules when they want to, and that the interests of the judiciary are often shared by people from certain class, gender, or ethnicities, while preserving an impression of impartiality.

Schaffer (1975) and Schaffer and Wen-hsien (1975), in critiquing bureaucratic positivism, focus their work on the rules governing a person’s command over goods and services officially provided through administrative provisioning, rather than through the market. Their work differs from that of Sen, who assumes that publicly-provided goods and services will be allocated strictly, in accordance with bureaucratic or administrative rules. Instead, they identify rules of access (corresponding to the rules of entitlements), that include “admission rules”, through which a person can demonstrate eligibility for a benefit or service; “line rules” through which a person’s priority in a queue is recognized; and “counter rules” that control the actual exchange between the official and applicant for the service or benefit. As has been discussed in this chapter, Sen identifies access to complimentary goods and services of particular importance in order to avoid hunger, and the aforementioned rules shape the practice of official provision through which people
seek entitlement to the goods and services. It may be necessary here to also bring together the work of Moore (1983), who understands the working of state-enforced laws as being dependent on the existence of many sources of “reglementation” in society. Further, she understands state-enforced laws, and rule-orders, in general, as continuously being unmade, remade, and actively being transformed.

2.3.2 Accounting for Political Economy

Watts and Bohle (1993, 117) point out that while Drèze and Sen understand entitlements to be both biological, in terms of food intake, and concerning social environment, in terms of access to healthcare and education, they fall short of clarifying more about “capability” and “totality of rights” that secure basic needs. They call for a radical extension of entitlements in both social and class sense, and structurally and politically. Further, Watts and Bohle in their landmark paper, “Hunger, Famine and the Space of Vulnerability”, seek analysis of famine to account for: (a) particular distribution of entitlements and their reproduction in certain circumstances, (b) empowerment or enfranchisement: a broader understanding of how entitlements come to be defined, contested, and lost or won, and (c) the “crisis of proneness” or structural properties of political economy that cause entitlements crisis. In critiquing Sen’s work, one finds a particular use in Watts and Bohle’s writing about class and crisis. In understanding famines, they ask us to provide attention to political economy, which while examining the production and reproduction of particular patterns of entitlement and empowerment in the society, privileges the historical and the structural. Further, that the transformation of
hunger in to famine, is a reflection of “short-term expression of a larger crisis tendencies and conflicts within the political economy.” Going further with class analysis, an understanding of both assets, and relations that aid mobilization and appropriation of surplus are necessary to understand famine as a poverty problem. This relates to Sen’s mention of specific varieties of famines (“boom” and “slump”) that have a root, according to Sen, in the “mode of production.” However, Watts and Bohle (1993, 120) would ask us to see this as a “historically localized expression of fundamental class processes.” Broadening this discussion, vulnerability is sought to be looked at a “structural–historical space” that finds itself to be shaped by the effects of commercialization, proletarianization, and marginalization (Watts and Bohle, 1993, 121).

Sen’s thesis recognizes failure of food entitlements as the proximate cause of famines (Osmani, 1991). According to Sen, “in the case of famines, the collapse of food entitlements is the initiating failure, in which epidemics themselves originate” (Drèze and Sen, 1989). Osmani (1991) defends the entitlements framework, against de Waal’s critique by explaining that while the entitlements theory does not itself specify the deeper causes or the ensuing dynamics of famine, it helps direct our attention in specific ways, to identify changes in endowments and entitlements mappings. However, Gasper (1993) argues that even with the case of the Bengal famine, entitlements failure caused by wartime inflation and speculation must be understood in the context of the forces that drove or retained many rural incomes down to such peripheral, vulnerable levels and sources, in the sense that “we should not highlight only the last push over the precipice.”
2.3.3 Moral Economy of Access

Sen’s work with Drèze on extended entitlements was mentioned previously as a tool to understand allocation of food within households, which did not find a theoretical space for itself in Sen’s original work. However, Leach et.al. (1997) have accused Sen of not accepting the full consequences of explicitly introducing social conventions and norms in entitlements mapping or e-mapping. To clarify, e-mapping are the “rules, conditions, and processes that affect how one’s entitlements are derived from one’s endowments” (Des Gasper, 1993). Therefore, it may be of merit to understand the implications of not having considered lack of presence of legal structures in developing countries or presence of extra-legal structures, to improve the concept of e-mapping. For instance, Gore (1993) provides an empirical example of food scarcity in Ghana (in the 1970s) that affected e-mapping through higher prices. The effect was also through the existing moral rules in the society, where being a regular customer determined whether or not it was possible to buy at given prices.

In advocating for a need to develop a broad view of rules of entitlement, Gore (1993, 451) asks us to not limit the “broad view” by drawing on Sen’s extended entitlements analysis alone. The analysis, he argues, retains a positivist notion of state-enforced law and does not give any weightage to the working of socially accepted moral rules or limits them to the domestic sphere. A broader view, Gore argues, would note the practicality of working of legal rules in determining entitlements, examine sites of rule-making and rule-enforcing outside of the governmental space, and examine how
command over commodities is constrained or enabled by the active relationship between state-enforced legal rules and socially-enforced moral rules.

In theory of structuration, Anthony Giddens, comprehensively explains a way to conceptualize the working of moral rules in the society in that he attempts to understand how moral rules both shape social practices, and how the social practices, in turn, shape the rules (Giddens, 1984). He further argues that establishment of a set of expectations regarding the “right” behavior, and a set of sanctions which can help penalize the “wrong” behavior, are the conditions of existence for a moral rule. Further, how meanings of others’ actions and events are interpreted, how resources are mobilized to sanction behavior, and how appropriate sanctions are negotiated – all of these account for whether or not a moral claim is redeemed (Gore, 1993; 452). Giddens asks us to notice the use of power in such negotiations – “power is expressed in the capabilities of certain actors to make a certain “account count” (Giddens, 1979; 83). Gore (1993; 452), therefore, argues for a need for entitlement analysis to incorporate analysis of the relations of power, as well as discursive practices, and the need to view the working of moral rules in tandem with power relationships and the communication of meaning.

Gore writes extensively connecting the moral economy of provisioning with food entitlements (Gore, 1993: 445 – 451). He points us to a concern in the literature to observe how in conditions where the socially accepted moral rules diverge from the legal rules, people act to apply a pattern of legitimate, but illegal, exchange practices. He explains that all members of a society may not share the moral rules (that constitute the moral economy) and they vary temporally and spatially (between localities and between
societies). Further, entitlement relations come to be understood as an “active process,” when moral economy is understood as a set of food exchange practices recognized by at least some members of society as legitimate and asserted against the functioning of legal rules in food markets. For Sen, moral economy is an informal insurance system that guarantees a certain minimum welfare – this understanding, however, is not in agreement with Gore’s view (1993, 446), who argues that the moral rules do not necessarily conform to Sen’s “particular welfarist morality”. James C. Scott studied the bases of peasant rebellion during the twentieth century in Southeast Asia. In doing so, he identified two important norms included in a moral economy of the peasant – the norm of reciprocity and the right to subsistence. Scott (1976, 167) explains that the “norm of reciprocity” was the rule that “a gift or service received creates a reciprocal obligation to return a gift or service at some future date.” The right to subsistence, on the other hand, means that “all members of the community have a presumptive right to a living as far as local resources will allow” (Scott, 1976; 176). While Scott (1976) shows how famines in Southeast Asia were accompanied by rebellion by peasants, and Arnold (1979) talks about food shortages and entitlement shifts in south India in 1918 leading to looting and grain riots, it may be incorrect to directly associate famine and hunger with food riots (Gore, 1993, 447). There is, perhaps, a need to develop a nuanced understanding of how the working of legal rules in the marketplace lead to results that go against the rules of moral economy.

The centrality of moral economy in understanding peasant subsistence is also reflected in the work of Michael Watts (1991), especially in the inspiration his work
draws from the James Scott’s pioneering work in agrarian studies in Southeast Asia. In examining the causes of famine in northern Nigeria, Watts explains that Hausa farmers traditionally possessed an adaptive flexibility to accommodate climatic risks at the levels of household, community, and region. Therefore, while droughts were expected, an indigenous relief system was integrated into the political-economic system. With an expanding colonial capitalism, commodity production of groundnuts and cotton was incorporated into the international economy, leaving subsistence production to reorganize itself, thereby, eroding the system. The moral economy became money economy as export cropping substantially altered the food production system, culture of reproduction, and the role of the state. Hence, many of the response systems that had buffered peasant household from the vagaries of a semi-arid environment were dissolved with integration into capitalism, rendering the peasants vulnerable to drought (Watts, 1983, 465).

In analyzing the dynamics of the Bengal famine in 1943–44, Paul Greenough (1980, 1983) argues that in the particular morality of distress that existed during those times in that context, considerations were given to “merit” as well as welfare. He explains this further by talking about the abandoning of clients (by landlords) and dependents (wives and children, by the male head), and that this considered imposition of starvation on some people was, in fact, designed to ensure the survival of some people, and that it was accepted as being “morally right.” EP Thompson (1971) identified food riots as a form of collective action in eighteenth century England. The poor when threatened by failure of exchange entitlement in the market-place gave precedence to the moral economy of food provisioning, over legal political rights as rules of entitlements. He
further suggests that entitlement to food depended on acts that were “legitimate, but illegal”, in the sense that the acts that were illegal also had specific rules. The food riots, it is claimed, were characterized by restraint and discipline, and setting of a fair price was a key component of them, and not embezzlement. In a broader discussion, Thompson (1991: 263) identifies a range of social practices that are used as social sanctions and are designed to make sure that the moral economy takes precedence over legal rights. These include, “mass petitioning the authorities, fast-days, sacrifices and prayer, perambulation of the houses of the rich” (Thompson, 1991: 263)

Finally, the moral economy literature that Charles Gore (1993) brings together to read alongside Sen’s entitlements framework is important because it points to us that moral economy is based on some set of moral rules regarding food exchange practices, which are shared socially, and which are socially forced through in situations of hunger and famine (Gore, 1993; 446). The four insights that Gore points us (1993; 445 – 451) to are: (a) in the context of Sen’s assumption of the inevitability of famine, once certain entitlement shifts occur, studies of moral economy provide a better view of social action during times of hunger and famine, (b) given that Sen’s entitlements analysis focuses on the ways in which entitlements shift for particular groups of people within a “given” set of rules of entitlements which predate the famine event and also survive it, the moral economy literature provides a more complete view of the dynamics of entitlements shifts as a famine develops, (c) the literature explains how the rules of entitlements can change in ways that alter the vulnerability of particular groups to hunger and famine, over the short-period as multiple rule-systems become dominant, and over longer periods, as rules
of entitlements undergo transformation, and finally (d) the moral economy literature helps us understand vulnerability to hunger and famine, and “unruly” social practices that combat this vulnerability at regional and local scales.

2.4 Conclusion

The entitlements approach to famine theorizing shifts the analytical focus away from a fixation on food supplies — the Malthusian logic of “too many people, too little food” — and on to the inability of groups of people to acquire food. Sen’s work, however, is criticized for showing little sensitivity to the politics of redistribution and recognition. Charles Gore, further, points us to his observation that people’s entitlements to public goods are not merely dependent on income, and that it is insufficient to limit rules of entitlement to legal rights, ownership. Also, the discussion and emphasis on the centrality of states in delivering entitlements does not do justice to questioning the empowerment potential of the entitlements programs.

In order to understand the “politics of access” to food that Sen’s framework was criticized for not paying sufficient attention to, this thesis first outlines the endowments and entitlements at the household level. This understanding of the possession of material forms of capital with various socio-economic groups is further complicated with an explanation of the workings of politics both at the micro-level and those practiced by the state that makes access to food possible. There is a paucity of field-based research that helps bring together both material and political conditions that enable or disable access to food. This research aims to fill that gap.
CHAPTER 3: STUDY AREA IN CONTEXT

This chapter, while broadly discussing human development indicators in India, will focus on the problem of hunger and food insecurity in the country, including India’s placement on the global hunger map, and food insecurity in the country with a focus on hunger and under- and mal-nutrition. Finally, the concluding section of this chapter, in discussing the suitability of Yavatmal district in state of Maharashtra in India as the site for field survey, will talk about the political economy and political ecology of the region such as, food insecurity, employment structure, and gender disparity in access to resources.

3.1 India – Development Indicators

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates that 870 million people suffer from hunger every day, and that most live in South Asia and the African continent. In fact, South Asia, with over 300 million food insecure people, is home to the largest number of hunger-affected people in the world (FAO, 2012). India alone is home to more than two thirds of undernourished people in the region. According to the latest Human Development Report (UNDP, 2011), India has been placed in the “medium human development” category, with a human development indicator rank of 134, among 187 countries. Among the “BRIC” countries, India ranks the lowest, with Brazil and Russia finding themselves among “high human development” countries, and China among the top performers in the “medium human development” category. On other human development indicators, the average life expectancy at birth in India for women is 67.7
years, and for men is 64.6 years. The urban – rural divide in India may be understood by analyzing this indicator alone - urban women in India live about five years longer, and urban men live for eight more years, compared to their respective rural counterparts (Times of India, October 2, 2012). For a country with a population of more than a billion people, the literacy rate in India is an impressive 74 per cent. However, this is far below the global average of 84 per cent, and there is marked disparity between the average literacy levels of women, which is 65.5 per cent, and men, which is, 82.1 per cent. Further, urban literacy average rate in India, at 85 per cent, is far ahead of the rural average at 68.9 per cent (Census, 2011). The latest survey also narrates to us that 58.8 per cent of rural women are literate in India, compared to a far higher 79.9 per cent of women in urban India, who are literate. Among men, 78.6 per cent rural men are literate compared to 89.7 per cent literate men in urban areas. Yet another important parameter that constitutes an important human development indicator is Gross National Income per capita. UNDP estimates that the GNI per capita of India in purchasing power parity terms (constant 2005 international $) is $3468. Among BRIC countries, this is, again, the lowest, with those of Brazil being $10,162, of the Russian federation being $14, 561, and of China being $7, 476. In fact, even within South Asia, Bhutan and Sri Lanka outperform India on this particular indicator.

The factors that broadly constitute UNDP’s Human Development Index may help, in a limited sense, to construct an understanding of current levels of development in India. Among the emerging market economies, especially the “BRIC” countries, India
seems to lag behind on most development indicators. In some, it also lags behind some of
the countries in South Asia, especially Sri Lanka.

3.2 India – Hunger and Food Insecurity

The Food and Agricultural Organization’s countries database provides the
following information about India: The country has close to 240 million undernourished
people, who constitute close to 21 per cent of the country’s population, and the child
mortality rate in the country is a concerning 66 per 1000 live births. Further, agriculture,
as an economic activity, adds up to a significant 16.5 per cent of the country’s Gross
Domestic Product. The Agriculture Development Report 2008 ranked South Asia as the
second most undernourished, malnourished, and food insecure region in the world. Ghosh
(2010) points to the Indian National Family Health Survey conducted in 2005 - 06, which
indicates that 46 per cent of Indian children below three years of age are underweight, the
Body Mass Index of a third of Indian women is below normal, and 79 per cent of children
below three years of age and 56 per cent of ever - married women below the age of 50
years, are anemic. Moreover, Ghosh argues that these figures are national averages and
that the rural numbers would be more concerning. Specifically, on the question of hunger
and starvation, the Indian National Sample Survey Organization’s large survey of 2004 -
05, indicates that the average daily intake of calories for the rural population of the
country has dropped by close to 5 per cent from the 1993 - 94 levels to 2,047 kcal and by
2.5 per cent to 2,020 kcal in urban areas for the same period. Interestingly, there is a case
to link the fall in the intake in nutrition with the advent of neo-liberal reforms in the
country (from the early 1990s), especially because the food grains subsidy program (PDS) in the country changed from a universal coverage to targeted coverage. In fact, data from the India State Hunger Index 2008 brought out by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) indicates that the situation of food insecurity in the Indian states of Bihar, Jharkhand, and Madhya Pradesh was similar to that in Zimbabwe, Haiti, Ethiopia, and Chad.

International Monetary Fund reported a growth in India in the real Gross Domestic Product of close to 6 per cent during the 1990s and of 8 per cent during the 2000s (IMF, 2011). Currently, as of 2011, the growth rate of GDP of India stands at 6.9 per cent, which is better than the performance of all the other BRIC countries, with the exception of China (World Bank online data, retrieved December 30, 2012). Therefore, this situation of a crisis in food security exists alongside India’s above-average economic performance over the past fifteen years. Further, since the country undertook World Bank and IMF directed structural adjustment policies, agricultural growth has actually slowed down and some of the factors considered responsible for the decline in agricultural productivity in the country are stagnation of public spending in agriculture for almost a quarter century (reduction, in case of spending on agricultural research and development, as a proportion of agricultural GDP), low rates of expansion in irrigation, and increased farm fragmentation (Balakrishnan, P. et. al, 2008). This, further, raises questions about the links between introduction of structural adjustment policies in the country and state withdrawal from the “unproductive”, primary sector.
3.3. Major Forms of Transfer Entitlements in India

It may be noted that India already has a “targeted” public distribution system (PDS) in place since 1997 that broadly allocates entitlements as per the location of the household on the income spectrum considered by the states. PDS, started in 1939 as a wartime rationing measure, helps households gain access to specific amounts of certain food commodities as subsidized prices. Swaminathan (2000) points us towards four stages in the history of PDS: (1) from the system’s origins to the 1960s, when the system was expanded beyond just a few cities, and there was a heavy dependence on import of grains for the purpose of distribution, (2) from 1960s to the late 1970s, which saw the Indian government, mostly as a response to the food crisis of the mid-1960s, setting up the Agricultural Prices Commission, and establishing the Food Corporation of India (FCI) in order to improve domestic procurement and storage, (3) from the late 1970s until 1991, when PDS was substantially expanded, and was supported by domestic procurement and stocks, and lastly, (4) from 1991 to the present one, when logics of economic liberalization redesigned the system to a targeted one. The objectives of PDS may be understood in a broader context, above and beyond food security concerns. These, according to Bapna (1990) are: (1) maintenance of price stability, (2) bringing welfare to the poor by providing food to vulnerable populations at subsidized prices, (3) rationing during scarcity, and (4) helping reduce food insecurity associated vulnerability, faced by the poor, on account of private trade practices.

Ray and Ray (2011) state that as of 2006, 222.2 million Indian families were being served by 480,000 fair price shops, with most shops being operated by private
individuals, or in some cases, by cooperatives, and in rare cases, by the state. Further, beginning 1997, the Indian state started distributing food at differentiated price levels to the targeted poor (below poverty line) and non-poor (above poverty line). In the year 2000, within the ambit of PDS, two additional schemes – the Antyoday Anna Yojana, targeted at the poorest of the poor, and the Annapurna Scheme, targeting “indigent senior citizens”. Briefly, under the targeted public distribution system (TPDS), Indian households living both above (APL) and below the poverty line (BPL) each receives a net total of 35 kilograms of food grains.

However, in the state of Maharashtra, where this research was carried out, BPL families are expected to pay INR 5.00 per kilogram of wheat, and INR 6.00 per kilogram of rice. APL families, on the other hand, pay INR 7.20 per kilogram of wheat and INR 9.60 per kilogram of rice. The “poorest of the poor” also get 35 kilograms of food grain from fair price shops, but pay INR 2.00 per kilogram of wheat, and INR 3.00 per kilogram of rice, while “indigent senior citizens” are provided with 10 kilograms of food free of cost. Households are able to procure grains from the fair price shops by securing, what are called “ration cards”. In the state of Maharashtra, households may own ration cards coded in one of the three colors – yellow, saffron, and white. Yellow-colored ration cards are typically given to members of households that meet certain eligibility criteria, such as lack of ability to pay any kind of taxes, lack of possession of a residential telephone connection or a four-wheeler, and possession of no more than a total of either two hectare of rain-fed or one hectare semi-irrigated, or half a hectare of irrigated land. Saffron ration cards are given to families with household annual income between INR
15,001 and INR 100,000 and possession of no more than four or more hectares of irrigated land. All households above these criteria qualify to get a white colored ration card.

The shift from mere grain distribution at subsidized costs to the poor to a government policy of providing of cooked, mid-day meals in the schools in rural India has resulted in the increased enrolment, in particular, of girl children in schools in rural parts of India, where this meal is also often the only meal that the children are able to get (Afridi, 2011).

An important transfer entitlements program launched by the Indian government aims at increasing the cash endowments of rural workers in the country. The program called the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) passed by the Indian parliament in 2005 empowers people in rural areas in India to demand and get work. Under the act, every rural household is guaranteed at least 100 days of wage employment to its adult members, in order to do unskilled manual work. Work under NREGA started in 200 districts in February 2006, and beginning April 2008, the entire country, with the exception of districts with 100 per cent urban population, has been brought under the purview of the act. A document hosted by the Indian ministry of rural development (MGNREGS operational guidelines, 2013) claims that this is the program has given rise to the “largest employment program in human history”. Further, the scheme has a built-in legal guarantee for wage employment, and is demand-driven, in that workers have the right to demand work. Besides a wage component, the program
also guarantees for allowances and compensation both in cases of failure to provide work on demand and delays in payment of wages for the work undertaken by laborers.

3.4 Food Security and Public Action in India – Insights from Maharashtra State

Mishra (2011) and Drèze (2004) argue that legislating access to food as a right in a country and consequently deciding on potential responsibility and culpability leads to the government taking up the issue of food security in all its comprehensiveness – which includes food production, distribution, and patterns of consumption. Their argument in favor of universalization of the right to subsidized food grains stems from the conclusion that targeting of subsidy programs leads to errors of exclusion of the poor, inclusion of the non-poor, and the fact that it is difficult to guarantee access to scarce goods such as food to the poor in largely hierarchal and discriminatory societies (such as India) (Cornia, G.A. & Stewart, F., 1993).

According to India’s Planning Commission, 28 per cent of the rural population is below poverty line, while the same survey used to arrive at these numbers gives the estimate of rural population suffering from calorie deficiency as 70 per cent (Deaton and Drèze, 2008). Further, it is also estimated that if all the households of the country were to be provided with 35 kilograms of food grain, the country will have to bear further subsidies close to US$ 140 million, which, while appearing large is only around 1.5 per cent of the country’s GDP (Ghosh, 2010).

In the Indian state of Maharashtra, where this research was carried out, an employment guarantee scheme (EGS) has been in existence since 1965, which started
from Tasgaon village in the Sangli district. Khera (2005) and Sen and Dreze (1989)
identify this program to have been a success in ensuring prevention of any increase in
poverty measures during the 1987-88 drought. Khera further claims that while the
headcount ratio of poverty may not have been impacted by the scheme, there has been an
impact on the severity of poverty, since the wages of the poor are augmented by EGS
wages. Shah (2012) explains that the scheme entails distribution of “job cards” to
prospective employees by village-level elected government (called gram panchayat). The
cards need to be handed out within fifteen days of receipt of an application, failing which,
there is a provision for unemployment allowance to be paid to applicants. In the state of
Maharashtra, close to only 34 per cent of registered households were issued the card. Roy
and Dey (2009) explain that without a job card, a laborer cannot apply to work, and
cannot corroborate the record of work done and wages received by her. Further, while
one of the aims of the national employment guarantee scheme is to positively
discriminate in favor of members of “lower” castes and indigenous communities, they do
not constitute more than a fifth of the beneficiaries. Further, while the scheme guarantees
at least a 100 days of employment per household per year, in reality, the scheme did not
achieve its goals. For instance, in the Indian state of Maharashtra, where this research
was carried out, during the year 2009 – 10, on an average enrolled households did not get
to work for more than 27 days. This has an impact on the wages the workers receive, and
their asset creation. On average, in the state of Maharashtra, the daily wages offered
under the scheme were close to INR 80, and the types of works undertaken as part of this
program are in the areas of rural irrigation, water conservation and harvesting, drought
proofing, land and water bodies’ development.

3.5 Detailed State Level and District Level Analysis:

The United Nations World Food Programme, in collaboration with Delhi-based
Institute for Human Development, published a comprehensive atlas of food security of
the Indian state of Maharashtra in 2010. As such, it may be useful to know that
Maharashtra is a state located in western India, and has a population of 112.4 million
people, which is more than a third of the population of the US, and occupies an area of
119,000 square miles, which is close to the size of New Mexico. (Census, 2011).

The contribution of the primary sector in the state’s Gross State Domestic Product
has reduced drastically from 42.1 per cent during 1961 to 17.4 per cent during the year
2000. However, the decline of the workforce in this sector during this period has been
relatively limited: from 72.1 per cent to 61.5 per cent. Therefore, there is now a
dependency of far more people on a sector that is largely not very productive, as
compared to other sectors. During the same period, agricultural production in the state
has been rising slowly at 1.3 per cent. This raises several questions about the entitlements
of those selling their produce in the market.

In Maharashtra, 43 per cent of rural women have low Body Mass Index and the
overall per capita per day calorie intake in the state is 1933 kilo calories, which is lower
than the minimum calorie intake standards. The survey also ranked all the thirty three
districts of the states using multiple criteria, some of which are presented below. The
under-five mortality rate in the state is about 47 per cent, while Yavatmal district ranks twenty seven on the factor of under-five year child mortality, with only six other districts performing worse, while the district ranks at thirty one, on the issue of underweight children, with only two other districts performing worse. In the state itself, about 37 per cent of the children are underweight. Both under-five mortality and underweight of children have implications on gender-based food entitlements, which in turn, reflect on how states should target subsidy based on gender (female, instead of male members of households). Also, clearly, the concept of extended entitlements is important to be considered– that patriarchy plays a role in the seemingly lack of access to nutritious food that women have.

The Vidarbha region of Maharashtra, where Yavatmal is located has been suffering from a prolonged agrarian crisis. One of the reasons for this is the region’s dependence on such cash crops like cotton and oilseeds for cultivation, which are primarily rain-fed. It may be noted that Vidarbha lies in the semi-arid planes of India and therefore, receives limited rainfall. Therefore, heavy reliance on international market fluctuations and unpredictability in the cost of agricultural inputs, have a history of impacting farmer indebtedness and, consequently, the crisis the farming community been suffering through. This is made worse by the fact the levels of irrigation in Yavatmal district are low, and the district ranks twenty seven in the state. Access to agricultural inputs and food is also dependent on the entitlements of the farmers, and indirectly on the wages that they earn (Sen, 1981). Only two districts in the state perform any worse than Yavatmal district on the level of wage rate. The survey also highlights that the state of
Maharashtra itself has a low rank of fourteen out of the seventeen states, where a survey was conducted to calculate existing wage rates.

Sen (1981), in his research on the Bengal famine of the 1940s points us to vulnerability associated with communities, whose entitlements are limited. He specifically points us to large numbers of agricultural laborers, who perished during the famine. The UN-WFP report suggests that among all districts of Maharashtra, Yavatmal has the fourth largest representation of agricultural laborers in its workforce, and that in the state of Maharashtra, the proportion of agricultural laborers among the poor is higher than their representation in the population of the state. The state also has a very high representation of people of ‘lower’ castes in their workforce (rank: eight in all districts of the state). What is of further interest is that these problems coexist in the state, along with not very poor levels of rural, female literacy (Maharashtra ranks a high second in the country, while the district of Yavatmal is ranked seventeen in the state).

Taking these and other factors into consideration, the report categorizes all the districts of the state into five different categories on food access, where Yavatmal district is characterized as “Severely Insecure.” There is just one district in the state performing any worse, which has been characterized as “Extremely Insecure.” Overall, the state of Maharashtra itself has been categorized as having an “alarming” level of food security – the only worse indicator being “extremely alarming” (IFPRI, 2008).
3.6 Study Area Description

This research – in particular, the household survey and several semi-structured interviews - were conducted in Marsul village, which is located in the Umarkhed taluk of Yavatmal district, in the Indian state of Maharashtra. Located on 19°38'46"N and 77°39'47"E, the village is 3 miles away from the town of Umarkhed, in the Yavatmal district. Yavatmal district and the state of Maharashtra in India are pointed in the map below:

Map 1: Location of Yavatmal district and the state of Maharashtra in India/South Asia.
As the discussion on the Yavatmal district of Maharashtra indicated, the share of rural laborers (agricultural and non-agricultural) in the laboring population of the village is high. The major crops grown in the village include soybean, lentils, sugarcane, vegetables, wheat, cotton, and sorghum. The type, variety, and quantity of crops grown in a plot of land were dependent on the size of the land and access to an irrigated source of water. As an indication of land sizes in the village, the average size of land of landowning farmers, interviewed for this research, was close to 5 hectares, and average household size of farmers was 12. Therefore, even landowning households were dependent not just on their own-production entitlement, to access food.

Water for the purpose of agriculture would be accessed by farmers, either by digging borewells in their fields, or by accessing a state-owned, artificial water tank (picture 1, page 56) built close to the village. Water would be pumped out of the tank, and a single canal would help the water reach the village. Farmers could tap into this water by seeking prior bureaucratic license. However, proximity to the channel, I was told by several agriculturists in the village, was helpful to get more water for irrigation. The few agriculturists, who were well-off, bought diesel-operated generators, to generate electricity, to access this water or water from their own borewells, since electricity supply from the state-regulated electricity transmission company was sporadic.
Agricultural laborers worked on the fields to earn a daily wage (paid in varying cycles – daily, weekly, and in some cases, semi-monthly) during the agricultural cycles, which they normally exchanged in return for food, either in the markets or in PDS stores. There were a few small grocery stores in the village, where one could buy food grains as well. Work opportunities under the government’s work for wage program were few, as the program had seen shoddy implementation in the village. Non-agricultural laboring opportunities in the village included, working for the farmers to build or repair their houses, construction of small or large wells for farmers, working for the village government to implement state or federal schemes such as, laying roads, waste water sewage lines, and drinking water pipelines, and their maintenance and repair
The caste system in the village also determined the location of homes in the village – at the center of the village was a temple, which was surrounded by homes of members of “higher” castes, and then of “lower” castes, while members of indigenous communities lived at the periphery of the village. The peripheral area of Marsul village was called Duttanagar, and the two areas within the village – the “central” village area and the peripheral one, Duttanagar, had their own PDS shops (picture 2 on page 58 is of the PDS shop in the “central” village area) and *anganwadi* schools – state – run, pre-schools for children, with additional responsibilities to teach children about health and hygiene, and to provide them with nutritional supplements and mid-day meals.

The village was administered by an elected village council, *panchayat*. Elections to the council’s nine positions would be held every five years – out of the nine positions, two were of the council head and their deputy. The top two positions would be decided by consensus among the elected members, and the leadership position could be claimed by elected members of any of the four broad caste categories, by rotation. I was told by the village council members in the Marsul village that members of the indigenous communities could not send representatives to elected as council members, because their population was not “sufficient enough”, according to the application of Indian legislative rules. Incidentally, both council head and her deputy were women. It may be noted that the Indian government mandated that half of the council positions be occupied by women. The council chair’s husband was also an elected member of the council, and in my experience, he performed most of her duties.
Picture 2: One of the two PDS shops in Marsul village

(Rai, Pronoy, August 2012)
CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

This chapter will describe the various methods used to conduct this research. I will begin by identifying the data needs and sources, especially those that help answer the two research questions. This research was carried out largely by application of qualitative methods (through data obtained from semi-structured interviews) and to some extent, quantitative methods (using data obtained from structured interviews). I will then illustrate the methods used to analyze the data obtained during the fieldwork. Finally, this chapter will be concluded with a discussion on the limitations of this research.

4.1. Data Needs and Sources

This research addresses two specific research questions: (a) how did entitlements vary across various socio-economic groups, and (b) How did the socio–economic groups respond to current and temporal challenges to accessing food, and what was the role of local elites and the Indian state in increasing or reducing food insecurity – related vulnerabilities of people?? In order to answer the first question, I chose to focus on four different socio-economic groups to carry out my research. Since this research was carried out in a rural location in India, the groups that were interviewed included agriculturists and agricultural laborers. In order to cover a wider gamut of occupation group, outside of the realm of agriculture, I also interviewed non-agricultural, rural laborers, which is a rather broad category of employment. Finally, I chose to specifically interview members of indigenous communities (clustered together under the socio-political category of “Scheduled Tribes” in India), because this group stands at the bottom of social hierarchy
in India and the Indian constitution has enabled several affirmative action measures for this group. As such, this group is a social one, and not an occupational one. Sen pointed in his work towards the particular vulnerability of the asset-less agricultural laborer – hence, my focus to interview a large number of laborers in the rural location – agricultural, and non-agricultural. Second, in order to draw a map of entitlements across the different socio-economic groups, I focused my attention, on the four different types of entitlements that Sen’s work focused on – “own-production entitlements”, “trade-based entitlements”, “own-labor entitlements”, and “inheritance and transfer entitlements”. My interview schedule included specific questions that helped me collect information to understand how the socio-economic groups access food, with the aid of these entitlements.

In addition to interviewing people from the four socio-economic groups, I also interviewed the husband of the woman, who is the elected chief (sarpanch) of the village (the man, in question, is also a member of the village council, Panchayat) where I carried out my research, owners of the two public distribution stores in the village, an officer who is the liaison between the state government and the elected village government, and the Tehsil (roughly, county) revenue official. These key informant interviews were semi-structured, and in addition to the questions I asked people in the village, helped me understand the power relations that enable or inhibit access to food for people. I have summarized information related to the research questions addressed, data needs, sources, collection, and analysis below:
Table 1:
Research questions and methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Data Needs</th>
<th>Sample Population</th>
<th>Data Collection Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How do endowments and entitlements vary across various socio-economic classes?</td>
<td>Information regarding type and extent of agricultural holding, crops grown, sold, and consumed, occupations, household inc/ome, agricultural wages, participation in NREGA, extent of dependence on PDS and local markets for food.</td>
<td>People across the four socio-economic groups</td>
<td>Household - level interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What is the role of micropolitics and state in producing socio-economic patterns of endowments and entitlements?</td>
<td>Qualitative information on various forms of everyday interaction between people of the four socio-economic groups and the Indian state (bureaucrats, elected village chief, PDS dealer), Data from government officials regarding food security and food access concerns</td>
<td>Members of the four socio-economic groups, elected village head, owners of PDS stores, village development officer, county revenue officer, NGO representative</td>
<td>Household-level Interviews, Key Informant Interviews</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2 Data Collection

4.2.1 Household-level Interviews

The data required to answer the two research questions raised in this thesis, were collected through the process of household-level interviews and key informant interviews in and around Umarkhed taluk in the Vidarbha region of central India. Most of the household-level interviews were conducted in the village of Marsul in Umarkhed taluk. During the course of my field research, I lived in and worked out of the campus of the Gopikabai Sitaram Gawande (GSG) College in Umarkhed. The college is a participant in a tripartite collaboration between Harvard University’s School of Public Health (Boston, MA) and taluk-level women health workers, called Anganwadi workers. India’s Women and Child Development ministry’s website provides the following information about the Aanganwadi program. Aanganwadi is a Hindi word that may be roughly translated to mean courtyard shelter, and the workers are responsible for the functioning of child and maternal care centers in villages. The Indian state initiated the Aanganwadi program under the broader ambit of the state-run Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) to combat hunger and malnutrition. The workers are employed for the purpose of pre-school teaching, monitoring growth of young children (0-6 years), and supplying health supplements to children and pregnant and lactating mothers.

In Umarkhed taluk, Harvard University Department of Public Health and GSG College have been providing technological, informational, and material assistance to the workers to help them with their jobs. These workers are elected by villagers, where they work, and are provided with a short training by the government. Therefore, given the
familiarity of the workers with the college, and given their knowledge about the villages, I chose to first meet with the workers, to explain to them the aims and objectives of my project, and to seek their support. After two hour-long meetings, I was made to understand by the workers that it would be advisable for me to work in Marsul village, because (a) altogether, the “workplace” of the workers was spread across four villages – Ambadi, Belkhed, Dahagaon, and Marsul – all in the Umarkhed taluk, and (b) GSG college was involved in several outreach initiatives in Marsul village, and the workers argued that while they would help me introduce myself in the village, the goodwill that the college had established in Marsul village would help me come across as being less of a suspicious outsider. Based on a format that I provided to the workers, I was given disaggregated data on occupation and caste of households in Marsul village by the workers, after which I selected 40 households – 10 in each of the four socio-economic groups of agricultural laborers, non-agricultural rural laborers, agriculturists, and indigenous communities. Simple random sampling method (random number table) was applied to select the households (Winchester and Rafe, 2010), and the number of households was limited to ten, per socio-economic group, given the paucity of time, and the fact that semi-structured interview schedules require more time to be discussed.

There are two important points to be made about pre-testing of the sample here: first, although Barnard (1995) suggests that questionnaires should be pre-tested on 10 per cent of the sample, I pre-tested on 20 per cent (eight of 48). Second, Dunn (2010) suggests that while pre-testing is helpful with structured interviews, it is not as helpful with semi-structured interviews. My interview schedules were a combination of
structured and semi-structured schedules, and it seemed necessary for me to pre-test these. Also, this was the first time that I was carrying out a rural survey, and also given my future career interests, I found it necessary to take an extra step. It is necessary to mention here that my schedule, at least during pre-testing was based on a publicly available one provided by Khera and Drèze (2011), which I modified based on the feedback I received after the sample survey.

In preparation of my survey, I spent the first few weeks in Umarkhed seeking help from a local English language lecturer at Gawande College, to get the Ohio University mandated consent form translated in Marathi. All through the process of household-level interviewing and through interviewing some of the key informants, I was assisted by two staff members of the GSG College, one of them accompanying me every alternate week. These two staff members acted as my interpreters, and since they lived in Marsul village, I found it easy to establish a certain degree of trust with my respondents. While Hindi – Urdu is my first language, the official language of the state of Maharashtra is Marathi. The two languages have similar script and belong to the “Indic” or “Indo-Aryan” family of languages. Therefore, it was not very difficult for me to converse with some of my older respondents, who only spoke Marathi and not Hindi – Urdu. However, the role of the two interpreters was important not just because they helped me establish trust with my respondents, but because they helped me translate certain words in the local dialect of Marathi language. Also, while I gave sufficient time to my respondents to read and ask me questions regarding the consent process (IRB approval number 12X133; dated June 25, 2012), the interpreters helped me clearly explain the risks involved, to the
respondents. Interviews with respondents were conducted at their homes. These household-level interviews were not exactly “individual” interviews, because several members of a household would gather around a member of the household I was interviewing, and contribute to the reply that my respondents would give.

A part of my interview schedule was structured because of the nature of information I wanted to seek – information about the ownership of endowments with people across the socio-economic groups. As Dunn (2010, 109) would have us do with structured interview schedules, each respondent was asked exactly the same question in the same order. There were other questions that were part of a semi-structured interview schedule, given the nature of the questions (say, to understand why a respondent did not have a job card, or why a respondent wanted state-run food distribution system to remain functional in their village). The nature of questioning remained flexible (Dunn, 2010, 110). My observation here is that questions that were part of the structured component of the schedules often ended up becoming gateways for me to create newer questions and seek more, relevant information from my respondents. I was able to perhaps do so, because my survey was carried out among a relatively smaller number of households.

4.2.2. Key Informant Interviews

Formal interviews with key informants were an important part of the data collection. Most of the key informants were part of the Indian state apparatus – the elected village head’s husband (who was a member of the elected village council or panchayat), a Maharashtra state government officer called the village development
officer or *gram sevak* (who was a liaison between the state and the elected village council), the Umarkhed *tehsil* revenue officer (a state bureaucrat), and the “dealers” of the two public distribution shops. My meeting with the *tehsil* revenue officer was arranged by GS Gawande College council board officials, the other meetings were arranged by my interpreters.

It is important at this stage to mention that I got limited opportunity to interact with the elected head of Marsul village, who is a woman. Her husband, an elected village council member himself, was the one I could talk with. I can identify two reasons for this—first, the woman chief could barely speak or understand Hindi – Urdu, and secondly, as Mary John (2007) explains, while the Indian government did pass affirmative action legislations, thereby reserving several leadership positions for women in village councils, women usually act as “proxies” for male members of their families, such as their husbands or sons. Therefore, both as an outsider and as a male, I only had a chance to have more detailed discussions with the village chief’s husband, and I would merely exchange greetings during my visits to the village, with the chief.

4.3 Data Analysis

For the purpose of data analysis, all the interviews were transcribed on the computer. During each of the days, when I carried out the surveys, I would interview no more than members of five households in a period of approximately half a day, during mornings. These interviews were recorded on a recorder, and the quantitative data was noted on paper interview schedules. The recordings would be transferred to a hard disk
later on the same evening. The interview recordings were transcribed here at Ohio University. While most answers that came out of the structured interview schedule components were filled in an Excel sheet that I customized, the qualitative information was coded using NVivo, a qualitative data analysis computer software package. The quantitative information was analyzed using various MS Excel functions.

Descriptive and analytic codes were employed to code the interview transcripts. As Cope (2010, 283) explains, descriptive codes reflect themes or patterns that are stated directly by research subjects, or are apparent on the surface. However, for the most part, analytic codes were employed to code the data. Analytic codes reflect a theme that a researcher may be interested in, or a theme that may have already been important in the research project. The process of coding led me to discover thematic codes that were useful in helping me understand the layers of “politics” in access to food.

4.4. Method Limitations

My lack of familiarity with Marathi language is one of the major limitations of this research, and I have written in detail about this in the previous pages. However, since I could partially understand Marathi, during the process of enumeration, I would insist my interpreter to re-interpret my questions to the respondents several times before it would sound to me as if the exact question was being asked to the respondents, as I meant to. This process was time consuming and frustrating to all the parties involved, especially the respondents. Secondly, since some of the questions related to seeking information about assets, people were hesitant to share this information. Though my interpreters
helped me convince my respondents that I was not a threat, in the sense, that I was not any sort of government income tax officer or perhaps an officer of the state that they needed to be worried about. Finally, I could not obtain information on certain variables – such as information from landed peasants about their income - because these data were hard to come from the respondents.
CHAPTER 5: ENDOWMENTS AND ENTITLEMENTS –
A CASE STUDY OF MARSUL VILLAGE, INDIA

5.1. Introduction:

This chapter presents a discussion on the first research question, through an analysis of the data collected as part of the fieldwork carried out in Marsul village of Umarkhed taluk in the Indian state of Maharashtra. This data was collected during July – August 2012. The chapter begins with a discussion of ownership of endowments with members of the four socio-economic groups interviewed during this research – agriculturists, agricultural laborers, non-agricultural rural laborers, and indigenous laborers. This follows a narration of access to entitlements with the four socio-economic groups, and a detailed description of the qualitative aspects of the entitlements. The conclusion part briefly summarizes the distribution of endowments and entitlements across the socio-economic groups, and sets the stage for a more detailed discussion of politics of access to food, in the next chapter.

The first research question that this thesis explores is the distribution of endowments and entitlements across socio-economic classes, and the process of conversion of endowments to entitlements. This question is significant as a first step to understand the politics of access to food and the vulnerability associated with dependence on one or the other type of endowment. As the rest of this chapter will narrate, for a majority of people across the socio-economic groups, food was acquired through a combination of different types of entitlements that Sen’s framework referred to – “production-based entitlement” (growing food), “trade-based entitlement” (purchasing
food), “own-labor entitlement” (working for food) and “inheritance and transfer entitlement”. This chapter will delve into a discussion about this combination.

5.2. Endowments:

During the course of this research, information on the following endowments was collected – land ownership, labor availability with the household, human capital (education), cattle and ruminant ownership, access to a “job card” that would help the workers get wage labor opportunities with the government, and access to a “ration card” that would help the villagers purchase food grains at highly subsidized prices from ration shops.

Livelihoods assets are framed as belonging to one of the five forms of capital (K), within the livelihoods approaches (Carr, 2013):

a. Natural K - natural resource stocks from which resource flows and services useful for livelihoods are derived

b. Physical K - Basic infrastructure and producer goods needed to support livelihoods

c. Human K – Skills, knowledge, ability to labor and good health

d. Financial K – Financial resources

e. Social K – Social resources that people draw on

I have discussed natural, human, financial, and to some extent, physical capital available with members of the four socio-economic groups here, in this chapter. As figure 1 below indicates, land ownership (natural capital) was a source of food and source of
income, human labor and education were identified as proxies for human capital, while PDS and NREGA cards were identified as proxies for financial capital. I also engage in a general description of the basic infrastructure available in the village in this chapter.

To reiterate, Sen identifies endowment set as a “combination of all resources legally owned by a person”, and these include land, equipment and animals, knowledge and skills, labor, or membership of particular community (Devereux, 2001).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Natural K</th>
<th>Human K</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Household land ownership</td>
<td>a. Household Labor Availability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Livestock ownership</td>
<td>b. Education level</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Financial K</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. NREGA card</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. PDS card</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 1: Major endowments analyzed and presented in this research*

Land is used both as an endowment and as a proxy for own-production entitlement. In the village where this research was carried out, household labor would be sold in exchange for a wage, which would then be exchanged for food in the markets. “Education” (used as a proxy for knowledge and skills) added value to labor, by increasing its exchange value, and so was an endowment. NREGA and PDS cards are considered endowments in the limited sense that these were resources legally owned by villagers. However, the mere ownership or lack of ownership of cards did not necessarily entitle villagers to the mandated amounts of food grains (in case of PDS) or laboring
opportunities (in case of NREGA), as this chapter and the next one, will inform. Cattle were endowments as they were both sources of food, and were readily available to be exchanged in the market, in return for money.

Carr (2013) points to livelihoods analyses resting on an implicit assumption that livelihood strategies are largely efforts to address material challenges to well-being – some of these material challenges are identified in endowments analysis. However, several studies have questioned the materials-only approach to livelihoods, and have clarified that social goals as well as material needs are addressed and livelihood strategies attempt to bring together the two contradictory grounds (Li, 2007).

5.2.1. Agriculturist Households:

The section summarizes information on endowments collected from agriculturist households, which have a direct or indirect impact on households’ ability to access food:

Table 2:

Endowments distribution among agriculturists

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agricultural land ownership (ha)</th>
<th>Workers</th>
<th>Education Levels</th>
<th>Cattle/ Ruminants</th>
<th>NREGA Cards</th>
<th>Ration Card</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cow, Buffalo, Ox</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Goat, Chicken</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Availability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range/Variation</td>
<td>0.6-20.2</td>
<td>2-12</td>
<td>Primary School - Graduate degree</td>
<td>0-7</td>
<td>0-3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As table 2 above indicates, on an average, agriculturist households owned 5.4 hectares of land, but the range of land ownership was from 20.2ha to a meager 0.6ha. Cultivable land, therefore, was an important endowment for agriculturists to access food. The agriculturists cultivated one or more of the following crops – soybean, lentils, wheat, sugarcane, cotton, sorghum, and vegetables – depending on land size and access to a source of irrigated water or well – each of which are capital-dependent. In all cases, sugarcane, soy bean, and cotton, were cultivated as cash crops. The rest of the crops were cultivated for consumption (to the extent needed), and the rest of the produce, sold in a market close to the village. In all but two cases, food crops were both consumed and sold in the nearby market, in exchange for cash.

A second endowment identified here is the availability of labor within a household. In case of agriculturist households, most of this labor was required to be employed on the fields. In cases where the amount of labor needed to cultivate land was less than necessary, agricultural laborers on daily wages would be employed to work on the land. While the numbers of workers available in the households ranged from as many as twelve to as few as two, agriculturist households only sold their labor on other agriculturists’ land, when their land size was small. In my sample, in general, households with less than a hectare of land, sought to increase their endowment by working on other agriculturists’ lands, because their own endowments felt short of their needs. Third, the role of human capital or education as an endowment is unclear – farmers with graduate degrees chose to not seek additional, service employments, while the only farmer who
was an absentee landlord and was employed in the service sector had a secondary school
diploma.

Fourth, there appears to be a correlation between land ownership and cattle
ownership. Some of the cattle (oxen, cows) were used in farming, and were also
sometimes rented out, in exchange for rent, to other, smaller agriculturists. Households
with cows and buffaloes not just consumed the milk produced by the animals, but also
sold the same in the nearby town in exchange of cash. Ownership of ruminants was rather
limited. Fifth, among the various transfer entitlement programs that people in the village
of Marsul accessed, the two major programs were the right to work program, or the
national rural employment guarantee scheme (NREGS), and the public distribution
system (PDS). Accessing each of these, per government regulations, requires ownership
of a card with the household – a job card, in case of the former, and a ration card, in case
of the later. Most agriculturists, especially with small land holdings (less than 2 ha),
owned National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme job cards to work on rural labor
programs, in return of wage from the government. Further, close to half the agriculturists
owned Public Distribution Scheme ration cards to access subsidized food grains from the
ration shops. It should be noted, however, that little, if any, work was available under the
government scheme at the village.

In conclusion, the occupation group of agriculturists was dependent on their land
ownership to access food, though within the group, there was a high level of inequality
that rendered most agriculturists dependent on other sources, such as agricultural labor, to
access food. On an average, seven laborers were available with each household, to work
on both fields owned by households, as well as on other agriculturists’ fields (depending on households’ land ownership). While there was significant variation in levels of education as well of the agriculturists, on an average, most agriculturists had never gone to college, and so brought few skills to bear on their labor that could help them secure higher – paying employment opportunities. Majority of the agriculturists owned job cards and PDS cards, though more laborers owned NREGA cards than PDS cards. There was almost no ownership of ruminants among agriculturists, while on an average each agriculturist household owned four cattle. The forthcoming sections will compare their endowment ownerships with those of the agriculturists.

5.2.2. Agricultural laborer households

The section summarizes information on endowments collected from agricultural laborer households, which have a direct or indirect impact on the household’s ability to access food:
Table 3:
Endowment distribution among agricultural laborers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agricultural land ownership (ha)</th>
<th>Workers</th>
<th>Education Levels</th>
<th>Cattle/ Ruminants</th>
<th>NREGA Cards</th>
<th>Ration Card</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Years</strong></td>
<td><strong>Cow, Buffalo, Ox</strong></td>
<td><strong>Goats, Chicken</strong></td>
<td><strong>Availability</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Variation</strong></td>
<td>0-1.6</td>
<td>2-8</td>
<td>Primary School- High School</td>
<td>0-4</td>
<td>0-8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As table 3 above indicates, close to half the agricultural laborers did not own any land, while the rest owned marginal or small pieces of land. There was, therefore, limited opportunity to use land as an endowment. Among the crops that the “marginal” and “small” farmers grew, were soybean, lentils, cotton, and wheat. Cotton and soybean were grown exclusively as cash crops, while lentils and wheat were grown for subsistence and to earn cash. The daily wage paid for doing agricultural labor in the village was INR 100 for men and INR 50 for women. Occupationally, the marginal farmers/agricultural laborers would spend eight to nine months laboring on other agriculturists’ fields, while the rest of the year would be spent on the small farms that the laborers owned. The only “small” landholding farmer in this sample group split his year equally between agricultural labor and farming.

Agricultural laborers both consumed a portion of and sold the rest of the food crops that they cultivated. It is important, however, to account for the size of the land
holdings to understand the amount of produce. On an average, the interviewed
agricultural laborer households had five members that either just worked as laborers, or
worked for a limited duration on the small pieces of lands owned by the households.

Third, in terms of access to transfer entitlement programs, of the households interviewed,
more than half (five) did not own job cards, while just one of them did not own a ration
card. However, this particular occupation group, on an average, recorded better
involvement in the NREGA, compared to the agriculturists. No agricultural laborer had
any more than a school diploma, and was not involved in any additional labor that had a
minimum education requirement. Most of the households were also in debt – on an
average of a little over INR 22,200, though some of the households were in debt of as
much as INR 50,000. Three of these households had secured loans from a state-owned
bank, while two had accessed credit from private persons, and just one had been given a
loan by a cooperative.

In conclusion, the occupation group of agricultural laborers was dependent on
markets and transfer entitlement opportunities to access food, with limited dependence on
their own-production, since their average land ownership was a meager 0.4ha – more
than thirteen times less than the ownership of agriculturists. Compared to agriculturists,
fewer (five laborers) were available to work for wages, or on the small pieces of lands
owned by the laborers. Unlike agriculturists, there was little variation in the education
levels among agricultural laborers, and most agricultural laborers just had a basic village
- school education. Almost all agricultural laborers – more than agriculturists - owned
ration cards, and accessed their transfer entitlements, while majority of them had few to
no opportunities to labor under the wage for wage scheme. There was minimal ownership (average = 1) of ruminants among agricultural laborers, while almost no ownership of cattle, unlike their agriculturist counterparts. The forthcoming sections will provide a narrative of endowment ownership among rural laborers, and will end up with a comparison with the two socio-economic groups of agriculturists and agricultural laborers.

5.2.3 Rural laborers

The section summarizes information on endowments, collected from rural laborer households, which have a direct or indirect impact on the household’s ability to access food:

Table 4:

Endowments distribution among rural laborers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agricultural land ownership (ha)</th>
<th>Workers</th>
<th>Education Levels</th>
<th>Cattle/Ruminants</th>
<th>NREGA Cards</th>
<th>Ration Card</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Years</td>
<td>Cow, Buffalo, Goats, Chicken</td>
<td>Availability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variation</td>
<td>0-3.2</td>
<td>1-13</td>
<td>0-6</td>
<td>0-9</td>
<td>No:4;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No:3;</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes:6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes:7</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes:7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data pertaining to ten rural laborers were analyzed for this research. As table 4 above indicates, land ownership was uncommon among rural laborers, with only three laborers owning an average of 2.8 hectares per household. The three landholding laborers, in this case, did not work on their fields though, but employed agricultural laborers to work on them – each one of the “laborers” was actually employed in the formal, service or manufacturing sector in nearby towns. Among the seven landless laborers, three also worked as agricultural laborers, besides laboring on other sites.

Among the crops that were grown by the “semi-medium” size landholding farmers were, cotton, wheat, soybean, lentils, vegetables, fruits (oranges), sugarcane, and rice. Soybean and sugarcane were grown exclusively as cash crops, whereas the other crops were grown for subsistence and for exchange in return of cash. The category of “rural laborers”, in this context, is economically highly heterogeneous. For instance, the average annual income of landholding farmers, excluding their income from agriculture averaged out to be a little over INR 252,600. On the other hand, no laborer interviewed, earned a daily wage of any more than INR 200, working for a limited number of days every year.

There were very clear differences between the educational attainments of households with and without access to land. On average, landed households had at least one member of the household with a college degree, while the landless households had, on an average, the maximum educational attainment of a secondary school qualification. The principal occupations that the educated laborers had obtained were partially dependent on their educational attainments. So, there was scope to see the impact on education on endowment creation. Further, in terms of labor availability in households,
an average of three workers labored in every household, in return of a salary or wage. The access to transfer entitlement programs was rather limited among rural laborers. However, among the landless rural laborers, a majority owned job cards, though on an average, a little more than a month’s labor was performed on NREGA sites.

A third of the rural laborer households did not own a ration card, and all three happened to also be landless. However, though the landowning rural laborers did own ration cards, they would not buy grains from the ration shops, but would instead rely on their own-production entitlement and the markets. Among those who accessed ration shops to buy grains, the Antyoday card holders and BPL card holders were being permitted to buy less than the government – mandated quantity of grains, and on an average, Antyoday card holders paid higher than the required rate. The graph below (figure 2) summarizes this information:

![Figure 2: Actual versus government-mandated pricing and quantity of PDS grains](image)
It is noteworthy here to mention that across socio-economic groups, when asked to rate the grains as being either of good quality or bad, most rated the grains as being of “bad” quality. An understanding of the quality of grains sold as transfer entitlement, is necessary, at the least, to appreciate the “usability”, or lack thereof, of the endowment, in question.

In conclusion, the occupation group of rural, non – agricultural, laborers was dependent on markets and transfer entitlement opportunities to access food, with limited dependence on their own – production, since their average land ownership was a meager 0.8ha – only a little improvement over the average 0.4ha land ownership of agricultural laborers. However, just as in the case with agriculturists and unlike the case with agricultural laborers, there was a high – level of inequity of land ownership within this group – three households about 2.5ha of land, where they got agricultural laborers to cultivate crops, while the rest of the sample households owned no land. Rural, non – agriculturist households, had as much labor endowments as agriculturist households – which was higher than the endowment with agricultural laborer households, although the education levels of this labor endowment was similar to that of agricultural laborers. The visible inequity within this group spilled over to education access as well, as the three landowning laboring households had access to college education, which most other households did not. Just as in the case with agriculturists, majority of rural, non – agricultural laborers owned NREGA and PDS cards. Just as in the case with their agricultural laborer counterparts, livestock ownership was minimal – with an average of one cattle and ruminant ownership with each of the households. The forthcoming section
will provide a narrative of endowment ownership among indigenous laboring households, and will end with a comparison with the three socio-economic groups, whose endowment ownership was described in the last few pages.

5.2.4. Indigenous Communities (Scheduled Tribes)

Members of indigenous communities, or scheduled tribes (as constitutionally/legally categorized in India) were interviewed during this research. The households interviewed were landless, and with the exception of two households, the remaining were agricultural labor households. Table 5 provides a summary of selected endowments:

Table 5:
Endowments of indigenous laborers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agricultural land ownership (ha)</th>
<th>Workers</th>
<th>Education Levels</th>
<th>Cattle/Ruminants</th>
<th>NREGA Cards</th>
<th>Ration Card</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0-0</td>
<td>1-6</td>
<td>Illiteracy</td>
<td>0-1</td>
<td>0-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>College degree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variation</td>
<td>0-0</td>
<td>1-6</td>
<td>Illiteracy</td>
<td>0-1</td>
<td>0-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>College degree</td>
<td>No:1;</td>
<td>No:4;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes:9</td>
<td>Yes:6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The community had access to education – with the exception of members of one of the households, at least one member of all the other households had been to school and close to half the households had also a college graduate in their household. However, one fails to note any relationship with higher education and endowment creation in this social
group. With the exception of the household, where the patriarch was a security guard, all other households owned a job card, while close to half the households did not own ration cards.

As agricultural laborers, the daily wage that male members of the households earned was INR 100, while women earned INR 50. Only men in the village could get employed as non-agricultural rural laborers, and their wage was dependent on the type of work they performed. In my sample, the daily wage earned varied between INR 50 to INR 300. The security officer earned a monthly income of INR 1560. Livestock ownership was also at the lower end in the community – just one of the households owned one cow, while half of the households owned goats (an average of approximately 2 per household).

Half of the households interviewed were not in debt, or could not access loans, while the other five that did, were, on an average, indebted for up to INR 10,400. The range of this debt was between INR 2,000 and INR 20,000, and most of this was secured from a village-level indigenous women’s cooperative (“self-help”) group.

With the exception of two households, the others (seven) were unable to determine the type of ration card that they owned. So, an accurate, comprehensive comparison of actual quantity of grains being distributed, and rates being charged with the government-mandated rates and quantity of grains is not possible. Further, on an average, all the households indicated that the quality of grains being distributed to them was of “bad” quality.
Indigenous laborers had no opportunity to either access food through own-production entitlement or own-labor entitlement. Many indigenous laborers also did not own means (ration cards) to access transfer entitlements. There was, therefore, a very significant dependence on markets, and laborers exchanged agricultural wages in return for food in the markets.

In conclusion, as an occupation group, indigenous laborers had no opportunity to depend on own – production endowment, because unlike the three socio – economic groups, they owned no land. Further, among all the socio – economic groups, indigenous labor households also owned the least labor endowments – an average of three laborers to work, although the education levels of this labor endowment was similar to that of both agricultural and non – agricultural, rural laborers. More than any other occupation group, most indigenous laborers owned NREGA cards, though the laborers could work for no more than fifteen days during the past year, under the scheme. Further, just as in the case with the other three occupational groups, majority of indigenous laborers owned ration cards. Finally, the group had zero cattle ownership, just like agricultural laborers, and the highest average ownership of ruminants among all groups (average = 2).

The forthcoming sections will provide a qualitative analysis of some of the endowments discussed here, in order to build a better understanding of the endowments themselves, and to set the stage to discuss the challenges in conversion of the endowments to entitlements.
5.2.5. Endowments – Summary

The discussion above pointed towards several types of endowments. The narrative in this section will summarize key points from the discussion, and will pave way of an analysis of the different types of entitlements available with the socio-economic groups. Land was an endowment primary in possession of agriculturists, and very few agricultural and rural laborers (figure 3). Indigenous laborers did not own any land at all. Further, land was very unequally distributed among the socio-economic groups, especially among agriculturists and rural, non-agricultural laborers.

The relationship between human capital and endowment creation may be understood in terms of the relationship between land ownership and educational attainment. The following table summarizes information averaged out across the income groups:
Table 6:

Average landholding and highest educational attainments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socio-economic group</th>
<th>Land holding</th>
<th>Average educational diploma attainment in households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculturists</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural Laborers</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>Secondary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Laborers</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>Secondary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous Laborers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Secondary School</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As table 6 above indicates, on an average, the socio – group with the highest land accumulation (agriculturists) also happened to have had relatively higher levels of educational attainments in their households.

The presence of workers in a household is an endowment in the sense that it adds to the amount of labor being carried out by the household to earn wages or to cultivate land owned by the households. My research also points towards the fact that presence of large numbers of members in agriculturist households with small land holdings was not helpful, as households had to diversify into other occupations, such as laboring in other agriculturists’ lands. The following graph provides further information:
As figure 4 above indicates, agriculturists and agricultural laborers shared equal numbers of labor endowment among them, while rural (non – agricultural) laborers and indigenous laborers shared a similar number of, fewer, labor endowments with them (figure 6). Given the disproportionate relationship between land ownership and labor endowment, one could conclude that among agricultural laborers, rural laborers, and indigenous laborers, there was a need to labor on other agriculturists’ lands, while agriculturists clearly did not have enough labor in their own households to cultivate their lands, and thus, needed to employ other laborers on their fields. However, to reiterate, most landholdings were small, and so agriculturists themselves labored on other agriculturists lands, during certain months in a season, in order to earn a wage. Therefore, “supplementary occupations” were crucial endowments in the village – though, as this chapter pointed out, some of the medium- and large- landholding farmers were absentee landlords, for whom, agriculture was a source of food and additional income,
supplementary to more assured income that came from a service or manufacturing sector employment.

Livestock ownership included ownership of oxen, cows, buffaloes, goats, and chicken. Oxen and cows were used to cultivate land; buffaloes, cows, and goats were owned for their milk, which was both consumed, and sold in the market in exchange for cash, and chicken were owned as poultry. Their ownership across occupation groups is presented below:

![Figure 5: Livestock ownership across socio-economic groups](image_url)

As figure 5 indicates, indigenous laborers did not own any cattle at all, while the highest cattle ownership was with agriculturists. Agricultural and rural, non-agricultural laborers owned similar, minimal numbers of cattle. It was the other way round, in terms of ruminant ownership, though it needs to be accounted for, that cattle are more expensive to buy as compared to ruminants (figure 7).
Ownership of NREGA cards or job cards, and PDS cards or ration cards, were considered as proxies for access to transfer entitlement programs. The following graph provides more information on access to the two programs:

*Figure 6: Access to NREGA and PDS cards, on a scale of 0 – 1*

By analyzing access to the programs on a scale of 0 (no access) and 1 (access), it becomes evident that majority of sampled households had access to both the entitlement programs, with the exception of agricultural laborers, fewer of whom had access to job cards (figure 6). In terms of differences among groups, more laborers (more agricultural laborers compared to rural laborers in turn compared to indigenous laborers) owned ration cards, as compared to agriculturists. Almost all indigenous laborers owned job
cards, while relatively fewer but majority of agriculturists and rural laborers owned them. In comparison, a minority of agricultural laborers owned job cards.

The sections from here on, will, based on the information detailed in this section, provide a narration of access to the different types of entitlements by the four socio-economic groups.

5.3. Entitlements

As was previously pointed out in the thesis, the entitlements approach aims, meticulously, to describe all legal sources of food, which Sen (1981) reduces to four categories: “production-based entitlement” (growing food), “trade-based entitlement” (purchasing food), “own-labor entitlement” (working for food) and “inheritance and transfer entitlement” (being given food by others). In Marsul, little, if any, evidence was found of the presence of “own-labor entitlement” – in the sense that while wages were paid in return of labor, which would then be exchanged at the PDS store or in the markets, to buy food, laborers had no share in the produce cultivated by them.

5.3.1. Entitlements – Dependence on Markets versus Transfer Entitlements

Since data is not available on the exact portion of produce that was utilized for consumption and that which was utilized for sale, I have provided data on land access as a proxy for own-production entitlement, being fully aware of the shortcomings of this process, in the sense that land size does not provide information about the split of commercial and food crops that are grown on the land, how fertile the land is, how the
food gets distributed in the family, and so on. Data available on agriculturists’
dependence on markets and transfer entitlements is also not as comprehensive as it for the
other three socio-economic groups, and therefore, in the graph provided below,
information pertaining to them has been excluded. A discussion, although, follows that
provides some details regarding the group.

Compared to the information obtained about agriculturists’ access to PDS food
grains, there was more information available on grains distributed through the PDS
system to this particular socio-economic group. The data obtained during the course of
this research indicates that in none of the targeted categories were recipients getting the
stipulated amount of grains they were supposed to, and they were all paying more than
the state-determined amount for every kilogram of grains being bought. Further, among
the five respondents who chose to answer the specific question, four identified the grains
they procured from the distribution store as being of “bad” quality. Data was also
obtained on the additional grains that households bought from the market and price at
which these were bought, to understand the role of market-based entitlements. The graph
below represents the existing gap – the bars on the left-hand side represent the average
amount of monthly food grains obtained from PDS shops and the average price paid for
each of the commodities, and the ones on the right indicate the average amount of

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1 Briefly, under the targeted public distribution system (TPDS), Indian households living both above (APL)
and below the poverty line (BPL) each are supposed to receive a net total of 35 kilograms of food grains.
However, in the state of Maharashtra, where this research was carried out, BPL families are expected to
pay INR 5.00 per kilogram of wheat, and INR 6.00 per kilogram of rice. APL families, on the other hand,
pay INR 7.20 per kilogram of wheat and INR 9.60 per kilogram of rice. The “poorest of the poor” (holding
the “Antyoday” card) also get 35 kilograms of food grain from fair price shops, but pay INR 2.00 per
kilogram of wheat, and INR 3.00 per kilogram of rice, while indigent senior citizens (under the
“Annapurna” scheme of the government are provided with 10 kilograms of food free of cost.
monthly food grains obtained by the households, in addition, from the market, and the average price paid per commodity.

Figure 7: Agricultural laborers’ dependence on market based entitlements and transfer entitlements.

Figure 7 above indicates that laborer households with ownership of marginal landholdings had the opportunity to partially depend on their own-production entitlements, in addition to state-based transfer entitlements and market-based entitlements. The landless laborers were, in most cases, dependent on their wages and transfer-entitlements, to access food, in addition to depending, heavily, on the markets, to exchange their wages with food grains.

A further comparison can be made between the dependence of the rural, non-agricultural laborers on market-based entitlements and transfer entitlements.
While the following figure indicates the average dependence of laborers on the two different types of entitlements, it is to be noted that this information pertains to the landless laborers only, since the laborers that own land, do not access PDS services, as mentioned earlier.

![Figure 8: Rural, non-agricultural laborers’ dependence on market-based entitlements and transfer entitlements during a month.](image)

Wheat is a staple in the region, and transfer entitlements fell far below the expectation in providing for the needs of the respondents (figure 8). Further, the rate at which wheat and rice is procured from the market speaks to the vulnerability that the lack of sufficiency of transfer entitlements exposed the respondents to. Also, the rural laborers bought lentils from the market in noticeable quantities and paid high prices for the same. It would be necessary to study this in the context of the low wages and un/under-employment of the workers.
A comparison of transfer-entitlements and market-based entitlements is made in figure 9 below, to demonstrate the levels of dependence of indigenous laborers on both the types of entitlements:

![Figure 9: Indigenous communities’ dependence on market-based entitlements and transfer entitlements during a month](image)

Households were dependent on the markets for more than double the quantity of wheat they are provided by the government, and pay a higher rate to purchase them. Almost the same amount of rice as that obtained from the ration stores is purchased from the markets at higher price. Vegetables and lentils were purchased by members of the community exclusively from the open market, since these are not distributed by ration shops.
Figure 10: Dependence of laborers from three socio-economic groups on transfer and market-based entitlements

Figure 11: Dependence of the four socio-economic groups on own-production entitlement, with land holding taken as a proxy for own-production entitlement
In terms of land-holding, the sample was highly unequal – more than half the households interviewed (21, to be precise), had no opportunity to depend on their “own-production entitlement” (figure 11). A third of the landless laborers also had no ration cards, and therefore, had little or no opportunity to depend on state-based transfer entitlements, and were, therefore, exclusively dependent on exchanging wages in return for food from the markets. Second, across occupation groups and land ownership, there were few, if any, opportunities to exchange labor in return of food, and therefore, “own-labor entitlements” were close to non-existent. As the many comparisons made in this chapter between food bought from PDS shops and markets show, even those with access to cards, had to buy substantially large amounts of grains from markets at relatively higher prices. Therefore, one of the most significant entitlements that people in the village used to access food, were market – based entitlements (figure 10).

Most large landowning agriculturists were employed in the service or secondary sector in nearby towns, but lived in the village, and employed laborers to work on their land. Therefore, given the risk associated with loss of crops, they had the security of an assured income to fall back upon. Figure 9 indicates the relative expenditure of households, in percentage terms, on market- based entitlements versus transfer entitlements. Less than a tenth of dependence across the groups, was on transfer – based entitlements, though among the three groups, indigenous laborers were more dependent on transfer entitlements, compared to agricultural and rural non – agricultural laborers, whose dependence, in turn, on both forms of entitlements was proportional.
Broadly, among agriculturists, large landowners depended heavily on their “own-production entitlement”, whereas, within the same socio-economic group, marginal and small landholding farmers were dependent on “own production”, “trade-based” (food was bought from the market), and “transfer entitlements” (food from ration shops). The size of a household is also one of the reasons for diversification of the types of entitlements for a household: a “semi-medium” size landholding peasant household of six members (including four adult members) chose to only depend on their production-based and trade-based entitlements - the household could not secure for itself a ration card, and so could not access transfer entitlements.

All the households that identified themselves as “agricultural laborers” either labored on other agriculturists’ lands or in cases where they owned marginal pieces of land, they cultivated their own land. On an average, no more than four months were spent by agricultural laborers on their own land, and therefore the dependence on market-based entitlements and transfer-entitlements to access food, was higher. The average landholding among agricultural laborers was 0.4 hectares, and four laborers did not own any land. Therefore, there was lesser dependence on production-based entitlement.

Finally, the rationale for distinguishing the interviewed agricultural laborers from rural laborers is that in rare cases did agricultural laborers engage in any occupation other than agricultural work.

The socio-economic group of “rural, non-agricultural laborers” was heterogeneous too. Some of the rural, non-agricultural laborers also sold their labor to agriculturists, working in the fields because agriculture was the largest sector of
employment in the village, and non-agricultural work was not always available.

However, among the rural laborers interviewed, three laborers lived in a rural area (the village, *Marsul*), and were laborers, in the sense that they were employed and were paid a wage, but in the secondary or tertiary industrial sector in the nearby town. In other words, they were landowners, who lived in the village, but had limited association with their land, and certainly did not labor on it. The three households had ration cards with them but chose to self-select themselves out of the transfer-entitlement program. They were dependent on production-based and market-based entitlements. While all the landless, non-agricultural, rural laborers interviewed during this research lived in the village, not all of them worked there. For instance, while some of the laborers worked in the village (eg., as part-time cook, laborers digging wells and laying pipelines in exchange of daily wages), others worked in the nearby town as part-time chauffeurs, workers/owners of small stores, and construction laborers. In all of these cases, access to food was dependent on the wages earned.

The members of indigenous communities (or “scheduled tribes”) interviewed for this research were socio-economically, a relatively homogeneous group – in that none of the households owned land, and therefore, were not dependent on their own production entitlement, to access food. A member of just one of the households was employed in the informal sector, and had an assurance of a monthly income – the other households were dependent on daily wages earned by laborers in the family. The security guard referred to earlier, despite not having access to a ration card, was being given ration by the PDS store owner at arbitrary rates, and I have expanded on the moral economy of access
further in the next results chapter. At least three other indigenous laborer households did not own ration cards, but were not provided food grains from the ration shops – these families, were, therefore, dependent on market-based entitlements, exclusively. As the graphs in this chapter indicate, even in cases where households accessed food using all the forms of entitlements – given the limited ownership of land, their dependence on the markets was relatively high. This could also be read in terms of the precarity of lives of the asset-less, landless, laborers.

5.3.2. PDS – Significance in the Basket of Entitlements

Based on qualitative analysis of interview transcripts obtained during this research, this section explores the significance of one form of state – based transfer entitlements programs – the public distribution system, in the basket of entitlements of villagers across the different socio – economic groups. Villagers from the four socio-economic groups articulated to me the many ways in which the public distribution system was important to them, despite all the imperfections or inefficiencies in the system as discussed in this chapter. These are narrated in detail in this section.

An agricultural laborer, while explaining the limited importance of PDS, pointed towards his inability to accumulate sufficient money to pay for the rations a hindrance to his access to the scheme. The laborer explained that rations would be brought from the government supplies to the shop, and be sold off in a period of less than two weeks, and it was important for people to have the necessary cash with them to buy food during that period. Several agricultural laborers saw the schemes as being helpful in diversifying the
grains being consumed in the village (from just sorghum, to now, wheat and rice), while others narrated to me the necessity for state control on prices of grains sold through the system, in the absence of which, it would become close to impossible for the laborers to buy all their grains from the market at market rate. They also feared that any move to remove government control over rates at which the government purchased grains from agriculturists, would give an edge to traders and agriculturists, at the cost of the laborers. Several laborers found the PDS, in all its inefficiencies of implementation in the village, as a cushion against what they saw, as severe market fluctuations, and their sheer lack of capability to accumulate endowments to support the needs of their households. As a member of the indigenous communities narrated to me, “…well, there is the PDS, but see how expensive everything is now – so, we are never able to save any money”, while another mentioned, “Yes, if I get to save some money (by buying grains from PDS store), I will at least have the money to save – to spend on the needs of my children, their education, etc.” For the laborers, their understanding of their vulnerability, in terms of their dependence on the markets despite the existence of the transfer entitlement program was quite clear. As a member of the indigenous community narrated to me, “Yes, we need both (PDS and access to markets). Else, I’ll have to buy so much more from the market at such high price. Sometimes, I think I need two ration cards.”

In my interviews with the owners of the PDS stores and the Tehsildar, it became rather apparent that there was disagreement on the distribution of sufficient/mandated quantity of grains to PDS shops. Both the shop owners claimed that they were provided with less than sufficient quantity of grains to distribute in the village. This, however, was
contradicted by the Tehsildar, who claimed that mandated amount of grains were being sent to the villages.

5.4. Qualitative Dimensions of Entitlements

This section will explore the qualitative dimensions of the different forms of entitlements, viz., own-production, transfer entitlements, and market-based entitlements, and will narrate in greater detail the challenges that present themselves to the process of e-mapping.

5.4.1. Own-production Dependence: Technologies of Production, and E-Mapping

In further discussing the process of e-mapping, or conversion of endowments to entitlements, the previous sections pointed towards the different varieties of crops grown by agriculturists, but gave little explanation for why only certain varieties were grown, and how agriculturists accessed multiple forms of entitlements. The section, based on qualitative analysis of interview transcripts, will discuss this and related concerns in detail.

Wheat was a staple in the region, and households that could afford to grow it, would decide on retaining a part of the produce for consumption, and selling the rest, based on many factors. A marginal farmer indicated to me that he needed to sell some of the produce so that he could buy seeds and fertilizers, and so was dependent on both the ration shop and the markets, aside from his dependence on his own production. Access to water was a concern for several marginal farmers – one expressed his financial inability
to install tube-well and hence, found himself unable to grow vegetables, while yet another lamented that the distance from the irrigation canal to his field was a reason why he could not grow water-intensive crops like wheat and sugarcane. A marginal farmer/agricultural laborer quite lucidly explained to me the risk dependence on the village tank, “…there’s a tank from where we get water in our fields, but if it doesn’t rain as much, we don’t get water to grow – and if there’s water in the tank, we can grow wheat, else we can’t.” Yet another hindrance to increased productivity from agriculture was the lack of access to capital or specifically, the ability to acquire capital in the form of loans. A small landholding farmer explained to me, “…we only have 5 acres of land, so we don’t get enough money as loan from the government banks. Since we own so little land, we have to consume all the wheat and lentils that we produce.”

The regional NGO specialist interviewed during this research lamented that the relatively newer agricultural policies in the country were partial to cultivators of investment- and resource–intensive, cash crops. He further added, “…Twenty years ago, cash needs were low, but in the present times, middle and backward caste farmers have lost control over resources. All agricultural inputs come from the market, and one can now notice farmers standing in front of seed shops and fertilizer shops for days together.” Picture 3 below shows a long queue of farmers waiting to get their share of fertilizers from a government distribution store.
5.4.2 Doing Agricultural Labor to Create Endowments

This section will present a qualitative analysis of “agricultural labor”, by discussing the vulnerabilities associated with the occupation, and explain its lack of sufficiency in creating endowments that would leave much as savings, for laborers to pursue any necessities of life beyond food and shelter. Not just agricultural laborer households were engaged in this occupation, but several agriculturist and indigenous laborer households worked as wage laborers on other agriculturists’ fields for varying number of months. It may be noted that when relatively better paying, non – agricultural rural laboring opportunities would not be available, even the “non – agricultural” rural laborers worked as agricultural laborers.
The ability of workers to work for several days in a given week, a given month, and a given year was contingent on various factors. Work was available for no more than 3–4 days every week, and only during agricultural cycles. Male agricultural laborers, who would earn double the wage that female agricultural laborers earned, would not get any work during the monsoon season, and would stay at home. Given the kind of work that women agricultural laborers performed in the fields, they had access to more number of days of employment – they would be engaged in weeding in the fields during the rains, though work was hard to come for anyone during the peak of summers. Secondly, since most land sizes were small and size of an average household in the village was large, small and marginal farmers also sold their labor in the village. In case of insufficiency in number of adults in households, the agricultural laborer/small farmer households would hire agricultural laborers to work on their farms – paying them the same wage that they would sell their own labor at. Third, in order to guarantee for them a regular source of income, some laborers chose to contract themselves to work with agriculturists. A salary would be paid every month or every few weeks, and laborers would be required to work every day. A contractual, agricultural laborer explained to me that if there would be no work in the fields on account of rains, agriculturists would engage the laborers in alternative work, for instance, in tending cattle. Fourth, ownership of one endowment added to the value derived from another – a laborer explained to me that his ownership of oxen helped him get double the normal agricultural laborer wage in the village. Though, to be sure, he also claimed that the opportunities for earning higher wages were few, as many agriculturists did own ox/oxen themselves.
Fifth, even though work was not available throughout the year, or even during a given week, wages were not static through the year. As a young rural laborer, who would also work in the fields, explained to me, “…sometimes, I get paid (INR) 125 during summers. But during these days, when it’s raining or other times, I don’t get paid as much – sometimes I get (paid) as little as (INR) 60 or 70.” Sixth, rural non-agricultural labor that paid relatively better wages than agricultural labor did was generally not available to women in the village. Male laborers claimed to me that the reason for this, was that the labor was “backbreaking” and not widely available. However, I did not seek the opinion of female laborers on the reasons for their lack of access to the relatively, higher paid labor, and therefore, may not be able to conclusively explain a cause. Finally, an agricultural laborer explained to me in no unclear terms, how the lack of asset creation by doing agricultural labor hindered social mobility: “…She (his daughter) graduated from high school. She wants to study nursing, but it would cost (INR) 100,000 to get her enrolled in a nursing college, and I don’t have that much money. So, she stays at home. If she gets through a government college, it won’t cost us much. So, we are hoping she gets into a state college next year. If she doesn’t, I don’t know what she’ll do.” Also, my interviews with agricultural laborers suggest that the agricultural laborer – agriculturist relationship was, despite everything, visibly feudal in many cases. To quote an indigenous woman laborer, “…in the field, the agriculturists prefer to throw away his extra chappatis at his dogs, rather than give those to us.” Therefore, depending on wage-providers to strengthen their food security was not necessarily an option for many agricultural laborers.
In order to understand the role of agricultural wages as endowments, I also interviewed people, who were not agricultural laborers, but were familiar with or were expected to be familiar with the employment. A regional NGO expert opined that agricultural wage rates had, in the recent past, gone up “dramatically” and workers generously used negotiation and organizing to seek about 1 ½ to 2 times the otherwise standard agricultural wages, by choosing to sell their labor as part of contractual employment, to agriculturists. My interviews with agricultural laborers corroborated this opinion largely, because the laborers did mention increase in wage rates and availability of a contractual form of employment that guaranteed better wage security. The NGO specialist also argued that if markets were the chief or exclusive source of supply of food grains, agricultural wages would be incapable of providing sufficient food, and therefore laborers’ dependence on subsidized grains was inevitable. The specialist also explained that PDS was insufficient in fulfilling nutritional requirements of laborers in that, oils, pulses, and vegetables were not provided by the system.

A very different opinion regarding low agricultural wages in the village was held by its leadership. In the words of the village council chair’s husband, “…If there is a need and sufficient workers are not available in the region, agriculturists sometimes increase the wage rate. Wages are low in our village also because the workers are so lazy – it is slightly better in some of the neighboring villages. Our workers don’t leave their houses before noon, while workers in the neighboring villages are there in the fields by 8am, so they get paid better. This PDS scheme is making things worse – people now buy grains at lower prices, so they don’t want to work hard. They play poker the entire day – they
don’t care about working hard and saving.” In continuing with the “lazy native” argument, the council member mentioned that he was glad that the state–based work-for-wage program (NREGA) that he also accused made laborers “lazy”, was more or less defunct in his village, and that application of technology, especially tractors and fertilizer spraying machines, had been increasingly replacing higher paying male labor from the fields. He also confirmed that wages had indeed increased during the past two years – double, in case of men and triple, in case of women. One of top regional bureaucrats interviewed by me, the Tehsildar, claimed that laborers were aware that the work – for – wage program of the Indian government was a demand – driven program, and that workers did seek work, and that they were provided work for the stipulated 100 days during the year. He also claimed that agriculturists were paying INR 200 as daily wages to laborers. However, none of these claims could be corroborated in my interviews from the sample village.

5.4.3. Indian Work-for-Wage Program as Endowments Creator

The Indian work for wage program, or NREGA, is the intervention of the Indian state in the rural labor market, to help create endowments for the laborers. This chapter will discuss the potential of this program to create endowments, as understood from the field.

It may be noted that access to the Indian work-for-wage program, or the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, was contingent on the availability of a “job card” with potential job seekers. To reiterate some of the points
raised in previous chapters about the scheme, in the state of Maharashtra where this research was carried out, only 34 per cent of registered households were issued job cards. Further, in the state, workers were able to secure work for less than a third of the mandated days for which employment was promised to be offered and were being paid, on an average, INR 80 per day, which was even less than the agricultural wage rates in my field – village. The availability of a job card itself, however, was no guarantee to getting 100 days of government – mandated rural employment, as mandated by the government, as this discussion will later demonstrate.

There were several reasons for laborers not owning a card, including the fact that applications to secure cards went unanswered. My interviews determine that people in the village were reliant on middlemen to get them their cards, and that in some cases, application were turned in (through the middlemen) as early as over two years ago, but cards were not issued. Several other factors, such as non – submission of photographs along with applications, proved impediments to accessing the cards. Several applicants had also paid a bribe to the middlemen to help them – as a rural laborer claimed, “…I even paid INR 600 to get the card made, but it wasn’t made.” Typically, rural laborers would be informed about the availability of work, by a local person employed by the village council to do so, by walking across the village, and, by beating a drum and making the announcement.

Second, I claim that little initiative was taken in the village to inform villagers about their rights in the program. For one, no villager interviewed knew that they had the right to demand work from their local government, and that if work would not be
available, they had the right to secure an unemployment allowance. In rare cases did anyone, who worked under the scheme, secure for themselves rural work for 100 days, during the preceding year. Some of the laborers were also unclear about the wages that laborers got under the scheme, because they hardly got any opportunities to work. As an agricultural laborer narrated to me, “I think people are paid (INR) 100, okay, (INR) 125 – anyway, hardly anyone gets paid in that scheme. People haven’t received their wages in months.” Third, several laborers narrated that they seldom got opportunities to work and were not paid – either in time, or sufficiently for the work that they performed. An indigenous laborer told me, “I have my NREGA card with me since the past three years, but I worked for one year, and then stopped. There was work. But we don’t get paid daily – how would we eat? We would get paid every eight days, or sometimes not even then – in agricultural labor, I would get paid every day. So, I’d rather do this, than work in the government scheme.” Those with their own fields to work on or on alternative service-employs chose to not participate in the scheme. Many with cards were denied work, because it was claimed by members of the village council that the local state bureaucracy had not sent a mandate to the village council to carry out any rural work. In response to my question about how rural laborers made a choice between working as agricultural laborers and working as NREGA laborers, an agricultural laborer said, “…The NREGA scheme doesn’t work that well. One only gets to work for, say, 15 days in a year – so, how does that scheme matter so much, anyway? Then, even if we work there (NREGA sites), we get paid late – sometimes by a month. I haven’t yet been paid for the work I did many months back. So, how will we manage things at home?”
The Indian government requires that the local bureaucracy deposit the daily wages that laborers earn by laboring at NREGA sites, in individual accounts in the local post office. The interviews conducted as part of this research indicate that the said procedure was ineffective. An indigenous laborer narrated to me, “…I worked on NREGA sites for a month. My parents went (to work), and then I went too. None of us got paid, and then the work itself stopped – there was nothing to do. Our wages were supposed to have been deposited in our post office bank accounts. But nothing happened. We asked the village agent (middleman), and he keeps saying the same thing – that the money will get deposited. And to your question about confronting village government people - no one is asking them any questions. I don’t know why – maybe because if I would ask about the money, I would be in the spotlight, and everyone would be after me. So, why should I ask?” In certain cases, the laborers’ found that accounts were not opened for them in the local post office, and thus, were denied any means to access the wages. Further, the laborer’s argument that to ask questions or to confront members of the village council, would be inappropriate, found resonance in the replies of many of my respondents. There was a “need” to maintain harmony in the village, and to question status-quo, was to be a rebel, which was frowned upon. Most medium-size and large landowning farmers did not have a reason to access any of the major government schemes mentioned here – neither the PDS, not the NREGA, and so they had no reason to confront the government for livelihood purposes. The ones, who needed to, were worried that they would come across as quarrelsome.
The response of various state actors about the status of the program in the village included a lot of blame-shifting. At the village level, the council head’s husband claimed that villagers did reach out to the council to ask for work, but since people didn’t get paid on time, there was low enthusiasm about the program – he transferred the blame on to the village development officer (gram sevak) and the Tehsildar. The village development officer explained that no villager had ever reached out to her to seek work, and that when work was not available to be allocated in the village, she would reach out to the Tehsildar to seek permission to allow the laborers to work at sites outside of the village. The Tehsildar claimed that everything was working well with the program, and the stipulated daily wage of 147 was being paid out to laborers every day, under the scheme. According to him, there was a registration/documentation of all laborers and the work that was being done under the scheme included, building of small dams, construction of village roads, and drainage canals. The village development officer was candid enough to confess that it was “normal” to expect a laborer to wait for up to six month to get their wages, since wages, she claimed, could not be given away until relevant muster rolls of the laborers was verified, attestations were provided by village council head and that of the block development officer, and the forms were turned in to the village council office.

5.4.4. Are PDS Grains Worth Being Consumed?

Information on the process of conversion of endowments (ration cards) to entitlements (access to subsidized grains) should account for what people are able to do with the entitlements, and therefore, this section focuses on what members of the
different socio-economic groups thought about the quality of grains that they were buying from PDS stores.

In almost all cases, I was told by the recipients of the grains that they found much to desire in the quality of the grains that were being sold to them through the stores. In comparing the grains bought from the PDS shop and a local grocery store, an agriculturist narrated to me that his household spent many hours cleaning the grains they bought from the PDS shops and that their rough estimate was that for every 10 kilos of wheat bought by the household, a kilo was thrown away because of inferior quality. He further claimed, “…The wheat we grow in our field – we just don’t need to clean that at all. The rice I buy from the PDS store has very small white pebbles that resemble rice grains.” The normalization of the inferior quality of the grains – the awareness that PDS grains are somehow “meant” to be of poor quality - was rather disturbingly ubiquitous among several indigenous laborers in the village. As one of the laborers mentioned to me, “…We’re not used to eating good quality grains, so we’re fine with the quality. People who’re used to eating better quality grains, end up feeding the PDS grains to their cattle, you know, to their cows and buffaloes.” As one of the rural laborers mentioned to me, there was simply no alternative to buying the poor quality grains from the ration shops. One of the PDS shop owners explained to me that he would retain a sample of grains from those supplied to him, for visiting government inspectors to examine, while another had the following to say about the quality of the grains, “…I sell whatever (grains) I am provided (by the government supply department). Now, what would you expect the government storage to be like? The quality of grains is sometimes good and sometimes
bad, but mostly bad. Say, if I brought 100 bags, 2 -3 would be good.” The Tehsildar, whom I had also interviewed, had a very different opinion in that he thought the grains that were sent to the villagers were of good quality, and were always tested and approved for quality before being sent out.

5.4.5. Market–Based Entitlements

This section uses qualitative analysis of interview transcripts, to narrate the importance that people from the different socio – economic groups gave to their dependence on market – based entitlements, in order to access food.

When sufficient food was not available through own-production entitlement or transfer entitlement, food was required to be bought from the markets. A marginal farmer explained to me that a cheaper way to access food grains was to buy sacks of grains from larger landowning relatives, who wanted to sell their produce, right in the village. This way, transportation costs that would normally be added to the sale value of the produce (since the grains would be sold in a market in the nearby town of Umarkhed), would not be added to the cost of the grains. Additionally, the quality of grains were guaranteed to be better, as the most recently produced grains would be bought, without the fear of mixing of grains of various ages and quality. As an indigenous laborer narrated, “…There are three – four different qualities of wheat (grains). Now, in the market, they mix different qualities of wheat (grains) and sell them in one bag. Say, they would add 5 quintals of old wheat to 20 quintals, and sell them to us. Older wheat should be of lower price, but we tend to get cheated. So, it’s safer to buy here in the village, because there is
no chance of products being mixed.” There was also the flexibility of paying the relatives only at the end of agricultural cycles, when there would be a greater likelihood of availability of cash with the marginal farmers/laborers.

To emphasize, any access to this system of securing food grains requires the presence of social capital – relatives and friends who owned enough land to produce grains for sale. Finally, the relationship between vulnerability associated with low wages and market dependence became evident, when I attempted to understand from a rural laborer their ability to buy vegetables. I was told, “…We buy vegetables once every eight days – that lasts for two days, and then it is over! But we buy vegetables, when we get work to do. If not, we don’t – we eat dal (lentils) and roti (South Asian bread).”

5.5. Conclusion

This chapter, through the interpretation of numerical data and analysis of qualitative interview transcripts, narrated the dependence of members of the four socio – economic groups, on the four types of entitlements that Amartya Sen had identified in his thesis. This chapter began with an identification of some of the endowments that the groups owned, and followed it up with a narrative on how the endowments were converted to entitlements. In the later part of this chapter, interview transcripts were used to paint an understanding of this process of conversion, as articulated by both members of the socio – economic groups and government functionaries.

In terms of endowments ownership among the four socio – economic groups, viz., agriculturists, agricultural laborers, rural (non – agricultural) laborers, and indigenous
laborers, this chapter made the following observations: agriculturists owned the major share of village land and indigenous laborers owned no land. Both rural (non-agricultural) and agricultural laborers owned minimal land (less than 1 ha). In terms of educational attainment (understood here as proxy for skills), while on an average, no group had been able to attain a college-level education, agriculturist households had been able to access high school, while all the other laboring groups had average educational attainments of secondary school.

Both agricultural and agriculturist households had a higher level of labor endowment with them (seven workers), while rural, non-agricultural laborers and indigenous laborers owned fewer labor endowments with them (five workers). In terms of livestock ownership, agriculturists owned the largest numbers of cattle, followed by minimal ownership of just one cattle by both the groups of agricultural and rural, non-agricultural laborer households, while indigenous laborers did not own any cattle. Ruminants (chicken, goats) ownership, on the other hand, was the highest among indigenous laborers, lower among agricultural and non-agricultural rural laborers, and none among indigenous laborers. Ownership of NREGA cards was also the highest among indigenous laborers, followed (equally) by agriculturists and rural, non-agricultural laborers. A minority of agricultural laborers owned NREGA cards. On a slightly contrary note, ownership of PDS cards was highest among agricultural laborers, followed by non-agricultural rural laborers, and thereafter by indigenous laborers. Just about half the agriculturists owned PDS cards, which was the lowest among all socio-economic groups.
To further summarize endowments ownership and draw comparisons among groups, first, there are some very clear differences, at least, between agriculturists and indigenous laborers, in the sense that one could easily place these groups on the two corners of the spectrum. Agriculturists lead all the groups in land ownership, educational attainment, labor endowment, and livestock (cattle) ownership, whereas indigenous laborers were at the bottom on all these counts. Indigenous laborers were doing better only on ruminants ownership and ownership of NREGA cards. However, the number count of ruminants was small and NREGA was largely non--functional in the village. Contrary to indigenous laborers, agriculturists did not own any ruminants and fewer agriculturist households owned NREGA cards. In fact, among all groups, the least number of agriculturist households owned PDS cards. However, these need to be read in the context of availability of land with agriculturists, in the sense that there was limited requirement to work in NREGA and depend on PDS grains, compared to, indigenous laborers.

Right in the middle of these extremes, lay agricultural and rural non--agricultural laborers. These two groups owned similar, minimal land endowment, and their labor had similar educational attainments, though the agricultural laborer households had higher labor endowment. Both the groups also had similar livestock endowment, while more agricultural laborers owned PDS cards than rural laborers did. Rural laborer households, on the other hand, had owned relatively larger number of NREGA cards.

This chapter also identifies the four types of entitlements that Sen had referred to, that are used by people to access food. In the context of the field--village, there was almost no
opportunity for any of the socio-economic groups to depend on “own – labor endowment”, in the sense that agriculturists would not part with their produce, in return of labor, but would instead pay wages. A comparison of landholdings was made as a proxy for “own – production entitlements”, to determine that the group of agriculturists had a relatively, overwhelmingly higher dependence on their own – production entitlements since they owned majority of the land, while indigenous laborers had none because they did not own any land. While both agricultural and rural non – agricultural laborers very small land holdings (< 1 ha), rural non – agricultural households held slightly more land than agricultural laborers. It may be noted that this difference may be read in the context of greater inequity in land ownership among rural non – agricultural laborers, compared to agricultural laborers. This leaves dependence on two forms of entitlements – market – based entitlements and transfer entitlements. This chapter indicated that dependence on transfer – entitlements was very low – the highest dependence being that of indigenous laborers (10% of their food expenditure), while the other two laboring groups had almost proportional dependence on the two forms of entitlements. Data pertaining to dependence of agriculturists on the two forms of entitlements was not collected, and therefore, it would not be feasible to compare them with the other groups.

This thesis identifies the fact that transfer entitlements had limited role to play in the lives of people. However, since PDS grains were being sold at relatively cheaper rates compared to the markets, was there a linear, simple relationship between ownership of card and access to food for a household, or were there any moral but extra – legal ways of
accessing this food? Further, why did some households not own these cards? These questions are not sufficiently answered in this chapter, but will be addressed in the next one. Since this thesis aims to focus on the politics of the state, explanations remain to be provided for the ways in which political, transfer entitlements were accessed by people and the barriers to accessing them, the ways in which “living conditions” were being created by the state that helped people to actually own endowments and access food through multiple forms of entitlements, and more generally, the changes that the landscape where this research was carried out, had experienced in endowments ownership and entitlements access. Providing explanations to these, is necessary in order to complicate the very process of e – mapping, and to understand the politics that people practice and the politics of the sovereign, that renders possible any ownership of endowments and access to entitlements, in the very first place.
CHAPTER 6: POLITICS, AND ACCESS TO FOOD

6.1. Introduction

This chapter examines in greater detail the question of “politics” of access to food from the ends of members of the four socio-economic groups, viz., agriculturists, agricultural laborers, rural non-agricultural laborers, and indigenous laborers, and the governing elites, and in doing so, addresses the second question on the nature of politics that is instrumental in aiding the process of what Sen termed, as “e–mapping”.

Specifically, this chapter seeks to address the following question: What is the role of micropolitics and state in producing food insecurity-related vulnerabilities of people?

The previous chapter highlighted the insufficiency of transfer entitlements, to fulfill the food security needs of the socio-economic groups, especially, the low-land owning laboring classes. The chapter ended with some observations that perhaps enrich our understanding of e-mapping that Sen identified as the process for accessing food. For instance, agriculturists that owned relatively smaller pieces of land bought food from relatives that owned larger pieces. Some laborers that were friends with such agriculturist households practiced the same. The advantage of this informal market strategy was that one could be assured of buying good quality grains and one could buy them at cheaper cost and delay making the payment, until the end of agricultural cycle or until a mutually agreed time. This chapter will further expand of these strategies of accessing food especially, state–subsidized grains, that may have been “extra–legal” but were moral. It is argued (Giddens, 1984) that establishment of a set of expectations regarding the “right” behavior, and a set of sanctions which can help penalize the “wrong” behavior, are the
conditions of existence for a moral rule. Some of the criticisms of Sen’s framework, therefore, that this chapter directly addresses are those identified previously as having been raised by Charles Gore (1993) regarding the need to focus on moral economy of access and the focus that Watts and Bohle (1993) ask us to give to the question of political economy. Foucault’s analytics of government, understood from this research, are explained through the lens of both Li (2007) and Akhil Gupta and Aradhana Sharma (2006).

The chapter begins by exploring the “informalization” of transfer entitlement programs in the village, where this research was carried out, and then articulates the inefficiencies in delivery of the programs. This is followed by a survey of temporal change in food insecurity as understood by people in the village, and their forms of everyday interaction with the state, including the role of the state in increasing or reducing their vulnerability to food security. The purpose of placing the Indian state as the foci of the discussion in the later segment of this chapter is to apply ethnographic observations obtained during this research, to present some initial discussions on the space of state.

6.2. Informal Ways of Accessing Government Schemes

This section will provide a narrative on the process of conversion of endowments (ration cards), owned by people, into politically – based transfer entitlements (example, PDS), in order to explain how villagers across the four socio – economic groups accessed subsidized grains provided by the Indian state. The purpose of this exercise is to further
understand the workings of “extra – legal” ways, in which legal, bureaucratic programs were accessed by people.

Access to food from ration shops required ownership of a ration card that is issued by the Indian government. However, several respondents interviewed for this research, reported accessing food from the two ration shops in the village, without ownership of a ration card: In one case, an agriculturist whose household income was above that of the Indian poverty line and did not own a ration card, bought household fuel from the local ration shop, and he could do that because he claimed that PDS shop owner was his friend - “…we’re all from the same village, so they give us 2 – 5 liters of kerosene every month”, he claimed. Meanwhile, an indigenous household that did not own a card either was able to access arbitrary quantities of food grains from the ration shop. When asked how he accessed food, despite not owning a card, the household patriarch explained, “…Well, the dealer sells us bags of grains because we’re all from the same village, after all. But I can’t get anything legally. Once he’s done selling grain bags to people who have cards, he sells some of the remaining ones to us. He sells the bags to us at a higher rate because we don’t own card. But then, people who own cards also buy grains at higher prices…” Nuclear households that were related to each other would also share PDS grains with each other, in order to help out households that did not own ration cards. As an indigenous household-head claimed, “…If and when, he (respondent’s father) would give us a share of grains from whatever he would buy from the PDS store, we would get affordable grains to eat.”
There was ambiguity in both the rate and quantity of grains that were being distributed to those without PDS cards, and the rationale that was being given for grains being denied at the government-mandated rates. As an agricultural laborer commented, “…The dealer doesn’t sell us anything – sometimes, maybe two – three times a year, I get wheat. Sometimes I get rice – maybe once every three months….He tell us that we have a field, so he doesn’t sell us anything. Sometimes he just claims that he was provided with fewer grain sacks by the government.” In many interviews given to me, villagers claimed that they were not being sold grain bags because they were told that their incomes placed them above the Indian poverty line, and were, thus, sold arbitrary amounts of only the more expensive grains – rice. It may be noted that the grains sacks distributed through the PDS stores were (highly) subsidized, but were not free of cost, and there were instances, when grains were denied to villagers, who did not even have the money to pay for the subsidized grains.

In my interviews with the two PDS shop owners/dealers, I sought to understand what any “spare” grain sacks that were left over in the shops, either due to some villagers self-selecting themselves out of the system, or for any other reasons, were done with. Both the shop owners confessed that they were indeed left with spare bags of grains – one claimed that he gave those away to people who wanted to buy more bags of grains than they were entitled to. In his words, “…it all balances out in the end.” Further, while one of the shop owners claimed that he would not sell the remaining bags to poorer households, unless they showed ownership of cards, the other one claimed that he would actually sell away grains to poorer households that didn’t have cards.
The section may be read in conjunction with Schaffer (1975) and Schaffer and Wen – hsien (1975)’s critique of bureaucratic positivism, and their understanding of the “rules of access” that govern people’s command over goods and services officially provided through state provisioning. In advocating for a need to develop a broad view of rules of entitlement, Gore (1993, 451) asks us to not limit the “broad view” by drawing on Sen’s extended entitlements analysis alone. The analysis, it is blamed, retains a positivist notion of state-enforced law and does not take into account the working of socially accepted moral rules. A broader view, Gore argues, would note the practicality of working of legal rules in determining entitlements, examine sites of rule-making and rule-enforcing outside of the governmental space, and examine how command over commodities is constrained or enabled by the active relationship between state-enforced legal rules and socially-enforced moral rules.

6.3. Why Wouldn’t They Own a Card?

It would help to understand why some people did not own (ration and job) cards, and what explanation they were provided in denying them access to the cards, by those who had power to issue the cards. By doing so, this section will develop a detailed, qualitative understanding of impediments to transfer entitlements access among people of the socio – economic groups.

In rare cases, some of the villagers had voluntarily opted out of the system. One of them had the following explanation for his reason for doing so, “…We grow everything, so why do we need (the card)? We grow wheat and sorghum. We grow
vegetables also. We have a bore-well in our field, so we grow green leafy vegetables and chili pepper in our field.” In most other cases, many villagers had attempted to access local bureaucracy and followed bureaucratic procedures, but were not successful in securing a card for themselves. An indigenous laborer claimed,

“…I went to the Tehsildar², he said that they are not distributing (ration) cards any more – that they are not available. I even got the signatures of a couple of people on a petition, but he did not accept our petition. When I ask the (PDS) dealer, he tells me that he would need INR 2000 to get the card. Now, where do we get that money from?”

His friend from the same community added,

“I also signed the petition, which we took to the Tehsildar. But I sometimes think that I should have got the petition attested by the Tehsildar, before bringing it back. Now, he didn’t do anything with the petition but at least we would have a record with us that we did try to petition him. See, this is the problem – we’re not literate, so we don’t think that we should do these things. Now we don’t have any evidence that we had petitioned him. He just turned us away – he said that we didn’t have the appropriate documents. I had the Sarpanch’s signature, got a revenue stamp on the petition, but the Tehsildar still returned the form to us.”

As the previous chapter indicated, most people interviewed had no or little land to cultivate crops on. Further, certain socio–economic groups, such as indigenous people, as a group, had no access to land. Given the limited opportunities in the village to do productive work that could result in any sort of capital accumulation, accessing

² State-appointed bureaucrat, in-charge of revenue matters of Umarkhed Tehsil.
government schemes was not a matter of choice for the laborers. Accessing the bureaucratized schemes also meant being able to access people, who commanded control over these schemes – right from village head and village store dealer, to the regional revenue officer (Tehsildar). As this discussion also indicated, people with little access to such social capital were asked to bribe their way to the schemes – when they had little or no capital to do that. Laborers had also attempted to utilize every alternative channel that existed, including petitioning their caste – representative in the village council. A rural, non-agricultural laborer narrated,

“…our caste–representative was elected just two years ago to the village council. So, he doesn’t care about us anymore. The PDS dealer told us that people in the Tehsil office need at least INR 1000–1500 to sign off on our PDS card. We are living our lives with so much hardship, sir – we earn and spend the money on food and children’s education, and have no savings left. How can we pay so much?”

Several villagers reported long delays in accessing cards, bureaucratic entanglements, and a general loss of interest in securing the card due to delays. One villagers reported long delays in accessing cards, bureaucratic entanglements, and a general loss of interest in securing the card due to delays. One villager (a young, male agriculturist) also suggested that he was not in favor of confronting village council members, and there was little reason for me to believe that this was out of fear. In some cases, villagers narrated instances of very arbitrary reasons that were given to them for being denied cards – an agriculturist narrated that he was told by the PDS dealer that he was denied a card because he owned a tractor (which meant that he was thought to be comparatively better–off).
The Tehsildar in his interview to me, pointed to how “proper, due process” would be followed in case someone from a local village came to him, complaining about lack of ownership of PDS card. When asked to explain the process, he said,

“…At the very outset, I would ask where they’re from, and then ask them if their name is included in their parents’ ration card. In case the name is included, we would ask them to apply to us to get their name removed from their parents’ ration card. If that’s not the case, they would turn in a filled-in form to me, and I would make sure they get a card”.

This information was clearly in contradiction to that provided to me by the local villagers, especially indigenous laborers.

The role of the dealers, who operated the PDS shops in the village on behalf of the government, warrants a discussion here. In my interviews with the dealers, it became clear to me that their jobs were sought after. One of the dealers told me that he had owned a license to operate one of the PDS stores since the past ten years, and that currently, under relatively newer procedures of selections, dealers were being selected by local administration through competitive examinations – although he also claimed that references from the regional (Tehsil) revenue officer to the District Collector, carried quite a lot of weight. The other, relatively younger PDS dealer confessed that since his father was also a PDS dealer, it was easier for him to get the job, and if one had the money to bribe the right people at the district collectorate, one could easily get the employment.
In my interviews with the two PDS dealers and with the Tehsildar, I was made to understand the following regarding the quantity of grains and the rates at which they were distributed - households above the Indian poverty line, were being sold 5 kilos of wheat, and a certain quantity of rice (depending on the supply from the government). Wheat would be sold at the rate of INR 8 and rice at the rate of INR 10. They claimed to supply 35 kilos of grains to families below poverty line, and similar quantity of grains to the “poorest of the poor” households or holders of the Antyoday card – with wheat sold at the rate of INR 2 to Antyoday card holders and INR 5 to households living below the poverty line. Rice was sold at the rate of INR 3 to Antyoday households, and INR 6 to households below the poverty line. Rarely did any of the households in the village get sugar or edible oil. The dealers blamed the local government supply office for not supplying them regularly with sufficient grains, to sell them to villagers. As was indicated in the previous chapter, households both above and below the Indian poverty line were entitled to 35 kilograms of grains – households above the poverty line were being denied this, and were being asked pay more than the nominal rates set by the government.

In my interviews with the husband of the village chief and the Tehsildar, I attempted to understand the procedures that actually go into enabling villagers to access ration cards that could get them food grains at subsidized costs. The village chief’s husband explained to me that every couple of months, a government order is issued to increase the ownership of a certain number of cards in respective villages. Further to this, a meeting of all villagers is called, where people discuss and decide on the kind of cards (Below Poverty Line, Antyoday, etc). that would be issued to prospective beneficiaries of
the program. For instance, in the last such round, fourteen recipients were decided upon, and this “people’s verdict” is attested by the village development officer (gram sevak), a small-time government officer in-charge of village land-record keeping, and the village council head, and the list is turned in to the Tehsildar for cards to be issued. The Tehsildar, however, elaborated to me that since villagers would always attempt to out-shout each other during the village meetings to secure BPL or Antyoday cards, the higher-ups – the officer himself, and the three officials mentioned previously, decide on the allocation of new cards by themselves. The state administration, however, he claimed, had sent out specific instructions to him, to include more women and physically challenged villagers among the recipients.

Several observations emanate out of the discussion above. If an exercise to map the sources of power that control access to food is undertaken, one notices that the role of the “government” is significant, and the “government” here is clearly not a monolith. Access to land was limited, and hence the possibility for people in the village to own land, collectively or individually, and grow and consume or sell crops. The state was itself sustaining, if not promoting, the proletarianization of people in the region, and sustaining them through “welfare” or transfer entitlement programs. To bring back Akhil Gupta and Aradhana Sharma’s argument (2006), the welfare programs are limited in their meaning, in that the states implementing these programs are not welfare states – any collapse in the Public Distribution System would leave laborers highly vulnerable to market – based entitlements. Second, the access to food through transfer entitlements
programs was being governed by several actors – for instance, local PDS dealers, village council people, Tehsildar (regional revenue officer), and District Collector.

While the Indian government was promoting decentralization of governance (villagers choosing future recipients of particular types of cards), local power structures were not allowing for this to happen. Similarly, while the Indian “anti – politics machinery” (Ferguson, 1990) of development was aimed at providing entitlements (NREGA, PDS) to people, as against empowering them, the working of this machinery was being interrupted by people, whose task it was to implement the programs. There was, however, in my observation, no revolt against this, but a consensual participation in the process of seeking entitlements from the government. Following Birkenholtz (2009), one can identify the “sources of power” here in Gramscian terms, and note the Foucauldian sense of existence of power as diffuse and capillary in construction of the self-conducting subjectivity of the laborers. As Gidwani (2009) would like us to understand, consent must be secured prior to self – conduct taking hold. The demands of the laborers was of increased and better governance – being given a card, being given work under NREGA and better wages, being given ration card and the entitled amount of food at the right price. The next section, explores in greater detail, the “space of state” which regulated the different ways to help people (both laborers and peasants) access food.
6.4. Role of the Indian State in Increasing or Reducing Food Insecurity

The ability of people in the village to access food was mediated in several ways by the forms of their interaction with the Indian state. This section analyzes the space of intersection of people from the different socio-economic groups, the Indian state, and the concern of food insecurity.

The large, artificial village tank that was used for the purpose of irrigating a few fields in the village was constructed by utilizing government funds, and was owned by the state. Access to the irrigation channels that branched out of the tank required government approval, and it was unavoidable to depend on this source to irrigate one’s fields, because digging individual bore wells was an expensive venture to undertake. There were instances (though, very rare) of land distribution by the state – I met a small landowner household that was provided with a small plot of land by the Indian government, because the family patriarch (who had since passed away), was a veteran and had served the Indian armed forces. Similarly, a very small piece of land was also given to a landless, rural laboring household by the local village government, in order for them to build a hut, though the household was aware that they couldn’t “legally” claim the land.

A member of the indigenous community explained to me the role of the state in the life of his household,

“…Both my sons receive scholarships from the government – my younger son is a student in a school run by a private trust, though he doesn’t always receive the scholarship money. For instance, during the past three years, he got the
scholarship money only once. My elder son, who is pursuing vocational studies at a college, receives a government scholarship too, but I have to pay for his books, and they’re all so expensive! My wages can’t always buy him his books. There are scholarships for our (indigenous people’s) children, but they hardly, actually get them. If we enquire about our children not getting scholarship money, the college administration complains to us about our children underperforming, academically.”

Several contradictions may be gleaned from this narrative – in the case of indigenous people, affirmative action policies clearly aid the process of increasing the ambit of governance to hitherto un-governed people, and to bring state – supported welfare to people, who were outside the ambit of “civil society”. The welfare measures only go so far – in that laborers also need to contribute from their endowments, to make the best use of the affirmative action policies. The rural wages, however, are insufficient for the laborers to make this contribution. These efforts, however, were not entirely effective, as observable from the fact that access to scholarship money by the recipient household was irregular. Further, any attempt at resistance by the indigenous household to their denial of endowments, was met with an explanation of circumstances (academic underperformance), that the state aid was precisely supposed to change.

This research was carried out in a region of the country affected by large – scale farmer suicides. This research identified several households being under debt, and debt is a cause for dispossession. Patnaik (2008) points out that withdrawal of state subsidies for farmers and an increase in the prices of grains by 58%, the percentage of rural people
consuming less than 2400 calories per day increased from 75% to 87% during 1994 and 2004. The World Bank provides a diagnosis for this problem by indicating that the reason why so many rural, landless people are unable to find a job for themselves in the “booming services sector” of India, is their lack of education and lack of skills (2008). It, of course, does not say much about the capability of the Indian services sector to absorb this “surplus” labor, even if they had the right skills, and the impact of neo – liberal policies on Indian agriculture. An explanation about the peculiar development in India is provided by Partha Chatterjee (2008): “large sections of peasants who are today the victims of the primitive accumulation of capital are completely unlikely to be absorbed into the new capitalist sectors of growth” Tania Li (2009) articulates that these “surplus” populations could be saved by providing them with “make live” provisions.

Li has, elsewhere (2007) explained that a “biopolitical” program may be viewed as an “assemblage of elements, pulled together at a particular conjuncture, in relation to a given ensemble of population and territory.” In the discussion above, several state programs were identified that aimed at securing the “welfare of the population, the improvement of its condition, the increase of its wealth, longevity, health, et cetera” (Foucault, 1991) These include, the work for wage program (NREGA), subsidized food distribution program (PDS), support for agriculture (irrigation tank, subsidized selling of seeds), and support towards school education for indigenous children. The politics of entitlements, therefore, may be viewed from the lens of bio – politics. To bring together Li (2007) and Scott (1995)’s notes on governmentality, governments operate by “educating desires, and configuring habits, aspirations, and beliefs” and since power
operates from afar, people may not be aware of how or why their conducts are being conducted, hence eliminating the need for consent. The de-politicizing language of entitlements is, therefore, very helpful to construct small and marginal peasants and landless laborers as subjects, whose lives are made to live. As noted earlier, these developmental programs that make people live, could be a starting point to explore the differences between entitlements and empowerment, in the sense that the programs systematically disempower people, and render them as governable subjects, who seek more efficient and increased governance for themselves, in asking for transparency in services delivery.

6.5. Temporal Changes in Food Security in Marsul Village

This section will narrate the temporal changes in food security in the village, as understood from qualitative interviews of members of the socio-economic groups obtained in the field – village, in order to develop a historic account of the challenges to and changes in food access in the region.

Food commodities that were relatively expensive were seldom consumed by the laborers. While rice was, thus, an item of luxury for agricultural laborer households, indigenous laborer households claimed that accessing non-vegetarian foodstuff and vegetables, was difficult. However, this section provides a more detailed discussion of the changes that food security witnessed over a period of time, in the region.

Firstly, laborers saw their current occupations – as laborers – an improvement over their former occupations. Laborers found it more rewarding to labor on fields than to
depend on forests for their living. Agricultural laborers noted an increase in wages, since their childhood, by almost 4–5 times, while some others pointed towards dependence on forest produce – edible roots, etc. – as being “shameful” as compared to the consumption of grains. An agricultural laborer presented a highly nuanced understanding of market dependence, which was,

“…During my childhood, we didn’t have to pay so much. Everything gets expensive really fast now. So, we were better off in the old days… we never had PDS shops then, but agriculturists would allow us to take away a part of the produce that we would grow for them – those grains used to be of good quality. We would grow lentils, sorghum, and rice, and we would bring back a portion of what we would grow. You don’t get all that in the PDS store, do you?”

Therefore, a culturally–based transfer entitlement was replaced by politically–based (state-supported) transfer entitlement program in the region, that not everyone was clearly happy with.

Agriculturists discussed with me the changes in the types of crops being cultivated. Access to irrigation had given way to increased replacement of sorghum, with wheat cultivation. The increase in the quantity, and variety of production (from sorghum, to wheat and lentils), were being credited to the construction of the large artificial village tank, and electrification of the village. I was also made to understand that technology had brought with itself the cultivation of cash crops like cotton that earned greater returns to cultivators, while yet another explanation for improvement in food access provided to
me, was that the general increase in household sizes had meant greater labor endowment. As a laborer from the indigenous community explained to me,

“…Things have improved–our economic circumstance was really bad. There are more people who work now, there’s the PDS store, but I think it’s because of the increase in number of people who work. I don’t think it’s as much about the government schemes.”

Typically, owners of land found increased sense of food security, and could bring to bear other endowments, such as access to technical education and greater flows of capital, to increase land productivity. Also, access to capital also made it possible for several landowners to make access to employment in the manufacturing or service industry possible for the children of the households. These sectors provided steadier source of supplementary income to the households. Agriculturists also mentioned of better returns for their produce from the market, but this poses the question of food security for the buyers at the bottom of the income pyramid – the laborers. Further, a rural laborer helped me understand that since food is a basic necessity of life, even though they could claim to be able to make themselves food secure by converting their endowments to entitlements, they would have little left to spend on other necessities of the households.

Laborers found decrease in levels of rainfall over the past several years, helpful in being able to access more wage endowments. An indigenous laborer explained, “…It doesn’t rain as much, so we get work during more months. And I think the wages are also slightly better now.” An indigenous laborer further explained to me the relationship
between decreased rainfall and increased welfare – a certain critical amount of rain was surely preferred, but with increased dependence on alternative sources of water for irrigation, such as wells and bore wells, there was an increase in the number of cycles of crops cultivated every year. Along with some increase in the wages paid out to laborers, this meant the ability to sell more labor to agriculturists, and therefore, increased earnings.

There was a sense of appreciation for the changes brought about to indigenous way of living by modernization–one household found merit in splitting of joint families into nuclear households because each smaller, nuclear household could find itself to be food secure by fully utilizing the PDS entitlements, while another had the following to say,

“…My father used to live in the forest, and cut trees and sell them. I was able to at least get primary school-level education, and then send my children to study in higher classes. But in our community, things are still bad. Illiteracy is a big problem – most people in our community still live in forested areas, where people like you don’t come to do survey or to help deliver any other state service.”

Not just agriculturists, but laborers found increased production of grains, or the ability to grow multiple cycles of crops every year (and therefore, increased availability of food) helpful in increasing food access. Availability of food, therefore, was important for people across levels of income and ownership of land. Laborers also felt it important to mention to me that their increased wages had helped them enroll their children in local schools. However, I found no conclusive evidence to link the increase in wages with
significant social or economic mobility. People in the village also found the installation of hand-pumps and electrification of houses as helpful in reducing labor time spent away from work - especially, in travelling long distances to fetch water.

Several temporal changes were discussed in this section. First, the introduction of politically – based transfer entitlements had changed ways of accessing food for several households: agriculturists did no longer share a part of their produce with the laborers and so the laborers were rendered dependent on accessing lower quality, fewer varieties of grains from the PDS stores. Secondly, laborers found it beneficial to split their traditional, joint households into more nuclear households to access more PDS cards, and there was certainly a discourse in the village that constructed consuming certain food types (especially those produced in the forests) as “shameful”, while some others (those available in the markets and ration shops) as not. I argue that this discourse was limiting laborers’, especially indigenous peoples’ access to a larger basket of food entitlements. Third, in a span of close to half a century, the village had undergone macro changes in technologies that had impacted crop productivity in the village. The state had electrified the village, had got a large irrigation tank constructed, and was providing access to the tank through canals. Also, several bore wells had come up in the village. Increased productivity of crops came through increased cycles of agricultural production, and with some increase in wage rates, that meant some increase in wages for laborers. Agriculturists also claimed getting better returns for their produce from the markets. Therefore, while availability of food is clearly no guarantee for access to food, this
research does demonstrate that access to food, especially in a rural context, is also very closely linked with improved agro – economy of the rural areas.

6.6 Conclusion

Entitlements, according to Sen (1981), “are a set of alternative commodity bundles, over which, a person can establish command, given the prevailing legal, political and economic arrangements.” This chapter identified several strategies employed by people, currently and over the past few decades that helped people get access to food. The response of the Indian state and local elites were also discussed in order to develop a discussion of the centrality of state in increasing or reducing food insecurity.

As the previous chapter indicated, while PDS grains did not constitute a significant portion of any of the income group’s basket of entitlements, the significance of cheaper PDS grains may be read in the context of the low levels of earnings of most of the laboring households. Food was bought from PDS stores by utilizing the social capital, as a replacement for the lack of access to PDS cards. Several cardholding agriculturists would opt out of the system, and several households, especially indigenous households, would not be able to access the system despite owning cards, because they would not even have the money to pay for the subsidized grains. The moral economy of the village allowed arbitrary amounts of PDS grains to be sold at arbitrary rates, but it also allowed access to the government scheme to several households that they would normally not have been able to. PDS grains would also be distributed among several related, nuclear households.
In examining sources of power that played a role in enabiling or disabling access to food, this chapter identified the role of the state as being central. The work – for – wage program aims at providing guaranteed wages to laboring households, for purposes that include accessing food at subsidized rates. The contradictory role of the Indian state becomes evident in the fact that the scheme is an entitlement program, but not an empowerment one. Further, local elites, right from village council members to regional government revenue officer, were not very helpful in getting people access to either of the entitlements schemes.

In describing the temporal shifts in food security, this thesis pointed towards erosion of hitherto existing rules of local political economy, with the introduction of transfer entitlements, which were not necessarily entirely helpful for laborers. Further, modernization and especially, the discourse of modernity, had rendered some lifestyles (indigenous) and some food commodities (forest products), obsolete and shameful, and thus made a difference to the basket of entitlements. Finally, state interventions through facilitating access to technologies of production had impacted crop productivity, saved on the use of labor time for non – production related activities, and increased production that had helped agriculturists and laborers alike. Laborers found more opportunities to sell their labor and thus earn more wages, while the availability of more food in the market increased possibilities of access for members of all socio–economic groups.

The above narration also presents a case for understanding the politics of access to food, from the lens of biopolitics. The welfare of the people was largely in the hands of the state – through technologies to produce crops, entitlements to access food, and
opportunities to earn wages to buy food grains. I present governmental interventions as assemblages, because doing so helps to break down the understanding of government as a monolith, and helps recognition of several institutions and people, that are involved with regulating conditions under which lives are lived (Tania Li, 2007). Finally, an understanding of the politics of access should also help us to differentiate entitlements from empowerment by recognizing entitlement programs to be those being delivered by the anti–politics machine of the government (Ferguson, 1990).
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

This thesis sought to present an understanding and critique of Amartya Sen’s entitlements framework (1981), through a review of literature, and analysis of data collected from a survey carried out in and around a village in central India during July – August 2012. Specifically, the following research questions were raised – (a) how do endowments and entitlements vary across socio-economic classes, and how are endowments converted to entitlements, and (b) what were the challenges, current and temporal, to accessing food, how did members across the socio – economic groups respond to them, and what was the role of local elites and the Indian state in increasing or reducing food insecurity – related vulnerabilities of people? These questions aimed at generating an understanding of the politics of access to food, in the Indian context.

This research reported several differences in the distribution of endowments among households of the four socio – economic groups – agriculturists, agricultural laborers, rural non – agricultural laborers, and indigenous laborers – that were interviewed, for the purpose of this research. Indigenous laborer households were acknowledged as being highly vulnerable, on account of their lack of ownership of the major endowments identified in this research, and their lack of access to either own – production or own – labor entitlements. State – based, transfer entitlements programs were demonstrated to be highly insufficient in meeting the food security needs of people. The highest levels of dependence that any group had on the Indian state’s public (food grains) distribution system, was the indigenous laboring class that found 90 per cent of its food budget being directed towards the markets. Indeed, market – based entitlements can
be conclusively stated as the major form of entitlement, at least for all the laboring
groups, and can be predicted to be the same for several agricultural households, since
land ownership was highly skewed in favor of only a few households.

While PDS was a small component in the basket of entitlements, the low cost of
access associated with it, lead the marginal - landholding agriculturist and landless
laborer households, to view this entitlement as being of importance. Several findings in
the thesis, reflect the criticisms of Gore (1993) of Sen’s framework. Sen’s later work with
Jean Dréze, proposed an extended entitlements analysis (1989) to account for the
workings of the rules of entitlements. Gore, however, citing Schaffer (1975) and Schaffer
and Wen – hsien (1975)’s critique of bureaucratic positivism, asks us to not limit our
understanding of transfer entitlements within the contours of positivist notions of state –
enforced law, but take into account the workings of “extra – legal” but socially accepted
moral rules. This research pointed to the existence of a specific moral economy of access
in the village, which was clearly outside of the legal. While several agriculturists who
owned cards chose to opt out of the transfer entitlements program on their own, several
marginal agriculturists and landless laborers accessed the system without owning a card,
because the PDS dealer and the villagers were long – time residents of the same village.
Further, social capital (in the form of relatives or friends who owned larger pieces of
land) also helped small agriculturists and laborers access produce at lower prices, right in
the village.

Entitlements are not externally given but are constituted and reproduced through
conflict, negotiation and struggle (Watts, 2000). While several agriculturists and laboring
households were thus, able to access food, outside of the legal system, members of some indigenous laboring classes reported their inability to access this entitlement, despite ownership of cards, since the food grains would only be made available by the dealer, in a given month, during a window of time. The inability of households to present money demanded by the dealer to buy the subsidized grains during this window, resulted in the loss of the entitlement for the households. Similarly, several households, despite their apparent eligibility, did not own PDS cards, and were thus, excluded from access to the transfer entitlement.

This chapter also identified the lackluster performance of yet another transfer entitlement program, the Indian state’s National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, in the village, and arguments of local government officials and local elites, in response to my observations. The scheme, aimed at increasing livelihood security, provides guaranteed wage – employment to rural households for 100 days during a year, and pays them the mandated minimum wages (Gazette of India, September 2005). Local state officials denied claims that the program was being run ineffectively while village council members found state programs as being responsible for turning laborers into “lazy” subjects. Further, introduction of state – based entitlements programs had also eroded cultural forms of entitlements (such as crop sharing). This, coupled with modernist discourses about which ways of leading life are modern and which ones are not, were found to have impacted the basket of entitlements that laborers, especially indigenous laborers, had access to. The Indian state was not just involved with provisioning welfare for laboring classes, but was an intrinsic part of the recent historic process of increase in
agricultural productivity of the region. State interventions directed towards increasing agricultural productivity, had resulted in increased availability of food grains and increased opportunities to sell labor in return of wages.

This study aims to contribute to the discussion on politicization and power, associated with access to food, that Sen’s entitlements framework was critiqued for not paying sufficient attention to. As this thesis explains, in a rural context, own – production entitlement was important for villagers to acquire food in several ways, in the sense that one was not just able to consume portion of the produce, but was able to sell some, in return of money. Households with landholding, and the agriculturist socio – economic class, in general, had access to higher levels of education and owned more productive assets and endowments, compared with other socio – economic classes. I argue that discussions on effectiveness of transfer entitlements, misses the larger question of empowerment. Akhil Gupta (2006) suggests that the distinction between “entitlement” and “empowerment” could be a starting point to explore the dichotomies of applied/ activist, inside/ outside, policy analysis/ class struggle, and developmentalism/ revolution. James Ferguson (1990), in the same vein, theorizes that with its elaborate but repetitive logic, the “machinery” of development focuses on the goal of delivering entitlements. Further, Ferguson, in “The Anti-Politics Machine”, suggests that the “machinery” of development does so (delivering entitlements) in order to remove all discussions of empowerment from the many discourses.

The entitlements programs in the village seem to exactly have had that affect – most villagers, especially marginal and small landowners, and laborers, wanted access to
cards that provided them with their entitlements and wanted their fair share of transfer entitlements. The anti – politics machine of state – lead development was, however, being disrupted by the workings of local power structures – village council members, village development officer, and regional revenue officer, partially because these scheme were sources to make money for those in power, and because of fear that state development schemes was making labor less - productive and expensive for use in the village. This particular concern is theorized later in this chapter, as one of limits to Foucault’s notions of governmentality.

This thesis narrated the mico –level workings of politics that privileges moral economy of food distribution, over legal rights. However, it is equally necessary to take into account questions of political economy. In critiquing Sen’s work, one finds a particular use in Watts and Bohle’s (1993) analysis of class and crisis. In understanding famines, they ask us to provide attention to political economy, which while examining the production and reproduction of particular patterns of entitlement and empowerment in the society, privileges the historical and the structural. Further, that the transformation of hunger in to famine, is a reflection of “short-term expression of a larger crisis tendencies and conflicts within the political economy”. Going further with class analysis, an understanding of both assets, and relations that aid mobilization and appropriation of surplus, are necessary to understand famine as a poverty problem. This relates to Sen’s mention of specific varieties of famines (“boom” and “slump”) that have a root, according to Sen, in the “mode of production”. However, Watts and Bohle (1993, 120)
would ask us to see this as a “historically localized expression of fundamental class processes”.

Broadening this discussion, vulnerability is sought to be looked at a “structural – historical space” that finds itself to be shaped by the effects of commercialization, proletarianization, and marginalization (Watts and Bohle, 1993, 121). This thesis points towards the high levels of high – risk dependence of all laboring groups, especially the indigenous laboring class, and some agriculturist households, on markets, to access food, thus, rendering them vulnerable to market fluctuations. The right to work program was doing little to affect proletarianization in the village, and along with the PDS, can be construed as an assemblage of programs put together, to make people live.

Despite the visible inefficiency of its interventions, especially in the form of developmental, transfer entitlement programs, socio – economic groups, especially the laboring classes were seeking greater state interventions, and not less. There is a possibility to further understand this, by carrying out ethnographic research and placing the observations in the context of post – colonial state studies. In fact, Gupta and Sharma (2006) in their study of globalization and post – colonial states, point to an interesting argument. The Indian state’s Integrated Child Development Scheme, they suggest, that contrary to global trends, has actually expanded, and this could be explained by the populist democratic politics of India. Welfare schemes such as ICDS (and PDS and NREGA) help to construct and maintain the legitimacy of governing regimes, after markets are opened for international trade that only a limited number of people in the nation – states, can benefit from. How do we explain the willingness of development
subjects to seek greater developmental interventions that merely sustain conditions for life, but are not transformative? This question could be explored in some detail in future research.

This thesis could be further improved by carrying out research on two micro-level access issues – (a) since the daily per capita calorie consumption of an average rural Indian is 2047 kcal (Ghosh, 2010), it may be helpful to understand how each of the entitlements contribute towards this number, in order to get a more clear, local picture of food insecurity, and (b) focus on the politics of access to food, outside or on the periphery of the state, especially to generate a more nuanced understanding of market-based entitlements, since it is such a significant component in the basket of entitlements, in the region. Further, specifically, this research demonstrated the high levels of vulnerability associated with the indigenous laboring socio-economic group. While as part of this research, all members of the group were interviewed from Marsul village (since there were so few indigenous laboring households), this research could further expand to include more indigenous households in the region, to generate a generalizable idea of their vulnerability, and their everyday interactions with the state.

This thesis broadly intended to address the criticism of lack of sufficient inclusion of politics, in Sen’s development of the entitlements framework. The centrality of states in enabling or disabling access to food was a major focus of Sen’s later work with Jean Dreze (1989). In a different context, Tania Li (2007) interprets the limits to governmentality to seek opening up of several critical challenges to governmental rationality. In this realm, she includes entitlement programs that generate a certain
expectation of improvement, but there ends up existing a gap, between promises made and results achieved. Yet another limit, could also be the process of decentralization of governance that neo-liberal reforms have resulted in. The formation of village councils and greater decentralization of power in India was intended to improve governance. My thesis points towards the contradictory agenda of several state actors – while the national and state governments may be interested in bringing welfare programs to the region, local state – based authorities, such as village council members, PDS dealers, village development officer, and Tehsildar, did not find it in their interest to implement them.

Tania Li (2007) further emphasizes that “politics is not external to government, it is constitutive of it. Therefore, if “the point is to change it” (Marx, 1986), and transformative development can be useful in that process, the purpose of enumerating ways of access to food, should be inclusive of the nature of politics that states practice, and should be critical of the forms of development, such as, entitlements.
REFERENCES


Census of India 2001: Data from the 2001 Census, including cities, villages and towns. Census Commission of India.


APPENDIX

Quantitative Survey Sample Schedule

PART I (GENERAL QUESTIONS)

A. Household Details

1. Ages (years): ______

2. Sex: [1 = Female; 2 = Male] /______/ 

3. Education level (indicate gender also): [1 = Illiterate; 2 = Literate (below primary); 3 = Primary (Class V complete); 4 = Upper Primary (class VIII complete); 5 = Secondary (class X complete); 6 = High School (class XII complete); 7 = Above High School; 9 = Unclear] /______/ 

4. Marital Status: [1 = Married; 2 = Widowed; 3 = Divorced, Abandoned or Separated; 4 = Unmarried; 5 = Other (specify); 9 = Unclear] /______/ 

5. Religion: [1 = Hindu; 2 = Muslim; 3 = Christian; 4 = Other (specify); 9 = Unclear] /______/ 

6. Category (caste): [1 = SC; 2 = ST; 3 = OBC; 4 = Other; 9 = Unclear] /______/ 

7. Which members of the household work? 

2B. Household Details 

[Investigator: The term “household” in this section refers to the household unit as perceived by the respondent. Usually this would correspond to members of a family who share the same “chulha” or stove.]
1. Number of household members:
[Investigator: Fill all entries in this table (write “0” if applicable) and make sure that the row total is the same as the column total.]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children (below 14 years)</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults (aged 14-65 years)</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged persons (above 65 years)</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Type of household [1 = Nuclear family; 2 = Nuclear family with dependent(s); 3 = Joint family (with several nuclear families); 4 = Other (specify); 9 = Unsure] /______/ 

3. Does the household have an NREGA job card? [1=Yes; 2=No; 9=Unsure] /______/ 

4. Number of days of NREGA work done during the last 12 months by all household members together. You can enter a “range” (e.g. 60-80 days), but try to avoid it if possible.] /______/ 

5. Type of dwelling: [1 = Kachha; 2 = Semi-pukka; 3 = Pukka; 9 = Unclear] /______/ 

6. Main occupation(s) of the household: [Investigator: Enter two codes (one in each box) if necessary, starting with the main occupation.] [1 = Self-employment (agriculture); 2 = Self-employment (non-agriculture); 3 = Casual Labour; 4 = Regular Employment (naukri); 5 = Other (specify); 9 = Unclear] /______/ /______/ 

7. Amount of agricultural land owned: [Investigator: Please convert local units into acres. If you are unable to convert, note the answer as given by the respondent, outside the box, and convert later on the same day.] /______/ acres
8. Who owns the land in the household? M/F

9. If household members do not work on their own farm, what is the total, daily wage earned by all members of the household?

Member1:

Member2:

Member3:

10. How many days in a year do the above members work? ___, ___, ___

11. Household assets. [Investigator: Please note below, preferably based on direct observation (and otherwise by asking), whether the household has the following possessions/facilities (1 = Yes; 2 = No; 9 = Not sure).]

Electricity /______/

Pressure cooker /______/

Fan /______/

Television /______/

Motorcycle/scooter /______/

Four-wheel vehicle /______/

Mobile phone /______/

Latrine /______/

Piped water /______/

12. How do the households access water and how do they clean the water?

13. Where is the water stored?
14. Is there a government-run healthcare center in the village? Does the household use its services?

15. If Yes, are they satisfied with its services? If not, where does the household go for medical care?

16. What is the total expenditure of the household on medical care, and what fraction of the household income is this?

17. Is the household under any debt; If yes, name amount and source.

C. Ration Cards

1. “Does your household have a Ration Card?” /______/ 
   [1 = Yes (only one); 2 = Yes (several, same type); 3 = Yes (several, different types); 4 = No; 9 = Unclear]
   [Investigator: If the respondent does not have a Ration Card, note the reasons in the space below and end the interview. If he/she has a Ration Card, ask to see it. If the household has several Ration Cards, select one Ration Card at random for further probing.]

2. Type of Ration Card:
3. What items does the household get from the PDS shop and at what rate? What is the market rate of each of these items/unit?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Rate</th>
<th>Rate/unit in open market</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. “Did you have to pay anyone any money to obtain your Ration Card, or for other associated expenses?” [Investigator: Please note amount; if there was no charge, write “0”.]
Ration Card: Rs. /______/ 

Other expenses (specify): Rs. /______/ 

5. “Are you in possession of your Ration Card at the moment, or is it with someone else?” [1 = In possession; 2 = Someone else; 9 = Not clear] /______/ 

6. “If it is with someone else, where is it?” 
[1 = Pradhan/Sarpanch; 2 = Sachiv; 3 = Other GP functionary (specify); 4 = Ration dealer; 5 = Other (specify); 9 = Unclear] /______/ 

Perceptions of PDS 

1. “How would you describe the attitude of the PDS dealer: helpful, indifferent or unhelpful?” [1=Helpful; 2= Indifferent; 3= Unhelpful; 9=Unclear] /______/ 

2. “How would you describe the importance of the PDS for your family’s welfare? Very important, quite important or not important?” [1=Very important; 2=Quite important; 3= Not important; 9=Unclear] /______/ 

3. “Are you satisfied with the functioning of the local PDS outlet?” [1=Highly satisfied; 2=Reasonably satisfied; 3=Somewhat dissatisfied; 4=Very dissatisfied; 9 =Unclear] /______/ 

Food and Consumption 

1. “How much grain does your household consume in an average month?” /______/ kg
2. “Is this enough to ensure that no-one goes hungry at any time?” [1=Yes; 2=No; 9=Unclear] /_______/

3. [If not] “How much grain would be required, in a month, to ensure that no-one goes hungry at any time?” [Investigator: If you don’t get a credible answer, write “NR”.] /_______/kg

4. “Has it ever happened, during the last three months, that some people in the household had to skip a meal or sleep hungry because there was not enough grain in the house?” [1=Yes; 2=No; 9=Unclear] /_______/

27. “Does everyone in your household get at least two square meals a day throughout the year?” [1=Yes; 2=No; 9=Unclear] /_______/

28. “Leaving food aside, how much do you spend in an average month (approximately) to run your household?” Rs /_______/

29. “During the last 7 days, on how many days did your family consume the following items?” [Investigator: Make sure to note number of days, instead of just “ticking”. If the item is not consumed at all in the last 7 days, enter "0".]

Details, if any (optional)

Vegetables /____//______________________________________/

Dal /____//______________________________________/

Milk /____//______________________________________/

Fruits /____//______________________________________/

Eggs /____//______________________________________/

Meat or fish /____//______________________________________/
Mid-day meal scheme in schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In an average week how often are cooked meals being served in the school</td>
<td>Every day [except holidays]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Most days [4-6 days]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A few days [2-3 days]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel that, since mid-day meals have started, it has become easier or more difficult to persuade the children to go to school in the morning?</td>
<td>Easier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More difficult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel that your children are looking forward to the mid-day meal?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has it ever happened that your children developed stomachache or felt unwell after eating the mid-day meal at school?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If yes, approximately how often has this happened?</td>
<td>Almost every day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often has your child fallen ill after consuming the meal at school in the last 7 days?</td>
<td>Never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the quality of the food provided at school?</td>
<td>Satisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why? Please describe.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Part II. Investigators’ Observations