

10

Women

Possibilities and Constraints*

10.1 Women in a Changing Village

In the six decades since the first survey round in Palanpur (1957/8), the last decade or two have in many ways been the most significant in terms of changes in women's lives in the village. The burden of household work has fallen with the adoption of new technologies. For example, women who were involved in tasks involving hard, time-consuming physical labour, such as manual grinding of flour (*chukki*), now have some extra time after the introduction of flour mills. Most have a handpump within the household or nearby and no longer have to walk long distances to fetch water. Fertility rates have fallen, with women having fewer children and therefore spending less time pregnant or caring for children. With many households in possession of a television set and/or a mobile phone, there is greater access to information and to the 'outside world'. There is increasing participation of girls in education. The primary school in the village had a female teacher for some time, and most primary-school-aged girls are now in school. Many girls walk to nearby Akrauli to attend high school, and some of them even travel by train to attend college in Chandausi or Moradabad. School-going children, especially daughters, have new aspirations and expose their mothers to new ideas.¹

Long-time visitors to the village have reported noticing more women outside their houses in Palanpur than earlier.² Many older women in the village talked about how they could not even sit down or speak if their fathers-in-law

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¹ Where all married women used to wear a saree, now some of the younger daughters-in-law have moved on to a *salwar kameez*, while the younger unmarried girls can be seen in jeans.

² Observations by Sue Stern, who visited the village in the 1970s and 1980s and then again in 2002 and 2008. See Chapter 2.

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were anywhere around. But now younger women, despite continuing to practise *purdah*, can sometimes give their opinion on household issues. The village in the last decade has for the first time also seen a couple, belonging to different castes, eloping. They got married and returned to the village. They were isolated for some time but have now been accepted by their families. There was another woman in Palanpur who had been widowed. She was living with her parents and fighting a legal battle with her husband's family for her share in his property.³ She had the complete support of her parents. Thanks to reserved seats for women in *panchayat* elections, the village now has a female Pradhan. However, her position is largely nominal as she and her husband live outside the village, and a nephew in the village exercises authority.

These are all stories that demonstrate how much has changed in Palanpur. Much of this change was probably unthinkable, even in the early 1980s. Despite these changes, however, there remains much more that could be improved. Household and care work are still predominantly carried out by women. The drudgery of this work remains high. Women spend most of their time in domestic work—cooking, taking care of children, cleaning, and so on. Literacy is still at a low level, and barely any women work for pay. While there has been great change in other aspects of village life, including the economy (see earlier chapters) and politics (see Chapter 11), the pace of change in women's roles both in society and within the household is slow.

Initial visits to Palanpur by the new team of researchers in 2008 indicated that women's lives in the village had not changed much over the decades of the survey. There were still very few women seen out on the streets, *purdah* was still practised, very few worked outside the home for a wage, and so on. There is very little physical mobility, with most women confined to the boundaries of the household. Strict *purdah* is widely practised (especially amongst the upper castes), marriages are patrilocal and patrilineal, and dowry is the norm. Domestic violence is prevalent. Most families do not consider the village a safe place for young girls. Women are absent from decision-making roles in the village society; their issues rarely become public issues. Therefore, while there have been some significant changes in women's lives, it is also the case that, on most dimensions, women in Palanpur continue to be largely invisible in economic, social, and political life.

As seen in Chapter 9, in terms of education there has been an impressive change in the village since the late 1990s, for both men and women. The fertility rates are lower, and therefore women have more time to participate in economic activities. These changes might be expected to increase women's

³ This woman's natal village is Palanpur, whereas her marital village is a slight distance away in the same district. While she went to live with her husband's family post-marriage, after his death she moved back to Palanpur.

participation in the workforce as well as their status both within the household and outside in the coming years. While movement on these fronts is still slow, we might see significant change in the role of women in the village in the next few decades. Women constitute almost half of Palanpur's population, and how the village grows and changes in the future is closely linked to the fate and role of women.

10.2 Data

Data on women's education and workforce participation are available for all the rounds, with differing levels of detail. Each survey round conducted a census of the village and collected some basic demographic data in relation to all members. While planning the latest survey (2008/10) in Palanpur, it was recognized from the beginning that a deeper understanding of the village required some more systematic data collection on women's lives.⁴ Although fully comparable data were not collected in the earlier surveys, there is considerable qualitative information and anecdotal evidence related to women. Further, some information, such as on schooling/literacy, employment status,⁵ marital status, and so on, is available from the household survey data. These data from earlier surveys are used to make some comparisons. Along with the general household information that was collected during the 2008/10 study period, this chapter uses data gathered from all ever-married women aged fifty or less based on a specific 'women' questionnaire. Information was collected on birth history, women's work outside home, autonomy, mobility, and domestic violence. Women with any children under six were also asked questions related to ante- and post-natal care, breastfeeding, child immunization, and participation in childcare services. Data on age, education, family structure, and so on were available from the household survey.

All the data related to the women questionnaire were collected by female researchers, and therefore there was a fair degree of comfort in sharing information. However, it must also be mentioned that it was difficult to talk to women alone as often other (female) family members would also be present. This was many times out of curiosity but also, in the case of younger and recently married women, there was almost always a 'chaperone' (usually the

⁴ In earlier Palanpur studies, there were a few visits by women involved in the research programme to the village (including Sue Stern, Jenny Lanjouw, and Jocelyn Kynch) but no extended data collection by women. This placed limitations on the access of past researchers to hold discussions with women in the village.

⁵ As mentioned in Dèize and Sharma (1998), there is a problem with employment data because this is mostly reported by men in the family who might undervalue a lot of the work done by women. This time around we also asked the women directly what work they did. Even this was not detailed enough to get a good estimate, but is definitely a step forward.

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mother-in-law and sometimes a younger sister-in-law). This made it difficult to discuss 'sensitive' issues, especially those related to domestic violence, dowry, decision-making within the household, and so on. On the other hand, due to the extended time spent in the village, the researchers developed a good rapport with some women with whom more personal discussions took place. And even if there were other women present, older women (those with children) were quite open about discussing many issues. Small details about the social contexts in which the survey was administered make a large difference to the quality of data, as we have argued in Chapter 1. Time and rapport have been crucial in ensuring that the data we collect in Palanpur have been of the highest possible quality; this is of particular importance in relation to understanding the role of women in the village.

10.3 Fertility

Whilst we do not have the detailed birth data to estimate fertility rates, there is sufficient evidence to show that, on average, women are giving birth to fewer children over time. Two crude measures are presented here to help understand fertility trends in the village. First, the ratio of children under fifteen to adult women in the village shows a decline from 1.9 in 1975 and 1.7 in 1993 to 1.3 in 2015. The gross fertility rate (GFR) is another indicator used by demographers. GFR is the ratio of births in a year to the number of women of reproductive age. Since we do not have detailed data on births, in Table 10.1 we look at the ratio of children aged less than a year per 1000 women in the reproductive age group (fifteen to forty-nine years), which also shows a sharp decline after 1993 (see Table 10.1).

Therefore, on the whole there are indications of declining fertility levels in Palanpur. It should be noted that this fertility rate is still high; it is quite common for women to have four or more children. Not many women use contraception.⁶

Table 10.1 Indicators of fertility rates

	Year						
	1958	1964	1975	1983	1993	2009	2015
Ratio of children under 15 to adult women	1.50	1.42	1.94	1.94	1.68	1.39	1.27
GFR (modified)*	171.2	135.7	137.8	134.6	130.5	106	91.3

Note: * Ratio of children aged less than one year per 1000 women in the reproductive age group.

⁶ We do not know much about condom usage among men. The local 'doctor' did inform us that he also sold condoms and that some men in the village bought them.

Some of them have undergone sterilization procedures,⁷ some of them still wanted children and did not use contraception, and some of them used contraceptive pills or condoms. The mean age at first pregnancy (miscarriages included) is 19.5 years. This corresponds to the average for rural India (19.5) when comparing with National Family Health Survey (NFHS) data (IIPS, 2007). We see that although there is a rise in the age at marriage, the age at first pregnancy does not seem to have increased over time, as it is around nineteen years of age for all age groups of women.

10.4 Education: Literacy and Schooling

Among important factors that give women a voice and agency within the family and the community are education and workforce participation. While education has an intrinsic value, it is also well established that female education, even more than male education, has a positive effect on the well-being of the entire family, especially of children. This is because women are the primary caregivers in a family, and an educated woman can take informed decisions, has a greater role in the decisions of the household, and is able to access available public services better. In this and other ways, increased maternal education is seen to have a major influence on reduced child mortality. Further, education is seen to have an impact not only through the characteristics of the individual mother, but also through the educational level of society as a whole (for example, Caldwell, 1979; Kravdal, 2003; Sinha, 2016; Ware, 1984).

Palanpur has seen a tremendous increase in literacy rates since the 1957/8 survey. However, serious gender gaps remain. While the male literacy rate increased from 14 per cent in 1957/8 to 77 per cent in 2015, the female literacy rate increased from almost nil (1 per cent) to 43 per cent during the same period. Up to 1993, the level of female literacy in the village was negligible, with only 8.7 per cent of females literate.⁸ It is only in the last two decades that

⁷ Kantti, a young Thakur woman, discussed her sterilization with us. Before the pregnancies, she used contraceptive pills her husband gave her. After having two boys, she wanted a girl so they had a third child, who was also a boy. They then decided not to have any more children. She was informed of a government sterilization programme through the ANM (Auxiliary Nurse Midwife) who came to administer polio drops for her children. She is happy with her and her husband's decision.

⁸ 'Literate' refers to all those who can 'read and write'. This status differs from education level, as persons without formal schooling are included as literate if they can 'read and write'. 'Read and write' is a category based on the responder's reporting. As for education level, those reporting no school education or who cannot read and write are 'illiterate', those with education till 5th standard are clubbed as 'primary', between 6 to 8th standard are clubbed as 'middle', 9th to 12th standard are 'secondary and high school', and beyond 12th standard are clubbed as 'higher educated'. Those below primary education would come under illiterate in 'literacy status' if they could not 'read and write'. It is taken in relation to individuals aged over seven.

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Table 10.2 Gender gap in literacy rates (%), by major caste groups

Caste Group	Year						
	1958	1964	1975	1984	1993	2009	2015
Thakur	34.1	49.6	46.5	44.9	39.6	34.4	35
Muraos	10.4	27.8	36.9	45	49.5	50.5	34.4
Muslims	4.2	20	7.9	24.7	36.1	47.7	51.8
Jatab	3	12.1	2.3	7.5	23.7	29.5	30.4
Overall	13.5	30.5	28.1	30.6	37.5	40.6	36.1

Source: Primary survey data from Palanpur.

an expansion in female education can be seen. However, it is also the case that even as late as 2015, less than half the girls/women in the village were literate.

The change in the 'gender gap' in literacy rates can be seen as an indicator of how fast women are catching up with men. As seen in Table 10.2, the gap was increasing until 2009, with a faster increase in the male literacy rate than the female. Although there was some reduction in the gender gap in 2015 it was still high at 36 percentage points. There is continuing gender bias in access to education in Palanpur (for further information, see Section 9.2 of Chapter 9).⁹

Usually when literacy rates are low, the gender gap is also low. The gender gap increases as literacy rates rise initially, and then there is a reduction in the gender gap as women also catch up. Such a trend is also seen for Palanpur, as shown in the caste-wise breakdown of the data in Table 10.2 where the gender gap is the least amongst the Jatabs. The gender gap among Muraos reduced the most between 2009 and 2015, while it remained more or less the same for Thakurs and continued to increase for Jatabs and Muslims. In each of the communities, education has first come for the males and then for females. Jatab women therefore face the dual disadvantage of caste and gender, with only 34 per cent of Jatab females literate in 2015.

To get an indication of the level of education among women and how this has changed over time, in Figure 10.1 we look at the highest level of education completed among women above eighteen. As can be seen, most women who are literate are educated only up to the primary level. There are very few adult women in the village who have completed high school. When we segregate the trends in women's education by caste, it becomes clear that the women of upper-caste households such as Thakurs and Kayasths were the earliest to enter schooling. Although the numbers before 1993 were almost negligible, they were enough to observe a caste-based gap in education within the women of Palanpur. Even after 1993, when almost all the castes except Jatabs

⁹ 'The gender gap' in literacy rates in Uttar Pradesh and Moradabad based on Census 2011 is around 20%.

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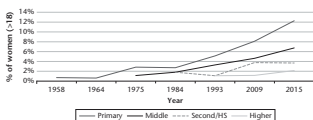


Figure 10.1 Level of education: women above 18 years

Source: Primary survey data from Palanpur.

showed some level of education among women, it was those of other upper castes and Thakurs who entered higher education, that is, beyond primary school level.

In 2009, there were four women who had completed class 12. Of these, one belonged to the Kayasth community and was working as the *anganwadi* worker at the local *anganwadi* centre.¹⁰ Her sister also studied up to high school but did not pass her 12th standard examinations. The other two belonged to the same Thakur household, and one of them was unmarried, while the other was the daughter-in-law of the head of the household; neither was engaged in any employment. By 2015, beyond these four, seven more girls in the village had completed class 12. Three more belonged to a single Thakur family, that of Naresh and Mahesh (one of whom came in as a daughter-in-law). None of these girls were engaged in any employment. One of the daughters-in-law used to work as a school teacher before she got married and came to Palanpur. While there are now a few girls in the village who have completed schooling and some who have even been to college, there are no employment opportunities for them. There do seem to be some 'pioneer' families who encourage female education; in almost all these cases both parents have some education.

10.5 Women's Employment Participation in Palanpur

All seven of the surveys, from the initial round onwards, listed the primary and secondary occupations of all individuals in the village, including all members of the household. The respondent to this round of data collection

¹⁰ The *anganwadi* (roughly translated as 'courtyard') is a part of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme by the central government. It acts as a hub for child welfare, nutrition, and health programmes within the village.

was usually the male 'head of the household'. As in other such survey data there is an underestimation of work done by women. However, these data seem reasonably reliable as long as mainstream definitions of employment participation are being used.¹¹

Primary occupation is defined as one which the person has been doing for the major part of the year, and secondary is what is done for less time. The 'major time' criterion is similar to that used in official data sets such as the National Sample Survey (NSS). Activities in which the respondents were engaged for more than six months in a year were categorized as 'primary' activities. If the engagement was less than six months, it was classified as a secondary or subsidiary occupation.

For women, the secondary employment status was particularly important because of the fragmented nature of their work. Since most of the farming and livestock activities are seasonal and done for few hours early in the morning or late in the evening, women's activities under these official criteria almost never show up as 'primary activity'.

The overall participation of women in the workforce in this village has always been very low (which is also the case for the region of western Uttar Pradesh in general). Women in Palanpur are engaged in several different kinds of unpaid work, including care work, and spend a significant amount of time in household work. Other than the tasks of cooking, cleaning, taking care of children, and so on, much time is spent on the preparation of dung cakes, which is the primary source of fuel in the village. Except for young married women from the Thakur caste, the rest also spent time in cutting fodder for the cattle that they own and in general in looking after the animals. Occasionally, some women are seen in the fields doing agriculture work as well.¹² When the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) came into the village some women participated, but otherwise it is rare to find women in Palanpur engaged in paid work (except for those working in government schemes like the *anganwadi* workers,¹³ ASHA,¹⁴ or para-teachers).

¹¹ There are valid criticisms on the way women's work is estimated in mainstream surveys. It generally excludes work done within the home boundary and also excludes unremunerated work which may be productive but for home consumption. While obviously problematic, for comparability and consistency this definition has been adopted here. For details on the underestimation of women's work, see Sinha (2016).

¹² There are barely any instances of women working in the fields as wage labour. What is, however, seen is that during certain operations such as weeding and harvesting women work on family farms or leased-in land. This is observed mainly in the case of Munao and Jatabs. Thakur women, other than in exceptional circumstances (such as in the case of widows), do not work in the fields.

¹³ *Anganwadi* workers run the *anganwadi* centre. The job involves conducting pre-school education, nutrition and health counselling, growth monitoring, supplementary feeding, and making health referrals.

¹⁴ 'ASHA', or Accredited Social Health Activist, is a health worker selected and trained from within the village under the central government's health programme. An ASHA is trained to be the interface between the rural community and the public health system.

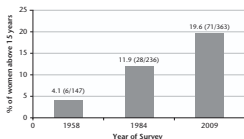


Figure 10.2 Number of women workers (primary and secondary) above 15

Note: Absolute numbers in brackets. WPR (P&S) is women's participation rate primary and secondary.

Source: Primary survey data from Palanpur.

In terms of the occupation data for the village, while a small proportion of women are classified as 'workers' on the basis of primary and secondary occupations, the long-term trend is one of increasing women's workforce participation: it has risen from 4 per cent in 1957/8 to 20 per cent in 2008/9 (see Figure 10.2). One of the reasons this has been recorded in Palanpur might be improved data collection. Although it is difficult to quantify this, we illustrate such data issues from some comparisons between the information from male heads of household and the smaller survey that was conducted in 2009 in the village with a sample of women in the reproductive age group. This survey asked women for information related to any work done by them in the seven days prior to the survey being conducted. Forty-two women who were shown as not being part of the workforce in the occupation data as reported by male heads of households were doing some work on the farms based on the data from this 'women's round'. Of these 42 women, 24 (belonging to Murao and Jatab castes) had done some paid work on others' land.

With the caveat that at least some of the apparent increase in women's workforce participation in Palanpur is a result of better definitions and data collection, in this section we examine the changing structure of economic activity in the village and how this is related to women's workforce participation. For instance, it is possibly the case that with a shift of male employment from farm to non-farm, more women are now increasingly engaged in cultivation. Further, the nature of the changes has been such that there are more opportunities for paid employment activities such as harvesting or weeding in agriculture, or in brick kilns outside that are taken up in groups, usually by the family or a couple as the payment is on a piece-rate basis. The other area where

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Table 10.3 Number of women in primary/secondary occupation (above 15 years)

Caste	1958	1964	1984	1993	2009	2015
Thakur	0	1	0	1	5	5
Muraos	0	0	7	3	24	13
Jatab	0	0	4	5	16	5
Muslim	2	2	4	1	8	4
Other	4	6	13	7	18	4
Total	6	9	28	17	71	31
Total population of women above 15	147	168	236	303	363	394

Source: Primary survey data from Palampur.

Table 10.4 Number of women by type of primary occupation

Primary Occupation	Thakur		Muraos		Jatab		Muslim		Total	
	2009	2015	2009	2015	2009	2015	2009	2015	2009	2015
Own cultivation	1	1	14	13	1	1	1	2	22	17
Casual labour					5	3	1		9	3
Self-employed	3	1					2	2	7	5
Regular	1	2							3	5
Total	5	4	14	13	6	4	4	4	41	30
Women above 15	96	97	87	109	45	79	52	60	363	394

Source: Primary survey data from Palampur.

women are joining the workforce is in the government sector and home-based self-employment in the form of tailoring or running a shop at home—but these are few. The activities have a caste-wise pattern which influences the possible avenues for women's participation in the workforce.

As can be seen in Table 10.3, the highest number of women showing workforce participation (either primary or secondary) in recent years are Muraos, followed by those from other small caste groups and Jatabs.¹⁵ There are a higher number of Thakur women reported as being workers compared to earlier, but this is still very low. From Table 10.4 (on primary occupations), we see that all women reporting any occupation other than domestic work among Muraos are in cultivation. Muraos are a caste strongly related to agriculture, and here it is acceptable for women to go to work in the fields, especially their own. We see that there was a major increase in women's participation for all castes (Table 10.3) between 1983/4 and 2008/9, but it is strongest for Muraos with cultivation as the only primary occupation (Table 10.4).

¹⁵ As seen in previous sections, Muraos women have also registered the greatest increase in educational outcomes.

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Table 10.5 Per cent of adult men in cultivation

Caste	1984			2009		
	Total	Cultivation	% Cultivation	Total	Cultivation	% Cultivation
Thakur	61	31	50.8	93	27	29.0
Muraos	63	47	74.6	92	47	51.1
Muslims	34	16	47.1	53	16	30.2
Jatab	29	13	44.8	53	13	24.5
Village Total	264	131	49.6	373	125	33.5

Note: Village Total also includes other castes not mentioned in the table.
Source: Primary survey data from Palanpur.

Between 2008/9 and 2015, there was a decline in female workforce participation among all castes. This is in line with the trend observed nationally and partly could be attributed to more women in the working age group now attending educational institutions. The percentage of women above fifteen attending educational institutions increased from 4.1 per cent in 2009 to 6.3 per cent in 2015.

While Muraos women always contributed to agriculture to some extent, it can be seen that with a shift in employment to non-farm jobs among Muraos males (see Table 10.5), more women are participating in cultivation. While such a shift to non-farm activities is also observed for Thakur men, Muraos appear more committed to holding on to agriculture.¹⁶ Thus, Thakurs with strong non-farm activities tend to have leased-out land (see Chapter 6), and Muraos have tended to increase women's participation in cultivation.

Therefore, in the case of Muraos, the 'feminization' of agriculture argument would seem relevant to explaining the rise in participation of women in cultivation.¹⁷ For instance, Sombati and Omvati, both belonging to Muraos households, were recorded as being engaged only in household work in the previous rounds, but in 2009 were shown as cultivators. During this period, the primary occupation of their husbands changed from cultivation to non-farm casual labour. Similarly, with Chanderkali (Passi), her husband's primary occupation was cultivation in the previous rounds but changed to working in and owning a cycle repair shop in 2009. Table 10.5 and Figure 10.3 further illustrate this point by showing that the increase in casual non-farm employment amongst Muraos, and corresponding decline in cultivators among Muraos males, is sharp between 1984 and 2009, which is also the period that saw an increase in female participation in cultivation. The rise of the participation of Muraos

¹⁶ Thakurs had higher land ownership both in terms of land owned and operated per capita than the Muraos in the 1950s and 1960s; but since the 1970s this has reversed, with the gap increasing over time.

¹⁷ On the trend of feminization of agriculture in India see, for example, Binswanger-Mkhaze (2013).

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Figure 10.3 Employment diversification: Murao males (the cultivators)

Source: Primary survey data from Palanpur.

women in cultivation is simultaneous with the decline of Murao men in cultivation (from roughly 75 per cent in 1984 to 51 per cent in 2009, see Table 10.5). Between 2009 and 2015 there was stagnation in non-farm employment for Murao males as well as in cultivation for Murao females.¹⁸

It is in situations of acute necessity that a Thakur woman in Palanpur would decide to break the norm of not working outside the home. Thus, Thakur women in Palanpur who are in cultivation are widows who have no support from the extended family and do not have adult male children.¹⁹ These women handle farming activities mainly to keep the land under their control till their children grow up. They are also treated with suspicion by the rest of the community. Although the level of education among girls and women is growing rapidly among the Thakurs, this has not translated into greater workforce participation.²⁰ This has as much to do with supply-side factors of women having low mobility as with demand-side factors in the sense that the kind of jobs that are seen as acceptable for these women are just not available in and around the village.

The other category where women are working is casual labour, although this just applies to Jatav women. Most Jatav men and women are engaged as casual labourers. The most common non-farm occupation for Jatav families is as labourers in brick kilns. This work is seasonal, where the entire family migrates

¹⁸ For further details on employment patterns in Palanpur, see Chapter 5.

¹⁹ Even the woman who was engaged as the cook for the midday meal scheme in the local school is a widow.

²⁰ The ASHA worker in the village is from a Thakur household. Her husband lost his job and their family had no other source of income when the Thakur 'elders' of the village decided to offer her the ASHA post. So in this instance there was a need and also an acceptable job available.

for three or four months a year, and everyone contributes to the work; they are paid by the number of bricks they make. It is possible that there is an under-estimation of women working in brick kilns, as formally it is the man who takes up the job, but most women also contribute. Many Jatabs who are in cultivation are tenant farmers in *chauthai* contracts, which are in large measure labour contracts (with one-quarter share), where once again it makes economic sense for the entire family to work. Within Jatabs there has been a strong increase in casual labour in non-farm activities. Jatab women, too, have entered the workforce as casual labour; often this has been distress related. The restrictions on women's mobility and employment are also the lowest among Jatabs. Further, the level of education among Jatabs is the lowest, with barely any adult literate women among Jatabs in the village.

Finally in 2009, amongst the five women workers from Thakur households, four are in the category of self-employed or regular jobs/working for government. These are basically women working as tailors or in small shops run from their own homes. Those in government employment were an ASHA worker in 2009 and the ASHA worker and a midday meal cook in 2015.²¹ From conversations with various members in Thakur households, both men and women, it is clear that it is acceptable for women to work only if the jobs are 'respectable'; working for the government, preferably as a teacher or officer, is seen as something that women can do. Otherwise, there is a strong preference for women to remain and work within the household boundary.

Other than the causal factors of men moving out of agriculture and the availability of acceptable jobs, most women who enter the workforce can be seen as influenced by, or classified in, one of three categories on the basis of the change in status compared to the previous round of survey: (i) those who have been widowed; (ii) suitable opportunities being available for women with some education; and (iii) cases where the economic status of the household changed (with an improvement resulting in women withdrawing from the workforce, and a decline leading to women joining work). We examine these in turn.

10.5.1 Widows

A category of women where, irrespective of caste, there is a higher workforce participation is widows without adult children. Of all the women in employment in 2009, nine are widows. Of these women, six were in the village in

²¹ Between 2009 and 2015, there was one girl from a Thakur household who briefly worked as a para-teacher in the village government school. She later moved to another village when she got married and worked as a teacher in a school near her marital village.

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1984 and were married and not working. In 1993, out of the nine, seven were in the village, all of them were married and not working. It is only in the 2009 round that they show up as 'workers', and the change in their status from the previous rounds is that they are now widowed. Looking at the data for the village, it is seen that for all women who are in the age groups of fifteen to sixty, the workforce participation rate is 20 per cent. However, this rate for widows is 32 per cent (8 out of 25). The workforce participation rate for widows excluding Thakurs (where the restrictions are highest) is 40 per cent (7 out of 18).

In 1964 out of the 11 women with any reported source of income, 6 were widows. Surja Devi, a Passi woman from the village, started working after her husband's death in 1964. Hardai, a widow in 1958, was not reported as working, but in 1964 she was working as a coal trader.²² Her son was an agricultural labourer in the village in 1958 but by 1964 he had migrated out of the village. Similarly, two Passi women, Champa and Ramkali, and Leelavati, the only Murao woman who was cultivating in 1984, started working after losing their husbands. Of the 32 women with a primary occupation (excluding 'new' residents) in 2009, 7 started working after their husbands died, and 4 started cultivating after male members of their family shifted to non-farm activities.

10.5.2 Availability of Opportunities for Educated Women

The level of education and literacy among women is low in the village. But, as seen in Chapter 9 (and Table 10.6), there has been an impressive increase in

Table 10.6 Per cent of literate women and level of education

Data for Women over 15 Years	Literacy Rate	Level of Education			
		Primary	Middle	Secondary	Higher
1958	1	0.7	0	0	0
1964	1	1.2	0	0	0
1975	6	4.4	1.3	0	0
1984	6	3.1	1.6	2.3	0
1993	11	5.8	3.5	1	1
2009	22	10.3	7.1	4	1.1
2015	37	13.6	6.9	4	1.7

Source: Primary survey data from Palampur.

²² The coal was sometimes obtained by illicit removal from steam trains stopped at Jargaon Station.

the literacy rate in the village between 1993 and 2009, which continued after 2009. Thirty-seven per cent of women above fifteen in the village were literate, and 6 per cent had completed secondary or higher levels in 2015. However, there are no job opportunities available for women who are educated, even though in discussions with them it emerged that they are willing to undertake some kinds of work.

Barring the para-teacher posts (which have now gone, as regular teachers have been appointed) and *angamwadi* workers, there are no jobs in the village that require education as a qualification for entry. In 1993 Shobha Devi and Lovely Devi (sisters, belonging to the only Kayasth family in the village) were the only two women with higher education. Both of them got jobs at the local *angamwadi* and continue to work there. In 2009, Suman, a Thakur woman with elementary education, started working as the ASHA under the National Rural Health Mission. Preeti, a Thakur woman who had completed her MA, worked in the local school as a para-teacher for some time. There have been no other such employment opportunities in the village.

10.5.3 *Change in Household Fortunes*

Decline in the households' fortunes over time has also been a reason for women entering the labour market, but women also seem to withdraw when their situations improve. Sometimes a husband's death and downward mobility may coincide, but in some households women started working even when the husband had sufficient work to earn enough for sustenance, but household income per capita had fallen. In 1964, out of the 11 working women, Bhagwati, a Dhimar woman, was observed to start working after her family's per capita income declined to Rs 74 (1960-1 prices) from Rs 100 in 1958. A similar case was observed for two Muslim women from the same family where the mother-in-law, Munno, worked as non-farm labourer in 1958, and in 1964 her daughter-in-law, Chhoti, joined her as their per capita income went down.

In 2009 at least eight households with working women showed decline in per capita income compared to earlier rounds. Suman, the only Thakur woman working in regular employment, was in one such household. Similarly, out of those women who had not endured any loss of working male members (due to either migration or death), three Murao women started working as their household's income declined. Asha and Sheela, who are from Jatab households, also saw a decline in real household income since 1983. In these two households, their total household income (including income from brick kilns) was less than Rs 2000 per month, about one-fourth the Palanpur average.

10.6 Autonomy, Decision-Making, Mobility, and Exposure to Media

With increasing education, there might be an expectation of enhanced autonomy for women within and outside the household. Since data on these aspects are not available from the previous rounds, we are somewhat limited as to what can be said in a quantitative manner on how these aspects have changed within the village over time. However, in the survey in 2009 the women's round collected some data on issues related to autonomy and decision-making, and it shows that like the rest of this region, such indicators point to a weak status of women in Palanpur.

In order to assess how household decisions are made and also to understand some direct indicators of 'autonomy', some questions were asked of women on decision-making within the household, physical mobility, domestic violence, exposure to media, and so on. Defining and measuring 'autonomy' or 'empowerment' is a complicated issue. For many feminists, the value of the concept lies precisely in its 'fuzziness' (Kabeer, 2000). The terms used in the literature are many and sometimes not well defined. The most frequently used term of 'status of women' is also defined differently depending on the authors (Mason, 1986). Some focus rather on the *prestige*, that is, the respect or esteem accorded to women because of their gender, whereas others concentrate on women's *power or empowerment and freedom*. We focus on the term women's *autonomy*, defined as 'the extent to which [women] have an equal voice in matters affecting themselves and their families, control over material and other resources, access to knowledge and information, the authority to make independent decisions, freedom from constraints on physical mobility, and the ability to forge equitable power relationships within families' (Jejeebhoy and Sathar, 2001: 688).

In Palanpur, norms on mobility and work for women are intrinsically linked with the caste status of the household, as in much of India, particularly north India. Among Thakurs, norms of *ghunghat* (covering head and face, part or fully with cloth) and restricted mobility for women are the strongest. New brides are extremely limited in their ability to go out of their homes, and generally women do not go to work on their farms or collect firewood/fodder, and so on. These tasks are done by the men of the household. Thakur women do a lot of livestock-related work, but this is usually within the household boundaries.

Muraos, being a caste focused on cultivation, have an attachment to land and farming. Amongst Muraos, while there also is a tendency towards restricting women's mobility, women working on their own farms is considered acceptable. For example, in response to questions on mobility asked to married women, among Muraos 72 per cent said they can go to the fields alone while only 28 per cent of Thakurs said so.

Table 10.7 Indicators of autonomy among women in Palanpur, 2009

Indicator	% (N: 224)
<i>Economic decision-making</i>	
Have a say in spending	73
Have cash in hand for expenses	88
Have land in own name	8
Have a bank/post office account in own name	19
<i>Mobility (can go the following places alone)</i>	
Local market	31
Village doctor	62
Fields outside the village	54
Relative's house	63
Village temple	71
Nearby shrine	21
Parents' house	50
Health centre	35
<i>Exposure to media (ever)</i>	
Read newspapers	6
Listen to radio	26
Watch TV	33
Ever gone to cinema	12
<i>Participation in civic life</i>	
Visited government office (outside or in Palanpur)	14
Voted in last elections	79

Note: Number of observations N = 224.
Source: Primary survey data from Palanpur.

Jatavs have the least restrictions on mobility for women. They are also the poorest caste group in the village with most of them being landless and depending on wage labour for work. Even among Jatavs it is rare to see women working in paid jobs independently. Most of their work is on farms as agricultural labour and in brick kilns, as mentioned; in both cases, the labour contract is with the man, on a piece-rate basis, and the entire family works.

It is, however, important to keep in mind that talking about 'the' status of women as if along a simple scale may not be appropriate; it is in many ways a multidimensional concept (Mason, 1986, 2005), spanning social, economic, political, and psychological factors. Some women may have more power in the private sphere and less in the public one, whereas for others it would be the other way around. We present some different indicators, using data from the women questionnaire, separately, without trying to construct one single indicator of women's autonomy. These are assembled in Table 10.7 and discussed in turn.

10.6.1 Economic Decision-Making

An important aspect of women's autonomy is whether they have some control over how the household resources are spent. As seen in Table 10.7,

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whereas three out of four women reported that they have a say in household expenditures, and 88 per cent do get cash in hand, only 8 per cent have any land in their name, and only 19 per cent have a bank account. In contrast, of all the households in the village, 53 per cent reported having at least one bank account, and 81 per cent owned some agricultural land.

10.6.2 Mobility

Traditionally, a woman is not allowed to go out alone and should be accompanied either by her husband or by someone else of her in-law family. We asked women whether they could go alone to a list of commonly visited places. The place where women can most often go alone is the village temple (70 per cent), followed by the village doctor (62 per cent), relatives or friends in the village (61 per cent), and fields outside the village (53 per cent).²³ One woman out of two can go alone to visit her parents (49 per cent), but this varies considerably across women in the village, and some parents may live quite far away. The places where fewest women can go alone are a health centre outside the village (33 per cent), the local market in the village (31 per cent), and a shrine or market outside the village (21 per cent).

While almost 70 per cent of the women said that they visited their parents once or twice a year, with the increasing availability of mobile phones women are now more in touch with their parents and other natal family. When asked how they would send a message to their parents in case of an emergency, 90 per cent of the women said that they would do so by phone. By 2015, the number of phones and mobile connectivity in the village had increased even more. Greater communication with the parents' family could improve women's fall-back position within the household.²⁴ In earlier times, women were not in touch with their parents for long periods, but now many spoke about how they would regularly call them.

The main determinant of mobility seems to be caste. As expected, Jatab women are the freest to go where they want to in almost every category. As also expected, Thakurs are at the bottom of the list in terms of mobility, except for the category temple in the village (where, obviously, Muslims rarely go),²⁵ or a health centre outside the village. One Thakur woman out of two can go to relatives or friends in the village, whereas almost all Jatab women can do so. Putting together the data on all the different places, for about 16 per cent of

²³ Women would go to fields outside the village to take meals to workers, to do farm work, to gather/cut grass for the cattle. Since there are very few households in Palanpur which have toilets, women also have to go to the fields to relieve themselves.

²⁴ On fall-back position see Agarwal (1997).

²⁵ The temple in the village is Hindu, and there is no mosque in the village. The nearest mosque is in the neighbouring village, Pipli (see also Chapter 11).

women there is no place where they can go to alone (mostly newly married women). But it also shows that every case is different, that the distribution within the village is not extreme—that is, women who can go everywhere versus women confined to their own house—and that a lot of intermediate cases do exist.

10.6.3 *Exposure to Media*

Women were asked whether they read newspapers or magazines, listen to the radio, or watch television, and, if they did, how frequently they did so. Fourteen women (6 per cent) said that they ever read the newspaper, of which 1 does it every day, and 3 at least once a week; 57 women (26 per cent) listen to the radio, most of them (40 women) almost every day; 74 women (33 per cent) watch television, half of them almost every day, 16 of them at least once a week, and 21 less than once a week. We also asked the women whether they had ever gone to a cinema hall or theatre to see a movie, and only 24 women (12 per cent) said they had.

Over half of Palanpur women are not exposed to media at all. One out of five has access to one type of media, one out of five to two types, and the remaining 5 per cent of the women to three or four. It has to be kept in mind that possession of a television or a radio is correlated with wealth and often with higher caste, as it can be expensive. Furthermore, a significant percentage of televisions and radios were acquired through dowries.²⁶

By 2015, the village had a number of households with DishTV. Women mostly watched daily serials ('soaps') or Hindi films, and on the radio listened to songs from Hindi films. Although they did not watch 'news' or other informational programmes, watching TV gave them an exposure to the 'outside world'. Some women also told us that they got to know about immunization, childcare, and so on from radio advertisements. It is difficult to say how increasing exposure to media, mainly through television, could shape preferences of women.²⁷ While watching TV is indeed giving women exposure to information and different lifestyles, the popular Hindi daily soaps have also often been criticized for their regressive portrayal of women.²⁸ In most cases the films and TV shows are located in urban settings and might seem alien to the women in Palanpur. Since satellite television came in only after the 2009 survey, we do not comment on this in detail.

²⁶ Information on sources of acquisition of durables was collected in detail.

²⁷ On institutional and cultural factors shaping preferences, see Fehr and Hoff (2011).

²⁸ For example, see Stanley (2012), Malhotra and Rogers (2000), Bhandari (2017).

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10.6.4 Civic Life

A total of 79 per cent of Palanpur women voted in the last elections (*panchayat* elections), which is an impressive participation rate by most international standards. In general, it is observed that in India the participation rates in elections, especially local elections, are high for both men and women. When asked if they had ever been to a government/*panchayat* office in their village, or in a government office outside the village, 86 per cent of women said no. Only 2 have ever been there in the village, and 29 outside the village. The women were also asked whether they had ever attended a Gram Sabha or any such meeting in the village or ever attended a public meeting/political meeting/rally outside the village, but there were no positive answers for the first question and only two for the second one. There was a whole section about women's participation in any kind of associational activities, including self-help groups, Mahila Mandals,²⁹ and so on. But none of the women reported being part of any association.

10.6.5 Domestic Violence

It is common knowledge in the village that domestic violence (in the form of physical violence where husband beats the wife) is prevalent in Palanpur. While we did not go into the factors affecting domestic violence, which many studies have done (for example, Eswaran and Malhotra, 2009; Jejeebhoy, 1998), in the survey with women we tried to get some basic information. Some of this is reported in Table 10.8.

Women were first asked about their opinion on domestic violence, and this was followed up with a question on whether they had ever experienced any

Table 10.8 Domestic violence

% of women who felt husband beating wife is justified if:	
Reasons for domestic violence	%
Wife is disrespectful to in-laws	76.3
Wife neglects household chores	74.3
Wife is disobedient	76.7
Wife beats children	55.3
% of women reporting being:	
Never beaten	48.2
Beaten regularly	10.3
Beaten sometimes	33.5

²⁹ Mahila Mandals are women's associations in a village.

violence from their spouses. Sometimes women were forthcoming with further details, but we did not probe unless they volunteered. Further, there was no insistence if women did not feel comfortable responding. However, there were not too many such instances.

In the first set of questions the woman was given hypothetical situations where a husband beat his wife in response to wife's behaviour, and was asked whether he was justified in doing so. As seen in Table 10.8, 76 per cent of the women felt that such violence was justified if the woman was disrespectful towards her in-laws, and a similar proportion felt that there was justification if a woman neglected her household chores or was 'disobedient'. However, when asked if the husband could beat a wife for mistreating their children, fewer women (55 per cent) said that this would be acceptable.

In relation to their personal experience of violence, 52 per cent of women in Palanpur said that they have ever been beaten by their husbands, among whom 20 per cent said that this happened *regularly*, and 65 per cent said *sometimes*. It is hence far higher than that reported as the rural India average of 36.1 per cent and the Uttar Pradesh average of 42 per cent (NFHS-3, IIPS, 2007). This could well be because of better reporting in this study. About 12 women did not answer the question. However, given that it is such a sensitive topic, it is surprising that so many women talked openly about it. It is nevertheless plausible that among the 48 per cent who said they were never beaten, some of them actually were, but did not want to talk about it. While there are no previous data on this, conversations with older women suggest that there is a decline in domestic violence, and women used to be beaten more often.

10.7 Conclusion

Many studies that have looked at reasons for the wide interstate variations in human development within India have pointed to the low status of women in north India, compared to relatively more open societies in south India, as an important determining factor for north India's continuing backwardness, especially in comparison with the southern states (Drèze and Gazdar, 1997; Drèze and Sen, 2002; Malhotra et al., 1995; Ramachandran, 1997). Women's status has been seen as an explanatory factor for crucial demographic changes, especially in the context of differences in fertility levels in north and south India (Dyson and Moore, 1983; Jejeebhoy, 1991). Better women's status is also understood to be one of the driving factors of better human development outcomes as well as more effective social services in states such as Tamil Nadu and Kerala in comparison to Uttar Pradesh and Bihar (Drèze and Sen, 2013; Sinha, 2016). Uttar Pradesh continues to perform very poorly in comparison with the rest of

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the country, as far as basic indicators, including on education and workforce participation, are concerned. For instance, the female literacy rate in Uttar Pradesh, at 59.3 per cent, is significantly lower than the all-India average of 65.5 per cent (Census, 2011), and the state ranks 31 out of 35 states in India. The female literacy rate of Moradabad district is much lower at 47.9 per cent. Similarly the female work participation rate (rural) of Moradabad district is 9.9 per cent (10.8 per cent), whereas it is 16.7 per cent (18.3 per cent) for Uttar Pradesh as a whole, and the all-India average female work participation rate is 25.5 per cent (30 per cent).

Uttar Pradesh has one of the poorest human development outcomes in the country, and Moradabad is amongst the weakest districts in Uttar Pradesh in this respect. In terms of economic prosperity, however, Moradabad district is above average for the state. Palanpur, in Moradabad district, more or less reflects this situation at the village level. The gender norms of western Uttar Pradesh are largely common through the region, with some caste and class differences. As with most other aspects of village life, Palanpur is not particularly unusual in its treatment of women. Drèze and Sharma (1998), based on the previous surveys in Palanpur village, described briefly the lives of women in Palanpur and the differences observed across caste. Similar to other villages in that region, Palanpur was a deeply patriarchal society, very unequal, where women had very little role to play in public life, were rarely seen outside of their homes, practised *purdah*, and could make little contact with 'outside men' or those outside the family.³⁰ Literacy and workforce participation among women was also very low. Most women were married off at a young age, with repeated pregnancies and poor access to health care. Women usually did not get a share in property (either from parents or in-laws) and had few freedoms. While much of this remains relevant even now, there are also some changes.

As seen in this chapter, there is an increase in female education. Other positive changes are to do with an increase in age at marriage, decline in fertility, and improved access to information. However, there are still many ways in which women's status is very low in Palanpur. Within the household, the inequalities remain stark, the extreme manifestation being the extent of domestic violence. The household as well as the village is also a very unequal space for women, with change coming only slowly, especially when compared to the economic changes that the village has gone through. Bargaining within the household also depends on a woman's fall-back position and, as we have seen, this is weak. Women's employment opportunities in Palanpur remain extraordinarily limited, especially in terms of any sort of skilled or well-remunerated employment. Further, much of the ability

³⁰ On gender relations in north India also see the references listed in Drèze and Sharma (1998).

of women to develop their potential is still linked to their social position in terms of class and caste, as well as the gender norms related to mobility.

In terms of the future, however, there is much potential for change in this aspect of village life. With more girls being sent to school, one might expect some changes in the labour market, with more women being available for work, as well as changes in intra-household relationships, with women having a greater say. Exposure to mass media and the outside world can also contribute to the process of improving women's status in the village. Proliferation of mobile phones can further contribute to changing dynamics, as women can be in touch with their parental family with greater ease. It is support from the parental family that is, in large measure, the 'fall-back position'. With education and exposure, we may also see an increase in the age of marriage and maybe even terms of marriage. These forces may increase as mobile phones become smartphones.

If change continues as it has in recent years, the rising status of women may reinforce the caste-based inequalities that exist, since it is particularly higher-caste girls who are getting an education. It will be interesting to see how public institutions respond to a situation of changed gender relations, whether politics in the state will address women's issues, and whether newer services/institutions will be created for women. Some external changes, such as reservation of posts in the *panchayat* elections, have resulted in Palanpur getting its first woman Pradhan. While there are doubts about the power wielded by her, it certainly sets a welcome precedent, one that might encourage more women to take on political roles. Overall, one can speculate that the improvements in education and health amongst women would eventually result in long-lasting changes for both the economy and human development in the village.

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