

25 - 27 NOVEMBER 2019

CHHATARPUR VISIT REPORT



PREPARED AND PRESENTED BY

RUTH ZOTHANPUII / REYAZ AHMAD
PROGRAMME COORDINATORS, MWF

VISITING THE OFFICE OF CHHATARPUR MAHILA JAGRITI MANCH: 25 NOVEMBER 2019



In the early morning of November 25, 2019, we found ourselves in the historic city of Khajuraho, Madhya Pradesh. A little less than 35 Kms from Khajuraho, we moved on to Chhatarpur, just two hours drive from Bameeta.

The main purpose of our visit to Chhatarpur was to meet MWF Fellows, Rajiya Khatoon and Rehana Khatoon. We had to see for ourselves the work they have been doing on the ground. They began their community work soon after they completed their residential leadership and capacity training provided by MWF under the project titled 'Leadership & Capacity Building Training for Muslim women'. The training took place at Dalit Shakti Kendra, Sanand, Gujarat for 2 months. We met back Rehana and Rajiya in Jhansi 10 months ago where we conducted their interview for the Leadership training. Since then, the two girls had come a long way.

Our first stop was at Nayamohalla Chauraha to meet Rajiya and Rehana at Chhatarpur Mahila Jagriti Manch office. The office was run by Afsar Jahan, a very committed social

worker. The office was small yet clean and well maintained. Afsar had been a role model for both Rajiya and Rehana right from the beginning when she introduced them to us.

We discussed Rajiya and Rehana's work elaborately and reviewed the monthly reports they have been sending to MWF. They have already conducted MWF baseline survey at 8 villages and covered over 250 households. Rehana submitted their neatly written forms and showed us the register for the survey. We were impressed with the detailed registration book and records they maintain.

Rehana mentioned that at the time of conducting the survey, people got suspicious of the name of 'Muslim Women's Forum' written on top of the form and hesitated. So they decided to write all the questions and marking down their answers in the register book. When they reached home in the evening, they would fill up the form accordingly.

They also narrated an incident in Alipura few months back, where a bus driver, a Muslim was badly beaten up for accidentally hitting a cow. The cow fell into the nearby drain. Few people collected around the place but situation was contained. However, on his return, some people stopped the bus. Within a short period of time, they managed to gather a large group of people, armed with sticks. They pulled the driver out and severely beat him up. Few locals took him to the hospital and then to the police station. The police refused to register an FIR. But the locals were persistent; therefore the police had no choice but to file FIR.

They told us how even small incidents / accidents are used as an excuse to flare up communal tension. Certain elements always trying to disturb communal harmony in the area. Afsar also narrated her own story of not being able to rent a house few years back for being a Muslim. She said that it has become increasingly difficult for Muslim to find a house to rent where owners are Non-Muslim.

We continued to inquire about the monthly report, and encouraged the girls to put more details of the work they do. A case in point was - Rehana's August 2019 report where she mentioned briefly about her visit and work at Gram Newari. We prompted for more details. She said that mainly fishermen reside in Newari. That there are no Muslim families living in this area, however, when she learnt that most of the families are without ration cards. She visited the village a few more times to help over 31 families in applying for the card. Unfortunately, the government had stopped sanctioning ration card for that period.

Rajiya and Rehana: Mobilizing women of their own community. Visiting different villages around Chhatarpur, listening to the voice of the marginalised women, building rapport with them

We asked the status of Muslim education in Chhatarpur. They mentioned that comparatively, Muslim's education percentage is slightly higher than the Dalits. Here too, parents prefer to let their daughter stay at home or if they go to study, they opted for Women's schools or colleges.

Rajiya & Rehana also helped enrolled more than 9 children back into school after convincing their parents to continue to support their education.



WARD NO. 14, EIDGAH PAHADIYA

At 1:30 p.m., Rajiya and Afsar took us to Ward no. 14 on their scooters. Rajiya, a skilled driver who seems to know all the nooks and corners of the area proved to be very helpful. Wherever we went we reached our destination in no time.

Ward No. 14 is a new area where mostly poor labourers and their families reside. Here Rehana organized her library meet at least once every week for the children. She taught young girls to read, write, and helped them with their schoolwork. They are able to help the young students in their exam preparation and also give them career guidance. And to the young adolescent group, Rehana gave them beauty parlour training, the skill she learned from Dalit Shakti Kendra herself. We were amazed how they make good use of every new skill they learnt at DSK like organizing a reading exercise and use it to engage the young children, play sports, and teach mehndi application etc.

A group of 25 women and children came to meet us. Nagma, a housewife, expressed her desire to work from home. Upon inquiring if they had any specific skill training, she said that none of the women in her area had any training of any sort.

Among the few young children we met, a young bright girl, Henna, 13 years old caught our attention. She would promptly answer most of our questions on behalf of the group. We inquired about her education and she told us that she is a Class 10 student. We later learnt that it was Rehana who encouraged Henna to continue her studies when her parents made her stop. Rehana convinced her parents to let her continue. She made several visits to her parents regarding this.

Finally they relented. Henna is now preparing for her board exam. She is also learning the art of mehndi from Rehana. She happily showed us her drawing book and we were very impressed with her work.



Henna showed us her paintings. She has so much potential



Visiting Rajiya and her students at her library dedicated for the children of Eidgah Pahadiya



WARD NO. 37, BIDI COLONY, DERI ROAD

About 8 km away from Ward no. 14, we moved on to Ward no. 37. At Aisha Masjid / Madarsa, over 30 women and children from different communities came to meet us. Most of them are beedi rollers and housewives. They earned a paltry sum of Rs. 180/- for their 3 days work. Pusha Puri, 36-year-old complained about the affect it had on their health. Farida Khan revealed that the middlemen are taking a huge cut from their small earning and would like to work without involving the middlemen. Some of them complained of not getting money for building toilets or that the contractors are building a substandard toilets which are not in working conditions, so many still prefer to go for an open defecation.



At Aisha Madarsa we hold a small meeting with the beedi rollers .

GULGANJ

26 NOVEMBER 2019

The next day, we took NH75 road from Chhatarpur to Gulganj. It is located in Bijawar Tehsil, about 35 km from Chhatarpur city. Rajiya selected this village for her work. We first stopped at small PHC also an Anganwadi Centre (Anganwadi No. 2). It was vaccination day at the centre. The centre was open from 9 am - 1 pm. Usha Khare, an Anganwadi worker, said that there are around 3 anganwadi centres in the area. Lactating women were given supplementary food – but some women said that they feed it to their cattle because they don't like the taste. Usha maintained a monthly record of the growth of each child who visited the centre. Afsar inquired if the centre has any test kit. Usha said no test kit were available.

We left the Anganwadi centre to go to Beechka Muhalla. We went to the house of Gafur Khan, where around 35 women came to meet us. At Aisha Madarsa we hold a small meeting with the beedi rollers. About 100 Muslim families reside there. They told us that we will find all kinds of Muslims – Pathan, Rangrez, Mirza and other non Muslim like Pandit, Yadav, Badahi (carpenter) and Dalits. Most Muslim are migrant labourers from UP or nearby district of MP. Women mostly elderly women – engaged in beedi rolling. Most of them are landless. Literacy rate is very low here, only 60.3% and the Female Literacy rate is 25.1% (2011 Census).



Here Rajiya and Rehana covered over 50 households in their survey. We introduced ourselves and spoke about MWF and its work and activities. In addition to conducting a survey, they also helped in getting ration card, Ayushman card and BPL card made for a number of people.

We also found that not all households have toilets. Some claimed that it was their fault that they don't have it, because they don't put toilet as their priority. While others said that

they desperately tried to meet the Sarpanch regarding this, but he was not willing to give them time.

Most of the women we met are housewives and they prefer to work only if they can work from home. Their ideal profession is tailoring. Some women who are engaged in beedi rolling earned upto Rs. 100 for every 1000 rolls of beedis.

MAUKHERA, BIJAWAR TEHSIL

Our next stop was Maukhera, 3 KM from Gulganj. We made our first stop at the Anganwadi centre cum PHC, it was also a vaccination day here so we saw many children and young mothers there. We stopped at the Centre to see the children before going into the village.

Here we find around 20 Muslim families, majority are Dalits. It usually takes Rajiya and Rehana about 45 minutes walk from the main road NH 75.

We gathered at Zeba's house. Her husband Zamir sat with us. Soon about 20 people came and we began our meeting.

The residents told us that earlier there were no Muslim families living in this area. However, the locals invited them to live there. We asked if this was done for their business skills or some other reason. We were told that earlier these areas were swarming with formidable dacoit gangs. Therefore, the villagers needed protection from this organized band of robbers and that prompted them to invite the Muslims to stay with them to thwart the dacoits.

We also found that most of the Muslim families here have a farming land. Women of Maukhera are mostly housewives.



The village literacy rate is 36.9% and the female literacy rate is only 12.9% (2011 Census). Here we met, Arti, a young girl. Like other girls of the village, she studied only upto class 8. Shabana Bano, BA student said that the village school does not have any rules or discipline. Children come and go as they pleased even in the presence of the teacher. For Class 9-12 they have to go to the next village, in Gopalpura, which is 9-10 kilometres from Maukhera.

Most of the men are away in big cities like Mumbai, Delhi, and Bangalore in search of work. The women spoke of a communal feeling when it comes to issuing of ration card, widow pension, old age pension etc. They all claimed that they have toilets. But some of them are using these as a godown and still defecate in the open. Some said that for the money given to them for building toilets, they have to give Rs. 2000 out of 12000/- to the official.

MAHUA JHALA

26 NOVEMBER 2019

We moved on to Mahua Jhala village, 32 KM from Chhatarpur. All the villages we visited so far have something in common, that is, large piles of garbage strewn all over the place, clogged drains, and mosquito menace. While their houses and immediate surroundings are clean, everything else is filled with used plastics and garbage. We discussed this with the Fellows and how they could put it in their agenda about spreading the importance of cleanliness.

50-60 families of Muslim families lived here. Most of them are farmers. Some migrate outside for work. A group of 15 women and

children and few men came to meet us at Gopal Khushwaha's house. This is another village, which was selected by Rajiya.

Women complained of corruption when it comes to the distribution of Awas Yojana, and Ayushman cards and admittedly a communal feeling is also involved. None of the household has any gas cylinder or toilet. Some said that they have toilet, but they are not using it. They are given only kerosene oil and nothing else. In Mahuajhala, Rajiya and Rehana covered 73 households in their survey. Here, we have girls who studied upto Class 8 and leave school after that. Same story like Maukhera,

due to non-availability of school beyond Class 8, many children study upto Class 8 only. Village literacy is 59.5% and the female literacy rate is 24.6% (2011 Census). We left Mahuajhala and returned to Chhatarpur. But before leaving, we took quick review of our two-day visit and conversed with Rajiya and Rehana about their observations, their field experiences thus far, key achievements, and challenges ahead. Below are the highlights from that conversation:

1. Rajiya and Rehana have already covered 4 villages each from the 10 villages they each selected. Based on our observation from this visit, we appreciated the good rapport they already built with the people in these villages. They managed to collect around 25-30 women in few minutes at every village we visited.
2. They expressed the difficulty they faced for not being able to provide MWF identity card or Dalit Foundation identity card as they said sometimes people get suspicious. Since they work in areas where majority community belongs to Muslim or Dalits, it is vital that we arrange to provide this facility.
3. They expressed their desire to continue to work as a social worker even after the MWF fellowship is over.

4. Upon inquiring if they would like any additional support from MWF. They promptly replied that they wanted to continue to build their capacity. Any training on the topic of Gender, Human Rights, Health and Education, they would like to attend to keep themselves informed and expand their knowledge in the subject.

5. When we asked about their key achievements in these past few months, they were a little hesitant. We framed our question differently. We asked if there is any change in their work place or even at home since they embark on this journey.

They mentioned how atmosphere at their home has changed for the better. Rehana said, "We took home all the good and practical lesson that we learnt from DSK including respecting our work at home and elsewhere. We sensitized our brothers and father who are now helping with the house chores." Rajiya added, "My brother who never used to help when it comes to domestic work is now helping my parents in our absence". Rajiya continued, "So it gives us time to do our paper work in the evening."

We've often talked about how change should begin at home; the story of Rajiya and Rehana is one such example. The baton needs to be passed on.

CONSTANT, SLOW MOVEMENT TEACHES US TO KEEP WORKING
LIKE A SMALL CREEK THAT STAYS CLEAR
THAT DOESN'T STAGNATE BUT FINDS A WAY
THROUGH NUMEROUS DETAILS, DELIBERATELY.

- JALALUDDIN RUMI