



## Society and Institutions







## Society and Institutions

Development means building up the productive capacity of a society, so as to ensure growth and an improvement in living standards. The productive capacity of a society, in turn, is crucially dependent on the effectiveness of the institutional structure. Social institutions affect the process of change. Social, economic and political equality are essential pre-requisites in the development of human resources. Society and the institutional structure are closely intertwined; neither can exist independently of the other. It is therefore important to understand Chhattisgarh's society, its social institutions, their structure and the influence that they exert.

This chapter examines how social institutions function in Chhattisgarh and attempts to detail the additional efforts required to usher change and bring about a more equitable society. The first section details the tribes of Chhattisgarh, the regional dialects and the structure of villages. The second section examines the social and traditional institutions of the State, and the institutions for self-government and change. These include the *Panchayats*, the Forest Resource Committees and other emerging institutions. A number of new institutions, which are functioning in Chhattisgarh, are also detailed. This section is followed by the experiences of the people and their perceptions regarding societal relationships and institutions

(especially the *Panchayats* and *Gram Sabhas*) as gathered from the *Jan Rapats*. The final section presents the challenges for the future and conclusions.

### The Tribes of Chhattisgarh and their Social Structure

Chhattisgarh's history and traditions date back to ancient times. It is said to be the parental

#### From the people

Our forefathers taught us to live in consonance with nature, its forests, mountains, animals and birds. Maybe I don't know or understand enough, but our lives are guided by this philosophy. Today, the media – television, radio, newspapers – and the dazzling consumer goods available in the market are changing our lives. We would also like to live in beautiful houses, like those in the cities, but we are caught in a trap. Our traditions, our lack of education and our limited means of livelihood hold us back. Our experience tells us that the goods that come to the market from outside can be bought with money. But we have always bartered goods among ourselves to meet our needs. We have never had much use for money. A lot has changed, some for good, some for bad. I don't know whether we are on the right path or not.



*A villager from Bade Kilepal, Bastanar Block, Bastar*

Table 5.1 **Population composition of Chhattisgarh** (percentage figures)

Scheduled Castes	Scheduled Tribes	Other communities (including Backward Classes)
11.61	31.8	56.59

Source: Census of India, 2001, Final Population Totals

home of Kaushalya, the mother of Ram (son of King Dashrath), legendary god of the epic Ramayana. Historically, the region was called Koshal, and over the ages it has come to be known as Mahakoshal.

Approximately 80 percent of Chhattisgarh's population lives in its villages, and depends on agriculture and natural resources for its livelihood. A small percentage of the population lives in cities. Rural life in the State is enmeshed in a network of institutions and societal structures.

## Tribes

Chhattisgarh is dominated by a number of tribes. Over half the area of the State is a 'scheduled area' or 'tribal majority area' and falls under the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution. Areas within the Fifth Schedule have been given special

rights to protect the unique way of life and the democratic institutions that exist in these areas. People belonging to the Scheduled Castes<sup>1</sup> (11.60 percent) and Scheduled Tribes<sup>2</sup> (31.08 percent) together account for 44.68 percent of the population of the State.

The majority of the people in the villages depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. A few castes or tribes dominate the villages in each region. However, other people belonging to work-related castes, such as priests (*brahmins*), blacksmiths, carpenters, potters, barbers and weavers (*koshthas*) also inhabit the villages. Each tribe continues to maintain its traditional, institutional structure and these structures govern life even today.

Table 5.2 and 5.3 present a mapping of the rural areas of the State by its resident communities.

## Languages and dialects

Chhattisgarh can be divided into four major regions on the basis of language/dialect: Surguja and Korea in the north; Bilaspur, Raipur, Durg and Rajnandgaon in the central region; the ancient Dandakaranya region of Bastar

Table 5.2 **The main regions and the people of Chhattisgarh**<sup>3</sup>

	Districts	Demographically dominant people
Northern region	Korea, Surguja, Jashpur, Raigarh and parts of Bilaspur, Korba and Kabirdham	Scheduled Tribes and Backward Classes <sup>4</sup>
Plains of Chhattisgarh	Raipur, Durg, Mahasamund, Rajnandgaon, Dhamtari, Janjgir-Champa and parts of Bilaspur district	Backward Classes
Southern region	Uttar Bastar-Kanker, Bastar and Dakshin Bastar-Dantewada	Scheduled Tribes and Backward Classes

<sup>1</sup> Scheduled Castes refers to those communities which have been at the lowest end of the social caste hierarchy in India, based on birth. These communities are relatively disadvantaged and marginalised.

<sup>2</sup> Scheduled Tribes refer to communities that are economically backward, partly due to the fact that they live in remote and isolated areas.

<sup>3</sup> This table has been prepared on the basis of information from the District *Jan Rapats* and the population figures from the Census of India 2001

<sup>4</sup> The term 'Backward Classes' is used to refer to historically marginalised and disadvantaged communities or groups of people.

Table 5.3 **Different regions and the tribes that inhabit them**<sup>5</sup>

Area	District	Major tribes that inhabit the area	Primitive tribes of Chhattisgarh
Northern region	Surguja, Korea, Jashpur, Raigarh	Kanwar, Oraon, Nagesia, Korwa, Saunta, Saur, Sawar, Baiga, Agaria, Kol, Dhanwar, Biyar, Binjhar, Manjhar, Bharia, Bhaina, Majhi, Khairwar, Kharia and Gond	Kamar, Bison horn Maria, Korwa, Birhor, <i>Baiga</i>
Central region	Durg, Rajnandgaon, Kabirdham, Korba, Bilaspur, Mahasamund Janjgir-Champa, Raipur, Dhamtari	Gond, Baiga, Kamar, Oraon, Kol, Binjhar, Dhanwar, Kanwar, Halba, Pardhi, Bahelia, Bhunjia, Agariya, Kondh, Bhaina, Majhi, Kanwar, Manjhar, Sonr, Saur Gadaba, Sawar, Saunta	
Southern region	Uttar Bastar Kanker, Bastar and Dakshin Bastar Dantewada	Halba, Gadaba, Pardhi, Kamar, Bhattra, Dhurwa, Muria, Maria, Bison horn Maria, Dandami Maria Gond, Raj Gond, Dorla, Hill Maria, Pardhan, Mudia	

to the south; and Jashpur and Raigarh in the west. People of the Scheduled Tribes dominate the regions of North and South Chhattisgarh, and these regions depend on agriculture and forestry.

Table 5.4 **Languages spoken in Chhattisgarh**<sup>6</sup>

Region	Language / dialect
Surguja, Korea	Surgujiya, Kurukh, Korwa <sup>7</sup> , Hindi
Jashpur, Raigarh	Chhattisgarhi, Kurukh, Gondi, Hindi
Bilaspur, Korba, Janjgir-Champa, Raipur, Durg, Rajnandgaon and Kabirdham, Mahasamund	Chhattisgarhi, Hindi, Gondi, Kurukh, Munda
Dhamtari, North Bastar-Kanker, Bastar and South Bastar-Dantewada	Chhattisgarhi, Halbi, Bhatti, Gondi, Hindi, Bastari, Boojhmadi, Dandamimadi, Dorli, Muria, Dhurvi, Koytoor

## Society and traditions

Society and its institution evolve simultaneously. Each society has its social organisation and each organisation its defined leadership structure. The common culture of the village, its habits and lifestyle influence the structure of these social institutions and organisations. Today, it is difficult to tell when habits and lifestyle became tradition and when tradition acquired institutional roots.

### Box 5.1

#### Traditional healers and faith healers

The *guniya* is a person who heals illness using indigenous herbs. First, he sifts rice, and then depending on the type of illness, he decides the medicine and its dosage. If the patient does not get well, he is taken to a *sirha*, who uses a combination of incantations and ritual prayer in an attempt to cure the patient. Before starting any healing rituals, the *sirha* demands certain things like rice, a black cock, lemons and *mahua* wine. After a series of rituals the *prasad* (offering) is given to the patient. These rituals are based on the belief that the gods are angry or the patient is suffering due to the ire of an evil soul.

<sup>5</sup> Source: 'Madhya Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2000' and *Panchayat Upbandh* (Extension of Scheduled Area) *Adhiniyam*, 1996 *Ke Pariprekshya Mein Adim Jati Evam Anuschi Jati Kalyan Vibhag Ka Abhimat*, 1997.

<sup>6</sup> Bastar: *Itihas Evam Sanskriti*; Lala Jagdalpuri, Madhya Pradesh Hindi *Granth Akademi*, Bhopal; 2nd Ed., 2000.

<sup>7</sup> Madhya Pradesh *ki Janjatiya*: Dr. S.K. Tewari; Dr. Shri Kamal Sharma; Madhya Pradesh Hindi *Granth Akademi*, 2000.

In Chhattisgarh, each tribe and caste group has a different social arrangement, and each tribal or caste grouping considers its society as pre-eminent<sup>8</sup>. More than one tribe or caste inhabits most villages. The villages have developed a common society that transcends caste or tribal groupings and coexists with the pre-eminent societal groupings. The philosophy of maintaining social harmony through cooperation and sharing of power is apparent in Chhattisgarh's rural society. This philosophy stresses working together, producing together, sharing the produce, and celebrating together. Social life is not individualistic, but collectively experienced, and centred on the group.

Communities have caste or tribal institutions to resolve disputes and direct their affairs. The structure and organisation of these institutions depend on the size of the community and its location. If a village has a particular caste or tribe in majority, it may form a village-level organisation. However, there are other people also living in the village, whose numbers may range from a few people to a substantial number. They may form their own organisations. These are not village-level organisations but usually cover four to 12 villages.

### **The fabric of social relationships**

Social relationships among villagers are bound together by festivals, customs, traditions and common culture. Festivals and customs are not restricted to a single household or community; all people living in the village participate and may even play a leading role in the festivities. There are however some common traditions across Chhattisgarh. One of the most prominent is the *Chher-Chhera* festival. After the crop is harvested, groups of children go from house to house demanding '*Chher-Chhera*', which is

usually given in the form of grain, to symbolise the celebration of a good harvest. The hallmark of these festivals is that they transcend caste and tribal divides and are pan-caste/tribal in nature.

Apart from caste affairs, village society discusses village life and issues connected with it, ranging from those relating to common well-being and happiness, to the changes taking place in society and the policies of the Government. The place where such discussions take place is normally the *haat* or weekly village market. Sometimes villages take turns to organise such discussions.

### **How villages function**

Most villages have a group of people who are responsible for the management of the affairs of the village. Apart from the leader of the village social system, there are others who play an important role in the daily life and needs of a village. They include the *sirhas* and *guniyas* (healers), the *baigas* (priests), the *panaras* (musicians), *manjhi-mukhiya* (village headmen or leaders) or the *bhatnayaks* (as they are called in the Bastar and in some other places), the potters, weavers, carpenters, blacksmiths, shepherds and barbers, among others.

### **Festivals and traditions**

The festivals, customs, traditions and culture of Chhattisgarh bind its 16 districts together. Since Chhattisgarh is mainly a rural society, most of the festivals and traditions are associated with the agricultural calendar. The numerous festivals reflect the rich cultural heritage of Chhattisgarh's society.

*Navakhani* (celebrating the new crop), *Matthi tihar* (festival of the earth), *Aam tihar* (celebrating

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<sup>8</sup>For example, the Halba people of Bastar or the Bhattra society or the Muria-Maria group believe that they are superior to the other tribes in their area.



the new mango crop), and *Diyari tihar* (festival of lights) are some of the festivals, which provide an opportunity for people to come together and celebrate. Naturally, no celebration is complete without the joy and merriment of dancing, which is an inseparable part of life of every community in Chhattisgarh.

Among the well known dances of Chhattisgarh are:

- The dance of the *Raut* (shepherd) community of the plains of Chhattisgarh
- The *Shaurya nritya* (valour dance), also called the Bison Horn Maria dance
- The *Karsad nritya* of the Abujmar region
- The Gondi dances of the *Gond* tribe
- The *Parab* dances

Many of these dances celebrate a good harvest. Special songs welcome the different seasons, and express joy, social power and grandeur. People celebrate festivals with enthusiasm and spend as much money as they can afford.

Certain social structures and behavioural conventions have evolved over time. For example, the soil is an important facet of life in Bastar and many other regions of Chhattisgarh. A vow on the land is looked upon as an inviolable oath. In addition to the mores of celebration, the people also practise a series of rituals related to the different stages of life, from birth to death. These depend upon the social class and standing of the people. Relationships are built through participation and support in such situations.



### From the people

Our village has many communities. The *Gonds* dominate the village. There are different customs, traditions and food habits among the different communities. *Gonds* do not allow the *Luhars* (ironsmiths) to take water from the well of the *Gond* community. Earlier, Panika, Ghasia, Luhar and Scheduled Caste communities were treated as being inferior to the *Gonds* who considered themselves as upper caste. These traditions are changing gradually. Youth groups are forcing the elders to change.



*Jhaar village, Panchayat Kongera, Narainpur Block, Bastar*

## Institutional Structure of Chhattisgarh

Rural society depends upon several formal and informal institutions to keep alive its traditions, customs and social relations. These institutions play an important role in finalising the rules and regulations that govern the social system. They also help in implementing such rules and they take corrective action whenever there is a violation of the social norms which have been decided by them.

## Social and religious institutions

Different districts have different communities and tribes that are predominant both in terms of number and social hierarchy. Often the same community is numerically dominant and is ranked high in the social hierarchy as well, but this is not always the case.

### Hierarchy in tribal society

Contrary to popular perception, the tribes that consider themselves to be 'superior' in the social order do not eat with members of other tribes. Tribes like the Kanwar and *Gond* do not eat in Uraon homes, and try to avoid

Box 5.2

#### Different ways of getting married

Different tribes have different marriage rituals, and even within the same tribe, marriage may be performed in a number of ways. In the Halba tribe, two types of marriages are common. These are *sankchipta* (short) and *vistrit* (detailed) marriage. In the *sankchipta* marriage, the bride is taken to the house of the bridegroom and the marriage is solemnised in a simple ceremony. The *vistrit* marriage has a long procedure. First the family of the bridegroom — the father along with some important people of the village go to the house of girl with gifts of rice, wine and a rooster. The date of marriage is finalised and the marriage is then solemnised on that date. The *sankchipta* marriage is common in poorer families, while the *vistrit* marriage is prevalent among the more affluent families of the tribe.

The Bhattra tribe has four different kinds of marriage. These are *mangani vivah* (engagement marriage), *prem vivah* (love marriage), *vidhwa vivah* (widow marriage) and *gharajiya vivah* (the son-in-law resides in the girl's house). The *gharajiya* marriage is common among the boys of poor families, who may be unable to get married because they cannot afford the expenses. Typically the boy goes to a family that has a girl of marriageable age. He works there, assisting the household for a month. If the family is happy with the behaviour and ability of the boy, they arrange a marriage and the boy continues to live in the family of the in-laws even after marriage. A similar tradition is found in the plains of Chhattisgarh, where it is referred to as *lamsena pratha*.

even drinking water there. Similarly, tribes like Pando and Korba are not regarded as 'equal' in the districts of Korba, Surguja and Jashpur. Even among the *Gonds*, hierarchies exist. The Raj *Gonds* are considered superior to the other *Gond* sub-castes. In villages, where people belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes live together, the tribes which consider themselves superior to the Scheduled Castes do not eat with them. Almost all the tribes of the State follow the *gotra*<sup>9</sup> system in matters of marriage. However, these practices are gradually changing.

### Social institutions

Different tribes follow different practices relating to different stages of life, from childbirth to death. Marriage is one of the oldest institutions in society. Along with the institution of the household, it is marriage that governs how men and women live together and behave as couples. There are many different ways in which marriages are performed in Chhattisgarh, particularly among its tribal communities, depending on the particular situation and economic standing of the people.

### Religious institutions

Religion and religious beliefs are an integral part of the lifestyle of the people of Chhattisgarh. Rituals and festivals are not just an expression of their religious beliefs but also a reflection of their traditions and institutions. The homage paid to the soil in *Matthi tihar*, to the new grain in *Navakhani* and to the new crop of mangoes in *Aam tihar*, all show how nature and environment are worshipped and revered in traditional tribal societies.

Religious beliefs have changed with time and have acquired new definitions.

<sup>9</sup> The *gotra* system is followed to avoid marriages within the family or within the branches of the family. It is similar to the *gotra* system of the upper-caste Hindus, where a girl and boy belonging to the same *gotra* cannot get married.



### The *Ghotul* – an education for life

The *ghotul* is a much-discussed cultural institution of the Muria-Gond tribals. It is a centre for young girls and boys, a night dormitory that is accepted by tribal society. The *ghotul* is built through community labour and it is in this institution that, once every year, unmarried youth — girls and boys — are permitted entry. The boys are called *chelic* and the girls are called *motiyari*. The leader of the *chelic*s is called *siredar* and the leader of the *motiyaris* is called *belosa* (leader of girls).

Earlier, *ghotuls* were of two kinds, one in which the relationship between the youths is long-standing and the other in which the pairings kept changing. The *ghotul* has a management committee, with various officials of different designations, whose powers and responsibilities are defined. There is provision for punishing indiscipline in the *ghotul*. Each girl and boy is given a name by which he or she is addressed in the *ghotul*. That name is restricted only to the *ghotul*.

Special attention is paid to cleanliness and hygiene in the *ghotul*. The artistry of the *ghotul* is outstanding.

The entrance door introduces you to the fine woodwork of the region. The inner walls are decorated with a variety of murals. The walls are plastered with red and yellow mud and the murals are done with coal and rice powder. The drawings of animals and birds, trees and plants are very attractive. The folk music of the *ghotul* is another attraction that draws you there. In truth, the lovingly crafted, disciplined and charming art centre, the *ghotul*, is a commendable establishment for multi-faceted training.

Once a person enters into married life he or she forfeits membership of the *ghotul*. *Lingopen* is the focus of adoration in the *ghotul* of the Gond-Muria society of the Bastar region. *Lingopen* is in fact the god Lingaraj or Natraj. It is through his mercy that the *chelic* and *motiyari*, as well as other individuals attain success in the musical arts. There is no idol of *Lingopen* in the *ghotul*; he remains formless. Only hymns of praise are sung to him.

*Extracted and translated from: Bastar: Itihas Evam Sanskriti, by Lala Jagdalpuri, Madhya Pradesh Hindi Granth Akademi, 2nd Ed., 2000*

## Educational and cultural institutions

Education is part of life in the Indian social system. The *ghotul* system, which is prevalent among the Scheduled Tribes of Bastar, educates, informs and teaches teenagers who are entering into adulthood and family life how to conduct themselves in this phase of life.

### The *ghotul* — an education for life

The *ghotul* system teaches girls and boys how to live together and understand each other as men and women.

### Cultural institutions

Society and culture are entwined. Economic and productive activities are the wellspring from which the form, depth and diversity of folk music and culture emanate. In Bastar and Dantewada, the festival of *Diyari* is celebrated on different days over a period of three months, according to the convenience of the shepherds

and graziers. *Diyari* is a day for entertainment, dancing and joy, accompanied by food and drink.

The *nacha mandal* (dance group) and the *bhajan mandal* (religious songs group) provide entertainment in rural Chhattisgarh. Cockfighting is a popular sport and entertainment in the villages.

## Post-independence institutions

Many institutions and administrative departments have been working in rural Chhattisgarh since Independence. The village *Jan Rapats* say that both traditional institutions and modern institutions coexist in rural Chhattisgarh. The following institutions are most common:

- Institutions for self-government and social change

## From the people

### **Dhorrai and the festival of light**



Our village has the tradition of appointing a *dhorrai*, a shepherd, who takes care of the animals of all the families of the village. The appointment is made for one year and is renewed every year. Till last year the *Raut* (who are like the Yadavs and are associated with animal husbandry) community had taken the responsibility of *dhorrai* but now they are not willing to do so. Now people from our own *Dhurva* tribe have taken over the functions of the *dhorrai*.

The *Diyari Tihar*, a festival that celebrates the new crop, is celebrated over a period of three months, in different villages. It is a three-day long celebration in the village where all the villagers together with the *dhorrai* make merry. People of the Mahara community usually do the work of grazing the cattle. The *maati pujari* (the priest of the soil), in consultation with the village leaders and the *dhorrai*, decides the actual dates of the festival. It is a time for renewal of contract and negotiation of payments and contractual arrangements. This is also the time to ask the *dhorrai* about his difficulties and problems. The *dhorrai* is appointed in the month of *Magh* (January-February) for the full year. If he leaves the job before the completion of one year he is fined. If he is not willing to take up the post of *dhorrai* in the following year he must inform the village head one month in advance. The *dhorrai* is offered cooked food every day and this is called *bhandi*.

Each village has a different date for the celebration. The *dhorrai* is the central figure of this festival. On the first day of the festival, he hosts a lunch for all the animal owners at his house. This is his duty, as the owners provide cooked food for him for the rest of the year (364 days). After the grand feast, the animals are cleaned and decorated. On the second day, after the feast, the *dhorrai* receives paddy from the animal owners, and on the third day, the *gothan* (the place where cows are kept) is worshipped. There may be more than one *dhorrai* family in the village, depending on the number of livestock.

Village Report of Machkot, Panchayat Chaukawada, Bastar Block  
Bastar District Report

- Institutions involved in economic activities
- Educational and human resource development institutions
- Modern cultural and social institutions

### **Institutions for self-government and social change**

There are basically two main types of institutions in rural Chhattisgarh; those that work for change and development, and those that administer and implement the law of the land. Apart from the various Government departments that function in the State, the *Panchayati Raj* institutions, some non-governmental organisations, and self-help groups are important instruments of change.

#### **Panchayati Raj institutions**

The *Panchayat Raj* institutions are among the predominant institutions that are active in Chhattisgarh. Chhattisgarh has 9,139 *Gram Panchayats*, 146 *Janpad Panchayats* (at the Block level), and 16 *Zila Panchayats*. The *Panchayati Raj* system covers around 20,000 villages in the State and has a total of 1,36,393 representatives. Altogether, close to 1.5 lakh people in rural Chhattisgarh are involved in the strengthening of self-government and the democratic process.

The *Panchayati Raj* structure is as follows:

- *Zila Panchayat* at the district level
- *Janpad Panchayat* at the block level

#### Box 5.4

##### **Composition of the Gram Panchayat**

A *Gram Panchayat* is composed of:

- One Chairperson or *Sarpanch* (directly elected)
- 10 to 20 *Panchs* (directly elected)
- One Deputy Chairperson or *Up-Sarpanch* elected by and from among the members

Table 5.5 **Representation in Panchayati Raj Institutions**

Representatives	Social Categories			
	Scheduled Castes	Scheduled Tribes	Backward Classes	Unreserved
<i>Gram Panchayat</i> Members	15,532	52,198	23,278	33,203
<i>Gram Panchayat Sarpanch</i>	898	5,166	1,610	1,433
<i>Janpad Panchayat</i> Members	318	1,062	540	719
<i>Janpad Panchayat</i> President	12	96	21	17
<i>Zila Panchayat</i> Members	30	112	58	74
<i>Zila Panchayat</i> President	2	10	3	1
Total	16,792	58,644	25,510	35,447

Source: *Panchman*, 1st Issue, November-2001, Chhattisgarh *Samvad*, Raipur

- *Gram Panchayat* for a minimum rural population of 1,000 people
- *Gram Sabha* for every revenue and forest village

#### **Institutional structure of Panchayati Raj institutions**

In Chhattisgarh, an attempt has been made to ensure that the *Panchayat Sarpanch*/chairperson and the members of the *Panchayati Raj* institutions are actively involved in the working of these institutions. *Panchayats* have set up permanent subcommittees at various levels, and delegated some of the powers assigned to them to these subcommittees. These include the power to decide about the work of some of the Government departments that have been placed under the supervision of the *Panchayats*.

In addition to this three-tiered structure, every revenue and forest village in the State has a *Gram Sabha*, with all the villagers as members. The members of the permanent subcommittees are chosen from among the ordinary members of the *Panchayat*.

Decisions made by these subcommittees are placed before the general assembly of the

*Panchayat* by the administration subcommittee. Once the decisions are approved, they are implemented. The *Panchayati Raj* system, which was implemented after the 73rd Amendment of the Constitution in 1994, is not completely new. Even before the implementation of the *Panchayati Raj* Act, there were functioning *Panchayats* in the districts, although their functions and powers were limited.

#### Box 5.5

#### **Standing committees of Panchayati Raj Institutions**

##### **Gram Panchayat**

Five permanent standing committees. These are:

- General administration
- Education, health and social welfare
- Development and construction
- Agriculture, animal husbandry and fisheries
- Revenue and forests

##### **Janpad and Zila Panchayat**

Five permanent standing committees. These are:

- General administration committee
- Agriculture committee
- Education committee
- Cooperatives and industries committee
- Communication and works committee

Source: *Hamarein Gaon Me Hami Sarkar*, Debate, 2002

### Committees of Panchayati Raj Institutions

Standing committees exist at all three levels, comprising the elected representatives. The basic objective behind constituting these committees is to create space for all elected representatives in the day-to-day management of the affairs of the institution.

### Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions

About 50,000 women are office bearers and members of the *Panchayat* bodies, and women account for 38 percent of all representatives in the *Panchayats*.<sup>10</sup>

The high participation of women can be explained by the positive sex ratio in rural Chhattisgarh and the socio-cultural conditions of the State. Korea, Surguja, Korba and Bilaspur are the only districts where the sex ratio in the rural areas is adverse. The most favourable sex ratio in urban areas is in Dhamtari, followed by Rajnandgaon, Kanker, Mahasamund and Bastar. The sex ratio in the urban areas in all the other districts is less than 950 women per 1,000 men.



Table 5.6 Sex ratio in Chhattisgarh

Name of the District	Sex Ratio		
	Rural	Urban	Total
Korea	971	890	946
Surguja	977	904	972
Jashpur	1003	919	999
Raigarh	1003	941	994
Korba	992	917	964
Janjgir-Champa	1005	941	998
Bilaspur	984	932	971
Kabirdham	1008	935	1002
Rajnandgaon	1034	976	1023
Durg	1016	929	982
Raipur	1004	929	980
Mahasamund	1026	961	1018
Dhamtari	1006	991	1004
Kanker	1007	976	1005
Bastar	1017	961	1011
Dantewada	1025	904	1016
State	1004	932	989

Source: Census of India, 2001

### Panchayati Raj in Scheduled Areas

A large part of the State falls under the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution of India. The *Gram Sabha* and *Panchayats* in areas which fall within

Table 5.7 Women members in Panchayati Raj Institutions

Women Representatives	Scheduled Castes	Scheduled Tribes	Backward Classes	Unreserved
<i>Panch</i>	5,074	17,520	8,129	11,220
<i>Sarpanch</i>	299	1,715	849	4,834
<i>Janpad Panchayat</i>	100	383	194	239
<i>Janpad Panchayat President</i>	6	38	6	5
<i>Zila Panchayat Members</i>	10	45	18	22
<i>Zila Panchayat President</i>	0	4	1	0
Total	5,489	19,705	9,197	16,320

Source: *Panchman*, 1st Issue, November 2001, Chhattisgarh *Samvad*, Raipur

<sup>10</sup> There is 33 percent reservation for women in *Panchayat* bodies. The representation in Chhattisgarh is five percent more than the stipulated requirement.

the Fifth Schedule have been given special rights. These rights relate to:

- Control and utilisation of natural resources
- Protection of the culture and traditions of Scheduled Tribe societies
- Legal framework for settling mutual disputes in Scheduled Tribe societies
- Abolishing moneylending activities in Scheduled Tribe areas

Table 5.8 **Fifth schedule areas in Chhattisgarh**

Districts completely under the Fifth Schedule	Districts partially covered by the Fifth Schedule
1. Korea	1. Raigarh
2. Surguja	2. Bilaspur
3. Korba	3. Raipur
4. Jashpur	4. Dhamtari
5. Kanker	5. Rajnandgaon
6. Bastar	6. Durg
7. Dantewada	

Source: *Hamarein Gaon Me Hami Sarkar*, Debate, 2002

The powers given to *Gram Sabha* in the Scheduled Tribe areas have influenced the laws of the country. Many of these powers have now been given to the *Gram Sabha* in non-Scheduled Tribe areas as well. They highlight the attempts that have been made to ensure that people in villages participate more actively in governing themselves. The *Panchayats* have also helped in establishing political equality in villages.

### **Gram Sabhas**

Each revenue and forest village has a separate *Gram Sabha*. In the early stages of *Panchayati Raj*, each *Gram Panchayat* had a *Gram Sabha*. However, since a *Gram Panchayat* had more than one village under its purview, provision was later

made in the *Panchayat Act* to constitute separate a *Gram Sabha* for each revenue village.

The *Gram Sabha* in Chhattisgarh represents a system of direct democracy. All villagers of voting age together constitute the *Gram Sabha*. The voters have the right to govern themselves through the medium of the *Panchayats*. The *Gram Sabha* can exercise control over the *Panchayat*, its decisions, plans, budget and staff.

### **Powers of the Gram Sabha**

- Controls the *Panchayat*, its resources and staff
- Through the medium of the *Panchayat*, exercises control over departments/ organisations and staff transferred to the *Panchayat* system
- Controls the plans that are to be implemented and the plan expenditure
- Is responsible for managing the natural resources of the village
- Has propriety rights over minor forest produce
- Is responsible for managing water and water sources

### **Gram Sabhas in scheduled areas**

*Gram Sabhas* in Scheduled Areas have the power to take all necessary steps to protect the traditions, cultural identity and community resources of the tribal community. They use traditional social methods for resolving disputes within the tribal community. The concerned parties are compelled to abide by the decisions taken by the *Gram Sabha* regarding disputes. If one of the parties to the dispute is unhappy with the decision of the *Gram Sabha*, he/she



can appeal against the decision to the District Court, but no Government official can change the decision of the *Gram Sabha*.

The *Gram Sabha* exercises control over the land, water and forests that fall within its geographical boundaries, and is permitted to manage the natural resources in conformity with local traditions.

### **Self-help groups**

During the last few years a network of self-help groups, especially women's savings groups, has emerged in the villages. These savings groups have tried to encourage savings in the village community, and are slowly forming a base for undertaking economic activities. The self-help groups have taken different names and forms in different districts, such as the Bambleshwari group in Rajnandgaon. The names of these groups are chosen on the basis of local symbols in an attempt to appeal instantly to the common people.

Some self-help groups have been set up through the projects operating in the area:

- *Swarna Jayanthi Gram Swarozgar Yojana* (a scheme for self-employment in the villages)
- Thrift and credit groups formed under the Watershed Mission

Table 5.9 **Self-help groups**

Number of committees	7,600
Savings through these committees	Rs 1.38 crores
Membership	8,38,000

Source: Directorate of Women and Child Development, Chhattisgarh

- Self-help groups set up by non-governmental organisations
- Organisations like *Gramya*, set up by Department of Women and Child Development.

Membership of the self-help groups benefit people by extending assistance to the indebted, as well as by providing assistance to improve the economic situation of the people. With 838,000 members, the 7,600 committees that exist in the State have generated savings worth Rs. 1.38 crores.

However, the impact of self-help groups is limited. People are inclined to be apprehensive of loans, because they associate loans with exploitation and indebtedness. There is a reluctance to engage in financial dealings which involve repayment, as they are viewed with suspicion.<sup>11</sup> Considerable advocacy and awareness is required to make micro-credit through self-help groups an effective instrument of change.

### **Government departments and institutions**

Today, every village has some interface with the Government and this is evident in the presence of functionaries such as the schoolteacher, the *patwari*, the agricultural extension officer and the health care worker. The Government is responsible for the provision of amenities such as electricity, drinking water, primary health care, and childcare. The experiences of the villagers with Government departments are mixed. While people welcome amenities like hand pumps and the services of the ANM, as well

<sup>11</sup> This mistrust stems from the collective inheritance of the people of Chhattisgarh. Under the British, the people of Bastar were frustrated with the exploitation of moneylenders and traders, who charged exorbitant rates of interest. They rose up in revolt. Even today, the people continue to view credit with apprehension.

as the setting up of Primary Health Centres and schools, the interface with the Forest Department, in particular, is not heartening.

Historically, the interaction of villagers with the forest department goes back a hundred years, when the British Government passed the Forest Protection Act and moved the people out of the forests. The laws relating to forests and forest produce continue to create friction between the people and the Government, even today.

The Government provides a range of services in the villages, through various departments like the Education department, the Public Health Engineering department, the Health department, the Forest department and the department for Animal Husbandry/Veterinary Services, the *Panchayat* and Social Welfare department. Electricity, irrigation and roads are other areas where there is an interface with the Government. The Police department is assigned the task of maintaining law and order in the village.

### **Institutions related to livelihood**

In the last few decades, a series of institutions have evolved, which impact on the lives of the people of Chhattisgarh. Some of these are traditional institutions like the village markets (*haats*) and cattle fairs, while others like the Forest Produce committees are new institutions designed to serve a specific purpose. The main institutions are:

- Cooperative Societies, particularly Large Agriculture Multi Purpose Societies (LAMPS), Farmers Agriculture Credit Societies (FACS), Primary Agriculture Credit Societies (PACS) and Forest Cooperatives
- Forest Produce Committees

- Village markets (*haats*) and cattle fairs
- *Mandis* or Agricultural Produce Marketing Committees (APMC)

### **Cooperative Societies**

The cooperative movement in Chhattisgarh is largely the result of Government effort. Many Government departments undertake work in the villages by establishing cooperative committees for specific programmes that they want to implement. The villagers themselves are members of these cooperatives. Hence, information about their plans and programmes filters down easily to the ground level. The villagers have benefited by becoming members of the cooperative committees. In particular, the LAMPS committee formed at the level of every 10 to 15 villages provides villagers with basic necessities through the public distribution system. These include essential commodities like rice, wheat, sugar, salt, edible oil and

Table 5.10 **Cooperative institutions**

Organisation	Number
LAMPS	243
PACS	1,335
Milk Federation	609
Fishing Federation	808
District Cooperative Federation	7
Joint Agricultural Cooperatives	132
General Marketing Activities	153
Tree Federations	352
Primary Consumers Warehouse	760
Building Construction	360
Weavers Society	242
Industrial Associations	463
Primary Forest Produce Federation	25
Mineral Cooperatives	542
Credit Societies	264
Marketing Societies	153

Source: Registrar of Cooperatives, Chhattisgarh

kerosene. Apart from this, LAMPS also provides crop loans in the villages within its field area, and people learn the use of new agricultural techniques and inputs, like improved hybrid seeds, fertilisers and pesticides. After the harvest, LAMPS purchases the crop at the declared support prices.

In villages where animal husbandry is prevalent, people have benefited economically through the setting up of milk cooperatives. In villages with mines, mineral cooperatives have been set up, and fishing cooperatives have been set up in villages with fisheries.

The cooperative institutions are set up under the purview of the Cooperatives Act. Government departments — major successes being LAMPS and the milk cooperatives — also manage most of them. The *Jan Rapats* outline details of the working of these cooperatives, particularly the LAMPS initiative in Bastar, which played a major role in the utilisation of forest resources.

**Forest resources committees (van dhan samitis)**

In 1998, during the Tamarind Movement<sup>12</sup>, the *van dhan samitis* (forest resources committees) were established. The Forest department and the Cooperation Department constituted two other committees, which had similar responsibilities.

A forest resource committee was set up for those families which had unemployed members, or were below the poverty line, or belonged to a Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe. It had a minimum membership of 10 and a maximum membership of 20. The *Gram Sabha* selected the members of the forest resource group. The objective was to collect forest

produce from the forests near the village. The Government, through Trifed, was to fix a fair market price for buying the produce from the forest resource committees. The *Gram Sabha* took this decision after discussion. The *Gram Sabha* insisted that the Government should ban middlemen totally, so that local villagers could get an appropriate price. Unemployed village youth got employment in the forest resources committees and the villagers received a fair price for the forest produce.

Within a period of four years, the project and the committees had evolved and developed so well that Trifed was able to withdraw. Although the project did not attain the expected level of success, it was perhaps for the first time that the communities of Bastar were able to identify with a Government programme. A major reason for this was that the programme recognised the intimate relationship between natural resources and the people, and it was designed with the active participation of the people. Almost all the *Jan Rapats* from different development blocks have urged that similar projects and programmes be taken up throughout the State.

**Project and programme specific committees**

Over the past few decades considerable emphasis has been placed on people's participation in development activities.

Project and programme specific committees	
●	Watershed committee
●	Forest protection committee
●	Forest management committee
●	Education committee

Many donor agencies working in the field insist that the beneficiaries be involved in the development of programmes and activities.

<sup>12</sup> The Tamarind Movement was a major initiative undertaken for the sale and collection of tamarind in Bastar district. It was a cooperative effort undertaken by the Government and the people to strengthen the economic base of the villages.

Table 5.11 **Committees at the village level**

Name of project	Committees active at the village level
Watershed projects	Watershed committees
Forest management projects	Forest protection committees and forest management committees
Animal husbandry projects	Projects to develop animal husbandry and enhance economic activities connected to animal husbandry in Bastar, undertaken with the help of Danida
Education projects	Village education committees and school management committees

Source: *Panchayat* and Health: Status of Decentralisation, Debate, March 2003

The Government has also left most of the decisions relating to the implementation of village development programmes to the people. It has organised committees at the village level, and set up an institutional framework for the purpose. Several projects in the districts are being run with the help of the Government and donor agencies (see table 5.11).

An attempt has been made to form village groups to implement these projects and achieve their objectives. Several committees for primary education were constituted under the Education Department. These include the school management committee, village education committee and village building construction committee. In the same way, the forest department has set up forest protection and forest management committees.

The experience of the people with these committees has been mixed. Their initial observation is that Government departments are making attempts to invite people's participation in the working of these committees, as well as trying to provide information about projects

and programmes to the villages. However, from the people's perspective, these committees are only a medium for the Government system to do its work. The villagers feel these project-based committees give useful insights into the structure and working of the Government system and afford an opportunity to learn and understand new techniques.

#### ***Traditional economic institutions***

There are many traditional economic institutions.

#### ***Village markets (haats)***

Village markets are a window to the changing lives and lifestyles of the villagers. They play a key role in determining village fashion, help to understand the demand pattern of the people, and provide a competitive market for small buyers and sellers. *Haats* are also social meeting grounds — going to the *haat* is an outing, a chance to meet friends and family and see what is new in the market.

The activities of the village market include:

Table 5.12 **Responsibilities of Committees**

Name of committee	Responsibility
Village education committee	School management
Forest protection committee	People's participation in protecting forests
Watershed management committee	People's participation in watershed development activities

- Buying and selling produce
- Exchange of information
- Entertainment (like cock fights)

### **Agricultural markets (*mandis*)**

The main objective of agricultural *mandis* is to provide a market where farmers and grain producers can get a minimum support price for their produce. These rural *mandis* are democratic in nature, because their office bearers are elected.

### **New institutions for education and capacity building**

Several institutions in Chhattisgarh are active in facing up to the challenge of changing times. Their main objective is to upgrade human resource capabilities in the State so that quality is improved and production is increased. These institutions are focusing on areas like education, medical and industrial education, livelihood training, agricultural education, training and technical education.

Yet, apart from primary and secondary education, the reach of other educational institutions is limited. Some efforts in this direction have been made in the last few years, since the formation of the new State. A number of institutions such as medical colleges, degree colleges and universities have been established. An important initiative that has been undertaken is the *Soochna Shakti*, which has taken computer education to the villages. Under this scheme, computer education is imparted to girls studying in the villages.

### **Modern cultural and social institutions**

In the last 10 to 15 years, several modern institutions have emerged in the rural areas of Chhattisgarh, which have become part village life. These include:

- *Yuvak mangal dal* (youth group)
- *Mahila bhajan mandali* (women's group that sings religious songs and offers prayers)
- *Mahila mangal dal* (women's entertainment group)
- *Bhajan mandal* and *kirtan dal* (groups that sing religious songs and offer prayers)

These groups are active in the villages and people join them for religious and spiritual reasons. Their main focus is social occasions. For example, a group may take up the responsibility for organising marriages in the villages. In times of crisis, the *yuvak mangal dal* (youth group) springs into action. During the lean agricultural periods, *bhajan mandals* organise *bhajan* sessions in the village or a group may organise a recital of the Ramayana.

### **Experiences and Perceptions of the People**

This section analyses the perception of the people regarding society and institutions and their impact on the process of development. Development in turn impacts on these institutions. The experiences describe the changes that are occurring within the village and its social structure, as well as the influence of external institutional systems that work within the villages. An analysis of the perceptions of the people, across districts, illustrates that there are considerable regional variations in the State.

The Village *Jan Rapats* document the community's perception of the current status of institutions, the status of women in the institutional framework, and the expectations of the community regarding change in the institutional organisations. The *Jan Rapats*



make clear that there is a strong desire for change. The reports outline the broad areas of support required from outside and the role of the people in this process of change.

## Perceptions regarding society and traditions

Extracts from the Village Reports (Box 5.6) shows us the difference in the perceptions of the people belonging to three villages (all three are from one block of Kabirdham district) regarding various aspects of life. It illustrates the oft-repeated point that generalisations cannot be made for Chhattisgarh.

### Women and society

The Village Reports are an integration of different group discussions in the villages. In all of them, separate groups of women discussed various issues<sup>13</sup> regarding the status of women, their role and their perception of themselves.

The men also discussed these issues and the analysis includes the perception of both men and women.

Table 5.13 **Place of women in traditional society**  
(percentage of Village Reports that discussed this issue)

Regions	High	Average	Low/Unequal
Northern region	40	44	16
Central plains	34	39	27
Southern region	50	45	7
State	41	43	17

Source: Village *Jan Rapats*, Part III

### Traditional status of women

Two out of four Village Reports say that traditionally women enjoy a high status in rural society. Almost the same proportion of reports say (43 percent) that women have only an 'average' status. Less than a fifth (17 percent) of the Village Reports say that traditionally

## From the people

### Opinions from the villages regarding the status of institutions



	Current status	Desire to change	About organisations	Role of the village in proposed change
Village Haddi, block Borla, District Kabirdham	We have a social tradition. We live in harmony. Child marriage and dowry is not practised. The customs in our village are not orthodox.	We do not wish to change our present customs and traditions.	Self-help group and defence committees are not constituted in our village.	No comment
Village Darai, block Borla, District Kabirdham	Traditions of society are not good. Child marriage is common in our village.	Elaborate campaign on education is needed.	No comment	Support is needed from the Government.
Village Keshamda, block Borla, District Kabirdham	Daily life depends on old customs and traditions. Festivals provide an opportunity to dance, sing and drink.	We want to change old customs that are rigid and bad.	There is no social and cultural organisation in our village.	We need a cultural forum. We also want to change our rigid and incorrect customs. Training, exposure and information will help us in changing such traditions.

*Village Jan Rapats, Part III*

<sup>13</sup> A little less than half the villages (7,359) discussed the status of women in the social system of the village. Of these, 2,233 villages are from the northern region, 3,637 are from the central plains of Chhattisgarh, and 1,489 villages are from the southern region of the State.

the status of women is 'low' and that they are treated as being inferior to men in rural society. The reports indicate that the status of women is perceived to be relatively better in the southern region than in the other two regions. Among the three regions, the status of women is perceived to be the worst in the central plains, where 27 percent of Village Reports say that women are traditionally regarded as unequal partners.

### **Present status of women**

The present status of women is not perceived to be better than their traditional status in rural society. In fact only 31 percent of the Village Reports maintain that the status of women is high, while 49 percent feel that the status of women is 'average'. The percentage of Village Reports that classify women's status as being 'low' or unequal to that of men, is 18

Table 5.14 **Status of women in present society**  
(percentage of Village Reports that discussed this issue)

Region	High	Average	Low
Northern region	26	59	13
Central plains	29	43	28
Southern region	38	44	14
State	31	49	18

Source: Village *Jan Rapats*, Part III

percent. On the whole, the status of women in modern society seems to be lower than that in traditional society. Once again, the status is perceived to be low by about 28 percent of the Village Reports in the central plains area. In the north and the south, this percentage is substantially lower, reflecting that women in these areas are perceived to have a higher status.

### **Change in customs and traditions**

About 27 percent of the Village Reports say that traditions and customs are changing with time. Just over a third (35 percent) of the Village Reports maintain that traditions are still useful. Another 30 percent of the Reports feel that customs create an environment of cooperation and have a positive influence. Many villages are proud of their customs and traditions. Two out of five Village Reports (40 percent) say that most of the customs are rigid and they need to be changed. Nearly a third of the reports (29 percent) say that customs related to death and marriages are interpreted in a manner that has an obstructive influence on society. The expenses associated with these occasions lead to considerable difficulties for the people.

Table 5.15 **Perceptions regarding customs and traditions**  
(percentage of Village Reports that discussed this issue<sup>14</sup>)

Region	Changing with time	Customs are useful	Positive and cooperative	Rigid and need to change	Some traditions force people to spend unnecessarily
Northern region	27	41	36	39	24
Central plains	31	26	21	62	47
Southern region	23	37	32	19	16
State	27	35	30	40	29

Source: Village *Jan Rapats*, Part III

<sup>14</sup> The perception analysis in this chapter relates to all the villages that discussed a particular issue. The data from all the *Jan Rapats* was analysed using special software developed for the purpose. However, this exercise has only been done for the 'Society and Institutions' section. Out of 19,128 villages 12,356 villages discussed the issue of customs and traditions in their villages. Out of these 4,325 villages are from the northern region, 6,453 are from the central region and 1,578 are from the southern region.

Table 5.16 **Change in customs and traditions**

(percentage of Village Reports that discussed this issue)

Region	No Change needed	Society and customs should change with time	Repressive and rigid customs should change	Expensive custom of marriage	Expensive death ceremonies	Caste based customs	Our society should change like urban society
Northern region	8	28	48	23	9	1	2
Central plains	5	39	63	44	23	6	4
Southern region	24	32	18	15	8	4	14
State	12	33	43	27	13	4	7

Source: Village *Jan Rapats*, Part III

Forty-three percent of the Village Reports suggest that practices like child marriage, dowry and alcoholism should be discouraged and should disappear from their society. A small percentage of the reports (seven percent) want their village to transform into an urban society. They feel that urban societies are better, because caste barriers are not as strong as they are in the villages.

The Village Reports suggest that the people have a role in the process of change, but they do expect the support of the State in this

### From the people



Turetha village is a tribal village. People of the Halba and the *Gond* tribes mainly inhabit it. Both tribes have their social organisations and social systems.

The Halba society has its own social customs. Their marriages, birth and death ceremonies, worship practices and other systems are different from other societies.

The *Gonds* in turn have their own distinct social customs. Their marriage systems, birth and death ceremonies, their gods and goddesses, worship practices are different from the Halba society.

The *Gonds* have the *ghotul*<sup>15</sup> system, which is an integral part of their social system. The *ghotul* system has various officials: subedar/chief, *patel*, *kotwal*, policeman, watchman, and check-post guard. These officials perform different duties to maintain the *ghotul* system.

*Turetha village, Mathla Gram Panchayat  
Narainpur Block, Bastar*

process. The extremely important role that institutions play in village life is apparent in the need expressed by the people for cultural forums and self-help groups.

### Change in social systems

Almost all Village *Jan Rapats* accept that change is occurring in the social and economic system. This change directly affects the social and economic relations among people.

Table 5.17 **Perceptions regarding change in social customs**

(percentage of Village Reports that discussed this issue)

Region	Good	Moderate	Partially useful	Not Good
Northern region	4	31	22.4	33
Central plains	27	30	23	22
Southern region	18	38	20	28
State	16	33	22	28

Source: Village *Jan Rapats*, Part III

<sup>15</sup> As described earlier the *ghotul* is a cultural centre in the village, which is managed by teenage girls and boys themselves.

## From the people

### **Institutional System** **The situation in the past**

About 25 to 30 years ago, our village – Govindpur – did not have a school building or an *anganwadi*. The future of our children was bleak.

### **Where are we at present?**

The *Sarpanch* reports that the present situation has improved a lot. The village has a middle school and an EGS school. Although there is still no building for the school or *anganwadi*, the school is functioning.

### **Where we want to reach in the future?**

The *Sarpanch* and the other villagers say that we shall send our children to school in future and construct a school building so that the standard of education is improved. We must also open a small hospital for our health needs.



### **How will this be possible?**

We require the support of the Government to achieve all this, but we will cooperate and offer all support. We must strengthen our education and become more aware.

### **What should we do?**

For this, we must all support this endeavour wholeheartedly. We expect the Government to construct a school building in our village, Govindpur, because we do not have one at present.

### **What do we expect from outside?**

In addition to our efforts we require the support of the Government to put the institutional structure in place in our village.

*Govindpur village, Chiparkaya Gram Panchayat, Batholi Development Block, Surguja*

The influence of outside forces on the structure and society of the villages is also increasing gradually. As a result the villages are abandoning their own institutional systems. Some of the changes that are taking place are:

- The breaking up of the joint family system and the move towards nuclear families
- The disbanding of established social organisations
- Decline in social and village unity
- Disillusionment with village life and a gradual shift to urban lifestyles
- Growing needs which require ever higher incomes

Not unexpectedly, these changes are not uniform in different areas of the State. The reactions of the people of Bastar and Dantewada vary

considerably from those of the people in Raipur and Durg, making it difficult to generalise. Often different tribes with different societal systems inhabit the same village, and the process of change is different in each society. Thus the process and pace of change within the same village may be quite different between different tribes.

### **Perceptions regarding institutions**

As far as institutions are concerned, the experiences of the people are more or less similar. They are positive about the changes initiated by the forest resources committees and the Government. However, the interface with the forest staff continues to be largely unfriendly and most people see the Government as a body that takes too long in taking decisions.

Looking beyond the institutions and the legal system the *Jan Rapats* have raised questions about the relevance and usefulness of these institutions to the villages.

The following analysis presents the perceptions of the people regarding a range of issues, varying from traditional to modern institutions and the changes that are taking place in these institutions. It also speaks of the role of Government agencies and Government employees, their own expectations for change and the role that they see for themselves in this process. The role of *Panchayats* has been examined in considerable detail.

### Traditional institutions

The Village Reports list the various types of traditional institutions which are active in the villages of Chhattisgarh<sup>16</sup>. These are:

- Community *Panchayats*
- Traditional village institutions
- Cultural institutions

Community *Panchayats* deal with matters related to a particular community, for example, there is a *Panchayat* of the *Gonds*, a *Panchayat* of the Raut community and a *Panchayat* of the Halba community, each one assigned the task of dealing with specific issues relating to its own community or sorting out problems with other communities.

Traditional village institutions deal with village level issues and cut across communities. General disputes among villagers, village level celebrations and issues pertaining to common resource management fall under the purview of traditional institutions. In some cases, the community *Panchayats* and the traditional village level institutions are coterminous because single communities or tribes inhabit the village. Cultural groups also cut across community lines and focus on cultural celebrations in the village.

More than half (53.3 percent) the Village Reports say that community *Panchayats* are still active in their villages. In the south and the central plains, the figure is 52 percent while in the north the figure is 56 percent. Out of 2,456 villages, 72 percent of the Village Reports say that traditional institutions are active and working in their village. Cultural institutions are present only in 64 percent of the villages.

### Modern institutions

The Village *Jan Rapats* say that modern institutions have come up in the last 10-15 years. These relatively new institutions have been termed as modern institutions. They include:

- Community institutions

Table 5.18 **Traditional institutions in the villages**  
(percentage of Village Reports that discussed this issue)

Region	Community <i>Panchayats</i>	Traditional institutions	Cultural institutions
Northern region	56	81	71
Central plains	52	70	63
Southern region	52	65	58
State	53.3	72	64

Source: Village *Jan Rapats*, Part III

<sup>16</sup> The existence and status of traditional institutions was discussed in 2,456 villages out of the total number of villages.



- Youth groups
- Women's groups

These institutions are largely initiated, managed and controlled by the villagers themselves. Community institutions deal with issues of common interest like expenditure on marriages, and the relationship of the village with outside agencies, especially Government departments. These institutions are largely amended versions of traditional institutions. The difference is that these institutions include young and sometimes influential people in the decision-making process, a feature that is not common in the traditional system.

The *Jan Rapats* say that community institutions are present in about 44.6 percent of the villages. Women's groups are not very common; only 18.3 percent of villages say that they have a women's group in their village. Rajnandgaon district, which reports the presence of functioning women's groups in 51 percent of its villages, is the only exception.

### ***Institutional changes in the villages***

Looking back, it is apparent that considerable change has occurred over time. Among the institutions that have taken over the traditional social administration are the:

- Revenue department
- Forest department
- Police department

These departments and their activities have taken the decision making process away

Table 5.19 **Modern institutions in the villages**  
(percentage of Village Reports that discussed this issue)

Region	Community institutions	Youth groups	Women's group(s)
Northern region	40	27	19
Central plains	48	30	26
Southern region	46	22	10
State	44.6	26.3	18.3

Source: Village *Jan Rapats*, Part III

### **From the people**

Our village has fraternal social relations. It does not face any problem. Whatever problems occur, they occur within the village. On the religious front, *navtha* (a devotional programme) is organised. Traditional festivals like *hariyali*, *Diwali* and *Holi* are celebrated with fervour.

**Lifestyle:** The lifestyle of the village is simple and the living good.

**Arts:** Arts find expression through the medium of music provided by our village musician, Kotwar Sarju.

**Literature:** We get to read stories, serials, books through the *Panchayat*.

**Dance:** The various kinds of dances include *suva*, *karma* and *dandia*.

### **Choice of a life partner:**

Life partners are chosen in the traditional way. The elders choose the partner and the children accept the choice.



**Education:** Our village has an alternative school system in which education is given from Class 1 to Class 5.

**Values in relationships:** The relations between husband and wife are good. Father-mother, father-son, brother-sister, neighbours all share good relations with each other. The bonds of friendship have survived for years, as a result of which there is harmony.

*Ralai village, Mehratola Gram Panchayat  
Charama Development Block, Kanker*

## From the people

### Where are we?

A lot of change has occurred in the institutional system as it prevails today. The joint family is breaking down. Individualism is becoming more widespread. Many social institutions are breaking down. The importance of social unity is diminishing. Youth groups no longer participate in cultural and religious activities as they used to. Unethical and anti-social activities are on the increase. The village administration has been entrusted to the *Gram Panchayat*. Through the Government, it is constructing youth centres, cultural centres, drama theatres, *mahila mandals* and youth group centres.

### Where do we wish to reach?

We would like to set up an institutional system that will strengthen the social organisation of the family. People want to develop traditions and cultural and social consciousness, so that the village can become pre-eminent, strong and organised.



*Mainpur village, Mainpur Gram Panchayat, Charama Development Block, Kanker*

We get no benefit from any of the *Panchayat* projects. Everything just remains the same.

*Ambikapur Development Block in Surguja*

from the village. Under the aegis of these departments, many new institutions have emerged. These institutions are the *Gram Panchayats* and *Gram Sabha*, the *tendu* leaf committees, the forest protection committees, the watershed committees and the self-help groups. These modern institutions impact upon the behaviour and traditions of village society in a number of ways.

### ***Institutions promoted by external agencies***

All the villages discussed the institutions promoted by external agencies. In the last

two-three decades many new institutions have started functioning in the villages. The Village Reports make clear that these institutions are promoted by outside agencies, and that the villages have very little control over them. Table 5.20 shows the percentage of Village Reports that report the presence of these institutions. Interestingly, most of these institutions are either Government line management departments or project-based committees, like the watershed committees. Not surprisingly, schools and *anganwadis* are the most widespread institutions in the villages. Nearly 90 percent

Table 5.20 **Institutions promoted by external agencies in the villages**  
(percentage of Village Reports that discussed this issue)

Region	School	Anganwadi	Post office	Bank	Revenue	Police	PHC	PDS	Veterinary	Panchayat	Watershed committee	Forest committee	Hostel for students
Northern region	96	79	11	5	3	4	17	39	12	50	24	28	9
Central plains	80	60	13	8	6	5	38	53	13	56	20	22	11
Southern region	92	62	6	5	2	4	24	16	5	58	23	21	8
State	89.3	67	10	6	3.7	4.3	26.3	36	10	54.7	22.3	23.7	9.3

Source: *Jan Rapats*, Part III

of the villages say that there is a functioning school in their village.<sup>17</sup>

The *Gram Panchayat* is considered to be a Government department, rather than an institution of self-government. About 50 percent of the villages list *Panchayats* as one among many institutions that are controlled and governed by an agency outside the village. Certain institutions like the Police and the Revenue department are not perceived as functioning or working in the village, but they do exist. A very small number of villages (less than 10 percent in every district) say that these departments are working in their village. Institutions like banks and post offices have been listed on their physical presence in the village.

### From the people



Today our village has the following institutions 1. Pre-middle School 2. Middle School 3. EGS 4. *Anganwadi* centre 5. Girls' hostel 6. Police camp 7. Primary health centre 8. Ayurvedic hospital 9. Forest office 10. Post office 11. *Saraswati Shishu Mandir*. The village also has social institutions like a youth group (*navyuvak mandal*), a women's group (*mahila mandal*), and a *ghotul*.

Village Report Dhorai, Panchayat – Dhorai, Block Narainpur, Bastar, Narainpur Block, Bastar

### Level of awareness regarding schemes and institutions

Given the presence of a number of external agencies in the villages of Chhattisgarh, the question that arises is how effective these

Table 5.21 **Level of awareness about Government schemes**  
(percentage of Village Reports that discussed this issue<sup>18</sup>)

Region	Very good	Good	Average	Low	Very Low
Northern region	3	20	50	23	5
Central plains	3	43	32	12	4
Southern region	2	20	59	21	1
State	2.7	28	47	19	3.3

Source: Village Jan Rapats, Part III

institutions are, and to what extent do they make a difference to the life of the village. A reasonable number of villages (47 percent) say that the level of information about various schemes is average.

In the central plains region, 43 percent of the villages say that the level of awareness regarding Government schemes is good. The northern and southern regions show a different trend. Twenty-one percent of the Village Reports of the southern region say that the level of awareness about Government schemes is low. Similarly, 23 percent of the villages in the northern region say that the level of awareness about Government schemes is low; in the central plains, this figure is only 12 percent.

### Role of Government institutions and employees

A large number of the institutions operating in Chhattisgarh are in fact promoted, managed, or set up by the Government and its departments. An analysis of how the Government is perceived is a telling commentary on the state of development in the region.

<sup>17</sup> However, in Rajnandgaon and Bilaspur, the percentage of Village Reports, which say that there is a functioning school in the village is considerably lower, at 70 and 75 percent respectively. This reflects the low access to schools in these districts.

<sup>18</sup> In an attempt to answer this question, 16,781 villages discussed the working of Government institutions and the level of awareness among the people regarding the schemes that are implemented by these institutions.

Table 5.22 **Perceptions about Government agencies**  
(percentage of Village Reports that discussed this issue<sup>19</sup>)

Region	Cooperative	Satisfactory	Not satisfactory	Low strength of employees
Northern region	38	16	23	23
Central plains	31	20	30	18
Southern region	32	26	23	23
State	34	21	25	21

Source: Village *Jan Rapats*, Part III

Government institutions, voluntary organisations and self-help groups also operate in the villages. Discussions held in the villages provide critical data about the role of Government institutions, the attitude and performance of their employees. While some Village Reports are not happy with the work of the Government agencies, others feel that the Government is largely supportive.

The people feel Government employees should be more honest and accessible to the people. There is some mention of self-help groups in the *Jan Rapats*, but they are not considered important in bringing about social change in the villages. In fact, the self-help groups have not had any substantial impact in the villages and even today villagers continue to depend on moneylenders for loans.

Only one in three villages (34 percent) says that Government institutions are cooperative. In Dantewada district, for example, only 14

percent of the Village Reports say that the Government institutions are cooperative. In the State as a whole, 25 percent of the villages feel that the work of Government institutions is not satisfactory. One-fifth (21 percent) of the Reports feel that this is partly because the number of Government employees is less than the number required, and this affects their functioning.

The perception of the people with regard to Government employees is similar. At the State level, 33.7 percent of the villages feel that Government employees are cooperative. An inter region comparison reveals that only 30 percent of the Village Reports in the central region say that the Government employees are cooperative. About 16 percent of the Village Reports say that the work done by the employees is satisfactory. However, a slightly higher percentage (19 percent) of Reports categorise the work of Government employees as not satisfactory. This percentage

Table 5.23 **Perceptions about Government employees**  
(percentage of Village Reports that discussed this issue)

Region	Cooperative	Satisfactory work	Not satisfactory	Busy in other work	Interested in gossip	Do not help people
Northern region	37	17	24	10	8	5
Central plains	30	14	26	20	5	6
Southern region	34	16	7	14	12	15
State	33.7	15.7	19	15	8.3	9

Source: Village *Jan Rapats*, Part III

<sup>19</sup> 12,435 villages discussed the issue of Government departments and their employees.

is considerably lower in the southern area, where it is only seven percent, but the unhelpful nature of Government employees is recorded as being substantially higher here. Nine percent of the reports suggest that Government employees do not help the common people.

### Expected nature of change in these institutions

The villages discussed the institutional set-up and the behaviour and attitude of employees. The reports reflect a strong desire for change in the Government institutions. They stress that whatever be the nature of change, it should improve the quality of work. Most villages feel there is a need to focus on the provision of adequate staff and resources. They want more efficient and cooperative Government institutions, with considerably more resources.

The Village Reports advocate that:

- Adequate resources should be available to Government institutions, so the villages can access them
- The institutions should be able to provide financial assistance to the villages and the people more efficiently
- There should be adequate employees in the

institutions, so that they are able to cater to the requirements of all the villages

- The quality of services need improvement
- The regular presence/attendance of employees in the offices is crucial for effective and better functioning
- Employees should be sensitive to the requirements of the people and try to solve their problems
- Government institutions must assist the villages in constructing necessary buildings like schools, warehouses for storage, community halls and other functional buildings.

### Role of villages in the process of change

All the villages discussed their role in changing the institutions in the villages. The people feel that they have an important role to play in changing the way the institutions function in the villages. They see the following roles for themselves:

- Contributing for labour to work carried out in the village
- Participating in the functioning of these institutions

Table 5.24 **Expected change in the role of the Government institutions**  
(percentage of Village Reports that discussed this issue)

Region	Adequate employees	Village level works be given to Panchayats	Availability of resources	Improvement in service quality	Financial assistance	Building assistance	Sensitive to needs of villagers	Regular presence of employees
Northern region	14	23	23	27	52	18	12	11
Central plains	23	17	40	18	53	22	8	24
Southern region	21	11	29	24	27	26	13	25
State	19.3	17	30.7	23	44	22	11	20

Source: Village Jan Rapats, Part III



Table 5.25 **Role of villages in changing the institutions**

(percentage of Village Reports that discussed this issue)

Region	Contributing Labour	Community participation	Assistance in information dissemination	Regular attendance at meetings
Northern region	51	33	23	27
Central plains	51	64	31	23
Southern region	13	42	23	6
State	38.3	46.3	25.7	19

Source: Village *Jan Rapats*, Part III

- Taking responsibility for the dissemination of information regarding various schemes and the functioning of different institutions
- Regularly attending meetings

### Support needed from outside agencies

While detailing the areas where the villages are willing to take the responsibility for affecting change in the role of the institutions, the reports also speak of the support needed from outside agencies. The development and spread of the

institutional structure in rural areas over the past two or three decades has taken place alongside existing traditional social institutions. The new institutional structure holds out the hope of change in the mores, rules and regulations of village society.

The Village Reports highlight several ways to improve these institutions and widen their impact. They list nine areas where they need outside support to change the institutions working in their villages. These areas are economic assistance, training, help in constructing buildings, additional resources, prizes and motivation, help in organising regular meetings, access information, institutions that can assist in promoting small scale industries, and finally, institutions for promoting higher and technical education. Economic assistance, training and resources are the three areas where outside support is most required.

The existing institutions have influenced society substantially. Educational institutions have ushered in winds of change across large parts of the State, and have kindled new hopes and ambitions in people. The challenge today

Table 5.26 **Support needed from outside the village**  
(percentage of Village Reports that discussed this issue)

Region	Economic assistance	Training	Building	Resources (other than financial)	Prize and motivation	Help in regular meetings	Information	Institution for promoting small-scale industry	Institutions for promoting higher and technical education
Northern region	43	26	16	20	1	3	10	5	2
Central plains	44	29	17	15	9	6	9	12	7
Southern region	51	31	11	12	4	2	6	7	8
State	46	28.7	14.7	16	4.7	4	8.3	8	6

Source: Village *Jan Rapats*, Part III

is to prevent these hopes and ambitions from transforming into a pessimism that may halt change. This might happen if the system does not change in consonance with the aspirations of the people. The overwhelming desire for change that is evident among the people necessitates a transformation in the institutions that govern life in Chhattisgarh.

### **Perceptions regarding the functioning of Panchayats and Gram Sabha**

Effective functioning of the *Gram Sabhas* and the *Gram Panchayats* can be the catalyst for change in rural Chhattisgarh, and can take the people towards a self-sufficient and autonomous society. While these institutions are seen as the harbingers of change, the experience of the people so far has not been very encouraging. Yet, the people are hopeful and optimistic that change will come.

#### **Panchayats**

Everyone accepts that the *Panchayati Raj* has helped in some limited decentralisation. There has been some change in every village since the introduction of the *Panchayati Raj* system. People feel that development is possible in each village, if the *Sarpanch* is proactive. They are also aware that resources and facilities that had not come to their villages for the past 50 years are now have accessible, following the constitution of *Panchayats*. However, they continue to feel excluded from the system.

In many villages, people express some dissatisfaction with the work that has been

undertaken. They say it is not in accordance with the wishes of the villagers. Most villages consider the *Panchayat* to be a Government department or part of the Government system. The reasons for this feeling are the reservation of posts in *Panchayats*, Government instructions on the work to be done, and Government's participation in implementation. The people see the *Panchayats* as being different from the tribal *Panchayat*, which makes its own decisions.

This perception of the *Panchayats* as being non-representative leads to low participation at *Gram Sabha* meetings. The people say that most of the discussion at these meetings and the decisions taken there are related to the implementation of Government programmes. From Surguja to Korea to Dantewada, the hopes of the people in the *Panchayati Raj* system have been belied. The District and Village *Jan Rapats* make clear that the people see the *Panchayat* system as a system for distributing Government patronage, not as a unit for self Government.

The District *Jan Rapats* of Bastar, Raipur, Dantewada, Korea and Mahasamund clearly indicate that people equate the *Panchayat* with any other Government department.

The lack of any observable change is indicative of the absence of synergy between the *Panchayati Raj* institutions and the Government departments. If change is to be initiated in the system, it is necessary to change the perception of the people regarding these institutions.

Regarding the perception of the people on the subject of *Panchayats*, an analysis of the *Jan Rapats* show that 12 percent of Village Reports say that the *Panchayat* system has encouraged nepotism within the village society and that the *Sarpanch* and other influential members try to use the *Panchayats* for their own benefit.

#### **From the people**

We get no benefit from any of the *Panchayat* projects. Everything just remains the same.



*Ambikapur Development Block in Surguja*

Table 5.27 **Perception regarding Panchayats**

(percentage of Village Reports that discussed this issue<sup>20</sup>)

Region	Encourages nepotism	Power to people	Institution of development	Rule of Sarpanch	Window to information	Institution for positive change
Northern region	10	22	31	9	18	41
Central plains	18	18	37	24	29	41
Southern region	8	6	18	7	11	43
State	12	15.3	28.7	13	19	42

Source: Village Jan Rapats, Part III

While 15.3 percent of the Reports say that the *Panchayati Raj* system has given power to the people, 13 percent (only marginally less) say that it has actually given power to the *Sarpanch*. Yet, 28.7 percent of the Village Reports say that the *Panchayat* is an institution for the development of the village. Twenty percent of the Reports say that the *Panchayat* works as a disseminator of information. The encouraging aspect is that a substantial percentage of the reports (42 percent) say that the *Panchayats* provide an opportunity for positive change in the villages.

Even though the *Panchayati Raj* system has led to increased participation in programmes and some influence of the people in resource allocation, the general feeling based on the experiences of the last five years is that:

- It is the *Sarpanch* who is the most active element in the *Panchayati Raj* system
- There is no participation of the *Panchs* (other members)

- Women representatives are not active
- Government does not give enough importance to the *Panchayati Raj* system
- Government employees are not interested in working with the *Panchayats* and interact only with the *Sarpanch*, and that too, only when they are forced to
- Parallel committees, like the watershed committee and forest protection committee, are already doing work similar to that of the *Panchayats*.

### **Lack of financial information**

Villages have little information about the income and expenditure of *Gram Panchayats*. At the State level, only five percent of the villages say that they have information about the annual income and expenditure of their *Gram Panchayat*. An exceedingly high proportion (95 percent) of Village Reports say that the people do not have any financial details regarding their *Gram Panchayat*. In Kabirdham, Raipur, Rajnandgaon and Bastar, more than five percent of the villages have information about the income and expenditure of their *Gram Panchayat*. In other districts, the percentage is less than five percent. These figures point to a lack of transparency in the functioning of the *Panchayats*.

This situation warrants intervention from the State Government so as to ensure transparency in the functioning of the *Panchayats* and see that the laws, which require that the *Panchayats* share financial information with the *Gram Sabha*, are followed.

<sup>20</sup> Detailed discussions on *Panchayats* were held in 13,554 villages

Table 5.28 **Information about income and expenditure of Gram Panchayats**  
(percentage of Village Reports that discussed this issue<sup>21</sup>)

Region	Yes	No
Northern region	4	96
Central plains	6	94
Southern region	5	96
State	5	95

Source: Village Jan Rapats, Part III

### **Change in the functioning of Panchayats**

The Village Reports say that the people want *Panchayats* to be more open in their functioning and to reflect the sentiments, needs and aspirations of their members. The areas which the *Panchayats* need to address are:

- More transparency
- Priority attention to the most deprived
- More participatory functioning
- Increase in the participation of women
- Construction and development

Table 5.29 **Willingness of people to participate in activities of Gram Panchayat**  
(percentage of Village Reports that discussed this issue)

Region	Yes	No
Northern region	78	21
Central plains	73	19
Southern region	82	13
State	77.67	17.7

Source: Village Jan Rapats, Part III

- Employment promotion
- Good planning
- More assertive role
- Information dissemination

The people want to participate in the activities of the *Panchayats* and want the *Panchayats* to function democratically (77.67 percent of the reports say that the people are willing to participate). This sentiment reflects that the people are aware of the potential role that these institutions can play. A large percentage of the reports express the view that the functioning

Table 5.30 **Change in the role of Panchayats**  
(percentage of Village Reports that discussed this issue)

Region	Transparency	Priority to poor	More participation	Increase in the participation of women	Construction and development	Institution that promotes employment	Institution for good planning	Assertive role	Centre for information dissemination
Northern region	30	13	17	17	32	18	13	27	21
Central plains	42	27	36	15	50	18	13	16	25
Southern region	27	14	16	19	23	9	4	12	11
State	33	18	23	17	35	15	10	18.3	19

Source: Village Jan Rapats, Part III

<sup>21</sup> All the villages discussed the role of the *Panchayats* and how they want this role to change.

of the *Panchayat* be more transparent and participatory, and take on a development role. This will require the *Panchayats* to initiate better planning to develop as centres for information dissemination, and tackle issues of poverty and employment generation. The reports also speak of increasing the participation of women in the activities of *Panchayats*. Villages in almost all the districts wish to see this change, although at the aggregate level the percentage is only 17 percent.

### Gram Sabhas

The village community does meet to discuss and resolve mutual disputes and quarrels, but they do not consider these to be *Gram Sabha* meetings. The Government does not consider these to be legal meetings of the *Gram Sabha*, because the *Panchayat* laws stipulate that a certain quorum is needed. The village has its own definition of quorum, and considers the presence of one individual from each family as fulfilling this criterion.

In many villages, the *Gram Sabha* or general assembly is non-functional. It is seen as a body that comes together to reap the benefits of the projects that are being implemented by the *Panchayat* and does not represent the people.

Table 5.31 **Level of information about Gram Sabhas**

(percentage of Village Reports that discussed this issue)

Region	Very high	High	Average	Little	Very little
Northern region	3	9	38	28	22
Central plains	4	16	37	32	12
Southern region	1	4	35	32	28
State	2.7	9.7	36.7	30.7	24.0

Source: Village *Jan Rapats*, Part III

Information in the villages about the role and responsibility of the *Gram Sabha*, its powers and duties is rather limited. This is disappointing because this is the first institution at the village level and should ideally be the most dynamic.

More than half the Village Reports say that they have either little or very little information about the powers and role of *Gram Sabhas*. Only 12.4 percent (9.7 plus 2.7 percent) of the reports say that they have a very high or a high level of information about *Gram Sabhas*. A little over a third (36.7 percent) of the villages has an 'average' level of information on *Gram Sabhas*. The central plains of the State are more aware compared to the southern and northern regions of the State.

Table 5.32 **Perceptions regarding the Gram Sabhas**

(percentage of Village Reports that discussed this issue)

Region	Institution that empowers community	Place which is formal	People come for their work	Very difficult to fulfil quorum	Place of information dissemination	Good concept	Medium for development
Northern region	14	22	16	23	26	27	12
Central plains	15	35	29	43	41	28	14
Southern region	13	19	10	8	18	16	8
State	14.0	25.3	18.3	24.7	28.3	23.7	11.3

Source: Village *Jan Rapats*, Part III

While a little less than 25 percent of the Village Reports say that the concept of *Gram Sabha* is very good and recognise that it creates a space for people to participate in the decision making process, only 14 percent of the reports affirm that the *Gram Sabha* actually empowers the community. It plays an important role in disseminating information about Government schemes and programmes (28.3 percent of Village Reports). About 11 percent of the reports see the *Gram Sabha* as a medium that ensures the development of the village.

The people's experience regarding the functioning of the *Gram Sabhas* over the last seven or eight years has not been very positive. One out of four Village Reports regards the *Gram Sabha* as a formal institution. Another common complaint is that the upper tiers of the *Panchayat* do often not respond to the proposals that are sent by the *Gram Sabha*. Villages also feel that only those who think they can get some benefit from the *Panchayat* and the *Gram Sabha* attend the meetings of these institutions. It is difficult to even get a quorum at the *Gram Sabha* meetings, because people do not attend them. They feel the institution cannot fulfil their expectations. The limited support of block and district level *Panchayat* makes the situation worse. The concept of management

powers and ownership rights being given to *Gram Sabhas* has yet to penetrate the villages. In areas where it has been introduced, villages have not been able to put it into practice. The *Jan Rapats* point to the following departments for their lack of cooperation:

- Revenue department
- Forest department
- Public distribution system
- Agricultural department

The villagers feel that the style of functioning of these departments and the attitude of their staff has remained unchanged.

However, they realise that the *Gram Sabha* has certain powers and if it operates democratically and in a more participatory manner, it can give them the power to take decisions regarding their village. This is clearly reflected in the expectations that the people have from the *Gram Sabha*.

An analysis of the *Jan Rapats* reveals that:

- More than 36 percent of the reports say that the Government should respond to

Table 5.33 **Expectations from the *Gram Sabha***  
(percentage of Village Reports that discussed this issue)

Region	It should help poor and destitute	Each hamlet should have its own <i>Gram Sabha</i>	Place for more information	Should become effective institution of control over resources and other institutions	Government should respond to the proposals
Northern region	9	12	23	17	28
Central plains	12	30	28	37	46
Southern region	4	10	26	24	36
State	8.3	17.3	25.7	26.0	36.7

Source: Village *Jan Rapats*, Part III



proposals sent by the *Gram Sabhas* if they are to play a more meaningful role.

- 17.3 percent of the village reports say that each village should have its own *Gram Sabha*.
- Twenty-six percent villages say that *Gram Sabhas* should become effective institutions of control over resources and other institutions.
- Eight percent of the reports see the *Gram Sabha* as playing a redistributive role and feel that it should help the poor and destitute.

It is important to reiterate that the people want the powers given to the *Gram Sabhas* by the Constitution and State enactments to be respected and implemented.

### Women in the *Panchayat* system

The village *Jan Rapats* discuss the role and status of women in Chhattisgarh, both in the institutional structure in general and in the *Gram Panchayats* and *Gram Sabhas* in particular. Twenty-nine percent villages feel that women have an equal status in the institutional set-up. This perception of equity is based on the following indicators:

- Access of women to all institutions
- Freedom to form *Mahila Mandals*
- Freedom to attend *Gram Sabha* meetings
- Freedom to contest *Panchayat* elections

The village community in general, and women in particular, say that they are not restricted from joining any institution. The status of women

Table 5.34 **Status of women in the institutional structure**

(percentage of Village Reports that discussed this issue)

Region	Equal to men	Almost equal to men	Less than equal	Lower than men
Northern region	31	28	24	16
Central plains	23	24	31	22
Southern region	34	19	70	12
State	29.3	23.7	41.7	16.7

Source: Village *Jan Rapats*, Part III

in the institutional structure reflects a better status in the northern and southern plateaus as compared to the plains of Chhattisgarh.

However, this does not mean that the traditional role of women is changing in rural Chhattisgarh. Only 29.3 percent of the reports say that the status of women in the institutional structure is equal to that of men. Forty-two percent of reports classify women's status as almost equal to that of men, while 16.7 percent of the reports express the view that the status of women is not equal and is actually lower than that of their male counterparts.

The status of women in the *Gram Sabhas* is categorised on a four-point scale. In the *Gram Sabhas* women's status is perceived to be better, with 60.6 percent (31.3 percent plus 29.3 percent) of the reports expressing the view that their status is high or very high. Fifteen percent of the Village Reports say that the status of women is lower than that of their male counterparts. Another 24 percent of the reports rank women's status as average.

As regards the status of women in *Gram Panchayats*, 17.3 percent of the Village Reports say that it is low compared to men. The high status in many cases is an outcome of the

Table 5.35 **Status of women in the Gram Sabhas**  
(percentage of Village Reports that discussed this issue)

Region	Low	Average	High	Very high
Northern region	19	18	35	32
Central plains	9	23	36	32
Southern region	17	37	23	24
State	15	26	31.3	29.3

Source: Village *Jan Rapats*, Part III

Table 5.36 **Status of women in Gram Panchayats**  
(percentage of Village Reports that discussed this issue)

Region	Low	Average	High	Very high
Northern region	16	42	28	13
Central plains	20	47	25	8
Southern region	16	41	36	8
State	17.3	43.3	29.7	9.67

Source: Village *Jan Rapats*, Part III

Table 5.37 **Ways to improve women's participation**

(percentage of Village Reports that discussed this issue)

Region	Educate women	Motivate women to participate	Continue with reservation	Improvement in employment	Provide training
Northern region	38	22	18	24	36
Central plains	36	28	41	40	34
Southern region	36	32	11	12	28
State	36.7	27.3	23.3	25.3	32.7

Source: Village *Jan Rapats*, Part III

provision of reservation for women. The percentage of Reports that classify women's status as high or very high drops dramatically from 60.6 percent (in the *Gram Sabhas*) to 39.37 percent (29.7 percent plus 9.67 percent) in *Gram Panchayats*.

The people recognise the important contribution that women can make to the economic status of communities and to the well-being of families. This is reflected in the suggestions that have been put forward to improve the status of women, both in the community and in the institutional organisation. The Village Reports identify five areas which require intervention to improve the status and participation of women. The first is literacy and education. Thirty-seven percent of the Village Reports feel that better provisioning for education and improved literacy will help better their status. Training and capacity building are seen as a means of empowering women by 32 percent of the Village Reports. Motivating women to participate in the activities of village level institutions has been stressed by 23 percent of the Village Reports.

Reservation is seen to be important in ensuring the representation of women in institutions. The people say that specific employment opportunities for women will empower them and help to improve their status both within the family and in the institutions.

## Conclusions and Challenges for the Future

The Village *Jan Rapats* have largely focused on the Government, the institutional structures connected to Government departments, *Panchayats*, *Gram Sabhas* and project-based institutions. The villages and the different classes of people have presented their views on subjects related to culture, traditions and social relationships. The people reiterate their resolve to change the system and overcome tradition and they expect the Government to be a participant in the process of change.

## **Institutional structure in Chhattisgarh**

The Village Reports have defined institutions in two ways:

- Those that have social approval
- Those that have legal approval

Institutions which have social approval are largely informal in nature but serve the useful function of maintaining society. The legally approved institutions are those which have been set up by the Government or Government departments. They have initiated a specific kind of change in the villages. For example:

- They have encouraged savings
- They have encouraged joint management of natural resources by the village and Government departments
- They have encouraged women to transcend social barriers and come forward to participate in social and political work

In generally, they have encouraged the mobilisation of villagers, and their activities have had two marked effects:

- Encouraging discussion on utilising outside resources for the continued development of villages
- Spreading information and knowledge to villages, to build a more modern society and social structure

There are three distinct categories of institutions present in rural Chhattisgarh: the

traditional and the modern; institutions that affect livelihoods and learning; institutions that oversee society and governance, culture and entertainment.

### **Traditional and modern institutions**

Traditional institutions in the rural context deal with traditions and lifestyles. These institutions are informal in character and are managed by rural society. Examples include the *ghotuls*, the caste *Panchayats* and the systems for social justice.

In the last two decades or so, banks, institutions managed by Government departments, voluntary organisations and religious organisations have also begun to appear in the villages. However, the villagers have a limited role in the management of these institutions. The top management formulates institutional policies and programmes. At the ground level, it strives to increase the participation of people in the implementation of its programmes.

Modern institutions, the spread of education and the communication media, modern lifestyles and culture are now influencing living patterns among the people and are beginning to occupy the space which was earlier covered by traditional institutions. The work style and philosophy of institutions set up by people and organisations from outside the village have shaped the development of community-based organisations and institutions.

### **Economic and educational institutions**

On the basis of their active role in the lives of the people and society, the following two kinds of institutions have high visibility:

- Institutions connected to livelihood and economic activities

- Institutions connected with imparting knowledge/teaching and spreading information

### **Social systems and entertainment**

From the perspective of the social system and source of entertainment, it is evident that:

- The older systems are effective in influencing social systems and local governance. Traditional systems and the *Panchayat Raj* are among these institutions
- Villages have their systems of entertainment, which are connected to the work, culture and life styles of the people. Popular forms of entertainment are cockfights and the famous *nacha* (dance) tradition of the Chhattisgarh plains

At different times and under different circumstances, village groups rely on the different systems, which have been described above.

However, while these institutions and systems are effective at an individual level in the areas in which they function, there is no coordination between them at the level of implementation of programmes. Another important concern is the quality of their personnel and the benefits that they offer. The opinions expressed by people clearly indicate that there is need for serious reconsideration regarding the delivery systems and processes because these do not measure up to requirements. Yet another concern relates to the coordination and dialogue between institutions, their employees/resources and the local people. It is apparent from the *Jan Rapats* that the system looks at people only as beneficiaries, who should be concerned only about the benefits they receive. The people have no control over the programmes, or the

resources, nor are they participants in the decision-making process at any stage.

While the people agree that some administrative reforms have taken place, they also stress that the institutional structure put in place by the Government has not been able to internalise these changes. The rules and systems to enhance decentralisation and people's participation have not been put into practice.

### **Systems of governance: hope for change**

The *Jan Rapats* reflect the hope that change will occur in the existing structure and functioning of the Government system. For example, while the people accept that relations have changed in the context of forest committees, they expect the forest department and its employees to understand the situation in the villages and change their attitude towards the people as well as their style of functioning.

The reports explicate the impact and spread of changes in the context of people's participation over the past two or three decades as a result of the institutional systems and their rules. While the system and its institutional structure have penetrated into distant villages, their functioning and people's participation still pose a challenge.

### **People's standards for assessment of institutions and their functioning**

People have their standards for judging the functioning of committees and institutional structures set up by the Government, its departments and other organisations. These are different from established indicators and standards. For example, the establishment of watershed committees and the fact that they have started to function may be seen as a measure of their success. However, the village

reviews these committees on the basis of a different set of indicators. These indicators, as evolved by the people relate to:

- Establishment
- Control
- Functioning
- The benefits they offer and the quality of these benefits
- Who established the specific committee the Government, the village, an individual or some other organisation?
- Why was the committee established?
- Who benefits from this committee and how?
- How does this committee benefit the poor?

Several questions arise in the context of the committees that have been set up by the Government or its departments, in particular the forest committees and education committees. While in many cases the committees are set up to implement Government projects and act as forums for people's participation, in practice these committees or institutions do not work in accordance with the people's requirements or wishes and the people do not therefore view these institutions as being 'successful'. They do, however, act as a medium of change, and result in some change in the attitude and behaviour of departmental employees. Another important function that they perform is that of information dissemination.

## The Way Ahead

### Complementary roles for the *Panchayats* and the Government

The biggest challenge lies in ensuring the effective working of the *Panchayati Raj* system. The main difficulty is that the *Panchayats* have been reduced to mere instruments that implement poverty eradication schemes and other Government programmes. The various departments of the Government do not involve the *Panchayats* in decision-making and the *Panchayats* are often marginalised.

In the initial years, the *Panchayat* system was perceived to be working. This may be because when the *Panchayats* were first established, they were not very assertive and Government departments did not see them as a threat. Now, as the *Panchayats* have become more aware of their powers and wish to exercise them, there are problems. There is a demand for change in the way things function and this is a positive development. The second phase, in which the *Panchayats* and the people are able to exercise the powers given to them, has to be planned. The *Panchayats* and the Government must complement each other and work together for development.



### **Revitalising the *Gram Sabhas***

The *Gram Sabhas* are largely inactive and attendance at their meetings is low. The people have not been able to exercise the powers given to the *Gram Sabhas* and these bodies are often ineffective and powerless. In some cases this is because the *Gram Sabhas* are constrained from exercising these powers, because the institutions that exercised them earlier have not handed them over to the *Gram Sabhas*. It is therefore important to develop capacities in the *Gram Sabhas*, so that they can exercise their powers and carry out their responsibilities. Government departments must also recognise their changed role and responsibilities.

### **Coordination in the institutional system**

If we examine the collective strength and resources of institutions active at the village, district and State level, two aspects become evident:

- In the rural areas of Chhattisgarh, every individual is a member of some institution

- Most institutions, especially those set up by organisations from outside the village, exist in isolation, and there a lack of coordination between them

These institutions need to be synergetic so that their collective energies are better utilised to speed up the process of development and change. A policy to ensure such coordination and plan strategies for the future is required. This is essential in order to offer protection against the setting up of new institutions, without first deliberating upon the capabilities and achievements of the old institutions.

It is now increasingly being recognised that the State and the community must complement each other in the development process if any meaningful progress is to take place. The Panchayati Raj system, the development of community-based institutions and the policy changes that have taken place over the past two decades evoke a dream of just such a future. Yet, the experience of the people makes clear that there are many challenges in actualising the principle of participative democracy and ensuring that it works.