

ALWAR



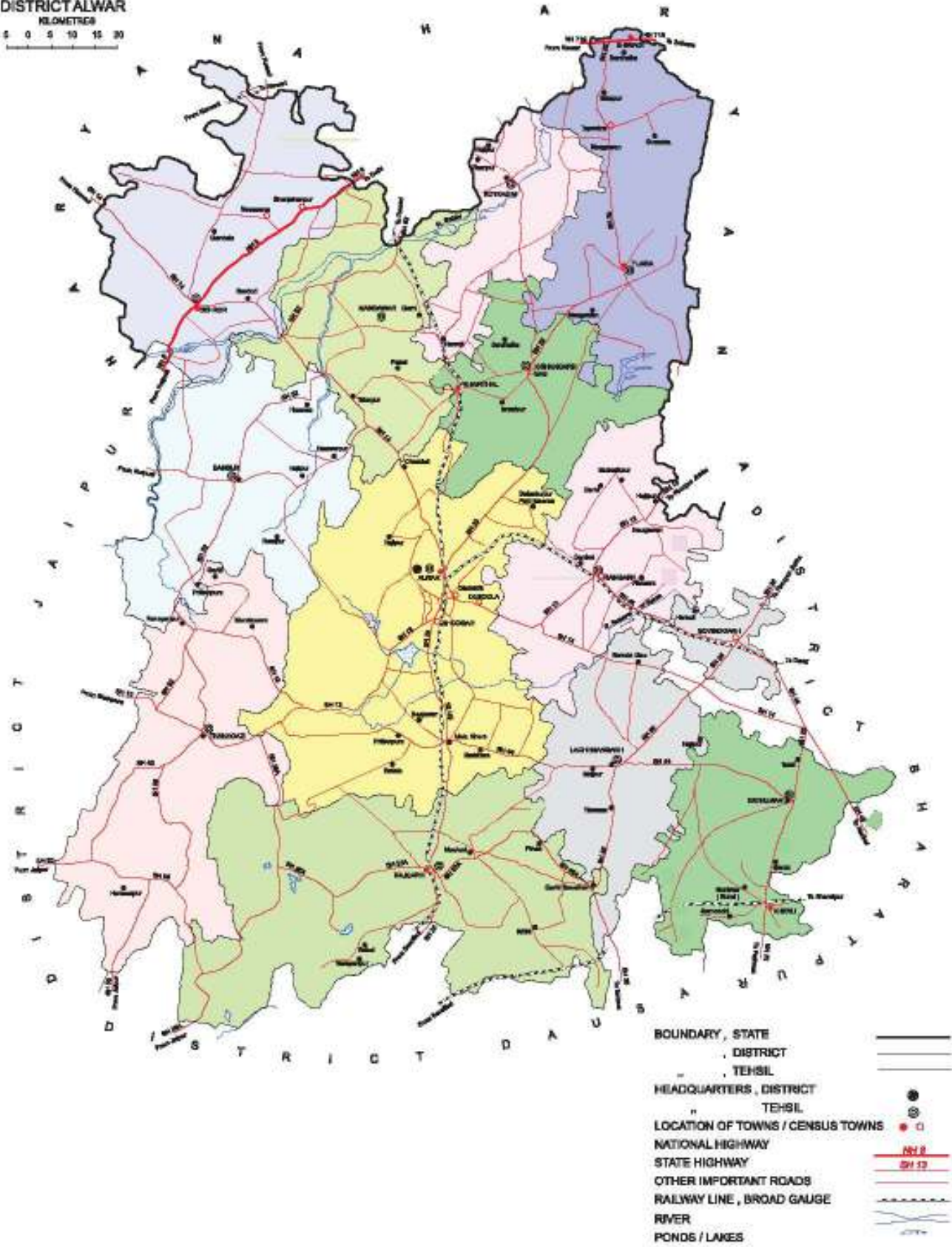
RAJASTHAN (INDIA)
DISTRICT ALWAR

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DISTRICT ALWAR

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Source: India Administrative Atlases, Census of India

Realising India Series (2017-2018)

District Alwar

This Realising India report is a part of the series compiled by the ISDM Knowledge and Research Centre to disseminate the secondary research put together by the students of the PGP-DL programme at ISDM along with their reflections from the field as an output of their Rural Immersion.

Each part of this series contains findings from secondary research on the district in the first section and individual reflective pieces written by the students in the group while in the specific district. Some of these pieces have also been published in blogs and/or other web portals.

**Names have been changed to protect identities and privacy of persons students interacted with.*

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ALWAR

History

There are many theories about the etymology of Alwar's name. Some say that the name has been derived from the Salva tribe, others hold that the city is named after Alaval Khan Mewati. Another study says that it was initially named after Maharaja Alaghraj. According to legends, the Pandavas in their thirteenth year of exile, lived in agyatvas (disguise) in Alwar (District Administration, 2017).

Alwar was the first princely state to enter into Treaty Relations with the East India Company. Alwar acceded unto the dominion of India following the independence of India in 1947. On 18th March 1948, the state merged with three neighbouring princely states (Bharatpur, Dholpur and Karauli) to form the Matsya Union. On 15th May 1949, it was united with neighbouring princely states and the territory of Ajmer to form the present-day Indian state of Rajasthan (District Administration, 2017).

Geography

Alwar is situated in the eastern part of Rajasthan. It is geographically situated between 27° 34' North Latitude and 76° 35' East Longitude at an elevation of 270 meters above sea level. The district is spread over an area of 8380 square kilometres. Alwar city is bordered by the Gurgaon district of Haryana on the North, on its North-East lies the Bharatpur district of Rajasthan and Mahendragarh of Haryana. The capital city of Jaipur is situated on its South-West and Dausa in the south. (District Administration, 2017)

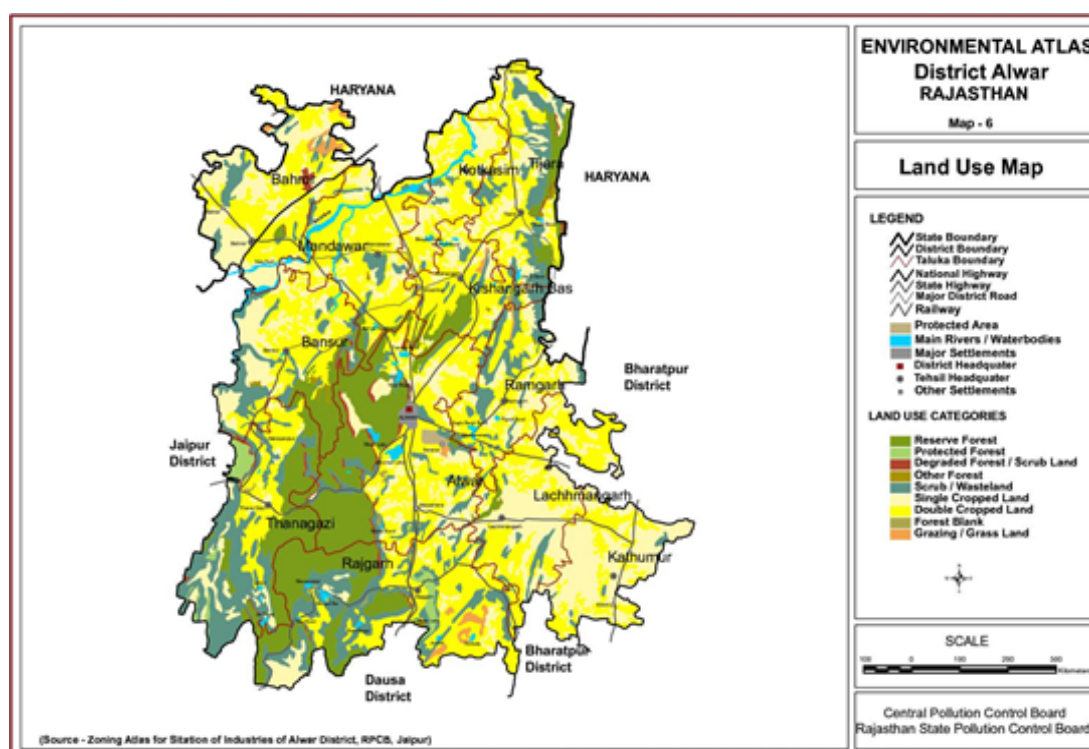


Figure 1: Land use Map of Alwar District

Source: Zoning Atlas for sitation of Industries of Alwar District, RPCB, Jaipur

Geography of Alwar comprises of rivers, mountains, plains and semi-arid areas. It is surrounded by the Aravalli hills from all sides which protects it from sandy and hot winds coming from the Thar desert. The area is adorned with expansive stretches of dense deciduous forests that are inhabited by rich flora and fauna. Tropical dry deciduous (Dhol) forests are mostly found in small patches in the northern and eastern slopes of the Aravalli ranges, mostly in Alwar, Bharatpur and Dholpur districts. (District Administration, 2017)

Throughout the year Alwar experiences dry climate, which is hot during the summer, cold in winter and a monsoon season which is quite short. Alwar in Rajasthan (East) holds the record for the highest maximum temperature of 50.60 C (1230 F) on 10 May 1956. (De, Dube, & Prakashrao, 2005) The region experiences very short monsoons. The average annual rainfall is around 57.77 cm. The average humidity of Alwar is 70%. The weather is very moderate, in comparison to other cities and towns of Rajasthan. The river Sahibi is the main river of this district. Ruparail is another important river in this district. (Maps of India, 2017)

Demographics

Based on local narratives, Alwar district is divided into four distinct regions. The Raath region, which shares its borders with Haryana, is majorly dominated by the Yadav and Jat community. It comprises of Bhiwani, Neemrana, Behror and Bansur blocks. The Mewat region, which is dominated by Meo-Muslims, consists of Tijara, Kishangarh Bass, Laxmangarh and Ramgarh blocks. Dhunawat region, bordering Jaipur, is dominated by the Meena community. It consists of Thanagaji, Rajgad and Raini blocks. The Kathumar region, bordering Bharatpur, is influenced by Braj Sanskriti. A small section of the populace lives inside the Sariska forest reserve as well.

The population of Alwar is 36,74,179 - of which 82.19 percent lives in rural and 17.81 percent lives in urban areas. The population comprises of 17.77 percent Schedule Caste (SC) and 7.87 percent Schedule Tribe (ST) population. (District Census Handbook - Alwar, 2011) The dominant religions of Alwar are Hinduism and Islam. Other religions are Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain and others (Census, 2011).

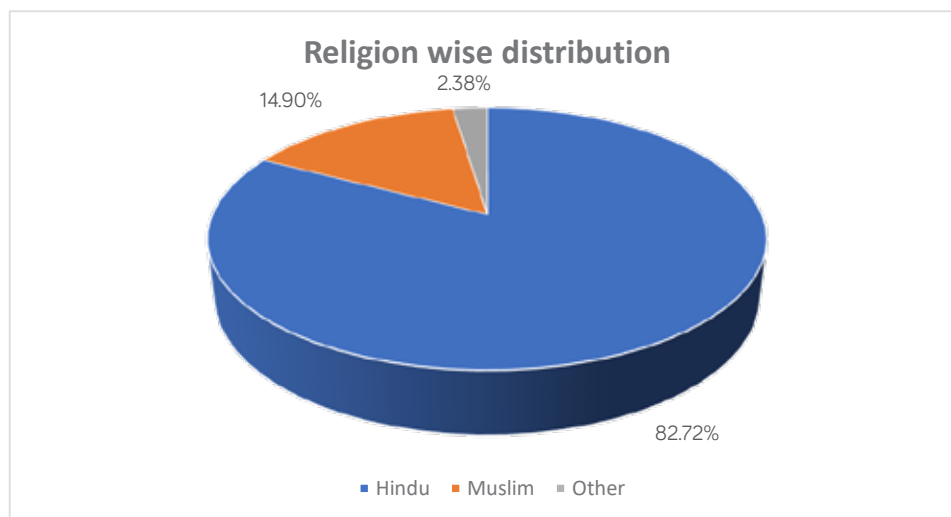


Figure 2: Religion wise distribution in Alwar (Census, 2011)

Alwar's sex ratio is 895 girls per 1000 boys which is lower when compared to the national sex ratio of 943. The rural sex ratio is 900 and urban sex ratio is 872 (Census, 2011). Literacy rate of Alwar is 70.72% - for rural it is around 68 percent and for urban areas it is around 83 percent (Census, 2011).

Administrative Structure

Alwar is one of the five districts that come under Jaipur division of Rajasthan.

District Collector and District Magistrate is head of the district for revenue and law and order matters. District Collector and District Magistrate are the head of District Administration. There are three Additional District Magistrates (ADM-I, ADM-II and ADM-City). For administration and development, the district is divided into Sub-Divisions and Tehsils.

District Alwar has 14 Sub-Divisions. There are 13 Sub Divisional Officers (SDOs) currently working at the

sub-division level. Alwar has 16 Tehsil headquarters and each one has a Tehsildar as an administrative officer who works according to the Land Record System to serve for the rural farmers and land holders.

To facilitate efficient rural development projects/schemes under Panchayat Raj system, the district is divided into 14 Panchayat Samitis (Blocks) and each one has a BDO (Block Development Officer) to serve as the representatives of the district administration in the rural areas. (Administration, 2017)

Table 1 – Administrative Division of Alwar District (Administration, 2017)

Sr.No.	Sub Division	Block	Tehsil	Sub-Tehsil
1	Alwar	Bansur	Alwar	Baroda Meo (Laxmangarh)
2	Bansur	Behror	Bansur	Bahadarpur (Alwar)
3	Behror	Kathumar	Behror	Bhanokhar (Kathumar)
4	Kathumar	Kishangarh Bas	Govindgarh	Harsauli (Kotkasim)
5	Kishangarhbas	Kotkasim	Kathumar	Khairthal (Kishangarhbas)
6	Kotkasim	Laxmangarh	Kishangarh Bas	Mandhan (Neemrana)
7	Laxmangarh	Mundawar	Kotkasim	Narayanpur (Thanagazi)
8	Mundawar	Neemrana	Laxmangarh	Tapukda (Tijara)
9	Neemrana	Rajgarh	Malakhera	Tehla (Rajgarh)
10	Rajgarh	Ramgarh	Mundawar	
11	Ramgarh	Reni	Neemrana	
12	Thanagazi	Thanagazi	Rajgarh	
13	Tijara	Tijara	Ramgarh	
14	Raini	Umren	Reni	
15			Thanagazi	
16			Tijara	

Education in Alwar

Literacy

As per 2011 census the literacy rate in Alwar is 70.72% (persons), 83.75% (males) and 56.25% (females) (Census, 2011).

For both males as well and females, the literacy rate was more than the average for Rajasthan i.e., 66%. (Rajasthan Education Board, 2017) However, it still remains lesser than the average rate for India which is 74%. There is a stark difference in literacy rate across gender in Alwar that is 83.75% for males while 56.25% for females. This difference implies gender inequality in access to education for girls (Census, 2011).

As per 2011 census data:

- The literacy rate for Alwar is higher than the literacy rate of Rajasthan for males and females as well as rural and urban
- The total literacy rate for Alwar is lower than that of India – it higher for urban while lower for rural

- The male literacy rate for Alwar is higher than that of India – it is higher for both urban and rural
- The female literacy rate for Alwar is lower than that of India – it is lower for both urban and rural

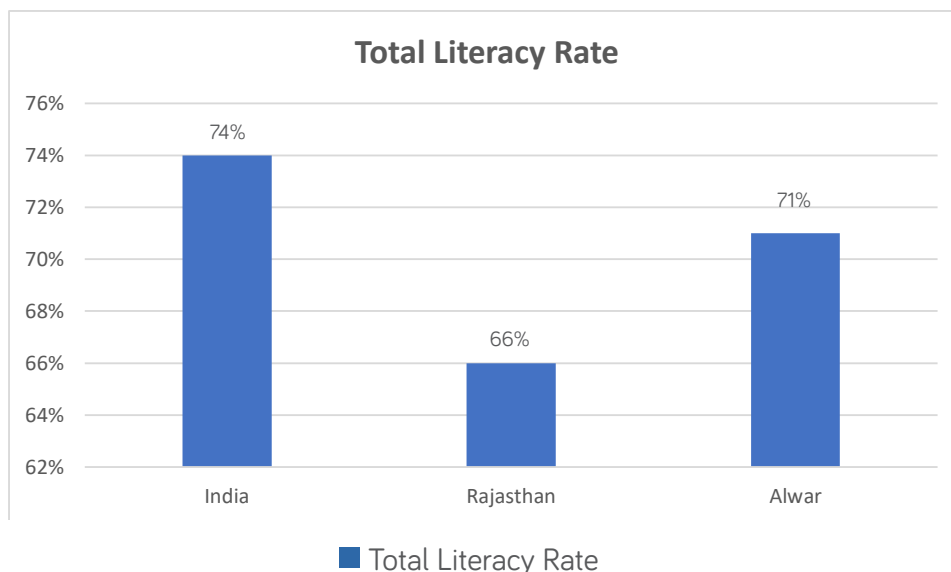


Table 3: Total Literacy Rate Alwar (Census, 2011)

Enrolments

	Primary Education	Upper Primary Education
Net Enrolment Ratio	74%	65%
Gross Enrolment Ratio	103%	88%
Enrolment of 1st to 8th	Boys = 54%; Girls = 46%	

Table 4: Enrolments ratio in Primary and Upper Primary Education (UDISE, 2015 - 16)

Net enrolment ratio: Enrolment in primary/upper primary education of official age group expressed as percentage of corresponding population.

Gross enrolment ratio: Total enrolment in primary/upper primary education regardless of age expressed as percentage of eligible official primary/upper primary school age population.

Enrolment in private is higher than government schools, which indicates that there could be a preference for private schools. Enrolment of girls is found to be lesser than boys at all levels. (UDISE, 2015 - 16)

Infrastructure for Education: Infrastructure plays an important role in increasing learning outcomes of children as seen in many studies. In Alwar, total number of government schools are 2986 which is higher in number than the total number of private schools- 2183. However, there are more private schools in rural areas than urban.

As per the District Information Systems for Education (DISE) report only 58% schools are electrified which is a poor number as there is high chance of absenteeism due to unavailability of fans during summer. About 98% government or government aided schools provide mid-day meals however there is no specific secondary data available on the quality of food provided under Midday Meal scheme. Schools with drinking water facility have reduced from 97% to 85% from 2014 as per the report. Water depletion in the district could be a factor behind this drop. All schools have facility of separate toilets for girls and boys. School classroom ratio is 22 and 65% schools have ramps available for disabled students. (UDISE, 2015 - 16)

Teachers: Teacher pupil ratio in Alwar is 19 (UDISE, 2015 - 16). Teacher school ratio is lower in government schools than private. Proportion of female teachers is 34% that is much lesser than male teachers while gender divide is even starker across teachers from ST, SC and Other Backward Castes (OBC). (UDISE, 2015 - 16).

Educational Schemes: Rajasthan Education Department runs various educational schemes, programmes, grants, bursaries, financial awards, loans scholarships, fellowships of School Education and Literacy, Elementary Education, Secondary Education, Higher Education, Adult Education, Tribal Education, Technical and Medical Education and Vocational Studies, skill development etc. (Government of Rajasthan, 2017)

The terms of benefits are mentioned below:

- Interest Subsidy (CSIS) on Education Loan
- Scholarship/Cash/Incentive/Awards
- Various vocational and technical training
- Educational assistance and facilities

Health in Alwar

Rajasthan has progressed well in the area of health in the last decade. (NITI Ayog, 2017). The Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) has reduced from 388 in 2004 to 244 in 2013 and Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) from 65 in 2005 to 41 in 2016 (NFHS-4, 2015 - 16). The MMR of Alwar is 238 with a lifetime risk 0.74% which is relatively better than Rajasthan's average on the whole at 264 at a lifetime risk of 0.89%. (Annual Health Survey - factsheet, 2011-12)

Alwar has 762 health sub centers (HSCs), 120 Primary Health Centers (PHCs), 36 Community Health Centres (CHC), 1 District hospital, 1 hospital for women and 1 government Ayurvedic hospital for almost 37 Lakh people. (RHS, 2014 - 15), (Census, 2011).

Only 5 percent pregnant women in Alwar receive complete antenatal care, i.e. up to 95 percent pregnant women do not have sufficient access to health services. 52 percent women get 1st antenatal care within first trimester of pregnancy. 81.9 percent women deliver their baby at institutes, while 1.6 percent of the total deliveries occur at home. 78.2 percent of women don't get standard maternal care. 27.9 percent of the total deliveries done at private hospitals are Caesareans, as compared to only 3.9 percent Caesarean deliveries in public institutes. 61.9 percent women receive financial assistance under the Janani Suraksha Yojana.

It appears that the socio-cultural practices in the district are causes for some of the health issues:

- 40.8 percent women age 20 - 24 years are married before 18 years of age and 9.7 percent females aged 15-19 are mothers or are pregnant i.e. early pregnancy (and potentially child marriage, which is prevalent in Alwar)
- Under-5 Mortality Rate (U5MR) of Alwar is 77, much higher than that of India (29). The leading reasons for this are malnutrition and water borne diseases. 66.9 percent of the diarrhoea cases are treated at hospitals.
- The treatment in private facilities in rural Alwar is greater than 60 percent
- Acute respiratory diseases are more common in rural areas (NFHS-4, 2015 - 16)

There are 692 villages in Alwar that have fluoride content in water above the permissible limit. This leads to osteoporosis and dental problems. (Hussain, Sharma, & Hussain, 2004)

Income and Work

Work participation rate (WPR) of Alwar district is 46.5 percent (32.1% Main workers and 14.4% Marginal workers) while the total non-workers are 53.5 percent. The gender gap in worker participation is 10.1 percent. Amongst workers the percentage of cultivators, agricultural laborers, workers in household industry and other workers (category of workers) are 52.6, 12.7, 2.0 and 32.7 percent respectively. (District Census Handbook - Alwar, 2011)

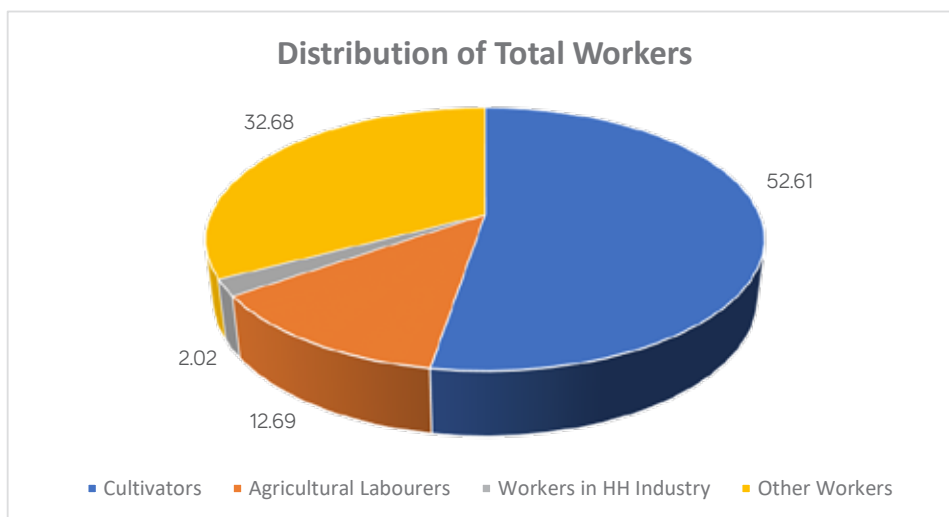


Figure 7: Distribution of Total Workers by Occupation

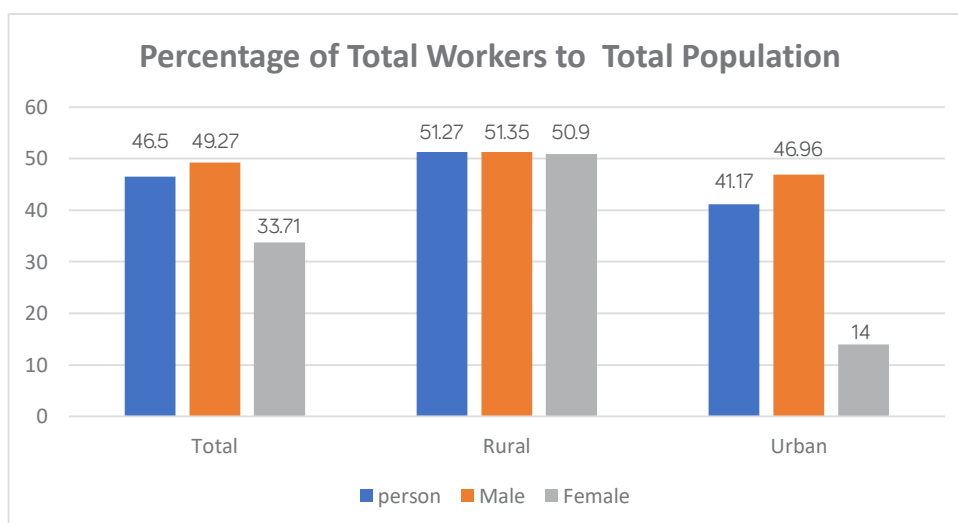


Figure 8: Percentage of Total Workers to Total Population (Datanet India Private Limited, 2017)

The concentration of large and medium industries is in the District Industrial Centre of Alwar and the District Industrial Centre of Bhiwadi. As on March 2016 there were 90 large units 11 medium units. Employment generated in large units was 39,938 and that in medium units was 2,267. There are a total of 21 industrial areas. (MSME, 2015 - 16)

There are number of tourist destinations near Alwar and directly or indirect engage 50,000 employees. The service enterprises include tourism industry (hotels, motels, etc.) and two and four-wheeler service workshops. The major cluster of industries includes:

1. Manufacturing Sector: Processed food, auto component, edible oil, cement pipes-jalies, leather tanning, etc.

2. Service Sector: Tourism industries, engineering workshop, beauty and herbal therapy, two and four-wheeler service workshop
3. Artisan Clusters: The cottage and artisan clusters of the district are mainly shoes embroidery, statue making (Murti Kala), pottery, Galicha, rope making, terracotta, Bans Tokri, etc. The major concentration of such artisans was found in Rajgarh, Thanagazi, Ramgarh, Bansur, Kishangarh, Laxhmangarh, Kathumar, Umrain, Mndawer, Kotkasim, Neemrana, Tijara. (MSME, 2015 - 16)

Energy

Access to clean energy for cooking and lighting purposes is a problem in Alwar. There is disparity in access to clean fuel for urban and rural areas. Only a small number of households have access to LPG cylinders, and most of them are urban households. A large population is still dependent on firewood and crop residue as sources of fuel. (NFHS-4, 2015 - 16)

As per Census 2011 data shows that 95.8% of rural households have access to electricity. (NFHS-4, 2015 - 16)

Water

Alwar is a water-stressed region, receiving less than 650 mm of rainfall per year (amongst the hottest in India). Most of the rain water either runs off or evaporates, leaving the land parched and dry for most of the year. The economy of Alwar is largely dependent on agriculture and need for water has increased over the years. (SANDRP, n.d.)

Groundwater is the main source of water in Alwar district. Almost 80 percent of people access water through hand pumps, bore wells, open wells, etc. The groundwater table has receded below the critical level and the state declared few parts as 'dark zones' – i.e. the situation was so severe as to warrant a restriction on any further extraction of groundwater. (District Census Handbook - Alwar, 2011)

Currently the groundwater is overexploited. It is observed that 692 villages out of 2000+ villages have fluoride content in water more than 1.5mg/litre (more than the permissible limit). Excessive fluoride content in water may lead to osteoporosis and dental problems. The availability of treated tap water is more in urban areas and for rural areas the water is sourced largely from open wells and tube wells. (Hussain, Sharma, & Hussain, 2004)

Interestingly, the NFHS-IV data says 98% of the rural households are connected with pure drinking water which is assumed to be treated tap water. (NFHS-4, 2015 - 16)

Rajasthan government runs a scheme to promote water conservation called Mukhya Mantri Jal Swavlamban Abhiyan (MJSA). The scheme is to be rolled out in three phases, of which phase 1 was completed by July 2016. Under MJSA, the state will cover 21,000 villages in four years. Aims and objectives of the program are on similar lines to that of adaptation of climate change and are eligible for funding under the Green Climate fund. For Alwar district in phase one, 232 villages have been covered (MJSA, 2015).

Food

Mustard is the major crop grown in Alwar while wheat and bajra are the major grains produced. Onions are the main vegetable grown in the district. According to data from the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), only 60% of the land is used for multi crop cultivation, which suggests that up to 40% of the land might be underutilized. (NICRA, 2012)

The Public Distribution System (PDS) system in Alwar is largely privatised - largely Fair Price Shops are private and only few are co-operatives. Consumers receive a message upon arrival of food supplies and

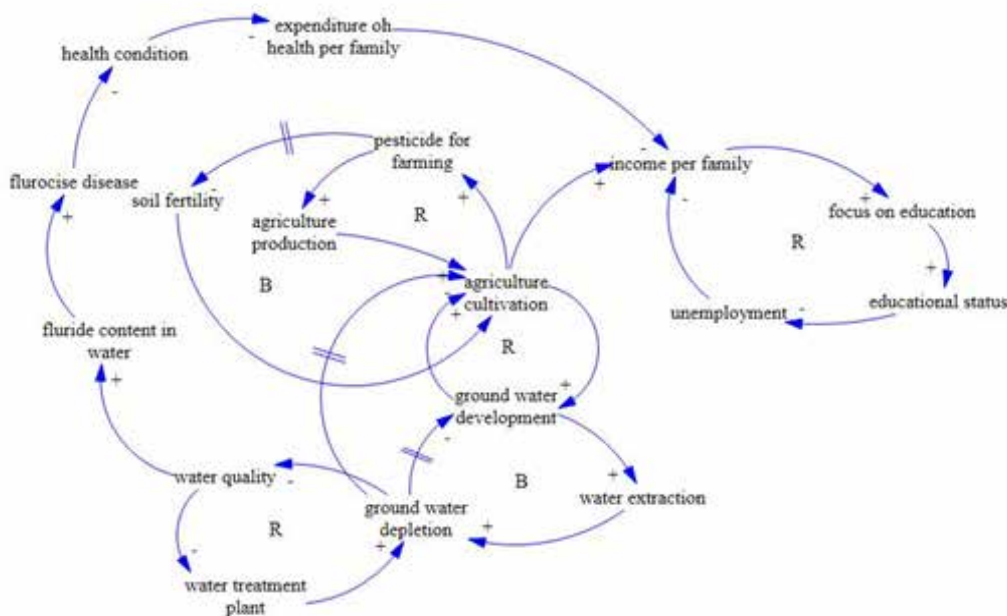
their respective purchases are also updated through text messages. Only small percentage of the BPL population has been issued ration cards.

Linking of Aadhaar cards has been mandated compulsory by the state government in order to avail ration through the PDS system. This goes against the Supreme Court order of not making the bio-metric authentication compulsory for PDS users. (Dreze, 2017)

Rajasthan government has taken number of new initiatives to remove corruption, improve efficiency and deliver higher number of products through PDS system. These initiatives include:

- Distribution of both PDS and non-PDS items
- Aadhar based identification of beneficiary
- PPP in Public Distribution System – Annapurna Bhandar Yojna (Singh&Gupta, 2016)

Impact of Water Depletion



Over the last decade, Alwar has been experiencing ground water depletion and water scarcity due to over-exploitation of groundwater and decreased rainfall. As a result, agricultural productivity has fallen in the recent years thereby impacting the livelihoods and income of households. Alwar being majorly a rural and agrarian district, agriculture and related activities are biggest source of livelihood. Decrease in rainfall and groundwater has adverse effect on agricultural output - it increases overall cost of agriculture and decreases income from agriculture and also leads to unemployment. Groundwater depletion increases the need for better treatment of water due to undesirable chemical contents such as fluorides. This leads to health issues like fluorosis. Increased expenditure in health leads to decrease in family income which has adverse impact on education of children, especially girls. There is scheme 'Mukhya Mantri Jal Swavalamban Abhiyan' operating in various districts to address the problem of water depletion. As better purifying facilities and clean water connection are being provided it is expected that the water quality is getting better (MJSA, 2015).

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Stories from the Field

☞ A memorable bus ride

I got onto a rickety private bus at 3.00 PM in Rampur to go to a village that was far away. The bus was almost full of people and the few remaining seats were held on by the people who were already in the bus. I walked to the rear end of the bus and found an empty seat beside an old woman. I felt naturally drawn to the old woman who was concerned about her co-passenger who hadn't come back from running an errand and it was already time for the bus to start its journey. She later gathered that the person wasn't coming back and gave place for my colleague to sit. It didn't stop there, the conductor had asked us to pay Rs 30 for the tickets, and she told us that it was just 20 and didn't sit silently until she was assured that we paid only Rs 20 for our tickets.

Once she calmed down, I began conversing with her. Language was a huge barrier, however our emotions and feelings helped us connect with each other. In the course of our conversation, with the help of my colleague I came to understand that she was unwell and had come to Rampur to get treated at the Primary Health Centre there. However, due to unavailability of medicines at that particular point of time, she was asked to come back at 5.00 PM in the evening. The availability of transport in that region is extremely poor because of which the old lady was going back empty-handed without being treated. Our conversation drifted further into her life. I got to know she became a widow at a very young age. She has two daughters and one of them is in Alwar pursuing her B.Ed degree. This old lady single-handedly brought up both her daughters and took care of their education by cultivating a small piece of land that she owns. I couldn't stop myself from taking both her hands into mine. These were the most calloused palms I have ever come across and it was difficult for me to imagine the amount of hard work she must have had to put in.

It is said time heals everything and that in due course, things will settle down, however I didn't see that happen in the case of this old woman. I couldn't help but ponder about how much pain she must have gone through and is still going through to have broken down in front of strangers while speaking about her deceased husband.

While living a life as difficult as hers, all she wanted was free medicines from the government hospital and she couldn't even get those. It indicates a huge failure on part of the government for not being able to discharge its duties and also the civil society for ignoring people like these. For those brief 15 minutes, I got an inkling of what it is like to be an uneducated old woman belonging to a lower caste from a poor economic background. It's a triple whammy and I silently wondered if I would ever have the courage and strength to go through what she went.

When my destination arrived, I got down from the bus and walked away feeling heavy. I couldn't help but think that widows such as the old lady have been further isolated by society.

— Veda Veeravalli

3 Stories of intelligence of a common man: insights from Alwar

I visited Alwar district as part of Realising India, a two-week immersion program as part of the Development Leadership programme. These stories are insights from interactions with individuals and observations from different parts of the district. Names of persons and places have been changed. These stories are narrations and open ended for interpretations.

Chapter 1: A proud farmer and his idea of government

It was the first day in the field and I went to attend a Self-Help Group meeting with my teammates. It was lunchtime when the meeting got over and we went out in search of food in the Kasba. All shops were closed since it was last day of the month. Finally, we got to a sweet shop in search of snacks to satiate our hunger, and there we met the main character of the story.

A middle aged Meo Muslim (an ethnic group that lives in the Mewat region) farmer sitting in the Brahmin's sweet shop smoking bidi proudly claimed himself a 'Jamindar' (land-owner). He has a large family of school going children and daughters of marriageable age who are all dependent on income from agriculture. Life has taught him the art of prediction and rationalising resources.

The area faces scarcity of water as ground water has gone down to three hundred feet deep yet he survives because he had dug a borewell three hundred feet deep ten years ago. He is a member of farmer's cooperative to gain access to interest free loans from the bank but he doesn't use seeds sold by government for cropping because his experience indicates that those are bad quality and with low yield. He uses this seed to feed cattle.

His eyes shone when he told that he produces food for his family and manages to support his family with the surplus. This year, the Bajra crop didn't grow well due to low rainfall in Kharif season but he is calm and composed as he has learned to live with it.

Chapter 2: Impoverished by Water

On a day while visiting a Meena (a caste group dominant in Rajasthan) hamlet to observe a Self-Help Group (SHG) meeting. The meeting showcased an odd SHG where men participated even though they weren't members. The meeting began as per usual- the core members (who were all women) mentioning their savings and putting accounts for the facilitator. After a while non-member males came to take part in the meeting and talks began of borrowings. All males were husbands or family members of member women. One was asking other men to borrow money as part of the SHG for him.

The man, a thin farmer dressed in dhoti kurta was seeking a loan of twenty-five thousand from the group so he could feed the village at a Bhoj. The reason for the Bhoj (feast) was that he dug an eight hundred feet borewell and had promised fellow villagers to a treat subsequently. The boring didn't work although he had spent around three lakhs. Despite no water coming, he had to keep his promise and throw a party. He is borrowing money for the Bhoj and has plans to dig another bore that will again cost around two lakhs. His logic to this is, "If I leave farming and go to find work as a labourer, I will earn 300 INR a day i.e. 9000 INR a month. 5000 rupees would go for running house and sending children to the school, 4000 rupees left to repay interest of earlier loans. I would be left with nothing and I have to do more to get more. I choose to do it to sustain." He chooses to be in debt trap rather than impoverished. It is saddening to see someone impoverished by what is essential for life.

Chapter 3: Handcapped by Technology

Walking on the streets outside the block office gave me an opportunity to interact with a group of young people chatting at a tea stall outside an Internet cafe. One of the young men looked at me and breaking

their political conversation, he asked me what I am doing here. I told them that we are students in the field to understand everything about the district, and their political discussion resumed. The young man sarcastically mentioned that nothing is happening in the district but making new ID cards every day. If I make one card, an order arrives to make another the next day. He took out his Bhamashah Card and said 'look I had applied for changes in this card one year ago to add my wife's name after I got married. It hasn't been done and I still keep my wedding card as proof. Don't know how long I will carry it. Unless it is rectified, I wouldn't be receiving benefits from it. Life is stuck among cards and identities'.

—Ravi Kant

Old Woman on the Bus

It was a busy afternoon when we boarded a jam-packed private bus. We were travelling to Jhiri village in Rajasthan. It is a remote village located in the Thanagazi block, also which known as most backward block, in Alwar district. This region is dominated mainly by the Meena community. The bus was flocked by men, women and children of all ages. There was hustle-bustle all around. Women clad in their bright colourful lehengas were trying to hold seats for themselves and their children. My friend, Veda and I managed to catch a seat besides an old woman. As the bus departed, Veda got into a conversation with this old woman. She spoke in the local dialect Marwari, and it was tough for us to fully understand what she was saying. But little did I know that this 15-minute conversation would turn out to be such a memorable experience.

The woman had a divine face and a beautiful smile. Her frail figure, wrinkled skin and rough palms hinted at the years of hard work and turmoil that she had undergone. She was unwell (fever and dizziness) and had come for a check-up at the Primary Healthcare Centre (PHC) at Pratapgarh. The doctor was unavailable, as usually happens with in public clinics, and she was asked to wait until 5 pm. She decided to return untreated instead of waiting for the doctor till the evening. This was because there are very limited options for transport, and she did not want to risk waiting at Pratapgarh till evening.

She then started narrating the story of her life. She had been widowed at a young age. With no financial security or support from her in-laws, she had to raise her children on her own. She cultivated a small piece of land to sustain her family. She worked as an agricultural labourer and took up any other work that could add to her meagre earnings. In these dire conditions, she somehow managed to educate her children. With a wide smile, she told us that her daughters are now studying and working in Jaipur. In her old age she lives alone and manages everything on her own. She had strived all her life to survive but did not lose hope no matter how bad the situation was. While listening to her story, something moved within me and tears started rolling down my eyes. And there she was – consoling me and wiping my tears away. I could see the love and compassion in her weary eyes. It wrenched by heart from within – how unfair things are for people like her while we enjoy privileges in our lives. They are denied their basic rights and subjugated to life-long atrocities while we complain about trivial things in life.

Later the bus conductor came and we bought our tickets. She thought we had paid him extra money (Rs. 10) and she immediately warned him not to overcharge us. This showed us the value of Rs. 10 in her life. I could only imagine how difficult it must have been for her to spend money on this bus travel, while she could not even get the required medical treatment that she deserved. As we approached Jhiri, we bade her farewell and got down. She was looking very intently at us and I wished that we had more time with her. I immediately rushed to the side of the bus and called for her. She reached out her hand towards me and gave the most incredible smile.

Gandhiji had said “I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you

may have seen and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him.” I hope to recall the face of this dear old woman in the future, as I take baby steps into the development sector.

—Nivedita Ghonge

Who will care for care givers?

I met an ASHA worker in Milkhpurr village. Her salary was Rs 1800. Her husband is a helper in one of the private hospitals in the district. She has very powerful voice and had detailed information about health systems at the grassroots level. Her daughter was studying in a private college pursuing her bachelor's degree. She recently met an accident and fractured her leg. She has another 18 year old daughter who was specially abled and the right part of her body was not functional.

The ASHA worker's house was in urgent need of repairs. She told me that she had tried hard to find treatments for her daughter who was differently abled but couldn't ensure any improvement to her condition. She feared the fate of her daughter after she couldn't look after her. She only hoped that her other daughter would help.

She was sad that there were no schools where her daughter could learn. Her only prayer was that she herself would be physically able to take care of her as long as possible. I felt agitated.

The ASHA worker receives Rs 300 from the government for every delivery in her village. She was angry that the wages of ASHA workers had not been increased for many years now and she said that most workers were struggling. There were times that ASHA workers would have to wait for months to receive their payments. Her opinion was that the government neglected the development and welfare of ASHAs.

We are all well aware that specially-abled children are amongst the most neglected section of our society but the plight of her mother was disturbing. She was helpless-economically and received no societal support. How her poverty had led to something which has a lifelong impact on her and now she couldn't do anything other than live with it. She was aware that states like Telangana and Kerala were giving Rs 6000 to ASHAs recruited under the National Health Mission.”. When it happened in other states why can't the local govt consider these amounts for the state too? I wish her more strength and willpower to endure her situation.

—Kishore Thota

How SHGs are creating women leaders from lower economic strata?

We largely see males in leadership roles. Also, we see that males are active in handling finances in rural areas. Additionally, men take decisions that affect every aspect in a family. Women have very limited participation in social, political and economic spheres.

During “Realising India” - rural immersion in rural Alwar, I had the opportunity to attend a federation meeting of many Self-Help Groups (SHGs). This federation had eleven executive members, who are representatives of village committees of many SHGs. The annual meeting was organized by the federation it was being facilitated by those federation leaders. These SHGs are nurtured by a local NGO called IBTADA that works on the empowerment of rural women for the last twenty years.

IBTADA works by forming SHGs and building capacities of women so that they can create village level committee of many SHGs. Subsequently, they support SHGs to create their federation, which includes SHGs from many villages. These federations employ local people and generate their own income. The women of each SHG is the owner of the federation.

During my field visit, I attend many SHG meetings. From ones that were one year old to those that were ten-year-old. During the first meeting, the discussions were on the savings and the distribution of loans. During the discussions, women were struggling to distribute the loan amounts. In another meeting, they were discussing whether they need a record keeper or not. I found out that women take loans for health expenditure, for their children's education and buying resources that generate more income for the family.

Finally, I attend meetings of groups that were between four and ten years old. Their savings and borrowing amounts were higher than newer SHGs. There meetings were systematically organised but conflicts also occurred. They were discussing about the investment of money that each woman borrowed from the group and also how they were facing challenges because of water scarcity and need of more money so that they can dig bore wells to access water. Because of this they collectively borrowed money from the federation. For example, six women borrowed eighty thousand rupees to dig a bore well. This federation had a goat farming company and major shareholders of this company are women.

Also, owing to these SHGs these women are now participating in their family's decisions making processes, in terms of finances or investment. This breaks the myth that women were not capable of handling money. Consequently, by realizing their potential those women have become more vocal and participate in development. In a village in Ramgarh block, these women SHG members took charge and were instrumental in closing the liquor shop in the village and raise their voice against domestic violence.

—Biswajit Brahma

Water as a source of poverty

I was given a glass of water, semi-brown in colour, the very first sip of which bombed my taste buds with all the salt and minerals it contained. What if I told you that an average woman in Alampur, a village in Alwar district, spent her early morning hours, traveling long distances, just to fetch this contaminated water used for drinking and cooking. When was the last time we had to think this much about the water we drink? We, the people of metropolitan upbringing, often don't realise how this basic universal right is the biggest struggle for most of our population, especially those living in the rural hinterlands of our country. This situation significantly impacts other basic human needs and rights as well - be it health, education or livelihoods.

Alwar comprises sixteen tehsils, and several social communities and castes - Meo muslims, Meena tribals, Hindu Rajputs, forest tribes, Yadavs and Baniya businesspersons. It has a large industrial area, and also has a illegal mining mafia. Alwar, is an agrarian society, which is largely dependent on water for their cattle and fields. With growing family sizes and excessive land fragmentation, there has been a significant rise in the demand for water. When asked about water, Azam Khan (name changed), a resident of Alampur, spoke about the 70s and 80s when they used to find water just by digging five feet. It was during this time that the government had incentivised construction of tube wells and borewells. While water was available at 50-60 feet in the 90's, today the table has dropped to over a thousand feet deep in some areas. Azam told us that he had not seen optimum rainfall (for rainfed agriculture) for over 20 years now.

A resident of Thanaghazi, another village in Alwar, spoke about how he raised loans (of about two lakh rupees) to dig a bore, and couldn't find water even at 1100 feet. He then fell into a debt trap - and has raised another loan to dig a bore at another location because he couldn't see a faster way to repay his first loan, especially given his skillset. He is currently on the lookout for odd jobs and opportunities that can help him raise money faster. As can be clearly seen, water has several forward and backward linkages. In my opinion, this problem is an amalgamation of the lack of awareness (of appropriate technology and indigenous methods), climate change, and dearth of alternative sources of income.

Azam Khan went on to talk about the quality of water, especially that found at deeper depths. He told us that there are excessive amounts of salt, silt and other minerals at such depths, which have severe consequences on their health and livelihoods. His son, who is 12 years old, had grey hair, and was suffering from joint pains and bone deformities. These occur due to excessive fluoride content in water (found in deep water tables) which lead to fluorosis. At this point, Azam reminisced about the lush green fertile lands of Alwar where farmers enjoyed large productivity and prosperity. Nowadays, there is a visible decline in crop productivity. Essentially, much bigger families, who are still largely dependent on agrarian occupations, have much lesser produce (especially after land fragmentation) and incomes to sustain livelihoods. They spend about a thousand rupees to water a third of an acre, every single time there is scanty rainfall. He said -

“Bhaiya, gareeb toh hum hain, fir hum kyun pani jaisi cheezon ke liye amiron se das guna zyada paisa dete hain?” (Why do I, a poor villager, pay ten times more than the rich for water?)

In Alwar, I realised an urgent need to address the water crisis - which has intersections with social constructs like class and gender, and hinders livelihoods, education and health conditions. Can we use appropriate and relevant technological innovations and indigenous methods to tackle the water crisis? Isn't there a need to acknowledge and work on climatic change, both at micro and macro levels? Should we bring a cultural shift from water intensive livelihoods to water efficient ones? Could we use community sharing and participative mechanisms to replenish water resources?

—Arpit Jain

Story of Mita in Alwar

On a bright sunny day, sat fifteen women for the monthly meeting of their Self-Help Group. I was an uninvited guest with my own agenda but was welcomed with open arms. I was surprised when they continued to respond to my question on their most debilitating problems in the village. I was listening carefully until I saw a baby girl who was one month old. The sight of that baby touched my heart. I had an urge to hold her and put her on my lap. I was looking at the baby and admiring her lovely smile until someone pointed towards a girl sitting towards the end of the group and mentioned that she was the baby's mother. I realised that she was the same girl we just talked about. I felt some sadness overpowering me taking over the warm feeling in my heart.

Oh! she is the same seventeen-year-old girl who lost her left arm in an accident and thus who got married to a specially abled person who was the younger brother-in-law to her younger sister. She was married off as a part of a tradition called “badla” (revenge) where siblings of married couples were married off to each other.

That sadness in my heart invoked many questions in the fraction of second.

What if I had been at her place and lost my arm? Where was I at seventeen years of age?

What will be her dreams and desires?

I realised my privilege. Privilege by birth and privilege by fate.

I smiled and said that her daughter is adorable and so is she. She smiled back and it just made everything lighter with that warm feeling again.

—Anamika Kandari

3 Stories of Hope and Truth

Here's a story of one Rajput family, settled in Choma Village. In the 2-3 hours that we spent with Udham Yadav and his wife, we were inspired by their mindset and outlook regarding education of girls, arranged but (not early) marriages and in general the status and position of women in households and society. And when we later met his children, we saw this transcend into the upbringing and overall conduct of their children.

Udham himself was an 8th standard drop out and moved to Gujarat at the age of 13 to learn to become an automobile mechanic. The owners of the workshop provided him and many others like him with accommodation and food. They were given no salary, in exchange they were given the training on how to be an automobile mechanic. In a few years, his friends and he decided to break away and open their own workshop in Gujarat. After a few years, and with some savings in hand he decided it was time for him to move back to Choma, get married (it was arranged before he was back from Gujarat) and take charge of the family cotton fields as his parents were ageing.

His wife Kanti Devi is an active member of a Self-Help Group and plays the important role of the book keeper within this 12 member forum. The bookkeeper earns Rs 150 to maintain the registers and update the savings and expenditures of every group member at each meeting. Interestingly, she is the only literate member of this particular group. Kanti Devi is an aware and conscious resident of Choma. She is the voice of many other women and was seen filling the MNREGA non employment allowance form. She also tends to the fields and the cattle.

Udham and Kanti have 5 children- 3 daughters and 2 sons. All 5 children have been given the best opportunities in terms of education and extra-curricular activities, despite their parents limited exposure. The English Medium Government school in Choma was good (as compared to the rest we heard about or saw) and all the 5 children of this Yadav household studied here. In Udham's words "mere liye mere saare bacche ek samaan hain. Chaye ladki ho ki ladka (for me, all my children are the same. Boys and girls)". Two of their younger daughters, aged 23 and 21 are pursuing their B-Ed degrees and are also teaching at the Government school in Choma where they had studied. This serves them with extra pocket money and practical experience for their teaching careers ahead.

All the three daughters learnt how to stitch, and he invested in a sewing machine. The girls together run a very popular tailoring unit from their home, and ladies from Choma and outside come to place their orders. Every night, post dinner, the girls sit for about 3 hours until 11 pm and custom make each outfit with the measurements they took down while the order was placed. Kanti Devi hands over the clothes and collects the money in the day when the girls are away.

For Udham, it is more important to for all his children to be secured in their livelihoods and relationships. While the marriages will be arranged, he strongly believes in making sure that his child is happy and agreeable at the same time. The younger 2 daughters find themselves to be the only unmarried girls amongst all their friends and batchmates. They laugh and say that they are in no hurry and it'll happen when it needs to happen.

Udham Yadav and his family are a model family in Choma and from my observations of other villages in the past 2 weeks, in much of Alwar too. His daughters are the role models for so many other young girls around them. Neighbours and others look up to them and are inspired by their practical and modern thoughts and the awareness and confidence that each of them exudes.

Owing to their exposure and their experiences through various opportunities they received, the children of the Yadav home have many options and avenues for them to pursue their dreams and live a life of quality and dignity.

But this story is still the exception and very different from the general narrative. This story gives us im-

mense positivity and hope as it is a refreshing change from the several other stories of poverty, unemployment and illiteracy that creates a vicious cycle hard to break out of. The story of this Yadav family reaffirms the value of education and skill development and the importance of gender equality. If only there were many more Udham Yadavs, then the social status of women and girls would much be improved. I'm sure it wouldn't have been easy for Udham and Kanti to break the prevailing norms and traditions of their ancestors with respect to early marriages, no schooling for girls and much more.

—Aalika Anne Peres

🌀 Snapshots of Alwar I saw

Story 1

A woman from the Scheduled Caste community said she has a red Below Poverty Line (BPL) card but has never received ration except wheat, no Kerosene, no sugar and no rice for months. Her monthly income was meagre, and she had to buy food from a non- Fair Price Shop which was making it very expensive for her. She has been struggling to buy grains to feed her family.

Story 2

While speaking to an ASHA worker we were told that her salary is 1800 per month and with her responsibilities in deliveries, she has a job where she works 24 hours a day. She calculated her daily income to be Rs 60 a day and even though it may not have been the correct manner to calculate this, she was sure that she was being exploited by the system.

Story 3

A rai sikh farmer moved to Thokdar Bas (a village in Alwar) and he bought farming land from a Brahmin from Mubarikpur. He paid Rs 12 lakhs for the farm, and despite this sum, the land is yet not registered in his name. He is unable to receive any subsidy or benefits because the farm is not in his name. He has failed to raise a complaint with the police as the Patwari looks into the matter and he is also from an upper caste and no one is ready to listen to his concern. He has given up on the system and has decided to continue with his current state of being. He has no money to go and fight a case in the court. I felt sad because I could see sheer helplessness in his words. It was a plight of 12 years of subjugation and which seemed normal and just another story of struggle to the other people. Justice doesn't seem like a right here. The notion of equality before law seemed to have ceased for an individual with no access to social capital.

Story 4

The woman chairperson of the Self Help Group had four children in only 6 years of her marriage and she was just 25 years old. She mentioned that she had no say in her bearing the child. Even if the couple chose to adopt a family planning method, she would have to undergo female sterilisation. He husband would not opt for a vasectomy. Imagining the plight of a woman who has no say in decisions related to her own body is suffocating. I felt she connected really well with my colleague and saw a friend in her who could not help but at least listen and console her.

Story 5

It was already six in the evening and it had started to get dark. We had just met the Sarpanch of Mubarikpur village along with her husband and the father-in-law and were on our way back to Nowgaon and from there to Alwar. We were looking for a mode of conveyance.

We met this autorickshaw driver named Ramesh and he said “bhaiya 100 rupiye lagega (brother, it will cost Rs 100)”. Usually we found sharing autorickshaws by 5pm till Nowgaon and but today it was late. We sat in the autorickshaw and two of my colleagues, Nivedita and Kishore sat in the back seat and I sat in the front. I thought I would speak to Ramesh as I had heard that a lot of people from the village were autorickshaw drivers. What unfolded next was a heart wrenching conversation which stayed in the mind as vividly as it was in the moment.

Ramesh studied in school only till the VII standard when his life changed. His father - the only bread winner for the family met with an accident and had a slip disc. There was no health facility in the village to address his health condition and they didn't have enough money to afford private hospitals. His father became bedridden and the responsibility of providing for the entire family fell on the shoulders of a 12-year-old child.

Ramesh had to drop from school and go to Jaipur to look for work and support his family. In the first year in Jaipur he earned Rs 3000 a month and was bullied in the city. Over the years he started earning 10k. He has three younger siblings - two sisters and one brother. He had to take loans from money lenders to marry off his two sisters. Few years later he took more loans to buy a piece of land to get back to his village. His plan was to return back to village and live with his family. Since the income from agriculture was bare minimum, he decided to buy an autorickshaw. In total he had taken three loans - of which he was able to pay half the amount for one of the loans. For the rest two he is still paying only the interest and will continue to do so. He is trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty and loans and has no clue of when and how this will end for him.

He is supporting his brother's education, who is pursuing Bachelors in Computer Application from Alwar presently. He is hopeful that someday soon, his brother will be able to support the family and help him in repaying the loans. He was also planning to take another loan and mortgage the land for his brother's studies. He asked me, “bhaiya aap batao yeh kaside khatam hoga koi jugaad hai aapke paas (brother, can you tell me how to break out of this cycle?)” and I had no answer. That is where the conversation ended.

I became numb - didn't have the strength to say anything. I didn't know “ki yeh kaise khatam hoga”. It seemed like a vicious cycle of lifelong subjugation - tied down by shackles of poverty with no escape route. His father is still bed ridden and mother too has developed health issues. Around half of his earnings are spent in medical expenses and the rest pay off his previous debts. I realised that not having adequate health facilities turned out to be a curse for this family.

We had reached Nowgaon and we got off from the autorickshaw. We paid him Rs 100 and I felt really guilty about bargaining with him previously. Sometimes we really do not know what the plight of the other person is unless we speak to him.

—Anubhar Singh

3 An overview of my time in Alwar

Twelve days of living in Alwar district of Rajasthan was a wonderful experience in itself. During the stay, three experiences kept me thinking of these issues. First was a discussion with an upper caste person in the main market area, complaining about the lack of opportunities for their children in educational institutions and government jobs? Even though we know of their social capital and privileges, they were adamant of scrapping reservations for backward castes and classes and that reservations were the cause of all problems. The emotions attached to this were very high and persistent.

The issue of caste was a topic of discussion in one of the government offices we visited. One of the officials in the office was sharing his experience of humiliation by the reserved caste official and he says, I quote “why am I being punished and insulted for the crimes committed by my ancestors”. He was emo-

tional and took even harder stand on reservation and people belonging to reserved castes. This kept me thinking of the oppressed becoming the oppressor and where does this cycle end. If we don't respect each other as human beings, can we put an end to this age-old practice?

My second experience was at the tiger reserve, when I was eager to see one of the beautiful mud houses and I was welcomed in by the person that built it. We were in the awe of the house but the lady of the house was talking of having a pucca house like her relatives in town and went on to talk about electricity and entertainment. This made me think of people's aspirations for a better life and need for basic facilities. A question remains, have we set the bar and standards for the way of life and we do not value what people have. And are we doing injustice to them by suppressing their aspirations?

Third experience was in the bus while speaking to a recent graduate who works in the district. Our discussion was around employment. He mentioned that he chose to work in Alwar even if it meant lower salary for him. He was clear that working closer home keeps him closer to family and friends. This showed the contentment in people if provided right opportunities, in this era of consumerism based economic model.

The overall experience was amazing and at the end of Realising India, I felt it was just the beginning of knowing the place and people better. One of my biggest learning was that people TRUST and share their feelings even after the know that this might be the last time they'll see us.

—Ashish V.R.

How Climate Change is impacting women from rural Alwar

Alwar is situated in a semi-arid region of Rajasthan. Villages face water crisis due to drastic reduction in rainfall and depletion of ground water level. The region last received optimum rainfall for agriculture of 1084.66 mm in 1996. In 2014 it was 477.8 mm where departure from normal rainfall was -23.7%.* Agriculture in this drought prone area is being practiced at nature's mercy. These climatic events are making life even harder for women.

My realisation during visiting several villages of Ramgarh and Bheror blocks as part of "Realising India", rural immersion programme at ISDM, has been about how climatic change in this region impacts women and girls far greater than men and boys and why their voices must be heard.

"This year bajra didn't survive because of no rainfall" says Raziya Begam, a woman farmer of Nangravaleiya Dhani (hamlet) in Piprodi GP of Ramgarh Block with a sigh. Women and girls in rural areas play a critical role in producing food to be consumed at home. More women than men work in agriculture. About 70% of farm work is carried out by women. They work, on average, longer hours than men. Women are primarily responsible for rearing livestock. While men tend to be more involved in growing cash crops i.e. cotton that are sold in open market.

The changes in climate has adverse impacts on crop yield. Women in this region are mostly unaware about farming techniques which are resilient to climate change. Therefore, their ability to provide food for their families decreases as crop yields decrease, which is threatening food security. This is leading to an increased burden on the farm. Also, women are often paid less than men, for the same manual work. Women migrate for two - three months to the Punjab during cotton harvesting with their husband.

Women have always been, and still are, responsible for the majority of the housework in addition to child-bearing and nurturing roles. From collection of fuel wood to cooking, from washing clothes to fetching water, women and girls do everything. Drinking water is another problem caused by the depletion of ground water levels. Reduction in rainfall, excess extraction of ground water for agriculture has led to depletion of ground water level to a great extent. "Ground water level has depleted to 800 to 1000 feet. Not all households are able to spend around 2 lakh rupees for digging a bore well," says Shima ji, a villager of Milakhpur village of Ramgarh block. Women spend a large amount of time to fetch water. Almost

every woman like Shima from her village wakes up at 3 am to stand in a queue to fetch water and draw buckets of water one after another from the lone source of water in the vicinity every day. This excessive work has reduced their time for leisure and had adversely impacted their health. Women are therefore more vulnerable to the impact of climate change in this region.

Gender inequality includes limited participation of women in household decision-making, no ownership on land and assets, restriction on mobility, sexual and gender-based violence, fewer employment opportunities, unequal share of unpaid work done by women, and limited access to resources and opportunities. And cultural norms legitimises this inequality. There is also a lack of gender-based adaptation budgets for state policies for the primary sector, including risk insurance and watershed development. These aspects make the situation very complex for the women and girls.

Women play critical roles in our communities. If they have a limited say in decision-making and their skills are not fully utilised, they will not be able to respond to, and contribute towards containing the problem of climate change, and to ensure food security and overall sustainable development. Their voice must be heard to keep civilisation alive and moving.

*According to Ground Water Year Book 2014 – 2015 by GOI, Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation, Central Ground Water Board.

—Koushik Hore

3 Nera's Guests

On the second day of “Realising India”, we were interacting with female members of a Self Help Group at Nangravaleiya Dhani (hamlet) in Piprodi GP of Ramgarh Block.

Suddenly one lady said to me, “Bhaiya, wo bhi Bangalan hey! Kalkatta se ayi hey (Brother, she is a Bengali too. Has come here from Kolkata)” pointing her finger to another lady. Sitting in the corner of the circle, she was breast feeding her 2-year-old child. I was a little amazed at finding a Bengali girl in that remote village in the Mewat region of Rajasthan. I asked her where her family lives in Kolkata, in Bengali. She tried her best to reply in Bengali but she couldn't and she had also forgotten the address of her home in Kolkata. The first lady said, “She has been here for the last 8 years after getting married. That's why she has forgotten her own language.” She also added, “there three or four more women who are here from Assam and Bihar. They have been brought to this village after getting married”. And they are called ‘paro’. Paro means ‘Yamuna ke us par se’ (from across the Yamuna).

This incident suddenly haunted me! I got lost musing about a very close friend from my childhood Buri, who I grew up with. She was the daughter of our maid at home. She was the youngest daughter among 3 siblings of our domestic maid in our home in Malda. At the age of 14, she was forced to marry a man from Rajasthan in exchange of a few rupees!

Unable to find local brides for men because of the low sex ratio in Rajasthan, “paros” are brought from different parts of India – from Assam, West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh to marry as well as for manual labour in the agricultural fields.

“The paro system is the inevitable fallout of a deadly combination of attitudes towards women and girls in these areas, female feticide, economic poverty, dwindling landholdings and increasing poverty. The whole system has been created to satisfy the sexual needs of men and labour needs of family,” - sums up Dr. Virendra Vidrohi, who runs Matsya Mewat Shiksha Evam Vikas Sansthan in Alwar. He also spoke about the brief history of this evil practice.

In the late 70s, driving became a lucrative profession for huge number of male especially from the Meo Muslim and Gujjar community because of growth of many transport industry in this region. They started

visiting states like Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Assam because of their profession and building rapport with the local community. According to Mr. Ram Roop, Inspector Police in the Anti Human Trafficking Unit, Alwar, this district is the hub for cross region brides in Rajasthan. Families of the girls are also more often than not, poor and cannot afford dowry. Parents of the child brides, like my friend, were not even aware that their child was taken away from them. In some cases, women themselves bring their relatives and arrange. Even khap panchayats seem to accept the practice of paro, and it doesn't matter that the bride is not from the same community because of drastic decline of child sex ratio. Since the 90s around 5000 girls have been trafficked into the region each year.

These women are often victims of a number of human rights violations, such as child marriage, trafficking, kidnapping, abuse, child labour, marital rape, rape outside marriage, day-to-day violence, lack of freedom of movement and decision-making in child-bearing. They are almost treated like slaves in their families. They are also sold multiple times and even are forced to enter commercial sexual exploitation (CSE). Cases have emerged where one women is used to meet the need of sexual satisfaction of all the male members of the family.

Now it sends a chilling shiver whenever I think what could have happened to my Buri!! Where could she be?

Our cold-hearted indifference towards gender inequality, objectification of women does result in these horrific human rights violation! I now seriously feel we hardly need research and statistics to know these, just a little introspection about how we remain silent at our levels every time gender-based violence takes place and normalizes discrimination and abuse.

“What would you call people who feast on fruits, wine and other exotic dishes while their fellow beings were torched to death in their presence to facilitate their luxuries?”

“I think, now we all know who are Nero's guests.” (Reference to the documentary titled 'Nero's Guests' by Deepa Bhatia, 2009.)

—Koushik Hore

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