

Acknowledgements

It is said, “it takes a village” to raise a child. This dissertation too was possible because of the people, who helped me at every step. I express my sincere gratitude to Nortti Bai, Chunni Ma, Sushila ji, Raji Bai, Aruna Roy, Ganga, Lakshmi, Kamla, Amita, Shankar Singh, Balu Ram, Lal Singh, Narayan Ji, Nikhil Dey, Roop Singh, Kalu Ram, Hemsingh, Amit and Rodeji for welcoming me into their world of the collective. They responded with patience and glee, as I prodded them to share snippets from their lives. No space was off-limits – I moved freely about the School for Democracy, the MKSS office in Bhim, the house at Devdungari, the market and the public square for observing the settings and talking to people. The people in the villages greeted me into their homes and their lives through their stories.

The women were in equal measure eager to relate their stories and to know more about me. Meera Ma and Chaman Ba acquainted me with the life-system at the grassroots and its strengths and failings. They shared numerous anecdotes about their family, time with the MKSS, meeting public officials and other dignitaries. Their stories spanned customs for marriage, birth, death and festivals to even the neighbourhood natter. These stories provided insights into their value systems. Woven as they were into the social fabric of the region, their critique of the social structure and narratives of negotiating with the structures were very inspiring. Their experiences also helped me in appreciating my roots in a better way, since my own cultural practices and those of my parents and family were derived from Rajasthan.

I am also thankful for the help and hospitality I received during the field-study in Rajasthan as well as archival research in New Delhi. Nikhil, Vineet, Amit, Poorvi, Rohit, Shubhangi, Aswati, Kartik facilitated the field-investigations by sharing the information they had. The bonhomie we shared made the tedious bits enjoyable.

Anurag and Antariksh at Rough Cut Productions let me access the video archives of the RTI campaigns and use the equipment required to process the archives. They also provided an inexhaustible supply of tea and meals during month-

long stays. Their warm hospitality also facilitated the other part of my archival research, for which I am indebted to the staff at Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi. I thank the Director, NMML, for approving my membership and request for accessing the MKSS collection. The reading room assistant, Ms Shalini, for helping with reading the catalogue, requisitions of files and photocopies of the documents. The meticulous indexing and cataloguing of collections expedited the research process.

I also thank the conference organisers at International Oral History Association and the University of Jyväskylä, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Karlstad University, Sweden and Benares Hindu University, Varanasi and the Symbiosis Institute of Mass Communication, Pune for providing me with an opportunity for sharing the research insights at different stages with a diverse pool of audience. Feedback from session chairs and discussions with colleagues at these conferences have helped in appreciating the finer nuances of my research domain.

I thank the anonymous reviewers and journal editors, Prof Suhas Palshikar at *Studies in Indian Politics*, Dr R Sooryamoorthy at *Rajagiri Journal of Social Development* and the Editorial Team at *Economic and Political Weekly* for reviewing the manuscripts and providing feedback. I also thank the editorial team at the journals for assisting with the publication of articles.

I will be failing in my duty if I do not acknowledge the efforts of my examiners and reviewers. The doctoral dissertation received incisive comments from Professors Amit Prakash and Mary E. John. Professor Amit Prakash kindly consented to the examiner for the viva-voce exam, which was conducted on 21 August 2020. His queries and comments posed during the viva-voce exam were intense and an enjoyable learning experience. Dr Kamal Nayan Chaubey reviewed the research progress for upgradation from Junior to Senior Research Fellow. Their comments have markedly shaped the dissertation.

At BITS Pilani, I acknowledge the institutional support by Vice-Chancellors, Prof B.N. Jain and Prof Souvik Bhattacharyya, the Directors Prof G. Raghurama and Prof Ashoke Sarkar and the Deans Academic Graduate Studies and Research Division, Prof Hemant Jadhav and Prof Jitendra Panwar, and Dr Shilpi Garg for assisting with the disbursement of scholarship. The library facilities were a blessing, particularly for accessing rare texts, e-journal subscriptions and inter-library loan. I also thank Mr Deepak Mehta, the assistant librarian for helping me with procuring texts on multiple occasions.

I would not have made it thus far without the support of my Doctoral Committee Members – Dr Anupam Yadav, a patient listener, who pressed me to refine my arguments and at the same time, cautioned me to tread carefully in the maze of philosophy. Dr Sailaja Nandigama encouraged me to think critically into several aspects. Special thanks to Prof Sundar, whose quick assessment of time, costs, benefits, opportunities and rationale were helpful in navigating research crossroads.

My mentor, Dr Hari Nair, guided me towards achieving the dissertation goals. He read through hundreds of pages of the dissertation many times over and commented on them patiently. His feedback has shaped the dissertation vastly.

I wish to thank the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, BITS Pilani, for providing an atmosphere conducive to research. I thank Professors Geetha B., G.S. Chauhan and S.K. Choudhary for timely support and guidance in administrative matters. The DRC convenors – Prof Kumar Neeraj Sachdev, Dr Kumar S. Bhattacharya, Prof Sangeeta Sharma and Dr Anupam Yadav provided regular support with coursework, qualifiers, grades and credits and other pre-requisites towards the completion of the doctoral programme. I have also benefited immensely from the constructive feedback from faculty members and colleagues at the doctoral colloquia. Special thanks to Dr Choubisa, Dr Veena, Prof Devika, Shrija, Mayuresh, Aayushi and Ishan, who shared their thoughts and provided me with an opportunity to reflect and reconsider.

Friends at the university and beyond were a wellspring of joy and compassion. I thank them for being a part of this journey. A special acknowledgement to the kinsfolk in Delhi and Jaipur - the Gadodia(s) and the Kedia(s), for their love, affection, good food and a warm bed on my multiple stays and stopovers in the cities. Cousins and nieces - Aanya, Ayaan, Prachi and Nishu, took my mind-off from obsessing over the work and perked me up with their chatter. Jyotsna is the proverbial friend in need and deserves a special mention. So does PD James, my feline roommate, who taught me to love him unconditionally.

I cannot possibly thank my family enough. *Ma* and *Papa*, for their unwavering confidence in me. Ayush, my brother, helped me manage my travel and finances. He also replaced me as the darling of the family when I was away. My *nani*, ecstatic with my sojourns in Rajasthan, provided handy tips on surviving the weather extremities. My parents (in-law) encouraged me to do good work and provided valuable support. Aamod, a friend and spouse, is the *voice of reason* in my life. He helped me stay calm, sane and motivated. I am also indebted to him for tech support throughout the research process.

askvidhi@gmail.com

Contents Overview

Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Jan sunwai and the quest for transparency in Rajasthan	28
Chapter 3: Art forms of the jan sunwai	71
Chapter 4: Dialogue and inclusion: People's participation at the jan sunwai	97
Chapter 5: Quest for justice: Grievance redressal at the jan sunwai	149
Chapter 6: Quest for truth: Jan sunwai as a mechanism of social audit	193
Chapter 7: Role of the jan sunwai in strengthening Panchayati Raj	251
Chapter 8: Conclusion	299
References cited	311
Appendices	329

Detailed Contents

Abstract

Acknowledgements

Abbreviations and Acronyms

Glossary of Indic Terms

Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 Objectives of the dissertation.....	2
1.2 Structure of the dissertation.....	3
1.3 Literature review.....	6
1.3.1 Jan sunwai and the movement for transparency.....	6
1.3.2 Art forms of the jan sunwai.....	8
1.3.3 Jan sunwai for fostering the participation of the marginalised	8
1.3.4 Jan sunwai as a forum for grievance redressal.....	10
1.3.5 Jan sunwai as a mechanism for social auditing.....	11
1.3.6 Jan sunwai and panchayati raj	12
1.4 Gaps in existing research.....	14
1.5 Relevance of the study.....	15
1.6 Research design	17
1.6.1 Nature of the sources.....	17
1.6.1.1 Oral history.....	17
1.6.1.2 Print archives.....	17
1.6.1.3 Audio-visual archives	18
1.6.2 Profile of the respondents	19
1.6.3 Research method.....	22
1.6.4 Data collection and analysis.....	23
1.6.5 Rationale for selecting the loci of field studies	26
1.6.6 Rationale for selecting the time period.....	26
1.6.7 Challenges faced during research.....	27
Chapter 2: Jan Sunwai and the quest for transparency in Rajasthan.....	28
2.1 Introduction	28
2.2 Concept, necessity and the origin of the jan sunwai.....	29
2.3 Characteristics of the jan sunwai.....	32
2.4 The first series of jan sunwai (1994-95).....	36
2.4.1 Kot Kirana jan sunwai.....	36
2.4.2 Bhim jan sunwai.....	38
2.4.3 Vijayapura jan sunwai.....	39
2.4.4 Jawaja jan sunwai.....	41
2.4.5 Thana jan sunwai.....	43
2.5 Beawar Dharna and the struggle for information within the Panchayati Raj system.....	44
2.6 Second series of jan sunwai	46
2.6.1 Kookarkheda jan sunwai.....	47
2.6.2 Surajpura jan sunwai.....	53
2.6.3 Bori jan sunwai.....	56
2.6.4 Bhim jan sunwai.....	59

2.6.5	Janawad jan sunwai.....	61
2.7	From the jan sunwai to the Right to Information Act 2005.....	67
2.8	Conclusion: fostering transparency through citizen engagement.....	69
Chapter 3: Art forms of the jan sunwai.....		71
3.1	Introduction.....	71
3.2	Characteristics of the art forms.....	72
3.3	Barefoot performers.....	75
3.4	Art and other forms of communication.....	77
3.4.1	Pad-yatra.....	78
3.4.2	Slogans.....	83
3.4.3	Street-plays.....	84
3.4.4	Puppetry.....	86
3.4.5	Protest songs.....	88
3.4.6	Pamphlets.....	91
3.4.7	Fair price grocery stores.....	91
3.5	Deploying culture as a mode of protest.....	92
3.6	Advocacy: From a national campaign towards a national legislation.....	94
3.7	Conclusion.....	96
Chapter 4: Dialogue and inclusion: People's participation at the jan sunwai.....		97
4.1	Introduction.....	97
4.2	Locating the jan sunwai within the dialogic tradition.....	98
4.3	Jan sunwai and the pre-requisites for dialogue.....	101
4.3.1	Equality.....	101
4.3.2	Freedom of expression.....	102
4.3.3	Transparency.....	103
4.3.4	Inclusion.....	105
4.4	Participation of marginalised communities in the jan sunwai.....	106
4.4.1	Women.....	107
4.4.2	Policy impetus for the development of women.....	107
4.4.3	Engaging women in the struggle for wages and information.....	110
4.4.4	Preparing women to speak up at the jan sunwai.....	112
4.4.5	Benefits of women's participation.....	115
4.5	Scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.....	117
4.5.1	Dynamics of the participation by select communities from the scheduled castes.....	124
4.5.2	Dynamics of the participation by select communities from the scheduled tribes.....	129
4.6	Other Backward Classes.....	130
4.7	Participation by the middle-classes: Bania, Jain, Mahajan and others.....	134
4.8	Obstructions to participation: Resistance and backlash.....	135
4.8.1	Restricting information.....	136
4.8.2	The fear of speaking up.....	138
4.8.3	Social hierarchies.....	140
4.8.4	Violence and physical oppression.....	142
4.8.5	Countering oppression through non-violence.....	143
4.9	Jan Sunwai as a form of non-violent protest and constructive action.....	144
4.10	Conclusion.....	147

Chapter 5: Quest for justice: Grievance redressal at the jan sunwai.....	149
5.1 Introduction	149
5.2 Addressing people's grievances at the jan sunwai	150
5.2.1 Nature of people's grievances.....	151
5.2.2 Channels of redress available to citizens	152
5.2.2.1 Judicial channels of redress	153
5.2.2.2 Administrative channels of redress.....	155
5.2.2.3 Political channels of redress.....	157
5.2.3 Challenges in redressing grievances.....	158
5.2.4 Redressing grievances at the jan sunwai.....	160
5.3 Measures introduced by the State for redressing grievances of the citizens.....	162
5.3.1 Government commissions and committees	163
5.3.2 Santhanam Committee (1962).....	163
5.3.3 First Administrative Reforms Commission (1966).....	164
5.3.4 Second Administrative Reforms Commission (2005)	166
5.3.5 Special Interest Commissions	167
5.3.6 Directorate of Public Grievances	168
5.3.7 Sector-specific ombudsman	169
5.3.8 Grievance redressal in public services delivery.....	170
5.3.9 Right to service and grievance redressal.....	172
5.4 Movement for the Right to Services in India.....	172
5.4.1 Chief Ministers' Conference in 1997.....	173
5.4.2 Adoption of the Citizen's Charter in India	174
5.4.3 Right to services legislation	175
5.4.4 Right to redressal	178
5.5 Jan sunwai and grievance redressal.....	179
5.5.1 Jan Sunwai and RTH camps in Rajasthan.....	180
5.5.2 Dialogue between the citizens and the administration.....	181
5.5.3 Participation of the community in governance	182
5.5.4 Enforcing public accountability of the officers.....	182
5.5.5 Grievance redressal and social audit	183
5.6 Digital modes of redressing grievances: The case of Rajasthan Sampark.....	184
5.6.1 Challenges of digital redressal: Contrasting the jan sunwai with Rajasthan Sampark.....	185
5.6.2 From Jan sunwai to Jan soochna in Rajasthan: A case for citizen-centric digital platforms.....	189
5.7 Conclusion.....	190
Chapter 6: Quest for truth: Jan sunwai as a mechanism of social audit.....	193
6.1 Introduction	193
6.2 Significance of social audit.....	195
6.2.1 CAG and the kinds of audit in India	195
6.2.2 Audit procedure for the panchayat institutions.....	197
6.2.3 Advantages of social auditing through the jan sunwai.....	200
6.2.3.1 Sharing audit reports in public domain	200
6.2.3.2 Visibility of social contexts and power equations.....	201
6.2.3.3 Deliberative solutions for problems in governance.....	202
6.2.3.4 Accountability of local bodies through social audits.....	204

6.2.3.5	Decentralisation of auditing: people as auditors	206
6.3	Social auditing at the jan sunwai: Process and its challenges	208
6.3.1	Jan Sunwai and the law courts: A comparison	208
6.3.2	Questions on the nature of truth.....	211
6.3.2.1	Triangulation of information from various sources	212
6.3.2.2	Systematic investigation into the expenditure records	213
6.3.2.3	Door-to-door verification of expenditure details	214
6.3.2.4	Physical verification of infrastructure.....	214
6.3.2.5	Recording people's statements on video.....	215
6.3.2.6	Collective testimonies of the workers.....	216
6.3.2.7	Peer-check at public hearings.....	217
6.3.2.8	Body-language and the conviction of the people.....	217
6.3.2.9	Fear of law courts and anti-corruption department	218
6.3.2.10	Platform for speaking the truth.....	218
6.3.2.11	Expression of grievances and injustice.....	219
6.3.3	Oral and written evidence.....	219
6.4	Institutionalising social audit via jan sunwai.....	221
6.4.1	Origins of social auditing in contemporary India	223
6.4.2	Social audits under the Rajasthan Panchayati Raj Amendment Act 2000.....	225
6.4.2.1	Government initiated jan sunwai in Rajasthan.....	227
6.4.3	Social auditing in other states in India.....	228
6.4.3.1	People's plan campaign: Kerala.....	228
6.4.3.2	Janmabhoomi: Andhra Pradesh.....	229
6.4.3.3	Jamabandi: Karnataka	230
6.4.4	Social audit under MNREGA 2005	231
6.4.4.1	Current status of social audits under MNREGA 2005	233
6.4.5	Social audit under National Food Security Act 2013.....	234
6.4.6	Social audit and role of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India	235
6.4.6.1	MNREGA Audit Scheme of Rules 2011	237
6.4.6.2	The Joint Task Force on social auditing standards.....	240
6.4.6.3	Social audit rules and standards.....	243
6.4.6.4	Bhilwara Principles.....	245
6.4.7	Social audit laws at the level of states.....	246
6.4.7.1	Meghalaya Social Audit Act 2017.....	247
6.5	Conclusion.....	248
Chapter 7: Role of the jan sunwai in strengthening Panchayati Raj		251
7.1	Introduction	251
7.2	The evolution, structure and a critique of the panchayati raj in Rajasthan.....	252
7.2.1	Antecedents of panchayati raj in Rajasthan prior to 1946	254
7.2.2	Constituent Assembly Debates on panchayati raj.....	255
7.2.3	Two generations of panchayati raj between 1950 and 1992.....	257
7.2.4	73 rd Constitutional Amendment and after.....	263
7.2.5	Challenges and weaknesses of panchayati raj	265
7.2.6	Representation versus participation	266
7.2.6.1	Women.....	267
7.2.6.2	Scheduled castes.....	269
7.2.6.3	Scheduled tribes	271

7.3	Panchayati Raj and civil society.....	272
7.3.1	Role of the MKSS outside the panchayat institutions.....	275
7.3.1.1	Stimulating people's participation	275
7.3.1.2	Thrust on transparency and dialogue.....	276
7.3.1.3	Capacity-building of citizens	276
7.3.2	MKSS members within panchayat institutions.....	278
7.3.2.1	Women members.....	278
7.3.2.2	Scheduled caste members.....	281
7.4	Principles and practices of the jan sunwai for strengthening panchayati raj	283
7.4.1	Reinvigorating deliberative bodies at the grassroots.....	284
7.4.2	Gram sabha.....	284
7.4.2.1	Jan sunwai and gram sabha: A comparison of deliberative bodies	287
7.4.2.2	Ward sabha	291
7.4.2.3	Nyaya panchayats and the jan sunwai: A contrast	293
7.4.3	Jan sunwai for lawmaking at the grassroots.....	296
7.5	Conclusion.....	297
Chapter 8: Conclusion		299
8.1	Principal conclusion.....	299
8.2	Assessment of the jan sunwai: A recapitulation	300
8.3	Recommendations.....	301
8.4	Jan sunwai and deliberative democracy.....	302
8.4.1	Deliberative democracy.....	303
8.4.2	Discourse Theory of Democracy	304
8.4.3	Jan sunwai and the Discourse Theory of Democracy	305
8.5	Limitations of the jan sunwai	308
8.6	Limitations of the study	309
8.7	Scope for future research.....	310
References cited.....		311
Appendices		329
Appendix 1: Chronology		330
1.1	Jan sunwai timeline	330
1.2	Grievance redressal timeline.....	331
1.3	Select milestones in the institutionalisation of social auditing.....	332
Appendix 2: Panchayati raj structure		334
Appendix 3: Provisions of the select panchayati raj legislations in Rajasthan.....		335
Appendix 4: Recommendations of select committees on panchayati raj		339
Appendix 5: Loci of field studies		341
Appendix 6: Questionnaire		343
Appendix 7: Interview consent form.....		344
Appendix 8: Timeline of oral history interviews conducted as part of field-study.....		345
Appendix 9: Select images from the field-study in Rajasthan		346
Appendix 10: Select archival material.....		351
Brief Profile of the Candidate.....		354
Brief Profile of the Supervisor		356

Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACB	Anti-Corruption Bureau
ARC	Administrative Reforms Commission
BDO	Block Development Officer
BPL	Below Poverty Line
CAG	Comptroller and Auditor General
CIC	Central Information Commission
CPGRAMS	Centralised Public Grievances Redress and Monitoring System
CVC	Central Vigilance Commission
DARPG	Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances
DPG	Directorate of Public Grievances
DGRO	District Grievance Redressal Officer
GoI	Government of India
IAAD	Indian Audit and Accounts Department
IAS	Indian Administrative Service
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Scheme
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IFC	Information and Facilitation Centre
IPTA	Indian People's Theatre Association
IRDP	Integrated Rural Development Programme
KSSP	Kerala Shashtra Sahitya Parishad
MIS	Management Information System
MKSS	Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sanghathan
MLA	Member of Legislative Assembly
MoRD	Ministry of Rural Development
MNREG Act	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
MP	Member of Parliament
NCPRI	National Campaign for People's Right to Information
NCSC	National Commission for Scheduled Castes
NCST	National Commission for Scheduled Tribes
NCW	National Commission for Women
NFS Act	National Food Security Act
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NHRC	National Human Rights Commission

NIRD-PR	National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj
NMML	Nehru Memorial Museum and Library
NREP	National Rural Employment Programme
OBC	Other Backward Classes
PIO	Public Information Officer
PHO	Public Hearing Officer
PPC	People's Plan Campaign (Kerala)
RLEP	Rural Landless Employment Programme
RPR Act	Rajasthan Panchayati Raj Act
RTE Act	Right to Education Act
RTI Act	Right to Information Act
RTH Act	(Rajasthan) Right to Hearing Act
SAU	Social Audit Unit
SC	Scheduled Caste
SDM	Sub-Divisional Collector
SFD	School for Democracy
S-R Abhiyan	Soochna Evum Rozgar Abhiyan
SSAAT	Society for Social Audit Accountability and Transparency
ST	Scheduled Tribes
SWRC	Social Work and Resource Centre

Glossary of Indic Terms

Adhikar	Hindi word for Rights
Dalit	The term used for referring to the members of the Scheduled Castes
Dharna	Sit-in at public places as an expression of protest
Gaon	Village area notified by the state government
Gram Panchayat	A gram panchayat is formed for a group of villages and notified by the state government. First tier of the panchayati raj
Haq	Urdu word for Rights
Nyay	Justice
Panch	Panch literally means the head. In panchayati raj, a panch is an elected representative at the ward level
Panch-ni	Elected woman representative at the ward level
Panchayati Raj	Three-tier system of local government at the village, block and district level. The units at corresponding levels are referred to as Panchayati Raj Institutions
Panchayat Samiti	A panchayat samiti is formed for a group of panchayats under the jurisdiction of the particular administrative block. Second tier of the panchayati raj
Patta	A land deed
Pradhan	Chairperson of the panchayat samiti
Pramukh	Chairperson of the zila parishad
Paisa Khaya	The term used for denoting rent-seeking conduct by persons
Rozgar	Employment
Saathi	An associate, ally, fellow and supporter in struggle
Sanghthan	Organisation or Collective
Sarpanch	Chairperson of the panchayat
Sarpanch-ni	Woman chairperson of the panchayat
Soochna/Jankari	Information
Tehsil	Revenue unit
Thakur	A feudal title for landowners in the villages of Northern and North-western India
Toli	A group of people formed for a specific purpose
Zila Parishad	A Zila parishad is formed at the district level and exercises supervisory power over all the panchayats and panchayat samitis in the district. Third tier of the panchayati raj