

# RURAL REALITY AND ASPIRATIONS IN INDIA

## How does your environment affect your life choices?

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### 1. Tasks

1. Read the article written by Neha Khandelwal, an Indian researcher who gives us “a city dweller’s introduction to Rural North India”. You will find it below the tasks.
  2. What surprised you? Write down 3 things you did not expect to read.
  3. Imagine you are born in this village as a boy/girl (you decide which gender). Write a diary entry describing your daily life, your dreams and hopes, your thoughts about your future, and the social framework you are living in.
  4. Compare the living conditions in this village to your own living conditions. How does it differ from the life in a big Indian city like New Delhi? What do you conclude?
  5. “Maybe when the situations are tough, having dreams is a luxury most people cannot afford.” – What do you think about this hypothesis?
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### 2. Text: What does a village in Rajasthan look like?

By Neha Khandelwal

By the rule of proximity, a bigger town has more amenities and as you go further away from the towns the amenities reduce. Therefore, the development of villages become inversely proportional to the distance from the closest town/city. Anela village is located 10 kms away from a bigger village Chhani and 25 km away from the Kherwara tehsil. The total Population of Anela is 688 with 132 households. The village is located in Aravali ranges and the houses are situated on top of small hills.

Buses or taxis don't come into Anela village. Therefore, people have to walk a lot and therefore, every household has a bike even if they do not have a bathroom. The logic being, why make a bathroom when you have all the open space?

The government is desperate to motivate people to make bathrooms and therefore it is offering 12k to every house that makes a bathroom under Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, given to them by the local panchayat upon completion. However, usually a bathroom construction costs 20k-25k and the method of receiving money is clicking a photo and submitting that photo to the panchayat based on the assumption that every household has a camera phone! They don't.

The village did not have a hospital until now. There is a 5-bed space under construction for primary health care which will have a nurse to administer medicines especially to new mothers, pregnant women, new born babies and also to provide referrals.

That is the reason the role anganwadis /आंगनवाड़ी (meaning courtyard shelters) play in the fabric of the rural lives is very important. The anganwadis are meant for children below the age of 6 years where they receive supplementary nutrition and preschool education. The anganwadi workers also have numerous responsibilities which include conducting surveys of pregnant women in the village, rounding up children and bringing them to the anganwadi, providing counselling to families on various issues, providing vaccinations and educating teenage girls and their families.

The Government school is till 8th grade and has mixed classes with various students sitting in the courtyard. The bathroom is located behind the anganwadi and the principal's office for girls. The bathroom was constructed without a pit and therefore is kept under lock as it is useless. Therefore the "bathroom" is just a space where the girls go to pee.

The majority of men of the village have migrated to ahemdabad for work while the women work in Mahatama Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act

(MGNREGA). This is a social security scheme that attempts to provide employment and livelihood to rural labourers in the country. The women work in road and bridge construction. Another means of livelihood is agriculture here.

The only Bank for the village is also in Chhani as well as the higher secondary primary school. Because of the current situation, Rajasthan Grameen Aajivika Vikas Parishad started Self Help Groups for women. A group of 12 women forms one SHG and collects Rs.25 four times in a month. Once they collect Rs.500, they open an account in the name of the SHG group.

These SHGs have enabled women to become independent. As a result of this, some women have been able to start purchasing vegetables from Chhani and bringing them back to Anela village as well as get their houses constructed. The success of SHG can be considered by the fact that Anela itself has 12 SHG's i.e. 144 women involved in the group.

The women were all illiterate or angootha chaap (अँगूठा छाप ) in the colloquial term meaning they do not even know how to write their name. They learned that in the SHG group for they have to sign the register. They all work in MGNREGA as labourers.

When I asked them about their aspirations for their daughters, everyone had the same answer.

“We want our daughters to be madams. We want them to live a life of dignity (vs. the life of a labourer) and not do this back breaking work.” Madams mean anganwadi workers, governmental schoolteachers, nurses and book record keeper for SHG Groups. The women they have seen living a better life than their own. Also, when they were younger everyone was illiterate but now, they feel shameful about using their thumb as their signature.

I also did a session with their adolescent daughters. I did the “A day in the life” with them to understand the various activities they did and at what age. They have a lot of household work to do from cleaning the house, cooking, taking care of their siblings, taking care of the animals, working in the farm to bringing water in matkas.

Out of the 15 girls present 11 wanted to be teachers, 3 wanted to learn stitching and one wanted to be a policewoman. The girl who wanted to be a policewoman have seen one on T.V. once.

The reality of the situation being that girls do not finish their education beyond 12th std. Even finishing a high school degree is tough since unless girls perform well parents do not see a value in their education also because the higher secondary school is not in their village. Child marriage is still prevalent here and if the girl is not already married once she stops studying, she will be married asap.

The lives their mothers are living also becomes their own without an education to support them. What got me was how quickly the aspirations started and ended at being a madam (the one I have mentioned already). Maybe when the situations are tough, having dreams is a luxury most people cannot afford.

But I am a firm believer that dreams help us push ourselves. They make us believe in ourselves and our capabilities however hard the situations are. My takeaway from this visit has been to understand better the aspirations of the adolescent girls in this area.

You can read the original article under the following link:  
<https://medium.com/@neha.khandelwal/what-does-a-village-in-rajasthan-look-like-bf754ee96c95>