CHAPTER 7
FINDINGS: PERSONAL LIFE DIMENSIONS OF THE SAHYOGINI

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter has indicated the induction process that is followed by MAVIM and indeed some of the hardships confronting the sahyoginis in their work of organizing women. It indicates how these women find inner resources and confidence to handle field situations. The aim of this chapter is to examine some of their personal struggles to move out of situations of socio economic deprivations. It then highlights how the SHGs that she has built and nurtured, are not just tick marks in her job roles, they have become extension of her and how she associates the success of her groups with her own success. The networking and the support systems built by her and the leadership role that she has taken over has a deep impact on her personal life and this new social identity achieved through MAVIM has changed the equation in the family. It indicates that her relationship with MAVIM cannot be viewed through the prism of profession.

This chapter throws light on significant strides made by her economically, socially and personally. It indicates how this has changed her and contributed to family and society at large. The chapter also delves into this realm of personal and professional spheres which are entwined. Finally it address ‘empowerment’ not theoretically, but as understood and practiced by the grass-root development workers – ‘The sahyoginis’

7.2 SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND OF THE SAHYOGINIS

MAVIM’s SHG programme is targeted to include the poorest of the poor women in the SHG fold, and as stated in the previous chapter, the majority of sahyoginis have been SHG members prior to becoming sahyoginis. They come from poor families of rural and tribal areas of Maharashtra, where the parents have been either casual laborers on farm land or had small piece of land for cultivation. In their personal stories they have indicated that they faced financial hardships in their growing up years.
7.2.1 Social Category

As indicated in Table 7.1 out of sample size of 70 respondents, 61 were from Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST), Other backward classes (OBC), and Denotified Nomadic Tribe (DNT) category whereas only 9 belonged to the open category. Large section of Sahyoginis comes from SC comprising of 43 percent, whereas 27 percent belong to the Scheduled Tribe. The Scheduled Tribes largely belong to the Nandurbar and Yavatmal district which has sizeable tribal population.

TABLE 7.1
SOCIAL CATEGORY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Category</th>
<th>Aurangabad</th>
<th>Thane</th>
<th>Nanded</th>
<th>Yavatmal</th>
<th>Nandurbar</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scheduled Caste</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduled Tribe</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OBC</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT/DNT</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7.2.2 Religion

Nearly 46 percent of the sample interviewed i.e. 32 respondents (refer table 7.2) were Hindus and 34 percent, i.e. 24 respondents stated that were Buddhists (Baudh or Jai Bhimb). Among the minorities there was only one respondent who was Muslim\(^1\) who worked in the Nandurbar district. What was noted was that out of the 19 respondents who belonged to the scheduled tribe (refer table 6.1) almost 6 stated that their religion was Hindu and the rest 13 stated that the religion was Adivasi although adivasi is a social category and not a religion.

TABLE 7.2
RELIGION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Aurangabad</th>
<th>Thane</th>
<th>Nanded</th>
<th>Yavatmal</th>
<th>Nandurbar</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baudh</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adivasi</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\) Although Aurangabad and Nanded had sizeable Muslim population, there was not a single Muslim respondent in the study in these two districts. MAVIM has started a scheme for minorities known as Minority Women Empowerment Program in 10 districts in year 2012 – 13 including Aurangabad and Nanded wherein there could have been Muslim Sahyogini. However as the research criteria was 3 years and more experienced Sahyogini, the rest could have been excluded for not satisfying the 3 year criteria.
7.2.3 Age

The age criterion for selection is that anyone above 18 years of age can apply. Table 7.3 indicates 40 percent i.e. 28 respondents were in the age category of 30 to 35 years, followed by 25 percent i.e. 18 respondents in the age group of 35 to 40 years. This brings out two important questions 1) Is it that women in thirties do not leave MAVIM because of lack of employment opportunities? Or 2) Is it that they take pride in their work? Or 3) Is it a combination of both. Interestingly only 9 percent belonged to the age category 20 to 25 years. This could be either because the criteria for sample selection mandated that the sahyoginis should have 3 years of work experience and therefore been excluded in the interview process itself. The other reasons could be that younger women have greater employment options or that the mobility of younger women is curtailed by their families.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age range</th>
<th>Aurangabad</th>
<th>Thane</th>
<th>Nanded</th>
<th>Yavatmal</th>
<th>Nandurbar</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20 – 25</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 – 30</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 – 35</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 – 40</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 – 45</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>45 – 50</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7.2.4 Education

The minimum criterion for the post of sahyogini is Std. X passed. However, the table 7.4 below indicates that 10 percent are post graduates and 29 percent are graduates. The number of post-graduates both in terms of absolute number as well as the percentage of sample is high in Aurangabad. Out of a sample of 13 interviewed in Aurangabad, 3 were post-graduates which come to 23 percent. There are a total of 7 post-graduates in the entire sample of 70 and in Aurangabad alone there are 3, so nearly 43 percent of post graduates come from Aurangabad. It indicates that sahyoginis of Aurangabad have slightly higher educational edge as compared to their counterparts in other districts.
### TABLE 7.4

**EDUCATION***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Aurangabad</th>
<th>Thane</th>
<th>Nanded</th>
<th>Yavatmal</th>
<th>Nandurbar</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X pass</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XII pass</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Graduation</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>13</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
<td><strong>18</strong></td>
<td><strong>70</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The table indicates the current education status at the time of interview. The educational qualification prior to joining MAVIM and the upskilling is detailed in table 7.7

### 7.2.5 Marital Status

Table 7.5 indicates the marital status of the respondents. 55 respondents are married while 4 are unmarried. 7 respondents which come to 10 percent are separated. Those married have said that they are able to work because of the support they receive from their husband’s family. This again raises the question as to the reason why less percent of unmarried women are in the profession. Does being married gain more acceptance from the organization as well as SHG members and authorities? Or is it that the sahyoginis may have joined prior to their marriage and continued with the profession even after marriage?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Aurangabad</th>
<th>Thane</th>
<th>Nanded</th>
<th>Yavatmal</th>
<th>Nandurbar</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>13</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
<td><strong>18</strong></td>
<td><strong>70</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 7.2.6 Family Type

As indicated in Table 7.6 a significant 51 percent have indicated that they live in nuclear families, whereas 9 percent have indicated that they live with their maternal families, i.e. their parents and brother’s family either because they are divorced widowed, separated or even the husband has come to stay with them. However, what is interesting is that there are also arrangements wherein husband stays with his parents and the sahyogini rents a room and stays with fellow sahyoginis or with her siblings. Sahyoginis who stay in nuclear families have also indicated that the children when small were raised by their grandparents, or by the
families of their siblings, indicating the support systems that the sahyoginis have to rely on. Especially in Nandurbar it was noted that married women living in nuclear families have arrangement wherein they rent a room and stay with fellow sahyoginis and meet their respective families once in 15 days.

**TABLE 7.6**

**FAMILY TYPE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Aurangabad</th>
<th>Thane</th>
<th>Nanded</th>
<th>Yavatmal</th>
<th>Nandurbar</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single woman headed household *</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuclear</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint Maternal**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*In this type, the separated, widowed or divorced or unmarried woman is the only earning member of the family

**In this type, the married, separated, widowed or divorced woman has come to her parents home and stays with them along with her children

7.3 STRUGGLE FOR BASIC EDUCATION & HIGHER EDUCATION

Parents of the sahyoginis had limited education. It was noticed that the mothers were illiterate. While reminiscing their childhood some of them became emotional. The same sahyogini’s who looked very confident and at ease on answering questions about their work experiences became vulnerable while replying to questions regarding their growing years.

Sahyoginis have struggled at an individual level in many ways to achieve their goals. One of the main struggles was education. They often had to walk to school as there were no schools nearby and lack of parental encouragement to carry school. Other struggles included, dire financial situation of the family that could not give priority to daughters education, burden of household chores and having to take care of the younger sibling, staying in hostel far away from family or lack of support after marriage to continue education. The obstacles are many, but it is worth noting the efforts the sahyoginis made to overcome these hurdles. Women when young have striven and overcome difficult circumstances to reach the goals that they had set for themselves. The circumstances in which the women have studied can be cited through some of the examples. Some of the stories narrated by women indicate the difficulties they faced for their education.
7.3.1 Lack of clothes

Ramaitai a very vocal and articulate sahyogini of Dhadgaon taluka of Nandurbar narrates her ordeal of attending village school in just shawl and underpants. She comes from a family of daily wage earners, wherein her mother, father as well as grandmother and grandfather were daily wage earners. Ramaitai was the 3rd daughter among 5 sisters and 3 brothers. Education was never a priority for her parents, as they would have preferred her working in the field instead of going to school, although her elder sister went to school. Ramaitai says “My parents felt that I should work in the farm, so I was not sent to school. But I had lot of desire to study, so then I was enrolled in the school in the village, but I went only in my underpants and just a shawl to cover myself. Till Std. IV I went to school with just a shawl and underpants to cover. Then one day the Principal of the school visited my parents and told them to put me in ashram school as the school in the village was only till Std. IV. So after the Principal convinced my parents, I was put in an ashram school in Dhadgaon, which had hostel facilities. In the hostel, I would cry for days and months as I missed my mother a lot. But the senior girls in the hostel told me that we have come here to study and when I heard that then I also decided that the aim should be to study.”

The story of Ramaitai points that she had to face not just adverse economic conditions but also parental apathy towards her education. The fact that she did not even have clothes to go to school highlights the extreme poverty of her family. Staying away from mother at a very young age must have been a harrowing experience. We further learn from Ramaitai, that she completed her Std. XII after joining MAVIM. Understanding the limitation of resources in a large family, she has limited her family size to just 2 children (boy aged 11 years and girl aged 18 yrs) and her focus is her children’s education. Both her children are enrolled in ashram schools with hostel facilities. Ramaitai stays in a rented room with another colleague while her husband who is a farmer by occupation stays and works in the remote village of Dhadgaon. These are some of the sacrifices that sahyoginis do to earn a livelihood.

7.3.2 Going to school on father’s shoulders

Sushmatai now a CMRC Manager at Nanded recounted her story of how she managed her education. Her father was small farmer, both parents were illiterate. However, her father knew the importance of education. Sushmatai was born to her parents after four sons. She was loved as the first girl born to them. After a couple of years, her sister was born. Her parents loved all their children equally and did not discriminate between them. Her father
toiled hard and also did some odd jobs in order to find the resources to educate his children. He was very clear that his children’s life should not be like his. The village school was far from their home. She was the first girl from her village to attend school. It was especially tough in the rains to travel to the school. The muck would slow the pace and also cause blisters on the feet. Sushmatai says “My father would lovingly pick me up and put me on his shoulders and would take me to school. I had no option but to go to school be it rain or sun”. The village school was only till Std. IV, therefore she was admitted in Taluka School at Nanded. She stayed there at a hostel. Soon as she completed her Std. XII she was married. However she could not get along with her husband and was deserted by him. Sushmatai was 3 months pregnant at that time. Her father stood like a rock by her side. Sushmatai says, her father encouraged her to attend college. He himself went and got her admitted to college. Her pregnancy did not deter her from continuing her education. So strong was Sushmatai’s determination that she says “On the 6th day of my delivery I went to college and gave my exams”. In order to be able to support herself she learnt typing and sewing class while attending college.

Sushmatai has spent more than 12 years with MAVIM. Her father is no more but she has taken his spirit of courage and determination. She has built a small house in the village on her father’s land. She says that she is aware of her legal rights and knows that she too, along with her brothers, have a share in father’s property. Sushmatai has come a long way the time she sat on her father’s shoulders. She is a CMRC Manager and mentors young women working under her.

7.3.3 The ‘Tradeoffs’ to secure education

The story of Mangalatai highlights the many tradeoffs that a woman sometimes makes to get education. Mangalatai belongs to the Pardhi tribe of Scheduled Tribe and lives in the Akkarani tehsil of Nandurbar. She is now 37 years old. The story she narrated is about 30 years old. Her father was a mistry (construction worker). She had two older sisters and two younger brothers. She recalls that her mother used to be unwell most of the times, therefore her father married again and got the other woman to stay with them. Her step-mother got a job as anganwadi sevika. This helped the family financially. Her two elder sisters were soon married and her mother passed away when she was in Std. V. The step-mother made her do everything. She had to take care of her younger siblings, as well as do all the household work. Mangalatai says, those were the toughest days for “I would get early in the morning at 4 am
and start doing things, I also had to walk a lot to go to river to fetch water. I also would do the cooking before stepping out to go to school, which started at 11:30 in the morning. I would often go to school without food.”

The reason for tolerating all this was, because she felt that if she helps the step-mother and keeps her happy, then she will be good to her younger siblings and most importantly she will not complain to father and allow her to continue with her school and studies. Shoudering so much responsibility at a young age toughened Mangalatai. At present there are no ill feelings for her mother, Mangalatai says that looking at her step-mother working and earning also made her realize the importance of work and education.

7.3.4 Choice between ‘lotus feet’ and education

Choices are not necessarily easy especially when it comes to education. Godavaritai from Nanded recounts her struggle while pursuing her education. As a young girl she was always fond of studies and her father had instilled in her the value of education. As her father passed away when she was in Std. X, her relatives pressurized her mother to get her married. She was married after Std. XI. Her husband was not good in studies, whereas she was good at it. He would refuse to let her study. Infact he even tried to stop her from appearing the Std. XII exams but somehow she managed to appear for it and even passed the exams. Her husband was furious with her success as even he had appeared at the same time for his Std.XII exams however he failed but Godavaritai cleared. The number of taunts and mental torture increased after that. He just could not bear his failure and her success. To dissuade her from further studies he would say “what will you do studying so much. You are not going to get a collector’s job. You have to look at my feet only and live and die looking at my feet. You can never live without me.” The differences between the husband and wife increased and they got separated though not legally divorced.

Godavaritai completed her graduation. She now stays with her mother, younger brother and sister-in-law along with her two nieces. She helped her brother to expand his business and takes care of the educational expenses of her nieces. Regarding her education she says that “Just as food satisfies all hunger, similarly this knowledge that I have gained has helped me to live a fulfilled life.” Between the choice of looking at her husband’s ‘lotus feet’ or pursuing education, Godavaritai chose the latter and is proud of that decision.
7.3.5 Education a pre condition for agreeing to marry

Jyotitai, aged 43 years, from Yavatmal was the youngest among her siblings. She has two sisters and one brother. Jyotitai’s eyes swell up on reminiscing her mother. Her mother had big dreams set for her. Her mother would lovingly call her ‘vakilinbai’ (lawyer) and wanted her to study a lot. Tragedy struck Jyotitai’s life, when she was in Std. X her parents died within a span of 4 months.

She was studying in the hostel at that time and was away from her village when her parents passed. Being the only daughter left to be married, her uncles took charge of ensuring that she got married at the earliest. However she was very clear that she wanted to study further and make her parents proud of her. Jyotitai just put one condition for getting married. She said that she will marry anyone as long as he does not object to her continuing her education. Today she is thankful to her husband who encouraged her to study further. Jyotitai is confident and proud of the fact that she has completed her graduation too. She has acquired additional qualifications such as ITI (Industrial Training Institute) certification. She credits her husband for the support in enabling her to achieve her dream, while he jokingly chides her for the precondition put by her before their marriage.

7.3.6 Carefree childhood

Bharatitai says that her childhood was good. She was born in Manikwada village and had 3 sisters. The village had school only till the Std. IV and therefore her uncle and aunt who used to stay in Chandrapur district took her and her elder sister with them for further education. She grew up with her cousins. She says that as Chandrapur was a town so schooling facilities was better. She and her sister would come and visit their parents during school vacations. Bharatitai stayed with her uncle and aunt and completed Std. XII. She continued to stay till her marriage. She considers her uncle and aunt as her real parents. There are others like Bharatitai who have stated that their childhood was easy and not difficult but such cases were far and few.

Kalpanatai the fiery and forever young-looking sahyogini and now CMRC manager aged 50 belonging to the Gond community of scheduled tribe in Yavatmal smiles reminiscing her childhood says. “We were a family of six members. Myself, my mother, father 2 sisters and brother. My father used to work at Akola. My father worked as a peon, we used to get company of higher caste people around us. I used to go in the same school as other higher caste children. My caste people used to say what is the point of studying, but I continued my
education. I learnt a lot from this higher caste, we used to behave, study, talk just like they did. We participated in cultural programmes along with them. My childhood was very good. There was no distinction, but then I got upper caste tastes of living that way. I have very happy memories from my childhood."

While there are no apparent caste distinctions which can be seen, The fact that “I have upper caste tastes” indicate that as a child unknowingly she may have imbibed certain traits of speaking and living which she is currently very proud of. The Brahamnised ways have made her think that it is superior way of living and she is proud to have acquired it

7.3.7 Some thwarted dreams

Dreams and aspirations are important part of the growing up years of a child. Pramilatai of Aurangabad always dreamt of joining police force. She was good at sports and had acquired many merit certificates for running too. After completing Std. X examinations, she and her cousin both applied for the police entrance exam. She was selected to undergo police training for six months in Gujarat. Her uncle objected her to join police force stating that girls should not stay away from home. Pramilatai was disheartened with this decision, more so because her father did not stand for her and asked her to follow the advice of her uncle. She regrets not joining Police force and says that she was brought up in a family where elders are respected and their word remains final. Although her dreams of becoming a Police officer were thwarted, she says that the role of a sahyogini gives her lot of satisfaction.

7.4 ROLE MODELS WHEN YOUNG

People go through education and hardship to chase a dream. So what was the dream these Sahyoginis were chasing. Most of the Sahyoginis expressed that they either wanted to become a teacher or join a police force. A few aspired to bring in social change and had Savitribai Phule as their role model. Some role models were elder brother, sister, cousins or uncles who had achieved place of importance in society. A substantial number replied that their parents were their role models. The reason provided was that they their parents had fought tough circumstances and brought them up.

Meenakshitai, a confident Sahyogini in late thirties from Yavatmal, said that her mother was her biggest role model. They were 3 siblings, Meenakshitai was the eldest and she had a younger brother and sister. They had a farm which was managed by their father. Her mother was not educated and did not know anything about financial matters neither knew
how to run the household. Her father unexpectedly passed away when she was young. After her father’s death her mother slowly picked up the reins and slowly learnt how to manage farm and house on own. She says that “My mother drove the tractor, but she also knew that people would say and taunt her so to avoid tongues wagging she took my younger brother and just put him on the wheel but actually she drove it.” She admires the courage and resilience of her mother.

Vandanatai from Aurangabad wanted to become a teacher right from her school days. Unfortunately she failed in one paper in Std. XII and though she cleared it later on the overall percentage was inadequate to get qualified. She had passion for teaching so she would gather children from the neigbourhood and teach them. Vandanatai says that her cousin was her role model. Speaking of her cousin Vandanatai says, “She was the first teacher from my family. She sacrificed a lot for the good of the family. When my cousin was of marriageable age, a very prosperous and good proposal came her way, but on one condition that she should leave her job as a teacher. So she refused the proposal and kept working, she ensured that all her younger siblings get educated. After many years she got married only after ensuring that her siblings are well settled.” Another thing she admired about her cousin was that she would put forth her views forthrightly and thus gained respect of the elders too. A teacher also gains respect from the students. Vandanatai consoles herself that although she could not become a teacher, the profession of sahyogini is no less than a teacher. She says just as a teacher mould and influences the minds of 50 to 60 students in a class a sahyogini moulds and makes an impact on the lives of nearly 500 to 600 SHG women. Thus according to Vandantai sahyogini is also a teacher in her own way.

7.5 SUPPORT SYSTEM

In the earlier chapter of work-life dimension we have seen that the work entails her to spend long hours in the field. The question then comes how she takes care of her household responsibilities? What are the support systems then that she relies on? Field findings reveal a lot of alternatives. It ranged from husband, children, in-laws, parents, brother-in-law, sisters and fellow sahyoginis too. However what is also apparent from the responses are that gender equations and concept of the sexual division of work has undergone lot of changes. The responses are varied.
7.5.1 Support of family

Pratibhatai, aged 38 and currently CMRC Manager in Aurangabad district is of the opinion that a woman cannot go far in her professional career unless there is solid support from husband and in-laws. In her case she did her graduation only after marriage. She lived in a joint family along with in-laws which included brother-in-law and his family too. She recalls that when her baby was only 6 months old, her brother-in-law himself went and got the admission form of college. Her mother-in-law took care of the children when she joined MAVIM as sahyogini. Today Pratibhatai has completed her Post Graduation in social work and is working as CMRC manager since 2010. She owes her progress to her family support.

However, not everyone gets unstinted support. Jyotitai who had put the pre-condition of education for giving her consent to marriage said that “My daughter was very small when I started working and had to do all my household responsibilities before stepping out of the house, including washing clothes, cooking. Although my mother-in-law was there, she would say you want to work then do your work. However, you have to take care of all your household work and then go for your office work. As my responsibilities increased my husband shared my domestic chores. He was into construction work and had the flexibility of working hours. My husband helped me in many ways, he would cut vegetables and I would put it up for cooking, if I put rice in the cooker, he would ensure that it is switched off at the right time. Mother-in-law would take care of my children.”

Conventional roles of a woman require her to take care of household chores like cleaning, cooking and filling up water, however, many sahyoginis while discussing their support system have mentioned the contribution of their husband in collecting of fodder, filling up water and cooking too.

7.5.2 Neighbor’s Support

Sunandatai is a young widow of 31 years old. She was thrown out of her marital home immediately after her husband’s death. She and her two daughters were left without any financial support or livelihood means. Sunandatai’s brother took her home for few days. She was a graduate and her plight caught the attention of the sahyogini who regularly visited the village. The sahyoginitai advised her to apply for the post of sahyogini. She applied for the post and being sufficiently qualified got the role. She moved from her brother’s house and went to her late husband’s village though not his home. She rented a room and started living there. Her neighbors’ were good people. They knew that she stays alone with her young
daughters. They took it upon themselves to see that her children are safe while she was away at work. Sunandatai says “My girls play with other children of the neighborhood and my neighbor keeps a close watch on them to ensure their safety. Even if I get late from work, I know my children are taken care of.” Due to her employment with MAVIM there is much stability in her life and financial position has improved and so has her relations with in-laws too. Mother-in-law also visits her at times. She and her work is looked at with respect and the people in the neighborhood too approach her in case they have any issues or seek her advise as her exposure to government schemes, authorities is high. Sunandatai’s story showcases the neighbor support system

7.5.3 Sister’s help

Young mothers find innovative ways of taking care of their children especially when they want their children to be looked after well without compromising their work commitments. Vandanaatai a zestful sahyogini, aged 32 years from Aurangabad district always likes to keep herself occupied. Prior to MAVIM she gave tuitions to children in the neighborhood. She also learnt sewing and did a beauty parlour course. She even ran a small parlour from her home. She narrated that her mother-in-law took care of her children when they were very small. She has two sons. When her mother-in-law passed away she sent her elder son to her sister’s house in Ahmednagar. Similarly when the younger one turned 4 she sent him there too. Her sister took good care of both her sons and once when they were 9 years old and could manage things on their own Vandanaatai got them back to Aurangabad to live with her.

7.5.4 Back at Mother’s Place

Satvikatai a young sahyogini belonging to the tribal belt of Mahur in Kinwat is only 23 years old. She has already completed 5 years with MAVIM and has recently become a mother. She is the only child of her parents, both of whom have been daily wage earners. Her uncle used to help them financially and especially for her education expenses. Satvikatai’s life was restricted to only her school and home. It was after she joined MAVIM, that she is able to talk and interact with people. Her husband is an auto rickshaw driver. The most interesting part is that she and husband along with the new born baby live at her mother’s place. She does not live with her in-laws. She finds her mother’s house convenient to travel to reach the respective villages allotted to her. Mother cooks food and fills up water and takes care of household responsibilities. Even the little baby is looked after by her mother.
Satvikatai’s husband is also fine with staying at the in-laws place. This arrangement where the women is married and stays with parents is observed far and few in number.

Anasuyatai from Nandurbar district also stayed with her mother along with her children for 3 continuous years. The reason was that Anasuyatai’s husband deserted her for having 3 daughters and could not give him a son which his family desperately needed. Helpless Anasuyatai did not have a place to call her own. Her mother took care of her and her children. However Anasuyatai realized that her presence was causing domestic problems in her brother’s family and decided to stay in rented room just one house away from her mother’s place. There are instances where sahyoginis who have been deserted have come back to their mother’s house, however not all resort to this arrangement.

7.5.5 Unusual Support System

Nilajatai of Biroli village of Nanded district informs that she along with the other sahyogini has rented a room close to their CMRC center. Nilajatai has kept her son at her mother’s place. He is 5 years old whereas her roommate does not have any children. Both have been separated from their husbands. Both Nilajatai and Sangeetatai find it economical to rent a room closer to the CMRC as it saves their time travelling. This is an example of how professional relations enter private spaces.

In another instance Ramshatai of Nandurbar district who is married with two children also has similar arrangement of renting a room near the CMRC office. Her husband is a small farmer who lives in another village. She visits her husband every 15 days. She has two children, both of them are enrolled in the ashram school which has lodging facilities. Ramshatai is happy with this arrangement and her husband too is cooperative. Just like Ramshatai, such instances where married women having children stay with roommates was also observed in Nanded, Yavatmal in few instances but especially in Nandurbar. The respondents at Aurangabad and Thane district did not mention about such living arrangements.

One may question the reason why sahyoginis may prefer such a support system. Most of the time they are on field, how does staying close to CMRC help? CMRCs are normally located at convenient locations in talukas so that it is accessible for the SHG women. Transportation facility are relatively available so travelling is not cumbersome and most importantly one saves on travel expenses as well as time. Moreover, with fellow roommate
one can share household expenses too. With children staying in ashram school, their responsibility is managed by the school authorities. Renting a room and staying, then becomes a viable option for the sahyoginis.

7.6 BOND OF SOLIDARITY WITH SHG WOMEN

Sahyoginis go to villages with the intent to tap the poorest of the poor women and help her to be a part of the SHG movement. The core objective of the movement as stated in the introduction chapter was to empower these poor women through increasing their social awareness be it Panchayat Raj or women’s legal rights or assisting them in improving their livelihood options. Most importantly it brings women together. In order to bring the women together, the sahyogini visits the villages on a regular basis, first to form groups and then to conduct their regular meetings twice in a month. Be it procuring loan for children’s education or for marriage of the children or for expansion of their small business, sahyogini helps each SHG member. As a result she comes to know members of the women’s household, the domestic and financial issues of the SHG women. A sahyogini is also acutely aware of the strengths and weaknesses of her SHGs. She also has the privilege of sitting and having a cup of tea at the SHG woman’s hearth. Some of the frequently heard responses are that ‘till you don’t reach the chul (kitchen) of the SHG member, you cannot win her’. Bonds and trust are built not just by meetings. It is a process that takes place over a period of time and sahyoginis know that they have given a lot of time to nurture this relationship with their SHG members. It is not a one way process and sahyoginis too have learnt a lot from the SHG women.

7.6.1 Learning to see a different world

Latatai of Yavatmal is very proud of her SHG women and when asked what is her personal achievement, she replied “My SHG women did not have a life outside ‘chul and mul’( kitchen and children). Now they have seen a bank, they know where to go for their ration cards, how to make death certificates, how to claim insurance, demand for a women gram sabhas, voice opinions in gram sabha, demand for daru bandi (prohibition of alcohol) in the village level committee and learn to start their own venture. These women can now walk to the bank branch and withdraw and deposit money on their own. They can travel to the CMRC and know what questions to ask”. All of these could be possible only due to the SHG movement of MAVIM. Latatai feels a personal achievement with this positive change and she aptly remarks “Our lives have changed after coming to MAVIM and we would like to change their lives too.”
7.6.2 Their problems are our problems too

Pinkytai another Sahyogini from Akkarani tehsil of Nandurbar narrated an incident from Haripura village which she would visit regularly. One of her SHG members was regularly taunted and abused by her husband for having 7 daughters and no son. The SHG member due to lack of education could never argue with her husband as to why only daughters were born. Her husband harassed her and made life difficult for her. Meanwhile Pinkytai underwent a training program called ‘Maitri Arogya’ (friendship with health - a health training program). In this program they were trained on many aspects of health including reproductive health. This training helped Pinkytai to understand about the concept of X and Y chromosomes and how it determines the sex of the child. Armed with this information and the booklet which had detailed information on the same she went to see the husband of the SHG member. She gave him the book to read. The lucid language as well as illustrative format of the book helped him to understand the concept of conception of babies as well. He realized the shortcomings of his previously known concepts. Later on he thanked Pinkytai and then onwards did not trouble his wife. These training programs not only help the sahyoginis and the SHG women, it also helps them to widen their knowledge and bring in more awareness in the family and society too. Similarly Sheetaltai the dynamic CMRC Manager of Nandurbar even saved her brother’s marriage who was planning to divorce his wife for bearing him 6 daughters and no son by clearing his misconceptions. Thus the training programmes not only benefit the SHG women but in the process helps bring in more understanding to the extended family of all involved.

The closeness that SHG women develop with the sahyogini can be seen from the following example. Rekhatai from Yavatmal gave training on detecting breast cancers. One of her SHG members after the training approached her and told her about the symptoms of swelling in her breast. This fact she did not even share with her immediate family members. She even showed Rekhatai the swelling and upon inspection Rekhatai immediately told her that this cannot be neglected and persuaded her to visit the medical doctor. Rekhatai says that it was cancerous tumor which was operated and removed. The SHG member is now fine and owes her life to Rekhatai.
7.6.3 **Their success is our success**

Sahyoginis take equal pride in highlighting the efforts of their SHG members in starting new livelihood ventures. The financial stability that the SHG woman gets through income generating activities, gives a sense of fulfillment for the sahyogini too. Vandanatai of Aurangabad enthusiastically shared about the Micro Livelihood Plan (MLP) that she has introduced in Jamgaon cluster in Aurangabad. Her SHG women were given training on dairy practices and machinery was procured for milk collection and storage units to store the milk. The SHG groups would have to return to MAVIM the cost of machinery through installment. The MLP is designed to enhance SHG women’s abilities and give them regular source of income. Vandanatai is excited about this dairy venture from her cluster. On enquiring why she cares so much for these women, she replies “I have spent more than 6 years in this role. I am part of their ‘sukh – dukh’ (happiness and sorrows). Seeing my women doing financially well, gives me immense satisfaction. Moreover they also take care of me; they have even come and dropped me home when it was very late in the field.” Similar opinions were echoed by the Sahyogini’s from the Yavatmal district too.

Sujatatai has been with the CMRC of Yavatmal for just 3 years but she proudly shows the entrepreneurship qualities of her SHG women from the Lohar village near Yavatmal city. She narrates how the marketing group formed from SHG groups went to Mumbai along with the products produced by the various SHG groups and how they sold all the products and made good profits for the groups. She took immense pleasure in showing the dal mill and the chilli grinding machine which was hired and operated by the SHG groups to package various dal (pulses) and to make chilli powder respectively. The income generated through this activities has helped the SHG women to increase their financial status and this is reflected when Sujatatai beamingly pointed to the scooter of one of the SHG women. It is not easy to overlook the personal involvement and passion for their work and for the SHG women.

Gunatatai again from Yavatmal district says that they also encourage their SHG women to stand for elections at the Gram Panchayat level. Getting elected at the Gram Panchayat helps all the SHGs. She says that “we don’t have to see what caste they belong to just we

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2 MAVIM has seeded the concept of Micro Livelihood Plan (MLP) at grass root level. In each MLP 20 to 30 SHG members are engaged, women involved in the same livelihood activity are organized to implement MLP together as a group. These members do not necessarily belonging to the same group. SHG members from across 2 – 4 groups come together to run the MLP. In MLP, 10 to 20 % amount is borne by SHG members, 20 % from project and remaining 60 % finance is expected from bank linkages and convergence. Project contribution is provided specifically for “Asset creation” and it is not grant but given in the form of revolving fund. This Revolving Fund will be managed and collected at CMRC level. (Tejaswini Annual Report 2014-2015)
have to ensure that our woman gets to stand and win so that with election of one woman the benefits of schemes can reach hundreds of other women”.

7.6.4 Joy of bringing a smile

There are many activities which sahyogini engages so as to strengthen the group. This include celebration of ‘women’s day’ on 08th March, celebrating Savitribai and Babasaheb Ambedkar Jayanti, functional literacy programmes, HIV and health campaigns, cleanliness drives, celebrating the birth of girl child, haldi kumkum (married women celebrate) ceremony, birthday celebration of the SHGs. Sometimes they also organize sports activities during women’s day celebration. The celebrations include skits and songs that celebrate women power. All these activities help to bond better with the SHG women. “Muli janmache swagat” (celebrate the birth of girl child) program is a unique program which celebrates the birth of a girl child. For example when a SHG member gives birth to a girl child, other members of the group buy a dress for the new born as well as give coconut and saree to the woman who has given birth. This celebration instills the belief that girl child is welcome and the woman is also shown respect for giving birth to the girl. Such programs go a long way in breaking certain patriarchal beliefs that ‘girls are a burden’ and the ‘duty of a woman is to give birth to a son’. Such celebrations not only positively impact the new mother that she is welcome in the society; it also impacts the belief systems of other SHG members. Through these programs sahyogins also get positively impacted and one can make that out when they say ‘There is no difference between girls and boys. Girls are equally important’. Such collective celebrations bring in immense change in SHG members, sahyoginis and the society at large. The story of Jyotitai of Yavatmal district shows how relations get strengthened through celebrations.

Jyotitai recalls an incident of an SHG group which she used to handle as a sahyogini. She says normally the SHG’s celebrate the anniversary on the day the group was formed. However once they decided to celebrate the birthday of the oldest member of that group. The lady was going to turn 65 and she had never celebrated her birthday ever neither as a young child nor as an adult. On the day of her birthday, the SHG members along with Jyotitai conducted the usual meeting and after the initial discussions they presented the old lady with a saree which was purchased with the contribution of all the group members. Jyotitai says that she still remembers this incident for the woman’s eyes welled up with tears and she was so overwhelmed, she told them this was the first time her birthday was celebrated. These
moments are unforgettable and mark the beginning of new relations or help to strengthen existing relationships. Instances such as these maybe small and may even look insignificant and not in perception of an SHG. However, these are the building blocks that cement the relationship, not just among the group but also with the sahyogini.

7.6.5 Practicing and not just preaching

Mutual respect is gained when you also practice what you preach. The same applies to Sahyogini’s too. Sahyogini’s as discussed in earlier chapter get extensive training and this training helps them in their personal lives too. In 2013 MAVIM launched the Ghar Doghanche Abhiyan (GDA)\(^3\) programme. The objective of the program was enforcement of the right to property for women by registering joint ownership of land and housing by husband and wife. Through the SHGs, gender awareness training would be given via the sahyogini. The programme initially launched in Parbhani as a pilot was slowly spread to other districts. Sahyogini’s created awareness in their SHGs through meetings and trainings. While running this program for the SHG women, they soon became aware of their own rights. A total of 8 sahyoginis have stated that the plot of land purchased by them have their name on it, whereas 6 have confirmed that they have added their names in the husband’s property.

Sheetaltai of Nandurbar district said that even the gold that she buys she adds her name in the receipt and advise the SHG women also to do the same. She recently purchased a plot of land jointly with her husband, however the property is registered in her name. Apart from this scheme, sahyoginis are also aware that they have a right in their parent’s home. 4 sahyoginis have said that they got a share in the parent’s property as they became aware of their legal rights. MAVIM also provides legal awareness and information support to the SHG members through intervention of Village KaydaSathi\(^4\) (A legal friend) Through the Kayda

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\(^3\) The lack of ownership of property puts women in a severely vulnerable position, forcing them to put up with domestic abuse and depriving them of decision-making power. It also makes them vulnerable to poverty and destitution as if the husband dies, divorces them or throws them out of the house they have very limited options for sustaining themselves. To address these issues the Government Resolution 1094/3625/10-08-1994 was passed. However this rule was not properly implemented both in rural as well as urban areas. This lacunae was highlighted by Mahila Arthik Vikas Mahamandal (MAVIM). MAVIM decided to focus on creating awareness among women in Maharashtra about their right to their husband’s property and began the initiative known as ‘Ghar Doghaanche Abhiyan’ or ‘Home of Two campaign’. Ghar Doghaanche Abhiyan is implemented through the Tejaswini programme. (Tejaswini Half Yearly Report April 2015 – September 2015)

\(^4\) Kaydasathi receive training on legal literacy which includes laws relating to women, domestic violence act, property rights act. These trained Kayadasathis function at the village level. They are acting as support
Sathi program, the SHG women are taught the basic legal rights. These programs also influence the thought process of the sahyoginis as they realise that sons and daughter have equal share in the parent’s property. What is even more important is that these programs which are meant for the SHG women also help the sahyoginis in enriching their knowledge and bringing in positive change.

7.7 DECISION MAKERS

Sahyoginis have economic independence and in some cases their salary is the only source of income for the family. Apart from shouldering economic responsibility, sahyoginis have narrated how their opinions are heard and at times decisions taken only after their consultation. Some of the decisions involved were regarding children’s education or whether to put them in hostel. Others were about family planning or decision regarding hospitalization.

Vandanatai of Aurangabad district lived in a joint and close-knitted family. She had a brother-in-law who was very intelligent and helpful, but he started behaving very whimsical so she told her family that he needs medical treatment, initially all the family members sister-in-law, husband and mother-in-law did not agree, but after much insistence they sent him to the local doctor however that did not help. So she found out that in Pune there is a medical treatment to cure his mental illness. She even sold her jewellery to fund the treatment. After six months of proper medical treatment, he returned home completely cured. His wife, who had left him, also returned back and now he is perfectly well. Vandanatai’s firm stand and persistence paid off and timely decision of sending him to Pune prevented aggravation of the illness. She has not asked to return the money for the treatment as she is glad that he has become normal and leads a happy family life.

Similarly Shobhatai who is now CMRC Manager of Naigaon CMRC at Nanded recalls that her elder brother had high fever and was not responding to any medicines. His family had him admitted in a town hospital, however Shobhatai took the decision of moving him to Hyderabad for better treatment and made arrangements to shift him in order to get immediate and correct treatment. The doctors in charge took in writing that she is shifting on her own responsibility and will not hold the hospital responsible incase of any unfortunate event. Shobhatai took this bold decision, despite the fact that she has 3 more elder brothers and sisters-in-law all of whom were incapable of taking any decision. Another important

mechanism for the victim at village level giving support to members to resolve family and village level issues (Tejaswini Half Yearly Report April 2015 – September 2015)
decision taken by her was remarrying her younger sister who had lost her husband and lastly building a house in her father’s land, being fully aware of her property rights.

Sukanyatai a petite woman, aged 30, from Aurangabad district stated that “prior to MAVIM, my in-laws would never consult me on any decision financial or otherwise. However now they have seen that I have more knowledge of schemes, health, rights and they have seen me speaking with confidence with SHG members. Now even the smallest to biggest decision are taken after consulting me”. She says, that they had intended to dig a well in the farm however the decision was changed when she convinced that the bore well will be economical and more efficient for the size of farm, that they own. She further adds that they now consult her more often than their own son.

In similar vein, Manoramatai of Aurangabad says that she did not have the flexibility to spend even Rs 5 for herself, but after joining MAVIM, she decides what to buy and she does not have to give an account for her expenses. She even bought a refrigerator in the house because she felt that the vegetable and food stay fresh in it. Bharatitai of Yavatmal district is of the opinion that if a woman earns two pennies of her own then she is able to take decisions for herself. She has acute business sense and she convinced her husband to put up a grocery shop, she helped him by giving the initial funds required. The shop once had goods worth Rs 10,000/ and now goods of more than Rs 200,000 are stored. Kalpanatai the most senior Sahyogini and now a CMRC Manager in the Pandarkavda taluka of Yavatmal says that in Medikeda village where her in-laws stay did not have any cold drink shop. So she felt that if she opens a shop for her son, it will be a good idea. She soon put her thought into action and rented a small shop near the State Transport bus stand where people get down or alight buses to travel to other villages. She says the shop is doing very well and she also got an agency of bisleri water and the shop is doing well. Now she intends to keep some eatables too.

7.8 MORE THAN JUST PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH MAVIM

What does MAVIM mean to sahyoginis? What is the relationship shared with MAVIM. For many this is the first job, for others they either worked in the farms or did teaching jobs within village or not worked at all. These women were Std. X and Std. XII passed and got to know of this opportunity either when senior Sahyoginis visited their villages and informed them as SHG members or relatives from other villages told them about the work. Learning to travel on own, understanding the bus routes, finding ways and means
of commuting from one village to another is the first step on long journey of empowerment. For many sahyogini’s MAVIM interview was the first interview ever given by them.

As Sunitatatai says “My hands were trembling and I shivered while I gave my interview now when I look back, I find it amusing, cause now I can conduct meetings and can talk in front of a crowd of 500 also.” Sahyoginis have gained a lot in terms of confidence and self-awareness due to MAVIM apart from the respect earned by them in the society. Ranjanatai said “when I go to the villages people call me Tai (which means elder sister), they know I work for MAVIM, I get lot of respect from people.” Sheetaltai beautifully explains the recognition that she gets due to the nature of her job “I was only known as Bhaskar’s daughter (Bhaskar is her father’s name) in the village. Now they know me by my name and address me as Sheetal Madam. After becoming CMRC manager, people started calling me Madam. This has given me lot of satisfaction”.

The relationship between sahyogini and MAVIM is not the typical employee employer relationship. It runs much deeper. The sahyogini’s call it their ‘maherghar’ (maternal home). As Godavaritai says “Today whatever we have learned is because of MAVIM.”. Another answer was “MAVIM has made us what we are. We owe everything to MAVIM.” Chanchalatai says that “I am a changed person today, till few years back did not know how to pin up a saree, walk confidently, speak before others , I now have the ability to communicate with the highest official and illiterate SHG woman, I can do all, but this is possible due to MAVIM”.

There are times when sahyoginis have walked the tightrope to keep a balance between their work commitment and personal commitments. Rajkanya of Yavatmal district mentioned that her son was severely unwell and she had to rush him to the hospital and on the same day there was the executive meeting at the CMRC office. They are not supposed to miss the meeting under any circumstances but then she called up her CMRC office and explained the problem and told them that she will be delayed to come to office. However after ensuring that son is well she rushed to the office to attend the meeting. Manishatai of Aurangabad was on maternity leave but had specifically come to give the interview which also shows the deep respect and commitment towards the organization.

Mayatai aged 40 of Yavatmal finds solace in her job. She comes from a poor family of farm labourers. With great difficulty her parents provided education till Std. XII. After
marriage Mayatai faced a lot of domestic violence at her husband’s home and soon separated from him. It was only in MAVIM that she actually got emotional support. Whatever she has learnt it is only due to MAVIM.

Anasuyatai from Nandurbar says it is only after her association with MAVIM that she saw a world outside her village. The leadership position at the district office plays a big role in sahyogini’s motivational levels. She says “I have received lot of encouragement from the district office, at that time when I joined MAVIM, Patil Sir was the DCO. My situation and financial position was so weak, I did not have money even to travel outside the village. We used to get travel allowance at that time but my sir would tell me anytime you don’t have money to travel do tell me. And I would get travel allowance immediately; it was his encouragement that helped me.” It is also the empathetic attitude of the senior officials that have helped the sahyoginis to traverse certain difficult patch in their personal lives.

7.9 PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION

Sahyoginis have experienced changes in their personalities and confidence levels. There is tremendous increase in their social awareness, confidence levels and aspirations for self and family too. They have become more aware of their legal rights too. Some of them have enrolled in distance learning programmes and completed their Std XII, graduation or post graduation. They have taken decisions for themselves and their families. In the process of imbibing the habit of savings among the SHG women they themselves have learnt the importance and do save. These changes can be noted through some of the following examples.

7.9.1 The Changed self

Sunitatai of the Sillod taluka of Aurangabad joined MAVIM when she was 34 years of age, having worked only in farm land as casual labourer. She is mother of 4 children and has acquired education till Std. X. She says that “Before joining MAVIM I would think a lot about what the other person may feel while having a conversation but that fear factor or that self consciousness while having conversations with people has gone. Now I can speak confidently with any number of people.” She also adds that “I have started pinning the saree, when I first started doing that people used to call names. Now I take a purse and pin up the saree and can go out easily without having to bother what people say or think. My standard of living and everything has changed. I can buy things on my own. Now I can go to the bank and withdraw money and buy the required things without taking any ones permission.”
Sunandatai also of Aurangabad speaks about how prior to joining MAVIM she would easily get angry and she did not have the ability to understand things from other people’s perspective. After joining MAVIM she says “I now can listen to other people’s opinions, have become more tolerant and able to solve issues because I can understand the perspective of the other person.” She lives independently with her two daughters as her husband has passed away. She has lot of respect in the village and people come to her to resolve their personal problems or her opinion is sought after by the villagers in a conflict situation. Thus Sunandatai with her patience and expertise handles tough situations around her.

Sangeetatai has seen her SHG women toiling in the farm lands day in and day out. She has also witnessed that the young children of the SHG women working and helping parents in the farm land. She saw that children neglect their studies and work in field as their daily wages support the large families. This made Sangeetatai resolve that she would limit her family size to not more than two children and adopted family planning measures. There are many other sahyoginis who have restricted their family size to two children.

Sunainatai aged 40, CMRC manager from Yavatmal said “The way I speak is different, courage and confidence have increased. As a CMRC Manager have to know and speak different languages, learnt to operate computer and manage a team as well as prepare reports and correspond via emails. When I joined MAVIM 12 year back my child was very small but I left him with my mother and used to work. I did not have so much confidence. Once I went outside the four walls of home, I realized there is a world outside. When I saw people who are poorer I felt that if these people can live then cant I live? I know for sure that that I can bring up my children on own, give education to my daughters. Today I have taken a room on rent and stay independently”. Sunainatai is a woman of determination and is currently pursuing her graduation and keen to complete the same.

Confidence and self-awareness of sahyoginis have increased many folds, due to the nature of the role performed by them. In one of the FGD at Aurangabad held at Phulambri Taluka the participant mentioned that “Now we are so confident in travelling with whatever means of transport that you can put us in an aeroplane too and we will travel at any destination without fear.”
7.9.2 Saving Habits

Every sahyogini interviewed said that they do save, although the saving patterns were different. Each one was an SHG member and had savings account. Realising the importance of life insurance, some of them had a LIC policy too. Although there are those who also mentioned that their salary is low and that the demands of the family are so high and hence saving regularly is a difficult task.

7.9.3 Further education

Sahyoginis have the drive to complete their education and they have pursued higher education after coming to MAVIM. Table 7.7 indicates the comparison of education acquired by sahyoginis prior and after joining MAVIM. The percentage of Graduates and Post Graduates has increased significantly after joining MAVIM. This reflects that sahyoginis to get motivated to pursue higher education and secondly the drive to further enhance their career prospects and take higher job responsibility such as CMRC Manager could also be the reason for pursuing higher education.

**TABLE 7.7**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Qualifications</th>
<th>Prior to Joining MAVIM</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>After Joining MAVIM</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X passed</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XII Passed</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Graduation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sahyoginis aspire a better life for themselves and their families. They have realized the importance of education and also strive to give the best for their kids. Sujatatai of Yavatmal stressing on education mentions that “If I am able to give good education to the children then life will change for them and for us too. Cause then I can stay in better house and can use better products, can travel in a car”.

7.10 ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION

Sahyoginis with their commitment and hard work have also made changes in their economic position. Some of the assets or acquisitions that have been possible are because of their income. As indicated in Table 7.8 almost 57 percent have stated that their income is spent on the education expenses. This education expense include for self, children and siblings as well as other family members (nieces/nephews). While 24 percent have stated that
the income earned has also been spent on buying a plot of land in their husband’s name. 11 percent have stated that the plot of land is individually owned by them. 28 percent have helped their families in expansion the business venture.

TABLE 7.8
ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Income used for education expenses</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment in Gold or silver</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase of Plot of Land</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renovations and Repairs of house</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase of Scooter</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment in Recurring Deposits</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Insurance cover</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plot of land on own name</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expansion of business venture</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting up of Poultry business</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7.11 SOCIAL STRUCTURE TRANSFORMATION

There has been a steady and positive change on the outlook of the family towards the role performed by the sahyogini. The family and extended family have started appreciating the work of the sahyoginis. Even if the sahyoginis are late from work the family members understand the nature of work, its importance and give cooperation. They stand with their wives and sisters if someone points the odd working hours. The family members listen to the opinions given by them. Sahyogini become an integral part of decision making process in family matters. Sometimes the financial burden of running and maintaining household expense is on the sahyogini and with the fact of underemployment high in rural areas the dependency on job at hand is high. As sahyoginis become the main financial contributors of household expenses, role reversals are also experienced in the families. It has changed the equation in the family as can be seen from the examples given below

Urvashitai who is unmarried and lives with her father and brother in Thane said that “Father supports a lot, he washes clothes with the help of washing machine and folds the clothes brother sweeps the floor and keeps it neat and tidy and helps in cooking too. Commenting on her support system, Gunatai mentioned that she can work due to her husband, “he cooks and collects fuel as well as collects water for the house because I am busy with my work.” Gunatai and her husband are fine with this role change. Out of the 70 interviewed, only 2 stated that they were victims of domestic abuse. Both the victims of
domestic abuse have separated from their husband. Regarding taking decisions, Seematai a
zestful sahyogini of Aurangabad said, that she is the eldest daughter-in-law in the family and
further added “Initially no one asked my opinions nor was I involved in any decisions, I
would only do household chores. After joining MAVIM everything changed, decision to get
the girls of the family married and how to marry them, all such decisions rests with me. Even
at my parent’s house they ask me to help them in taking decisions, my brother also asks my
opinions.” Sagunatai of Nanded district said that “I am financially independent, consistent
income is there because of me and family is dependent upon farming so with my income it
helps to fulfill basic requirements, hence respect has gone up.” All of this show the respect
earned by the sahyoginis in their families. Sahyoginis have also stated that their families take
immense pride in telling that their daughter-in-law or sister-in-law is a sahyogini working
with MAVIM. Sandhyatai from Yavatmal narrated how her father-in-law supported her.
Sahyogini can be posted to a different taluka within the district. Sandhyatai was posted to
Kalamb taluka whereas she lived in Pussad taluka. She did not know how to manage home
and household as it would mean additional 2 hours of travelling. She says that her father-in-
law told her not to worry about household chores and encouraged to take the new posting. He
even managed Sandhyatai’s young child who was only 3 years old then. There are also times
when families of the sahyoginis do support them and in the process also experience
transformation in their day to day lives.

Sahyogini’s usually organise meetings with their respective SHG groups as per the
convenience and availability of the SHG women. There have been occasions when the
meetings stretch for longer duration. During such times when meeting prolong and there are
no means of transportation back, at occasions, sahyoginis stay back at the home of one of the
SHG women. When asked whether staying away from the family and not returning home for
the night does it cause any problems in the family front? They replied that the families are
usually aware of village where they have gone for meetings. Secondly the families are fully
aware of the nature of the role performed by them about organizing women and empowering
them, they therefore do not raise objection of having to stay overnight at the SHG woman’s
house. There are also times when the husbands of the sahyogini’s drop them to the nearest
village in the morning when they set out for work. Thus the job/role of the sahyogini is
viewed with respect and families extend support in whatever way they can. Sukanyatai from
Yavatmal says sometimes her SHG women call her up when she is at home and if my
husband pick up they ask “Is Madam at home?” then my husband laughs and calls out to me
and says “oh Madam a call has come for you”. This reflects that families are proud of the fact that the SHG women address their wives with respect.

Latatai of Yavatmal (the detailed narrative is provided in the next chapter) explains how her house is a meeting place to conduct meetings of her SHG women. They come and meet her for their queries/problems or resolving any urgent issues. The family of Latatai understands the role of sahyogini and has never objected to the SHG woman coming to their home or taking the personal time of Latatai after office hours. Thus professional and personal spaces sometimes do get integrated. When you are committed to your work it really becomes difficult to draw lines between personal and professional spaces.

7.12 UNDERSTANDING ‘EMPOWERMENT’

The concept of empowerment has been debated and contested by scholars. In the chapter of review of literature too this concept has been discussed. However what need to be understood is what exactly empowerment is in the common parlance for the sahyogini’s. The following responses of the sahyoginis give an insight of empowerment

Jayashreetai of Aurangabad says “Empowerment means having knowledge of things, becoming smart. Ability to deal with Gram Panchayat, tehsil office, police patil of the village and ability to participate in elections too is also empowerment”. Shobhatai says empowerment should be reflected in educational level, financial position and overall personality development. According to Sujatai from Yavatmal uplifting women from their present situation, making them able to speak in public and discuss issues in meetings, making them step out of the four walls of home and getting informed about health is empowerment. Latatai also from Yavatmal says “Empowerment means when women understand that they have equal rights in all family property, and realize that all assets made by husband should be in joint names of husband and wife. Empowerment also means when husband consults his wife in all decisions. Women is empowered when she is progressed on all the fronts”

Anasuyatai of Nandurbar says that “Empowerment means when women can start speaking outside home and people listen to them and when they participate and their voices are heard in gram sabha. Interacting and participating in community activities and stepping out of home also mean empowerment”. Satvikatai talks about her experience of empowerment she says initially she would come under lot of pressure and stress out, but now
she has learnt to put her point across to people. So to come out of stressful situations and handle them and live life on your terms by making others understand your viewpoint is empowerment. Vandanatai says progress in all aspects of your life be it health, confidence, ability to do banking transactions, ability to travel alone or ability to take decisions for self or family including decisions regarding which school to put your children is empowerment. Pratibhatai of Aurangabad says empowerment is when the name plates outside the home also bear the name of the woman.

Sheetaltai of Nandurbar states that empowerment means emotional and financial development of individual. Speaking of her SHG women, she says that Initially women were afraid of taking loans as they feared how they will repay but later on their confidence increased and they can take loans of 1 lakh too and they trust their own capacity of repayment. This confidence in self and ability to believe that they can do it is empowerment. Manjushatai of Nanded says that being aware of one’s political rights and legal rights is empowerment. Speaking of her SHG women she says that the SHG women have realized the importance of voting and take a stand of whom to vote and make it a point to vote, this is empowerment. Ramshatai of Nandurbar says “Dhanacha ani Manacha Vikas Hone (Development in the financial status as well as developing one’s personality) is empowerment. Finally as Sheetaltai says ability to take decisions and implement them is empowerment. This explanation resonates so much with Naila Kabeer’s thoughts on empowerment wherein she says ability to choose and exercising choices is critical for empowerment.

The discussions in FGDs have come up with some interesting points on empowerment. Sahyogini’s have stated that when women participate and get elected at the gram panchayat level then they get to know about various schemes that the government has planned for them through the gram panchayat bodies and they can then demand for those schemes and funds. When women are aware of their rights they will not be elected members for namesake but they will do value addition and no one can take undue advantage of them. Empowerment means only women should not change but the entire society should develop change; change in their outlook, men should also get training on empowering women. As much as women should know and be aware of their legal rights but men should also know of

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women’s rights so that the feeling of equality is strengthened among men. Domestic violence act should be known to both men and women so that women know what to do and men know what are the consequences if they abuse women i.e. fear of law.

SUMMARY

Sahyoginis come from a poor socio economic background. Education has been a strong pillar in their life reflecting their determination and resilience. They have also stayed away from their families sometimes at relatives place to compete their basic schooling. As young girls many had desire of becoming a teacher or a police officer as these professions are looked upon with respect. They also had their parents as role models for the reason that they had brought them in difficult financial circumstances and yet provided basic education. The Sahyoginis have built strong support systems and it is this support system that helps them to carry their professional duties. The support system is in the form of parents, husband, in-laws, neighbours or colleagues. The colleagues become important part of their life as some of them they do share rented accommodation with them. The bonds of solidarity between SHG women and the sahyoginis could be seen from the fact that the sahyoginis rejoice on seeing the successful enterprises of their SHG women and the SHG women too confide all their problems with the sahyogini’s, they ensure that the sahyogini does not travel alone when it is very late at night. These bonds get stronger with the celebration of events and activities that are planned at the village level. The relationship that the sahyogini shares with MAVIM is different from the normal professional relationship as for many MAVIM has opened up the doors for a world outside their home. MAVIM is more of an emotional anchor for them especially the sahyoginis who have been deserted/separated from their husbands. The personal and professional spaces do get integrated. Their association with MAVIM has enriched them personally, economically and socially too. This transformation brings us to the question and understanding of what is empowerment and what does this concept mean to the sahyogini’s whose role is to facilitate empowerment of SHG women and how this journey of empowering others has helped.