Domination versus Sharing - An Alternative Model For Development

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In the process of economic development the control of, or access to, a particular technique/technology acquires utmost importance as a key factor. To hold control of such a factor inevitably leads to competition and conflict amongst the various beneficiary groups or individuals in the community. When a particular process is introduced to a society anew, apart from the technological aspect of that particular development process, knowledge about the process may itself act as a key factor depending upon the stage of development of that society prior to introduction of that particular development process. Gaining control over or access to resources denied hitherto becomes then the main aim of some groups (mostly the deprived ones) and retaining, monopolising and restricting control becomes a problem for the more established dominant group / groups / classes.

CONCEPT OF DOMINATION

In the changing situation, the key factor in the rural power structure does not remain confined to the access to technology alone but 'knowledge' of applying that technology in a particular situation becomes the 'key factor'. The knowledge flows from a source-group which not only possesses knowledge but is also in a position to decide what knowledge is to be made accessible to others (and to what extent) and what should not be. Thus, this group dominates the flow of basic information and knowledge. In a traditional society, the knowledge tends to be shared by all concerned, firstly, because it is limited and secondly, because it is considered as a common asset or heritage. Interestingly enough, newly introduced developmental technology does not automatically become a part of that heritage. Its introduction creates a sort of ascendancy of the source groups over others.

In a small community also this pattern of dominant and subordinate relationship between the 'givers' and `receivers' surfaces whenever some new technology is introduced. It not only creates domination but also seeks to retain and sustain it. In such a pattern, not only those at the receiving and are the losers but also the society as a whole loses a lot. First of all, the process of economic growth may itself be hampered. Secondly, rich traditions and institutional arrangements of a society may be destroyed. Thirdly, the ostensible groups become dependent on the dominating groups. Fourthly, whatever development takes places, does not necessarily lead to harmoneous and integrated development as such. Fifthly, it creates profound distortions within the group itself. The needy group loses its integrated character, the traditional qualities and cultural heritage is not only destroyed but is seen as undesirable.

CONCEPT OF SHARING

The following important aspects would explain the essence of sharing as a principle : (i) **Integrated development** : the development should not be equated with economic growth alone. Consideration of socio-cultural, educational, technological and such other factors as a part of development is equally necessary (ii) **Global approach** : Development of a group in isolation is not possible. Adequate linkages amongst different groups need to be developed so that the progress of all will be linked with each other's progress. (iii) **Equitable growth** : The advantages of development process should be made available to the weaker sections in such a way that they can have an opportunity to be equal to the powerful blocs. (iv) **Endogenous element** : A development process should encourage actually the self reliance of a people. Aims and objective should be based on the needs perceived by the ostensible beneficiaries and not as seen by the dominant groups. The beneficiaries should be encouraged to harness resources which are at their disposal easily and not to be supplied from outside. The needy should gain strength from their own cultural heritage, values, and modes of thoughts and actions.

In any cooperative lift scheme, control over actual distribution of water acts as a key factor for its success. If a handful of individuals get to know the necessary details of the working of the lift scheme and others have no access to such a knowledge, the domination pattern would get established inevitably. If however, most of the beneficiaries have adequate knowledge of working of the lift, can 'sharing pattern' occur there? A study of such apparently simple situations will enable us to compare situations conforming to the 'dominant pattern' with those close to the 'sharing pattern'.

The concept of sharing as an antithesis of domination in this model is something different from and additional to simply sharing of benefits. As used here, the concept of 'sharing' implies that less developed groups do not simply mean people without culture or innovativeness and groups devoid of any development potential of their own, but those who have something to pass on to others should not only acknowledge but also pay due respect and scope to the potentialities of others. If by dominating, the dominants are destroying the qualities of a people, the pattern is as much disadvantageous to the dominant as it is to the dominated ; for the dominant too may lose some useful knowledge in the process, a collective wisdom possessed by 'needy' (dominated) groups. Since all situations are not uniformly designed, nor are their implications uniform, scope to the originality amongst less well-developed is a necessity not only for themselves but also for the process of development as a whole. Mutual sharing for maximum benefits ought to be the aim of the development process so that people become self-reliant and self-supporting in every respect. Thus, domination and sharing symbolise two situations or patterns which differ mainly in the nature of basic relationships between the groups.

The government of Maharasthra adopted a policy to promote 'cooperative lift irrigation schemes' to boost agricultural productivity in the state since its formation in May 1960. In cooperative principle, sharing of at least benefits, if not of knowledge, is implied. It is also expected that those who participate in a cooperative venture have equal access to its control. The researcher had noticed that farmers have been forming cooperative lifts very enthusiastically, to start with but subsequently, very few of these lifts continued to function effectively. [See table 1]

Table 1

Status of the lift cooperatives in Maharasthra : 1986

Head	1961	1985
Total no.of societies	119	2,001
Share capital raised	Rs.22 lakh	Rs.650 lakh
Command area (in Hectares)	18,300	3,00,000
Irrigated area by these lifts	4,700	1,00,000
Societies in profit	41	500
Profits	Rs.2 lakh	Rs.100 lakh
Societies in loss	62	800
Losses	Rs.2 lakh	Rs.150 lakh

A question that would strike to any scrupulous observer of rural Maharashtra is :– 'why only a few lifts ran successfully and why others – only a few miles away – remained suspended ?' Studies were conducted in a drought prone village in Pune district in search of causes leading to this condition. A village called Sangvi Sandas was selected for the purpose. The village Sangvi-Sandas is situated about 45 kms. East of Pune city. Its exact position is 18-37 latitudes North and 74-10 longitudes East. It is on the right bank of River Bhima and is connected by a metal road to Wagholi on Pune-Ahmednagar state highway.

The lift of Sangvi Sandas was initially started in 1996 as a cooperative venture. At that time it functioned smoothly hardly a year or so. It was suspended from mid 1973 till 1984 when a social worker from *Gramayan* [a voluntary organization from Pune] revitalised it. It is functioning smoothly since then to serve the purpose well. In both the cases, outside agency had played an important role but the patterns of relationship between such an agency and the farmer members were different. The pertinent questions guiding this study are : (i) What was mode of transfer of knowledge to peasants in the period 1969 to1973 ? (ii) What was mode of functioning of lift during that period ? Can it be held responsible for what happen subsequently ? (iii) How and why did farmers re-organise themselves after 1982 to restart the suspended lift ? (iv) What mode of functioning of the lift is at present ?

COLLECTION OF DATA

All members of the lift in Sangvi Sandas were treated as a universe of the study for obtaining quantitative data . In order to get at the economic effects of the lift on the village life and on individual farmers, basic data were collected using an interview schedule, on which data for each respondent were recorded. A separate schedule was used for collecting primary demographic information about each household in the sample. Another schedule was meant to collect information on detailed consumer expenditure pattern of each household and its economic conditions prior to introduction of the lift. The third schedule is much broader in its coverage. Most of the questions were aimed at seeking information about the investment of members of their irrigated land as well as their non-irrigated plots.

For secondary source material, files from the Gramayan office in Pune, files from cooperative lift society's office at Sangvi and the records of Talathi office served a very useful purpose. This type of data was used primarily to prepare an historical account of the lift in Sangvi.

For qualitative data, we used informal meetings and discussions with the villagers in general and lift members in particular. The technique of interview was utilised to the maximum and forms to situational requirements but without missing the consistency of investigation. The researcher frequently visited the village. Many members and non members of the lift cooperative were contacted each time and non-scheduled, spontaneous, unstructured interviews in the form of informal conversations too were carried out fruitfully. The villagers were aware right from the beginning that researcher's visits were in connection with his research project. The researcher could also seize an opportunity of attending a few general body meetings, executive committee meetings of the lift society as well as informal gatherings of the members on some issue concerning the lift, e.g. recovery of bank loans. The proceedings of such meetings were revealing and proved to be of utmost importance in understanding the interactions of the members and the dynamics of power and decision making process. A diary of all such interviews and meetings was maintained by the researcher. Notes were made in the evening of each day of visit.

POWER STRUCTURE

The power structure is related basically, to the economics of the lift. A beneficiary farmer has to purchase a share of the cooperative, which is irrespective of his land to be irrigated under the lift. The selections are held every year and the Executive Committee of five members is elected. They appoint a secretary who is paid employee [could be a non-member also] but is not elected. Patkari is also appointed as a paid employee. The Chairman and the Vice Chairman are elected from the Executive Committee by all members of the society. The Secretary and the Committee have to work hand in hand. The Secretary is expected to be a trained person, or at least an educated person if a trained one is not available. He is expected to be conversant with rules and all procedural matters concerning decision making and execution of those decisions on the behalf of the cooperative society.

Major decisions are made in a general body meeting and the executive committee has to follow up their implementation. In practice, the Chairman and the Secretary wield considerable power much greater than is stipulated in the rules of the cooperative society; especially when the average farmer member is not much educated and is ignorant of rules about the working of the cooperative.

In Sangvi Sandas, the old lift scheme was initiated in 1969. Manibhai Desai, a well-known social worker and devoutly committed to the Gandhian thought on rural reconstruction, approached the villagers to persuade them to form a lift irrigation cooperative, which was to become a member of the Haveli Taluka Lift Cooperative Federation. Though seemingly an attractive proposal, the villagers were initially rather reluctant to form such a cooperative. After a series of meetings between the Federation promoters and the villagers, about 25 farmers came forward and thus the proposed cooperative was ultimately formed. Once institutionalization of the cooperative was formalised, the members were totally at the mercy of the Federation basically because none of the villagers had any knowledge whatsoever about the whole scheme – either its formal-legal aspects or its working and practical operations.

The Federation took upon itself the task of completing various formalities and handling government / official agencies associated with rural development schemes including the irrigation department. A farmer member's role was confined to only two things : (i) to purchase a share of the cooperative and (ii) to mortgage his land to the bank for obtaining the required loans as directed by the Federation. All the practical aspects of the paper work, survey, estimates and work-plan were looked after by the Federation. When each of the proposed lifts [at various villages] was finally passed and loans were received by the respective village lifts, the Federation saw to it that the lifts actually started functioning. In all 26 lifts started functioning, which had been initiated by the Federation, till 1972, and these include the lift in Sangvi.

In Sangvi, when the lift started functioning in 1971, the Federation in a sense had completed major part of its role. The water was available to the farmer-members for agricultural purposes. To ensure proper functioning of the lift was the responsibility of the villagers themselves. Initially, some guidelines and norms regarding actual utilization and distribution of water were laid down by the Federation. They comprised of main aspects of the economics of the lift, such as procedure of calculating water consumption of each individual member, how to work out consumption charges, how to schedule the distribution of water and the like. The federation appointed a 'patkari' to take care of physical channeling of water in the fields through distributories, to appear a schedule and to keep the members informed about the day-to-day functioning of the lift. The Executive Committee of five members was formed which was responsible for efficient working of the lift.

From the village KV, SB, BD, NT and MS are the persons who took initiative in forming lift scheme in scheme in 1969. They acted as leaders of farmers in Sangvi, before the lift commenced. After the lift came to functioning, they were appointed as members of Executive Committee by the Federation. All of them are owners of more than 10 acres of land, KV and SB are from 'deshmukh' family. BD and MT are from Talekar families, which are supposed to be original owners of the land around. Therefore, all of them esteem themselves above other. MS not only a descendent of a 'police patil' but he had also held that office for some years till 1970. All of these used to expect and did indeed receive also high respect from other villagers.

Once the local Executive Committee took over the day-to-day work, the Federation authorities minimised their interference. As the Executive Committee was responsible for, it had also powers over, the distribution of water from the lift. The ordinary member was happy that abundant water was available for the first time in his fields. That kept him busy with the farm operations. They believed that the leaders i.e. members of the Executive Committee, were capable of handling the lift operations properly. In fact, the leaders knew their business too well, more than what others expected of them. Very soon it became clear to other members that leaders often tried 'to rob water' i.e. to consume more water than their due share. Since they were bestowed with the authority, patkari could be easily pressurised by them to do so.

A few members did raise the issue of misuse of authority occasionally in their informal talks – a usual practice among the rural folks. The response from other members was mild because most of them were concerned about getting enough water for their own fields and not to bother about who was doing what. A few of them did genuinely admire their leaders as the very persons who had taken initiative for bringing the lift to the village and had persuaded others to join the scheme. Hence, they did not really doubt their leaders integrity nor did they believe their leaders would do something that would harm the smooth running of lift. Since the initiators of the lift were also traditional leaders, there was no higher authority at the local level, whom a member could complain to. Consequently, the situation was conducive for the leaders to acquire near absolute power.

The fruits of the scheme were attractive till the crucial problem of repayment of loans and payment of water and electricity charges had not confronted the beneficiaries. The bills of M.S.E.B. were not paid in time by the Executive Committee members in spite of collection from the farmer-members and consequently the electricity supply to the pumphouse was cut off promptly by the Board in mid – 1973. The lift came to a standstill.

EFFECTS OF CLOSURE OF THE LIFT

The outcome of nearly two years (1971 – 73) efforts could be summarised as follows : The traditional leaders of the village, who were also big landlords, (i.e. owning more than 10 acres of land each) had put only a part of their property at stake in the lift, and had exercised control to the lift for their maximum benefit. They made good profits of the increased farm products but did not pay their dues. On the contrary the small holders (i.e. those less than 4 acres of land each) had major part of their property at stake if not all, got only a limited benefit from the lift because they had no control over the working of the lift. Finally, although most of them had paid their dues in time still they could not prevent the lift from coming to a dead halt.

The economic condition of most of the member-farmers at Sangvi was too precarious for them to sustain this blow. Most of the members, especially those who did not have any other sources of income than their lands under the lift, had to mortgage their assets to the bank, and were literally ruined. The lift scheme thus added to their economic burden instead of helping them to reduce it. The leaders did not suffer to the same extent because all of them had plots of agricultural land elsewhere also.

The consequences of this crisis are not far to seek. A few of the villagers migrated to find work as wage labourers. Those who had neither contacts nor courage to move out had to search for work in the neighbouring villages. A few others who did not believe in hard work and were looking for easy money, reportedly started distilling illicit liquor – [hathbhatti] It was initially marketed outside the village but soon many residents of Sangvi also got addicted to drinking.

Thus, a village, which had so far maintained its social cohesiveness, was now transformed into a faction-ridden village. Factionalism on the basis of primordial identities of caste also started showing up. Even amongst Marathas, individuals started quarreling amongst themselves - a fact to be attributed largely to their newly acquired drinking habits.

THE SECOND PHASE OF THE LIFT

In 1982, one fine morning, an outsider approached the village. The visitor had come from another village called Parodi only 10 kms. away from Sangvi. After his education upto matriculation, he had completed a course designed for secretaryship of cooperative societies. His family owned a few acres of land and was satisfied and happy with their lot. The visitor known as HT came in contact with the voluntary organisation from Pune called Gramayan, in 1981. The organisation was established to help peasantry stand on their own feet, and to promote rural development through self-help and mobilisation of resources at the local level. HT had decided to take up as his first assignment a case of non-functioning lift. HT selected Sangvi for a simple reason that it was nearer his place.

Soon after HT's arrival in Sangvi he befriended many of the villagers through his free and uninhibited association with all of them. Nobody had ever dreamt that the lift would resume its functioning after a nine year interval [1974 to 1983], but his robust optimism paved way gradually to an eventual solution of the problems of the villagers. A few from amongst the younger generation saw wisdom in HT's thinking, logic and argument. A few others were impressed by his sense of commitment and dedication to the social cause. A few who were suspicious of his intentions in the beginning, were at last convinced of his seriousness of purpose and sincerity towards the task he wanted to accomplish.

After initial talks and discussions which took 5 – 6 months HT was able to bring people together on the issue of restarting the lift and could rebuild confidence among them. Many villagers had privately confided in Ht and had told him who were responsible for the stoppage of the lift in 1973 and in what way. Authorities of Gramayan visited Sangvi a few times in the years 1982 and 1983. They had discussions on various aspects of the proposed plan of restarting the lift in the village. A few enthusiastic farmers were taken to visit a lift at Nimgaon Mhalungi [12 kms] which had been put back into operation.

HT also tried to put across a few more ideas to the villagers by this time. He emphasized the need to achieve total prohibition in the village, to send children to school, and to resolve all local conflicts through consensus and amicable settlements in the village panchayat itself. These additional activities on the part of HT ushered in a new culture and outlook on quality of life among the villagers, particularly most of the youngsters realised how he had much more to offer to others and they now readily acknowledged his leadership.

First of all HT (on behalf of the proposed lift society as its Secretary) had to seek permission from the government. One major hurdle was that a new lift in place of the old one should take upon itself repayment of all the balance dues. In this particular case it was around Rs.12 lakhs. The financial burden of the lift was estimated to be Rs.4 lakhs; thus the overall responsibility of payment of earlier dues and repayment of fresh loans was of the order of Rs.16 lakhs – by no means a small sum. The villagers gave a second thought to the whole proposal, But finally accepted the challenge.

The second main problem was with the rules laid down for agricultural financing by the nationalised banks. Those who were members of the old lifts also, were disqualified for entering into a new mortgage deed for raising a fresh loan, but due to the goodwill of Gramayan authorities with the highest authorities of the Bank Of Maharashtra, The bank that had financed the earlier lift, agreed to accept the cases afresh.

The agreement between individual farmers [lift members] and the bank authorities needed to be registered, the Sub-Registrar declared that only three cases would be completed in one sitting and that there would be only one sitting every week. Fortunately, in this case also, the superior authorities of the Sub-registrar were convinced by the Gramayan authorities and ordered their subordinate staff to complete all the cases in one and the same sitting. Incredible though it may sound, he indeed completed them in a day.

The M.S.E.B. staff was also no less sadistic in harassing the needy peasant. All the required formalities were completed by the end of May 1984 and the electricity connection was awaited since then. It was a question of connecting only a few feet of live wire to the pumphouse installation but the M.S.E.B. circle engineer took nearly six months to approve of it and sign an order to that effect.

From July 1985, regular implementation of the lift commenced. Initially, most of the members had no idea about making the maximum as well as optimum use of water available to them. Secondly, many of them were also skeptical about smooth and continuous functioning of the lift. Thirdly, and most importantly, many did not have sufficient capital resources to invest. But still, the results were satisfactory. The joy of the farmers was expressed by our informants thus : " After many years we had abundant food grains for Diwali festival and that also produced by our own land without resorting to borrowing ".

By the end of May 1986 except 5 – 6 members all members had paid up their installments to the lift office. Those who had not paid were not deliberately doing so, but their produces were not sold by that time and were going to pay, as soon as the sale proceeds reached their hands. Thus, the society could pay its own installments to the bank at the end of the first year. The first year of the resumption of lift not only proved a great success but also created a sense of achievement and purposefulness in the minds of the members.

SOCIAL IMPACT

Though most of the farmers are poorly educated and a few of them were even illiterates they are now encouraged to think logically, rationally, and thoroughly by the young Secretary. He does purposely play a curious role trying to involve all members in the discussion by asking suggestive questions. He carefully channelises the flow of discussion. He wants to develop among them the habit of logical-analytical thinking. Although HT was capable of giving them ready-made solutions he did not do so. That would have created a sense of dependency amongst the members; on the contrary he wants them to work with their collective wisdom - not with anybody else's wisdom – and then own the responsibility of what they decided.

The first period of old lift i.e. from 1969 to 1973 was that of domination pattern. Throughout this chain of events between 1969 and 1973, ordinary member-farmers had remained silent spectators though the project aimed at their development. They had neither any knowledge of the happening around them nor any control over the chain events. Consequently, those at the receiving end suffered economic losses and the Federation or the 'leaders' too did not benefit in the long run. Ultimately, nobody could taste the fruits of the so called development.

In contrast with this background, the nature of leadership that emerged from 1982 onwards definitely has been close to the pattern of ‘sharing’. Right from the beginning, the farmers of Sangvi were involved in decision-making process about restarting of the lift, and participated in the proceedings of the lift Cooperative Society. Gramayan tried to put across the idea that, ‘economic growth must not be an end in itself, but needs to be seen as a means for better way of life’. The concept of development should be understood as something involving an overall change or multidimensional but integrated change’. Thus, the working of lift after 1983 involved inculcation of altogether new qualities, values and virtues. Farmers started learning to think rationally, discuss collectively and arrive at decision within the framework of prescribed rules and regulations. Their traditional fatalism is now being replaced step-by-step by self confidence and the spirit of self reliance. A new self-consciousness and creative will had replaced their earlier meek and docile disposition.

The farmers from Sangvi have realized the inherent strength of participatory decision-making. Thus, the seeds of modern thinking, participatory democracy and collective leadership were sown. The traditional farmer accepted day-to-day situations as God’s gifts but farmers now thought in ‘this worldly’ terms. A very important lesson had been learnt by them that, “difficulties could always be overcome by efforts.” Along with the economic achievements that the lift had made possible these social advantage are very important as they had a far reaching impact on the village community. Intervention of HT in resuming the lift, and in making people participate in the decision-making processes at the grass-roots level had thus completed the transition from the ‘dominant’ to the ‘sharing’ pattern of collective leadership. The difference between the two situations was necessarily that of the relationship inside the group of beneficiaries themselves. As already mentioned, impact of the ideology of self-help, self-reliance and commitment to participatory decision-making in the second phase of working of the lift, has resulted into a sustainable development. The lift cooperative at Sangvi has thus illustrated very clearly that replacement of the ‘domination pattern by the sharing’ model in a concrete micro-level setting is the most viable and lasting alternative in rural development.