

SHORTER NOTES

VILLAGE VALUES AS RURAL DEVELOPMENT THEMES

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Rural development policy makers and applied social scientists are increasingly vocal about their self-perceived need for greater information on the values and worldview of rural peoples :

Planners tend to assume that wealth is the sole motivator in industry and agriculture Consequently, developmental administrators have not considered systematically either the other values resources available for broadening citizens' motivation to engage in modernization or their implications for the design of new technological systems in these...sectors (Montgomery 1976 :10).

. . . a one-week seminar of carefully prepared indoctrinational material on the value system for development planners and administrators would immediately sharpen the effectiveness of aid programs (Maynard 1976 :80).

Agricultural production is not just a singular activity that takes place in isolation, but rather a way of life. It is part of an encompassing social system and a function of such basic characteristics as the land tenure system, the power and authority structure, a system of values and social obligations,

a certain code of conduct that governs individual and group behavior, etc. (Cernea and Tipping, 1977 :9).

It is precisely this 'system of values and social obligations' and the 'code of conduct that governs individual and group behavior', noted by Cernea and Tipping, which—in relation to development program acceptance and understanding—has received little careful, focused research.

One example of how this analysis can be undertaken is an approach we term 'values-based research'. This approach involves a close examination of the shared conceptual universe existing in a village or region focusing on factors crucial to the development process. Important conceptual categories include shared understandings of how change occurs, when and how change is viewed as a desirable turn-of-events, their views on urbanization and its effects on people whom they know or they themselves (if any have lived in large towns or cities), and villagers' evaluations of what is desirable about those facets of modernization which they have experienced. In other words, the study focus is upon villagers' emotional responses to the changes that are now gradually washing toward them . . . which types of change are eagerly sought by them, which types are they building defences against. At a deeper level, the analysis should formulate verbal 'capsulizations' of villagers' own symbols and images regarding change and modernization as expressed *in their own words*. When identified, these villager values (concepts) can be the basis of relevant, appropriate development policy objectives. Relevant because they build upon the villagers, (not the developers') views of the world and how it should change. Appropriate because it incorporates the villagers' attitudes toward what changes they are ready to accept now and those toward which they are adamantly opposed.

The remainder of this paper illustrates this approach with case study data on villager values in a small village in western India, an analysis of these data in relation to development change, and a preliminary effort to identify some development policy implications which emerge from these data.

The case study data came from interviews and group discussion held with approximately 40 adult male informants in the village of Sakat, western Maharashtra. At the time (1980) Sakat had a population of 511 people living in 85 households; its dominant caste groups were Marathas and Dhangars. The former's traditional occupation speciality was agriculture and the latter's was sheep and goat herding; today, both groups are primarily cultivators or agricultural laborers. Sakat is located in a dry, drought-prone area where landholdings are large by Indian standards (about

11 acres) but, at the same time, the annual household income is only Rs. 2,657 (\$332).

While it may not be absolutely typical, there is nothing remarkable about Sakat from an economic, social, political, or cultural standpoint. It is one of thousands of small, poor Indian villages which is yet to feel any major impact of modernization or any significant benefits from either national or state government development programs.

Between November 1979, and February 1980, a four-person research team headed by myself and Dr. P. S. Jacob of Ahmednagar College undertook a pilot study of Sakat villager values with special focus on concepts related to change, modernization, and development. We held individual interviews with sizeable proportions of the adult male Maratha and Dhangar populations as well as group discussions. During these individual and group sessions, we talked about a wide array of subjects and issues, often delving into topics which, on the surface, had little to do with rural development (such as 'what are the characteristics of a good wife?') but which, in our analysis, gave us a more comprehensive view of the villagers' worldview. We discussed such disparate subjects as the cinema and its impact on people's behavior, why women should not be allowed to sing with men, what they would do if a fortune suddenly dropped into their lap, why Gandhi and Nehru were godlike, the three deadly sins a villager should eschew, and a host of other questions. Space limitations do not permit me to elaborate on these issues; a monograph is now in preparation which details this study.¹

Based on these villager values raw data—the individual answers to a questionnaire schedule and tape transcripts of four lengthy group discussion sessions—Dr. Jacob isolated three key concepts that have a direct bearing on the way in which villagers interpret development-linked changes. We believe that these concepts summarize important conceptual demands which Sakat villagers share about 'how the world works', ideas and feelings which bear an important relationship to how these men respond to new ideas and technological innovations. These concepts, we suggest can be seen as predisposing conditions that determine the extent to which an innovation will or will not be adopted². Three examples of such 'gatekeeping' concepts are presented here with illustrations of how they influence villagers' adoption of new ideas and/or relinquishment of old practices.

THREE 'GATEKEEPING' CONCEPTS

The Margadarshan Concept: *Margadarshan* or 'good guidance' was a phrase that recurred continually in our data. A good village headman in

dealings with villagers, a newly-wedded husband toward his young wife, and a priest to lay-people should all provide 'good guidance'. Gandhi and Nehru provided it to the nation, the Ahmednagar College staff should provide *margadarshan* to Sakat villagers, and so on. 'Margadarshan', in the sense used by the villagers, can be roughly translated as 'Oh wise one, you must show me the proper way'. This attitude may be interpreted as an expression of the 'mabap' (mother-father) syndrome: 'you (government official or worker) are my mother and father: you must treat me as your own child'.

The behavioral implications of this concept in terms of developmental change is that villagers cannot know what is the proper course of action. They are poor, uneducated, unsophisticated peasants who are totally *confused* about how to improve themselves. Given this self-image, the Sakat villager (in his own mind) is exempted from responsibility for his village's or his household's improvement. They are not even responsible for sweeping the village lanes; it is the duty of the village-level worker!

Such a concept is antithetical to the notion of self-help and self-reliance. Development of the village's modern infrastructure is left up to others who, of course, may share the same attitude of not knowing 'what to do'.

The Kashtalu Concept: *Kashtalu* or 'hard-working' is another concept mentioned frequently in our data. The idea of *kashtalu* implies endurance, perseverance, and hope. Villagers realize that sometimes one must invest time and energy today in hope of a long-term reward. That is, they need not have immediate gratification because they have seen with their own eyes that some well-off people have achieved their success by *kashtalu*³.

This is an important, positive concept for the advancement of developmental change. It indicated that Sakat villagers recognize their personal and collective life-betterment will be advanced by the degree to which they are willing to patiently consistently work hard. Often, the *kashtalu* concept was linked with the *margadarshan* concept in a rationalizing manner: that is, although they were hard-working, they were not achieving enough because they lacked good guidance.

The Anuroopata Concept: *Anuroopata* or 'harmony' is a term we use to describe a collection of various villager viewpoints that center around the notion of the need to maintain harmony in village life. More accurately, this concept stresses the idea of 'harmony in conformity', that the need to maintain a healthy harmony in the village is a principle of greater importance than the need for change. From Sakat villagers' perspective, changes and innovations must be adjusted to the *status quo* or the result will be total

Transforming the good guidance psychic reflex so as to encourage the development of self-help attitudes will require the creation of a new social environment in Sakat, an atmosphere which encourages psychological freedom to deviate from existing norms. This atmosphere will be most readily generated where appropriate social education techniques such as dramas, skits, songs, and other teaching techniques can be implemented.

1. The concept of *kāshṭala* or 'hard-working' can be emphasized and enhanced by illustrating ways in which the difficulty of villagers' work can be minimized (through appropriate technology and other mechanical innovations), and, by demonstrating how the degree of work they accomplish can be maximized (through the adoption of new organizational techniques such as caste group-based cooperatives, reciprocal labor pools, or village-development cadres).

2. Villagers can be shown that change need not be devastatingly traumatic, that altering age-old customs and attitudes will not cause the world to stop or the sky to fall. The grip of the past on villagers' mind and feelings can be released most readily if knowledgeable social scientists will use their skills to identify stirring images that will facilitate the transfer of villagers' emotional loyalties from their *ancestors* to their *descendants*. Instead of a backward-looking effort to maintain the past in the present, villagers can be encouraged to turn their attention toward the future and their children's social and economic legacy. Many villagers we spoke with were curiously ambivalent and confused about the future. They say few familiar symbols or friendly signposts to help them, to offer good guidance. Skillful social scientists, especially cultural anthropologists, could make a very important contribution to the development of India as well as other older societies, by helping design 'transition-symbols' that will provide semantic bridges between villagers' obligations to the past and future. For instance, in the case of Sakat, traditional culture heroes from the Ramayana and other classics might be used to legitimate needed social and economic changes⁵.

This 'values-based' development approach emphasizes using the values of the villager—the ultimate client of development activities—rather than those of the planner or government official. This approach can be an important planning methodology because it promises less-disruptive transitions to modernity. With respect to less disruptive impacts from change-oriented projects, we can only surmise that if villagers and other development clients are interviewed to gain insights concerning their vision about what development means, what kinds of preliminary change are amenable to them, what

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anarchy. Whenever 'harmony in conformity' is challenged by individuals, events, or acts, and initial chaos occurs but soon the system of harmony re-establishes its supremacy. This term capsulizes an important psycho-cultural force operating in Sakat to enforce conformity on individuals and groups, to resist change because it will lead to disorder, upheaval and turmoil.

The impact of this concept on developmental change efforts is obvious—it is a major roadblock to significant change. *Anuroopata* explains why village change efforts are often stymied or, more precisely, transformed into a new expression of old verities. For examples, one outcome of the Green Revolution was the enhanced concentration of power among the already powerful farmers⁴.

These are examples of how significant shared concepts can have a direct bearing on villager's willingness and self-perceived efficacy to undertake developmental change. Based on our analysis, two of these concepts may act to inhibit and one to facilitate villagers' response to developmental change projects. While we do not pretend that these three are exhaustive or ultimate delineations of villager values, we conclude this paper with a brief discussion illustrating how a rural life analyst could use data such as these to formulate development policy. We shall examine the application of villager values to development programming in terms of specific illustrations from the Sakat material and in terms of general recommendations for values-based planning procedures.

Specific applications of these Sakat data in a relevant, appropriate development program would include the introduction of an extensive adult education component to existing development efforts. This educational program would focus on introducing Sakat villagers to new information on several topics highlighted in our values research including the benefits of self-help over a dependency posture in dealing with change and new ideas. Eradicating the long-standing psychic disposition to relinquish decision-making to 'those who know better' will not be an easy task but it is an essential prerequisite before many other aspects of village development can proceed. *The margadarshan* or 'good guidance' concept may be directly related to the notion of *anuroopata* or 'harmony in conformity'; that is, part of maintaining the harmony in a village is conformity to the concept of good guidance. Women should not think for themselves, young people should listen carefully to their elders, the priest and headman should be the mainsprings of village leadership . . . these guiding relationships are foundations for the maintenance of village harmony.

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they fear about change, and so forth, then this technique will provide a smoother transition from traditional to more modern lifestyles.

NOTES

1. The complete results of this research are compiled in our manuscript 'Village Values and Rural Development: Psychocultural Aspects of Modernization'.
2. As pointed out by Quint (1958: 373): 'Modern technology requires a new type of man, equipped with a value system consonant with the type of society modern technology demands'. Also, Smith and Inkeles (1974: 283) note that 'learning of lessons; modernity depends not only on the skill of the teacher but also on the psychological readiness of the learner'. Dube (1958: 110) also remarked on the need to study attitudes to learn the village peoples' views of change.
3. Given the cultural history of India, rural villagers do not always perceive the cause-effect relationship between hard work and material prosperity. As noted by Ganguli (1967:30), '...it is certainly true that Indians tend to believe in fate slightly more than other people, and do not always believe that in hard work lies the foundation of prosperity'. Nair (1979) has pointed out the common belief in India by British as well as Indian administrators that certain castes were better agriculturalists than others.
4. Kapp (1963:40) argues that 'social institutions do change and while individuals and groups are making adjustments to changing conditions, traditional patterns of thought and value may be strong enough to maintain their hold on Hindu society...'
5. Kapp (1963:64) believes that 'To the foreign observer it seems as though only limited and half-hearted efforts have so far been made to reorientate and reinterpret Hindu tradition in order to make it part of the great venture of modernization and socio-cultural change'. Dube (1958:131) noted that '...the problems of communication in rural community development are those of adapting the agent of change, the media of communication and the form and content of the communication to the culture, value system, attitudes and world view of the community'. Schwenk (1972) also noted the possibility of mobilizing existing socio-cultural traditions for modernization.

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