

# Villagers' Response to Development and the Identification of the Quantitative Indicators of Cultural Development

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**Abstract:** In this presentation I want to share the villagers' attitude towards development. This paper also explains the meaning and significance of alternative development by citing the case studies, mainly from all the 87 studied villages by the IGNCIA investigators, and the successes and failures of the approach and the functioning of the indicators taken to achieve an alternative development. The role of Self-Help-Groups (SHGs) and cooperatives as the measures of self-help, mainly among women and on aspects of cooperation through *khadi*, *bhoodan*, *gramdan*, and other initiatives are discussed in their essence. The second part of the presentation speaks about the mechanisms of identifying the indicators of cultural development in quantitative terms and tabular style for the planners, administrators, government officials, NGO professionals and the commoners.

## Introduction

What is development? For answering this question I have not consulted any encyclopedia or the internationally known work of a scholar of economics, sociology, anthropology or Development studies. I have rather tried to cull out the meaning of development from the mouth of common villagers by reading the reports of Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts and also on the basis of my first hand information from one of the villages of Mithila, Bihar. The development for a villager, as I have understood, is some measure of change that ensures better civic amenities, health, educational infrastructure, metal road, job opportunities (avenues of job opportunities), equal opportunity for the women, down-trodden and the marginalized section of the village community, etc. But the way projects of development are implemented does not satisfy the common villagers. In most of the cases they either not consulted or their voice is not heard properly. As a result they express their dissatisfaction, frustration and revulsion against the planners and those who implement the projects of development.

All techno centric measures of development that ensure good health, metal road, communication telephone, media, rail transport, post office, electricity, film, television, modern world etc. are being generously accepted by the common villagers of India. They accept them as part of their life. This attitude or response of the villagers of India is best cited by the famous Maithili poet Baidynath Mishra 'Yatri' who is also known in Hindi as 'Nagarjuna'. As a radical villager and poet, inside his heart, "Yatri" writes:

"Neek	hamra	lagai	achi
adhunik			samsar/Ranga-Virangak
lok	vividhachar	aar	vichaar/...
Rail-motor			tram.../Post-telegram.../

Jaladhi	par	jalyan.../Neel	nabhme
Shwet	peet	vimaan.../	bijali
Radio	o	film.../Neek	hamra
Achi ce aadhunik samsaar....”			

“Yatri” has been known in the entire Hindi heartland as a wanderer villager. He has always depicted the village life and pains and pleasures of the common villagers, with special reference to the women, poor, widows, destitute, helpless, untouchables etc. through his writings.

In this paper I am going to discuss mainly about the alternative development.

The second part of the presentation speaks about the indicators of cultural developments and innovative measures successfully implemented by the villagers or the change agents including individual, institutions and NGOs.

#### **DEVELOPMENT AND ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT**

When we are speaking about development or alternative development the questions that come into mind are: a) What is an alternative development?; b) Alternative development: is it an appropriate model?; c) Alternative approach: dose it long last or shifts from one to another successive alternative models?; d) Functioning of alternative development: could make an inroad among the target people?; and e) Alternative models and the role of NGOs.

As name suggests an alternative model of development is a way of achieving the goal of development through non-linear method. It is mainly based on the implementer’s experience of dealing with the people. It can have regional, national, international or universal target group as per the requirement of the nature of the projects and the programmes. One small measures of changing the attitude of the villagers in a small village towards the elimination of child labour and the promotion of the cooperatives and SHGs both can be treated as alternative models of development.

The framers and founders of free India resolved to improve the quality of life and socio-economic condition of all citizens, mainly the villagers, by implementing multi-dimensional development projects and policies. Through such policies they promised to provide minimum needs - food, nutrition, health, security, drinking water, sanitation environmental protection, shelter, etc. They also envisaged the creation of gender equality and a casteless society where the people might live in harmony, fearlessness and with a sense of equality and justice. The makers of free India dreamt of a society, which besides keeping its traditional values and practices intact, accommodated the latest development processes. They tried to create a society where nobody is left out of the development process.

Rural development has now become a buzzword for governments [central as well as state(s)], Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and financial institutions. New programmes and policies are accordingly framed to develop villages. The impact is worth mentioning. In many areas India registered entry as a model country. We became the largest democracy in the world. The food scarcity has been solved with the quick adoption of scientific farming and hard work. The mortality and morbidity rates have

decreased significantly, literacy has improved, most of the villages are linked with the metal roads, post offices, Public Health Centres (PHC), and have primary, middle and senior secondary schools (according to the population size and geographical area of the village) and in some cases, even colleges; special initiatives are taken to educate women, Harijans and Girijans (Indian Tribes). Steps are also taken to provide shelter, job opportunities and other financial benefits to the rural poor, mainly to Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Communities (OBCs), women and those living below the poverty line. Village Panchayats are now more powerful and direct players in development according to the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment of the Indian Constitution. One-third of seats are reserved for women and proportionate reservation is also provided to the SCs, STs, minorities, etc., so as to let them reap the benefits of development without any discrimination. Technological innovations such as telephone, mass medias, radio, television, etc., have also worked prominently to create massive awareness among the rural populace. Facilities such as road, railway lines, transportation, etc., have bridged the gap between villages and cities. Now they interact regularly. The Governments (mainly through institutions such as National Bank for Agricultural and Rural Development [NABARD], SIDBI, Gramin Banks, Rashtriya Mahila Kosh [RMK] and others), NGOs, Community Based Organizations (CBOs) etc., are trying to make people self-sufficient by creating entrepreneurial skills and cooperative consciousness. Many Self Help Groups (SHGs), as a result, are functional in several parts of Indian states. The youth are also given soft loans under Prime Minister Rojgar Yojana (PRY), Chief Minister Rozgar Yojna (CRY) and other schemes to start their own businesses.

### **Self Help Group Cooperatives as Alternative Model for Women Development**

Women of all ages, classes and communities in general and those belonging to the SC communities in particular have for generations been subjected to varying degrees of exploitation. The stratified structure of the society, the sexual division of labor and control over women's sexuality have all combined to assign women the traditional roles of mother and wife. They have been made passive receivers of these roles for generations. This role has been sanctified by the age-old Indian tradition to such an extent that it is sometimes abhorrent to a rational mind and civilized conscience. This culture of acquiescence has led to a state of helplessness for women. It is also responsible for many of aberrations and ailments which afflict society such as child marriage, very large families, absence of leisure, freedom and relaxation leading to a drudgerous existence and denial of basic dignity to which every woman in the society is entitled. After Independence steps have been taken in all possible areas to address the issues relating to development of women: health, hygiene, education, social, physical, psychological, legal/constitutional to name a few.

Governments with the help of NGO's and financial institutions have taken many steps to promote the socio-economic status of rural women in the country. To create a platform of integrated development for women in all areas of concern, innovative as well as practical measures were adopted in every possible area. Accordingly, rural women are motivated to realize their inalienable social, economic and political rights. They are encouraged to utilize the social and community support services in areas of education, health, family welfare, immunization and nutrition, drinking water, legal aid, etc. The rationale of these initiatives is clear. Boys and girls are born out of the same mother's womb. They breathe the same air, share the same food and water, and wear the dress made out of the same fiber. Girls are endowed with the same intelligence and abilities as are boys. Women are endowed with the same, if not better, ingenuity, resourcefulness and capacity for hard work as are of men.

Educational, social, legal and economic strategies were deployed to ensure that women develop an ability to think independently and express themselves fearlessly. Promises were made to motivate and provide an atmosphere where women could build up group cohesion for decision-

making and take collective action for bringing about change. Their equal participation in the process of bringing about social change was rightly seen to be crucial. Economic independence, after all, is impossible without women's emancipation.

Implementation of such policies held hope for women. They have responded positively to all programs and policies. Their status has improved in all directions. But in many areas people are not very happy with the pace of development. Some of them have also expressed their difference with the agencies involved in women's development. But the overall response is no doubt encouraging.

Major initiatives are undertaken by the Ministry of Women and Child Development. Through the 73rd Amendment in the Indian constitution, a provision is made to reserve one-third of seats for women in village panchayats. This is followed strictly in every state, where Panchayat elections take place. Women head the panchayats in many villages as a result (as Sarpanch).

The central and state governments have also been promoting women's organizations like Mahila Mandals, Mahila Sangams, Women's Thrift and Credit Groups or Self Help-Groups (SHGs) etc.

In Kumbhavadi village of Gujarat, the bond of dairy farming has integrated the village women and the 'Dugdha-Mandali' has become a common ground for their social and cultural activities. It is here that they assemble for every cultural and religious celebration. Under the DRDA scheme of Women and Child welfare, 3 organisations of women 'Gujarat Mahila Mandal', 'Umila Mahila Mandal' and 'Limbode Gram Vikas Mandal', were given revolving fund loan of Rs. 24,000/- each for purchase of cooking set, Mandap decoration and sale of castor seed.

In Panchwad, Maharashtra, women play an important role in the household as well as in agricultural activities. At social level they are highly regarded. Most of them are educated and employed in various fields. They have a place in Gram Panchayats and Mahila Mandals. They play significant, though minor and nominal role in the decision making within the family.

The response to Development of Women & Child in Rural Areas (DWCRA) and SHGs is immense in the village of Kothaindlu in Andhra Pradesh. This was initiated in 1995 and now there are nine SHGs of women in the village. Each member pays @Rs. 30/- per month. The collected amount is deposited in a nationalized bank. All groups have received revolving fund from the Government departments and financial institutions. The amount saved as well as the revolving fund is distributed as loans to the group members who are in need with an annual interest rate of 24%. The remaining fund is deposited in the bank. More than 50% of the milch cattle are borrowed in the village under this scheme.

Similar Thrift and Credit Groups of women are also functional in Srinagavarapupadu village in Andra Pradesh under DWCRA scheme.

In Andad village of Maharashtra, women have recently started participating in the meetings of *Gramsabhas*. Generally, men consult their wives before taking any important decision, for example while finding a spouse for their child.

Status of women in the village of Berain, Bihar after *Gramdan* (1958) was elevated to some extent. They have performed responsible functions in the economic spheres. They have traditionally worked in the fields as agricultural labourers even before Gramdan to support their families. After Gramdan the village women joined hands with menfolk on equal terms: they learnt spinning, weaving, were trained to work on looms and in small and cottage industries in the village. They play important role in harvesting of crops. Though the control of production is not in the hands of women, their participation in agricultural activities is considerable productive and crucial.

Availability of sanitation, drinking water, electricity and other facilities in the house have a positive impact on the health of women and their children. Once they are conscious about health and hygiene, many concerns of other family members is already taken care of.

In many states the condition of the rural women have not improved. We see many examples of dissatisfaction in various reports as far as women's development is concerned.

Education both in the traditional and modern sense was expected to liberate women from the culture of silence and dependence, from the drudgery, monotony and tyranny of a domesticated role of mother and housewife. Ironically, however, the very forces of traditionalism and obscurantism which education was to fight and eliminate have made education inaccessible to the vast majority of girls and women. This would be evident from their low enrolment in and heavy dropout from schools.

In Sringavarapupadu village in Andhra Pradesh, boys are being sent outside the village for education to improve their social status. Those belonging to the backward castes benefit from reservation given to the Other Backward Class (OBC) in government jobs. Because, girls are not given equal opportunities of education, they cannot even avail of reservation benefits.

In the Kakhaura village, Bihar while literacy among the women is on the rise, standard of modern education has gone down. Majority of girl-children are educated till the primary level only. Insecurity created by the rowdy elements does not allow the villagers to send their girls in the neighboring village for attending classes in Senior Secondary Schools. In some cases, people do not allow their daughters to obtain higher education because it would be difficult for them to get qualified life partners for those well-educated girls. In Bihar huge amount of cash and gift items have to be given as dowry to get qualified and well-educated bridegrooms. These traditions discourage parents who would have otherwise liked to arrange for their daughters' higher education.

In the village of Andad in Maharashtra, women of all communities work in the fields, take part in agricultural activities viz., transplantation, weeding, harvesting, thrashing, storing of grains, etc., even though they have no freedom to decide what to grow in the field. They do not have control over the process of production. As laborers, women do not get an equal wage. A male laborer earns Rs.50/- per day while for the same quantum of job, a woman gets just Rs.40/-.

To ensure the self-help component self-help group (SHGs) are formed in rural India "India has

been experimenting since 1960s with very flexible system, giving a lot of freedom to the NGOs to set up SHGs based on various models. SHGs are mostly informal groups of people where members pool their savings and relent in the group on rotational basis, depending upon individual consumption, production or investment needs. Many such groups are formed around specific production activities to promote savings among members and use the pooled common resources to meet the emergent credit needs of members” (Sahu, 1997). Thrift and credit or Self-Help groups in this way aim at reaching self-reliance.

The main significance of self-help groups is to link up the grass roots development processes and financial transactions to the international monetary order. No wonder many banks associate themselves with NGOs, which identify prospective borrowers, appraise their requests and forward viable proposals to the banks. After the loan is sanctioned, NGOs also help in providing necessary training to the borrowers, in maintaining assets, and in monitoring loans and sanctions. “Enthused by the prospects of bringing large numbers in the banking fold, the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) and the Reserve Bank of India made bold moves to intensify the formation of SHGs across the country. These included offering refinance to Banks for lending to SHGs and active networking at district levels for motivating bankers and NFOs to engage in SHG promotion. Not only did grassroots agencies become active in SHG promotion, and some of them exclusively so, a number of sophisticated support intermediary agencies also emerged, providing training, linkage and even financial services to NGOs and SHGs” (Khandelwas, 2001).

According to NABARD data (1999-2000) SHGs availing credit has increased from 3,841 in 1997 to 81,780 in 2000. the total number of SHGs linked to banks stand at 1,14,755 in March 2000. 85% of them are women groups. The number of financial institutions extending credit to the SHGs has increased from 120 in 1997 to 266 in 2000. the SHGs are operating in 362 districts of 24 states and Union Territories. The number of NGO, dealing with SHG has increased from 220 in 1997 to 718 in 2000. (Dasgupta, 2001).

The concept of self-help groups getting immense favor from the women of Indian Villages where they are willing to invest their small savings or pocket money through micro-credit institutions. SHGs so formed do not limit only to financial transactions but also get activated for many other issues. The collective aspirations of the members of the SHGs becomes stronger day by day as the group dynamics gets strengthened and group bonds get cemented. The group members learn the benefit of group action and realize the importance of group strength. The SGH besides offering a means to access resources start functioning as a collective unit which address common problems through group action. “As creation of awareness and non-formal education is integral to the activities of any voluntary agency, SHGs not only provide the members with an opportunity to carry out economic activities but also discuss and analyse the social and economic situation to arrive at the root cause of their problems, and strive to find and implement solutions. SHGs therefore become a forum for collective voice of the poor against common problems and exploitation” (Roy Burman and Das, 2002).

Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK), sponsored by the Government of India (Department of Women and Child Development), was set up mainly with the objective of assisting women below poverty line. The RMK provides financial packages to the women concerned, encourages them to set up SHGs and assists them to undertake income-generating activities. The chief function of RMK is to provide credit for productive activities, alongwith some support for vocational training. The institutions eligible for financial support are NGOs, Women's Credit Cooperatives and Women's Development Corporations working on

sound lines and having experience in SHGs Administration. Other financial institutions such as NABARD, SIDBI, etc. have also come forward to promote the self-employment and cooperative movement among the rural women. This experiment has been launched successfully in many states.

Though the SHGs have improved the savings component in the rural areas, the financial deals have also helped them to escape from the clutches of moneylenders, the phenomenon has led to a dependency syndromes. In most cases SHGs are formed through active involvement of Non-Governmental organizations (NGOs) or Voluntary Organisations (Vos). Often concerned Vos supplement the resources of the SHGs by providing some capital in the form of grants or interest free-loans, to be used as working fund by the SHG.

The assistance rendered by the NGOs and SHGs certainly make the financial transactions much cheaper and safer. For example, in "Thali Village of Tamil Nadu transaction level of the Indian Bank branch is clearly cheaper when worked out through SHGs and NGOs. While it is Rs. 103 for SHG members, it is Rs.157 for a non-member. Recovery performance for branch level is 42.53% for direct lending and 86.81% for SHG lending. The recovery rate in some select villages of the state was 37.88% from non-SHG members and 92.30% for SHG beneficiaries" (Karmakar, 1999).

Villagers in general are not happy with the officials of the Department of Agriculture, banks, and other service sectors of the government. In Andhari village of Bihar there is a Veterinary hospital with a doctor, but its services are poor. Doctor's attitude irritates the villagers, and they are compelled to take their animals nearby towns and consult private practitioners.

In the village of Ainole in Andhra Pradesh certain social welfare activities are on the anvil. Peasants of SC and ST communities are sanctioned loan for sinking bore-wells for irrigation purposes. SC Corporation, BC Corporation and certain other banks are also providing loan facilities to the villagers.

Shelterless, cottage or hut dwellers now have pucca houses to live in. These houses were made by a government agency under Indira Awas Yojna (Scheme). Other schemes such as JRY, PRY, etc., provide job opportunities to the poor and underprivileged.

In Andhari village of Bihar, village Drain and Community Hall are constructed under JRY. Poor villagers, mainly those belonging to Harijan and Backward Communities had got job opportunities under these schemes. Pucca houses are built for the homeless Harijan families under Indira Awas Yojna. Rural poor have received loan for purchasing cattle, bullocks, buffaloes, etc. Officials from agriculture department often visit the village to educate them about the use of fertilizers, new and scientific-seeds, pesticides, etc.

**Other Examples of Alternative Development:**

The Village Kottakkal of the Malappuram district of Kerala has created an extraordinary example of alternative development by way of retaining and propagating the heritage of Ayurvedic system of medicine. Since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century its recent historical development is based on its Ayurvedic system of medicine introduced by P.S. Variar (1869-1944), a traditional Ayurveda *Vaidya*, who founded an Ayurvedic *pathshala* (College) at Calicut town, was later shifted to Kottakkal Village. This *pathshala* continues to this day.

The social and cultural development of the village can be attributed to P.S. Variar who belonged to the Variar caste. The traditional occupation of this caste was cleaning of temples. One Brahmin family brought one family of this caste from the Panniyampalli Variyam of the Kozhikoda (Calicut) district for their service to the temples of Kottakkal. P.S. Variar studied Ayurveda under Kuttancherry Moosed. A number of families of the village are totally engaged in jobs, connected with Ayurveda. They find subsistence within the village and outside. Most of the people, irrespective of caste and community, are involved in the manufacture of Ayurvedic medicines. The contribution made by this village in the field of Ayurvedic is quite remarkable. It was Vaidyaratnam P.S. Variar who made a deep study of the science of Ayurveda under Brahmasri Kuttancherry Vasudevan Moosed, one of the great *Asthavidyas* of his time, and also acquired a sound knowledge of the Allopathic system under the Dewan Bahadur Dr. Varghese, a distinguished Physician and Surgeon. On the *Vijaya Dasami* day, the 12<sup>th</sup> October 1902, P.S. Variar founded the Kottakkal Arya Vaidya Shala. In 1907 he initiated an association of all Ayurvedic physicians in the state under a society called Arya Vaidya Samajam. The Society conducted examinations and meetings for Ayurvedic students. In 1917, he founded an Ayurvedic Pathashala at Calicut and in 1924, he started a charitable hospital at Kottakkal. Later he thought of shifting the Pathashala from Calicut to Kottakkal in order to provide ample practical training for students. After the integration of the princely states into Kerala, the syllabuses of the institutes were revised and a unified system of tuition for the Diploma course in Ayurveda, with common public examination conducted by the Government of Kerala, came into force from 1959 onwards. In 1972, the B.A.M. degree course was introduced in the college. This was later converted into the B.A.M.S degree course. The college is affiliated to the Calicut University, and the steps to change it to a deemed university are in progress. It may be mentioned that 20 hectares of the village land are being utilized for medicinal plants.

The Kottakkal Arya Vaidyashala has its branches in various parts of Kerala, Coimbatore, Chennai, Calcutta, Secunderabad, New Delhi and several other places. There are 850 agents of the Arya Vaidyashala all over India. The Vaidyashala, with 1732 employees, holds promise of an expanding industry.

It has proven its self-organizing ability. In the health sector, it has developed traditional medicine. The contribution made by an individual, Vaidyaratnam P.S. Variar is quite remarkable. In 1902, he founded the Kottakkal Arya Vaidya Sala, an association of the Ayurvedic physicians. Today it is an internationally known centre of learning in Ayurveda formed on the pattern of modern research in medicine. The village has earned a reputation also in the field of developing kathakali dance, the great art form of Kerala. Its own centre, known as Mahila Samajam, imparts professional training for women in tailoring, soap making and other small industries. (Kailash K Mishra 2003)

The people of Chingari Navatoli in the newly created State of Jharkhand (Bihar), are now well aware of the significance of election. They organize a meeting just a few days before voting to evaluate the work done by the sitting MLA, M.P or any other representatives in question, and accordingly decide next



course of action collectively.

Village members meet here every Thursday and discuss the issues related to village development. Their collective endeavor is so directed that neither society, nor any individual is made to suffer in any manner.

The villagers of Madhavamala in Andhra Pradesh are very receptive to the development programmes initiated by the Government or other agencies. Schemes like Janmabhoomi and DWCRA are running successfully. People's response on the schemes such as Prime Minister Employment Scheme, Chief Minister Employment Scheme, Literary Drives, Soft Loans for various activities, etc., are worth mentioning.

The planners or project makers need to know the socio-cultural fabrication of the society before implementing any project of development. If the social reality is ignored the result would be devastating or it may not fetch desired results. Sometime the planners fail to understand the social engineering of the village society but if the indigenous villagers understand it and accordingly an alternative model of development is devised using the traditional measures it comes out as most acceptable measure of development and gets full supports from all sections of the target groups. This can be substantiated with Gandhi's experiment of *khadi* and a few enthusiastic and visionaries' attempt to transform Mithila painting from walls and floors to the canvas with special reference to the women of Mithila, Bihar. On careful examination it was discovered that it contains an interesting social history behind it. The women of higher castes were not allowed in the region to cross the boundary of their houses however they wanted to do some work for generating finance to run their families smoothly mainly during the natural calamities. One blind folk poet, Faturilal of the present Shahpur village of the Madhubani district had described the pathetic condition of the people of during famine in the late nineteenth century in his famous poetry known as the *Akalkavitta* (famine poetry). Influenced with his poetic description the then Maharaja of Darbhanga, Maharaja Laxmeshwar Singh decided to create job opportunity with the help of the British ruler for the people. Many bridges were constructed and other job opportunities were created in order to provide food for everybody without any description but the women of the higher caste did not come forward to do any such jobs as they were against the tradition of the family to send women outside the house for earning the livelihood. They opted to face the cruelty of the natural calamity half fed half naked. "Yatri" has depicted the hardship of a widow of a poor high caste family in the couplet mentioned below:

*Bansak odhi ukhadi karai chee jaarani/*

*hammar dukh ki nahi mitatai jagataarani?*

The women of lower caste however were helping their husbands or male counterparts by working in the agricultural fields or anywhere outside their homes. In such a situation the *khadi* spinning initiated by Mahatma Gandhi came as a boon for these women – widows, destitute, poor etc., of higher caste communities – of Mithila. They accepted this as a way of getting some financial help in the form of money and required clothes. As they were already preparing the *janeu* (sacred thread) on the tradition *takuli* (reed), they find this job very close and dear to their heart. The enthusiastic *khadi* workers used to give them raw materials such as raw cotton and *charkha* (spinning wheel) to prepare *khadi* thread in the house itself and collect their prepared yarns. Even today very delicate and costly *khadi* clothes are woven from these world-class yarns and they are in great demand everywhere in the country. Some

women prepare so very fine thread that at times length of sacred thread is contained in the case of a piece of cardamom. The *khadi* centers give money as well as clothes of daily use such as shawl, *dari*, *loongi*, blankets, bed sheets etc., for their labor. Mainly the women of higher castes in the region as respectful jobs accepted this. The men folk also did not have any problem with *khadi* and they very generously allowed their women to prepare *khadi* yarns.

The second step that was initiated was the Mithila Paintings. In the beginning only a few Brahman women were given the opportunity to practice the Mithila paintings on canvas, paper, movable objects etc., as an alternative measure to create job opportunity by way of exploiting the traditional-cum-ritual art in the form of production of art objects in the bulk for attracting the potential buyers. In this way some Brahman women contributed to promote the Brahman style of paintings. This style, as we all know, is characterized by bright colours and an absence of shade, mainly concerned with *kohbaras* (symbolic marriage paintings) and gods (Krishna, Rama and Durga mostly). Bawa Devi and her daughter, Sarita Devi made important personal contributions. After ten years some women of the Kayastha also came forward with new styles. They picked it up as a measure of creative employment because the Kayastha was also facing the similar problem. They were landless community and their women also got attracted towards this art form to gain some finance. They worked hard in the art and also in the entrepreneurship and finally achieved recognition in seventies. These women of the Kayastha caste earned their name for their elaborate line paintings. They depict village or religious scenes in the finest details such as the late Ganga Devi, Pushpa Kumari, Karpoori Devi, Mahasundari Devi and Godawari Dutta. These two forms of Mithila expressions, both due to women from the higher castes, embody traditional Mithila art. The third group, the Harijan women, came forward in the eighties. The women of the Dusadh and Chamar were doing all forms of ritual and traditional paintings in order to please the deities or decorate the walls, floors and body. Influenced with the financial success and creative experiment of the women of the Brahman and the Kayastha they experimented the *godna* (tattooing) using the black and bright colors in their paintings. Their pictorial alphabet began to include lines, waves, circles, sticks and snails, opening the way to stylization and more abstraction. That also worked. And, now women of all castes and communities in Mithila have been practicing this creative art as a measure to get financial help to sustain their families.

### **Mahatma Gandhi and his Experiment of Alternative Development**

Mahatma Gandhi stands out in history as one of the greatest mobilizers of the rural masses. It is one of the miracles to many of his biographers as to how he endeared himself to the millions of countrymen of various categories. His simple life, close association with the villagers, the sincerity with which he led them to social action, the idiom that he spoke, the loin cloth that he wore were genuine expressions of his profound conviction to identify himself with the poorest of the poor. His own life became an exemplar of not only higher values of life but also the fountainhead of a new source of inspiration and passion for collective action. He decided to begin his journey of freedom struggle from the villages of India. He always wanted that power should be given to the local bodies of villages. In 1931 when he visited England in connection with the Second Round Table Conference, he was asked at Oxford, "what is the greatest obstacle in the way of Swaraj?" he replied, "It is the British officers' unwillingness to part with power and our incapacity to wrest power from unwilling hands." The whole concept of Panchayati Raj was evolved on the Gandhian principle of Gram Swaraj in which the village was made the centre for planning and implementation of development activities. In his *ashrams* and camps as well as in *khadi* spinning and weaving centres his prayers and meetings and dining all held in a *chaupal* like atmosphere. The untouchables and the Brahmans all were eating together in a common place. All used to clean their toilets themselves. He opted to choose the conventional Indian measures for creating an atmosphere of civil society. He visioned *Rama rajya* instead of liberal society.

Non-Hindus and a section among his admirers failed to understand what Gandhi meant by Ram Rajya. He said, "By Ram Rajya, I do not mean Hindu Raj, I mean by Ram Rajya, a Divine Raj, the Kingdom of God." His faith in God was unshakable. His God was not a personal god. Ram, for him, the almighty God which guides to noble action and whose presence can be felt everywhere. The Ram Rajya he was promoting was an ideal social order where an ideal king rules over his subjects without any distinction whatsoever. Truth, *dharma* and justice will be the dominant characteristics of such a society. Both the Pandit and the poorest of the poor will have equal say in the governance. Nobody will be discriminated against anybody.

Gandhi's Ram Rajya was not a utopia where idealism alone will prevail. There was much in common, if one can stretch it, between Plato's Ideal Republic and Gandhiji's Ram Rajya though Tolstoy's influence on Gandhiji could also be discernible in formulating his vision of a new society. The major difference between the approaches of Gandhi and Plato is that while Plato is philosophical Gandhiji is pragmatic and down to earth a realist.

*For Mahatma Gandhi rights and duties are complementary and a citizen who is not conscious of his duties has no right to think of his rights. He believed, "There can be no Ram Raj in the present state of iniquitous inequalities in which only a few roll in riches, while the masses do not get even enough to eat." Does this Gandhian passion for social justice remain a far cry? No one knows. In the modern context a king like Ram, Gandhiji's ideal king, is the Custodian of not only the physical domain of the people but also the inspirer of his people of higher realms of spiritual attainments. To him, a real devotee of Ram is he who feels the pains and sufferings of the poor and the helpless. He rightly preferred to use Narsimha Mehta's devotional song, Vainav jana to tene kahiye jo pira parai jane re. He initiated changes that could really groomed the way for civil society in a conventional but innovative manner. Coming to his ashramas all people, mainly those with rural background felt to come in the native atmosphere and made themselves ready for freedom struggle in a peaceful manner. It was his connection with the rural setups that made truly the Father of the Nation, Rastrapita. He took three major initiatives: first, motivated people to fight for freedom struggle in a peaceful and non-violent way; second, created an atmosphere through his experiments for women's freedom and participation in all walks of life; third, fought for the evil practices of the traditional Indian society such as untouchability, child marriage etc. People liked his experiments. Men and women all became the committed members of his movements and swadeshi initiatives to get freedom from the colonial rule of India in peaceful and non-violent measures. Even non-literate Indians had no problem to understand his objectives of non-violence, satyagraha, civil-disobedience movement, self rule and spinning and weaving khadi clothes.*

#### **INDICATORS OF CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT:**

Our data confirms village culture as one of the best examples of syncretism. It has been the tradition of the Indian villages since time immemorial to always incorporate and adjust themselves with the good foreign traditions of the world. The Indian villages were receptive to new religious ideas of the incoming groups. This faculty of mutual co-existence and tolerance was basically bestowed to it by a section of its peasantry having linkages with the Bhakti movement. Some of the main pillars of *nirgun bhaktivad* were Rahim, Raskhan, Jaisi and Kabir. Guru Nanak was a disciple of the *sufi* saint Baba Fareed whose couplets find place in the *Guru Granth Sahib*. They all believed and preached the basic Vedantic concept – *a- ham brahma* (I am the God). The *suffis* like Sarmad and Mansoor accepted this precept with Islamic externals in the form of *anal Haq* (I am the ultimate truth). The *baul* singers of West Bengal, roaming from village to village expound the *sufi matawad*, propagating tolerance, amity and pluralism among the various sections of the society. The Husseini Brahmans of Uttar Pradesh and

Rajasthan exhibit a reverent attitude and a special emotional attachment to Imam Hussein – the grandson of prophet Mohammed. They actively participate in all Mohrram congregations that are held to commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Hussein and his associates. The Hindu villagers of eastern Uttar Pradesh come to the village Imambaras and sing *daha* throughout the night on the 10<sup>th</sup> Mohrram in front of *tazias*. On 10<sup>th</sup> Mohrram all the Hindus lift the bier on which *tazias* are put and carry them in a procession to the village Karbala for their burial. After burial of the *tazias* they stand for hours waiting to collect the coins and food grains which are distributed by the Muslim devotees in the name of Imam Hussein. The Hindu villagers put these coins around the neck or forearm of an ailing person for quick recovery from illness. In the villages of North Bihar the Hindu households keep fast on the eve of the Mohrram and offer prayer to Imam Hussein. The Muslims of this region sing *kohbar* songs during the marriage ceremony of their daughters in the same tune and style they are sung by the Hindus. They also sing the *mersia* songs in the tune of the *udasi* and *smadaun* in order to explain and depict the separation. This shows their mutual cooperation and respect for the faith of each other.

The village society which has made these traditions as their own generally overlook the differences and avoid compartmentalizing traditions or accentuating their differences. In its living form influences from different religious traditions are complementarily and harmoniously intertwined. A Hindu peasant, for example, has an attitude of reverence towards and worships not only the gods, deities and spirits of his own pantheon but does not hesitate to pay obeisance to saints, gods, deities and spirits of religions other than his own. A vast scattering of temples, *samadhis*, *dargahs*, *mazaras* and *ziarats* can be found all over India. A large number of devotees, irrespective of their creed, caste and class come to these places to offer their prayers.

#### **Elders are the treasures of Traditional knowledge system**

Old people are paid due respect and their word matter in the decision. Petty disputes are settled with their consultation. They are treated as the custodians of tradition. Some progressive young people, however, differ with many of their opinions but this certainly does not create any open clash between the people of two generations in the village.

Elders of the village of Nallavadu in Pondicherry, always enjoy respect, as it was of the wisdom accumulated through their long association with Panchayat. For the past 2-3 decades the younger members had to defer to the older people in several matters, both familial and public. However, those associated with political parties unduly manipulate for themselves certain benefits from the Government sponsored welfare schemes.

The 87 Village reports confirm that the common villagers have been responding positively to the good measures of development but at the same time they want to retain many of the traditional attributes of their culture. In most of the States the panchayat elections are held as per the guidelines of the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment of the Indian constitution and according to the instruction of the Election Commission of India. All the representations are elected through the secret ballot, and reservations are given to the women, scheduled castes, scheduled Tribes and Minorities as per their proportion and the population of the Indian constitution. The villagers have faith in the gram panchayat election, but the traditional caste panchayat and other forms of non-formal panchayat systems are also functioning. Most of the villagers try to sort out small or petty disputes in consultation with these non-formal traditional panchayats, if the situation is beyond the control of these institutions they consult the stating panchayat members. Most of the panchayat members of stating panchayat are also representing as the members of the traditional panchayats. The words of the panches of the traditional panches are honored in the stating panchayat. There is a wonderful balance between these two institutions in most of the villages that are studied by the IGNCIA investigation under

Village-India Project.

### **Coexistence of Traditional Panchayat system and statutory systems**

The Gram Panchayat is very active in Ranjangaon, Maharashtra. The women of Gram Panchayat are silent members and do not raise their voice.

Harijans and STs for long have lived in a pathetic and sad condition. Efforts therefore were made to upgrade their socio-economic status by adopting appropriate measures. In order to facilitate and provide home, food, education and employment for O.B.C., SCs and STs of rural India, several projects had been implemented. Many people have received benefits from such schemes. Constitutional and legal measures were taken to create caste less society.

The people of these communities are now allowed to participate in all public functions, and their entry into religious, social and educational structures or campus is no more restricted. Legally as well as socially, the tradition of un-touchability has loosen its grip, bondage labour is now rarely kept, incidents of child marriage is reduced significantly. SCs and STs have been given reservation in education, service, etc. Some constituencies are reserved according to the percentage of their share in population so that their voice can be heard in the decision-making bodies and institutions such as Gram Panchayats, State Legislative Assemblies and Parliament. In many areas it is felt that the development is not that effective.

In Kakhaura village of Bihar, in the last 55 years the socio-economic status of SCs and other lower castes has improved significantly. They are now respected, and liberal citizens of the village that presents a good example of civil society in democratic India. They are enjoying the benefits of reservation in jobs and education, and other opportunities provided to them buy the Government agencies. Previously many of them were not allowed to use their voting rights, but now things have changed drastically. They participate in the elections and cast their vote according to their choice using their freedom to vote and elect. The people of lower communities have also raised their economic status. They are purchasing the farming land from the people of higher castes who have been holding the ownership of these lands for centuries. This change has gradually been creating a class of neo-rich in the village. Un-touchability is on the decline. Students, boys and girls, are going to schools and colleges without any fear of caste or communal boundaries. All the villages without any discrimination of caste, class or sex use common hand-pumps.

In Ranjangaon village of Maharashtra, free education is given in the Govt. school. Every school child from a backward community gets free textbooks and 4 kg. of rice very month.

In the village of Andhari in Bihar, because of the influence of Gandhian and Sarvodaya workers, the Harijans and the people of low castes are now allowed socially to visit the temple and all common religious shrines of the village.

In the Strait Island of Andaman and Nicobar, literacy programme has been initiated but the response is very casual. Even school going children lack proper initiative to study. The teaching staff is not very dedicated.

With the Administration providing subsidy for their subsistence and sustenance, no development as such has taken place. They have become casual and lethargic because all the basic amenities are provided free of costs.

## Does Migration Change the Personality and Attitude of a Villager?

This can once again be depicted with the help of the poems of "Yatri". His every writing-prose of poetry anything is a wonderful account may close to ethnographic details written by a trained anthropologist or a sociologist for the referential use of professional social scientists. He to me is a perfect participatory fieldworker... 'Yatri' was compelled to leave his village and surrounding and came to Delhi and other cities of India for earning his livelihood.

In his frustration he says:

*Ab je phero atae rahben kahtau lok batah/*

*Tain tun hammar baat maan/ Aa sojhe dilli jah/*

In Delhi he establishes himself a well-known writer and poet and feels happy about himself. It appears he does not want to go back to the village that has failed to accommodate his creativity by not providing him a job opportunity. Out of utter dissatisfaction he says:

"Sadai ghodi vala sakurik ekka nahi padai achimon/pher ohs dehat men ham kiyay jayab! prayojna kaun..."

This frustration however is transitory. It does not long last and once again he is back in the surroundings of his village and its neighboring cultures:

"Hash apyash ho, labh-haani ho, such ho athva shok/sabsun pahinemon padai achi apne bhumik lok...Ehna halatmen 'ki ham bisari payab/ Tausauni sanak/garhadaa san aam?/Deedi inaark paani/Apan pokharik O thuttha-patar Jaathi/Hariarik saagar jakan hilkar rahi-rahi lait/Dhanhar badh kosa-kosa...."

The unemployment in the rural set most often compels the villagers to migrate from the village to industrial or urban centers but their heart remains in the villages. They live all the times mentally and emotionally in the fabric of their village culture. One interesting experience is shared by a Sahitya Academy winner Maithili poet Bhimnath Jha "Bhima" through his famous poem, *Dhuri*. He went to Ranchi to work in Hatia Heavy Engineering Factory and got the job there. But most of the time he was occupied with the thought of his village surroundings. The poem depicts it fantastically:

*Hamra lel maiek jee chan-chan karait hetai/*

*Hanar sudhik barkha men adiklan titait hetai/*

*Angan saun khinne mon charkha katait hetih/*

*Hamra per khaunjh hetanhi thari phorait hetih/*

*Kantirbi jaoran lel aphan torait hetai/*

*Ka' ka' khinchar gahil lotki phorait hetai/*

*Batuk adhik kal apan bhaie alg rahait hetah/*

*Matie ker bhatthha saun a, aa, likhait hetah/*

*Mitru maleria ke sua bhonkait hetah/*

*Gen devithan men bhagwanji khelait hetah/  
Gamo saun bhagane kichu bhel kahan/  
Gamak janjal hamar gel kahan?*

**Conclusion:**

The rural populace is generally very receptive to all the sincere measures of development. India has progressed and travelled a long journey in last 50-plus years because of their active participation in the development schemes. They have, however, expressed their mixed response to the programmes, projects, politics and processes of development. Alternatively, these development measures have also created a sense of frustration and sometimes even revulsion in their minds for the corrupt officials, contractors, etc. who misappropriate the development funds. In many areas, they think, the situation has not improved. In some areas the condition has, rather, deteriorated.

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The team has been working on the following lines of action:i) Roles of cultural heritage of India in shaping the life of people and how these have undergone changes with developmentii) Cross-cultural and multi-cultural aspects of Indiaiii) Effect of new technologies on existing culturesiv) People's response to development planning, policies and processesv) Hopes, wishes, aspirations of people in relation to technology and developmentAlternate models of rural life comprising the majority of Indian population.