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Abstract

Forest management has been in the tradition of indigenous communities and gets reflected in their traditional knowledge base through their diverse forest dependence, product utilization and management practises. In India too the indigenous populace had various management and utilization practises developed as a result of constant interaction and dependence on the resource. Their long standing experience ensured a common understanding and mutual trust in the communities, which could be termed as social capital. But this capital got eroded as the link between man and forest was broken by the adoption of policy of exclusive management in India for more than 150 years. Once again an attempt to involve communities in resource management is being made through programs like Joint Forest Management. But the common experience is that the program has varying quality of implementation as well as acceptability by the targeted communities. In this paper we present two case studies of indigenous communities from Gadchiroli district in Maharashtra State of India. Although both communities have homogenous indigenous population, high resource dependence and abundance of resource, the two have demonstrated varying degree of enthusiasm in collective action. The experiences of the two communities bring out the fact that though it is possible to revive dormant social capital, it may not be possible for the communities to do it all by themselves. A supportive role played by government agencies or non-governmental organisations may become essential for initiating collective action and/or for ensuring its sustainability.

SIGNIFICANCE OF TRADITIONAL PRACTICES AND INDIGENOUS INSTITUTIONS IN FOREST MANAGEMENT: A CASE STUDY FROM INDIA

-Deepshikha Mehra and Rucha Ghate

Introduction

India has a rich reserve of natural resources and forests are one among them. The diversity of indigenous populations staying in and around these forests for generations is also one of its kind. The 'People of India Project' of Anthropological Survey of India has identified 461 tribal communities in India. For generations these forests have been managed by these indigenous communities for their diverse forest dependence and product utilization over the years. Human practice of setting aside areas for the conservation of natural resources can be seen in several examples of sacred groves, royal hunting forests, and sacred gardens (Gadgil 1982, Gadgil *et al.*, 1993; Chandrashekara and Sankar, 1998). "These practices studied by anthropologists and ethno biologists, involve a variety of restraints on harvesting in terms of quantity, locality, season, and age, sex and social class" (Gadgil *et al.*, 1992). Norms were set up for the use of these resources by little village institutions. These 'independent village republics' that existed in the 19th century regulated the use and preservation of natural resources like forest through decentralized community control systems (Krishnan, 2000). This is appreciable at the time and period when the resource was available in plentiful and the population pressure was very low. In all, prudent use of the resource was practiced which served as a common good for the communities who in turn shared common interest and understanding towards the sustainable use of the resource. The commonality of purpose developed through the high forest dependence, common norms and beliefs of the indigenous communities about the 'natural capital' which helped shape the 'social capital' of the communities.

But with the colonial rule in India came policies of the British that placed total disregard for the forest dependent needs and rights of the local communities. The objective of the British was to extract timber species that would help in the building of ships for the Navy and later for the expansion of the rail network in India in the mid 1800s. With the establishment of the Forest Department under the British government in 1864, subsequent forest acts placed restriction on the use of this resource by the communities who have been using and managing it for

generations. With the declarations of the Forest act of 1878 came the categorization of forest areas: 'Reserve Forests', 'Protected Forests' and 'Village Forests'. In Reserve Forests complete restrictions were imposed and communities living and using these forests suddenly became 'trespassers' in the forestland. In Protected Forests limited restrictions were imposed and harvesting was allowed with permission from the government. In case of Village Forests the communities were allowed to carry out harvesting activities but those could be banned or restricted as and when the ruling government deemed essential. All these changes in the access rights of the communities brought changes in their harvesting and management practices and institutions. The local institutions slowly lost significance.

India's independence in 1947 brought hope for a change in the scenario, but the government of Independent India replicated the objectives of the British policies and continued with the exclusive management of the forests. However, after more than four decades the government realized that centralized control over a huge resource is something that they could not handle with the limited manpower and resources. But before the realization came, nearly a century of exclusive management by the governments took its toll on the traditional institutions and the social capital that had ensured regulated use of forests and other assets of the communities for generations. Some of the forest-dwelling communities who no longer felt that the resource belonged to them, resorted to indiscriminate harvesting for short term gains and the government used such instances to blame the indigenous communities for the decline in the stock of the resource. Fortunately traditional ecological ethos continued to survive in many local societies although often in weaker forms. It is evident even today from the fact that many communities have tried to revive their age-old traditional practices, still finding them relevant for the preservation of the resource (Kothari, 2000; Ghate 2004). Some others have tried developing new norms and practices in the face of scarcity of forest products. Incidentally, the forest policy of 1988 also visualized involvement of the local people in the management of the resource for the first time. In 1990, introduction of the Joint Forest Management (JFM) program of the government was initiated with this objective, although it varies in its implementation as well as in its acceptance by the targeted communities. In this paper we wish to look into contribution of 'social capital' in the success of collective under the banner of JFM or otherwise. Is it an important factor? Are communities capable of reviving traditional institutions and practices and help build social capital all by themselves? Or they need support from other agencies to do so?

These questions become pertinent with the change in forest policy promoting participatory forest management that places lot of responsibilities on communities to manage the resource.

This paper presents a study of two neighboring villages, Mendha and Markegaon, which are under JFM fold now, but collective action in both the cases has taken very different course. It is interesting to study this aspect more so because of the striking similarities in two villages and yet the course of collective action being ‘progressing’ in one and ‘struggling’ in the other. Both the villages have homogenous tribal population, high forest dependence and good forest availability. While one has been able to successfully revive its traditional institution and practices mixing it with modern values over a period of three decades, the other is still struggling with revival of traditional institution or acceptance of Forest Protection Committee under JFM, a modern government-backed institution. Instead of evaluating collective action in the two communities, we wish to bring out the reasons for collective action being initiated, expanded, improved, which seems to be working satisfactorily in one community; and the continued struggle in case of the other. After briefly discussing the significance of social capital in success of collective action along with the importance of traditional practices and traditional institutions in forest management, we present the socio-economic, historical and institutional background of the case studies. Analysis of the two cases on the basis of factors considered conducive to collective action concludes the paper.

Significance of Social Capital in community initiative

With decentralization of natural resource management significance of community level action has gained prominence. As accepted by Mr. Maurice Strong, Secretary General, at the UN conference on Environment and development (the Earth Summit) in 1992, local level action such as resource management is the very foundation of successful sustainable development policy. Experience increasingly shows that the imperative transition to sustainable development cannot be made without the full support of the community and the participation of the people at the local level. Accordingly many developed countries have taken recourse to ‘participatory’ programs. At times communities have themselves taken initiative in solving their resource use problems through collective action. These informal community institutions have emerged “parallel to and often preceding state initiative” (Sarin, 1998). Subsequent studies on the commons have

identified various factors that are conducive to collective action and that help in ensuring the success of natural resource management at the community level. Among these the 'Social capital' of the community has come to acquire an important place. Social Capital has been referred to as trust, norms and shared understanding by a group of actors that enable them to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives (Blomkvist and Swain, 2001). It is "the institutions, relationships and norms that shape the quality and quantity of a society's social interactions". Social capital is not just the sum of the institutions which underpin society – it is the glue that holds them together" (The World Bank Group Poverty Net 1999). Increasing evidence shows that societal cohesion is critical for societies to prosper economically and for development to be sustainable. It helps groups/communities to plan and evaluate, make decisions, to mobilize resources and manage them, communicate with each other and coordinate activities, resolve conflicts etc. in the development debate, social capital is understood "as a resource, a propensity for mutually beneficial collective action that different communities possess to different extents (Krishna, 2002). The sustainability of the traditional forms of capital like physical, natural, human depend on the existence of social capital as without trust, rules and a shared understanding the traditional forms of capital might degenerate.

The stock of this Capital is something that can erode through neglect or increase by new investment (Throsby, 2001), at the same time it can be enhanced as well as mobilized (Krishna, 2002). Among the agents of this capital that facilitate its growth and existence many other have also been recognized like effective leadership, participation of all members in the decision-making, consensus, homogeneity of population, tradition of participation or existence of institutions and sustainable management practices, scarcity or perceived scarcity of the resource, local NGOs, committed government officials etc. (D'silva *et al* 2003; Baland and Plateau, 1996; Krishna, 2001; Ghate, 2003). Each of these elements combines with the others to generate social capital in order to facilitate its important function in the success of collective action. Sometimes in the process one of the elements tend to become more important than the other but not sufficient in itself to create this asset.

Tradition - an element of Social Capital

Tradition of collective action through traditional institutions and knowledge that has been acquired from generations of experience in management of the resource has been considered as key to success of collective action of a community. "Collective action is successful where an underlying tendency for united action already exists in a community based on cultural values, common identity, a tradition of participation and shared historical experiences" (D'Silva *et al*, 2003). The rules and norms in a cultural tradition used for crafting of institutions for natural resource management are forms of shared knowledge (Ostrom, 1992), which is nothing but the social capital of the community. A tradition of collective action and cooperative-institutions can help build trust, cooperation and a resulting social capital through myths, customs, sayings and norms. This could turn out to be a possible factor for a cooperative success of a community (Baland and Plateau, 1996). Most of the traditional institutional structures are perceived to encompass indigenous resource management practices and knowledge. Thus, they form a part of the socioeconomic structure of a given community. (Sadeeque, 1999). Indigenous knowledge is common and a part of the tradition of the communities. It is formed due to the close proximity of the communities to the natural resource along with generations of experience in natural resource use and management. It is an important part of the lives of the poor and is a key element of the social capital of the poor (Anonymous, www.nuffic.nl). The traditional practices and use-rules of natural resource management and other community assets have the social recognition simply because they are understood as part of the tradition and custom of the community giving them a kind of sacredness. Thus, they automatically get the legitimacy and as a result a common consent and action. This is the reason they have a better chance of rebuilding or sustaining the social capital of a community than institutions/rules/sanctions/practices that have been evolved afresh. It is been increasingly recognized that erosion of traditional organization is often a major factor contributing in the decline of strength of village level organizations for CPR management and allocation. In villages where traditional social sanctions and institutions are still respected, decline in CPR area is less. (Baland and Pleatuea,1996).

The pertinent question, however, is: do all the communities respond equally to the incentives provided for reviving eroded or dormant social capital? Programs like JFM that attempt to involve communities in resource management and expect the communities to develop their own operative rules for day-to-day functioning and intra-community settlements, often have varying outcomes. While some communities are able to come together and not only solve the problems

of commons for themselves but also expand the domain of collective action to achieve additional objectives, many others have to struggle for long time to come together for achieving basic collective needs. Therefore the stock of social capital as a starting point may be same for two communities but if the levels of incentives and support to put the stock to use are different, the results could be varied too. This paper tries to bring out this observation through two case studies.

Indian Context

In India tribal societies are known to have sustainable forest management and use practices due to their high forest dependence and the resulting economic subsistence of these communities and cultural sanctity of the resource. Tribal villages in India are small homogenous groups with little differences in levels of education, income and life style. This helps in building shared understanding, mutual trust and common norms through long associations. Gradually the village institutions emerge based on traditional laws and customs that promote joint functioning and resource conservation (D'Silva *et al*, 2003). Although very little is known how traditions of prudent use came to be accepted and practiced in India, they illustrate every type of practical management prescribed in modern times (Chaturvedi *et al*, 2001). In the Indian context traditional community resource management systems were found in different parts in the form of 'kans' of Uttar Kannada, 'Cumindad' lands in Goa, 'Orans' in Rajasthan, 'Shmilat' forest in Punjab, 'Sacred groves' in the Himalayas, and the supply and safety forests in Mizoram. A review of Indian experiences of local forest management has shown that effective community groups still usually have, among other things, presence of indigenous resource management institutions and traditional socio-religious forest values (Sarin, 1996), even though with the centralized forest policies many of these practices and institutions in many of the tribal societies have died, some of these practices are still in use (Gadgil and Berkes, 1991; Gadgil and Subhashchandra, 1992; Roy Burman, 1985).

The presence of a leader in tribal societies of India is also part of the tradition of these societies where the role of the leader is to keep the community together on all issues related to the communities. Many experiences tend to show that the existence of well-organized traditional leaders is an important factor of success in village-based management schemes. This is because the prestige that they carry as customary leaders and the trust that they can generate (Baland and

Plateau, 1996) helps to resolve conflicts and maintain the existing social capital or build new social capital. Thus, the role of a leader and that of the members of the community are rooted in strong tradition of collective action (Sarin, 1996). But just the presence of a leader, who is there as part of the tradition of a community, would not ensure collective action if he/she is ineffective in the role of a leader. However, the existence of such a tradition helps to facilitate the role of a competent traditional leader in effectively maintaining and building communal unity and solidarity. In the cases we present here, local tribal leadership has played an important role in reviving traditional practices.

Background and Data collection

Villages Mendha and Markegaon are tribal villages located in Gadchiroli district of a western state of India that is Maharashtra. Gadchiroli district is one of the districts of Maharashtra, which has dense forest area and a sizable tribal population. 21 percent of the total forest area of the state is in Gadchiroli. Among the 47 scheduled tribes of Maharashtra, Gond is the dominant tribe constituting 11.63 percent of the total tribal population. 38 percent of the total population of Gadchiroli district is tribal with the majority of Gond population. Mendha and Markegaon are also Gond villages. Apart from being located next to each other, i.e. sharing geographical boundary, the villages also share a common history of two important movements that the district witnesses in recent past. The initiation of the idea of forest conservation by communities collectively, came about in the second half of 1970s when the community came in touch with a tribal leader Shri Lalsham Shah Maharaj, a descendent of royal Gond family. He started a movement demanding refurbishment of tribal rights on forests along with the tribal tradition that had received a severe set back after the nationalization of forest in India. The traditional sense of belonging toward the resource and long experience in community management had lost significance under the state-regulated authority. Under the centralized rule in independent India the Forest Department's working plans gave authority to forest contractors to fell trees, on which the local communities had no control. Rampant illicit felling took place under this arrangement leading to deforestation at large scale. The communities of Mendha and Markegaon, like many others, were a silent witness to this degradation believing that 'you don't protect what you don't own'.

During this time another movement known as '*Jangal Bachao, Manav Bachao abhiyan*' (save forests, save human beings movement) led by Dr. B.D. Sharma, former Tribal Commissioner in Madhya Pradesh Government, had spread to Gadchiroli. A one person NGO (Non-governmental organization) by the name '*Vrikshmitra*' (friend of trees) was associated with both the movements. He came to the helm of affairs during the first movement, taking the reins from Shri Lalsham Shah Maharaj. He was instrumental in spreading the message by traveling from one village to the other, including Mendha and Markegaon, and making tribals aware of their rights.

The historical, socio-economic and institutional background of the case studies have been documented in this paper with the help of data collected through the use focused interviews of community leaders and the NGP (non-governmental person), and informal and formal group discussions with the people of the two villages. The observations are based on several visits made to these villages between 1997 and 2004.

Mendha Village

Mendha is a small village of 80 *Gond* households. It has a rich forest within its revenue boundary and has a forest area of 1806.49 ha., which comes to a per capita availability of 4.8 ha. of forest area per person.

Historical background of Community effort

'Vrikshmitra' had visited Mendha on several occasions during the period of social unrest and had noticed the interest of Mendha community as a whole and the leader of Mendha in particular, in reviving the tribal traditions based on living collectively. He came to play an important role in the community's effort to start and maintain the forest conservation activities. In all, he had a major influence on the villagers including Devaji Tofa, the leader of Mendha community, even after the two movements in this area slowly lost their sheen and initial enthusiasm died down. In Mendha, the local leader kept the movement alive in the minds of his community. He organized the Mendha community to strive for establishing their due rights on their village resources with the help and guidance of the NGO. The one person NGO had started visiting Mendha regularly and had also rented a house where he came and stayed for almost a week every month. With uncontrolled harvesting in their forest by the Forest contractors on the one hand and recognition of the fact that the sustainability and survival of the resource is important for the survival of the community on the other, set off the fire of resistance and the Mendha community started to get

together. Dewaji Tofa took the lead. He, like all others, was convinced of the fact that the tribal community as a whole would end up being losers by giving up some of the traditional practices. He also knew that it is these practices and norms that can bring the community together and thus decided to revive some of these consciously. The first and foremost decision was to assemble the community every day and discuss various matters in the most informal way. It is then that he asked the elderly in the village talk about the past, the culture and traditions of *gonds*, the state of forest, ownership patterns etc. During these assemblies the community decided to continue with some traditional practices that were sustainable and relevant to the current needs. One such was the tribal system of a *Gotul*, which is a wooden structure, like a club house, where elders discuss day-to day activities, children sit and learn about the community's history, their traditions and skills, and young unmarried girls and boys sing, dance and choose life partners. It is thus a place where the members of the communities come together to share ideas, solve problems and involve themselves in many more communal activities.

In the year 1989, Mendha community decided to build a '*Gotul*' in their village. Traditionally, *Gotuls* are built using Teak. A few male members of the community collected the required timber from the forest, and constructed the *Gotul*. Getting a wind of this, two officials of the Forest department were sent to talk to the people and surrender the valuable timber that was illegally harvested. But the community refused to dismantle the structure. This was followed by a visit by higher officials who tried to persuade them. Sometimes the villagers were also warned of dire consequences if they didn't comply. But the people of Mendha stuck to their decision. With souring of relations with the department the community members were ready for the worst. They had guessed rightly that the Forest department would bring in the police. Strategically, the women of the community decided to face the police force, as it was believed that the policemen might hesitate to raise their baton on women. The police did come to the village to assist the Department with the task. The department staff, though successfully dismantled the structure and seized the timber, was unable to arrest any individual on the charge of felling the trees, as the whole village including the women and children came forward together for a mass arrest. Immediately after the government officials had left the village, people of Mendha, adamant on rebuilding their *Gotul*, went and extracted more timber from the forest and built the *Gotul* again within a day. The message was sent to the senior officers of the department that if they came again and destroyed the structure, it will be built again resulting in felling of more trees. The department wisely decided to turn a blind eye. This event played a very important role in

bringing the community together because the construction of this traditional structure meant a revival of the sacred Gond traditions which to the people was something. One wonders if the community could have mustered enough courage to face the men in uniform, without the knowledge of their rights and privileges that they learnt from ‘*Vrikshmitra*’.

This tussle with the Forest Department only added to the discontent against the Forest Department that was brewing in the Mendha community. It is after this that the community decided to rejuvenate its traditional ‘*panchayat*’ for taking all the decisions pertaining to the collective interest of the community. Along with this a Forest association called the “*Van Sanrakshan Samiti*” in 1989 was formed to deal specifically with forest related issues. With the formation of the *Van sanrakshan samiti* (Forest Protection Committee) the first step taken was to guard their forest from outsiders as well as to regulate internal use, in keeping with the traditional practices. Rules were established which have taken a formal shape now under the formal structure and status of the Forest Protection committee. The whole community is now a part of this committee, where one male and one female member from each household are members and participated in rule making. Guarding the forest with voluntary patrolling by the community members was initiated ever since 1989.

Revival of Traditional practices

Further on, the Mendha community under the leadership of Mr. Tofa rejuvenated several of the abandoned practices. Some of the traditional practices that were revived were to not only ensure the sustainable use of forest and other resources of the community but also a sense of belonging towards the resource. For example in many tribal communities it is customary to build houses out of grass and bamboo; teak (valuable specie) is specifically not used. Similarly, grass is not cut for fodder until the seeds fall off, so that they can germinate in the next season. The water holes used by wild animals are not used for fishing. Using poison for fishing is prohibited. Instead, leaves of a particular tree are used, which make the fish unconscious and can be caught with ease. This method doesn’t harm the water quality or other insects.

Tribal cultures being a “group culture”, many day-to-day activities are undertaken in groups. Usually members of all households go to the forest together for collection of non-timber forest products (NTFP). In earlier days before hunting was banned, all the villagers hunted together and the catch was distributed equitably amongst all. Pregnant women got double their share, and

members who could not join the effort, also got their due share. Even in those times when wildlife was available in abundance, hunting was restricted to customary celebrations only, and was not done as a routine. Even now this tradition of hunting continues though not openly and so does sharing among all the community members. Hunted animal however small or big is shared with all members. The traditional method of cutting trees for house construction can also be seen in Mendha which ensures the survival of the tree and its re-growth.

By late 80s, '*Vrikshamitra*' had spread the story of Mendha amongst other NGOs in the region during their meetings, by writing articles in newspapers and by giving lectures in various forums. Many visitors started coming to meet Mr. Tofa. As the community recalls, the villagers at that time used to run away in forest to avoid talking to 'foreigners'. Initially even Mr. Tofa did not know any language apart from Gondi, but he gradually learnt Hindi and Marathi (two local languages spoken in the state) from the NGO. '*Vrikshamitra*' encouraged the student visitors to take up 'Mendha' for their study. He also encouraged the community members to participate in such studies. He arranged workshops for self-help groups, training programs in bee-keeping, watershed management, soil and moisture conservation works etc. With the increasing recognition of his work in the village many government officials came to know about him. He used his good name to bring information of various developmental schemes to Mendha community, and making use of the development funds, the community progressed. Happy with the immediate and tangible benefits, the community was encouraged further to work together.

Institutional set-up: mix of traditional and modern values

In 1996 the *Van Sanrakshan Samiti* was registered under the JFM program of Government of India. In fact it was the Forest Department which came forward with the offer of including Mendha in the JFM program. Eventually it became a show piece of JFM for the department as it brought many important visitors to this village to show the achievements of JFM. In reality, Mendha village had started protecting its forest much before 1996 and even after joining JFM, it is continuing with its old rule structure for forest management.

Women are involved in every activity, and they share responsibilities in decision-making as well as in the implementation of those decisions. The implementation may also involve guarding forests at night, which the women do enthusiastically. This is not a traditional practice. This modern value has been incorporated at the behest of the catalyst NGO.

The association has also taken up plantation of some valuable species with the help of the Forest Department to change the specie mix mainly to improve density and quality of the forest. Some of the members have built up a nursery under the department's assured 'buy back seedlings' scheme. Making use of many developmental schemes the community is simultaneously trying to reduce its dependence on the forest. For example, biogas plants have replaced many traditional stoves. There is a conscious attempt to increase household incomes by taking up forest related occupations without harming the resource. Some members of the Mendha user group took training in improved bee-keeping techniques and are now earning well from honey that is sold at the community centre. This has brought earnings to the association. As a result it is the only community in the area to own a telephone.

The forest institution has made rules regarding harvesting, processing, and selling of fuel wood, bamboo and timber, which affect the harvesting level or use of these products. These rules are mainly regarding the quantity of the product that can be harvested and have not changed much over the past 10 years. Non-timber minor forest products are collected and sold, but the decision to this effect is not taken individually but by the '*panchayat*'. *Gram Sabha* (general body) has the right to decide whether a forest product is to be sold individually or collectively through its cooperative. The sale of NTFP has been one of the largest sources of income for the committee, yet over-harvesting of the products has never been reported even by Forest Department officials.

It is interesting to note that even after entering into the JFM arrangement with the Forest Department, the rules followed are the ones formed by VSS because these are considered fair, efficient, sustainable, and democratic. The villagers consider the forest not only a sacred resource but also an important economic resource. Discussions with the local villagers strikingly brought out their sense of ownership of the resource despite the fact that legal ownership of the forest rests with the Forest Department. It is this sense of ownership that provides incentive for taking the responsibility of protection and management. The villagers have regularly deliberated on its rule-forming mechanism, and to date social fencing has proved to be extremely successful.

In general, the awareness level of the community of Mendha is high and their willingness to find out more has encouraged them to take up several studies with the help of experts from various universities and research institutes. Members of the community have traveled not only out of the state but also to foreign countries recently. '*Vrikshamitra*' has constantly encouraged the local leader as well as other community members to participate in various meeting related to forest

management taking place all over the country. Historically, *Gond* dynasty has ruled and provided leadership in this part of region for a long time. Yet, not many *Gond* villages in the vicinity have come up with collective action or have provided leadership. In case of Mendha not only has Mr. Tofa provided good leadership but has also insisted on developing the second rung of leadership. He chose to transfer the leadership position from time to time, encouraging others to take responsibilities. During the discussions with the community members, leader and the NGO, the fact that stand out is that the community could not have achieved what it has today without constant support, advise and help from the NGO.

Markegoan Village

Markegaon is a small tribal village of 32 households. It came into being in the period 1930 to 1935 when residents of a distant village moved in village Heti, its present neighboring village. It was in Heti village that all the revenue related meetings used to take place at the times of *Malgujari* system. Heti had turned into a ghost town due to an epidemic that had spread in the village, resulting in an exodus of people with only a few remaining. With empty houses in Heti, it was easier for families to move in. Gradually, the village grew and in order to accommodate the growing population, a new settlement came up near Heti, which is the present Markegaon.

Initiation

Like Mendha, Markegoan had also been part of the *Jungle Bachao Manav Bachao Andolan*, but as the movement died down so did the enthusiasm in Markegoan. Forest and its products have always been available in plenty here due to low density of population and abundance of forest surrounding the village. Thus the need for forest protection and restrictive use of forest products never made sense to a majority of the people. Although the need for forest protection was felt by a few people of the village, especially an individual Mr. Chatura Halami, the community as whole was not united on this issue. Very few realized that the forest could not cope with the constant increase in the population of surrounding villages. Difficulties in harvesting forest products and rising conflicts with intruders rose continuously. With scarcity came corruption and the Forest guard started asking for some kind of a payment to allow people to harvest, every time they were caught. Due to this, discontent among the people was continuously growing. However, only a small group was slowly realizing the need to protect the forest and was involved in few

instances when they refused to let workers of local paper mill from extracting bamboo from the Markegoan forest.

In 1995 Mr. Devaji Tofa came to Markegaon to invite a representative for attending a 15 day Indo-German training program on Water-shed management. Mr. Chatura Halami attended this training. The training incorporated not only techniques of watershed management but also various aspects of forest management. After returning to Markegaon, Mr. Chatura Halami shared his experiences with the community members. They got together and built rock dams in the forest. But the community did not do much as far as forest protection was concerned. In the mean time indiscriminate felling by not only the community members, but also by the neighboring villagers for self consumption as well as for sale, went on.

It took two years for Chatura Halami who himself was influenced by the beliefs and views of Devaji Tofa to convince the community that at this rate they would be left with no forest, and thus protection was needed for the benefit of present as well as the future generation. A consensus to that effect was finally reached. Forest conservation and management activities started in earnest, in 1997 with the setting up of the JFM Forest Protection committee. An application was submitted to the Range forest office, which was followed by a visit by the Range officer and the forest guard to the village to talk to the people about the provisions of JFM. The officials explained the responsibility of forest protection that came with the benefits of joining the program. The FPC was formed under JFM. The villagers in the first meeting of the Forest protection committee took the decision for three types of restrictions: unrestricted grazing (*Chara Bandi*), liquor consumption (*Nasha Bandi*), and tree felling (*Kurhad Bandi*). Forest Department promised to provide funds for plantation and soil-conservation.

Institutional set-up

The Forest association got its formal registration in the year 2000. An executive committee of the association was formed where eight men and three women were elected. The members of the executive body work on voluntary basis and do not receive any remuneration in cash or kind.

As per the norm, the general body of the association was formed by one male and one female member from each household. The meetings of the association are to be held once a month where all members are eligible to participate. In reality the attendance in these meetings is

normally 50 per cent in Markegaon, despite a provision of fine of Rs. 2 for every member that does not attend two consecutive meetings. Decisions in these meetings are normally taken regarding the poaching of bamboo and thefts in the plantation areas. Such instances are brought to the notice of the persons responsible for patrolling the forest. Suggestions are invited from members for improvements to be made in the vigilance or in restrictive rules, although no suggestions have come from any member yet. Payments of fines also take place in these meetings. Provision for an emergency meeting in case of special cases like theft has been also made, but no such meeting has been needed so far.

The association has a written statement of its mission and objectives, which is based on the forest policy of Government of India, 1988 and the World Bank's JFM program. The rules of the forest association are based on the original set of rules provided by the government and are the same as other Forest associations under the JFM program. Although in reality the villagers of Markegaon are not aware of these rules. The community has developed its own rules but rule compliance is poor. For any of the forest related activities like construction of rock dams, plantation, timber contact employment etc. the villagers are paid on a daily basis (there are no full time or part time employees), while protection work is done voluntarily, where three people from three households go everyday for a twelve hour vigil from eight in the morning till eight at night. No over-night patrolling takes place as the villagers believe that no night-time thefts can take place due to the difficult terrain of the forest. The guards are appointed in meetings that take place every month. To meet the requirement of timber no new trees are allowed to be cut, especially valuable trees like *Tendu*, *Awala*, *Moha*, which are more important for their leaves and fruit. Only one pole per year is allowed for house construction. For fuel wood, only fallen wood and stems can be harvested. Earlier, even full grown trees were cut down for fuel wood. One cartload of fuel wood in a year is free, after that Rs.5 are charged per extra cartload. For all extra requirements an application has to be submitted to the Forest Protection Committee. For meeting grazing requirements, open-grazing for three quarters of the year has been allowed, except in the plantation area. For this purpose each household has to carry a Livestock grazing permit for which Rs.1 per year is charged.

Infractions to these rules do take place as people collect more than what the limit defines. Provision to deal with infraction is also in place, for felling of timber, fine is equal to the market price of the tree(s). It includes the value of flower, bark, and fruits. If the person is not in a

position to pay the amount, the executive committee decides the amount to be paid. With a minimum amount of Rs. 51, in case of fuel wood and other forest products, a fine structure has been devised according to the economic status of the members. In general Rs.51 are to be paid by the poor households, Rs. 101 by middle-income households, and Rs. 151 by high income households (according to the local definition of wealth and poverty). However, penalties are not strictly imposed and the offender (s) is let off in the first couple of infractions. The incidence of anyone losing his harvesting rights has not occurred as yet. Forest department does not play any role in either formation of rules, fixing penalties, or with dealing with infractions that are in practice today. Records of the identity of the office-bearers and fines collected have been maintained since last two years only. The records are kept with the Forest guard and the range forest officers. The villagers neither know about them nor have ever seen them. The round officer who is also a member of the executive body maintains these records.

Building community effort

Markegaon community has struggled all along in its effort to come together and protect its resource. It shares its history with neighboring village Mendha, the two tribal movements had touched this village as well, it had a committed local leader in form of Mr. Halami and yet collective effort did not initiate of its own, nor is it effective under JFM. Although there are improvements and additions in the rule-in-use made recently. Even the Forest department that initiated forest protection activities in the village is providing little help in the day to day functioning of the Markegoan Forest association. Meetings of the forest association are hardly attended by any representative of the Forest Department, even by the forest guard who is an ex-officio member of the Executive committee. As a result, meetings do not take place regularly, neither is the community aware of the provisions of JFM, nor is the department aware of the decisions taken by the association. Management of forests is all that the community does on its own. The 'joint-ness' in day-to-day decision making is totally missing in Markegaon.

Supporting revival of social capital

The common, shared past by the two neighboring communities against the stark difference in its collective effort to revive traditional institutions and practices raises the question of the ability of indigenous communities to establish the role of social capital in their lives through their own

efforts. Apart from social capital other factors that are considered conducive to collective action seem to be similar to the two communities. Both the communities depend significantly on the resource (**salience**), both villages have sufficient forest area to cater to their everyday needs (**scarcity/abundance**), both are located more or less equally from the market (**location**) and both are indigenous communities with little economic as well as social differences (**homogeneity**). Both the communities are governed under same rule structure (**property rights**) with no legal ownership of the resource and have well defined village boundaries with well defined forest category. Both communities are small in size (**group size**) and located very close to the resource (**distance from the resource**). In case of both the communities Government has given them authority to form their own operative rules (**recognition by competent authority**) and the communities do have rule structures that are considered easy to understand and enforce, with graduated sanctions (**own rule structures and graduated sanctions**). Both Mendha and Markegaon have local leadership which is committed to the cause (**leadership**). Yet, 'collective action' in Mendha has not only consolidated but gone beyond forest management, while Markegaon is still struggling with non-compliance of rules formulated by Forest Protection Committee. As is clear in the documentation of the histories of collective action of the two communities, role of NGO has been significant in the achievements of Mendha community. Social capital was present in dormant form in case of both Mendha and Markegaon, as is apparent from their indigenous nature of life style with shared norms and traditional practices. Both the community received the initial impetus to establish their tribal identity and revive indigenous practices in the form of the two movements that impacted the area in late 1970s and mid 1980s. However, the resulting initial enthusiasm was further kindled and nurtured by an NGO in case of Mendha. The moral support this community got to establish its traditional practices gave it the courage to fight even with government official, for the survival of its traditional practices, the 'social capital'. The support continued in the form of information for development, understanding rights and privileges given under law, inculcating interest in studying various aspects of their own practices. Exposure to the community through several visits by experts in various fields and opportunity for locals to visit places away from their district played an important role in gaining self confidence for the community members in general and the leader in particular. The recognition Mendha community received from 'outside' world gave it courage and will to pursue their collective efforts. Due to the wise guidance Mendha villagers were not only able to retain the good aspects of their traditional practices but

were also able to adopt some modern values and modern practices. Markegaon could not achieve any of these as the local leader did not get any support from outside. The community with little exposure to outside world did not share the concerns of its leader.

With decentralization in the governance of natural resources becoming an accepted norm, it would be pertinent to realize that the long experience of the communities in prudent resource management would require efforts beyond introducing programs like JFM. It would be naïve to believe that all the indigenous communities will have stock of ‘social capital’ and will use it for protecting the resource, thereby reducing the protection work of the Forest Department. If JFM is to be used as an effective instrument of development along with forest protection, each community will have to be catered to according to its needs in the form of moral, legal, financial and coordinated support from various development agencies.

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