GRAM GOURAV PRATISTHAN, NAIGAON, PURANDHAR TEHSIL, PUNE DISTRICT

Notes and Reflections on a Field Visit 28-30 April 1981

Past and Present

The Gram Gourav Pratisthan (GGP), a voluntary agency trust, is run by Mr. V.B. Salunke, and Mrs. C. Salunke, now with the administrative support of Colonel S.P. Salunke. It has an office in Pune, but its centre of gravity is Naigaon, a village two hours' drive from Pune and well off the tarmac where Mr. and Mrs. Salunke have been working since about 1973. It is a poor area with rainfall in places as low as an average of 15 inches, and uncertain low-yielding crops from rainfed agriculture.

The Salunkes' initiatives began with the drought of 1972/3. People were given work breaking stones which were unlikely ever to be used and which remain on the hillsides as monuments to futility. Mr. Salunke set out to find more productive alternatives. In Naigaon village a percolation tank had recently been dug below 40 acres of land which a widow, the last of her family, was donating to the temple. With the agreement of the villagers, the land was rented on a long lease, and an experiment-cum-demonstration farm started. Early efforts included the introduction of milk cattle; but those who bought them were those who had irrigation, and who came from other more prosperous areas. The main chance emerged as lift irrigation. Dramatic increases in yields were achieved on the farm (from perhaps 5 quintals total before it was taken over to 200 quintals in the third year). A pump for villagers was also installed below a percolation tank, but they showed not much interest, having not taken part in planning and construction and not having a stake in the enterprise.

Out of these experiences and experiments, the main thrust developed, the Pani Panchayat system. In this, groups of people with land came together, subscribe shares, and with help from the Trust develop and manage a water source using pump lift. The funding system has been known as 20:40:40, with 20 per cent coming from participants' subscriptions, 40 per cent from GGP, and 40 per cent from Government subsidies. There are now (May 1981) (approximately) in order of decreasing degree of completion:

Projects irrigating	16
Complete but without electricity	7
Work in progress	16
Awaiting government subsidy	4
People collecting subscriptions	7
	50

For a total of 45 of the more completed projects the aggregate details are:

Members (i.e. farmers)	1,305
Hectares	1,059
Horsepower for lift	722
Average lift	80-85 feet

New groups are now coming forward every week, and a halt is being called at 50 groups for the time being in order to consolidate.

Visit

I visited Naigaon from 28-30 April. Kamla Chowdhry and Roberto Lenton joined on 30 April. I was shown round by Mrs. Salunke and Colonel Salunke, who also interpreted in interviews. We visited the following places where there are Pani Panchayat Projects: Bubawadi, Tekawadi, Naigaon, Pandeshwar, Kothale, Rajuri and Hargude. While I did not discuss with anyone who had not joined a group or with any landless labourers (who are however a small minority), I was able to meet quite a range of participants. I saw some of the best projects, and also had a good discussion with two project-holders (group leaders) whose projects had stalled because the electricity connections had not yet been made. It was possible to observe the irrefutable evidence of astonishing enthusiasm and industry on the part of new groups, and the fact of intensive summer irrigation. As always, after such short visits, what follows should be treated with caution. I am grateful to Colonel Salunke for correcting errors in an earlier draft.

The Approach

The sequence is roughly the following:

i. a group, or a leader, comes to the Pani Panchayat meeting (held at Naigaon every Sunday) and asks for a project. The Pani Panchayat consists of project-holders (group leaders) plus Mr. & Mrs. Salunke and other staff. It is not a formalised body.

ii. a technical survey is carried out to assess feasibility and to estimate cost.

iii. the group collects 20 per cent of the cost and pays it in. At the same time a social survey is carried out.

iv. the GGP applies for the government subsidy and an electricity connection.

v. physical works (e.g. digging of trenches, of a well etc.), and ordering and installation of the pump. (Impatient people get on with this without waiting for iv to be completed.)

vi. when ready, irrigation starts.

There are several problems:

- government subsidy depends on all participants being small or marginal farmers. Sometimes large families have large holdings which have not been divided up. Time is then taken (and much dusty work) finding and updating the land records

- government subsidies may be delayed (e.g. near the end of the financial year, which is just when people are most able and anxious to get on with physical works)

- delays in electricity connections. This is the most serious.

None of these is insuperable.

Rules and Conditions

The rules of the Pani Panchayat are attached (appendix).

Each member has a card on which water distributions are recorded. On the back of the card are some of the rules. These include prohibition of growing sugar cane. In addition, each member has a legally stamped agreement document.

Equity

An important subject for research is to unravel the complexities of the early process in which people decide to join or not to join, and make their subscriptions. The sums involved may be large for some people, but are trivial compared with the benefits. For one acre, an average subscription of the 20 per cent is of the order of only Rs.300-400.

Rights to subscribe are in practice determined by, first, the area of land in the command, and then the number of persons in the family at the rate of half an acre per person whether adult or child.

Thus some examples would be

Number in family	Acreage	Limit to water rights (in acres)
5	$\frac{1}{2}$	$\frac{1}{2}$
5	$2\frac{1}{2}$	$2\frac{1}{2}$
5	4	$2\frac{1}{2}$
10	8	5

On equity, negative points are:

i. no landless family has acquired any water rights (although "in concept" this is possible).

ii. a family with less than $\frac{1}{2}$ acre per member in practice receives less water per member than one with $\frac{1}{2}$ acre or more per member.

iii. some poor families may find it difficult to raise the cash. However, I was told that all who wanted to were usually able to subscribe.

iv. the poorer families may be those least willing to take risks, and therefore most cautious about subscribing. They may hedge their bets by making only a modest contribution, thus losing a major future benefit.

v. the question can be asked whether less poor farmers lend money to those who are poorer in order to gain their water rights. I did not come across any hint of this, but would not expect to on such a visit.

vi. the range of acreage-equivalent water rights does vary quite widely:

Project	Smallest right (acres)	Largest right (acres)
Pandeshwar (Shepherds' group)	0.75	4
Kothale	0.12	3
Lapthalwadi	0.05	7

On equity, positive points are:

i. the limitation of half an acre per family member should restrain the larger landholders from making gains proportional to their land.

ii. smaller right-holders cultivate more intensively, and may take 3 crops a year off a small plot, compared with only 2 crops a year taken by larger right-holders.

iii. the procedure whereby all pay for their rights, and then have these enshrined in a stamped legal document, fortifies the weaker people to demand their rights. In Mrs. Salunke's words "Assertion comes only after payment".

iv. those who take part tend to be the smaller farmers anyway. Larger farmers have usually already dug their own wells and installed their own pumps. In Naigaon, for example, there are some 250 families. Of these about 30 have their own lift irrigation and are not members, while 176 families are members of 9 Pani Panchayat schemes. Not all the population is covered, but most are, including many of the smaller poorer farmers.

v. groups vary in the arrangements they make. At the Pani Panchayat meetings principles and options are discussed. One group, at Santkripa, in which all 30 participants have 2 acres or more of land under potential command, decided that all families would have the same water-rights, for 2 acres. There is thus potential for moving in directions which are more rather than less egalitarian.

vi. the demand for labour will rise, and almost certainly wage rates too. Thus it can be expected that able-bodied landless families will be better off. Moreover, the sharp increases in incomes will generate opportunities for secondary employment. In some areas, one can anticipate quite acute labour shortages.

vii. some of the groups are predominantly or entirely from low status castes: in Pandeshwar, the shepherds have their project; and in Naigaon the cobblers and liquor-makers have their separate projects. These groups are not necessarily exclusive (so much depends on the geographical position and ownership of fields): the cobblers, for example, have 4 higher caste members in their group of 14. But the dominant effect is to raise the self-respect, independence, and economic position of lower groups.

viii. counter-migration. Already there are suggestions of counter-migration from Bombay, Pune and elsewhere. People absent in towns have been anxious to subscribe. At Lapthalwadi, two absent families were so anxious to subscribe that they sent money in excess of their entitlements to subscribe as determined by their landholdings. In that village, some 25 families out of 100 are in Bombay or elsewhere and the project holder estimated that 15 of them will now return for a better life than in the slums. Perhaps these will include those who are worst off in the towns. In one of the Naigaon groups, an informant said that 7 out of 35 families in his group had returned from Sholapur in order to take up irrigation. While these figures would need careful checking, the net migration effect, reducing urban misery, cannot be doubted.

ix. stabilising landholdings. This can only be a conjecture. The villages concerned are at a fairly early stage of differentiation of landholding size. (They correspond to Dasgupta's B, rather than A villages).[1] Although there is considerable variation in water rights, those who gain them will be protected from ratchets of impoverishment - contingencies which they can only meet through selling land. Over the long term this may have the effect of slowing or even reversing the tendency for the distribution of landholding sizes to become more skew.

x. sharply raised income and food supplies, spaced around the year. Irrigation, especially on intensive small holdings, provides food and income at more intervals round the year, and more reliably. This can transform the economy and outlook of a small farmer.

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(1) Biplab Dasgupta "A Typology of Village Socio-Economic Systems from Indian Village Studies" Economic and Political Weekly, Vol.X, 33-35, August 1975.

Women

A further important aspect of equity concerns women. During the visit I was able to meet quite a number of women, with whom Mrs. Salunke has an excellent rapport. Irrigation activities are usually so much the preserve of men that it was encouraging to find signs and intentions which run counter to that tendency. Some of the most important impacts on women will be those linked with the general equity points listed above. But beyond those, the following points are of note:

(i) two of the project-holders are women. This is not something I would have expected.

(ii) the all-women's project at Hargude, though still at the stage of physical construction, seems a remarkable development. Kamla Chowdhry, Roberto Lenton and I made a brief visit to Hargude and were impressed by the enthusiasm of the project-holder and those of the 15 members we met; but in the time available we were not able to find out much about the group. It would repay study and monitoring. Are there any other all-women irrigation groups anywhere in the world? What part, if any, do men play in it? How and why did it form? What are the land relations of the members of the group? What effects will it have (differing from those where men are the members) on the household and intra-family relations? There are many questions.

(iii) none of the water masters (1 or 2 per project) are women but Mrs. Salunke foresaw that with the expanding project, an increasing number might be.

(iv) in Babawadi, as an adjunct to the irrigation project, piped water has been put into the village, with individual extensions and taps to each house. This may not be replicable, but may have a much greater impact on health and family welfare than communal taps. (There is evidence from Africa of a quantum jump in family water use only when water was supplied individually to households). The woman I interviewed was very pleased indeed. The previous water supply had been over a kilometre away.

Who Gets the Water?

A further question is who gets the last water, and for what. The better-off farmers have been able to dig wells in nallas and below percolation tanks, to buy pumps, and then to irrigate sugarcane. They have thus made, and continue to make, preemptive strikes to appropriate the communal resource of groundwater. The GGP enables poorer farmers to compete in this scramble.

Conflicts of interest are inevitable. At Pandeshwar we met the project-holder and some members of a new group, most of whom were Dhangars (shepherds). This summer they have their first irrigation, by pumping from a well in the nalla bed. They have 23 members and 60 acres of land with water rights. But because of shortage of water they are only irrigating 6 acres. I was told that they had divided this 6 acres among all members and saw the block where this irrigation was taking place. They are using water sparingly to grow vegetables. Meanwhile, about two kilometres upstream in the nalla, a larger farmer is pumping out water to irrigate 10 acres of sugarcane. The Dhangars resent this doubly: one farmer is appropriating upstream water and denying it to them; and he is doing this to grow a thirsty crop which they have agreed, as a condition of joining the Pani Panchayat, not to grow.

Replication - the Main Chance

The potential significance and impact of GGP goes further than Purandhar Tehsil, Pune District, Maharashtra, or India. The search is on for ways of combining the necessary scale of some lift irrigation with the resources and capabilities of small farmers. In many places, larger farmers are appropriating (once and for all, short of major reform or revolution) the diminishing stock of remaining groundwater. When lift irrigation schemes involving small farmers are started, all too often they are captured by the better off and larger farmers. Has GGP found, or is it in the process of finding, a replicable way of enabling very small and poor farmers to avoid this and to secure a share of the remaining stock of groundwater?

It is difficult to say. With the projects so far there have been the following specially favourable conditions:

i. the leadership and inspiration of the Salunkes.

ii. water sources which are on communal land (unlike much tubewell irrigation which tends to be sited on the land of a larger farmer).

iii. very large private economic gains for participating households which start from a very low base.

iv. an environment in which larger farmers have generally already got their own wells and pumps and are therefore not interested in joining, dominating and exploiting the groups.

v. heavy subsidies (80% of capital cost plus GGP's management overheads).

It is also difficult to say because none of the groups has been irrigating for long, and their internal dynamics, including the distribution of water, have not been analysed. With similar groups elsewhere it is rare for actual practice to correspond one for one with theory, and any realistic appraisal of replicability has to take account of natural slippage from ideals.

However it may be possible to identify the core of conditions and of an approach which could be adopted by other voluntary agencies and by governments. The core conditions seem to me:

- a communal water source able to command small farmers' lands
- high private economic gains for participants
- larger farmers, where present, not interested in joining

The core of the approach seems to me:

- contributions by participants deposited in advance
- agreement on a more rather than less egalitarian allocation of water rights (details could vary)
- rights enshrined in legal documents
- technical, administrative, moral, and political support for the groups

There are many other elements which are important (means of solving disputes, water masters for routine operation, regular meetings, etc.) and concerning which lessons can be learnt from the GGP experience.

But this core, or something like it, may be the key for replication. The question is whether, like early HYV seeds, it needs all sorts of special care and treatment, or whether it is robust and adaptable.

To find that out requires tests. As a first stage, are there other voluntary agencies, in Pune District, in Maharashtra, in India, or elsewhere, prepared and able to carry those tests out?

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Appendix

Rules of the Water Panchayat
(For Members Only)

1. The relationship of water is to be with the individual, not with the land.

2. Water will be divided equally among all members after taking into account amount available.

3. Water taxes are to be paid by all members in 2 instalments each year by the dates fixed by consensus.

4. All equipment connected with the project will be kept with the Water Panchayat.

5. The Water Panchayat has the right to appoint workers for the maintenance of the project and to decide on an honorarium payable to them.

6. All the money obtained from the taxes will be deposited in an account in the project's name.

7. All claims on the project will be paid by the Water Panchayat from money in this account.

8. A meeting of all the members will be held twice a month. At these meetings problems faced by members in getting water should be resolved by all the members in accordance with the rules.

9. Any problem not resolved in the general meeting should be sent in writing by the group leader to the elected Council of the Water Panchayat for an impartial decision, according to rules.

10. Any action by a member contrary to the rules will be severely punished.

11. If payment of water tax is not made according to Rule No. 3, the member's water supply will be cut off.

12. Land for which the water is obtained under this project cannot be sold without the permission of the Water Panchayat.

13. Any member who causes a grave problem in the working of the project and disobeys the Water Panchayat will have his membership cancelled.

14. Each member should have this card filled by the group leader.

15. The Water Panchayat has the right to make new rules and to change existing rules.

WATER PANCHAYAT

No. _____ Scheme No. _____

Name _____ Field _____ Group(?) No. _____

Water Tax:- 1) _____ 2) _____

Water Timings			Water Timings			Crop	Field		?
Day Fixed	Day Received	Hrs.	Day Fixed	Day Received	Hrs.		Ha.	?	