

PATHAMADAI - A PARABLE OF SOCIAL CHANGE & LEADERSHIP

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A brief introduction

The Foundation for Advancement of Craft Enterprise and Skills (FACES) is a trust created by the confederation of Indian Industries (CII). FACES has been working with three craft communities to help an socio-economic development of the community by making the craft economically viable. The three craft communities FACES is working with – The *Mushari's* of *Changanasseri* – Bell metal; The *Ojhas* of *Adilabad – Dokra*; and the *Lebbais* of *Pathamadai* – Mat weaving. While these attempts have been fairly successful in meeting the economic goals, they have provided us with great insight and learning. The nature of events that unfolded around our modest attempts was like a microcosm of the transition that we in India are going through in our attempts to modernise. We provide more details on the project in Appendix I.

Abstract of Pathamadai Paper :

This paper traces the path taken by the Foundation for Advancement of Craft Enterprise & Skills (FACES) in helping the “silk-mat” weavers of *Pathamadai* to develop themselves. FACES was confronted with many issues ranging from the readiness of the community to accept them and their intervention to communal violence that erupted in the village. The resilience and dignity with which these matters were dealt with by the community has provided very useful insights into the nature of “Bharath”. FACES used a few frameworks through which it understood the processes it encountered at *Pathamadai*. These frameworks helped FACES to plan its strategies. The paper discusses these frameworks while it takes the reader through the narrative of *Pathamadai* experience.

A thumbnail sketch of the work at *Pathamadai* till the time we introduced the loom:

Processes and outcomes :

The initial part of the work at *Pathamadai* started with FACES attempting to understand the craft, the crafts person and the community. This took the better part of a year. During this time FACES helped the crafts persons by selling their mats and slowly inculcating a feeling for quality.

Once it understood the context at *Pathamadai*, FACES made its first major intervention : Reintroducing vegetable dyes to the crafts persons. The older ways of using these colours were being lost.

This was the theme song for 1996. The year started with a workshop conducted by Mr. Chandramouli, an authority on the subject. Mr. Chandramouli completed a journey begun thirty years ago, when he visited *Pathamadai* to learn natural dyeing of *korai* from the parents of the current artisans. A follow-up workshop in October and location of a source in Kerala for sapan wood (a dye material) have been the supply side inputs.

Demand side factors, however, have convincingly put this process on the road. FACES had demonstrated retail sale prices that have hiked artisan earnings per mat by 25%. More than that, suddenly, all the *pattu pai* weavers have full-time work, increasing incomes many times over.

The best part, of course, is the story of Abdul Kader – the only 140-count weaver today. Should you happen to visit *Pathamadi*, he will tell you with great relish of his adventure in Delhi. His natural dyed mat entry earned him the National Master Craftsman Award for 1996.

Market Interventions

FACES placed a standing order with the community from September for supply of 10 mats per month of 100 + count (our estimate of the maximal production capacity is 15). FACES received two / three mats initially – within 8 months, this increased to eight. These have been market-tested through direct campaigns and two exhibition-sales, one at Delhi and the other at Bangalore. FACES has also begun a process of new product development with trials on wall-hangings, table-mats and coasters.

Loom Improvement

The existing loom imposes a great strain on the back; yet its very simplicity contributes to the versatile range of designs afforded. A dialogue has been initiated with the Rural Technology Centre of the Gandhigram University on redesigning the loom. Meanwhile, a breakthrough has been the location of a source for the '*achchu*' or reed, a critical component that had not been replaced for over a decade and that had rendered many looms inoperable or inefficient. An industrial designer with an interest in crafts offered to work on the loom.

The Pathamadai Story

Pathamadai may not be the average Indian village. *Swami Shivananda* came from this village, and so did other eminent men..... *Pir Bhai*, will tell you with pride about all of them and how *Swami Chidananda* invites him (when ever he is in *Pathamadai*) to have a dialogue where *Pir Bhai* talks about his understanding of the *Quran* and listens to the Swami's insights. For his living, *Pir Bhai* sells mats. The *Pathamadai* mats are (or should I say were) well known. They are unique and special because they are superfine. In *Tamil* they are called "silk mats"

because of their fineness and because they can be folded like cloth. It was the custom till a few years ago that in all Hindu marriages in the area, a silk mat woven with the names of the bride and bride groom was presented to the couple as an heirloom!

Preamble

Like the *aalap* of a beautiful song, the preamble is slow, meandering and beautiful. But, as the song proceeds, we will have to contend with the echoes of bomb blasts and the *Babri Masjid* as they challenge the structure of a beautiful part of our heritage. FACES is a participant observer of a process of change that has been triggered off in this village.

A small digression here before we come back to our main story. Next to agriculture, craft employs the maximum number of people in India; but, it is a very neglected sector. While there are schemes and NGOs a plenty for the poorer sectors, direct focus on the agricultural and industrial sectors, very little is done for craft (except in textile, and even there handloom is fighting a desperate battle). FACES was initiated to make an attempt to understand how craft can be the cutting edge of a developmental process; an attempt to link back with the Gandhian idea of development where craft development cascades other developmental processes into the community.

The context

Hema has been working with the *Lebbai* community of fine mat weavers for about 3 ½ years. (She has rented a house in the *agraharam* area originally allocated for the *Bhramins*. *Pir Bhai* advised her to do so since he thought that she would be safer there). It is important to highlight a few concepts about Hema to understand the processes at *Pathamadai*. Hema graduated from NID, She hails from *Pollachi*, and She is married to George Mathew and lives in Bangalore, when she is not in *Pathamadai*. In 3 ½ years, she has helped the mat weavers increase the quality of the mats woven, increase the number of families working on fine mats and almost double the earnings of the weaver. FACES has also re-introduced vegetable colours in the mats. We decided that having made these gains and having understood the mat weaving process to a large extent, we need to work with the loom itself and improve the loom for better ergonomics and productivity.

An engineer, Badrinarayana, volunteered to help us design and make the new loom. We studied and filmed the existing process. We discussed the essential features the weavers would look for in the new loom. The loom we made was a first prototype. Wahab one of the master weavers from Pathamadai tested it off site.

The dynamics of introducing the loom

The community welcomed the new loom and the stage was set to start the field trials and that was when the world outside entered rudely in the picture. An RSS member living in *Pathamadai* was murdered in the Muslim area of the town!

This has a story behind it. The man who was murdered was a carpenter. He had travelled to *Ayodhya* a few years ago and come back with a brick from the *Babri Masjid*. A small procession was taken through the town and the matter was forgotten. *Pir Bhai* describes the murdered carpenter as a harmless low profile person and in fact, he had to walk through the Muslim locality to go home every day. He had done that after the heroism of his *Ayodhya* visit just as he had all his life!

The people in the *agraharam* were very frightened and disturbed by the murder. They had all kinds of fantasies about the danger. Work on the testing of the new loom had to be suspended because the design needed improvement and the carpenters who were needed to work on the loom, were Hindus. The loom needed a new kind of warping technique and the cloth weavers of *Pathamadai* had to teach the technique to the mat weavers. The cloth weavers were Hindus. However, none of these were real problems!

The murderer was definitely not a local resident. But, the police had to do something. A list of local youth was made out, taken to the *Masjid* and very quietly and peacefully, the youth were handed over. "The police also have to be seen as doing their work" was the general comment. Where the local police seemed to be settling old scores, they were told off. Particularly interesting is the resistance put up by an old woman. She was harassed at her home where she was alone and asked to sign a paper of some kind. Her son lives in Bombay and has not been home for more than a year. She simply fended off the policeman single-handed. *Pir Bhai* was distraught with the whole affair. "I am so ashamed. How will I face my friends in the other communities and how will I bless the local marriages?" (He as an elder and a priest was often invited as a respected guest to all weddings) How will I face *Swami Chidananda* (from the Shivananda Ashram) who regularly visits me when he comes to the village?" was his concern.

The weavers and the carpenters when approached for help were very wise. They did not say "No!". "Give us time", they said. We waited. In a few weeks time, the carpenters and the weavers gave tentative feelers. Soon, the help needed was offered. Changes were made in the design, new techniques were taught and the loom is being tested.

What is most amazing is that till we introduced the loom, there was very little interaction among the *Lebbais*, the weavers and the carpenters on any significant commercial or technical level. Our earlier suggestions that such an interaction

could help did not amount to much. Yet, when real interdependence was required, the village responded, and that too in the face of a great tragedy.

This whole experience has left us both inspired, and very sad. Inspired with the subtle but powerful demonstration of the wisdom of old India, of Bharatvarsh. Deeply saddened by the mindlessness and violence of new India - the pseudo modern India.

We had designed our interventions based on a framework that had been developed from earlier work with other craft communities(1). To explain the context of change in India, we will look at the frame works and learn about the dynamics of this community based on these frame works.

THE FRAME WORK OF CHANGE :

The Old and the New

Every action choice that man makes goes hand in hand with creating opportunities to develop some aspects of himself and society while suppressing and submerging others. When choices of social organisation and cultural norms get established, this pattern of opportunity and suppression become a living condition. The individual processes find reflection in the societal processes. Some groups end up with privileges and others become under-privileged, just as each individual finds legitimacy for his status, high or low. Changes in such conditions could come from within or from the outside. Such changes are often heralded by extraordinary individuals who rise above the given reality and have deep insights into the negatives of the contemporary conditions. In India such resolution and renewal have always come from saints and sages. People who have risen above the norms and traditions of the time but deeply rooted in an inner spiritual human quest. From the times of the *Buddha* and *Mahavira*, the *Upanishadic* Sages through to the *Bhakti* saints and *Sufi* Mystics, this has been India's path. Gandhi walked the path of this tradition. But, the political condition of the time gave his action an added dimension. Social change was superimposed by the obvious struggle for power and freedom.

At the threshold of change, the words old and new take on very powerful emotive meanings. The old represents all the dark, unenlightened, dead conformities, unquestioned norms, unexamined beliefs and the like that oppress man. The old is the past that must be left behind.

The 'new' represents bright, intelligent, progressive, free and inviting spaces, fresh beginnings that give hope to man. The new is the future destiny that beckons each person and he must embrace it with both arms.

The New and the Old - in an "either or" discourse

The language of the leaders of such times gets heavily laced with the vocabulary, imagery and mythology of this fragmentation. The energy that the "new" can mobilise is directly related to and dependent upon the oppression experienced through the "old". When the vision of the new is founded upon a deeply human, compassionate and spiritual base, it takes the form of a self-propelling wave. It sweeps millions of people and spans vast times. The *Buddha's* words still ring fresh in our ears. But, when the call for the new is without substance, when it relates only to externals and is based on forecast of material progress, it can only mobilise opportunism. An escape from old problems scramble to acquire the material benefits arising out of the change. Without the deep inward energy of truth and compassion, it will not move man. The act of gaining independence created a very powerful context in which the "old vs. new" became the operative metaphor. Unfortunately, it also represents a discontinuity between the direction created by Gandhiji and the direction chosen by Nehru. A deep inward search gave way to a superficial idea.

The incomplete revolutions

The struggle for *Swatantra* and *Swadeshi* decayed into a superficial change i.e., an opening up of opportunities for a changed order of power and wealth. The evidence for this lies in the fact that except for the colour and nationality of the rulers having changed, there is very little change in the process of governing our nation. The laws follow the colonisers' precedent. The government bureaucracy has not changed in structure, in its mission, or its norms and culture. The educational pattern remains largely unaltered, the books and the rendering of the History of the nation, remain the same. Industrial Organisations operate with imported knowledge and alien management philosophies. They are becoming the leading edge of a mind colonisation. But access to political and economic power has opened up, the societal balances between castes has changed. Thus the more opportunistic and violent have grabbed the new instruments of power. Some of the earlier struggles for political and economic power were played out within the bounds of values and dignity. Today the forces welling up to grab a piece of the cake, act from a naked lust for power. The frustration caused by a belied hope in the emergence of a truly developmental context adds fuel to the fire.

The call for building a new scientific India that Nehru voiced, has become a wave for consumerist industrialisation and economic and technological opportunism. Gandhi is associated with village industry, which is therefore looked at as a pious responsibility. Apart from keeping alive *Khadi Gramudyog Bhavans* and co-operative textiles, the idea of village development has been forgotten. The pioneering work of Nelly Setna, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya and Pupul Jayakar has not led to the revolution in village technology that one expected. New age textiles rule the day.

With the relegation of the old, a whole host of Indian tradition languishes. The metaphor and practice of science and technology in India, the continuity of village crafts, the regeneration of Indian design in architecture and art have all been marginalised. A person with a westernised training in technology holds the power and makes decisions. An indigenous scholar in any field of learning has to languish and be at the mercy of the new breed of petty officials and managers.

Opportunism takes over

A new intellectual middle class has joined a new power elite to usher in a bastardised western modality of growth and development. This attempt would be welcome were it possible to cut oneself off cleanly and completely from one's background and one's heritage. But since that is clearly impossible both individually and collectively, the disturbance caused by the superficial call for the new and, in our case, for westernisation, technologisation and politicisation can only unleash self centered, power hungry reactionary forces. The awakening to a progressive India that Gandhiji represented and led, has become submerged in a cathartic release from some oppressive structures and a race for acquisition of new forms of power. Has the tradition of spiritual, introspective, compassionate, truthful, peaceful change ended with what seems to be Gandhiji's partial success?

The metaphor of the old and the new is not only false in the sense that it fragments the reality of the here and now, it is false also because it creates a context for action that is hollow and insubstantial. It evokes mirages, trivial non-enduring action and short-term gains. It takes one's attention away from the real issues of the here and the now. The metaphor of Gandhiji was based on confronting the truth, introspection, self-purification and assertion without aggression or violence. *Satyagraha* compelled one to stay with the burning human issues, delve deeply into an exploration of the condition of the present, in the now, and discover one's response to it and act powerfully but peacefully. The new, in his vision, is an unfolding and flowering of this quest.

The individual's dilemma : The Search and the Symbol

Let us take a closer look at these processes that compel an individual to respond to rapid change. Change in the technology of living, in political, economic and social order, places an enormous strain on people. A culture of transience sets in and the imperative transition to new ways of living unleashes deep anxieties and fears. This outburst of feelings is a powerful force. When this force cathects to a movement that is a deep search into one's tradition and history it leads a wave of meaningful and peaceful change. In the absence of such an institutional space, this force becomes cathartic and violent. It clings to symbols of past glory and stability. The movement is superficial but it provides safety in membership. The followers and leaders of this movement are terrified of abandoning the external anchors that seem to provide security, belonging and identity.

A movement from a past into the future challenges beliefs and cultural traditions very deeply. Through the ages, through successive invasions into India, the indigenous culture has been through many shocks. But, we have always found ways of assimilating the new people who came in and their philosophy. Their identities were never threatened while space was given for a new social balance. The beautiful story of how the *Parsees* found a new home in India illustrates this strength of our people. The external norms and practices were never the source of conflict. The ability to act from deep faith, humanness and dignity for the self and others was the central issue. A *Dharmic* existence and code was the demand. The institutions of search were vibrant.

The changes that have come in the wake of Independence seem to have altered all this. Let us look at the case of *Ayodhya*. For many years the spot now claimed as *Ram Janma Bhoomi* has been the place that thousands of devotees would visit around *Ramanavami* day. *Ayodhya* as a whole was venerated as the holy ground. Whatever the historical events led to the *Babri Masjid* being built, the tradition of simple folk visiting the *Ram Janma Bhoomi* carried on in a peaceful way. It lived through uncomplicated faith and no communal tensions had resulted from it till recently.

The power of symbols

Today it has become a symbol of a resurgent Hindu psyche! Have we regressed so far in our thinking that events that are almost a thousand years old have become powerful reminders of hurt? The word Hindu as referring to a particular religion was coined by 16th century Jesuits. They had to define the religious phenomenon they wished to attack and conquer. How come we have internalised both the word and the need to attack another faith in order to proclaim our own? Our ancient texts do not refer to any religious dogma or theology. They talk of philosophy, insight, knowledge, practice and norms. What then is this new Hinduism that we choose to hook our hurt identity upon? The word *Dharma* refers to action that will nourish the well being of all forms of life. What then is the meaning of the statement "*Hum apne dharm ko nahi chodenge*" ("We will not let go of our faith") of an AK 47 wielding self proclaimed defender of the faith?

The more regressive processes that are rampant today could be the ripening of the sentiments that marginalised Gandhi during and immediately after 1947. The forces of integration and living in mutual dignity that *Kabir*, *Guru Nanak*, *Chaitanya*, *Appar* and a host of *bhakti* saints had nurtured has given way to the divisive designs of the coloniser. A people whose faith in the Divine was kept alive by the words and lives of saints and sages, have given allegiance to dogmatic priests and *mullahs*. The trust in inner conviction and the power of truth gave way to outer conformism and the power of violent demand. The symbol has obliterated the search. This then is the deeper dilemma triggered by the forces of history; the dilemma of choice between introspection and discovery in the face of

the challenges on the one hand, and blind by clinging on to symbols of security on the other.

The relationship between the dilemmas

The processes in the realm of the psyche closely parallel the processes that led to change in political and economic power. Gandhi was a deeply religious man. Nehru was a modern intellectual. Gandhi evoked the faith and trust of a people. Nehru spoke eloquently of a vision of new India that touched the dreams of the elite.

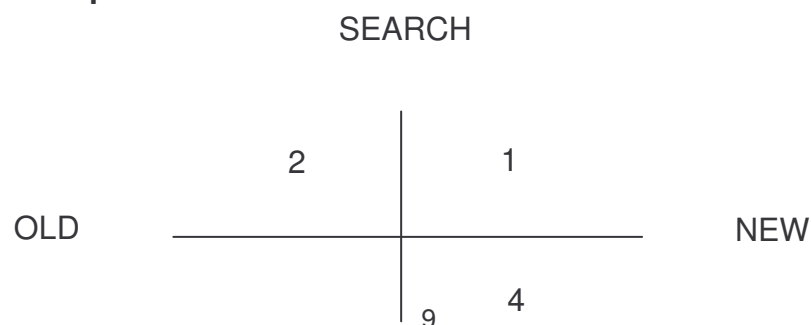
The old and the universe of faith have much in common. They are experienced in one's feelings and are seldom given form. Articulating them and defining them are almost impossible. They are a quiet background upon which one acts out the drama of one's life; their strengths are implicit and taken for granted while their negatives are explicit and call for attention. One's being is soaked in them while one's thoughts and dreams roam free. One awakens to them only when they are lost and one feels empty within.

The political and religious dramas that have burst upon us in the recent past must surely touch each one of us. While neither of them is desirable, both of them reflect our own inner processes. They seem trivial and external in their expression but reveal an erosion of human values in general and the cultural positives of our country in particular. The corruption and violence that we see in the political arena, reflects our own compromises for economic gains and our belief in being aggressive in a competitive world. Yet, we had won our independence, on the power of a different belief. The dogmatism and fundamentalism in the religious spheres, reflects our own erosion of faith, our very limited attitudes to human values, our desperate search for external symbols, necessary balance inner insecurity. Yet, we placed faith in *Ahimsa* and *Satyagraha*, only a few years ago.

Advancing a Conceptual Map : A Gist of the discussions

To understand the hypothesis put forth here, let us look at a conceptual map of the processes discussed. One axis of the map is the myth of the 'old' and the 'new'. The other axis is the nature of the action that people find security / meaning in, i.e., the search and the symbol.

Conceptual Map 1



SYMBOL

Quadrant 3: Old Entrenchments

Transition from one technological mode of survival and social / political organisation, to another, creates an extraordinary amount of anxiety and insecurity. In traditional agrarian societies, like India, which have experienced centuries of stability and prosperity – the metaphors, meanings, symbols of the tradition, get deeply entrenched in the minds of the people. A passive acceptance of the givens sets in, negative experiences and feelings generated by the socio-psychological context, i.e., feelings of relativity / anger and helplessness at the given conditions get contained in conformity and conservatism. The vibrant, alive body of people, end up holding on to empty norms and forms. This is where we find India in the 19th and early 20th century.

Quadrant 1 & 2: Process of real transformation

In order to regenerate and develop, the spark and the seed have to come from within the body politic. Institutional spaces that evoke a sharing of pathos and encourage an exploration into one's living context, provide the ground from which the seeds can develop, grow and transform a society. Such institutions are like a compost pit where the decaying part can nourish an emerging future. They are the places of intense introspection and search of the community, where empty forms and encrusted, over-crystallised, dead symbols are examined and the living sparks and seminal wisdom, indigenous to the community is discovered. Mahatma Gandhi had created such an institution starting from Tilak's cry for *Swarajya*, *Swadeshi* and *Swatantra*. He evolved the method of *Satyagraha*, which made the Congress party, an institutional space. Not only did he constantly articulate his insights about the political reality, but also delved deep into religious texts of wisdom; discovering the essential principles and strengths of its living core. He initiated a cleansing of the old stream and gave it a new movement, a new force and direction. His mode of search and action closely resembles the modes of sages and social reformers of old, like the *Buddha*, *Guru Nanak*, *Kabir*, etc. He expanded the scope for right action into the political field also. He created an institution at *Wardha* free from old entrenchments where introspection, development and growth could take place. A living transition, where the future is not a dream, or a vision, but an unfolding and a flowering of introspection and assertion. This institutional space covers quadrant one and two of the map. The sheer genius, wisdom and compassion of this attempt by Gandhiji defy description.

Quadrant 4: An invitation to opportunism

In the absence of such an institution, the call for the 'new' must rely on evoking dreams and hopes, and be fuelled by euphoria. Nehru (whatever his intentions might have been) became the symbol of this movement and its moving force. The totally alien political canvas that the Constitution of India created set the context of his leadership. A political manifesto having no link with the struggle and institutional processes symbolised by Gandhiji. The context of his action was constrained by the continuance of colonial organisations and the law. The vision of the 'new' did not touch the heart of the Indian people, the way Gandhiji's call had. It provided opportunities for new forms of power, a new economic order and enterprise. The ferment created by the struggle for independence was left orphaned. Its more fanciful aspects were given space. The feelings that would have nourished the seeds sown by Gandhiji, were left without leadership. The more self-serving interests found space and opportunity for acquisition. Thus, we find many of the political and economic initiatives taken in the 50's giving way to more violent, profiteering leadership and entrepreneurship, in the late 60's. The philosophy of action is not national growth, it is power, money and violence. Today, they are visible in brutal starkness.

When the Congress party decided to assume political power, by a quirk of fate, or a sleight of hand as it were, the people of India were robbed of a most magnificent experiment. The institution that saw *Swaraj* as one of the consequences of its struggle, became an instrument of power. The institution that mobilised commitment to a new awakening, was converted into a conduit of power. This subtle betrayal that Gandhiji tried hard to resist has robbed the fight for Indian independence of the power of being a movement and reduced it to a form of rebellion and fight for power.

A frame work to understand Leadership

The group in status quo :

Leadership is understood and explained in many different ways. Here, we are focussing on leadership that can change the culture of a social group. We start by looking at a socio-economic group in its "steady state". The group has learnt the use of certain tools and technology. This technology ensures survival and helps in wealth creation. The group also learns over a period of time a set of norms and rules of relationship. Roles are defined and by linking the roles together into a meaningful whole, this group becomes an organised system. However, these roles and relationships also limit the nature of discourse that the group engages in. What can be said, to whom and how gets defined and along with it, legitimacy of ownership and action. The group also set up rules that assure adherence to "What is good for our growth and survival". Individuals internalise and are socialised into the group language and technology. This socialisation leads to a dependence on the group for security and survival.

Managing Differences

This situation is fine if change is very slow i.e., changes in technology and living contexts happens in measures of a life time. When change is faster, these rules / roles / technology do not suffice. Individuals respond to the change but can not influence the group. Differences surface. These differences are often articulated in small private groups. In the settings, either the disturbance is resolved or, small accommodations and adjustments are made. The individual attempts at new definitions of reality, a new language of discourse as it were but is drawn back to the group.

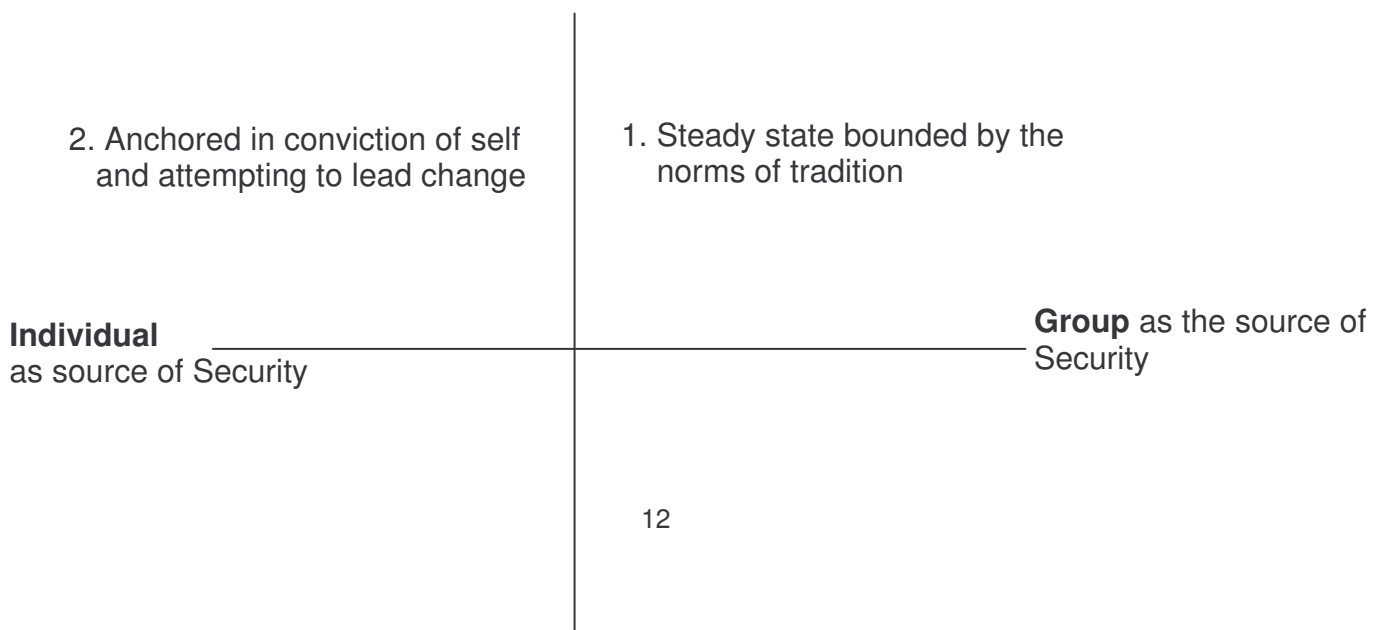
Seeking the new

When the differences become large, or when an individual is not satisfied with accommodation and adjustment, he / she feels alienated from the group. The call for real seeking and enquiry is heard. Individuals with leadership potential respond to this call. They step into the lonely journey of a seeker. A person who relies on the self for his / her security and searches for a new way; once he / she finds this, has the choice to come back to the group, re-engages with it. Through a process of dialogue, the individual persuades the group to enlarge its socio-technical and socio-economic repertoire. Initially this attempt is resisted and the person is seen as dangerous. True heroism lies in the process of discovery and reintegration.

Joseph Campbell describes in great detail and in a very rich way this process in his book "The hero with a thousand faces".

Conceptual Map 2 : (2)

Group Language



3. Seeking a new way,
dissatisfaction with
status quo

4. Discharge of differences with
the group, traditional modes
of containing differences

Individual Language

Applying the frame works:

Community responses – Conceptual Map 1:

Let us get back to *Pathamadai*. We first use conceptual map 1: The *Lebbai* community was located in the lower left quadrant. Living in an old context with an old set of meanings, language and technology (mat weavers are the focus of our study). They had experienced sporadic attempts made by groups like us to help them in the past. These exchanges had been of the kind where the groups saw themselves as the givers who were bringing hope to the poor weavers. The *lebbais* had dealt with them initially with a great deal of simplicity. A few of the community people took the new opportunity, became opportunists and ended up preying upon their own. The old and almost defunct “Mat Weavers Society” in *Pathamadai* is a living monument of this. It is still used when certain kinds of “opportunities” arise. The community feels compelled by circumstances to respond, inspite of knowing that a few individuals are misusing the situation for their own benefit. (Quadrant 3 / 4).

We went in with a clear understanding that while the resources and networks we brought with us was the “new context” for the *Lebbais*. The *Lebbais*, their culture, ways of interdependence, community structure etc. was “new” to us. We could not “give” any thing until we understood them in their context and they understood us in our context. We, therefore, located ourselves in the top left quadrant 2. *Pir Bhai, Wahab* and a few others joined us there. Slowly, more and more, the reality of the community was revealed to us. *Pir Bhai, Wahab* and others visited us in our context. They appreciated our offerings and a dialogue began. We have learnt of their internal issues and problems, we have learnt of their history, the break up of the community and the inroads the “bead” rolling has made into their community and how they have integrated this work into their social fabric. The vegetable dyeing revival was our first major step in trying to create a “new ground” (quadrant 1). It worked well. Mat pricing could be changed, a new crop of high quality weavers emerged from within, their own trading practices changed, one more trader from within the community set up shop. This was still within the community.

New technology and new levels of interdependence (Conceptual Map 2)

The loom opened up a whole new level of dialogue. Other communities with which an old pattern of exchange had existed for many decades had to be changed. Just when we were opening up the dialogue, the politics of “*Babri Masjid*” that has now become rampant in India intruded into the space. We discovered many things. We discovered that disturbing inter community harmony was a thing of great shame in *Pathamadai*. We discovered that most of the people in the community both Hindu and Muslim thought that the Al-umma & the RSS deserved each other! Both were disowned by their own communities at one level but were forced to manage the violent ways in which they forced

themselves upon the community. The tensions internal to the community, personal loss of credibility of the more enlightened individuals and the tearing of the larger inter community bonds is poignant. (Quadrant 1 and 4).

In parallel with this, another fascinating story opens up. The mat weaving community (when we went in) was in the top right quadrant (quadrant 1). It had its own tensions, fights for leadership and so on, but, these disturbances were managed in smaller groups. Some of them within families where the stances that would disturb the community were smoothed out, face saving devices created and viability maintained. These were the lower right quadrant (quadrant 2) dynamics. What was fascinating is the forays that *Pir Bhai*, *Wahab* and others took into finding new ways of dealing with the situation, the one created by us and the loom, and the other by the murder (quadrant 3). Tentatively at first and more boldly later (after they ascertained that we had a long term commitment), they would “experiment” with us. This experimenting was both a way of seeking new ways, tools, networks and resources for the community as well as insulating the community from us. These few leaders were risking themselves, their present standing in the community to learn. We too went through our struggle : “Would those experimenters take the learning back to the community?”, or, ‘Would they learn, and become opportunist? become the new elite of their own community, become brokers for us and betray both us and the community?” The “loom-*Babri Masjid*” episode tells us that not only true leadership, but community growth has started. Leaders from within each of the other communities – Carpenters and Weavers took charge of the entire process of the new dialogue. They saw the new possibilities for the *Lebbais* and their helplessness if the new technology was not internalised. They also saw that the *Pathamadai* society had to own up and internalise the loom and all the inter-linked technologies. The leaders are taking back the new learning, spreading it and therefore, expanding the range of capabilities and resources of the weavers as a group. (Quadrant 2 behaviour).

It has also become very obvious to us, that in the absence of the collective and individual wisdom of *Pathamadai*, we would have encountered India in a mini scale again. Let me explain : The wisdom of Bharathvarsha seems to lie in

- 1) The ability of each community to maintain stability within
- 2) To find individuals who can experiment with and create new learning while keeping the community protected.
- 3) To come together and create shared wealth first and then go back into bargaining or claiming rights and status within the community.

Fr. Gregorius has discussed many of the aspects that make up this worldview in a comprehensive paper in “The Eye”. (“Who are we in Bharatvarsha today” – The Eye – Magazine of Indian thought, Vol. IV No. 1 & 2, 1997 SPIC MACAY Publication, New Delhi).

These three learnings are significant and if we contrast this to the brutal, self-centered politics that we see in India, the loss will be clear. Modern India seems to do the following:

1. Each community holds on to its tradition in a mixture of superstition, sentimentality and fear. (Both within and in its interface with other communities).
2. Individual “leaders”, “experimenters” that the community throws up in the hope that they will come back as heroes and bring new gifts, turn into villains. They use the new knowledge for personal gain and learn the game of keeping the rest of the community both dependent on them and afraid of the change.
3. These “leaders” and the communities they represent have learnt to demand and bargain for their rights. They have not the slightest idea of how to create a common pool of wealth.

This then is the New India that is being created out of the body and soul of Bharathvarsha.

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