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PRIA

Interaction between Theories of Management and Development

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Namaskar! Thank you very much. I am indeed honoured to be invited on the occasion of Dr. Verghese Kurien's centenary celebrations at IRMA. I was hoping to be able to be with you physically for a couple of days and I do promise to make it up next time – hopefully before the year is out.

When Prof. Saswata Biswas called me couple of months ago, I began to make some notes about the why and how of my journey, which I could share with you this morning – starting with my engineering and management degrees, interactions with the field of development in India, and what lessons I have learned from that.

Between 1972 and 1979) is what I call my early journey. I completed my electronics engineering from IIT (Kanpur) and went to IIM (Calcutta) for an MBA. This was the time when we had some of the best professors on Organisational Behaviour at IIM (Calcutta), viz., Prof. Nitish Dey, who was the Director of the institute, Prof. Gaurango Chattopadhyay, Prof. Dharni Sinha, Prof. Bhupen Srivastava. We had a galaxy of academics and I got interested in Organisational Behaviour despite my background in electronics engineering. While I was there, Prof. Dey suggested that given my interest in teaching and research I might consider an appointment at IIM. I applied and got the job (this was my first job, basically entry level). In those days we were called Associates (not Lecturers).

I had just been appointed, when Dr. Kamla Chowdhury visited IIM (Calcutta) campus. She was, at that time, Advisor at the Ford Foundation on Management Education. She gave me wise advice – that if I wanted to teach and do research, I might have to do a Ph.D and asked what my interest was. She put me in contact with several schools (Carnegie, etc.) but I chose the Department of Organisational Behaviour at the School of Management at Case Western University, in Michigan, USA. Those were the days of the Emergency and I wanted to return and do field work in India. NLI had just been set up with Prof. Nitish Dey as its first Director. He gave me the opportunity and my doctoral field work was anchored in the National Labour Institute (NLI) in Delhi. At the fag end of emergency in late 1976 (early 1977), rural labour camps were being organised by NLI.

By coincidence I met Dr. Mohan Sinha Mehta (Bhai Saheb) from Sewa Mandir at NLI. I went to Southern Rajasthan in the district of Udaipur through Sewa Mandir to do my field work. I finished my Ph.D in 1978 and came back to work at the Public Enterprise Centre (PECEE), which was set up at that time to support public enterprises in rural development. It was in this period when I began to consider, in consultation with my colleagues and friends, the founding of PRIA. This was around 1981-82. This journey tells you a little bit about what professional education I had and what I began to do. So, in the initial intervention period (1982-86), I was involved through Sewa Mandir even before PRIA was set up.

In training and participatory methodology, rural women literacy programmes were being conducted by Sewa Mandir and many other agencies, and I did some work with them. In order to conduct those programmes there was no methodology of how women learn. It was basically a teaching programme as opposes to a learning programme. You may remember that the first National Programme on Adult Education was also started in 1978-79, and when training of functionaries was being designed, Late Shri Anil Bordia got hold of me and said, '*You designed these training modules because you are talking about participatory training*'.

In the early 1980s, the first National Programme for Women in Rural Areas (DWCRA), under the Integrated Rural Development Program (IRDPP) started. I began to do some training of programme functionaries with support from UNICEF and Ministry of Rural Development. NIPCCD was anchoring the DWCRA programme – there was no Ministry of Women and Child Development at that time. I did some training on participatory training methodology for NIPCCD faculty in Delhi and in eastern and southern

zones. In 1984, based on some of these experiences, PRIA's own programme on Training of Trainers (ToT) for those working in voluntary development organisations was started and it began to be known as a single programme because a lot of students from IRMA and a lot of practitioners in voluntary agencies went through this programme. The programme focused on participatory learning. When did I pick this up? When I was at Case Western University, Prof. David Kolb (the author of experiential learning) was our faculty and we had learnt both the theory and practice of experiential learning, and I adopted that model in designing a number of these training programmes.

Participatory learning was introduced through structured learning exercises during the training itself. So, it was only after 1982, 1983 and 1984 that you will find reference to role plays, simulations, self-reflection and understanding using your own experience (both past experience and experience during the training programme) as a source of learning – because by this time my belief was, any kind of personal and social change required unlearning, relearning and learning. This is actually foundational and if we support learning we are actually contributing to change. Because of my own training at Case Western University and IIM (Calcutta), I looked at the possibility of training facilitators who could facilitate learning of others, particularly learning of rural underprivileged and excluded communities, rural women, rural marginal farmers, rural labour. I believe that it is possible to develop competencies and that is what PRIA's ToT programme was all about in the 1980s. I am delighted to hear from Prof. Hippu that there was a simulation carried out over the past three days and that is an example of using experience inside a training programme to reflect on. Experiential learning is foundational in my view to social and personal change.

The second dimension which I introduced based on my own professional training in IIM and at Case Western University was understanding small group process. When I came to Sewa Mandir and in many development organisations, I heard people talking about building farmers' groups, sanghas, community organisations, community based organisations – but what does a strong group look like? What is a small group process? Both theoretical and practical understanding of that was inadequate. What is communication? Participation? Conflict resolution? Leadership? Partnership? How do you gain collective strength through effectively functioning community teams? Just bringing in 10 or 15 people in a place does not make them effective functioning groups and, therefore, the training methodology that I introduced brought this theoretical understanding as well as its practical manifestations based on the work that I had done myself.

I introduced the concept of inter-group relations to negotiate with the delivery system. Marginal farmers, women, rural women, when they get organised, they learn to deal with the frontline delivery programme of the government, and rural development functionaries at the block and village level, through a process of negotiation, through a process of mutual engagement. I used to train these groups myself so that they learn how to engage with the Block Development Officer, to engage with village level workers, with the literacy project officer. Therefore, the understanding and using the concept of power to influence others, the power within, hidden power and the power to transform is critical – because changing relations of power is fundamental to any development process. We cannot bring about sustainable development, sustainable improvement in the lives of the excluded and marginalized, without changing relations of power. Therefore, understanding power, understanding how it functions and how it can be leveraged through the collective voice of the poor was one of the political perspectives that I introduced in building community based organisations in 1983-93.

The third and the last point I want to make is how I brought my expertise and professional education in management in the work I was doing. When I started looking at the organisations in the voluntary sector, like Sewa Mandir and many others, I saw that these were organisations were designed to do

something in the society but they were paying very little attention to themselves as organisations. Much of my training in organisational development and organisational theory in the early days of IIM, Calcutta and Case Western Reserve was based on corporate enterprises and occasionally based on PSUs – I hope that has changed now. Most of these theories and writings were based on large organisations – the theory of organisational development used to say that because they are over-organized you loosen them a bit to make the place a bit more enjoyable and participatory. My intellectual theory and curiosity, based on my interactions with community based organisations and local voluntary agencies in India in the early years, suggested that actually they are quite the opposite and they are under-organised. Even founders did not know that there are some regulatory requirements or did not care. So, in 1984, when I introduced the course on financial management of voluntary agencies, they thought I was spoiling the enthusiasm and creativity and spontaneity of the voluntary sector. A lot of accusations came to my way. Several people said, these “American returned management experts” are trying to spoil development organisations, their spirit of spontaneity and commitment. My argument was that along with commitment you also need organisational and individual competence.

I began developing a theory of under-organised social system, and from that understanding a framework of organisations and interrelated ecosystems. When PRIA convened the first workshop on management of voluntary organisations, people said, “what does management have to do with voluntary organizations?” – that was 1985. We went on in late 1980s and 1990s to conduct strategic planning for social change organisations, renewing organisation vision, mission and strategy, and began to understand that the work we were doing is not a short-term project to be abandoned but to build organisations and institutions within the civic space, within civil society. This understanding was not even there in funders and they use to pretend that you are doing this project for a few years, after which there is no need to worry about the sustainability of the organization or even designing tasks appropriate for that organisation. Because, as many organisations have since discovered, if you start getting fully funded by the Government of India or state government, you also begin to organise yourself as a government department or government agency. Your character then becomes like a government agency and not as a spontaneous, flexible, resilient, adaptive civil society organisation. So, pay attention to the organisation, so that it is not just a temporary event for activity but a mechanism for doing public good. Several organizations have tried to do this.

We did a number of training programmes on organisational vision, mission and strategy with foundation teams, with core leadership of the organisation, with their chairperson or other members of the board. This was surprising in those days because nobody had thought about it. In the process, PRIA developed tools for organisational development and renewal. The concept of organisational sub-systems and framework are not necessarily different, but their manifestation and adaptation are, in the context of civil society, which are social purpose organisations designed to bring about change in the society. Therefore, we must also look at change within – because if the organisations are successful, and society has changed, they should change themselves. If they are unsuccessful in their interventions, and society has not changed –then they must change themselves all the more.

Organisational renewal, organisational development for civil society required a different way of conceptualizing organisations and their contribution to the social and economic context in which they operate. In the mid of 1990s, PRIA did a number of training programmes for facilitators of organisational development for social change organisations. These became very popular – we use to get nominations from Africa and Central Europe and South East Asia as well. So, in some way, if you look at what I brought to this field of development – largely by trial and error and not by any long term plan – was:

- First, learning is foundational for personal and social change and therefore experiential learning methods, theories and principles for adults, adolescents and seniors are not just child-teaching theories, which was being practiced in training programmes and training institutes.
- Second, participatory learning and training methodology based on the foundational perspectives of experimental learning. Making groups strong, effective functional teams. This was particularly relevant because in the early 1980s there was a post Janta Party government experiment, and a new generation of development organizations were mushrooming. They were all committed to fulfil the popular education perspective of creating local collectives. This was pre self-help movement, pre-savings credit. In Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, they use to call them social action groups, sanghas in Rajasthan, sangathans in Uttar Pradesh. Different phrases were used but the idea was collective strength. Even the work that I did at that time with trade unions, working in the informal sector with agricultural labour or forest workers, they themselves need an understanding – because organising in a formal workplace like a factory or a mine is very different from organising agricultural labour or forest labour in a community setting. Therefore, team functioning of sanghas and sangathans you need to understand and facilitate effective, transparent, accountable, good functioning. This is the same model which was later on used in building cooperatives. It is the principle of cooperation nowadays which is being used in farmer producer organisations. Wherever we need collectives, we must understand how small groups function and how we can facilitate effective, strong functioning of small groups. So, team building is not just for staff of NGOs and development organisations. Team building, effective group building is also for community based organisations.
- Third, I brought was an organisational view to civil society voluntary organisations – an understanding of how a voluntary organisation needs periodic renewal and how you can take tools and methods of organisational development to enable that to happen. The context in which you operate continuously changes – political, economic and social – and therefore you need to renew yourself from time-to-time to remain effective and remain relevant.

Thank you very much for making me think about this journey because I had never put these thoughts together in this way. Being a practitioner I used to try out things but not necessarily conceptualise them as I have been able to do because of your invitation. Thank you very much and I hope the next generation of doctoral students sitting there, will be willing to try to learn from both the world of practice and the world of academe in a way that new theories, formulations and methodologies can be evolved.

I remember when I met Dr. Kamla Chowdhury again in 1981-82, she asked, “What are you doing now?” I told her what I was doing. She replied, “I didn’t think that you would go to do a PhD in management and then come back to do this kind of work.”

But it has been gratifying and very satisfying for me. I feel professionally more enriched. I hope all of you will undertake this perspective of integrating development theories and management knowledge in your profession – it is very important. Because only then can we be called professionals in development management in a field which is underdeveloped in India today – I hope IRMA’s DOCMAD program can promote that.

Thank you very much!

Watch the recording of this talk, [here](#).