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A unique case of using community property resource (water) from Bankura district of West Bengal

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Abstract
Bankura district is located in Southern part of West Bengal; district is drought prone and due to undulating, lateritic, and porous soil moisture content at subsoil level is low. Fluctuating rainfall with intermittent drought spell between two successive rainfalls badly affects Kharif crop in terms of yield. In view of this, marginal and small farmers demand for excavation of small tank locally known as *hapa* in their agricultural land for conserving of water. And field study reveals that thousands of *hapa* have been excavated on individual land of farmers. In addition, many years ago (century ago) 7-8 farmers by forming informal group excavated big tank (pond) in the land of one medium farmer and water was used for cultivation by all. The process started in great grandfathers' period but water is used by generations together. One such case is pretended here where altogether seven members were involved.

Keywords: Bankura, *hapa* (small tank), farmers and water

Introduction

This case from Bankura district of West Bengal portrays using water from a huge tank by seven different households as community property and the tank was excavated century ago in the land of a farmer for irrigating of seven farmers' land. In those days great grandfathers paid some money for using the water in their agricultural land which are in the vicinity of seven households. The author carried out the study at *Ghattore* village located at Bankura-I block in Bankura district of West Bengal in February 2016. The district Bankura is located in southern part of West Bengal. It is an important district in terms of ancient history and culture as the name of the district is found in the great epic of *Mahabharata*. The district is a part of Chhotonagpur plateau with alluvial soil. Total land area of the district is 688,200 hectares out of which forest area is 147,700 hectares while the high land and medium land are 176,915 and 150,611 hectares respectively. Again highland covers an area of 176,915 hectares where traditional cultivation of paddy is not remunerative. (The information has been collected by compiling from the sources like bankura.gov.in/ agriculture.html & District Human Development Report, Bankura).

Agro-climatic condition

The agro-climatic condition of the district is suitable for plantation and horticultural crops. The district with dry climatic condition and vast wasteland has great potential for undertaking plantation and horticultural activities like mango, guava, citrus fruits and medicinal and aromatic plant. At the same time the dry climate is very suited to animal resource development and seed production. The land utilization statistics may be seen from following Table.

Table 1: Land Utilisation Statistics 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 (Area in Hectares)

S. No.	Sl. No. Items	2009-2010	2010-2011
1.	Geographical Area	688100.00	688100.00
		(100.0)	(100.0)
2.	Forest	148350.00	148350.00
		(21.56)	(21.56)
3.	Area under Non Agricultural use	109621.00	109621.00
		(15.93)	(15.93)
4.	Barren and Un-cultivable Land	3302.00	3302.00
		(0.48)	(0.48)
5.	Permanent Pasture	633.00	633.00
		(0.09)	(0.09)
6.	Area under Fruit Crops, Misc. Tree crops and others	5096.49	5284.49
		(0.74)	(0.77)
7.	Cultureable Waste Land	2337.00	2337.00
		(0.34)	(0.34)
8.	Fallow other than Current Fallow	1386.00	1386.00
		(0.20)	(0.20)
9.	Current Fallow	60470.11	255679.40
		(8.79)	(37.16)
10.	Net Area Cultivated	356904.40	161507.11
		(51.87)	(23.47)
11.	Area Cultivated more than once	170914.00	149985.00

Source: bankura.gov.in/agriculture.html

Although table is self-explanatory but few of the important points, as observed from the above table, are:

1. Although around 50 percent of the total geographical area was under cultivation in 2009-10 but the same was drastically reduced to 23 percent in 2010-11 as a sequel area under current fallow has increased substantially in 2010-11 than the previous year.
2. As per environmental protection a region should have 1/ 3rd of its area under forest and according to the World Bank forest area (% of land area) in India was last measured at 23.07 in 2011.
3. In 2009-10 less than 50 percent area was cultivated for more than once and in 2010-11 it was reduced further.

The district is drought prone and due to undulating, lateritic, and porous soil moisture content at subsoil level is low. Fluctuating rainfall with intermittent drought spell between two successive rainfalls badly affects Kharif crop in terms of yield. In view of this, marginal and small farmers demand for excavation of tank in their land agricultural land for conserving of water. And field study reveals the fact that thousands of such tank locally known as *hapa* have been excavated on individual land of farmers. The length and width of one *hapa* hovers around 40-60 feet i.e. length may be minimum of 40 feet to 60 feet and same for width (40 to 60 feet) with 10-12 feet depth. These *hapas* are having many uses in addition to provide irrigation, in dry season. The other benefits derived from a *hapa* are fishes can be reared; vegetables can be cultivated in the all the sides as well as poultry /duck-rearing etc. can also be taken up in its vicinity. Further, water table in the area goes up also. Cost of each *hapa* was in between Rs. 45,000 and Rs. 48 000 depending upon its size (in January 2016). While the author visited the district observed that under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, popularly known as MGNREGS many *hapas* were excavated which are in great demand of the rural people in the district. It is pertinent to mention that MGNREGS aims at enhancing livelihood security of households in rural areas of the country by providing at least one hundred days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. Unique features here is that 100 days of employment is guaranteed for a household and wage has to be paid within 15 days. If employment cannot be provided within 15 days then provision for payment of unemployment allowance has been made (Annual Report, 14-15)

Field Observation

As already mentioned the district has been suffering from water crisis as it is drought prone district so many marginal and small farmers have been provided with small tank /*hapa* at free of cost (60 length x 40 width x 12 depth, feet) under MGNREGS where fish is reared in the tank; in the four sides vegetables are cultivated throughout the year; ducks are nurtured and water is used for irrigation in Rabi. In addition, around 100 years back or even more many villagers in the district by forming purely informal group of 7-8 farmers by paying some money excavated tank/pond on the land of one medium or semi medium farmer for conserving water. And thus water is used in the agricultural land of the members. Such practise has been going on generations together and normally 7 or 8 farmers join in one group (very informal) and another important condition is that the farmers should have contiguous agricultural land of the pond. One such unique case was studied at Ghattore village of *Bankura* –I block of *Bankura* district in February 2016.

In the agricultural land of Pashupati Chakraborty's great grandfather, one big tank literally can be termed as pond was excavated century ago by paying some money (could not recall by Chakraborty as what was the amount etc. as happened many many years ago) by the great grandfathers of (i) Bablu Batabyal (ii) Kirti Patsha (iii) Sridam Batabyal (iv) Shankar Karmakar (v) Indranarayan Singha and also Sri Chakraborty's great grandfather. All had their agricultural land in the vicinity of the pond and condition was that all would use water from the tank. The size of tank was approximately 220 x 160 feet in length and width respectively. In addition to using water for agricultural purpose by the members the other villagers were using the pond's water for bathing and washing cloth. However, the tank required to be renovated as demanded by the villagers, accordingly in 2014-15 under MGNREGS by incurring an expenditure of Rs.2.40 lakh it was renovated. Altogether 1300 man-days were generated exclusively for unskilled labourers who were from the village and its vicinity and all had job card. Altogether, 90 per cent SC people worked in the project.

During the course of field study, Group Discussion as followed in PRA was initiated. All the villagers in unison supported the renovation work as this pond was one of the important sources of providing water to the villagers. Further, crops in both Rabi and Kharif were also harvested as reported by the seven owners as sequel they could lead quality life. Bathing and washing were available for all the villagers. However, fish *albeit* was nurtured in the tank but it was leased out and by leasing the fish, around Rs. 1500 was the additional annual income of the seven partners.

Conclusion

This unique case has been studied to get an idea how centuries together villagers developed an idea of creating and managing water of a pond (excavated by their great grandfathers). This practice, till February 2016, continued and centuries together no politics could harm the integration of the seven households.

Reference

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