

Berunda: A Case of Exhausted Development

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IN 1970 I remember approaching the village of Berunda through the dry-land areas of Jodhpur. Whereas elsewhere, scattered plots were irrigated through Persian Wheels or tanks constructed by local Rajas — in Berunda the entire village floated on water. Starting in 1948, an innovating group of farmers centering on the Detha family had begun using a large diesel-operated tubewell going down 100-150 feet. By 1970, one-third of the village was irrigated and reaping the fruits of exploiting the resulting opportunities to grow HYV. The resources released enabled widespread 'pucca' permanent construction of housing. It enabled the question of village sanitation to be taken up. And it financed as well the development of the Rupayan Sansthan, a village-based institution for conserving and studying Rajasthani folk culture. The Sansthan supported the publication of folk tales, and a journal.

My return in 1980 was disappointing. Public buildings had been constructed and the Rupayan Sansthan was located in a beautiful new building — containing a well-displayed museum of Rajasthan folk-crafts, a remarkable library which reflected the widespread intellectual interests of those who were responsible for the village ferment, and shelves of recordings and video-tapes of Rajasthan folk custom and music. But little else had changed. The primary school founded in its present form in 1948 was raised to a middle school in 1956 and a high school in 1959. A government dispensary with a doctor and nurses was established in 1960 (with usage rates that are three times those in comparable rural dispensaries in Jodhpur district) and Rupayan Sansthan itself in 1960. No new steps were reported. The wells and village showed signs of decay. The government constructed as well a pucca mandi with space for shops in the 1970s.

I talked of Indradan Detha, one of the village's farmers who has been keeping a detailed record of the village, and its travails in prose and pictures. He reports that the large tubewells of the 1960s have been abandoned and each of 100 plus far-

mers has his own tubewell, but the absolute amount of irrigated acreage has decreased. Meanwhile, interestingly, the adjoining villages which had little irrigated land in 1960 had installed tubewells and their percentage of irrigated acreage approached Berunda's. Further, despite heavy borrowings from banks and co-operatives, most of which were in arrears, little advance had occurred in production*. Much of the borrowing itself had been used to support consumption. No change had occurred in HYV tubewell package which was, Detha felt, exhausting its potential. Irrigation from well-side was still by flood irrigation. Power cuts reduced farmers who had run their tubewells for 16-24 hours a day to 8-12. Most borrowers from institutional sources were in arrears, so new loans were not available; increasing dependence on money-lenders especially by the weaker sections, was reported and interest rates were rising.

Literacy rates, school enrolments, education at higher levels, and new enterprise creation were constant. The two exceptions were the development of lime kilns, almost entirely done by outsiders, and the exploitation of the timber resources, that had sprung up in an unplanned way as a fall-out from the irrigation. Even these were now being cut, on what Indradan felt was an excessive rate, to feed the lime kilns and meet urban demand. The fall-out from the intensive state-wide dairy development had hardly reached Berunda (which is about 120 km from Jodhpur and perhaps as much from Ajmer in the other direction). The few who had gone in for cattle raisins had not made a good thing of it.

The explanation, if one is required, clearly lies, in addition to outside forces like the power shortage and the unwise borrowing, in the decline of the dynamic village leadership. Old strains between the formerly dominant Rajputs and non-Rajput groups like the Charans or heralds to which Indradan, and much of the former village leadership belonged, re-emerged.

In the pre-independence period it had resulted in several murders and dislocations which had forced the

Charans out of their village and put them in contact with the outside world. The village had pulled together after independence, under the long time leadership of Chandidan Detha, the long-time Sarpanch. He had retired a year or two ago, avoiding an electoral defeat and reflecting the decline of his group's position, partially because of the partition of his large joint family and partly because of the general lack of success with the village economic model.

The general morals to be drawn from my visit have to be tentative since I did not have time to cross-check what I saw and heard on a short visit, but several things seem suggested.

(1) The limits of tubewell based agriculture in the circumstances of power cuts, and without shift to higher return mixed farming.

(2) The natural inertia of villages especially where dynamic development measured, *inter alia*, by agricultural intensification and the spread of literacy (as representative of general consciousness) is limited to a fraction of the village.

(3) The serious problems of the institutionalisation of the dynamic for change in village society. Typically outstanding village accomplishments in education, health or the productive sectors are the products of the activity of a small elite, insiders or outsiders as they may be. They pioneer an activity and encourage some others to join them. Villages vary to the extent that the changes they introduce are radical and spread their effects through all members of village society. By necessity most groups limit themselves to one or two transformations — say, the introduction of new agricultural technology or the establishment of an institution like a school. The spread is limited whether to communities or at least to the body of the 'bhaichara' to owner-cultivators of the village. In unusual cases, the elite is itself landless and the change connected with some assertion or change among the landless or marginally landed. More frequently some fall-out copies the landless way in terms of higher income or social services like education. In any case, some accommodation or sponsorship by the village leadership is required. Since the first generation of leadership achieves its purposes, the village often stabilises on a new level. Spread effects usually mean that adjoining areas catch up with its levels. But the impetus is exhausted.

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