



Sustainability and Solidarity in a Globalized World: The Case of a Local Network Economy in Rural India^{*}

Latha Poonamallee

abstract

In this paper, I argue for the case of local solidarity in the 'globalized' world. By using a critical genealogical approach, I describe the impact of globalization on the marginal communities of India, especially livelihood issues and draw a parallel between globalization and erstwhile colonialism in their impact on social and physical ecologies of the country. I argue that the tradition of locally organized protest movements during colonialism continues today in an attempt to create locally sustainable economic models and present an example of a case study from a village in India and its challenges. I also advocate for scholars to step out of the mainstream to study the margins that are emerging as crucibles of innovative social forms.

Introduction

This paper highlights the role local solidarity plays for marginal communities in today's globalized world by using a critical genealogical approach to describe the impact of capitalization on social and physical ecologies of India, especially people's livelihood and ways of life. It also presents and critiques an example of a bold social experiment being performed in Kuthambakkam village near the city of Chennai, in the state of Tamil Nadu using the vehicle of Panchayat (Village Government). It describes the village, the accomplishments of its unique Panchayat Leader, Elango and his vision for the future of the village and a sustainable model for Rural Economy. He is trying to build what he calls, a *Network Economy* among a few villages in the region, through which the local economy builds, sustains and nurtures itself, without dependence on the mainstream, global economy, although not completely divorcing itself from it either. Elango's ambition is to demonstrate this idea through a working model on which other local economies can follow. He has founded a Trust for Village Self Governance through which he imparts these ideas to village leaders from other parts of the state and

* The author wishes to thank the community featured in this case study, and particularly, Elango, a truly visionary leader.

country. This village is on its way to becoming the first hut-less village in the country, the new dwellings built using indigenous materials, technology and labor, with the government resources being augmented by the villagers themselves and funds raised personally by Elango through his connection agencies and well-wishers.

I made my initial contact with Elango of Kuthambakkam in May 2003 and followed it with an intensive data collection visit for three months in 2004 and then with another brief visit in Jan 2005. In all, I spent around six months in this site over a period of three years collecting various types of data including interviews with individuals, focus group discussions, and archival data. I also kept an extensive personal journal. During the visits, I was able to spend substantial time visiting with people and informally talking to them. Here, the interviews were conducted in Tamil, my native language. I listened to the interviews at the end of every day and then transcribed and translated them at frequent intervals. During the translation, I have chosen not to clean up the language but to maintain the flavor of the original language and its construction and the mixed use of English in conversation in this part of the country and the selected quotes reflect this choice.

This paper also locates the case in Gadgil and Guha's (2000) socio-ecological framework and advocates for learning from the margins. Gadgil and Guha's framework of the new social stratification perpetuated by the processes of development and globalization explains this phenomenon at the national level in India and at the global level. This new stratification consists of three different groups of people: Ecosystem people, Omnivores and Ecological Refugees. Ecosystem people are those who depend on their local environment for their livelihood, mostly indigenous groups like hunter-gatherers and small farmers. Omnivores are the rich farmers, white collars workers and bureaucrats who lead a luxurious life at the cost of great damage to people and resources all around them. Bias in the development process and the exploitation of natural resources by the omnivores pass off costs such as resource depletion, habitat fragmentation, and species loss to the ecosystem people making them the Ecological Refugees. These ecological refugees end up mostly as homeless migrant labor in the urban centers while their villages are slowly facing economic extinction. A similar vicious cycle was triggered in Kuthambakkam, the site of this case, by privatization of water and uncontrolled exploitation of local natural resources. This village is responding by initiating a social experiment to start a network economy as a sustainable economic alternative. This paper outlines the key challenges in implementing the change program. Two key factors are leadership and caste/class/power dynamic.

Globalization and India

Appadurai asks,

What does globalization mean for labor markets and fair wages? How will it affect chances for real jobs and reliable rewards? What does it mean for the ability of nations to determine the economic futures of their populations? What is the hidden dowry of globalization? Christianity? Cyberproletarianism? New forms of structural adjustments? Americanization disguised as human rights or MTV? (2000: 3)

While 350,000 new jobs have been created in the outsourcing industry in India, which is heralded as the liberating force of Indian economy, the first ever labor study of the outsourcing industry published a report that accuses the companies of running sweatshops which are worse than seventeenth century capitalist enterprises. The anticipated gains of globalization for India, where nearly 70 percent of the population is directly or indirectly involved with agriculture and farming, have been almost negligible. TRIPS (Agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights), a brainchild of an industry coalition and its first initiative, Intellectual Property Committee has been generating huge controversies, especially its patents on plants and plant varieties.

Gupta (2000) contends that global environmentalism is part of a qualitative transformation of the world economy whose ramifications go beyond mere intensification of existing trends. It foreshadows the creation of a set of institutions and practices that make up, in Foucauldian terms, a new technology of government. He also says that to talk about these changes entirely in terms of geographical expansion of capitalism is to thus underspecify what is distinctive about the world order. Efforts to push a binding treaty that would mandate conservation failed, owing to strenuous opposition from Brazil, India, and Malaysia. If signed, it would result in international pressure on the Indian government to limit access to firewood, which would raise the price of cooking fuel, and would raise prices for oil based chemical fertilizers. In 1937, George Orwell observed that bourgeois socialists were prepared to demand the death of capitalism and the destruction of the British Empire only because they knew that these things were unlikely to happen. The economic formula has not changed much in the last seven decades. The inhabitants of the first world owe their prosperity, comparative comfort and high physical quality of life indicators and their GDP to the inordinate power that their governments wield, the inordinate wealth that flows from that power. Accepting the need for global democracy would mean accepting the loss of this power to ensure that the world is not run for the benefit of the rich. The commonality among the approaches of domination and exploitation whether it was extermination in the Americas, colonization of India, 'development' by the World Bank and the present day mantra of globalization, all these start with depriving the poorest of the world, of their basic security in food and medicine and their livelihood.

Deprivation of access to commons did not just deny their basic rights to land but also their livelihoods (Poonamallee, 2003). For instance, before the Forest Act of 1857 was passed in India, artisans used to take bamboo and silk cocoons from the forests at no cost, and after the Act was passed, they were forced to buy their raw material from the state and their sustenance economy could not afford it. This is quite similar to the current day dispute over patenting of life forms by the Western companies, which forces the poor farmers to buy seeds. For generations, they have not only crossbred and generated a number of seed forms, they are also used to saving part of the current year's crop as seeds for the next season. The British government also imposed very high taxes on local weavers and iron smelters making it possible to dump their cheaper manufactured goods into the Indian market. This is not dissimilar to the unequal tariff structures between various countries that allow the west to dump their surplus into the markets of the developing countries and simultaneously robbing millions of the poor their livelihood.

India is an important area to study. The country is predicted to emerge as one of the key economic powers in the immediate future. Flavin and Gardner (2006) liken the emergence of India and China to civilization changing events such as the rise of the Roman Empire or the discovery of the New World. Moreover, this growth is going to have an enormous impact on the global biosphere, especially because this growth, unlike the west, does not have the material resources to make investments critical to equity and sustainability. Sunita Narain (2006) summarizes this imperative and argues that India needs to reinvent the development trajectory. Because, the environmental movement in the west emerged after the period of wealth creation and during the period of waste generation, they argued for containment of the waste but did not have the need to argue for the reinvention of the paradigm of waste generation, whereas a fast growing economy like India needs a breakthrough in terms of new and inventive thinking. Scholars like Appadurai (2000) and Esteva and Prakash (2000) point out the social experiments in the margins of globalization as the crucibles of new social forms and this paper is an invitation to other scholars to learn from these populations.

By examining and advocating for sustainable local economic alternatives and contextualizing them in the globalization discourse, this paper attempts to bring together the local and global discourses. As Sunita Narain (2006) closes her impressive preface to the year's state of the world report, it is here the rich must learn its Gandhi. She writes, "It [the rich world] must learn that it cannot preach because it has nothing to teach. But it can learn, if it follows the environmentalism of the poor, to share Earth's resources so that there is a common future for all." Poonamallee (2005) writes that India co-holds multiple countries within herself, each one being a crucible of major transformation. At one end of the spectrum is the software writing, international banking, hip, urban India greatly influenced and materially benefited by the process of globalization. At the other extreme is Bharat; its villagers protesting against globalization and its impact on their livelihood, with groups in between committed to finding appropriate and sustainable economic and social alternatives. This paper argues that local and global discourses are not divorced from each other but they are rather deeply intertwined. Local solidarity is one way in which marginal communities are fighting against the deleterious effects of globalization. What happens to the water table in a small village in India has the power to reverberate across the globe. In this section, I argued that physical ecologies impact social life and described the zeitgeist in the context of globalization. Next, I overview the village, its context and the social experiment.

Village Overview and its Livelihood

Located in the south eastern state of Tamil Nadu, and close to Chennai, the state capital (formerly known as Madras), Kuthambakkam is a long lived habitat covering an area of about 36 sq. kilometres with a population of around five thousand. A vast lake irrigates around 1400 acres while another 700 acres are rainfed. There are many caste divisions, though the major division is between those of the upper castes and Scheduled Tribes, who form the lower caste Hindus. Though 75% of the inhabitants are dalits (the lower caste), they own only around 2% of the land and hence work as laborers in the

landlords' farms. The literacy rate is around 85% but the difference in levels of education among different castes is quite high. Class divisions among and within castes make the society even more complex. Although the educated landowning families have other non-agro sources of employment like government, schools, and factories in the outskirts of Chennai, most of the village economy is still agro-based. Table 1 lists the village's socio-economic and political characteristics.

Dimension	Characteristic
Economy	Networked, Farming and Dairy
Structures	Quasi-Democratic /Hierarchical/ Network
Available Capital	Land to some extent, labor, social, cultural and political capital
Trigger to Change	Internal-External Leader
Leadership	A Strong Leader with a vision to organize the community into an economic network
Relationship with Government	Co-optation and claim of ownership
Demographics	Rural and Semi-urban, landed and landless farming
Religion	Mix of Hindus, Muslims and Christians, though the majority population is Hindu
Organizing Purpose	Local Economy/Livelihood

Table 1: Characteristics of the Case

While there is much difference in class, caste and land ownership, almost all the villagers have traditionally shared the reliance on water for livelihood. Next, I present a socio-ecological view of the cases based on Gadgil and Guha's (2000) original framework.

A Socio-ecological View of the Case

In this section, I overview the framework, and develop the concept of class mobility in this framework as a vicious cycle and locate the three cases by discussing how 'water' a key resource for survival and prosperity of human groups impacts the case under consideration. Gadgil and Guha (2000) offer an original framework to understand social stratification from an ecological point of view, based on the relationship with nature. This framework divides the society into three categories: *Ecosystem people*, *Omnivores and Ecological Refugees*.

Ecosystem people are those who depend on their local environment for their livelihood and meet most of their material needs. The authors suggest that perhaps four-fifths of India's rural people belong to this category. These include small and subsistence farmers, hunter-gatherers, artisanal fisherfolk and the like. As the natural world recedes, the capacity of the local ecosystems to support these people shrinks. For example, dams and mines have physically displaced millions of peasants and tribal people in independent India. Bias in the development process passes off costs such as resource

depletion, habitat fragmentation, and species loss to the ecosystem people and makes them *Ecological Refugees*. Ecological refugees live on the margins of islands of prosperity, as farm laborers in the rural areas and as domestic servants in the urban areas. As many as one-third of the Indian population live today such a life as displaced, with little that they can pick up from the natural world, but not much money to buy the commodities that the shops are brimming with either. The remaining one-sixth of the population ends up being what Gadgil and Guha (2000) describe as the growth of the artificial at the cost of the natural. These beneficiaries are bigger landowners with access to irrigation, urban professionals, lawyers, doctors, investment bankers, rapidly gaining in wealth and prestige, and the ever-growing number of bureaucrats. According to this framework, devouring everything produced all over the earth, leading a luxurious life at the cost of great damage to people and resources all around them, they are the *Omnivores* of the society. This model can also be successfully applied to the world at large. Most of the inhabitants of the first world and the elite of the third world are the omnivores driving more and more of the third world poor ecosystem people into becoming ecological refugees. Esteva and Prakash (2000) call this the divide between social majority and minority.

Ecosystem People to Ecological Refugees – a vicious cycle

Mobility among these three categories is not always upward in terms of quality of life and I now position the case in this framework and describe the socio-ecological interrelationships in the site and the entities around it. I use water as a key organizing resource to illustrate and explain this dynamic interrelationship. Water is a life-sustaining resource that many global citizens take for granted but it is a commodity for which corporate and social battles are being waged at the global level today. What should be a basic inalienable right has been commodified in the global economy. Global consumption of water is doubling every 20 years, more than twice the rate of human population growth while less than one half of a percent of water on earth is available as fresh water. The global private water industry is estimated to be worth US \$400 billion, one third larger than global pharmaceuticals, while more than a billion people lack access to safe drinking water and more than five million people, most of them children, die each year from illnesses caused from drinking unsafe water. In the US alone, private water corporations generate revenues of more than a billion US dollars a year, four times the annual sales of Microsoft. Four of the top ten water companies are ranked among the Fortune 100 companies. People drink more and more bottled water everyday across the world.

In Kuthambakkam Village, while the Indian caste system predated colonial invasion, the British divide and rule approach to politics pitted one group of Indians against the others. This practice led to rampant caste conflicts and the exclusion of the lower castes from access to opportunity structures and resources led to multiple antisocial behaviors including the one that causes most damage in these communities: the economy of illicit liquor: brewing, sale and consumption. Usually, even in the midst of rampant caste politics, antisocial activities like brewing of illicit liquor and lack of amenities and hygiene, this village has been prosperous due to their longstanding and highly effective

rainwater harvesting practices. Rain-water harvesting has been an extremely important practice in the history of irrigation in India, because most of the country is dependent on monsoon for its water and it is important not only to save water when they can, but also to ensure continuous renewal of the underground water aquifers as they in turn ensure water supply for the rest of the year and the future. These traditional rainwater-harvesting structures like ponds, tanks, lakes, and small earthen check dams not only serve as catchment areas for rainwater during the monsoon season but also continually renew the underground water resources. They are also eco and human friendly because they do not cause the kind of damage like flooding and displacement of villages that are attendant effects of bigger dams; whereas these structures are built around the needs of each village and are their 'commons. Like many parts of the country, the state of Tamil Nadu has practiced the traditional rainwater harvesting methods and Tamil Nadu is especially well known for its historic Tank Irrigation system. These practices in Kuthambakkam allowed the village farmers to grow three crops a year, which meant that most of the population had steady income and therefore did not go hungry even in the midst of severe drought. But more recently this has been changing with the depletion of water resources by multiple parties. The offenders include private water bottling companies, Coca-Cola and the state government.

During the period of data collection for this study, apart from the state government that was drawing water from this village to supply the urban population of the city, there were also three water bottling companies in Kuthambakkam village. These are proprietary firms owned by individuals who had the forethought to buy about half acre of land each in the village and put in a deep well motor system to pump the water. Their capital investment is limited in scope to the bottles, transportation, and labor for those who bottle and seal water. All these companies used a similar *modus operandi*. They hire about five to eight women from the local villages, and a couple of men to do the heavy lifting, and invest in a van to transport these employees to work and back home. These women simply fill the cans, and seal them and the men put them away for transportation to the city's hundreds of retail outlets that distribute the water cans to offices, and households. Additionally, on the outskirts of this village there is a Coca-Cola bottling plant set in a large campus of around twenty five acres, equipped with tens of sunken bore wells up to 3000 feet to pump water for bottling operations and uses up to 132,000 liters a day. This plant is a reasonably new arrival to this village, starting its operations less than a decade ago. The present team of managers have taken up their jobs in the last five years, and as per the practice of most multinational companies, the initial green field team has been disbanded once the plant was up and running. Their mandate is to make the plant profitable and therefore according to them, the ongoing pumping and deepening of wells for the bottling operations is an inevitable business decision.

Independent observers say that the permit system for licensing commercial activities involving extraction of water is fundamentally flawed because no means exist to independently verify the quantity of water drawn by companies. In the absence of accurate data as to who is drawing how much, it is virtually impossible to ensure efficient usage of water and minimize wastage. Engineers from the Tamilnadu Pollution Control Board concede that under the circumstances, figures reported by the industry are likely to be gross underestimates. Even the conservative figures declared by the

industry indicate that packaged water units waste anywhere between 15 and 35 percent of the water they draw from the ground. This rampant depletion of ground water resources has led to a major water crisis in this village, in turn leading to loss of livelihood for the large section of the population dependent on agriculture. Today, the village is in the throes of a drought. Almost eighty percent of the population has suffered the loss of their livelihoods and are looking for any kind of work that might come their way, to make sure that their children eat at least once a day. Neighbors and family members share the available jobs, so everyone can have a chance to make ends meet. Communities until recently self-sufficient for water are now on the edge of desperation as their water security is being compromised to serve the interests of the consumers in cities like Chennai.

Alternative Paths

Does this mean we have reached a place of no alternatives? I don't believe so and I think there are examples, though far and few in between, of people who have achieved a good quality of life without a fanatic drive towards 'growth' that legitimizes the exploitation of the planet and its poor. There are examples of the creation of local and sustainable economies, both historical and contemporary. From the first recorded rebellion in Indian history by people against the rulers in their fight for access to commons in the 1500s, to the Indian independence struggle, to the present day anti-globalization protest movements, common people have fought for and will continue to fight for their rights over their 'commons'. Most of these protests were and continue to be extra legal hidden forms of resistance and individual acts of violation resting on the support of a network. Apart from protests, a number of local self-help groups outside of the government and development institutions began to take active roles in changing people's lives, restoring their spaces and changing their worlds. Mann (1986) suggests that such interstitial emergence is an important pathway of social change. Efforts include conservation of natural resources, reforestation, alternate local governing bodies, resort to local wisdom, and women's participation in these initiatives. Most of the protests come from the Ecosystem people who face the danger of becoming Ecological Refugees. Fortunately, though Indian democracy is flawed, it is functioning, nobody is completely powerless and there are always avenues for expression of popular protest, even for the most disadvantaged.

India is not alone in the struggle; every country and region has its own form of protest and that includes the rebellion for aboriginal rights as in the case of the New World countries like the Zapatistas of Mexico and peasant rights in various other third world countries. The Seattle protests against the WTO in 1999 were a manifestation of these protests acquiring worldwide support. 50,000 plus people from all over the world came to protest against WTO's policies. In the 1998 Geneva meeting, the delegates had hardly seen the protesters; in Seattle the delegates could not get out of their hotels because of them. Today, the anti-globalization protesters are accorded the status of a social movement. What makes these different 'peoples' alike is they are all autonomous and mostly independent from and, in a few cases, even antagonistic to the state. As Latouche claims,

Progress of real significance today may be through a devaluing the paradigm of development – to dethrone it, reverse its paramount status and leave it behind in the pursuit of radically alternative visions of social life. So it is all in their interests to invent, if they can, other games, and to remake themselves to become nouveaux riches in other ways. (Latouche, 1993)

Esteva and Prakash write,

they (grassroots movements) are pleading for protection of the commons, ways of living together that limit economic damage and give room for new forms of social life. Within their traditional forms of governance, they keep alive their own life-support systems, based on self-reliance and mutual help, informal networks for indirect exchange of goods, services and information and an administration of justice that calls for compensation than punishment. (2000:7)

Appadurai (2000) writes that although the sociology of these emergent social forms of globalization from below – part movements, part networks, part organizations – has yet to be developed, there is a considerable progressive consensus that these forms are the crucibles and institutional instruments of most serious efforts to globalize from below. In this context, the sites under consideration have much to offer that we can learn from because collective action and social movements create new organizational forms (Rao, Morrill and Zald, 2000). This paper describes and critiques a living example of one such effort towards creating a locally sustainable economic model by a different kind of a leader.

A Different Kind of Panchayat Leader

Elango, the second-term President of the Panchayat (Village Government), a dynamic forty five year old man was one of the fortunate few of this village who had the access to an engineering education that took him away from the village for around fifteen years, after which he decided to come back and work for his homeland's welfare. He is from a dalit (lowest caste) family, though economically their family was not in the lowest strata of that community. Born and brought up in Kuthambakkam, Elango obtained a degree in Chemical Engineering and was a scientist with Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) in India for eight years. Whenever he visited his village, he found that the social ills like poverty, caste riots, illicit liquor, and environmental degradation continued to plague his community. In 1994, he quit his job as a scientist to return to the village fulltime to work on his community's welfare. While many such men usually work through NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations), Elango chose a completely different route. While most of the educated, middle class of the country choose to stay away from politics, he jumped into the fray, contested independently in the elections in 1996 and became the President of the Village government. In an interview with me conducted in 2003, he describes his vision for the Panchayat rule:

Panchayat is a system for the village. It is available in all the villages of the country. According to 73rd amendment of the constitution, so it is a constitutional body, it has to function as a self governing body for the village, to solve the problems, to attain the social and economic development. So in this, everything fits. But if this functions effectively, as envisioned by the constitution or as it originally did in the pre-colonial India, if this takes off, it starts to deliver

results to people, the entire problem of the villages can be solved within a decade or something. (Interview with Elango, June 2003)

He also believes that social change has to be accompanied by viable, economic alternatives and that access to resources and creation of opportunity structures are key ingredients of successful social change programs. I quote him once again:

For example one man is taking absurdly but democratically, if he gets liberated, yes you are liberating him, but to what. Even take the case of caste politics. When they were liberated by the forward thinkers, there was no economic alternative for them. I am not a negative person but an alternative person. All the dalit activists are emotionally driven. . I don't have meaning in the feelings. If instead they had spoken to the upper classes to improve their standard of life, things would have been better for the lower castes. Because there was some safety net for them. But now it has been destroyed with no support structures in place. I might be portrayed as a reactionary but I am a pragmatic person. What I feel is that emotional issues alone will not work for dalit liberation because they are poor, there should be an economic package that goes with it. there is no point in liberating them emotionally and sending them off to the dark economically. I put him in the slum, it is the same communism that taught me the culture. The pig culture. They live in a community, enjoy their lives. We put them in slums, they live like pigs. When we liberate dalits, we need to take an economic package, there is no point in addressing only emotional issues. Or help them come up with a partnership with the upper caste. Someone who has fifty acres, ask him to let a dalit family use two acres for themselves. The Anna Hazare model. Offer alternative lives. What if you bring a prostitute and do not offer an alternative, she will brew illicit liquor. You are liberating that person in a competitive world, no one has compassion. So many people are suffering in my homeland and no one cares. I am a dalit development worker looking for an alternate route. (Interview with Elango, Feb 2005)

Change Infrastructure

In Kuthambakkam, change is designed to be driven through three key structural entities. Elango's role and presence are pivotal to all the three entities. In my later discussion, I present this as a problematic, that his role in the formal government might be inhibiting his success in the informal role as the leader of the Trust for Village Self Governance, although there are other factors at play. The three structural entities are: *Panchayat*, The Trust for Village Self Government, and Women's Self Help Groups.

Panchayat (Village Government)

This is an elected governing body with constitutionally vested powers for village self governance. In Kuthambakkam, it consists of ten elected ward members with Elango as the President . There is a woman Vice President. In India Affirmative Action takes the route of reservations, and therefore, in democratic bodies, a certain number of positions are reserved for the under-represented lower castes as well as women. Panchayat is responsible for collecting local taxes which it then deploys for the use of the village in the form of infrastructural improvements or maintenance. State and federal funds also augment their tax collections. They are supposed to meet formally once a month but they never met formally even once during my visits. But, they do interact with each other on an everyday basis. Therefore, while I have observed the individual interactions of the members with Elango, I have never observed them together as a group. It also means that most communication that happens is one way from Elango to the ward

member, or two-way between Elango and a ward member but almost never as a whole governing body.

Elango, thanks to his exemplary networking ability, has brought in funds from government and other agencies to work on infrastructural projects. He then allocates the funds to various projects in the ten wards which are overseen by the respective ward members. The ward members also act as contractors and build in a ten percent margin on the project cost so their effort and time get materially rewarded. Moreover, since most of the labor hired is local, a substantial portion of the funds generated by the village and allocated by the state government is retained and shared by the village itself. They have worked on many projects like housing, roads, drains, streetlights, sanitation, all of which have improved their physical quality of life tremendously. The Panchayat started its work with the establishment of 'Samthavapuram' of 50 twin-houses (now one of the 6 hamlets of Kuthambakkam) in October 2000. Samthavapuram is a housing project of the Tamil Nadu state government, which is envisioned as a symbol of peaceful co-existence of traditionally antagonistic communities. In this housing project scheme, a dalit family and a non-dalit family share a twin house. While this is an ongoing scheme of the state government, Kuthambakkam Panchayat redefined the process of this housing project. It was the first time in the history of Samthavapurams (of which there are 154 in the state), that a panchayat demanded a say in its planning. Elango describes the change that his panchayat brought to this process:

when there is a government house being built in a village, the rule is that the government engineer has to do the plan, grade the plan, approve the groundbreaking, and everything happens under his supervision. But building houses in villages is not a new thing, for thousands of years, villagers have built houses. Even houses with more than one story has been built. But what does the government say? It says that our government engineer has to come and take a look, he has to mark, and stuff like that. What do we say? That government does not have to interfere. Government gives 40 K. let them send someone to see if what we build is worth the money, that should be the thing. Here in kuthambakkam we are building houses worth 40000 rupees. But what the government rule says is, our person should come, because we are dependent on them, our work gets delayed. For example, we might begin work everyday at 8 am with our local mason, whereas we have to wait for the mason, who will come at 10.30, we have to wait till he comes. If we can use and organize the local people to do the work, we will do the work between 6 and 10.30 before the sun really starts scorching but we were able to convince the government. Because panchayat itself is a people's body, if it is a big superstructure with fourteen stories, then engineering is important, there you need to intervene. But this is after all a small structure. We were able to convince. Now it is only certification after the house is constructed, to see if it is worth the money that the government is investing in. this is worth more than 40000. Before it was not like this, every time, every stage there is a bill and a lot of bureaucracy. So for many things panchayat has authority. For rules and regulations we need to change the rules when it does not benefit people. Now people have the clarity. To the extent possible, they should be allowed to do whatever they can. Why should we interfere? We have lobbied for such changes. Especially the housing. (Interview with Elango, Feb 2004)

Unlike typical concrete box-houses with asbestos roofing, which are harmful, eco-unfriendly and expensive, Elango chose to employ the stabilized mud-block technology with the help of HUDCO. This technology is simple, inexpensive, uses local red soil for blocks, and mortar and is aesthetically appealing. More importantly, it does not require baking and hence is eco-friendly. The traditional Madras terrace controls the temperature inside. While a typical *Samthavapuram* house is only 210 square feet in

area with only jails (grills) for ventilation, the *Kuthambakkam* house was expanded to 286 square feet with wide windows for the same cost. Out of the total cost of about Rs. 88 lacs, Rs. 28 lakhs was paid for labor, who were the 220 families rehabilitated from the illicit-arrack trading. While the people were meaningfully employed, they also learnt the technology and construction skills. There are 216 more huts in the village. These will soon be converted into mud-block houses this year, under the central government's innovative housing scheme. The villagers will be responsible for laying the foundation and building the walls at their own cost. The government will help with the roof tiles, doors and windows. Elango has been involved in raising funds to cover the shortfall through his personal network as well as Swiss Development Agency which has a rotational funding scheme for habitat development. In another year, *Kuthambakkam* is expected to become a hut-free village.

Similar to the housing scheme, families rehabilitated from production and sale of illicit liquor were involved in laying good interior concrete roads in every part of the village at low cost. Unlike in the cities, village roads are used not merely for transportation; the space is used for socializing by the men and women folk in the evenings; it is converted into children's playgrounds during vacations and clean plinths for drying grains during the harvest seasons. With government support, all highway and union roads were also repaired, and re-laid, where necessary. They also built drains using locally available materials. During this phase of operations, the *Panchayat* has desilted and deepened six ponds in and around the village, as a result of which the water table does not go below 13 feet even during the summers. An overhead water tank has been constructed, and a water pump installed in every hamlet. These are connected to every house cluster. Elango also came up with a new energy saving lighting scheme for the streets of *Kuthambakkam* and these lights were assembled by a woman's self help group in the village. A well-maintained toilet is essential for maintaining health and hygiene of the population. Elango has set up a number of low cost toilets in his village. Restoring *Panchayat* to the community is what Elango attempts to do. He believes that *Panchayat* is a community vehicle and people should feel that it is theirs and they own it and they should learn that it is their right to demand good service from their government. In an interview during 2005, he told me:

In the past, people used to complain about the panchayat malfunctioning to outsiders like District collector or Block Development Officers because they didn't feel that the panchayat was theirs. But now, they are giving the petition to us, if there is a problem with water or street lights they inform us addressed to me. Now panchayat is a community organization. They will go outside, the outsider will call me. So when that used to happen, I always used to tell the DC to tell the plaintiff to come and talk to me. Tell him to come and find me at my office, my home. Don't entertain him. Don't talk about rules. Water is my business, village business, make him part of the system. If he comes here, I tell him solutions to fix his problems himself. A single bolt that needed to be fixed, fix it and come to me and get it reimbursed. Don't waste four days of your life chasing the bureaucracy. (Interview with Elango, Feb 2005)

While partisan politics is very common in this state, Elango is non-partisan and the regard that people have for him in general has allowed the *Panchayat* to govern in a non-partisan fashion. Physically, this office is located next to the temple and the bus stop and therefore, quite centrally located. While do we need to keep in mind that caste led society, being central means that is close to the streets/hamlets where the upper

castes live, I found no evidence of this preventing people from any caste to approach the office or Elango. This office has one salaried accountant/administrative assistant who is paid by the government.

Trust for Village Self Governance

This is a nongovernmental organization founded and run by Elango in the village. The objective of this agency is to establish a sustainable locally based network economy in Kuthambakkam and train leaders from other *Panchayats* through the *Panchayat Academy*. It occupies a separate physical space from that of the *Panchayat* office. During my initial visits in 2003 and 2004, this campus had a small office and a small living area, both for the use of Elango. It also had a work-shed intended to be used for different projects like tailoring, soap making etc. During my later visit in 2005, I found that Elango had raised funds from the British High Commission and the Oil and Natural Gas Commission (of India) to build an impressive classroom setting for the *Panchayat Academy* and a more spacious, modern office for the staff. During this visit, I also found that he had hired a couple of more people to man this trust and that he had started to spend more time in this place than at the *Panchayat* office. During the period of my study, while this agency had organized more than a few informational sessions for other *Panchayat* leaders, they had not done much to mobilize the locals except two women's self help groups. These are discussed in the following paragraph.

Women's Self Help Groups (SHG)

Kuthambakkam has one sporadically functioning women's self help group and one that is still looking for a beginning. I met with both the groups and had lengthy focus group discussions with them about their experience, vision for the future and every day life. The first one was formed by Elango when he conceived the idea of low cost street lighting for the village. It consists of fifteen women from lower castes. He put together the group and got them to assemble the lights and paid them for their labor. While it is a major first step in bringing women into the change process, my data suggests that it is not truly an autonomous group yet. Whenever there is a new set of lights that need to be put together, Elango sends word and they all gather at the building that houses the Women's Development Center. This building is a small two room house which was on the same street on which I stayed. The second group consists of eleven women of mixed castes and the leader of the group is a college educated, middle-aged woman. A couple of the women are the wives of men who are educated and work as a schoolteacher and as a bank employee respectively. While the group was formed six months before I met them, they had not done anything concrete yet. The group appeared to want to do something but was still struggling to find the right thing to do. While both the groups did not seem either autonomous or well functioning at the moment, data on SHGs suggest that they are powerful vehicles for social change and therefore it is an important structural element that needs to be paid attention.

Network Economy: A Social Experiment in Making

Prof Indiresan, Ex-Director of Indian Institute of Technology, Chennai, explained:

For instance, the government has no employment generation schemes for cities; yet, there are plenty of jobs and high-paying ones too. In villages there are a variety of job creation schemes for the poor but few jobs of any kind to be had, let alone well-paid ones. The reason: The government invests in the macro economy of cities and in villages it tackles only at the micro economic level. It is time the government tackled the poverty of villages rather than the poverty of villagers. Villagers cannot get rich so long as villages remain poor, too poor to attract modern industry and commerce. As a thumb rule, at least 80 per cent of the rural population must make a living in non-agricultural occupations... (March, 24, 2004 reported from the third Ambirajan memorial lecture on 'Equity and Sustainable Development,' jointly organized by the Institute of Economic Education and Public Expenditure Round Table)

Traditionally village communities in India have maintained a sustainable economy which safeguarded the security of their basic needs. This has been made possible through practices of sustainable agriculture, low cost labor and simple and yet elegant life style in relationship with nature. They took no more than they gave back to nature and held the ecological balance sacred. Such sustainability of the day-to-day life in the village has been the basis of the sustainable economy. Elango realized that it was not enough to provide the basic infrastructure but the need of the hour was to create a sustainable source of livelihood at the village level. This model couldn't be informed by the mainstream economic model which was based on mass production. In the village economy, it had to be production by the masses. For instance, when Elango came up with the energy saving lights production scheme, a women's self help group from the village produced for itself. But as he explains further:

Contentment versus development. Humility versus Greed. If you are vested in development philosophy or thought, scale of thinking is very different. Energy efficient light project, there is a huge demand, there is potential to grow more, even 25 lakhs of turnover per day is possible. Philips company has offered two crores to set up an unit here. I am thinking about it carefully because that way, we will be plugged back into the mainstream economy and why don't we show that the villagers can do it on their own? Since I know both the models I am confused about the merits of one versus other. If I didn't know about the macro economy I might have said, it is okay, even if we become financially non viable, we will stay with the village economy. But I think, that if thirty people work here on this project, spread the opportunity around. For instance, if a panchayat from Namakkal wants these lights, Kuthambakkam shouldn't make money out of it but rather teach the other panchayat's villagers this technology so they can manufacture their own lights. That village's money should stay in their community. (Interview with Elango, April 2004)

Therefore, he learnt about various rural development models already operating in India including Anna Hazare's watershed management in Maharashtra, Dr. Parameswara Rao's wasteland development in Andhra Pradesh, Dr. Karunakaran's Gram Swaraj movement in Madhya Pradesh, Dr. M. P. Parameswaran's Swadeshi movement in Kerala and from several universities working on relevant/appropriate rural technologies like the Central Food Technology and Research Institute (CFTRI), Mysore and Central Mechanical Engineering Research Institute (CMERI). Elango's network of rural development workers, academics and government officials and ministers has helped him refine his model constantly. Based on lessons learnt from various sources, Elango drew up a detailed five-year plan for the integrated development of Kuthambakkam in 2003.

This model is also grounded on the data collected from the villagers themselves. Elango and his team conducted a survey among the villagers of Kuthambakkam with a focus on

understanding the consumption and supply patterns of the village. The study included the consumption of food items and other goods and materials, which are necessary and form part of the routine life of the village communities. The survey also included the sources of origin and venues of value addition for such goods. The other elements of the survey included the mapping of the local resources, which include agricultural produce, natural raw materials, skills and the present level of value addition or processing that is happening at the village level. He found out that almost all the commodities being used by this community is coming from the urban market. A more important part of the discovery was that most of the local produce was sold to the market as raw material and the value addition to that local produce takes place in the urban industries and through a multi-tier distribution system. These finished goods are being sold back to them at much higher prices. Therefore Elango decided to focus on developing a system which enables the villagers to use their local resources by converting them into consumable, finished goods through value addition by themselves for their own use.

I am not saying that let's close industry, but we can combine both. We need refineries but we can replace sugar with jaggery production. Let the urban population earn money, I don't want them to be my enemies, I would rather create a model of affection and holistic economy that will attract population here. We will need to create this model. Globalization cannot be stopped but don't marginalize the villagers but find a niche for the village economy in that big cycle. The Australian milk has a longer shelf life. Their entire process is different, because they start from zero bacteria. What will happen to the dairy farmers here? Let's give them a break even. They cannot sell half liter for five or six rupees. Can we offer a local alternative for the same or better price. Shirt example. The price can never be compared. Because their costs are different. Production by the masses instead of mass production. It will work in the local economy. Each community should start its own community. Kuthambakkam people will think about and care about Kuthambakkam dairy farmers. They will not work for farmers in Pune but between these villages, there can be an integration at all levels; emotional, economic and social integration. (Interview with Elango, Feb 2004)

Key Elements of the Network Growth Economy Model

Panchayat's Role as Facilitator

Panchayats are envisioned by Elango as pivotal to the effectiveness and success of Network Economy model and have to play a major role as a facilitator, enabler and at times implementer for all the interventions, which are required towards operationalization of this model. Since this model envisages a number of villages working together in a collaborative manner, a network among Panchayat leaders will need to be established with fair amount of mutual understanding. The group of villages in a cluster has to live like a big family and the Panchayat leaders would be responsible to establish an adequate degree of harmony and solidarity among the villagers. This mandate will require a high degree of leadership, maturity and team building qualities in the Panchayat leaders so that they can handle the group dynamics while dealing with the village communities of different castes and religions. Further the Panchayat leaders have to make efforts to deal with the various state and central government departments for mobilizing necessary support and assistance for their villages under different schemes in force. In order to ensure holistic development of their villages, their Panchayat leaders will have to give due emphasis on all the important matters

pertaining to community needs like education, health, employment, infrastructure and utilities. The Panchayat Academy founded by Elango will support these panchayats in making these possible.

Promotion of Village Industries (VIs)

Self Help Group members and other villagers have to be motivated and trained to put up value addition units for converting locally produced items and raw/waste materials into finished goods. There are various Central and State Government schemes that are available for this purpose and need to be dovetailed for financial and technical assistance. The entire process needs to be carried out through the *Panchayat*. Elango is setting up a demonstration and training center in his Trust to show how these units will work. The infrastructure development is already in process and some of the equipment, tools, and machinery have been installed. In addition to demonstration and training, these units will also be used to produce some items through Self Help Groups of Kuthambakkam village. The Trust plans to organize training programs for SHG leaders and members in collaboration with the Panchayats. The Panchayats will be responsible for organizing the villagers into these activities and may charge a fee or tax for this support so they can generate revenue for investment in village developmental activities. Some of the models that Elango has envisioned for these village industries in Kuthambakkam include processing of locally grown lentils, dairy, a soap-making unit for local consumption, peanut oil production, and bakery projects.

External Networks

To make these infrastructural investments possible, Elango has not only built relationships with the district level and state level bureaucracies but also with a number of external organizations including Association of India Development (AID, USA), Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), Ashoka Foundation, Indians for Collective Action (USA), the British High Commission, and Sankalp Foundation (USA). As Elango himself describes, he has also been picky about who he chooses to build his networks with:

I network with likeminded people. I refused aid from USAID. The consulate general visited here, they have been talking with me. I told him that we don't need much money infusion, all I need I can raise through individual contributions. When I demonstrate, it becomes a people's economy. They will have the money. But you help me with travel, if I go to the US, give me tickets, organize my stay there, do those kinds of things. Whereas Swiss government wanted people movements focusing on habitat development. Mostly it happens through agencies and they wanted to experiment with panchayat. I have a meeting with British high commission this afternoon. British attitude is different. They want to pay back. They say that they feel guilty and they want to pay back. There is affection. America, there is no emotional binding. We have a history with UK. Europe is very leftist in orientation. (Interview with Elango, April 2004)

Current Status and Implications

In spite of a functional infrastructure and the apparent willingness of the villagers to cooperate with the Panchayat to make their village a model village, hunger still remains a persistent problem. The families rehabilitated from the illicit arrack brewing trade were temporarily employed in reconstructing the village. Now, they go hungry and are

waiting for alternatives. The Panchayat is now working towards making Kuthambakkam a hunger-free village in one year. The plan is to revive traditional (organic) farming on unutilized and abandoned lands, and establish several small-scale rural industries, which will employ the villagers, who will be trained in production as well as their maintenance. Several auxiliary units can operate around these. The rural industries will, to the extent possible, be land- (agro-) based; use of locally available raw-materials and indigenous knowledge; cater to the local market; meet the basic needs of villagers – food, clothing and shelter – to attain self-sufficiency; be diverse; work on a cooperative model through men and Women Self Help Groups (SHGs) without the interference of the state or the central government; be heavily dependent on human power; be environment-friendly. That Elango has been re-elected in the 2001 elections with zero campaign cost speaks for the faith the villagers have placed on him. He is also concerned about creating local, sustainable livelihood to avoid potential migration of educated youth out of the village, and thus can be depended to take up roles of leadership and responsibility to implement and spread the message of ‘Network Economy’.

While the Panchayat related activities have been a great success in Kuthambakkam owing mostly to Elango’s integrity, commitment and dedication, my data doesn’t suggest a distributed ownership and leadership of the network economic model. At the time of this data collection, all the ideas for local manufacturing like soap making, bakery unit, tailoring unit, food processing have been languishing in the early stages for years now. They are all ideas with great potential and through his detailed market survey in villages of Kuthambakkam and around, he is convinced that there is sufficient demand for these products in the local market. Therefore, implementation of these ideas through involvement of local villagers might result in creating a sustainable local economy but not one of them have seen the light of the day yet. In this section, I outline the challenges faced in the implementation of this change program and speculate on key factors that are problematic in this experiment. Two of the key significant issues are post colonial class-caste/ power dynamic and leadership.

Post-colonial Caste/Caste/Power Dynamic

Kuthambakkam is a more complex case as far as social norms and power relations are concerned. Elango is from a lower caste family and his presence as a leader brings in more complexity. The upper caste, educated families understand his influence as the Panchayat leader and want to build relationships with him, but it is still an evolving process. In Kuthambakkam, livelihood is not a shared concern and the inequity between different economic classes is very obvious even to a lay observer. This is due to two reasons: given the proximity to Chennai, an urban metropolis offering and the economic opportunities, the more wealthy, educated villagers of Kuthambakkam are able to take up jobs in the city and are not necessarily dependent on the village economy for their livelihood. The second reason is the difference between land owning and non-land owning sections of the population. Those who don’t own land are dependent on the village and its farming activities for survival because traditionally they work as landless laborers in other people’s farms. With increasing mechanization of agriculture and continuing draught conditions and depletion of water table, these jobs are fast disappearing and these influence the social norms too. Elango believes that economic

emancipation is the route to social change and so does not explicitly challenge the caste based and economically driven social norms. He brought in a state government driven initiative called *Samathvapuram* (Town of Equality) which offers homes to both upper and lower caste families if they are willing to live as peaceful neighbors. Even in the case of this new colony, the danger of this dislocation alienating the families that moved from their kinship structures that supported them in their previous habitat was not considered deeply. A number of the residents talked to me about how removed they are from the opportunities for employment. In those settings, even a mile seems like a long distance to get a job, because they are used to living in hamlets located closer to the farmlands where they could work.

Even though the Panchayat government is legally owned by and in service of the people, the villagers still feel that they are obliged to the Panchayat for the favors it bestows on them including basic infrastructure. The same feeling is extended to the activities of Elango and his Trust for Self-Governance. This might be the residual effect of the colonial rule and the erstwhile relationship of natives with the governing authorities, which is perhaps also reinforced by Elango's 'I know best' attitude and the ensuing behaviors. Moreover, Elango's holding of two positions, one as the leader of a formal government machinery and the other, an NGO that aims at creating bonds within the village toward change, may have been at odds with each other.

Leadership

When I say leadership factor, at this stage, it is mostly got to do with Elango's approach, belief system and style. The motivation of the individuals who take up key positions of leadership roles in social movement and their approach to change are fascinating because of two reasons: (1) an absence of a clear cost-benefit based motivation to the individual who gets involved in social change movements because they usually pay a personal prices for getting involved and continuing to do so and (2) their motivations and beliefs about the nature of the change process itself are key elements of the organization's teleoaffective structures.

Leadership Model

Elango's style, what he terms, 'maternal model of leadership' is problematic. He said,

A few people may be negative, some people may be too positive in their evaluation of me. But we have to look at the facts for both. For example, we are building a drain. Drain issues. People might say, "What is this? He is building drains all over"... Whatever you do, you might do it against his aspirations, but ultimately you are doing it for his welfare. A mother has the right to do it, I have the same right. Ultimately you need it, that is the point...I feel that this whole community is mine. But when I think like that, sometimes I expect the community to react in a particular way. That is not a dictatorship. It is one of affection. When we admonish a child not to do something unsafe, it is done out of love. But there should be transparency, democracy to the possible extent which will not disintegrate the strength of the community. (Interview with Elango, December, 2004)

My observation of his daily activities also supports this model. For instance, every single day I saw him giving money to someone or other, an old lady who had scheduled a hospital visit, a child who didn't have note books or clothes, a young man who had to pay his college fees. Elango was always ready to help them. He would also go with the

young people of the village for college enrollment, pay for their computer education. While it can be termed as paternalistic approach to leadership, Elango calls it the maternal approach: with caring and compassion, but setting boundaries with a belief that 'mother knows best.' This also smacks of reproduction of colonial or caste based power relations although Elango is from a lower caste himself. His education and reputation in the external world positions him as superior to the rest of the villagers. This model of leadership also informs his vision for an effective social change process.

I hypothesize that this alienates the rest of the village from taking up ownership for the change vision. My data from Kuthambakkam, both the interviews with the villagers as well as my fairly extensive observational data, suggest that they do not necessarily believe in their own ability to change their lives, but rather in their leader's ability to bring some change in their lives. Paradoxically, even though Elango's network economy model rests on the philosophy of local self reliance, the villagers look up to Elango for instructions and direction and do not operate on their own. While the community has a great deal of respect and affection for Elango, they are yet to share his vision. The onus for accomplishment is still perceived as Elango's even though they want good things to happen. I provide a couple of examples of statements expressing such sentiment. I interviewed a woman villager in 2004 who said,

Before him, we didn't know the role of the panchayat. After he became the leader, we are at least aware about it. He keeps doing something or the other. Big changes, like roads, water, street lights, of course it was all government funding, but he was the one who took efforts to get these amenities for this village. He has full support in this village. He really showed us a lot. Houses are being built. He was the one who showed that all this is possible. (Interview with Kale, a villager, March, 2004)

An enthusiastic and vocal member of a Women's Self Help Group that I talked to in 2005 said,

Even if the plans are on paper, one should implement it right? That he is trying, that is the main thing. If it remains on paper, what good will happen? It has been six months since we joined together and formed the group, but we haven't started any major income generation activity yet. Thalaivar (the leader) said that he will help us start something, it will be good if he can take some steps. It will be good to get some income regularly. (Interview with Anandavalli, member of a Women's Self Help Group, Feb 2005)

Approach to Change

Even though he was a Dalit (Untouchable) activist in his youth, Elango believes that the Dalit Movement was informed by the western models of Revolution. His vision for the community change process lies in nurturing and building of relationships. He also believes that such revitalization of relationships can only happen at a local level, where there is a history between the people involved. His definition of 'relationships' is very different from the generic understanding of relationships in the Western Model, but predicated more on the indigenous kinship models. In the kinship or familial model, it is not about relationships between individuals, but more about a shared history, trust woven among a group of individuals. In Elango's case he is positioned in such a network because he was born and raised in Kuthambakkam. He offers an example of how he resolved an issue with a woman who was angry at him through a community

solution of conversation and negotiation, which he contrasts against the western model of protests and revolution. As he says,

In the western style, it is done through revolution, protest, fight and liberation whereas in a community set up it can happen through a revitalization of relationships. So, I cannot do it on a district level. Because I am not connected to them, so my words will not penetrate their hearts but I am making that leader do the same. He spreads the word to other villages. The community is organizing, the panchayat is a community movement. It may be a parliamentary democracy, and they feel that they are partners and participate in the process of selection through voting. They feel that they have a right. When we do good work, they enjoy and feel reaffirmed. There the democracy should stop. What do we do? If some researcher says 50 people are vehement, what am I supposed to do? management researchers might come up with some hundred problems but what I do is, go to the person who is angry and ask her, "Sister, why did you say that?" and she says, "That you scolded me" and I say sorry. Everything gets crumbled. That is the community solution. There is a compromise and negotiation. There is a relationship. But you will give a grievance procedure and teach them how to protest against me. So the mega-thoughts will not suit us but micro levels or network level approach will work for us. We resolve through conversation and negotiation. We are not related by blood. But people come up and talk with me, a man says that your grandfather and I were friends. Not everything works with law. But with community and relationships, things work. (Interview with Elango, March 2004)

While this is an admirable approach to change processes within, for forging bonds of local solidarity, it becomes an almost naive approach to dealing with situations of power like the one that exists in the context of water. To my knowledge, this village has not fought against Coca-Cola or other water bottling companies operating in their region. In contrast, there are examples of other villages (Pachimada in Kerala) that have gone to court instigating closure of the Coca-Cola plant in their village for over months. In this village, there is an almost naive and simplistic approach to dealing with abuse of power and lacks critical reflection.

Action vs Theory

Elango derides the ivory tower theorists who have neither a relationship with the community nor the willingness to work on the ground.

Symbiosis institute of management visited us. Last year, the world class examples in India, I was one of the four chosen people and I went and spoke to a large audience. What can you do as MBAs? You can do only theory. You can keep on working on more and more theories, and more graphical representations, more and more presentations, but only when you come in you can look at it. Your argument can be only on the graph, there is no sustainability. Management argument is hypothetical, it is only theory. It is all based on assumptions, but here it is based on reality, love, community. There is no need for hypothetical talk about village economy or its success. Success is Anna Hazare. (Interview with Elango, Feb 2005)

At first glance, this statement might appear contradictory to his approach where he has begun the social process of social change with a well-defined vision and an economic model for rural economy. But what we must keep in mind is that it was grounded in information from many other practitioners as well as data from his own village. He has also been on the ground working on infrastructural issues that he had the power to intervene in his capacity as the *Panchayat* leader. However, I believe that this approach cripples his ability to receive feedback from the situation and others, as well as his ability to distill learning for the future from past experience. It may be useful to consider McNulty and Ferlie's (2004) thesis that weak and incoherent reformative

ideology and mixed messages may be an obstacle to radical forms of change within contemporary public service organizations and that a reliance on strong leadership by itself is a weak basis for transformational organizational change in large, complex organizations.

Conclusion

While globalization is touted as inevitable and advantageous to all the participants, there are communities on the margins of the globalized world whose lives and worlds have been profoundly affected by it negatively. However, even in the context of the inevitable globalization, local solidarity continues to play a part in revitalization of communities, as it has played a part in resistance against colonial governments all over the world. This paper has presented an example of one such effort in India locating it in a socio-ecological framework and critiqued it. Moreover, this paper has also argued for organizational scholars to step out of the mainstream to study newly emerging organizations with innovative forms in the margins.

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the author

Latha Poonamallee is Assistant Professor of Organizational Behavior in Michigan Technological University's School of Business and Economics. Her research interests are generative capacities and mechanisms for change, leadership and partnerships in the context of social transformation, and sustainable livelihood for the social minority.
Email: poonamallee@gmail.com