

Bariapada Model of Tribal Development: A Case Study

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Introduction:

Indian society is broadly divided into three segments: rural, urban, and tribal. Although India has completed 75 years of independence, the tribal community appears to have lagged significantly behind in the development process compared to rural and urban communities. If visionary leadership is available to guide tribal communities into the mainstream of development, transformative change can occur. A living example of this is the village of Bariapada. Bariapada has become a model of tribal development and has attracted attention at both national and international levels. In the present research paper, we undertake a case study of Bariapada village.

Research Methodology:

An exploratory method has been adopted to conduct this case study. Data collection techniques included field visits to the village, interviews, and participant observation.

Present Structure of the Village:

Bariapada is a tribal village located in Sakri Taluka of Dhule District in Maharashtra. The village comprises only 94 families. The residents mainly belong to the Kokna and Bhil tribal communities. The current population of the village is approximately 750. Bariapada is spread over 300 hectares of land.

All the roads in the village are cemented, and proper drainage systems have been constructed along the sides of the roads. There is not a single two-storey building in the village. Except for the Gram Panchayat office and the school building, no structure is made of cement. Traditional houses are still commonly seen. The village is exceptionally clean, with no visible garbage or waste.

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In the Gram Panchayat office, the mobile numbers of the Anganwadi worker and the Gram Sevak are displayed on the wall. Information regarding government schemes and the funds received under each scheme is also publicly displayed. The village administration is highly transparent and clean.

Past Condition of the Village:

During the 1980s, the village faced numerous problems. There were only two wells in the village, which would dry up by December. As a result, villagers migrated for six months every year in search of water and employment. Even when they stayed in the village, agriculture alone was insufficient for survival. Many families depended on illegal activities such as cutting wood from the forest and producing liquor from Mahua flowers. Liquor production was primarily undertaken by tribal women. This led to frequent conflicts and social unrest within the village.

Only 15 hectares of land were cultivable. The surrounding forest resources had begun to degrade. No child in the village could pursue continuous education because most families migrated for half the year. Women had to walk miles to collect firewood for cooking. When the riverbed dried up, women dug pits in it to collect water, which they used for their daily needs.

Deprived of social, educational, and economic progress and engulfed in darkness due to various problems, Bariapada village came into the limelight due to the efforts of a young man, Mr. Chaitram Pawar.

Padmashri Shri Chaitram Pawar

Shri Chaitram Pawar was born in Bariapada village in the Kokna tribal community. The tribal population of Bariapada faced numerous challenges such as poverty, illiteracy, and severe water scarcity. Chaitram Pawar spent his early life in extremely difficult circumstances and had to struggle greatly to complete his education. He earned a postgraduate degree in Commerce.

Inspired by Dr. Anand Phatak, who was working full-time in a neighboring village to provide healthcare services to tribal communities, Chaitram Pawar decided to dedicate his life to village development. He declined government job offers from a bank and the Indian Air Force and chose instead to remain in his village and work for its upliftment.

In 1991, Chaitram Pawar came into contact with the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram organization. As a young leader in the village, he drew the attention of the villagers to the rapidly depleting forest resources around

them. With the support of Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, he brought about a remarkable transformation in Bariapada village.

Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram is a voluntary organization that works with the objective of building a strong, self-respecting, and self-reliant tribal society. Based on the principle “Tu Mai Ek Rakt” (You and I share the same blood), which emphasizes that tribal people and other Hindus are brothers and belong to the same community, the organization was founded in 1952 by Vanayogi Balasaheb Deshpande at Jashpur in Chhattisgarh. Its aim is the overall educational, health, social, and economic development of tribal communities.

Chaitram Pawar developed Bariapada village by focusing on five key components. The first component is as follows:

Water (Jal):

Water is a basic human necessity. To conserve and store every drop of water, the villagers of Bariapada, with the help of the Forest Department and through voluntary labor (shramdaan), constructed 480 small check dams and dug a five-kilometer-long canal. Over the past 30 years, the villagers have completed around 600 water conservation projects.

As a result, the village now has 40 wells that remain filled throughout the year. Once a village that struggled for every drop of water, Bariapada, through collective effort, successfully implemented water conservation measures. Today, the village supplies drinking water to five neighbouring villages.

Solar Energy and Sustainable Power

Since Bariapada is located in an interior region, it suffered from electricity shortages for many years. There used to be load shedding of nearly 12 hours daily, making farming extremely difficult for the villagers. Today, Bariapada runs entirely on solar energy.

Chaitram Pawar shared his experience regarding solar energy initiatives. He regularly organizes training sessions and workshops for villagers with the help of external experts to address agricultural and drinking water-related issues. During one such training session in 2014, villagers learned about solar water pumps and how they could function without dependence on electricity. The idea appealed to everyone, and a collective decision was made to install solar pumps.



With the support of Mr. Sunil Trivedi and through the Deshbandhu Manju Gupta Foundation, the village received its first 2-kilowatt solar pump. After being satisfied with its performance, the Meenakshi Mehta Foundation facilitated the installation of an additional 32 solar pumps.

These solar pumps ensured a continuous water supply for agriculture without relying on costly electricity, marking a major step toward sustainable energy. Chaitram Pawar explains that they deliberately chose lower-capacity solar pumps. Although there was an opportunity to install 5-kilowatt pumps, they decided to extract only as much groundwater as necessary to avoid wastage.

Today, due to solar energy, water availability has improved significantly. Homes and streets are well lit, and safety during nighttime has increased considerably.

Forest (Jangal):

Chaitram Pawar organized the villagers and drew their attention to the exploitation of the forest resources surrounding the village. He made them aware that continued deforestation would lead to serious consequences.

With the joint efforts of the villagers and the Forest Department, greenery was restored in 450 hectares of forest land around the village. Thousands of trees were planted with the active participation of villagers. The efforts made by Chaitram Pawar and the community, with the support of the Forest Department, are noteworthy.

On 23 May 1993, during a village gathering, an informal local Forest Protection Committee was formed to safeguard the forest. Under the Joint Forest Management (JFM) initiative, villagers were organized and a formal Forest Protection Committee (FPC) was established.

Initially, some villagers were skeptical about the initiative. To build trust, they were given important positions within the FPC. Chaitram Pawar was elected as the President of the committee.

It was decided that there would be no permanent members in the FPC. Each family would send one representative to the committee on a rotational basis, ensuring participation from all households.

The FPC framed certain rules and regulations for forest protection:

- Anyone found cutting or stealing forest produce would be punished.



- Two elderly villagers were appointed as forest guards. They were paid ₹100 per month, and the guards were changed annually.
- Each family contributed either ₹3 in cash or 7 kilograms of grain to generate funds for paying the guards.
- A fine of ₹1,000 was imposed if cattle were taken into the forest for grazing.
- If anyone other than the guards caught an offender, they were rewarded ₹501.
- No one from within or outside the village was allowed to enter the forest with a bullock cart for any reason.

Later, some rules were modified:

- People from neighboring villages were allowed to extract limited resources for social and religious purposes, but only with prior permission from Bariapada village.
- For 30 days a year, 50 acres of forest land were allocated for grazing. The grazing area was changed annually. Sheep and goats were not permitted.
- On social occasions such as marriages and funerals, villagers were allowed to collect dry wood. Additionally, for one month during winter, only villagers were permitted to collect firewood.

In October 2004, the villagers initiated a Plant Biodiversity Registration process to document the vegetation in their forest. They prepared a People's Biodiversity Register (PBR) and forest vegetation maps. Fourteen different forest sites were identified, and vegetation mapping was conducted using 100-square-meter plots.

Today, Bariapada is surrounded by 445 hectares of forest. Tree species found here include teak, devkumba, pangara, ain, kumbha, mahua, neem, karvanda, and many others. Wildlife such as panthers, Indian wolves, black-naped hares, foxes, monitor lizards, and other animals are found in the area.

Bariapada is perhaps the only village in Maharashtra that has maintained biodiversity records for the past 21 years. Due to these efforts, the village received the India Biodiversity Award and the United Nations Development Programme Award in 2003. In total, the village has been honored with 33 awards.



The forest of Bariapada contains hundreds of teak trees valued at approximately ₹300 crores. Currently, cutting of teak is prohibited. However, when harvesting is permitted in the future, 50% of the value of the timber will legally go to the villagers. Therefore, Chaitram Pawar proudly tells the villagers, “You are owners of wealth worth crores.”

Land (Jamin):

Earlier, Bariapada had barren, uneven, and uncultivable agricultural land. At one time, only 15 hectares were suitable for farming. Due to limited land and water scarcity, income was very low.

With improved water availability, the land became fertile and multiple crops could be cultivated. Today, three crops a year are grown on 120 hectares of land. Cash crops such as onions, pulses, and strawberries have ensured that no family in the village now lives below the poverty line.

With assistance from the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), there has been a record increase in the production of grains, wheat, potatoes, and vegetables. Tribal families’ incomes have significantly improved.

Even today, Bariapada practices organic and traditional farming methods. No hybrid seeds are used; instead, local seeds are preserved and cultivated. For promoting local knowledge and innovation, the village has received international recognition.

For the past 20 years, Bariapada has celebrated a unique “Forest Vegetable Festival.” The concept was developed by Shailesh Shukla, a PhD scholar from Canada, who visited the village for research. The festival includes a cooking competition in which participating women must explain the medicinal properties of forest vegetables used in their dishes.

In one such festival, a woman presented 101 varieties of forest vegetables and was specially honored. The Government of India recognized the village’s efforts and awarded ₹1 lakh as a prize. This amount was used to start a jaggery production unit at the village level, which now employs 25 local youth.

To promote women’s self-reliance, 15 Self-Help Groups (SHGs) were formed under the guidance of workers from Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram. Through these SHGs, various enterprises were started. Rice cultivation is prominent in the village, and the Indrayani rice of Bariapada is famous across Maharashtra. Five women’s SHGs are exclusively engaged in selling Indrayani rice.



A Farmer Producer Company was established for marketing this rice, which now supplies paddy to nearby districts. Through this company, high-quality products such as liquor, soap, perfume, raisins, and chocolates are also made from mahua flowers collected from the forest.

People (Jan):

No village can develop without public participation. To unite people, collective festivals and sports competitions were organized. It took Chaitram Pawar nearly two years to mobilize the villagers. A shared goal of saving the forests fostered unity among them.

The village developed an inclusive conflict resolution system. One member from each family must participate in resolving disputes, regardless of the issue. Collective action has significantly increased. Weddings are now organized collectively on auspicious days, reducing expenses.

Jan Seva Foundation and Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram supported community development initiatives such as building improved toilets, developing water recycling techniques, and promoting kitchen gardens. With community participation, the Bariapada Gram Vikas Samiti (BGVS) was established.

In a village where earlier students rarely studied beyond the fourth grade, young individuals like Sunil Pawar and Abhimat Pawar are now educated and working as teachers in government schools. The village committee made it compulsory for every family to send their children to school, failing which fines are imposed. Earlier, teachers absent from school were fined ₹51 per day, and students were fined ₹1 per day for absenteeism. As a result, children now attend government school regularly.

In 2003, Chaitram Pawar helped village women establish a fisheries cooperative society using the common village pond. Jan Seva Andolan supported this initiative. Women are now satisfied, having shifted from liquor production to fish farming. They have also taken a strict stand against alcohol consumption. Men now fear coming home drunk, and domestic conflicts have significantly reduced.

Through such collective action, villagers began prioritizing the development of their village. Consequently, incidents of forest theft have significantly decreased, and illegal extraction of forest resources by villagers has completely stopped. Conservation efforts have also reduced water over-extraction and wastage.



Animals (Janawar):

Animal husbandry has traditionally been an occupation of tribal communities, and livestock has always been an integral part of their lives. However, earlier in Bariapada village, there was insufficient fodder and water for animals. As a result, livestock rearing was limited, and milk production was low.

With the development of the watershed area, dry land became fertile and abundant fodder and water became available. Consequently, livestock rearing improved significantly. The number of cows and buffaloes increased, and dairy farming began providing additional income to families. Animal waste started being used to prepare organic manure for agriculture.

Today, every family in Bariapada owns livestock such as poultry, goats, sheep, cows, and buffaloes in substantial numbers.

Chaitram Pawar explains that if forests around a village are conserved, rainfall becomes abundant. If rainwater is stored through check dams and allowed to percolate into the soil, the groundwater level rises, ensuring permanent water availability in rivers and wells. As a result, farmland becomes fertile, fodder and water for animals are ensured, and ultimately the income and overall development of the people increase.

Bariapada is not only a model of environmental conservation but also of self-reliance, sustainable development, and social awareness. Through the fivefold approach—Water, Forest, Land, People, and Livestock—Chaitram Pawar has presented to the world an excellent model of tribal development.

The work of Chaitram Pawar has been recognized at both national and international levels. He has received numerous awards, including the International Fund for Agricultural Development Award, India Biodiversity Award, Sant Tukaram Vanagram Award, Krishinishtha Shetkari Award, Adivasi Asmita Award, Dr. Hedgewar Smruti Seva Nidhi Karya Award, the State Government's Jalnayak Award, the Maharashtra Vanbhushan Award in 2024, and in 2025 he was honoured with India's fourth-highest civilian award, the Padma Shri.

Conclusion

The present research paper concludes that whether it is tribal development or overall village development, progress can be achieved not merely by depending on the government but through self-motivated efforts under effective local leadership. When such initiatives are undertaken at the grassroots level, even the government recognizes and supports them. Development must begin from within the community itself.



The fivefold principle—Water, Forest, Land, People, and Livestock—forms the five pillars of sustainable development. Only by conserving and strengthening these five components can the holistic development of tribal society be achieved. This is the Bariapada model developed by Shri Chaitram Pawar. If other tribal-dominated villages adopt this model, they too can achieve development and contribute to building a stronger nation.

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