

Work as Key to the Social Question

The Great Social and Economic Transformations and the Subjective Dimension of Work



Subjective Dimensions of Human Work in Rural India: Signs of Hope

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I. INTRODUCTION

Rerum Novarum, written by Pope Leo XIII on 15 May 1891, when the industrial revolution, was at its height in Europe, will remain the tone setting expression of the Church's Social Doctrine.

In the West this industrial Society is coming to an end and is fast giving way to the global market society.

In the remainder of the world, especially the poor countries of the South, the global society is advancing with brave steps but is unable to live up to its claim of bringing about the good life it promised for all. Rather, it has reduced work opportunities in the formal sector of the economy and in rural areas it further widens the gap between the already very poor and the better off.

The global market not only functions in urban centres but reaches out to the furthest and most isolated village areas.

It undertakes the building up of infrastructures through the contractor system. This system provides opportunities for the entrepreneurship of small business persons, the rural elite, not only to earn an income, but also to assiduously pursue profit.

The profit motive, which was and remains the driving force of industrial society is even more clearly the hallmark of the global market society.

Not surprisingly therefore one witnesses the high tide of exploitation of human beings. A

State, weakened by scarcity of resources and by corruption, can no longer restrain the excesses of the market as it did earlier.

The outcome is that in countries like India the rural workers and those who eke out an existence through informal business today are at the level where the small farmers and labourers of Europe were hundred and fifty years ago.

In the West it were the farmers and workers who found out ways to adjust to the harsh conditions of the industrial society through savings and credit, cooperatives, mutual benefit societies, group insurance, trade unions etc.

So, in the South too it is especially amongst the poor in rural areas today that the harsh struggle for survival forces the poor to adjust and to organize in order to survive. They rediscover the value of working together in a community, this time, to restore their environment to a sustainable and productive condition.

This discovery by people at the grassroots is analogical to that of the people awakening earlier in the West but not identical.

The conditions in the West as Pope Leo XIII and his successors faced and those existing today in watershed management projects in rural India can be contrasted in the form of two paradigms.

I am convinced that this discovery of the rural poor in India and other countries of South Asia contains the seeds of a response to the ills of the global market. This may be a tall claim, but I believe that it is valid.

It is a subject that deserves the study by Scholars of the Catholic Social Doctrine.

The new paradigm of working for a sustainable society arises out of the experiences of rural people who have survived for generations and who now realize that what is at stake is nothing less than the reestablishment of a sustainable society. What is at stake is not wealth, but sheer survival.

The paper covers the following points :

1. Watershed Management in Rural India.
2. The human and social aspects of Watershed Management.
3. The paradigms of the Global Market Society and the Watershed Management Projects.
4. Values promoted by Catholic Social Thought and those advocated by the Watershed

Management Society.

5. The paper ends with an appeal to colleagues present at the conference to acquaint themselves with the insights and values contained in Watershed Management and use them to enrich the environmental Ethics of Catholic Social Thought.

II. WATERSHED MANAGEMENT IN RURAL INDIA

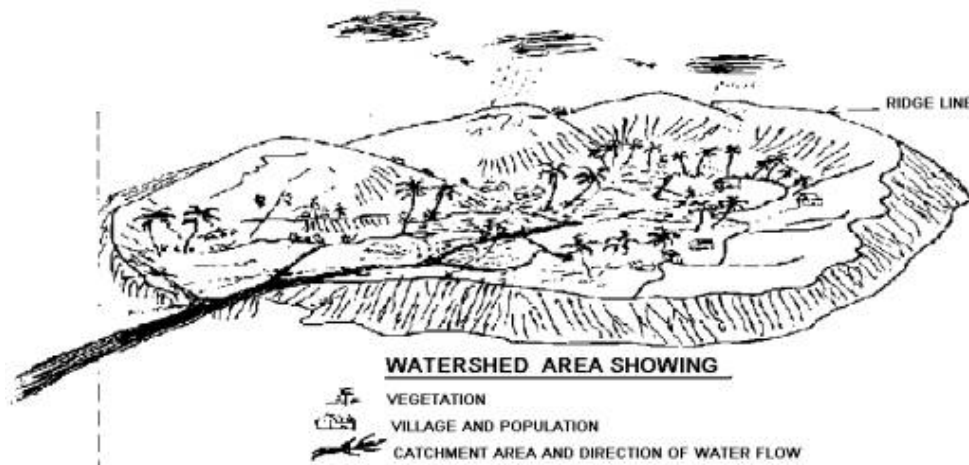
1. Since 1951 when it introduced Community Development Projects, India has tried out several strategies to promote integral rural development. Some programmes gave priority to technological factors, others to agrarian legislation and its interpretations, still others put their hopes on delegation of authority to rural communities such as the recent attention to Panchayats (village councils) since 1993.

These programmes did have some impact but none called up the interest and commitment of the rural population as the Watershed Management programme does at present. Everybody talks about it.

This programme is not much more than 15 years old. It apparently started with pioneers and donors in the Voluntary Sector in South India as well as Western and Northern parts of the country.

2. Why has it found such a deep and lasting resonance in the mind of the rural people? Important **reasons** are:

- a. It attempts an **integral approach**, starting from the land-and-water resources of a well-defined area, covering agricultural activities, management of domestic animals, non-agricultural employment, role of women, and paying attention to all sections of the population, so that none is left out.

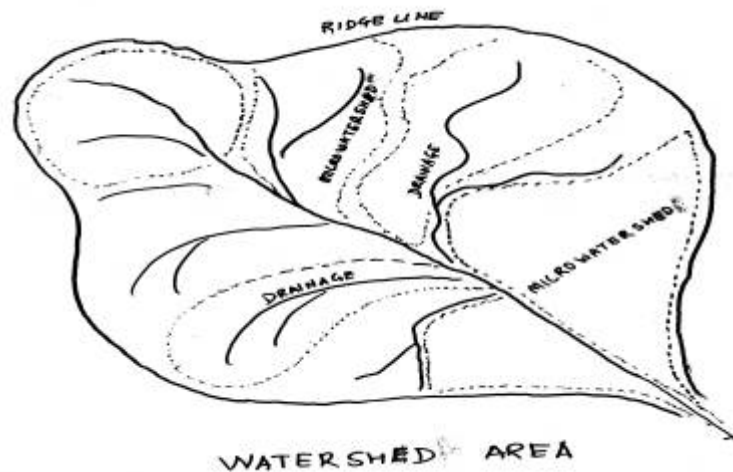


- b. A watershed is a well defined geographical area where all water that falls out of the sky, collects and flows down to one water-course or river which evacuates the water to larger watersheds or river basins and eventually to the oceans.

The boundary of a watershed is called the ridge line. It connects the highest contour points. Rain water that falls on one side of this ridge line enters into one watershed while the water that falls on the other side of the same ridge line enters into another watershed area and travels to the ocean through another water stream.

One distinguishes **mini**-watersheds (from 500 to 5000 hectares) **milli**-watersheds from 5,000 to 20,000 hectares and **macro** watersheds covering more than 20,000 hectares. All watersheds together form a **river basin** which can be extremely large.

- c. The **boundaries**, the ridge lines, are precise and are drawn by **nature** itself, Rural inhabitants know these boundaries very well and identify with the area which falls within such boundaries, as their home. Village people are especially **familiar** with their mini-watershed, which may share this area with a few more villages in their neighbourhood.



So, the idea is **easily grasped** as nature-given and people understand that all inhabitants of a watershed jointly share the **responsibility** to maintain the sustainability and natural productivity of the watershed, so that **future generations** can live from the land, the forests, rather than destroy it by over-exploitation, for quick profit.

3. If separated from other development efforts, watershed management **favours only the landowners**, small or large, within its boundaries, and ignores the lot of **landless** agricultural labours or self employed artisans.

Good watershed management, however, sees to it that **all the inhabitants** profit from the

restoration of nature by increasing for instance the days of wage employment in a year. In good watershed projects **out-migration** decrease dramatically and may stop altogether within 3 years.

Without proper correctives the watershed might be boycotted by those whose interests are ignored.

4. In the Encyclical **Laborem Exercens**, Pope John Paul II mentions **Agricultural Work** (No. 21) but it is limited to the context of work on the land of large landowners as still exist in S. America.

In India, in some areas where large landowners still do exist, the same situation exists as in South America. They employ landless workers as serfs. In such a situation the Watershed Management approach simply can not function. These workers do not participate in decision making. Such situations may occur in **plains areas** or the bottoms of river valleys, paradoxically, in more modernized systems such as plantations. In many areas of Central India however, the land is hilly, with valleys and plateaus.

In the higher reaches of these valleys the relief of the land makes it ideally suitable for watershed management. The land is broken up in parcels, which are in the possession of small or marginal farmers. One finds few traditional large landowners. Some may be better off but can not dominate as is the case with large landowners in the plains.

It is in these hilly areas that watershed management has the best chance to succeed.

5. From what is said above it follows logically that inhabitants of watersheds:
 - a. have a pronounced **understanding** of their watershed and its boundaries (ridge lines)
 - b. **identify** strongly with this **area** on whose proper management, their survival and that of future generations depend.
 - c. understand the importance of **solidarity** amongst all and a sense of **moral-communal ownership** of the whole area. They also understand that all persons, including shepherds, women, forest dweller, and artisans, must participate in decision making.
 - d. The **legal ownership** of land is not disturbed. The larger owners however, understand that sooner or later they have to accept the moral authority of the Village Watershed Committee (VWC).

6. Non-governmental donor agencies, international agencies, and Governmental agencies have understood the vital importance of watershed management to assure with the

commitment of the inhabitants, the restoration of the land to a state of sustainability. It is not a minute too early, because one third of India's land surface is said to be already reduced to a status of wasteland. The restoration of a watershed is quite costly, and risks of failure are considerable.

Therefore these bodies have made **large funds** available to **Village Watershed Committees** to finance land restoration activities by individual peasants or groups including :

- **Bunding** of contours or of fields
- Land **levelling**
- **Plugging** of gullies
- Construction of low **stop or check dams** in rivulets
- Digging, repairs, deepening of **Water ponds**
- **Plantation** of grasses, bushes, trees, fruit trees
- Creation of **self-employment** of **non-agricultural** nature for villagers not engaged in agriculture.

7. The Government and other donor agencies have worked out sets of **rules for running the Village Watershed Committees** and for accounting for funds spent. If these rules are properly followed one obtains a transparent system of administration

8. Another measure which helps very much is the **role of escorting** VWCs. It is entrusted to **Non-Governmental Organizations** (NGOs) whose Chief Executive is named as the **Project Implementing Agent (PIA)**. He or she countersigns all cheques of incoming and outgoing moneys.

III. HUMAN AND SOCIAL ASPECTS OF WATERSHED MANAGEMENT

The control of the means of production in situations of watershed management in India is so different from those in industrial societies in the West, to which the Social Encyclicals refer, that it is necessary to reflect further on them.

1. Man's Relations towards land and the means of Production

In India the land in rural areas along with water of course remain the most vital means of

production.

The people **identify** themselves, very much with their land, their animals, the houses, in which generations have lived before them. They have their roots there. These things are much more than **means** of production, they are home to them.

The situation is contrary to the **alienation** that Marx had noted between industrial workers in the West where the means of production belonged to the owners of factories.

2. Identification with the Village Community

The rural person is **rooted** in a family, a particular caste, and a whole village community which controlled the ownership of land. Before the arrival of the British in 1750 land was held in common.

Through his community a person belongs to the land rather than the other way around.

3. The Community's Stake in Watershed

Therefore all persons living in a watershed, in spite of the caste differences that separate them, carry a joint stake in the vitality and sustainability of that watershed. Without water the land does not produce. This includes not only land owners, but also small farmers, the landless the artisans, shepherds, and forest dwellers.

The idea of **class struggle** does not fit in such a situation. The marginalized, if ignored, however can boycott efforts at restoring the watershed by destroying plantations etc.

Because of this strong feeling of a common stake, there is also a tendency towards equality, appreciating the role of each player for instance women.

4. Working for Survival rather than for Profit Maximization

In a watershed the concern about the survival of the whole biological system is the top priority rather than optimizing profits through intensive cultivation. Families hold the land as stewards, for future generations, as they received it from their forebears.

5. It is therefore natural that the "**We**" **feeling is strong** and that the **interests of the common good** prevail over the rights or interests of the individual, even if he be a richer person.

The **Village Watershed Committee** is the effective **expression** and the **instrument** to achieve the common goal. It's decisions carry great weight, which nobody, even a powerful person can **shrug off**, lest he faces the prospect of ostracism.

6. One more characteristic of Watershed is the **awareness** that it is hedged in by **boundaries**. Boundaries **drawn by nature**. The resources of nature within these boundaries and of the people living within them, form one integrated system, whose carrying capacity is limited.

Human beings continually cross the boundaries or borders of micro, macro watersheds, even of river basins, and transport goods, services. But it nevertheless remains a fact, that if an area is denuded to the stage of waste land, it is the inhabitants of the watershed who are held responsible. Watershed management makes persons realize that resources are limited and that they are jointly responsible for them.

7. The tendency in industrial and business on the contrary has since colonial times been one of conquest of unlimited spaces, of colonies and of creating markets. The modern concept of market does not provide allowance for boundaries. On the contrary industrial and business entrepreneurs have always tried to break down the barriers they encountered. They have so well succeeded that the stage of **one integrated global market** has now been reached. Whether a world economy which prides itself of having broken down all barriers or boundaries to its forward march is in the long run sustainable at all, can be very seriously questioned. The two basic trends face each other and a balance has to be maintained.

8. Another characteristic of Watershed Management and the policies the State has adopted towards its administration is that de facto Watershed Management does **recognize the vital role the local population plays as managers of their own resources**.

It means a very significant step in **empowerment** of local people quite the contrary of what happened under bureaucratically managed development programmes. The **people** are now the **decision makers**. The State only provides the funds needed to execute field operations. The same awareness explains the decentralization of power to the gram panchayat structures (village community).

9. Protectiveness and Solidarity

- People who have become aware of their role in the watershed in which they live have a natural tendency to become **protective** and to narrow their perspective.
- The same watershed approach however also makes them feel how much they share solidarity with their neighbours in next-door watersheds whether micro or macro. Unless there is for instance, proper understanding about release of water from one micro watershed to other milli or macro watersheds that water may destroy crops and structures in the latter.
- This solidarity reaches out to all people, living within a river basin and river basins can spread out over immense catchments areas.

10. Warning

The above elaboration of the human and social aspects of Watershed Management may have sounded **idealistic**. Too good to be true. One has to be aware of this. The people living in watersheds are not overnight turning into little saints, full of concern for the common good and for the poorest living in their watershed.

As sons and daughters of Adam and Eve, they suffer from passions and evil inclinations. The most dangerous of these is the **lust for money and for power**, which is fanned into a dangerous fire, by the **profit motive**.

The struggle goes on in each human heart but its effects are most clearly seen in the better off and the powerful, the village elite.

The latter are tempted to misuse their power connections, networks, to continue to enrich themselves, to over-exploit resources, to corrupt officials into submission to their designs.



A dacoit (high-way robber) who has understood the value of Watershed Management. He carries water, a task first considered to be good enough for women.
(According to *NAYA DUNIYA*, Indore, March 25, 2001)

An article in a Hindi Daily *Nayi Duniya*, published from Indore reported that some dacoits of the Chambal valley had been won over for the idea of watershed. A cartoon showed a dacoit, carrying water pots, a task reserved to village women.

Earning one's life through watershed had become for them, a safer way than pursuing their traditional and very risky business of highway robbing and intergang wars.

11. Role of Motivating and Escorting Agencies

People in watersheds may opt for either way. The likelihood of choosing the watershed option is greater if a voluntary organization can help them to opt for honesty, transparency

in the use of resources, including money, rather than for self enrichment and corruption.

Large voluntary agencies are however rare in this field. An immense amount of work remains to be done by professionally trained and highly motivated facilitators or catalytic agents.

IV. THE PARADIGMS OF THE GLOBAL MARKET AND OF WATERSHED MANAGEMENT

To contrast the conceptual frame works of two different approaches to reality brings out clearly the identity of each framework. It may not give a total picture. It is not found in nature in its pure form, it is only a construct of the mind. But it helps reflection. In this spirit the two paradigms of watershed management and of the Global market are contrasted.

GLOBAL MARKET

WATERSHED MANAGEMENT

1. MAN'S RELATION TO ENVIRONMENT

- Production is dissociated from location of raw materials. These are transported from all over the world.
 - Hence, industry created mobility, migration, community displacement. It uproots. It shifts to other parts of the world.
 - Industry takes place in a contrived environment, ruled by management. This alienates the workers.
- Production is localized, bound to the land, limited to a natural watershed.
 - Place of production is near the home or inside it.
 - Means of production, animals, etc., constitute man's familiar environment inherited from forefathers.
 - It leads to identification and caring

2. CAPITAL

- Investment of large capitals of money, plant, and equipment infrastructures.
 - By private entrepreneurs, helped by bankers, financial institutions, the bourse, the World Bank.
 - This capital travels to places where it yields the most profits.
- Capital consists of the local ecosystem, water, soil, plants, forests, animals, humans. It is handed down from generation to generation.
 - This capital restores itself, providing natural products, but can be destroyed by overuse.
 - It is essentially local, fixed, and conditioned by the climate of a place.

3. BASIC OBJECTIVE

- Production of wealth through goods, services, money surpluses.
 - Industrial growth and expansion: takeovers.
 - Innovation, search for quality.
 - Marked improvement in quality and lowering of prices of consumer goods.
- Survival of the human, animal, organic population.
 - Sustainability of the production capacity of nature.
 - Attention to essentials of life, such as water.
 - Replenish the aquifers of river basins.

GLOBAL MARKET

WATERSHED MANAGEMENT

4. DRIVING FORCE

- To make more profit.
- Compete with others; increase one's share of the market.
- Quality of the product.
- Conservation, restoration of resources.
- Maintain the natural balance in the system, including all its components, the marginal, etc.

5. OWNERSHIP OF RESOURCES

- It is with the owners of the means of production. They are keen to maximize their returns on capital for themselves and their shareholders.
- Capital travels globally to where best returns are made.
- Vulnerability to cyber raiders.
- The 'social' ownership is in the hands of the local community.
- Individual owners abide by the decisions of the community.
- A watershed is managed in an integrated manner.
- Basic needs of all must be satisfied.

6. TECHNOLOGY FAVOURED

- Capital intensive, labour-saving.
- Costly. Based on continuous research and development.
- Often exogenous.
- Quick obsolescence. The best quality spreads all over the world. Standardization of styles, tastes (jeans).
- Depends on intensive use of energy.
- Fossil-based technology creates much pollution and exhaustion of most non-renewable resources.
- Deep interventions destroy and exhaust resources and poison ground water.
- Labour intensive, not capital intensive; often tradition-bound.
- Search for ethnic authenticity--indigenous.
- Technology is appropriate.
- Watershed encourages local small scale industries.
- Use of solar energy and natural fuels.
- Conservation and reprocessing of waste, renewable sources.
- Collected from the earth's surface rather than from deep mines.
- It taps the indigenous knowledge, gathered over generations, and the shrewdness of peasants.

GLOBAL MARKET

WATERSHED MANAGEMENT

7. HUMAN RESOURCES

- Their employment is subjected to technical and financial demands.
- Subjected to authority of
- Most inhabitants of a watershed seek and find work inside the watershed unless forced by

management.

- Expensive, highly mobile.
- Easily dispensed with.
- The work environment generates great stress, alienates workers, creates illnesses (heart, cancers, etc.)

drought to temporarily migrate.

- Watershed leaders are not bosses.
- Women play a vital role in nurturing nature.
- Wages and working conditions are fixed by convention.
- Alienation is absent depending on the natural health of the watershed system.

8. THE MARKET

- The market for luxury and quality goods has attained global dimensions.
- Cheap goods from abroad (China) displace local goods (Indian).
- The market is not kind to the weak. The gap widens.
- Production for local and regional markets prevails.
- Herbal products, eatables meet a rising demand.
- Ethnic goods.
- Primary producers interact with the final consumers.

9. SUMMARY

1. Man mistakes the biblical concept of stewardship for one of Lordship of creation. He uses technology as if it were value free. It is anthropocentric. Man forgets the total picture.
2. Man seen as conqueror of resources, power, money. Profit goes to the entrepreneur. Profit motive is the driving force. Profit is the measure of success.
3. The mistaken faith that the global market will create harmony, leads to frustration.
4. An economy of the powerful, not of sharing with the weak and poor. It leads to a growing gap between rich and poor.
1. Together with all other living beings Man forms a family in balance with creation. The resources are limited; they cannot be wasted. They are for all people of the earth. Ethics regulate the use of technology.
2. Man is steward of creation. Survival of creation has priority over the profit of a few. Competition must be replaced by cooperation and sharing.
3. Survival is assured if for every natural area, its carrying capacity is respected, e.g., water needs.
4. An economy of sharing and sober living is only sustainable. Nature sends alarm signals that we are approaching the limits. We need to be humble and to learn, rather than

proud and obtuse.

The two paradigms attempted above are 'models' which have been contrasted. It is good to repeat that they are ideal, not found in their pure form in daily life. Nor do they present an either or situation. The two types of economy that they represent, will survive for quite sometime to come. The global market cannot be wished away.

The value of the Watershed Paradigm consists in its being a counter culture to the global market.

The watershed management values can be seen as allies of those of the Christian Ethics as found, or as underlying the social doctrine of Church.

These values however come from a different world view and it is useful to compare them with those of the social value of the church. This is done in the following section.

V. VALUES PROMOTED BY CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT AND BY WATERSHED MANAGEMENT

What follows is an effort at comparing the basic values and behaviour patterns of watershed management found in rural India today, with the values and behaviour patterns that are promoted by the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church, and Western Society based on Judaeo Christian World view.

The exercise is not based on scientific research and it represents a rather awkward effort at relating two world views. They have altogether different roots but a certain number of convergences exist also.

Values promoted by Christian Social Ethics and Watershed Management

<u>WATERSHED MANAGEMENT</u>	<u>CHRISTIAN SOCIAL DOCTRINE AND SITUATION IN PRESENT WESTERN WORLD</u>
1. ORIGIN	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The compulsions of nature and of survival in a shrinking world force people to work together as on community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The commandments revealed to Moses and by Jesus, as reflected upon by the Church, guide ethical behaviour.
2. CONCEPT OF MAN	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He is part of the family of living creatures, animals, plants, inhabiting a certain environment. • Man is not above the rest of creation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Man is placed on earth as steward of creation. • He is taken up into the life of God by the Spirit given through Jesus. • The dignity and rights of man are stressed.
3. BASIC ETHICAL PRINCIPLES	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-violence; tolerance. • Rootedness in the natural and social order through 'Dharma', which differs from caste to caste. • Compassion towards all living creatures. • Simplicity of life is fostered. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worship of the one God. • Love one another as I have loved you. • Ten commandments. • Justice towards others; social justice. • Responsibility and accountability for one's commissions and omissions (free

- Conspicuous wealth is considered as obscene.
- Religious practices form an integral part of the warp and woof of life.
- People in India are 'naturally' religious.
- will).
- The way to God is through what one does for one's neighbour.
- Forgive us as we forgive others.
- Western man has become secular. He has lost sense of the sacredness of creation.

4. WORLD VIEW

- The Universe is God. Man's separate identity is an illusion.
- Life is cyclical.
- Liberation from the cycles of rebirth proceeds till one merges into God (Nirvana).
- The excesses of nature: heat, drought, famine or floods, diseases have to be tolerated, since man also enjoys the kindness of nature. You can do little about a catastrophe.
- The Universe is created by God, including human beings.
- Original sin by man was a disobedience towards God and has upset man's relations with man and with creation.
- Man is a wounded creature, threatened by selfishness, greed, hatred, violence.
- Man is redeemed by Christ. The Blessed Trinity lives mysteriously in the believer.
- Life is lived only once, and is followed by God's reward as per man's actions.
- If a disaster strikes, help one another to collect the pieces and build up again.

WATERSHED MANAGEMENT

CHRISTIAN SOCIAL DOCTRINE AND SITUATION IN PRESENT WESTERN WORLD

5. VIEW OF THE OTHER

- Every person lives out his Karma according to his position in life. He is alone in this task.
- The social order as laid down by the Rules of Manu has to be observed. Society is ordered in a hierarchical manner. Not all human beings are the same, but arranged in castes as per their dharma.
- Purity remains an underlying concept.
- All human beings by their nature, and the fact of having been saved by Jesus Christ, are equal, also men and women.
- Their basic rights have to be respected.
- Christ is present in the poorest, and we are called to serve them in our fellow human beings.
- Life will be judged according to the way we have behaved to our neighbours who are in need.
- Manual work has dignity.

6. FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

- In tribal societies man belongs to a village which was inhabited by his forefathers, and where their remains are buried. Honoring of ancestors is a part of religious practices.
- Man's primary obligations are towards his extended family, village, caste.
- The interests of the individual are subordinated to those of his family. Do not give priority to rights, but to
- God creates human beings as sexual and blesses their union, in which they become one, and generate children.
- All men and women are created equal.
- Parents are expected to educate and care for their children, and the latter are expected to care for their parents in old age.
- Since the Industrial Revolution, the joint

<p>obligation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The eldest male in a family leads the family, and his advice is sought for any major decisions, including the choice of marriage partners. • Ideally two or three generations live under the same roof. • Attending ritual ceremonies of relatives of the extended family, such as birth, marriage, death are serious matters, and people indebt themselves for such rituals. • Women in rural areas continue to withdraw themselves from free contact with outsiders. However, they play a very important role inside the family, also a ritual role. • Contacts between men and women remain formal, and no signs of love or affection are tolerated in public. Family relations are still important and provide a cocoon of security in India. • Hospitality to the stranger is a sacred duty. 	<p>family does not exist anymore.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Men and women choose their marriage partners, but may consult their parents. • After a marriage, man and wife move into a home and live separately from parents and siblings. They bring up their children. • Most families cannot take care of their old parents. The latter live alone or in old-age homes. • At the age of 17 or 18, a person becomes an adult and takes his or her life fully in hand. • Modern living conditions often necessitate work by father and mother. • The family is under immense stress. More than 1/3 of all marriages end in divorce. • Family relations have suffered badly. Age gap between parents and children. • The modern man/woman is often very alone, isolated, lonely, but prizes his privacy.
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SUMMARY

1. The rural person in India and more so when he belongs to the indigenous or tribal population is somebody for whom the **community of fellow villagers** is very important. It is thanks to the mutual help that existed amongst them that they survived in the midst of great deprivations often for long periods. In spite of the individualism that has crept in a return to **community priorities and values** especially when survival is at stake, is relatively easy and natural.

In the West on the other hand, rationalism individualism, the priority of profit, the separation of religion from State, has made people strongly aware of their dignity and rights but Western persons suffer from a **lack of belonging**. Industrial man has lost the sense of the sacred. The Western person however is a doer somebody who accepts responsibility. Somebody who accepts science and uses technology to solve problems, including environmental ones.

2. The people in India strongly identify with nature of which they are an integral part. If you scratch a Westerner you find an anthropocentrist possessed of a domineering attitude towards nature which the global market does not lessen but rather strengthens further.
3. Where the Western world does better is through the effectiveness of what it

undertakes, including actions to restore nature. The average Indian, including the educated person, talks but lacks effective will to do what has to be done. In the same line, neighbourly concern is alive in the West though many persons have weakened their relations with their Christian roots.

Real concern for the neighbour in need irrespective of caste, language, extended family and an effective desire to cooperate for the **common good** do not come easily in India. **Cooperation itself** does not come naturally not even to educated persons.

Why has the country in fifty years not solved the problem of poverty of 30 to 40 percent of its population? The political will was not there, and is not yet there.

4. The **profit motive** is playing havoc in India with the community spirit which has existed till recently.

After centuries of deprivation persons who get a chance to make an extra rupee, even the man in the street, will not forgo the occasion.

The profit motive if not counteracted by the motivation work of voluntary agencies, plays havoc even of the community benefits that accrue to Watershed Management projects managed in the right spirit.

5. The convergence of the values of watershed management as witnessed in India, and the Western outlook on life, especially if it draws sustenance from its Christian roots, emerges from what has been described in the above pages.

VI. FOLLOW-UP, MAKING CONVERGENCE EFFECTIVE

1. Before summing up it is opportune to offer a word of **explanation** on how this paper **originated**.

I have lived in India as a Jesuit missionary of Belgian origin for the last fifty years. The combination of the old roots and long field experience in India have made it possible for me, a hybrid creature, to read the documents of the social doctrine of the Church against the background of this field experience.

I became acquainted with watershed management fifteen years ago in Orissa, and even more closely since the last 6 years at Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh, where I have been helping to build up **Xavier Institute of Development Action and Studies (XIDAS)** a centre training men and women to function as facilitators in the process of rural people becoming the effective managers of their own village resources.

In 1996 XIDAS took up the escorting of a milli-watershed in 12 villages of Dhimerkheda

Block 75 Km North of Jabalpur. It enabled us at XIDAS to see the functioning of a watershed through the eyes of the villagers.

The paper is not of a Scientific nature. It is based not on what others have written but on the life experience of a team of young Jesuits of Madhya Pradesh, belonging to a tribal community found in this State, and myself.

2. Significance

In the presence of the Global Market the work experience of grass roots people with watershed management, is a flea-bite to an elephant. It does not even register in the consciousness of the elephant.

But it has the potential of being repeated many times in India and in other Asian countries, wherever watershed projects are executed and enjoy the benefit of being escorted by a committed Voluntary Organisation.

The **Significance** lies in :

- The fact that it exist at all, not as the mental construct of a learned person, but a verifiable **social fact**.
- That it can be noticed and will hopefully become the subject of systematic **attention** of many who till now may have been culture-bound when discoursing about the nature of work.
- The fact that it is a **daily experience** of millions of people in a poor country of South Asia, who are reduced to the level of working for subsistence.
- That it contains a seed of an **alternative philosophy of work** which deals with the problem of survival of people living in natural environments with few **resources**.
- The fact that this seed also contains a **counter culture** to the view of work held by the Global market and by much of Western thought. Western thought has been conditioned much by **industrial work** and the factory system.

The experience of organizing for survival rather than for profit maximization, may look quaint especially if it is based on what the indigenous population of India has to teach us.

As a matter of fact it is a very modern approach and the only way to survive in the future.

If one reflects about it, there are many similarities between how people in watersheds organize their work for survival and a team of **astronauts** in a **space vehicle** circling the earth or on a course to Mars.

- The same awareness of boundaries.

- The same consciousness that the survival of the group, **precedes** any claims an individual may make for his rights.
- A similar concern for the **common resources** within the small space, resources which need to be **recycled**.
- Reliance on **total group consensus** on decisions, though a captain may have the power to command.
- The risk of failure that haunts the venture.
- Highly restrained space, where privacy is not possible.

If one reads management magazines published in the West, one gets the impression that most of what could be learned and taught about the present industrial or business milieu of the market economy has been learned. It can be presented under different words and images but it remains basically the same. It is déjà vu. Why this is so is easy to understand, it comes out of the same system.

The watershed management system is an **altogether different system**. Its roots, values, outlook on life are different. But this is precisely why it may offer points from which **new insights, theories, methods** can be learned.

When the Global market will have exhausted to that extent the resources of nature in the world that the non-utility of the **profit motive** is becoming obvious everybody will speak of **organizing work for survival**. Then, what the marginalized indigenous people have done for ages, and in what they have been experts, living for survival will become the new in-thing.

We will at that moment hopefully be humble enough to learn from them.

3. The **major lessons that can be learned from watershed management** can be summarized as follows :

- a. **Nature** itself **forces human beings** to adjust themselves to the parameters set by it, and to become ethical, if they want to survive.

This is a lesson God taught long ago to Moses when he gave him the ten commandments. Since then this learning has been handed down by teachers, gurus and by the teachings of the church. It was mainly done through the argument of authority.

Now the almighty does it once again but through nature.

The outcome is that the awareness comes from **within**, from **below**, from those who live **closest to nature**.

It is an event from which the Church should in turn be keen to learn.

- b. Fresh Water is becoming one of the critical **resources** in the World. Scientists and Administrators are becoming aware that potable water is a resource whose limitations have been calculated.

Adapting a saying of M.K. Gandhi “There is enough for each one’s needs, but not for his greed”. The wasteful ways in which water has been used in agriculture, watering of garden (lawns) swimming pools for the well-heeled have to be restrained.

Water has to be accounted for.

Another major lesson which is about to be learned is that all potable water is originally water that falls out of the sky as **rain water**.

The wisdom of gathering such water in very large reservoirs, or letting it flow into major rivers is now questioned. It poses major problems of displacement of indigenous populations who inhabit areas where dams are to be built.

The sharing of waters of major rivers has become an subject of contention between States through which the rivers run. The solution lies in **harvesting rain water** as near as possible to the place where it falls out the sky rather than allow it to flow away.

This is done in mini watersheds at the place where small rivulets form and carry water to larger and larger watercourses. Rain water that is harvested penetrates the subsoil and recharges the aquifers. This water is gradually released. The higher reaches of watersheds and river basins are the natural water towers of an area, especially if vigorous forestation or reforestation is carried out and forests are protected.

Baba Amte, well known leader of Maharashtra who devoted his life to leprosy patients, lived for several years on the banks of the Narmada, at Barwani, near the M.P.-Gujarat border. The area would be flooded by the construction of the Sardar Sarowar Project.

Baba told me that if the whole Narmada basin would be treated with watersheds, water harvesting and small check dams, no large dams would be required. The flow of water throughout the year would be sufficient to supply enough water to the whole of its command area.

The implication of this position is that the future management of water resources will increasingly depend on the skills, the systems of conservation followed by the

inhabitants of mini, milli and macro watersheds.

Water is power, and this power will go more and more into the hands of the millions of people inhabiting the upper reaches of river basins.

The future role of the small people, till now marginalized and treated as nobodies, will become important and people will have to learn. The right skills and systems of fair distribution will have to be worked out.

Water will become more important than land.

- c. Watershed management projects carry a great potential for teaching people who habit the watersheds, lessons of solidarity, sharing, caring for all inhabitants.

If the Profit motive which has penetrated the rural areas, is however allowed to pervade the management structures of watersheds, the rural elite will divert all resources, for their own advantage and the potential for a new approach to work, will remain a dream. Many watershed projects in India who did not enjoy escorting by upright, motivated, and capable voluntary organizations, have already experienced this tragedy of missed opportunities.

4. A Final Appeal

It is my hope that this Conference on Work as Key to the Social Question, will be an occasion for the Church to assume new moral leadership in questions of environment which exercise the peoples of South Asia. There are large problems but also immense opportunities to motivate people towards mutual concern.

Nature itself urges us in this direction.

If the Church can learn from what is happening in South Asia, and if she speaks up clearly, and with conviction she will meet the enthusiastic response of the people of Asia.

It is for experts in the Social Doctrine of the Church, to take up the challenge and to help the Church authorities to prepare an Encyclical On Environmental Challenges and Opportunities.

Such an encyclical offers an opportunity to dialogue with the major religions of Asia, especially Hinduism and Buddhism, but also with some enlightened non-religious organizations in India, to cooperate in the drafting of such an Encyclical. The time is now.