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Genealogies as a method of social mapping in PRA

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• Introduction

Genealogies have long been an important instrument of 'social mapping' in the anthropologists's tool kit. Not only do genealogies provide a map of local communities in kinship terms, but anthropologists have used genealogies to explore patterns of inheritance, marriage alliance, social hierarchy and reciprocity, and in other ways to develop an understanding of local communities. Genealogies provide a means by which analysts and development workers can place individuals socially. Moreover, the genealogy involves a type of knowledge which is often central to the social reckoning of members of the community themselves.

The ODA/Kribhco Rainfed Farming Project has recently begun work in the Bhil tribal districts of Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Rajasthan, in India. As part of a series of introductory PRA exercises in selected villages in this area, we experimented with the use of genealogies and kinship mapping. There are several reasons why genealogies are a particularly useful tool for rural appraisal in this area. This note suggests some of the key uses of genealogies and makes brief comment on the method itself.

• The Kribhco project

The settlement pattern in the hill tribal area of the Kribhco project is highly dispersed and non-nucleated. The unit of territorial organisation is the village, but the village does

not have a distinct physical identity. Rather, each homestead is situated in its own cultivated fields. Villages are often composed of two or more hamlets (phaliyas) which are commonly the units within which the voluntary exchange of goods and labour takes place. A village is typically composed of a single lineage, and the hamlets are composed of units of this lineage. Indeed, the practice of village exogamy (marriage outside the village) expresses the tacit view of the village as a large unilineal (single line) descent group. This gives the village a strong corporate identity.

The village in which we conducted an introductory PRA, Chatra Kuta (Banswara Dt., Rajasthan) typifies this pattern of kinship and territorial organisation. With a group of 67 older men it was possible to compile a genealogy covering the entire village of 84 households. The exercise took about three hours. The villagers had already prepared a village map using coloured (rangoli) powders and had marked each house with a stone. Randomly selecting a household from this map as a starting point, we asked for the names of the man's father, fathers' father etc., going back as far as possible, and, as it happened to the founding members of the village. We then worked 'back' towards the present identifying, in turn, brothers and sons in each generation. In fact, we later discovered that it was much simpler to start with individuals who were participating in the exercise and use their immediate families as the point at which to start the genealogy exercise.

Figure 1. *Genealogy of the major lineage, descendants of the founder of Chatra Kuta village, Banswara District, Rajasthan, India. (The Editors regret the poor quality reproduction of this Figure, which has had to be very considerably reduced in size).*

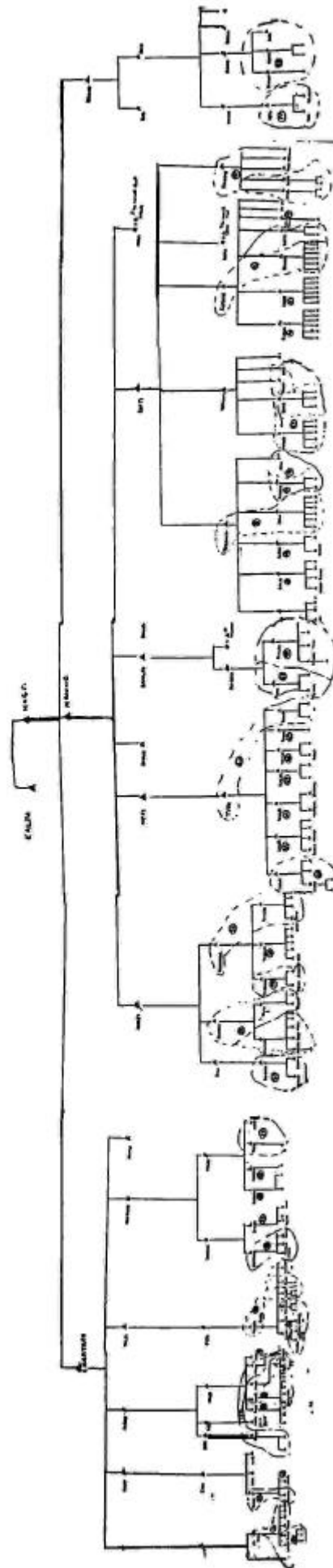


Figure 2. Genealogy of descendants of later settler in the village

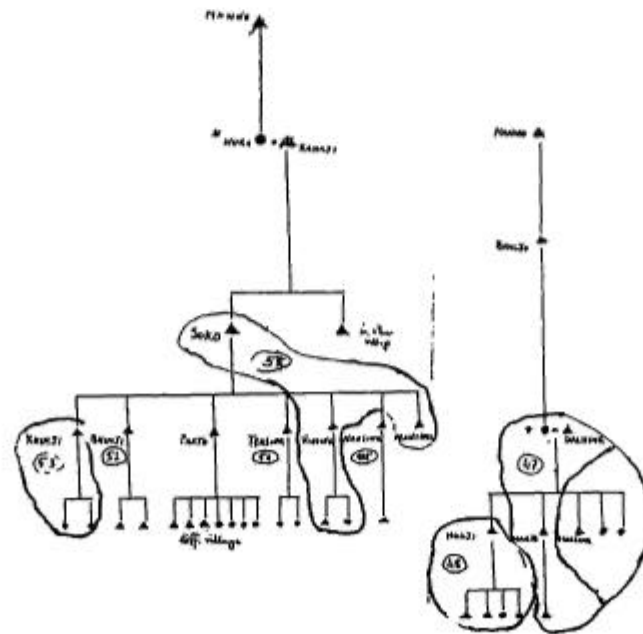
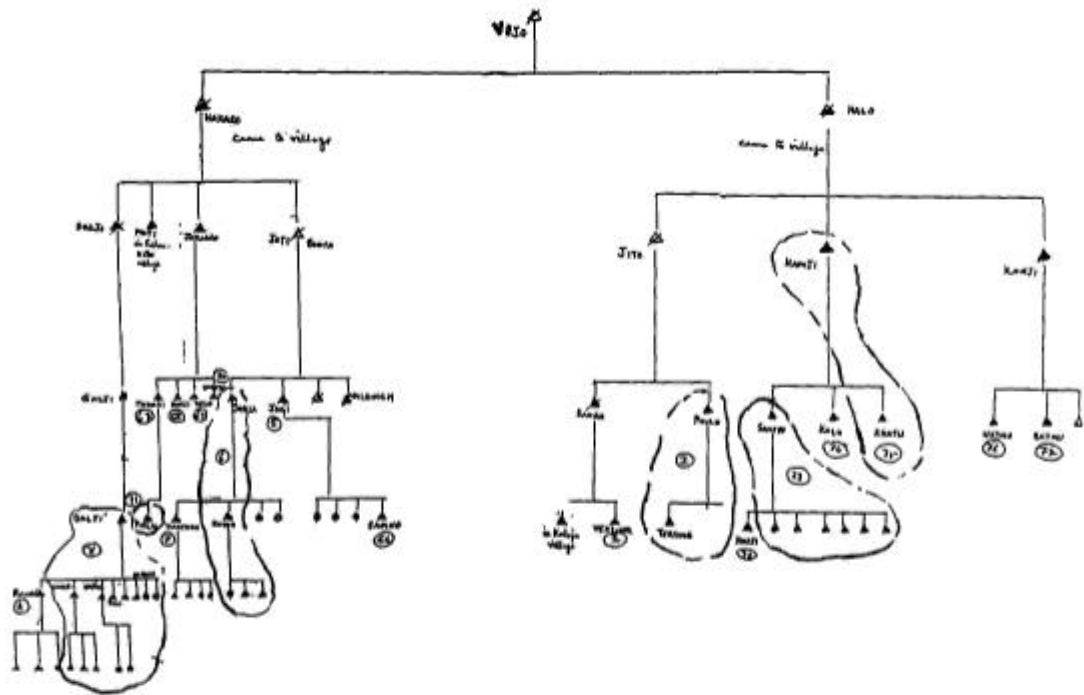


Figure 3. Families descended from women who remained in the village after marriage

As it turned out the village is composed almost entirely of two lineages. The principle lineage (Figure 1) starts with the original settler of the village, a man called Nagji four/five generations back. His elder brother Kalju founded a neighbouring village. Nagji had three sons, and as the charts show, the number of descendants from each of these is very different. The second lineage (Figure 2) has a depth of three/four generations. Members of this kin group, who are unrelated to the principle lineage, immigrated into the village more recently.

After completing the genealogy for the main lineages in outline, individual households were circled and given a number, to correspond with a number on the village map. Members of the same household were circled on the genealogy (see Figures). This circling also distinguished those who shared the same house but formed a separate family unit in the sense of having a separate chula, or cooking stove. In this way the physical and kinship maps could be related to each other. Among other things, this immediately revealed the extent to which, in this particular village, neighbourhood groups were in fact composed of a single lineage.

Having completed the genealogy of the principle patrilineages, we asked about other families, in particular those houses on the map which had not yet been identified as belonging to either of the main lineages. Only at this point, interestingly, were families which did not fall clearly within the main patrilineages mentioned. These included: families descending from uxorilocal households, that is from the sisters of men of the patrilineage who had remained in the village and married men from other clans/villagers who had been given land and had settled in the village (Figure 3); families of recent settlers in the village who have been given land by members of the main lineage; and the family of the Dholis (traditionally an inferior basket making and musician Bhil clan).

- **Observations on the process**

Villagers - in this case men - appeared to have a clear model of the village in kinship terms. Information on the name and relationships of individuals from 4-5 generations ago was

provided without either hesitation or disagreement from among those participating in the exercise.

Obviously, individuals have greater knowledge of their own immediate families, but what was remarkable was the amount and precision of information which the men had of all parts of the village/lineage. The exceptions to this are themselves striking. The only genealogy in which there were significant gaps was the one of the smaller 'immigrant' lineage who were not represented in the interview group. A young man from this lineage very quickly corrected errors and omissions subsequently.

As with village mapping, the way in which the exercise takes place, the omissions and afterthoughts, and the different perspectives of those from different social positions, provide important social information.

The first genealogy which was drawn was confined to the patriline. In a patrilineal and patrilocal community - that is a community in which property inheritance and residence are both determined by the male line - the collective memory tends to focus on fathers and brothers and to exclude mothers (who come from other villages and clans) and sisters (who leave the village and marry elsewhere). Nonetheless, it is quite possible to elaborate the basic descent lines in recent generations by including women. If, for example, one were to include the clan and natal village of women settling in the village on marriage, and the village/clan into which women from the village marry, a rich body of information on women's social networks and inter-village linkage could be developed. This is particularly useful where, as in this tribal area in India, marriage circles are (still) physically fairly limited (i.e. within a 15 mile radius).

Although we have not yet attempted to develop genealogies with groups of women, we suspect that the genealogical charts represent knowledge of formal patrilineal social relations - a type of knowledge which characteristically has a different meaning for men than for women. For women this is knowledge which they would acquire first in their natal home and then in their married home. The extent and significance of

knowledge of natal patrilineages will vary depending upon a variety of factors such as age of marriage, the physical and social distance of their natal home, the number of women in the village from their natal clans, and other links with their natal home. These kinship ties may mean that the social networks of women in a village may well differ from that implied by patrilineal genealogies. Thus, women from the same natal village, or having close relations through their mothers, may have closer ties than the patrilineal links would imply. Similarly, men who are sons of women from the same natal clan may have closer ties than the focus on patrilineages suggests. Needless to say, all this has relevance for programmes, such as the ODA/Kribhco Rainfed Farming Project, which involve the promotion of informal local institutions, groups of women and men, for natural resource development and management.

As the charts show, the 'kinship mapping' exercise carried out in the village of Chatra Kuta, followed established genealogical conventions. Moreover, it was the outsiders, rather than the villagers themselves, who drew the charts. None of this need necessarily be the case. Although the time required would be longer, there is no reason why villagers could not be encouraged to develop their own conventions in representing kinship relationships, and to draw these themselves.

• **Uses of genealogies**

The potential applications of information contained within a genealogical chart in practical development are many:

- Genealogies provide an accurate record of social identities in a community. Relational (rather than statistical) information is particularly important for social analysis, and it helps overcome the statistical fiction that communities are composed of assemblies of independent households.
- In conjunction with the village map, the location and kinship relationship of all members of the village could be established.
- Genealogies provide field workers with knowledge which helps them situate individuals and draw social connections in a way which parallels that used by villagers themselves. It facilitates the identification of village sub-groups and alliances and the interpretation of conflicts.
- Genealogies provide a means to overcome the inherent bias (in existing forms of social mapping) towards spatial models and metaphors of social links (maps, linkage diagrams).
- The genealogy provides information on the major kin groups in a community and on minority or subordinate groups (e.g. affinal or immigrant lineages). The genealogy, thus provides a reference point for discussion of a range of issues (some otherwise sensitive) concerning the composition and social organisation of the community.
- The genealogy clearly indicates the composition of each household. This provides a rapid picture of, for example, family sizes, single vs. joint residence and shared 'hearths'.
- Genealogies provide a clear record of the history of individual families, the pattern of family expansion and separation and the nature of present day inter-generational links (e.g. which households have elderly dependents).
- The genealogy can and has been used to cross check social information obtained in other ways, e.g. information on the village map, from a village census. In the present case, several gaps were identified and corrected.
- Used in conjunction with other sources of information (participatory mapping, wealth ranking, cadastral maps etc.) genealogies can provide a key to understanding and analysing patterns of landholding, inheritance and fragmentation. Using the genealogy in Chatra Kuta, for example, it becomes clear that up until a certain point land rights must have been linked to cultivation; larger families cultivated more land and acquired more wealth. However, in recent times following registration, land is held by title and divided equally between

brothers - with the ultimate consequence of fragmentation.

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- A genealogy provides a grid on which a variety of things can be 'mapped'.
 - The nature of participation in project activities can be 'mapped' in kinship terms. It was only after we had completed the genealogy, for example, that it was clear that those who were most actively participating in the PRA exercises were from key families of the principle lineage, and more particularly that the minor lineage (and therefore their views) was poorly represented.
 - It is possible to identify the kinship identity of all of the key village figures and holders of formal and informal offices. Once the project had established a procedure for recording the name of all participants in project meetings and activities, the genealogy provides a useful tool in the interpretation of this information.
 - Equally the pattern of other social activities can be recorded, e.g. involvement in seasonal migration; the flow of information and innovation.

• Conclusions

There is absolutely nothing new about genealogies as a method of social research. Indeed, as with much in the PRA tool kit, this is a tool which has been around for a long time, but which is now being introduced for application in different contexts and by different types of professionals. In the ODA/Kribhco Rainfed Farming Project, village-based community organisers are being trained in the preparation of genealogies as an aid to developing an understanding of the structure of local communities, and to help in monitoring the nature of participation in project activities and their social impact. There is no reason why other applications could not be found in a wide range of other development contexts.

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