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Social maps and geographical transects: some recent experiences in Orissa, India

Prahlad Mishra and Gayatree Mohanty

• Introduction

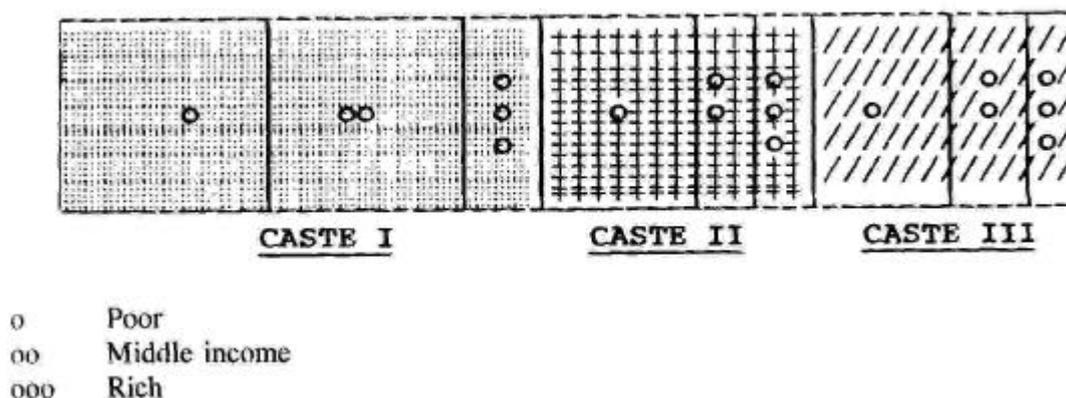
Since PRA is a flexible approach, innovations often evolve during the process. Recently much thought has gone towards finding ways of making the methods even more participatory and innovative. During fieldwork which we conducted in Orissa in 1992, some innovative approaches to social mapping and geographical transects emerged.

• Social mapping

In our experience, maps showing social characteristics of villages such as caste and

income levels, are useful and straightforward to make when a village is small. However in recent use of PRA in a larger village (more than 500 households) a social map such as this was highly complex and impossible to transfer onto one sheet of paper. After long discussions with the villagers a modified approach was decided on. First, reference points such as roads and wells were drawn on the ground. The villagers then divided the settlement into clusters of households. We held group discussions on caste and income in each cluster. Then caste and income groups were mapped (using coloured chalk) for each cluster with the help of the villagers (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Social map of village cluster showing caste and income groups*

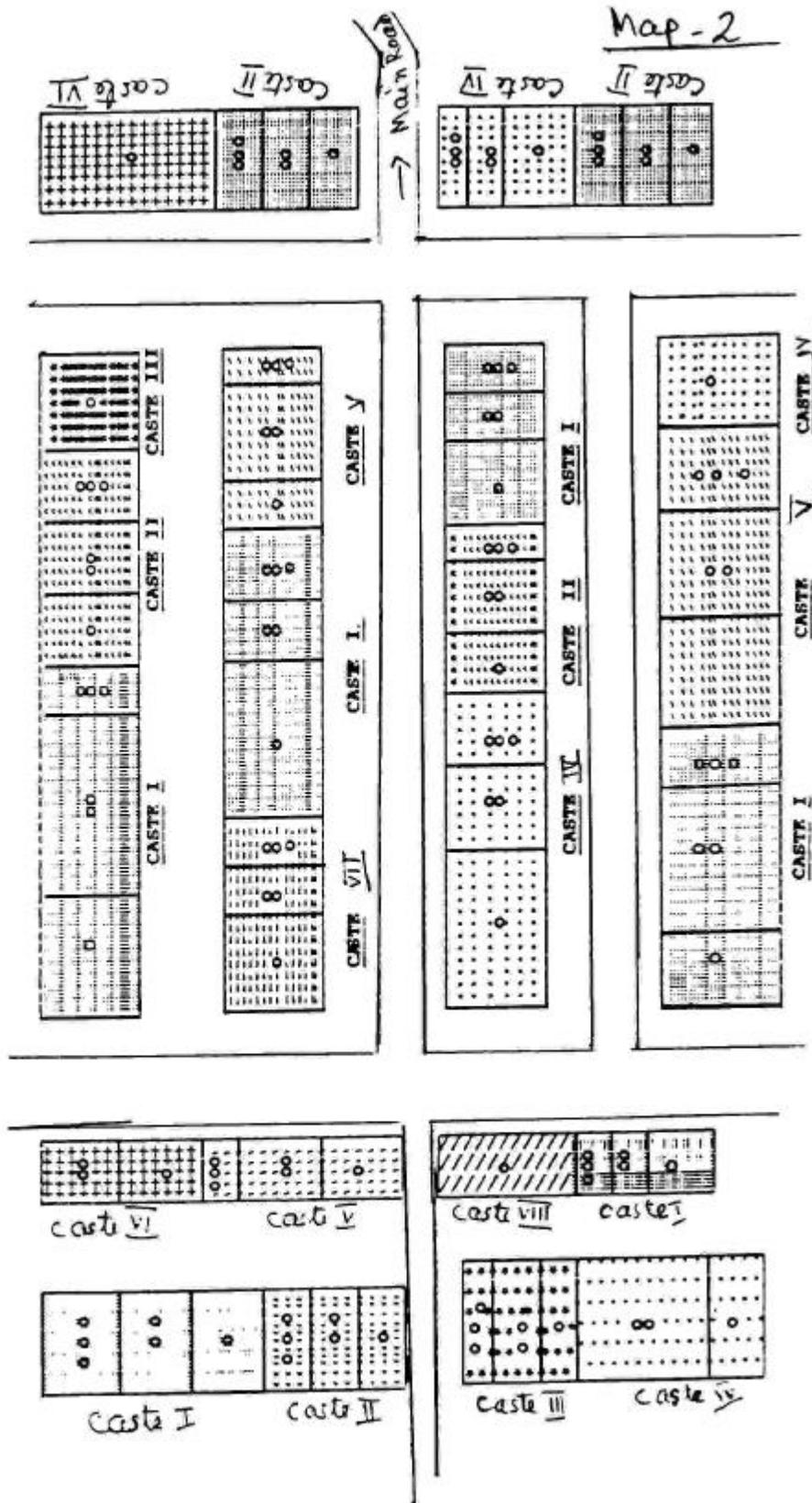


*The area of each rectangle represents the proportion of households included in each category. Thus in this example, caste I contains the largest number of households, but within this caste, the wealthy make up the smallest number.

A map like this was prepared in each cluster, and finally the whole village map was completed by putting the cluster maps in their

respective places on the overall map. This map was again discussed with the villagers to validate what they saw (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Caste and Resource-Specific Social Map of a Village of More Than 1000 Households



- **Geographical transects: a reconsideration**

Geographical transects can give an idea of the whereabouts of soil types, crops, and other natural resources and can reveal problems and prospects in the village. PRA practitioners use three types of transect: a cross transect (east-west or north-south), a *nala* transect (following the course of a stream) or a loop transect. But here is a danger that these transects could be used to provide the basis for a total inventory of the natural resources of the village. Our concern is that these types of transect alone could overlook areas of land that may be highly significant.

We would suggest that a natural resource map of the village and surrounding area should be drawn first, after which the facilitator could accompany villagers to the different land types (*nalas*, ponds etc.) identified on the map. This could be referred to as an "investigative transect" since it does not conform to any of the more familiar transect types.

- **Conclusion**

There are always opportunities to improvise while carrying out PRA. This is clearly an advantage of the PRA approach over the more traditional approaches. However, one should not lose sight of the purpose in the process of innovation. The methods should always address the purpose for which the exercise is being conducted.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prahlad Mishra and Gayatree Mohanty,
Xavier Institute of Management,
Bhubaneswar-751013, India. |
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