



AWARENESS ACTIVITIES WITH PARTICIPATORY APPROACH CHANGE THE MIND SET OF PEOPLE OF DONGARWADI VILLAGE, MAHARASHTRA-SPARED BULLOCKS FROM HARDSHIP OF TRAVELLING LONG DISTANCES FOR WORSHIP - A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

Chinchali, a village of district Belgaum, Karnataka located on the Karnataka and Maharashtra state boundary of India, is a place where people travel by bullock carts for hundreds of kilometers across Maharashtra and gather annually for worshipping Goddess Mayakka. A village named Dongarwadi, district Sangli, Maharashtra state, which is about 75 km far away from Chinchali and bullock owners from this village visit to Chinchali for annual function by bullock carts and such distance is covered only in one and half days' time for onward journey and same distance is covered by them in less than one & half days' time while returning back. Travelling long distance by bullock carts is tough for the bullocks as they suffer in various ways viz. lameness (limping due to continuous walking/running on hard surface i.e. on metallic roads), dehydration (deficit of water in body, due to non-availability & accessibility of water to animals), wounds

(injuries to animals due to being beaten by whip, continuous yanking of nose rope, inappropriate harness, use of torture devices), diarrhea (loose motion due to change in feed & water and travelling stress), accidents etc. To stop use of bullocks for travelling long distances, there was a need of people involvement to create awareness and sensitize them. Various participatory activities helped in changing behavior and attitude of bullock owners of Dongarwadi village and they realized that bullock suffers a lot when they are made to travel for long distances on metallic roads and hence they stopped use of bullock for this purpose and also stopped other practices in which bullocks suffer unnecessarily.

Key words: participatory activities, bullocks, long distance travelling, metallic roads, torture devices, behaviour.

Introduction

Chinchali is a village in the Raibag taluka of Belgaum district of Karnataka, a southern state of India. Chinchali village has a temple of goddess Mayakka Devi which is famous amongst the people of north Karnataka and Sangli, Solapur, Kolhapur & Satara districts of Maharashtra. There is an annual function (locally called as Yatra) of temple which falls during month of February/ March every year and thousands of devotees travel to Chinchali to render religious reverence to the goddess. Many families travel by bullock carts (two bullocks hitched with one cart), bullock-horse/ pony cart (bullock & horse/ pony hitched together with one cart) and horse/ pony carts (2 horses/ ponies hitched with one cart). Distance covered by these animals to reach temple and get back to their home ranges between 100 to 350 kilometers in 4-5 days (to & fro journey). This annual festival is a terrible time for bullocks and horses as they have to travel long distance in short duration with little rest. During travel most of the animals suffer from lameness (limping due to continuously walking on metallic roads), dehydration (loss of water from the body due to non-availability & accessibility of water to animals on time), wounds (injuries caused to animals due to getting hit by whip, continuous yanking of nose ropes, inappropriate harness), diarrhea (caused due to change in food & water and travelling stress), accidents etc. Travelling such a long distance by animal carts is due to myth among the people, that, their wishes will be fulfilled when they travel to temple by animal driven carts only. Awareness activities with participatory approach changed the mindset of the people from Dongarwadi village of Maharashtra, India, permanently regarding their myths of attending annual function of Mayakka Devi at Chinchali by travelling on animal driven carts. This change in mindset of the people of Dongarwadi village happened in the span of three years (2014-2016) time and new practice *i.e.* use of

mechanised mode of transport to travel to annual function of Chinchali instead of animal driven cart is being continued thereafter until now.

The aim of drafting this article is to narrate, how awareness activities with participatory approach is effective in bringing permanent change in mindset of people for saving animal from hardship of travelling long distances in the name of tradition and myth.

Background

A village named Dongarwadi, Taluka Miraj, District Sangli, Maharashtra, India with 23 bullock owners having 46 bullocks and all of them have been attending annual function (Yatra) of Chinchali fair every year by travelling on bullock carts. The distance from Dongarwadi village to Chinchali is about 75 kilometers (one way) and this long distance is covered by travelling on bullock carts only in one and half days' time which is too long distance for bullocks who are not habitual of travelling so long distances and are also made to run. They provide rest to bullocks once during entire journey and they beat bullocks continuously by using whip to make them run faster and also use torture devices such as sharp nails studded spikes, spiral barbed wires on the sides of the bullocks to prevent them from moving away on the sides. Animal Rahat, an animal welfare organization which works in area of Sangli, Solapur, Satara and Kolhapur districts of Maharashtra for providing free quality treatment services to working animals and other needy animals at owner's door step as well as animal fairs and such type of annual festivals and create awareness amongst people for adopting welfare friendly management practices for their animals. We started our intervention in Dongarwadi village, as part of Chinchali fair in the year 2014 to create awareness amongst the bullock owners to adopt mechanized mode of transport for covering such long distance instead of bullock driven carts to render religious reverence to the Goddess Mayakka at Chinchali village and spare bullocks from such hardship.

Process

Entry Point activity

In March 2014, Animal Rahat facilitators (AR facilitators or facilitators) visited village Dongarwadi and with the help of a key person named Mr. Popat (this person was identified during previous year's annual function of Goddess Mayakka at one of the rest and treatment camps of Animal Rahat for the animals), met with other bullock owners of

village and introduced themselves as AR facilitators and explained how Animal Rahat works and what is the objective of organization and why it is? During this first visit AR facilitators met with village Sarpanch (public leader) and explained him organization's objectives and why Animal Rahat wants that people should not use bullock driven carts for travelling such long distances in this modern era on the name of myth, tradition and these innocent animals must be saved from such arduous journey. As a result of this discussion Sarpanch of the village assured AR facilitators for convening a common formal meeting in presence of all the bullock owners of this village where the AR facilitators could discuss on this issue in his presence by next week. Animal Rahat also assured the Sarpanch that in next meeting they will bring their veterinarian who may examine their village bullocks and suggest or make available necessary treatment for them.

Meeting, Planning and Execution

As per plan 14 bullock owners (all were not present), village Sarpanch and AR facilitators along with the veterinarian gathered at the decided venue of Dongarwadi village. It was a good indicator that even at initial stage, 14 bullock owners gathered for discussing on issue related to bullocks. First a formal introduction session was organized, each participant introduced themselves one by one. After introduction, most of bullock owners were interested to get their bullocks examined first from the Animal Rahat veterinarian, which was a good indicator that owner scared about their animal and were concerned more about their animal's health. So it was decided that this meeting will be continued on next day and today all the bullocks of all the animal owners will be examined. All of them assured AR facilitators to attend the meeting on next day and also assured to bring the remaining owners too for the meeting. Bullocks of all owners were examined by AR veterinarian and provided necessary treatment to the needy animals and suggested medicines as well. In this way AR facilitators gave priority to the bullock owners issue while discussing on other issue, which was the most important aspect to develop trust amongst AR facilitators and bullock owners.

On next day, as per decision of previous day, all of them gathered at the venue and discussion was initiated. After non-formal discussion for some time, AR facilitators tried to engage all the gathered people and made them all to focus on one point and asked a question "what do you expect from your owner if you were a bullock?" (Fig. 1) Initially this question was considered as a joke by the animal owners, but after

insisting by AR facilitators, they all begin to discuss and one by one, they started to say that if, I were a bullock then I want this or that from my owner. One of Animal Rahat team members and one bullock owner listed out all the desires (Table 1) mentioned by bullock owners which they wanted from their owners if, they were a bullock.

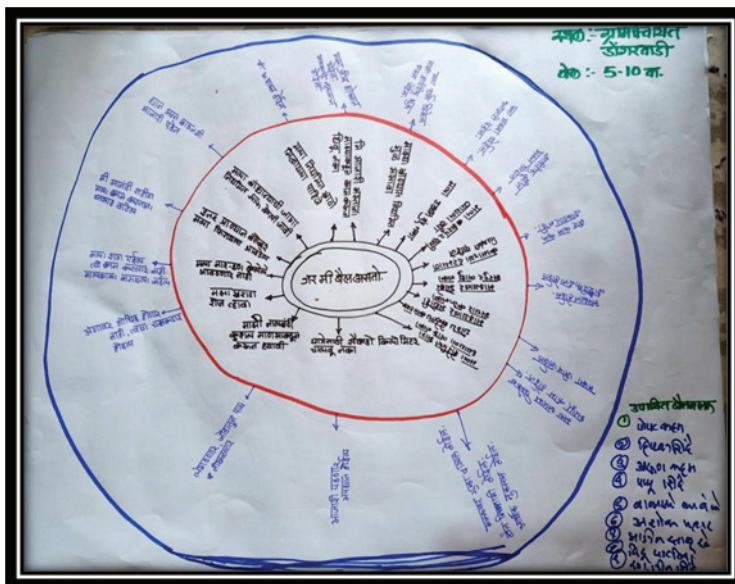


Fig. 1: Tool name “If I were a bullock” was used for discussion wherein Bullock is in center, inner circle about what bullock wants from his or their owner and outer circle represents what happen to bullocks if owner does not fulfil their desires

Immediately after making a long list of what were their expectations from their owners if they were the bullocks, another discussion started *i.e.* currently as an owner what they are providing to their bullocks. So there was huge gap identified in between their desire if they were a bullock (knowledge they possess) and current situation (practices which they are following for their bullock’s). At the end of this meeting it was decided by all the bullock owners that they will try to fill their bullock’s desires (as enlisted by them) and they all will meet after a month to evaluate themselves on these points.

After a month, they all gathered again and few of them tried genuinely to fulfill the desires of their animals which were enlisted during the last meeting. Then again AR facilitator asked a question to all that “*what type of works your bullock are doing?*” They started to mention; use of bullocks for sowing, cultivation, transporting of fodder for other animals,

Table 1: List of Desires revealed by bullock owners

<i>Sr.No</i>	<i>Desire mentioned by bullock owners "if I were a bullock"</i>
1.	I need grooming of my body on daily basis
2.	I need shoeing from skilled farrier and appropriate size of shoe
3.	I do not like to be beaten by someone
4.	I would love to mingle with other animals
5.	My dwelling place must be cleaned regularly
6.	I need a good, nutritious food on daily basis
7.	I need little amount of jaggery with food on daily basis
8.	I do not want my owner to take work from me when I am sick
9.	I do not want my owner to take work from me during midday under the scorching sun
10.	I need to drink water plenty of times during the day
11.	I need little rest during work
12.	Do not put over load on me and also do not take extra work from me
13.	Treat me as a living being
14.	Do not use me in the bullock cart race
15.	Do not make me to walk for long distances

travelling to Goddess Mayakka at Chinchali, Belgaum and other festival. Thereafter the facilitator asked them that how far is Chinchali village from your village, then one person immediately replied that one side it is 70 km. Then AR facilitators initiated the discussion on how the welfare of bullock is being compromised while traveling such long distances in short period of time, while you made a list of desires which bullock have from his owner during the last meeting. After this discussion all of them accepted and realized that travelling long distances by bullock is arduous for bullocks and they suffer a lot. But, they did not agree to change this practice of going to temple by bullock carts even in this modern era because; 1) this is an annual event and falls in month of February/ March every year and during this time the bullock owners are not having much engagement in agriculture, 2) as they have been going to temple using bullock driven carts since long time every year, 3) they believe in a myth that worship of goddess is accomplished when they travel on bullock driven cart and 4) they can leave this practice of travelling to temple with the bullock driven cart, but they do not have enough money to travel by bus or car or any other mode of mechanized transport. This meeting concluded here

with an assurance that they will all gather again for further discussion on this issue.

Continuous meeting at regular interval with the bullock owners of this village and after next two meetings, they understood that the bullock suffers a lot by travelling long distances and they should not use bullocks and instead they should use mechanized mode of transport for travelling to attend the annual function of Goddess Mayakka. But all bullock owners were not convinced to switch to alternate mechanized mode of transport because they were thinking that goddess will be unhappy and their worship won't be accomplished. Even those who were convinced for travelling by bus resting their bullocks at their homes had an issue of money to hire the bus, so Animal Rahat and Gram Panchayat supported such bullock owners. So in next season that is 2015, total 16 bullock owners used buses to travel to offer worship to the Goddess Mayakka at Chinchali. In this way 32 bullocks were spared from arduous long distance travelling on tar roads. AR facilitator got confidence and they continued their efforts to interact with the bullock owners who got convinced and who are still adamant to make changes in favour of animals. AR facilitator also used some other visuals (Fig. 2) to sensitize the bullock owners and also used a game – Snake & Ladder (Fig. 3 and Fig. 4). In next 2 years' time all the bullock owners of this particular village got convinced to travel to Chinchali by a mechanized mode of transport instead of bullock carts. In year 2017, all the bullock owners of this particular village travelled with their family by using mechanized mode of transport to Chinchali for annual worship of Goddess Mayakka and understood that these innocent bullocks suffer a lot while travelling long distances and now they are using the bullocks for their routine agriculture works.

Outputs

With continuous involvement of animal owners by using different awareness activities and continuous reinforcing by the AR facilitators resulted in all bullock owners completely switching to mechanized mode of transport instead of using bullock carts to travel long distances to Chinchali for attending annual function of Goddess Mayakka in 3 years' time. This practice is being continued until now and all bullock owners have assured the AR facilitators while drafting this article that they will not be using bullocks for such purpose again in future. Along with this, the bullock owners of this village have also left other practices too in which bullocks were made to suffer and these practices were attending other gods annual function, participating in illegal bullock



Fig. 4: Meeting with bullock owners on content of snake and ladder game

cart races, shearing of bullocks horns and painting them using harmful lead containing oil paints etc.

Discussion

- India is a country where majority of population resides in villages, with agriculture & its allied activities being the core of village life. Animals play an important role in all the activities in a village life and animal owners love their animals. But, knowingly or unknowingly (on the name of tradition or myth) they also adopt many practices which are neither animal welfare friendly nor legal and these include animal sacrifices, use of harmful chemical paints on animal's horn for decorating them during festivals, use of bullock driven carts for travelling long distances to attend annual functions for worshipping god/ goddess in the temples, participating in illegal bullock cart races etc.
- However, various acts and rules are in place to stop illegal practices viz. Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960 (6), Draught & Pack Animal Rules, 1965, (5) but people do dare to break these rules for various reasons. So there is a need to change the people's mind set in different ways *i.e.* making them aware by involving them and bring the permanent change in their minds and practices which is the key.

Lack of people's involvement has been studied as one of the major cause of the failure of most projects to be implemented effectively. People's participation can make the projects more effective by granting them a say in deciding the objectives and strategies, and by participating in implementation, thereby, ensuring effective utilization of resource (4). Clarity in objectives of specific participatory research projects mobilizes researchers and participants to solve the resulting dilemmas and contradictions (2). Stopping potentially harmful human behavior and practices before the damage is done can save money and time as well as the environment and simple remedial action can go a long way if initiated by people who are sometimes at the root of the problem. (1)

The proper facilitation plays an important role in mobilizing people which depends more on the behavior, attitudes and commitment of the facilitators who are technology intermediaries, and on who controls the process (3) which is also in agreement of this case study.

Conclusion

Awareness activities with participatory approach (involvement of people in process) motivate and sensitize people which help to bring permanent change in behavior of people and can lead to improved welfare of animals.

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