Understanding the Koodam

The Barefoot Academy of Governance

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The Koodam

An Engagement Model for Creating Conscious Community

The Koodam is a model for dialogue and decision-making in communities that has existed for millennia.

A circle of friends on the path of Dhamma- The Sangha

`Koodam' and the `podhu ill' –
Parallels in ancient Tamil Society and Culture

"The term *podhigai* itslef is a corruption of *podhu ill*, which means and signifies a village commons or a place where the community people assembled to meet and discuss matters of administrative importance and course of just action. during the time of neo-lithic period, such meeting places must have been a few, besides this *podhu ill* or common house. It would be correct to assume that the elite of the community including bards and men of letters assembled there to contribute their worth to the general deliberation. Like the cross roads which carry their importance in terms of

trade and exchange of goods, such of these common houses too served the useful purpose of public relations and community participation in a democratic manner.

"With the august presence of *Agathiyar* there engaging in daily deliberations with the local dignitaries and elite, learning their ways and in exchange, imparting his own wisdom concerning the Siddha tradition as obtained in the Himalayan school. *Podhigai* or *podhu ill* must have developed in course of time into a veritable academy or centre of learning. One can infer a similar development as regards the samgama of ancient times"

Ref.: Page 51-53, from Chapter 7 on Agathiyar : S.A. Sarma, *Tamil Siddhas, a Study from Historical, Socio-cultural and Religio-Philosophical Perspectives*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi, 2007.

"Indigenous institutions have been functional in the Indian society for long. Many of them have evolved over long periods and have been managed by native communities in India for centuries. Some of these thrive till date without compromising on their core principles.

Some of these institutions have responded to changing societal situations through its ventures and initiatives. These could range from enterprise, education, administration, irrigation, agriculture, trade, production, etc."

Management of Indigenous Institutions

Learning from Community Institutions in Tamilnadu

Report prepared by Samanvaya for COMPAS- 2004

Koodam and Sangha are spaces have energized communities and were the primary indigenous form of Governance till they were replaced by Colonial structures. In many places they are still operational, though their centrality is not recognized by the Governmental structures. This paper discusses how these cultural memories were reawakened and deployed in solving chronic problems of Governance.

(Refer Appendix 1 for more details)

The Problem Statement

In many communities, operating both the processes of Governance has been a way of preserving oneself and ones world-view. The consequence of having two processes for governance has been that a person who belongs to the polity has the dubious dilemma of being true to both or choosing one or the other based on ones convenience. The strength of the business communities of South India was decimated because of this *(conversations with Mr. M.V. Subbiah 1992-93)*. It also led to the elite of the pre colonial India to use the Colonial Law to acquire property, while abandoning their role in the nurturing of the community! Dharampal in the PPST Journal has described this:

The primary steps which the new political system initiated were (i) revenue enhancement and centralization, (ii) attempts at breaking the sense of community (geographical "or based on occupation or kinship) amongst the people of India and reducing them to an atomized individual condition, (iii) reducing their needs and consumption to the minimum, especially through higher taxation and lowering of wage rates, and (iv) an imposition of newer concepts of property, rights and laws, backed by suitably picked up precedents from certain periods of Indian history and scriptures, so that the impositions appeared less alien and seemingly derived from our people's own history and past social practice.

A NOTE ON THE DISRUPTION AND DISORGANISATION OF INDIAN SOCIETY IN THE LAST TWO CENTURIES

PPST Journal- VOL 3. NO 2, NOVEMBER 1983

Communities like the Nadars where this betrayal did not happen have devised creative ways of bridging the traditional modes with contemporary ways.

(http://integralleadershipreview.com/347-'amirtasya-putraha'-children-of-immortal-bliss-rejoice-being-'slumdog-millionaire'). In many communities this dichotomy between the two worlds leads to disastrous consequences and great stress.
(http://integralleadershipreview.com/339-exploring-what-is-indian-a-parable-and-a-discussion)

Panchayathi Raj is the official attempt to reconcile this tension, however the party politics that the new democratic ways deploy conflicts with the dharma of the older ways of conducting the Panchayats. This is not peculiar to India alone, but is a dilemma faced by the entire SAARC regions.

Dharampal's Heritage

The design of the Koodam is the explicit form given to Dharampal's fundamental premise. Firstly, Dharampal observed that the Bharathiya manas (as he liked to refer to the genius of the traditional Indian mind) was alive and well, albeit unrecognized by the Western Educated Indian. Secondly that in the early days of Panchayati Raj, the Panchyat officials often undertook two sets of tasks namely the "sarkari kam" or official work (jobs that were prescribed by the governmental authorities) and "apna kam" or our work (the ones they saw as part of the traditional dharma of the community head). Dharampal observed that wherever the official and largely colonial structures of command and control were removed, the local genius asserted itself and older institutional modes became resurgent and creative solutions to contemporary problems emerged. He was therefore a fervent proponent of the idea that creating ways by which the older institutions can have a healthy dialogue with the holders of newer knowledge could unleash powerful, meaningful and locally relevant solutions.

Part 1: The Two Models

The indigenous model and the colonial model differ fundamentally in their understanding of the nature of phenomena, the nature of man and the nature of reality however, the problematic of finding a viable solution confronts us as a grave and urgent need. (*the recent writings of Rajiv Malhotra throw an insightful light on these*

differences: *Being Different: An Indian Challenge to Western Universalism; 2011; Harper Collinns Publishers India in JV with India Today Group*).

The authors of this paper were faced with this dilemma when they were engaged in the designing of a change management programme for the TWAD Board (*http://integralleadershipreview.com/410-'koodam'-breaking-hierarchy-building-democracy*). The idea of the Koodam was germinated in the several conversations centered around this problematic. Suresh and Pradip deployed the Koodam model with resounding success. The gamble that we took in designing the Koodam was that the new and more 'Sarkaari' ways of running the Government departments has not fully uprooted the memory of the traditional Koodam. Once the Dharma of the Koodam is awakened, and along with it the dharma of oneself as a role holder in a community, a transformation in the operating dynamics would follow.

To understand this problematic, one has to look at a reality that is an unintended consequence of human evolution. A few centuries back, an individual was born in a locality, learns about his world and develops capabilities in the same locality and finally deploys his capabilities and pursues his vocation in the same locality. Therefore his structures of thought feeling and action have a coherence, convergence and correspondence. There are both positives and negatives of this primarily revolves around the deep coding and conditioning in one way of dealing with the world. The negative fall outs of this is an entrenchment of the negative consequences as much as there is a reinforcement of its positives.

Modernity also means that these three aspects of the self are shaped by very different 'localities'. One is born in a family with it's own tradition and heritage, one studies and learns about ones world and shapes ones thought in schools and colleges that have very little continuity with his familial heritage. One then goes to work, and if one is lucky discovers a vocation, in a very different location. Therefore the structures of thought feeling and action are not coherent (may be even be divergent) and therefore neither convergent nor correspondent. Articulated in a different way, the energy of belonging through birth, through ideology and through vocation are fragmented in the modern psyche. The processes and structures of governance are an outcome of this psyche. In colonized countries, the fragmentation is deeper and more angst ridden since the space of ideology and

vocation are designed from assumptions of self and the world at deep variance with the indigenous concepts.

The Koodam in its new form that we have experimented with to help a dialogue to happen between stakeholders who come from very different universes! Therefore the Koodam methodology first creates an realization among its members of the ground of interconnectedness that can not be denied. For example, to work with the future of fisher communities, the governmental agencies, the PRI's, the organizations in the fishing industry and the fishing communities are deeply interested in ensuring that the ocean has plenty of fish! It is amazing that these stakeholders rarely engage in a dialogue before policies plans and strategies are drawn up by each of the stakeholders. The intent of a Koodam that we design today takes the form, the processes and the intent of the traditional Koodam, but adds to it processes and pre-requisites that enables its stakeholders to heal the fragmentation of the three anchors of belonging and suspend it at least in the areas where their futures are deeply interdependent. Today, the fragmented logic of capitalist economics, modern technology and profit centric enterprise has pushed the earth to the 'limits of growth'. Governance mechanisms that are supposed to articulate the voice of the world external to these organizations namely the society at large and the environment, are often distorted by short term thinking (from one election to the next) compulsions of electioneering, and the power of self-interests. Globalization has exacerbated the problem, and relied solely on instrumental and capitalist modes of thinking to respond to the problem. It therefore celebrates self-interests at the cost of the commons that support and provide resources for the self-interested entities to exist!! Having created a way of life and life support system that are based on market dynamics and governments are caught in the horns of a dilemma, the world is damned if we persist with the present ways, the governments are damned if they do not continuously feed the aspirations of its citizens created and fostered by market dynamics. The discriminated, the denied, the deprived and the disenfranchised people and the resource rich commons pay the price of not resolving this dilemma. This dilemma is not a dharma-sankata since both sides of the present argument lack dharma. They are only the polarities within an instrumental and materialistic idea of man and the world.
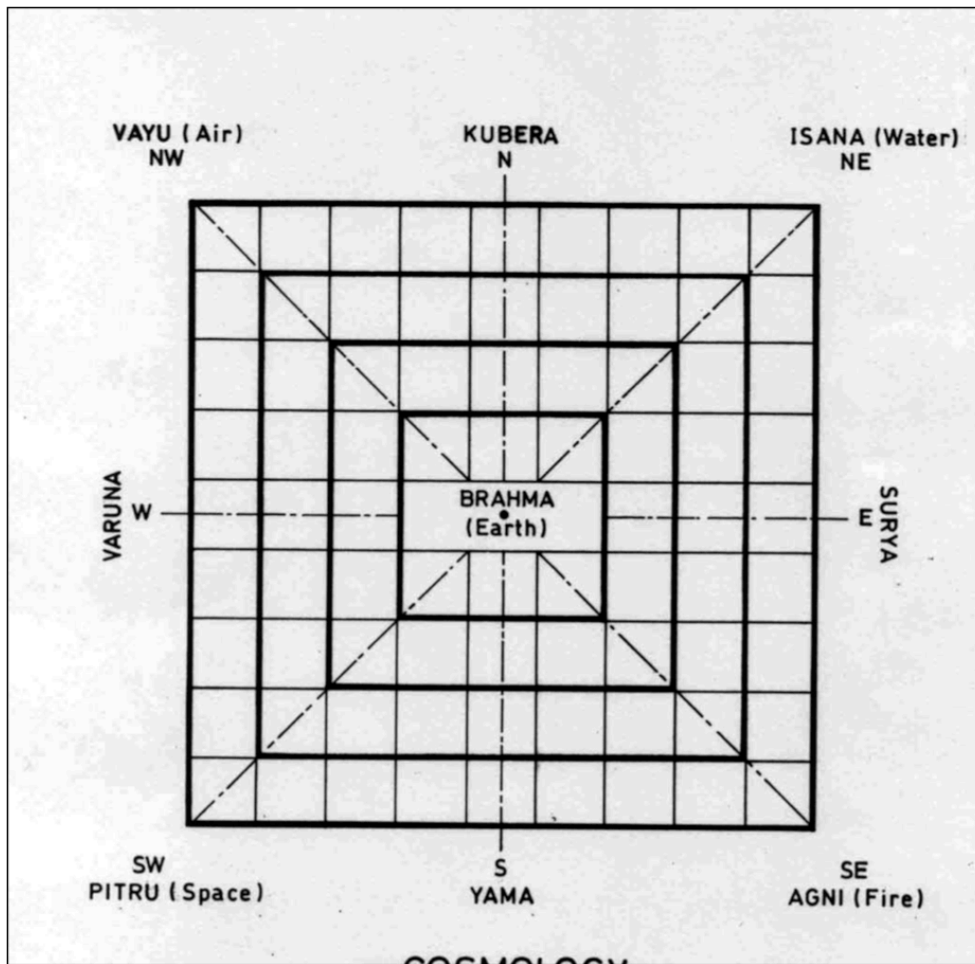
There is a dharma-sankata however, that has to be addressed. It should be obvious by now that the philosophy and the pragmatics of the capitalistic society with its dependence on market forces and the logic of continuous growth, unbridled competition and consumerism cannot create a sustainable future. 'India Shinning' has clearly embraced this way and its socio-technical mechanisms. The fact that we are living off the future generations has become clear beyond all doubts. On the other hand there is what we might call 'Bharathiya Vidya' that has time and again showed its capability to create an equitable and sustainable future *(examples The Timbuktu Collective founded by Ms. Mary Vattamattam, Mr. C.K.Ganguly http://www.timbaktu.org/)*. These examples are compelling but few, and the bulk of the population that holds the wisdom is fast loosing it. Gandhiji has articulated the philosophy and the pragmatics of this world. It calls for a level of voluntary simplicity and a unilateral commitment to the poor! Is it possible to turn the clock back? Is it possible for the aware person to continue to invest in India Shinning? Is it possible to embed the power of technology in the philosophy of Gandhiji? This is the dharma-sankata. We believe that the Koodam is a framework for dialogue and

collective consensus building that can be the crucible in which society shapes it's answers.

The rest of the paper explores the theoretical underpinnings of the Koodam.
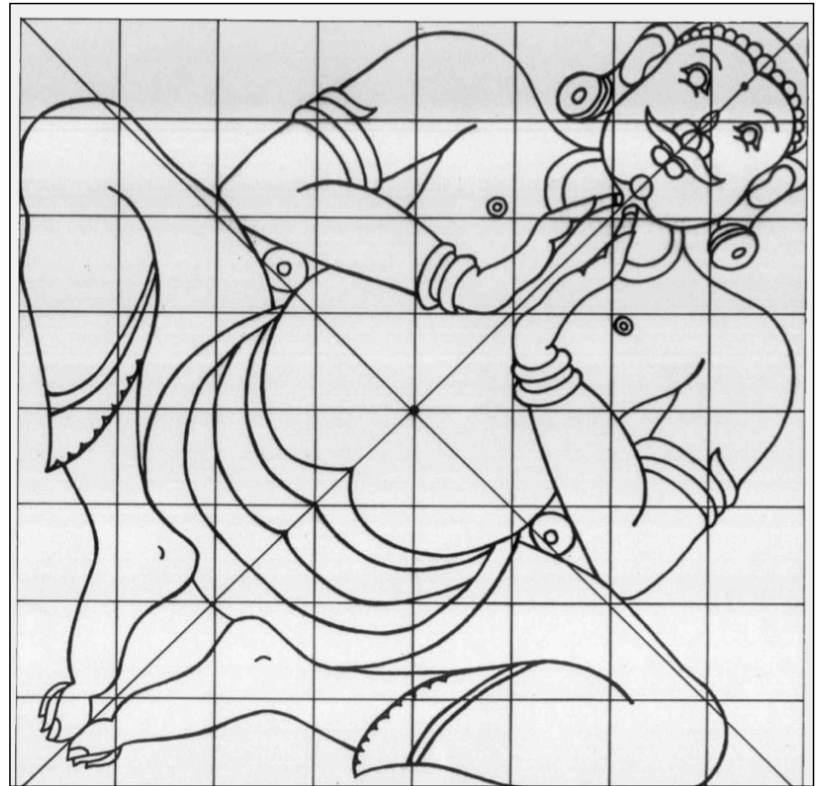
The key principles of the Vaastu-Shastras

The structure and the processes of the Koodam were refined in the idea of design enshrined in the Vaastu-Shastras. When we redefine the Koodam for a contemporary deployment it is important to understand the design intent and nuances.

There are two fundamental principles that seemed relevant to the design task. First, in the Vaastu System of design, any design is supposed to embody a harmony between three factors. These are *bhogadyam* or functionality, *sukhadarsham* or aesthetics, and *ramyam* or spiritual evocation. If we translate this to the issue of Governance, both the process and the outcomes of a governance process ought to be effective, efficient *and evocative*. This imperative makes the person and his voice central to the process and the outcome. There cannot be a fragmentation between

where and how and by whom the decisions are made and where, how and by whom they are to be enacted.

The second principle is the way space is divided. The innermost space is called the *Brahma Padam* this is the space that is dedicated to the ever present, nascent energy of life, a space beyond definition, and experience. This corresponds to the process called *Para* 'the beyond'. The space adjacent to this, the next outer space is called *Deva Padam* the space of subtle energies as the primal energy starts to manifest. This corresponds to the process called *Pashyanti* 'seeing'. One becomes aware at subtle levels where the seeds of possible emergent realities, and deep intent are born. The space around the *Deva Padam* is called the *Maanusha Padam* the space of action where matter and intent meet and tangible offerings are shaped. This corresponds to *Madhyama* 'the middle', the bridging process between the inner and the outer. The outermost space is called the *Paishachica Padam* this is space of transactions. This corresponds to *Vaikhari* 'flow and mixing'. This is where the inner and the outer meet, and in this meeting, both engage and influence each other.

When we applied these principles to designing the Koodam, we translated the four spaces as spaces where certain 'roles' can be played and specific types of dialogue could take place. These are not task roles, but are definitions of the level and nature of responsibility a community member was willing to take up. Equity is
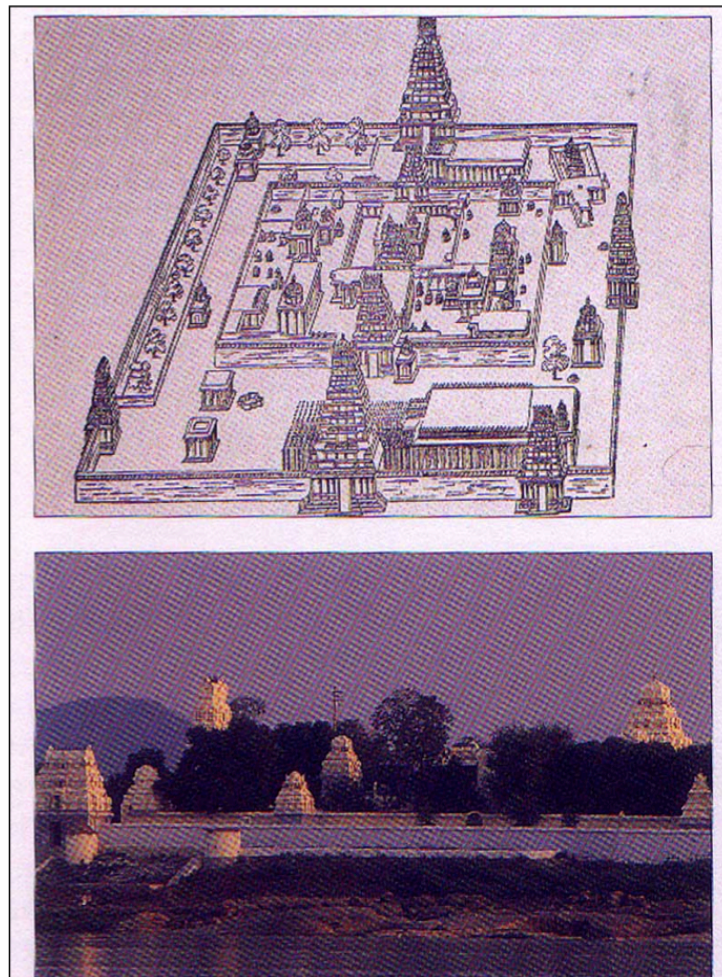
a basic value of the Koodam, therefore, every member voluntarily commits to the behaviors expected of him/her. However, for the functioning of the organizational roles are necessary. These are in existence, and through an engagement with the

processes of the Koodam, these would also be played out in a more dharmic way, and not in an 'officious' way. All traditional Indian homes have a space between the threshold of the home and the street where wayfarers can rest for a night, where conversations with neighbors and towns folk take place, where commercial transactions are carried out (called the *thinnai* in Tamil Nadu). A role holder who has to engage with the members of the community, or transact with them has an understanding of the traditional graces and nuances. The space created by bringing alive the Koodam behaviour is the first inside space, the *Maanusha Padam.* In this space the dialogues and discussions among the stakeholders takes place, however, they bring in the common and shared future as the focus of the discourse. A member, who feels ready for it, and called upon to take on greater responsibility and act on behalf of the Koodam, can play other roles such as the 'gardener' or the 'orchestrator'. These roles are very different from task-based roles that are the norm in an organizational setting. They are roles taken from a voluntary sensing of the necessity of playing these roles for the health of the Koodam. When a member plays these roles the deeper space namely, the *Deva Padam* gets enlivened. The individual then voluntarily commits to becoming more deeply aware of the subtler aspects of the Koodam's intent, it's energetic processes, it's human struggles and enables the embodiment of the energies and the intent of the Koodam into tangible actions and offerings. The central space is empty since the primordial energy is evoked here and is the ultimate source of life for the community. The community that comes together in a Koodam therefore acts from an inner dharma and seeks the presence of the divine to guide its thoughts. This space embodies the best, the most pure and integral processes of the community; it's highest aspiration as well as its highest humanness.

The design of a village embodies the process of Governance

The design of the village is based on the principles of the Vaastu Shastras, and therefore, the space for a Koodam is usually in front of the village deity. When the villagers gather in the Koodam, they drop all hierarchies and other differences.

They gather to ask the question 'what is in the greater good of the village?' 'what is the right thing to do for all, the pangali's (those who share in the profits and losses, the joys and sorrows of the group)?'. In some villages there are rules of engagement that ensure that every member has a voice. In others, the role taking discipline of the individual operates. Often, the Koodam will convene till a consensus is reached. The village elders pronounce the consensus, but are ordinary members of the Koodam until this point. To mark the end of the Koodam they play a ceremonial function. Since the decisions and commitments are made in a social setting and in public, there is strong social sanction attached to its adherence.

Some of the key ideas that comprise the design principles of the Vaastu Purusha Mandala:

Space is the foundation of form
Space is created when objects form relationships
The understanding of these relationships is the basis of design
Paishachika Padam
Manusha Padam
Deva Padam
Brahma Padam
Prakruti and Purusha are the two types of enegy
Prakruti is form movement and substance
Purusha is intelligence
All of existence is a form of Prakruti and Pursha
All effort is an interaction of energies
All energies are Devas

The Town is divided into the pada
Each part is planned for a profession and in keeping with both
internal and external relationships
The central square houses all shared services
The Brahma Pada is the space for the temple
The outer walls are decorated with fun objects; as one goes inward,
the symbols and architecture help a psychological journey
People drop their role differences and participate in story telling,
dance, drama before going home
All four quadrants are designed into the town

This design cannot be replicated today because the stakeholders of the collective are often geographically separated. The task of creating a contemporary Koodam there fore is 'how do we create the collective polity in the mind?' This is a large question since this polity is not bounded clearly in any way. It does not have the boundaries of contract like an organization, nor of location, nor of tasks, nor does it have the compulsions of contact! We create a virtual modern Koodam where it acts beyond the temporary forms and processes and adherence to its dharma is voluntary. Therefore to touch and articulate the existential and real consequences of the interdependence becomes vital. Often, the Koodam comes alive at the point when the real life and death consequences of the deep interdependence becomes obvious and is articulated in a way that every member acknowledges it. This coherence and convergence of the heart and mind is the ground of the energy that ensure that all the actions taken once the group disperses

are co-respond to one another (though they will be taking place in locations dispersed in time, space and organizational boundaries).

Part 2: Institutional Spaces

Some principles of design drawn from OD applications

In most organizations there is a compulsion that emphasises visible results and targets alone. The "Action Wheel" represents this whose prominent parts are Budgeting, Planning, Implementation, Review, etc. *(Conceptual map 1 below)* When organizations focus on "action" exclusively, there is a withholding of individual differences and an emphasis on co-ordination. In the TAO framework (*detailed out in the book The Totally Aligned Organization Author Raghu Ananthanarayanan: second edition published by Productivity and Quality Publishing Limited in 2008*), the deployment of individual energy and the various human interfaces are reviewed simultaneously with the "Action Wheel". The human aspect is represented by the "Insight Wheel" which focuses on processes, on valuing of differences, developing new meanings, and on deeper and wider understanding of human processes in organisations. These soft aspects are represented as Learning, Culture and Climate, Work Ecology, etc.

While organizations are focusing on the "Action Wheel" the "Insight Wheel" is rarely looked at with the same regularity or intensity. It is essential that both wheels be moved simultaneously to harness individual energy towards organisational objectives. If the Insight Wheel does not move or moves too slowly, the way the group interprets reality, feels communion and acts will lag behind the technology it deploys. Cultural negatives, such as fragmentation and divergent action will seriously impact the efficiency and effectiveness of the Action Wheel.

Institutions create the internal spirit that summons continuous evolution of thinking and learning within the organisation. They facilitate the continuous re-calibration that is required within and between individuals when any new learning takes place. They help to generate dialogue that brings into consciousness the various undercurrents of feelings, associations, emotions and sentiments. These dialogues must be made a part of the 'Insight Wheel" in order to understand the different human perspectives in the context of the new learning.
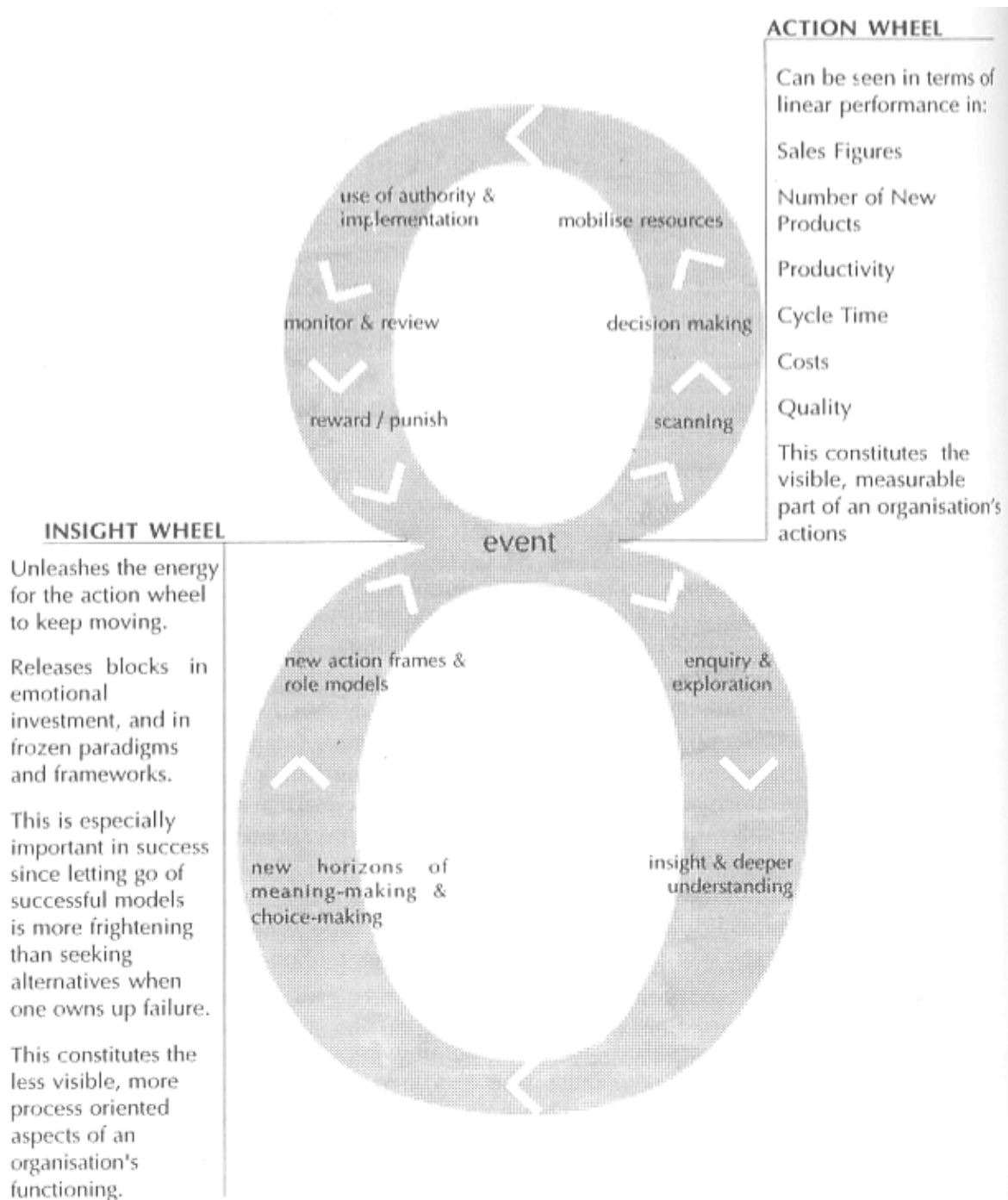
The 'necessary and sufficient' condition for the effective functioning of the institutional space is the practice of Bohmian dialogue. This dialogue brings alive the Deva Padam. An individual who wishes to enter this dialogue ought to be willing and able to explore deeply three personal questions namely 'who am I?' 'where am I?' and 'why am I here?'.

Let us look at this a little more deeply. A person "V" answers these questions in the following manner: "I am an Engineer; I am in an organization that incentivizes me well for deploying my technological expertise; I am here to earn a lot of money". Person "C" who is also an engineer of similar competence however, answers these questions differently: "I am a human being endowed with technological competence; I am living in a world that is facing the consequences of unbridled technological success; I am here to discover ways by which one deploy technology to build a sustainable world."

V would be very happy with discussions and processes that are purposive and answer the question 'what is in it for me?' more directly. This discussion would bring alive the Maanusha Padam. It would lead to the 'manufacture' of offerings that can be transacted with the world. V would not be drawn to and probably not be interested in the dialogues that characterize the ones C would expect as an important source of meaning. C will come alive in a Koodam, the Deva Padam where the larger questions of collective responsibility are dialogued. This space does not preclude the interests of V.

Conceptual Map 1

ACTION WHEEL

Can be seen in terms of linear performance in:

Sales Figures

Number of New Products

Productivity

Cycle Time

Costs

Quality

This constitutes the visible, measurable part of an organisation's actions

use of authority & implementation

mobilise resources

monitor & review

decision making

reward / punish

scanning

event

INSIGHT WHEEL

Unleashes the energy for the action wheel to keep moving.

Releases blocks in emotional investment, and in frozen paradigms and frameworks.

This is especially important in success since letting go of successful models is more frightening than seeking alternatives when one owns up failure.

This constitutes the less visible, more process oriented aspects of an organisation's functioning.

new action frames & role models

enquiry & exploration

new horizons of meaning-making & choice-making
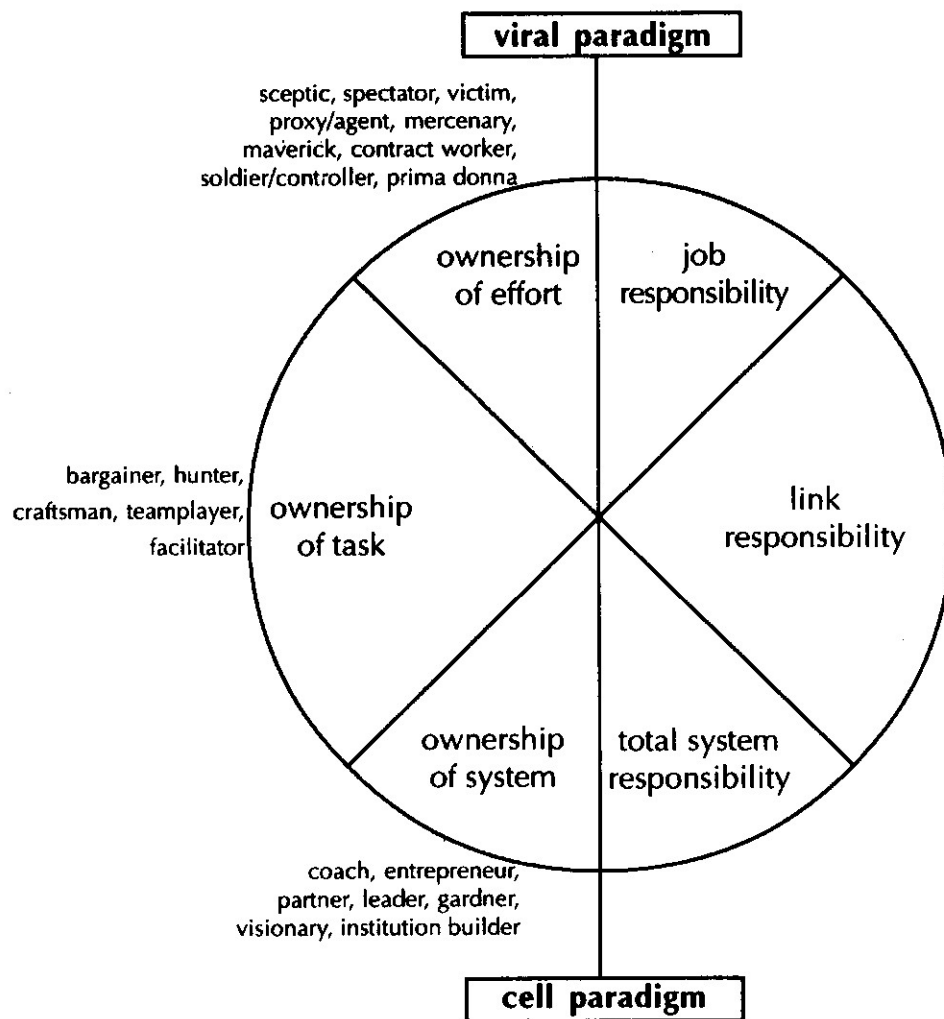
insight & deeper understanding

Cell and Virus as metaphors for role taking

We will now provide a brief explanation of the use of the "cell" and "virus" as metaphors for organisational design:

Cells and viruses are basic living organisms. Although they are similar in many respects of their structure and functioning, they differ from each other in one very important aspect. Whereas a cell has embedded within it a map of the whole organism of which it is a part, the virus has only the awareness of its own survival and proliferation. Cells, therefore, naturally act from the understanding " I am because we are" and creates synergy with other cells; the 'self and the system must find a simultaneous growth'. A Virus acts only from a concern for itself. In other words 'self as apart from the system'. The cells actions are derived naturally from an understanding of the simultaneous well being of both itself and the system, whereas a virus understands only the needs of itself.

When an embryo is formed, the rhythmic and orderly development of a foetus is possible because each cell has a picture of the whole and is able to 'know' the stage of growth of the foetus. Therefore, when the first cells have become the heart and brain cells, the subsequent cells 'choose' to locate themselves relative to the initial cells and form the body, the arms, legs, inner organs etc. The DNA has the whole map and the time triggers that enable this.

If we look at the Koodam, the individuals who are members of the Sangha are like cells with a crucial difference. They are not fixed to any one role. As a particular form of the Sangha emerges, individuals will make choices and take roles that supplement and complement each other. Thus a functional body/ team will be formed. Tasks will get accomplished, transactions with the world will take place. When the next need emerges, this body will dissolve and a new one will emerge. Individuals will assume a new set of roles appropriate to the new reality.

viral paradigm

sceptic, spectator, victim, proxy/agent, mercenary, maverick, contract worker, soldier/controller, prima donna

ownership of effort

job responsibility

bargainer, hunter, craftsman, teamplayer, facilitator

ownership of task

link responsibility

ownership of system

total system responsibility

coach, entrepreneur, partner, leader, gardner, visionary, institution builder

cell paradigm

Conceptual Map 2

The Koodam, using the cell design model will therefore anchor itself on the members who are able to move easily between the *Deva Padam*, the *Maanusha Padam* and the *Paishachika Padam* without any friction. This is what 'conscious role shaping/ taking' would mean: spontaneously choosing to perform roles and tasks necessary at that point of time without any pulls and pushes within or without arising from status, visibility, incentives, personal prospects and the like.
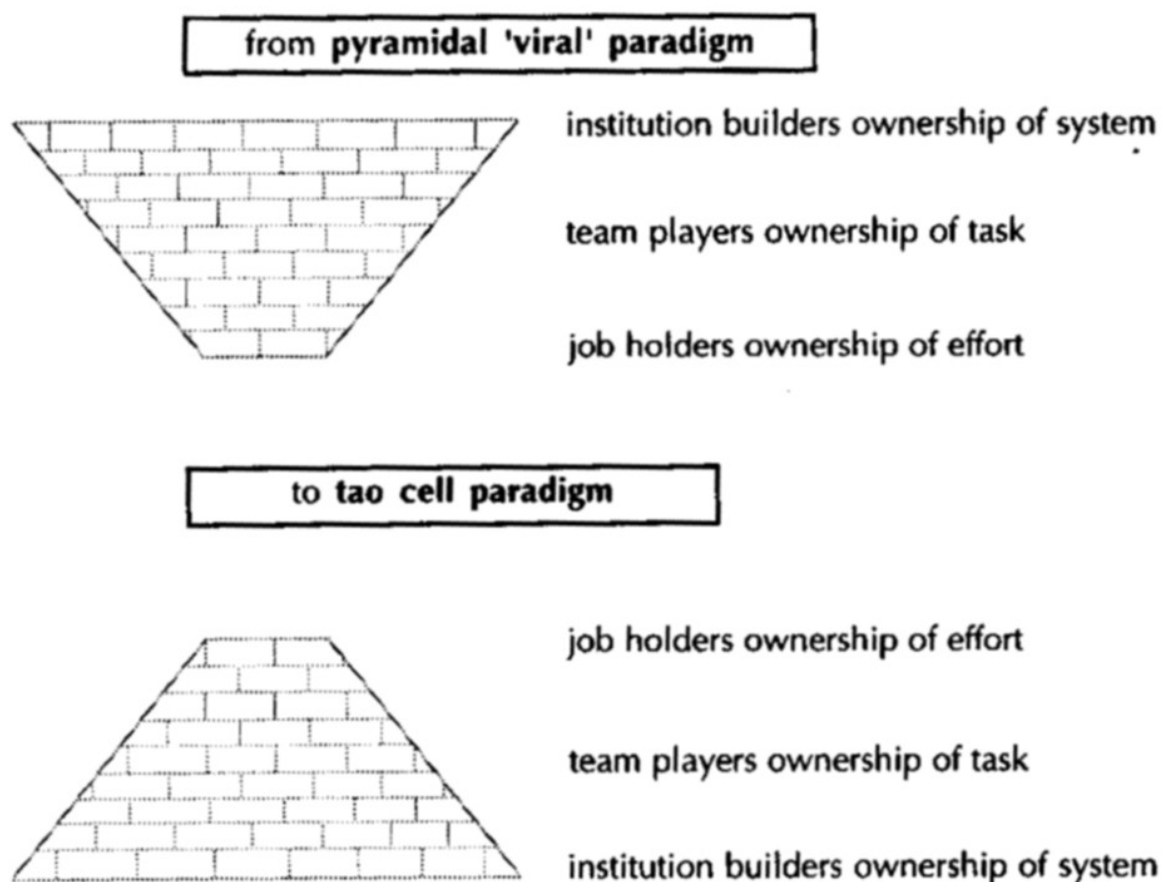
The Koodam would enable this by having broad frames of reference available like 'Lego' sets derived from a dialogue covering the following aspects (an indicative list):

  a. Communication - How would the basic values and goals of the community be communicated to each member of the team, and how would feedback be collected to validate the assumption that the message was received?

  b. Leadership and Co-ordination - What style and Community organisation would suit this collective?

  c. Organizational energy and synergy - How would issues of productivity and creativity be addressed?

  d. Role shaping/taking – How will roles be designed? How will they be offered/ or taken up? How will the team ensure a 'mutuality of opportunity' to its members in the way it functions? What buried potentials the team might unleash?

  e. Role feeling (the feelings associated with the various roles) - How would the individuals feel about their place within the organisation?

  f. System and subsystem optimization – How are the systems designed? How might the entire system benefit?

Most communities have become fragmented, and organizations are built on the basis of a limited purpose. Therefore, their foundation comprises of individuals who are like "V". Their membership will be contingent on their answering "what's in it for me?" The continuing membership will be contingent upon the right 'incentives' on offer. The relationships between individuals in this

community/ organization will be characterized by a mutuality of dependence and control. Individuals like "C" will feel constrained.

However, communities/ organizations built upon the basis of a purpose that is 'dharmic' i.e., meaningful in the context of human striving and suffering, will comprise of individuals like "C". Their membership will be contingent upon the commitment of the organization to answering the questions "Who are we? Where are we? And, why are we here?" in a coherent manner. The relationships between individuals will be based upon a mutuality of opportunity and autonomy. It can easily find ways of offering a space for "V" to engage and become a member of goal oriented teams.

from pyramidal 'viral' paradigm

institution builders ownership of system

team players ownership of task

job holders ownership of effort

to tao cell paradigm

job holders ownership of effort

team players ownership of task

institution builders ownership of system

Application

The concepts that we have been discussing were at the heart of the work done by Dr Suresh and Pradip Prabhu in the Tamil Nadu Water and Sewarage Board (TWAD). Raghu Ananthanarayanan designed the OD intervention with Suresh and Pradip. The 'problem to be solved' was centred around getting a Government department to significantly enhance its effectiveness in ensuring water security for the State of Tamil Nadu (India). While brainstorming the design possibilities the idea that old institutional ways of mobilising Dharmic action was the most promising line of enquiry. Traditionally, any issue that impacted the whole community (*Pangali's* i.e., all the people who shared in the joys and sorrows as well as the profits and losses) was brought to a space called the 'Koodam'. In this space the differences of heirarchy and status was dropped, in a spirit of eqalization and autonomy the whole group dilaogued the issue and the action choices in front of them. The Koodam is located in the *'Deva Padam'* of a building design.

The process of mobilizing the community started with by asking the group the three key questions 'who are you?' 'where are you?' 'why are you here?'. The process evoked deep echoes in the minds of the participants and over the course of the intervention, the group made deep changes in their self construct, redifined their roles in ways that were revolutionary though simple. They saw the preservation of water resources for the future generations as their primary role. Once a core group of the department had internalised these changes deeply and the head of the department displayed conviction and commitment to the changes, the TWAD acomplished truly amazing results. The method has been recognized one of the most creative interventions by the UNDP.

The Roles in a Koodam

There are 4 roles that get played out in the Koodam. These are: 1. The Koodam Member 2. The Koodam Orchestrator 3. The Koodam Elder and 4. The Koodam Anchor.

These roles are a voluntary acceptance of responsibilities in order to enliven and sustain the Koodam. Therefore they are not primarily task based, they are based on the depth of concern and willingness to invest time and energy for the well being of the community.

Every one who is a *'pangaali'* (shares in the joys and sorrows, profits and losses) and is present to voice his/ her concerns in the dialogue forums is a member of the Koodam. The member might take on additional responsibilities.

The Koodam Elders for example are respected members of the community whose goodwill for the community is evident, and whose sense of integrity is beyond question. They have the perspective to look at the context of the Koodam in the larger socio-political and socio-economic context.

The Koodam Orchestrators are the members of the Koodam who take on the administration of the whole process. They organize the pre-dialogue processes, facilitate the Koodam-dialogue and help out in the post Koodam-dialogue phase when actions and decisions taken in the Koodam have to be worked upon. The Orchestrators must be well trained in the art designing and conducting the dialogue. A combination of process capabilities and a good understanding of the content are both important aspects of the orchestrating processes. For example, while conducting the Koodam for the members of the fishing communities of Pondicherry, Suresh had to dip into his understanding of the legal issues involved in the fishing industry, the socio-economic implications of the privatization initiatives being suggested as well as the socio-political context of the PRI's in the community. The Koodam Elders are a great help since their insights into the community and its struggles is invaluable in understanding the angst of the community. The Elders provide the mentoring help as well in the pre and post dialogue processes.

The Koodam Anchors are members of the Koodam who take on responsibilities on behalf of the Koodam that have to be carried out after the dialogue phase is over, and decisions have to be implemented. These anchors are expected to act with full understanding of the Koodam Dharma. Though they do not have to be deeply immersed in the Koodam methodology, it is important for

them to be educated in the philosophy and ways of a Koodam. Often, the Koodam is not a new way for the communities, it has become a mode that has lost favour and therefore not employed with vigor and rigour except in some communities. Helping the members and the anchors reinvest their faith in these old institutions that have stood the test of time is not a difficult process. However, they need help in recalibrating the old modes with the new context.

"Independence begins at the bottom... A society must be built in which every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its own affairs... This does not exclude dependence on and willing help from neighbours or from the world. It will be a free and voluntary play of mutual forces..."

M.K. Gandhi

Appendix 1.

Explaining the concepts behind the grand new Secretariat complex in Chennai, Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi referred to the great inspiration Tamil Nadu can draw from the Uttaramerur inscription. It testifies to the historical fact that nearly 1,100 years ago, a village had an elaborate and highly refined electoral system and even a written constitution prescribing the mode of elections. The details of this system of elective village democracy are inscribed on the walls of the village assembly (grama sabha mandapa), a rectangular structure made of granite slabs.

"This inscription, dated around 920 A.D. in the reign of Parantaka Chola [907-955 A.D.]," explains Dr. R. Nagaswamy, former Director of the Tamil Nadu Department of Archaeology, "is an outstanding document in the history of India. It is a veritable written constitution of the village assembly that functioned 1,000 years ago," Dr. Nagaswamy is the author of a book, Uttaramerur, the Historic Village in Tamil Nadu, which has been published in both English and Tamil." The inscription, he adds, "gives astonishing details about the constitution of wards, the qualification of candidates standing for elections, the disqualification norms, the mode of election, the constitution of committees with elected members, the functions of those committees, the power to remove the wrongdoer, etc…"

But that is not all. "On the walls of the mandapa," he points out, "are inscribed a variety of secular transactions of the village, dealing with administrative, judicial, commercial, agricultural, transportation and irrigation regulations, as administered by the then village assembly, giving a vivid picture of the efficient administration of the village society in the bygone ages."

The villagers even had the right to recall the elected representatives if they failed in their duty.

Uttaramerur, which has a 1,250-year history, is situated in Kancheepuram district, about 90 km from Chennai. The Pallava king Nandivarman II established it around 750 A.D. The Pallavas, the Cholas, the Pandyas, the Sambuvarayars, the Vijayanagara Rayas, and the Nayaks successively ruled it. The village has three important temples, the Sundara Varadaraja Perumal temple, the Subramanya

temple, and the Kailasanatha temple.

The three temples have a large number of inscriptions, notably those from the reigns of Raja Raja Chola (985-1014 A.D.), his son Rajendra Chola, and the Vijayanagar emperor Krishnadeva Raya. Rajendra Chola as well as Krishnadeva Raya visited Uttaramerur.

Uttaramerur, built on the canons of the agama texts, has the village assembly mandapa at the centre. All the temples are oriented with reference to the mandapa.

Scholars are of the view that while village assemblies might have existed before the period of Parantaka Chola, it was during his reign that the village administration was honed into a perfect system through elections. In fact, inscriptions on temple walls in several parts of Tamil Nadu refer to village assemblies. "But it is at Uttaramerur on the walls of the village assembly (mandapa) itself that we have the earliest inscriptions with complete information about how the elected village assembly functioned," notes R. Sivanandam, epigraphist at the Tamil Nadu Department of Archaeology.

The practice

R. Vasanthakalyani, retired chief epigraphist-cum-instructor at the department, adds that the entire village, including infants, had to be present at the village assembly mandapa at Uttaramerur when elections were held. Only the sick and those who had gone on a pilgrimage were exempt.

There were committees for the maintenance of irrigation tanks, roads, to provide relief during drought, to test gold, and so forth.

There was another astonishing feature of the elective system in the village. "The village assembly of Uttaramerur," Dr. Nagaswamy marvels, "drafted the constitution for the elections. The salient features were as follows: the village was divided into 30 wards, one representative elected for each. Specific qualifications were prescribed for those who wanted to contest.

The essential criteria were age limit, possession of immovable property, and minimum educational qualification. Those who wanted to be elected should be above 35 years of age and below 70."

Only those who owned land that attracted tax could contest elections. Another stipulation, Dr. Nagaswamy points out, was that such owners should possess a house built on a legally owned site (not on public poromboke). A person serving in any of the committees could not contest again for the next three terms, each term lasting a year.

Elected members who accepted bribes, misappropriated others' property, committed incest, or acted against the public interest suffered disqualification.

[1] http://www.thehindu.com/news/states/tamil-nadu/article243997.ece @ 18.2.2012; Thanks to TS Subramanian of the Frontline for this reference