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Glocalization of Natural Farming: A Case Study of India

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Glocalization of Natural Farming:
A Case Study of India

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to elucidate the mechanism of the spread of natural farming around the world, especially in India, by using the concept of glocalization.

Natural farming is a farming method that follows the principles of no-tillage, no fertilizer, no pesticides, and no weeding, and this method was advocated by the late Japanese farmer and philosopher, Masanobu Fukuoka (1913-2008), in the 1950s. It is also known as “do-nothing farming.” This method is a form of alternative agriculture that does not use any machines, chemicals or biotechnology.

Among the alternative methods of farming, organic farming has gradually been gaining support in Japan. The history of organic farming in Japan began in 1971. Many books by Albert Howard, who started the organic farming movement in Indore, India, have been translated into Japanese. Rudolf Steiner’s biodynamic method and permaculture have also had a strong influence. In 2006, the Japanese government acknowledged the importance of organic farming and decided that both the central and local governments have responsibilities for the promotion of organic farming (The Act for the Promotion of Organic Agriculture). Although the number of farmers who participate in organic farming is still only 0.5% of the total farmers in Japan, the number has been increasing (Nakajima 2015: 9-10). Additionally, the average age of organic farmers, which is 59 years old, is relatively young (Nakajima 2015: 10). In 1999, the Japanese Agricultural Standard for Organic Products was created. However, because the standard was originally created in Europe, where the system of land use is different from Japan, and because it has excluded

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many indigenous organic farmers due to their own methods, which are different from the international standard, the serious debate on this issue has been taking place (Nakajima 2015, Masugata 2017).

Mokichi Okada (1882-1955) is another legendary founder of natural farming in Japan. He was the founder of a religious sect, the Church of World Messianity. Okada's natural farming method is a more religious or sentimental and is a part of his distinctive religious philosophy. Most natural farmers in Japan have adapted both Fukuoka's and Okada's methods. However, Okada's natural farming is not as famous as Fukuoka's. Outside Japan, 'natural farming' usually refers to Fukuoka's natural farming, while Mokichi Okada's name is hardly known.

In this paper, after summarizing the history of Fukuoka's four visits to India (chapter 1), I describe the situations of a farmer who has fully practised Fukuoka's natural farming in India and another farmer who has practised their own "natural farming" in India (chapter 2) based on field surveys. I will then analyse the process of the spread of Fukuoka's natural farming in India using the concept of "glocalization" (chapter 3). The field surveys were conducted in August and November 2017.

1. Fukuoka's visits to India

Masanobu Fukuoka was born in 1913 in a village in Ehime on Shikoku, the fourth largest island in southwestern Japan. Fukuoka was a scientist who worked in the plant inspection section of Yokohama custom house, and in 1937, he suddenly fell ill and was hospitalized. After a while, his condition improved but was not entirely relieved and he was roaming around in Yokohama city. One day in the early morning, when he was still half-sleeping at a park, he told us, that he had a sudden encounter with God, and he understood that everything in this world was nothing (Ishizaka 2017: 23-24). After that enlightenment experience, he quit his job at Yokohama, returned to his native farm in Ehime, and began his experiment with alternative methods of farming. In approximately 1950, he concluded that natural farming would be the best method for sustainable agriculture.

Masanobu Fukuoka's name became globally known after 1978, when the English translation of his book, *One-Straw Revolution*, was published in the United States. Since then, Fukuoka's books have been translated into more than 30 languages (Ishizaka 2018: 19).

Fukuoka enthusiastically visited various parts of the world. He visited 17 countries, and he was actively engaged in promoting his methods and philosophy (Ishizaka 2018: 19). He visited India four times. The first visit was from December 1987 to February 1988. A Bengali social activist, Pannalal Dasgupta (1908-1999), invited him and Saiji Makino (1924-2010), a teacher of Japanese language at Santiniketan who was associated with a Japanese Buddhist sect, Nipponzan Myohoji, accompanied Fukuoka as an interpreter. They visited Calcutta, Santiniketan, Banaras, Bombay, Hyderabad, Rasulia, Pune, Madras, Pondicherry, Kanpur, Delhi, and Bhubaneswar. They participated in the 28th All India Sarvodaya Conference and the 15th All India Science Congress. They also met with the Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi (1944-1991) and M. Swaminathan (1925-), one of the famous promoters of the Green Revolution. Fukuoka was awarded Deshkottam at Viswa Bharati (Makino 2011).

The second visit was from November to December in 1991. This time the Director of the Department for the Development of Degraded Land at the Ministry of Forest & Environment in India, Samal Singh, invited him. Fukuoka visited Calcutta, Sundarbans, Delhi, Chambal canyon, and Imphal. He met the Prime Minister, Narasimha Rao (1921-2004) and the Minister of Forest & Environment, Kamal Nath (1946-) (Makino 2011; Fukuoka 2004: 405-427).

The third visit was in March 1996 which was a brief visit to Bombay on his way back from Tanzania to Japan. The final visit was in October 1997. He visited Bombay, Nagpur, Wardha, Sevagram, Paunar, and Valsad. He attended the Birth Anniversary meeting for Gandhi on October 2, 1997 (Makino 2011).

During these four visits to India, Fukuoka not only met and talked directly with many people in India but also provided them with specific agricultural technical guidance. For some of them, as will be shown in the next chapter, the encounter with Fukuoka was a turning point in their lives.

2. The Natural farmers in India

Meeting with Fukuoka deeply impacted some people including Raju Titus (1946-2018). Fortunately for him, in 1988, Fukuoka visited the Titus Farm at Rasulia, Hoshangabad district in the Madhya Pradesh in India and gave him some practical advice. Titus had

started natural farming two years before Fukuoka's visit. He had almost given up farming because of the bad yield when he encountered Masanobu Fukuoka's *One Straw Revolution*. Soon after reading the book, he sold his cattle and started natural farming in 1985. It was very fortunate for him that the condition of his farm improved, and in 1988, Fukuoka visited it. The meeting with Fukuoka was a decisive moment for Titus, and after that, he continued experiments with natural farming.

When I visited the Titus farm in August 2017, the main activities were (1) wheat cultivation, (2) goat rearing, and (3) use of the *subabul* trees. The goats were raised for milk and meat processing. *Subabul* trees were not only used to supply nitrogen to crops such as wheat, but also as fodder for goats and fuelwood. Pulses and vegetables were also produced.

Titus continued to experiment with the use of 'clay dumplings', which Fukuoka was keen to develop. He also faithfully followed the 'no-till' principle of Fukuoka's natural farming. As a result, large numbers of earthworms were found in the soil of the Titus farm. Another important point in the cultivation was the crimping of the *gajar ghans*, which initially looks like a weed.

There is a Quaker community, the Friends Rural Centre, which is situated approximately 1.5 km from the Titus Farm. This has been a major Quaker stronghold since the British period, and there are many Quakers living in and around Rasulia. Raju Titus was also Quaker and the name 'Titus' comes from the Bible. At the Friends Rural Centre, Marjorie Sykes (1905-1995), a British woman who was a 'disciple' of M.K. Gandhi, led a movement to reconsider the agricultural situation in the late 1970s and 1980s. The problem was that the Green Revolution, which was spreading in India at the time, was causing soil degradation and poverty in rural areas. At the end of 1983, one of the members of the community, Partap Aggarwal, discovered the English translation of Masanobu Fukuoka's *One Straw Revolution* and immediately ordered a copy of the book from the United States and held a reading session among the community members. This led to the publication of the Indian edition of *One-Straw Revolution*.

The Kalpavruksha farm is located in Dehari, Valsad district in Gujarat, India, and is currently run by Abhijay Save (1988-). The farm was originally started by Bhaskar Save (1922-2015), a grandfather of Abhijay Save. At the end of the 1960s, he stopped using chemical fertilizers and developed his own methods of natural farming. It is not known

when Bhaskar first heard about Fukuoka, but Abhijay said that his grandfather must have become aware of Fukuoka quite early (in the early 1980s), as he travelled all over India and interacted with fellow organic farmers.

When I visited the farm in November 2017, Abhijay had been practising natural farming for the past three or four years after studying for seven years in a boarding school (ashram) run by Swadhyay, an organisation of the Hindu spiritual movement. His choice to live in his native rural area instead of going to the city after his higher education was largely influenced by what he learned in Swadhyaya. Abhijay's father is also a farmer with a side job and practises natural farming on the farm.

The main activities of the farm were (1) cultivation of chikoo fruits, (2) coconut cultivation, (3) rice cultivation, (4) banana cultivation and (5) cattle rearing. The main sources of income were coconut seedlings and oil, and chikoo fruits. In addition to milk, cow's urine was used to prevent crop diseases and pests. They also produced areca nut, vegetables and pulses. Rice and vegetables were mainly for home consumption. Rice straws were used as fodder for cattle.

During his visit to India in 1997, Fukuoka visited the Kalpavruksha farm and met Bhaskar Save. In the documentary 'For Living on the Planet Earth, Fukuoka Masanobu goes to India', directed by Koji Imaizumi, there is a scene where Fukuoka looked around the farm while on an ox cart and is impressed by what he sees as 'a real paradise'. The encounter between Fukuoka and Bhaskar was a great encouragement for both participants.

3. The diffusion of natural farming in India

In past studies on glocalization, it has been elucidated that globalization does not necessarily result in uniformity or homogenization of the world, but globalization always involves localization (or indigenization). The perspective of glocalization seeks to reveal the ways in which particular localities are directly connected to other localities in the world. Thus, the glocalization of natural farming can be described as follows. Natural farming, which had been embedded in a locality, is disembedded from that locality and then re-embedded in other localities in different parts of the world.

This section analyses the mechanism of glocalization of natural farming, that started in Ehime, Japan and spread to various parts of India, focusing on the following three

dimensions. The first approach focuses on the power of promotion in the “disembedding” phase of the glocalization process. The second approach focuses on the background of the “re-embedding” phase of the glocalization process. The third approach highlights the “complex” dynamism of the glocalization process, where various unintended distortions occur and mutual feedback is activated.

Masanobu Fukuoka’s writing and publication of books on natural farming, which were translated and published in various languages, made natural farming known throughout the world. In India, an Indian edition of the English translation was published in 1983, followed by translations into Malayalam, Kannada, Telugu, Tamil, Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, Bengali and Punjabi. Over the years, Fukuoka’s books have gone through many reprints in India. Raju Titus, Bhaskar Save, and Abhijay Save have also read Fukuoka’s works. If Fukuoka had not written his books and if his books had not been translated, natural farming would not be as widely known in the world today.

It is also important to note that Masanobu Fukuoka visited more than 17 countries around the world. Raju Titus and Bhaskar Save met Fukuoka in person and received advice directly from him, which was a great encouragement for them in their practice of natural farming.

Some Fukuoka’s ‘disciples,’ such as Larry Korn in the United States and Panos Manikis in Greece, have played important roles in the promotion of natural farming. Korn, who was one of the translators of the English version of *One-Straw Revolution*, wrote a book in English on Masanobu Fukuoka and natural farming (*One-straw revolutionary: The philosophy and work of Masanobu Fukuoka*, published in 2015). Manikis organizes workshops on natural farming in Greece.

In India, the most important supporters of natural farming have been Gandhian activists and their networks. Gandhian activists are people who aim to realize M.K. Gandhi’s dream and are engaged in various activities such as social work, educational work, and social movements. Other supporters have included a Japanese Buddhist sect, Nipponzan Myohoji, and a Quaker community in the Hoshangabad district of Madhya Pradesh. Fukuoka visited India four times, delivering lectures and giving instructions to farmers in various parts of India. These visits were made possible mainly because of the supporters’ efforts. For Fukuoka’s travels in India, these supporters provided invitations and interpretation and cared for his well-being including the provision of food,

accommodation, and sometimes his travel fees.

I would like to highlight two reasons for the emergence of natural farming practices in various parts of India. In the 1980s and 1990s, criticism of the Green Revolution focusing on negative aspects such as environmental degradation and widening disparities and opposition to the development of large dams gained momentum. In the 2000s, the movement against the introduction of genetically modified crops also began. Furthermore, water shortage problems such as falling groundwater levels and the depletion of water sources and farmer suicide due to difficulties repaying loans became major concerns. Natural farming has attracted attention partly as a solution to these problems.

The second reason is the weak organisational capacity of agricultural cooperatives in India. In Japan, for example, not using pesticides or chemical fertilizers is against the wishes of many agricultural cooperatives. It is difficult to practise natural farming without clashing with farmers' cooperatives and surrounding farmers. In India, by contrast, individual farmers seem to be able to more freely and independently choose what kind of farming methods they want to adopt. However, the nature of farming and rural life in India varies greatly from region to region and needs to be more carefully analysed.

In India, top-level politicians and bureaucrats, such as Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Prime Minister Narasimha Rao, met with Fukuoka during his visits to India. Recently, the promotion of "natural farming" has been advocated in several states, with each chief minister taking the lead. It is a significant feature of India that not only the grassroots level but also the government has been paying attention to natural farming.

Although Fukuoka was invited to visit various parts of the world, there were often gaps in understanding between Fukuoka and his hosts. After observing the arid zone in the United States from the air during his first visit to the country in 1979, Fukuoka's lifelong mission became the prevention of desertification. For that purpose, he enthusiastically visited Africa, India, and China. However, according to a person who accompanied him on his travels, many people who wanted to meet Fukuoka in those areas were interested in his philosophy and methods of farming and not necessarily his methods for preventing desertification.

It is also interesting that the *One-Straw Revolution* was not necessarily regarded as a book on agriculture, the environment, or philosophy. In a bookstore in Thailand, the book is

displayed on a shelf in the social sciences section along with books by Max Weber and Benedict Anderson (confirmed by the author during a visit to Bangkok in July, 2017). In China, it is in the Japanese literature section along with novels by Haruki Murakami (confirmed by the author during a visit to Shanghai in September, 2017).

However, natural farming is not something that has one definitive or “real” method. Natural farming, even according to its founder, is always in a constant state of change and will continue to change forever. We tend to think that the “original” or “real thing” exists as determined by the originator and that it is gradually “distorted” as it spreads around the world. However, it may be useful to avoid such a view and analyse the issue of natural farming by not assuming the existence of the “original thing”.

For example, Raju Titus was greatly encouraged by the fact that he met Fukuoka and received his advice in person. However, Fukuoka felt the same way and was thrilled to find “a real paradise” at Bhaskar Save’s farm. The promoters are also influenced and transformed by the receivers.

Fukuoka’s methods and philosophy were transforming throughout his entire life until he passed away in 2008, more than 30 years after the publication of his classic, *One-Straw Revolution*. Thus, there should not be only one, original, authentic, or final method of natural farming.

Conclusion

This paper clarified that the glocalization process can be effectively analysed using a three-angle approach. First, we should focus on the promoters’ efforts at the “disembedding” phase. Second, we should analyse the backgrounds of the localities at the “re-embedding” phase. Third, we should take into account the complex process of glocalization. The intentions of the founder and the followers of natural farming have not necessarily been the same. Furthermore, natural farming methods are not rigidly structured and have been “re-embedded” repeatedly and differently in each place. Even Fukuoka saw no end to his process of “re-embedding.”

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