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Newsletter of the Rural Action Project



 National Institute of Bank Management

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OTHER INDIA

A news letter of the

Rural Action Project

No. 4, 1979

National Institute of Bank Management
85, Nepean Sea Road
Bombay - 400 006.

"Working for economic equality means levelling down of the few rich in whose hands is concentrated the bulk of the nation's wealth on the one hand, and the levelling up of the semi-starved naked millions on the other. A non-violent system of government is clearly an impossibility so long as the wide gulf between the rich and the hungry millions persists; the contrast between the palaces of New Delhi and the miserable hovels of the poor labouring class remains. It cannot last one day in free India, the poor will enjoy the same power as the rich in the land."

(Mahatma Gandhi)

Dear friends of the Spearhead Teams,

So far there have been three issues of the newsletter. The last one was in December 1977. We have come a long way since then. At that point we were still busy with the implementation of the Farmer Service Societies idea.

During the period of January 1977 to September 1978. We were operating in 19 districts in eight states i.e. Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, Bihar, Orissa, West Bengal and Assam. We were closely associated with the Regional Rural Banks, Commercial Banks and DCC's to promote new Farmer Service Societies or to vitalize them through the amalgamation of primary agricultural credit societies. The Teams in Rajasthan and Haryana could not even start the work as : 1) no area was ceded to the bank for the formation of FSS and 2) the societies likely to be offered to the bank were not found suitable by the bank in question. Therefore those Teams worked directly with the people for the creation of various self reliant economic schemes and then later on were withdrawn from the area and put into other states where we had much better co-operation from the Registrar of Co-operative Societies as well as other government offices. In areas where we tried to reorganise the societies on Panchayat basis, many societies became bad by inheriting the past debts of amalgamated societies. There was understandable reluctance on the part of RRB's and nationalized banks to adopt such societies. Some teams spent over a year studying various societies in depth to help the banks to select societies for adoption. The societies chosen after such studies were either never ceded or there were enormous administrative delays. In exasperation these teams too were withdrawn from these areas and placed in other areas where they could undertake more productive work commensurate with their training and the project objectives.

During the period five Farmer Service Societies were registered : two in West Bengal and one each in Bihar, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh.

However, in most cases, State Government support, as stated earlier did not become available. The managing directors (Sanchalaks) posted in these societies were not properly recruited and trained as envisaged in the original scheme. Thus the performance of the managing directors varied to a great degree. Lack of orientation towards the objectives of Farmers' Service Societies became apparent through their performance for types of business they transacted and through their management behaviour. Many of them had old co-operative administrative background and were guided by their schemes which did not allow them to have a new and fresh approach needed for creating a new organisation of change.

Thus the goal of achieving the Project object through the programme of Farmers' Service Societies ran into rough weather due to non-availability of clear-cut directives from state governments and the Agricultural Credit Department. Therefore the Project had to develop alternatives. These strategies could be grouped as :

- 1) Working directly with the poorest sections of the people towards the creation of self-reliant and self-generating economics.
- 2) Working in collaboration with Small Farmers' Development Agency, Marginal Farmers and Agricultural Labourers groups, Block Offices and other agencies with objectives similar to our own.

- 3) Working in collaboration with the Regional Rural Banks and the commercial banks for financing the weaker sections directly.
- 4) Working in collaboration with F S S, LAMP, or other societies.

In the meanwhile we have had many Seminars, which as one looks back, have been like the milestones marking the path of growth for the project. The first series was organized from the 3rd to the 24th of April 1978 at Chotosimulia in Birbhum District of West Bengal. Many Teams raised questions on the method of operation as they felt : 1) The Farmers Service Societies did not prove to be the right tool for achieving the objective. 2) Working with Financial Institutions was taking more than 50% of their time and even when they could achieve some results, the benefits somehow seem to go into the pockets of a few, who were not really the poorest. Though many serious questions were raised, no immediate answers were forthcoming. But one aspect which had become clear to almost all the teams was that wherever we were working for the conscious mobilization of exclusively the poorer sections, mainly Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes, there was a greater margin of success. The final conclusion that emerged from the Seminar was that all the teams would continue with the ongoing activities but would study the issue of participation of the poorest sections with special interest.

The next was a Seminar for the Teams from Rajasthan, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh held at the Xaiver Institute of Social Services in Ranchi. This was followed by the next one from the 20th of July to the 3rd of August 1978 at Mirza, Kamrup district, Assam for the Assam Teams. In these Seminars there was a thorough analysis of all our efforts at

each location. Many Teams expressed various concerns relating to the following points :

- a) The goals and process of work : inspite of best efforts there were not many signs of the poorest section becoming independent. The strategies we had adopted did not always have the poorest man in focus; and wherever he was in focus it was very difficult to keep it up because of the pressure from the established socio-economic and political powers.
- b) Institutional restraints : these came at the field level from the various agencies and offices with which the teams had to work and at the monitoring level from the National Institute of Bank Management itself which could not make any immediate suggestions or provide any concrete directives.
- c) The personnel involved in the Rural Action Project : a few members had somehow developed certain amount of frustration as results were not as fast as they had expected and some others had not fully comprehended the seriousness of their involvement nor were they prepared for the sacrifices demanded. It was however decided to give them another chance to prove themselves in terms of the Project objectives.

After long discussions the various teams were re-grouped on the basis of their own understanding with each other and the requirements of the new areas. Many teams had expressed the feeling that they would be able to perform much better in terms of achieving the goal if they had the possibility of moving into new areas where poverty was more acute and the possibilities of organising people for productive activities

- 4) Lack of proper communication between team members and villagers, team members and officials of other agencies working in the area and between team members and other personnel within the Project.

Taking all this into consideration a new set of criteria was drawn up to evaluate each and every member involved in the Project. Using this as the guide line 47 Spearhead Team Members were relieved from their services with effect from 1st January 1979. The Institute has been trying to get those terminated into other agencies or institutions where their training and skills may be useful. Selection procedures are under way to recruit and train some new Spearhead Team Members on the basis of the new criteria and new selection and Training methods which have been worked out.

At the moment we have 10 teams at the following locations :

	<u>Block</u>	<u>District</u>	<u>State</u>
1.	Mahasamund	Raipur	Madhya Pradesh
2.	Shankargarh	Sarguja	Madhya Pradesh
3.	Rajpur	Sarguja	Madhya Pradesh
4.	Barachaur	Gazipur	Uttar Pradesh
5.	Ranibandh	Bankura	West Bengal
6.	Tikabali	Phulbani	Orissa
7.	Chandeshwar	Puri	Orissa
8.	Bokajan	Karbi Anglong	Assam
9.	Bokajan	Karbi Anglong	Assam
10.	Rajapara	Kamrup	Assam

With the changed strategies and the renewed rigour of the teams some of the teams have been doing very good work during the past few months. After a close analysis of what is going on in each of these places we can quite confidently say that we are on the right path in terms of achieving the objectives of the Project. Reports from some of the teams are given below :

Your Colleagues at NIBM

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GAZIPUR

REPORT FROM GAZIPUR TEAM

We reached here on 11th July 1978. Barachawar Block is one of the most poverty stricken areas in Uttar Pradesh with about 50% of the people fully dependant on their daily labour for their livelihood. 25% of the total population belong to Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe and these communities form the poorest sections of the area. One third of the block is also flood affected. The landed gentry consisting of the Rai, Rajput and Bania communities own more than 90% of the land of these villages. The members of these communities also hold the positions of Lekhpal (Revenue Department Official), Government Tube Well operator, village level Worker, Pradhan (Village President), Panchayat, Sevaks and all other government and village administration posts. They own all the local grocery and provision stores, cloth shops, hotels and are involved in all sorts of money lending operations.

Wage rates are so complicated that we took long time even in understanding how much finally gets to the hand of the labourers. Without any consideration of the amount of land which a landlord owns and the labourer is asked to operate in (it could vary from 4 to 8 acres) the labourer is given one fourth of an acre in which he has to put in all the expenses excluding ploughing and get back only the grain from that land and even the fodder goes back to the landowner. On days when there is full work, the labourer is paid 1 kg. grain (rice or wheat depending on what is cheaper) 1/2 kg. 'Sathu' and gur ka pani. According to our calculations the maximum a full time labourer gets for a whole year is around 837 Rs. altogether. Along with the labourer, his wife and children also have to put in their labour in return for which the only additional benefit they get is a drink of gur ka pani. Even with all these limitations one can find labour only for 300 days in a

year and the rest of the time he looks after his own house or other personal affairs. In essence, by giving one fourth of an acre to the labourer, the landlord gets the labourer bonded to him for the whole year making it impossible for him to go to someone else's field for work.

Staying in Karimuddinpur village, we studied 7 villages around it with a total population of 15,645 out of which 3,705 are Harijans belonging to Chamar, Dusaad, Kurmi, Pasi and Bhangi sections. The majority of these are Chamars. After establishing good contacts and relationship with all these sections we came to know that their major problems are low wage rate, bonded labour, exploitation by money lenders, trafficking in women by richer sections, in-fights within the sub castes and gambling. On the basis of these observations we took up various activities in various villages and results in some of our adopted villages are given below :

Uchadih Village :

Even as we came to this area, there was a labour strike going on in this village, organised by the Harijan labourers of the village. But this lasted only very few days and finally fizzled out because the non-harijan labourers did not co-operate; as the landowners created problems for the labourers by not giving water from their wells for the small one fourth acre land pieces and by bringing labourers from other villagers. The non-harijan labourers did not co-operate because the harijans had not consulted them before starting the strike and because the chamar women had demanded higher wages for the post natal services not only from the Bhoomihars (landowners) but also from the non-harijan labourers. Even though the strike did not achieve the set goals, its effects were felt by the landowners and the

labourers in many respects. For the landowners, inspite of their bringing labourers from outside and paying them extra, production was less than 50% of the usual output due to the delay in operations as well as inadequate labour. Some of them were forced to give water to the labourers' fields and this caused inner quarrêls among them. For the labourers, they became clear that the landowners were dependent on them and that they could manage to find outside labour when needed. Due to this the labourers got enough self confidence and by organising meetings between harijan and non-harijan labourers, they got a new sense of their strength and of how they could organize another strike and succeed. They saw through the weak points of the landowners and they have decided that in the next elections they will have their own candidate for the Gram Sabha elections. Plans are being made for a united labour strike for the next crop with the co-operation of all the labourers of all castes and all villages in this block.

Karimuddinpur Village :

When we came into this village we found that there was already a Yuvak Samiti and a Salahkar Samiti both of which had become stagnant. After meetings and discussions both of these groups were reformed with new members and new office-bearers. Salahkar Samiti was renamed Samaj Sudhar Samiti. From the general meetings which were held, all the people expressed the feeling that they were fed up of all the small divisions and groups within themselves which had emerged as a result of power crazy leadership as well as the "15 Anna" system of punishment given to members of the community for offences committed by them. This system of punishment not only isolated the offender from the rest of the group but also made him to go to the moneylender to obtain the money required for the feast which was to be given to the whole community as penance. It was also seen that whenever there was

a dispute or inner fight among the Harijans, the Rais always got involved and exploited the situation. A number of cases were reported in which the landlords had come into the Harijan Basti and had molested and raped Harijan women.

After meetings in each of the sub-groups to discuss about their own problems, common meeting were called.

Along with the reformulation of the Samaj Sudhar Samiti it was decided that every Chowdhury (leader of a section called Chattaya) would get an educated youth from the same Chattaya to assist and help him. These youth members became the connecting link between the Yuvak Samiti and the Samaj Sudhar Samiti and instruments for bringing in new ideas and changes. In the beginning the Chowdhurys resented this but then seeing the vision and capacity of the youth members, have accepted the system. The Yuvak Mandal runs a tuition centre with over 100 students attending it and are working for introducing an adult literacy centre for those who have never gone to school. Seeing this example the youths of two of the nearby villages have set up their own Yuvak Mandals. The Samaj Sudhar Samiti meets every 15 days to discuss all the problems of the village and to find out solutions and there is a meeting of the whole village every month to discuss all the issues. The Yuvak Mandal along with the Samaj Sudhar Samiti have already tackled quite a few problems successfully. When the local postman (who is a Bhoomihar) was taking money from those who receive Money Orders and those who had received flood relief money, they went to the post office and got the postman and postmaster to agree that this will not happen again. And now whenever a non-educated person goes to withdraw the money he takes along an educated youth of the village. The Samaj Sudhar Samiti and Yuvak Mandal have set up their own watchdog system to make rounds in the village to catch people who gamble and to see that no one from the landlords come to the Harijan Basti after sunset

to harass the women. The members of these groups have been visiting nearby villages helping them to set up similar groups in their own villages. From the first week of March onwards the Yuvak Dal in Karimuddinpur has started a new night school in the northern corner of the village particularly for the Harijan children who were finding it difficult to go to the other night school which is far away in the other corner of the village. The Samaj Sudhar Samiti is planning to raise a fund of Rs. 5,000/- by joint cultivation on Railway land which they will take on lease. Both the Samities are also trying to motivate the women of Karimuddinpur, Khara and Uchadih to form their own Mahila Mandals. At the moment the women do not participate in any way in the social life of the community.

Khara Village :

Some youth from Khara Village got to know about our involvement in Karimuddinpur and invited us there for a meeting. Khara had a Harijan Yuvak Mandal which was at a loss as to what to do and how to be helpful to the village. Khara has almost 50% Harijan population but the local Thakur community has always had them under their thumb. After a few meetings these youth decided to reform their Samiti and to start with new programmes on the lines of what is going on in Karimuddinpur.

On 5th January 1979 a Harijan complained to a Thakur (who was his friend) about the Thakur's son spoiling his son. Thakur's son who came to know of this decided to beat the Harijan's son. Both the sides collected their own friends for an encounter. On 7th January a Harijan labourer was beaten up by the Thakur youths for no reason at all. The case went to the police but nothing happened. The Harijan youth confronted Thakur's son and his friends and beat them up. The Harijan youth and older men have become very alert and they are ready to face any eventuality.

In Khara village, the pradhan has been exploiting the Harijans by selling off the fish from the village pond which has been reserved for the Harijans. The Yuvak Samiti has also decided to stop the pradhan from doing this.

In most of the villages where we are working one of the common problems is that of landlords taking away even the small bits of land which has been given to the labourer to cultivate or even chasing him out on flimsy grounds after he has cultivated the field and put in a lot of labour, without giving him anything in return. The labourers have decided to deal with every such case and have asked all the labourers to report all such cases to the Samiti.

The Karimuddinpur Samaj Sudhar Samiti along with the Mazdoor Kalyan Parishad is making a list of all the agricultural and non agricultural labourers in all the nearby villages. The same Samaj Sudhar Samiti lately has formed four sub groups whose main role is to form Samaj Sudhar Samities in all the villages around Karimuddinpur. Each of these sub groups has one of us working with it.

In each village the Samaj Sudhar Samities and the Yuvak Samities meet every fortnight to work out their own programmes and whenever they can do so they also invite members of the Samities from the other villages to participate. Before July 1979 we are planning to have a Workers' Seminar comprising all the workers at least from eight villages in the immediate vicinity and also a Block Level Yuva Mela in which all the Yuvak Samities will participate.

RAIPUR

Report From Raipur Team

From our initial surveys we got to know these points.

- The poorest sections are the Adivasis and Harijans
- The Harijans had between two and five acres of land per family and there were hardly any landless among them.
- Most of them are worker - farmers : during the season they work on their own fields and then help others out in their fields on a wage rate of Rs. 2.50 for men and Rs. 2.00 for women.
- It is a one crop area and even that is completely left to the mercy of the weather : no rains - no crop. After the Kharif paddy crop, they wait for nature's moods and if the rains come then they sow for various short term crops like Mung Dhal, Chana, various kinds of oilseeds and vegetables.
- Some of the Adivasis have very little land and some of them have leased out to others the little they have and live out of what they get from the collection of and sale of forest products (mostly wood) basket making or pottery.
- There are a lot of outside traders, mostly Sardars, who have built up their business and money-lending establishments at Jhalap, which is a big village on the National Highway.
- The poor people have been very co-operative and open, are to some extent conscious about the exploitative presence of the outside traders but feel absolutely helpless. In most cases the community leaders such as Sarpanches and panches are also Adivasis and are very much with the people in their economic situation and feeling of helplessness.

First Villages we took up for work :

Telibanda : One of the poorest sections in the community is that of the Basket makers (6 families). Farmers profit very little from the one crop which they get; so are the labourers who also get only Rs. 2/- . Both farmers and labourers play both the roles and live on subsistence - based production. Irrigation is the major issue. Community is very co-operative minded. From the meeting with the basket makers, it was evident that they had not experienced any success out of unity for a long time. One of the Panches is a rich Patel unlike all other Panches of the neighbouring villages.

Kurrubhata : Conditions are almost the same as in Telibanda. Almost all are small farmers; exchange labour is prevalent. Some also go out to work in rich farmers' fields outside Kurrubhata.

Singerupalli : About 6 km. from Jhalap; have to cross 2 canals (pretty small and crossable even in rains). People are extremely co-operative minded; friendly and docile. Farm conditions are same as in the previous two. Water is the main problem.

Turedih : 3 km. along the National Highway, almost all are adivasis. Just a handful of landless; all others are worker - farmers. Upto 10 years ago they lived in abundance. Then the Sardars came with bundles of pots and pans on their shoulders. They set up small motor/cycle repair centres and gradually shifted into business (small shops), money-lending and dealing in forest products, especially wood, move and firewood. They would loan out Rs. 10/- and in a month this would become Rs. 100/- and Rs. 1000/- in a year. At least 25% of the villagers lost their lands (part or full) to the Sardarjis. Now almost all the shops,

restaurants, motor repairing places, petrol pump, carpentry and tailor shops belong to them. They have even set up own village "Chilpawan". In all these they make use of the young Adivasis' labour for anything between Rs. 30/- to Rs. 80/- a month; one young boy said that he works in the carpentry shop and gets Rs. 70/- per month for work from morning to night and if he doesn't turn up for a day's work due to some illness they cut 5 days pay.

Then later on we moved into the villages of Tikarapara, Patandadra, Sarekel and Joru. It took us over a month for being able to fully understand the Chathisgadi dialect. Even after this we felt that we had to get closer to the people and we came to the conclusion that we would join along with them in the festivals which are of great importance. Gradually we got to know all about the various festivals they celebrate, each one's significance, how it gets organised, what are its social implications etc. Simultaneously we also did a study on the drinking habits of the local people and its implications. They too had a lot of questions about our families, why we do this work etc. some of them who got to know us well would tell their friends about us and these friends used to come over to our residence.

Then we suggested that they call up small village meetings. In the meetings they said that their main problems were problems of irrigation, drinking water not getting bamboos at concessional rate, non-availability of employment, marketing difficulties, lack of education and too much of drinking. In every meeting most discussion was on the problem of irrigation and one or the other would say: "If we could only get enough water for our fields,-----". This made us to take up the irrigation problems as the first challenge.

In Singarupalli, 5 years ago the Block had spent Rs. 10,000 to built a huge percolation tank. For the next three years there was not much water. Then during the fourth year there was continuous rain and the gush of water from the nearby mountains broke the bund and all the water went off into the forest. At the second General Meeting of the villagers, people decided that they would put up a memorandum to the Block through the Sarpanch. They got the memorandum ready and got the signatures of all the villagers and, submitted it to the Block office at Mahasamund. They waited patiently but at every meeting kept asking the Sarpanch if he had got to know about any answer to their memorandum. Even after four months when they could not get a reply, they made the Sarpanch to go to the B D O's office to follow up the matter. The memorandum was accepted and the Block office agreed to take up the work by the end of March 1979 the work was completed and the people are hopeful that at least for one crop this tank will provide them with water. After the completion of the project all the villagers sat for a meeting and shared the joy of their success. And decided that now on they will work unitedly for solving their other problems. In the nearby village of Kurrubhata people have been closely watching the move and now they have also sent a memorandum to the Block office for building percolation tank in their village. Simultaneously the villages of Patandadra and Sarekel who were having a problem for water for bath, washing clothes and drinking water for animals held meetings in their own villages, put up a joint memorandum for a well. The money has been sanctioned and they have just started with the work. In all these efforts the people have offered shramdhan.

Basket-makers of Telibanda, Kurrubhata, Patandadra, Koldadra, Rampur, Jora, all Adivasis came to know about our involvement in Singarupalli and asked us how they could get together and do something. Most of these families stay outside the village living out of their earnings from the sale of various bamboo products and various forest products. They told us that their main problem was in getting bamboos at a cheap rate. Even though the Madhya Pradesh Government had promised bamboos at 60 paise each for traditional bamboo workers, this facility has not been available to these villagers. Time and again during the last fifteen years they have contacted various government officials and even offered gifts only to receive various promises.

At the initial stage, they showed a lot of resentment even at the idea of working together with the other village's basket-makers. So we held separate meetings in each of these villages and through the discussions it became quite clear to them that this isolation was causing twofold problems. One was the feeling of helplessness due to the small number of them involved in this trade in their own village. And the other due to the competition at the weekly market between the various villages and they were forced to sell off their products at very low prices. Initially the basket maker families of Telibanda and Kurrubhata held a common meeting. Then Patandadra joined in. Then they sent their own representatives to Koldadra and Rampur. Thus the next meeting was a huge one. At the second joint meeting they wrote out a joint memorandum and sent it to the District Forest Officer at Raipur. As usual, nothing happened by just sending in the memorandum. Twice they send their representatives along with one of us and finally got the sanction for a Bamboo Depot at Jhelap, near the market. And now a bamboo costs only 30 paise and a family can buy upto 1500 bamboos a year.

After the depot was opened, they had a meeting in which they discussed how they got the work done and what should be their next move. They have got their bamboo account pass books made. Some of them have opened bank accounts so that they can start saving their extra income. They have decided to hold fortnight meetings to discuss their problems and also to fix common prices for their products so that they will not lose their profits through cut-throat competition in the market. Present plans are to improve the quality of their products and to set up better marketing systems.

Education of children was the next issue we took up. Right next to our residence, there is a school run with aid from World Bank. We noticed that almost all the children who came to this school were those of the upper caste and business community people of the area. At the village meetings this was discussed. Then we kept visiting every Harijan and Adivasi family to sort out their problems in sending their children to school. Today about 30 over 60% of the children attending the school are from the Adivasi and Harijan families.

In Turidih village, most of them are Harijan labourers. The total population is 250. Even at the first meeting they had said that one of their main problems was that they did not have a school in the village and the other village with a school was far away. They discussed this issue with their panches and Sarpanch. Then one of the educated youth in the village had an idea. Why shouldn't they approach the Block? So everyone in the village signed and they sent a proposal to the Block office for the construction of a school in the village. They promised to contribute their share through Shramdhan. Rs. 12,000 has been sanctioned from the Block and the work has already started. Seeing this, the people of Singarupalli have also sent an application requesting a school in their village.

We got to know that 50 labourers from Turidih village had worked on the road for PWD and had not been paid their wages. There was some misunderstanding between the Sub Engineer, the Contractor and the time-keeper. Weeks and weeks passed by. The people did not find any other work either. Every time a few of them would go over to see the engineer and he would give a different excuse. A meeting of all the villagers was held and they decided to go altogether. And they got their money.

There are about 15 hamals working at Jhalap, mostly in the service of the Sardarjis, Marwaris and Banias, Seeing the unity of the workers in Turidih, these people also came together and have put in a petition with the panchayat for their registration. By this they will be able to get a reasonable wage and also will be able to stop the outside hamals who at the moment do work for lower wages and defeat their united struggle for higher wages.

Inspite of continuous efforts, there is a great shortage of work. So inspite of all their unity and consciousness the labourers of this area are still facing this problem. And inspite of many petitions and requests we have not been able to open up any new avenues of employment so far.

When we came we found that no one in this place had anything good to say about drinking. Not even the permanent drunkards. "But how to give it up?" : Was the usual question. In every village, at every meeting this was discussed but no solutions were forthcoming. From a small study we had done on drinking habits in the locality we found that in almost every adivasi family, they would make and consume atleast 5 kg. liquor per week.

The people around Jhalap were troubled a lot by the big owners and customers of the brewing joint at Jhalap. So the people held a big meeting and asked the panchayat to close down the joint. The Sarpanch and panches of Jhalap contacted all the Sarpanches and panches of seven Gram panchayats around. They all met and discussed the issue and finally passed a joint resolution to close all the liquor bhattis in their villages. Copies of the resolution with signatures of 105 Sarpanches and panches from the 35 villages of 7 gram panchayats were sent to the District Magistrate as well as the Chief Minister.

Through all these efforts, the people came very close to us and now every visit of ours into any of the neighbouring villages turns out into a small village meeting in a matter of minutes.

Inspite of their co-operative spirit, joviality and willingness for hardwork, there are very few of them who have two meals a day. Whenever we asked them how this is so, all their replies would invariably be about the glorious past they have had. Today why things are like this they do not know and they are too frightened to think about the future. Answering the same question, the Sarpanch of Turidih said, "before 20 years we had lots of land enough water and very good crops. We ate as many times as we wanted. My parents were strong and huge built like giants. Today myself and my wife get two meals a day now and then. And we are something like human beings. But our children, nobody knows what they will get to eat. They might grow up to the size of little ducklings". That is his feeling about the future. "But how do you think this has happened, Uday ramji ?" : We ask him. "What to say brothers" he goes on "What I remember is this. About 20 years ago a few Sardars landed up here. Must be from somewhere up north. Each one had a cloth bundle on the head. A cycle pump, some

broken cycle parts, a pot and a pan. That is all. Then they set up small cycle repair shops. We used to laugh at them. At night they used to sleep under the trees by the side of their repair shops at Jhalap. Then slowly they started with the buying and selling of wood, mauva flowers, rice and forest fruits. After a while other villagers told me that they were giving loans to adivasis. Then they set up small team shops, motor repair shops, grocery shops and liquor joints. But the main business was giving loans. Between 1960 and 1970 there were many famines with the biggest one in 1967. No one else except the Sardars had food or money. Almost everyone borrowed, village after village. You take 10 Rupees. After a month, you go back with the money. And Sardar says : "You had taken 20 Rupees, and 10 Rupees interest." Within a year the amount become 500 Rupees. None of us knew how. But everyone said : "Only the Sardar has the account." Then Sardar would come with his goondas. Out of fear of getting beaten up we wrote off our lands to the Sardars. Almost all of us lost more than half of what we had. Most people have no more land to loose. But even now our blood is still being sucked. We work hard. Whole day. And get Rs. 2/-. And in the evening we have to go back to Sardar's shop and buy things at exorbitant costs. In season we sell our rice to the Sardar 1.25 a kilo. Then after three months we buy the same rice for anything between Rs. 2.50 to 3.00. Have to survive, no ?"

We tried to get the small farmers together so that they could fix the price of paddy before the public auction in which the Sardars, Banias and Marwaris have mutually agreed upon terms and conditions through which they offer very low prices. But at the moment the farmers are in a fix. They know that if they store up the paddy they can get better price; but who will give them the small amounts they need now ? This forces them to sell their paddy at very low prices. In two villages they are thinking of

the grain bank idea. Once when we had called a small meeting of the marginal farmers the local grain dealers accused us of 'involving ourselves in local politics'. But in our minds we are quite clear that this is a matter of existence for the poor adivasi farmer.

We have a long way to go. Some of our efforts have generated a lot of enthusiasm. From now on we will play a subdued role, especially in those villages where some activities have succeeded. In those we are forming various small groups like Yuvak Dals and from Vikas Dals so that they can take on and be the inspiration for others. In Sarekel the Gram Vikas Dal has 50 members. In Singarupalli there are 20. In Jhalap, eventhough they have not yet decided on the formation of a group, about 30 of them come together regularly and one of the first things they want to start is a co-operative grocery shop so that all the poor people around can buy the basic commodities at reasonable rate.

P H U L B A N I

Report from Phulbani

Paburia is in the Baliguda Sub-division under Tikabali Block of Phulbani District in Orissa. We stayed here for a while and tried to learn more about the people. Majority of the people here belong to the Khonda community. About 10% of the people belong to other communities such as Brahmins, Businessmen, Oilmen, potters etc. These people have a lot of money and so they control the economic and political situation. The Khondas speak 'Koi' which we found very different from Oriya, but after mixing with the people we are now able to communicate with them and get a feel of their problems. The Khondas produce Ginger, Tumeric and Maize in plenty but traders make a contract of sale even before harvesting and thus they get the produce very cheap.

We gradually began visiting other villages like Malerima, Damiguda, Tentulisahi and Kutiguda. In every village there is an entertainment programme. For these programmes they have a separate house called 'Dindagarh'. We had several meetings with the people of different villages. In one such meeting the people of Kutiguda had proposed to celebrate a feast after harvesting.

In a meeting they discussed how they would celebrate their feast and what would be the amount of subscription needed. First they thought of Rs. 2/- each. After a discussion they found that it was not possible for all to pay so much. So it was decided that each would pay Rs. 1.50 and $\frac{1}{2}$ kg. rice and the person who is unable to pay may give rice and whatever he can afford. But all should participate.

In the next meeting they divided the participants into groups. Four persons voluntarily took charge of collecting the subscription. One group was in-charge of purchasing commodities, another to collect utensils and one group was in-charge of selecting

the place. We give this because it is found that sometimes even in advanced societies there is mismanagement. But in this case everything was very well managed and no one had any trouble.

On the day of the feast they went to a high place where people of the nearby villages could see them. They had hired a bandparty from a village named Rudangia, which is at a distance of 10 kms. from here. Everybody, old, young and children attended the feast. They had also invited some people from Danuguda. In all there were 60 participants.

They arranged the feast with great courage. Some took charge of cooking (they did not hire a cook) others took charge of various other arrangements. During the feast they sang and danced. The celebration was over at 5 p.m.

After that they took a grand procession with music and dancing. They shouted slogans like 'Asa Yubake Ek Heba; Gaon ku sahare badlai deba'. (Oh I youth come, and together we shall change our village) Kutiguda Yubak Sangh Ki Jai etc. The procession went through all the nearby villages and carried on till 10 p.m. Some ladies had also joined the procession.

This event had a very good impact on the village. After this the people came closer and closer and their unity became stronger. The success of this festal celebration gave them confidence that they can organise any thing. They also did some organisational work which will be discussed later.

Previously it was found that the old people did not co-operate with the youth. But soon after the feast they began to co-operate and showed their sympathy towards their work. They also began attending the Yubak Sangha meetings.

An important thing happened in the feast. At every feast the participants used to drink but this was the first feast in which they did not take wine. The Band-party members were from another village so they did not know of the decision taken by the Yubak Sangha. They asked for wine. Some members refused to give it to them and some members tried to convince them not to drink and then they brought them fried rice and tiffin instead of alcohol.

Impact on other villages :

When the procession went through different villages, it was found that the people of Paburia became jealous. They told the people of Kutiguda village that it was alright to have a feast but they should not have taken the procession through Paburia and tried to show off. The people of Paburia did not allow the youth from Kutiguda to attend their 'Dindagarh'. This had a good impact on the youth of Kutiguda. The people of Kutiguda cleared the misunderstanding. They convinced the people of Paburia that they did their procession for pleasure, not for show, they did not have any other intention and they are ready to help them if they want to organise a Yuba Sangha.

Some other villages were also influenced by this feast and procession. In Barsahi, Burbinazu, Paburia, Danuguda, Malerima it was found that they became active and tried to organise Yubak Sanghas. Initially there was a competitive spirit but now this has somehow changed.

In a meeting at Kutiguda there was a discussion about the feast. The following came from the discussion :

1. Previously they never had a feast in which all the villagers participated.
2. They got much amusement from this feast, which they did not get from other feasts.
3. They were also getting pleasure out of drinking, attending 'Dinda Ghar' etc. But the effects of drinking were harmful as they usually quarrelled with others or used abusive language. When they attended 'Dinda Ghar' they got tired because of sleepless night. But from this feast they got pleasure without any harmful effects.
4. Previously, any feast, even religious, was not celebrated without drink but this was the only feast in which drink was prohibited.

Meeting for the Bandha (embankment) work and Brick making

Every year the people faced a lot of problems due to the shortage of water so they usually checked the flow of water by putting a bandha. This bandha was prepared with the money from the village fund. This year they decided that everybody, old and young, will together contribute their labour instead of spending the money from the village fund.

They also gave a piece of common land, where they tried to build a club house, but failed due to lack of co-operation. So in a meeting they decided that they will build the club house this year after harvesting. At first they thought of building with their village fund. For this they would have to ask the old people for the money. They knew that the money may not be made available to them because the village fund was generally used by the old men and for their village festival. So they discussed further and this is what came out of the discussion :

1. First they would make the bricks, bake them and collect wood from the forest.
2. Those of them who know carpentry would make the doors and windows etc.
- 3) When they are in need of money, at the last stage they would ask their elders to help them and then there would be less possibility of them refusing.

For this they listed the names of people who know brick making. Then they made 12 groups and in each group they put two skilled and 3 unskilled persons. Each group was assigned to make 1500 bricks. When the brick making would be over, they would go one day to forest and bring some firewood for baking brick.

The next day they started the bandha work. It was found that all young, old, children were happily engaged in bandha work. The some slogan was used here. When they were working i.e. "Kutiguda Yubak Sangha Ki Jai."

Each group prepared the bricks. Then they went to the forest and brought wood. In front of the club house they burnt the bricks.

Its impact on the villagers :

In all the villages there was no work. So people sat idle. But after this work it is found that some families have now started preparing bricks. Some ladies have also joined them.

Its impact on other villages :

When other villages saw the progress of Kutiguda, they got courage to organise Yubak Sangha and do some works in their village. Now we found that in some villages the Yubak Sangha

was organised, meetings were taking place, also they were doing some community work.

Barsahi people once called us to help them to organise Yubak Sangha. But now they were trying to stand by their own feet and told us to help them when they need. Before some days they cleaned one village dirty road.

In Burbinazu, a young tailor, who is working at Paburia, saw the development of Kutiguda. He discussed with Kutiguda people and tried to organise the youth of his village by adopting the same procedure.

Now they are having meetings frequently. For Yubak Sangha they thought of a fund. So they decided to work one day in a week in another person's field. They deposited the wages in to their common fund. They have also constructed a road to the jungle.

In Malerima and Danuguda Yubak Sangha have been formed. Because of their efforts, all the wine shops in their village have been closed. There was an unused broken house which the members repaired and are now using as their club house. Here two villages joined and formed one Yubak Sangha. They cleaned a pond and the village road. They held meetings frequently.

They thought that first they become strong and than they will join Kutiguda and some other villages and when the organization will become big and strong enough than they will stop the corruption going on in this area.

Sometimes some members from Malerima and Danuguda attend the meeting of Kutiguda.

The people from Paburia also come to us and discuss with us. We are also trying to go closer and become intimate with them.

This news has spread in every village here. And all villagers are thinking of it.

Village Panchayat :

It was a practice that the village Pradhan and some other members decided village disputes and fine collected from both the parties was spent on drinking.

One of the women told others that Kutiguda people were trying to kill her by means of some "Guni" or "Mantras" and that she was alone in that village. So people tried to convince her that as she is growing old may be she has some health problems. They advised her to consult a doctor but the old woman did not.

For that reason, the village Panchayat sat to decide the case. The old woman complained particularly against one person, so he was called.

This time, the Panchayat called the Yubak Sangha members to give their opinion and participate in the judgement. The woman was found to be at fault. Consequently the old woman was fined Rs. 8/- and the person was fined Rs. 2/-. The Yubak Sangha opposed this as he was not at fault. The Panchayat agreed with them and that man got back his money. When the old woman gave the fine, the Panchayat divided the fine into two and gave Rs. 4/- to the Yubak Sangha for Adult Literacy Centre. This is a great change.

Village Meeting :

In one meeting the Team Members and a member of the faculty were present. A man named Suman entered the meeting hall. He was under the influence of drink. Other members tried to make him to sit but he wanted to disturb the meeting. They asked him to go out of the place. But he began to abuse, so all other members got angry and beat him severely. After some time we asked people why they beat him. They replied us that "We could have killed him if you were not here". Under heavy influence of alcohol he sometimes beat his brothers and parents. Villagers persuaded him to try and give up drinking, but he did not listen.

On the next day during the meeting, villagers asked Suman why he did not come to night classes. He answered that he knew reading and writing. So had no need of attending classes. Villagers discussed the advantages of the night classes. They told him that there are some persons who know reading and writing but still they come because they discuss various problems and learn from each other.

That day they decided it is not possible for all members to attend class every day. So night class will be continuing everyday and teachers and students will be coming every day. They fixed two days in a week i.e. Tuesday and Saturday for their general meeting. Now it is running according to their decision.

Koi Samaj Meeting :

A Koi Samaj general meeting was held on 16th January 1979 at Kutiguda village where 30 representatives from 30 different villages joined. This meeting was organised by Kutiguda people where Team was not present as we have been to Puri Seminar. The following points were decided in that meeting :

1. Prohibition of drinking.
2. Stopping the "Dinda Ghar going" and
3. No girl will attend the "MADA". Mada means, when a man dies, his relatives from the nearby villages attend the funeral ceremony and after the cremation young boys and girls sleep together and enjoy themselves. The people felt that it creates social disturbance. So they have stopped the girls from attending the Mada.

Regarding the drinking of alcohol, all the representatives have decided that no one will purchase wine from others but they can prepare wine in their houses for their personal consumption.

But the last part of the meeting was a failure as it become politicalised. Some political people were present, some of them asked people to vote for Janata and others for congress.

Grand village Meeting :

To discuss the Socio-economic development of Kutiguda, a meeting was organised by the villagers, where all the young, old and children participated. Before this meeting, Yubak Sangha discussed among themselves how to face the questions and convince the villagers. The following points were discussed in the meeting.

1. First all the old men explained their bitter experiences of drinking in the following points :
 - i) When they feel the need of money for drinking they usually steal paddy, rice etc from their own house without the knowledge of their family members.
 - ii) Some of them sometimes, sell their lands, houses, goats, cows etc.

- iii) Heavy drinking leads to unhealthiness and consequently some of their friends have died.
- iv) Due to their poor health they are now unable to work hard.
- v) When elders drink in their own homes, their children used to join them in drinking.
- vi) Due to drinking quarrels take place in the family and consequently family peace gets destroyed.
- vii) When they drink they quarrel with their neighbours.
- viii) When they drink they do not feel hungry.

2) After the old men's statements regarding consequences of drink, the young people expressed what usually happen when they attend the "Dinda Ghar". The following points came out of their discussion :

- i) The whole day they spend in the field and in the night they dance and enjoy upto 2 a.m. So they do not get time to sleep. And consequently they have health problems.
- ii) The only thing that they get out of it is pleasure. At last they have taken the following decisions :
 - a) That nobody in their village will prepare or sell wine.
 - b) No one can drink, but they can drink 'Salap' for three months.
 - c) Young people will not attend "Dinda Ghar".

- d) Girls are not allowed to attend 'Mada'. Now it has been found out that some of the old men are not drinking Salap. The young boys have totally stopped "Dinda Ghar" going.

The Kutiguda Yubak Sangha members organised themselves to start joint vegetable cultivation in the Rabi season. For this purpose one of the villagers has given his plot of land (about 40 decimila). Jointly all the young people dug the pits added green manure in the pits dug by them and prepared the pits for seedlings. In the middle of February they have sown Pumpkin, cucumber, bitter gourd and long gourd seeds. They have divided themselves into teams and each team gets its turn to water, weed add fertilizers and spray the plants from time to time. Simultaneously they have put a fencing to the plot. They have made an cross embankment on the channel and reserved the usual flowing water reservation is serving a dual purpose. It is used to irrigate the vegetable crop and for bathing and washing. Both men and women have been working and participating in this work.

This activity was initiated by us not only to teach them how to grow vegetables in Rabi season, thus make maximum use of the scanty flowing water to support their economy but also to study their continuous co-operative attitude as it is a continuous programme for 3/4 months in Rabi season. Most of the villagers have grown this type of vegetables in their kitchen gardens.

We are trying to organise the women. For this purpose we mix with them sing songs. They also join in watering the vegetable plants. Seeing that their brothers are learning to read and write by going to night school; they have asked us to help them open a night school for them. They have also proposed to have a feast for the women folk.

SHANKARGARH

Shankargarh Report

11th July 1978. That was the day our team arrived in Shankargarh Block of Samri Tehsil, Sarguja District in Madhya Pradesh. Shankargarh is a bazar joint with a few shops, a Police Station, a Rest House, a Primary Health Centre, the Offices of the Patwari and Block Development Officer and a branch of the Central Bank of India. Surrounding it, are villages belonging to Jamdi and Chalgali Panchayats. From the report of the Scouting team we had known that the area has 80% Adivasi population. For a few days we went from village to village meeting all sorts of people, trying to find out about their socio-economic conditions as well as to obtain a place for our residence.

In Jamdi village a few people came together and then we told them about the team and its activities. They told us that they would very much like us to stay and work with them. The Patel told us that Jamdi village has a Beej Bhandaar built by the villagers themselves and we should be able to get it for our residence. They told us that the key to the Beej Bhandaar was with the Gram Sevak and so we met him and the Block Development Officer to get the key and started staying at the Beej Bhandaar in Jamdi village.

During the first few days we went from house to house in Jamdi, Amgaon, Kharkhona, Tikni, Sarnadih, and Bijadih villages. The people told us that more than 85% of them are Adivasis, most of them get only one meal a day, wage rate is as low as 1 1/2 kg. paddy or Rs. 2/- for a man and 1 kg. paddy or Re. 1/- for a woman. They also told us that at least 40% of the people suffer from venereal disease. Hardly any of the children go to school and almost in every family there are people with skin diseases. Speaking about what the team could start with, they suggested that they would like to have a night school through which they

could learn to read and write. Looking at their faces one could easily notice that there were more crucial issues which they wanted to discuss about but somehow they would not come out with. We did not press them on this as we thought that things would clear up as soon as a closer relationship is established. On the very first day of the night school there were 16 Adivasi youth, boys and girls, most of whom were busy during the whole day looking after the cattle. We spent a few days visiting the villagers in their houses and fields and talking to them the whole day and looking after the classes in the night. After a week the number of youth coming for the classes increased to 40. One of the empty rooms in the village is the school.

The numbers and alphabets are written on the mud wall with charcoal. Along with the reading and writing there is a little singing and a few riddles to be solved followed by a discussion on the problems of the village and possible solutions. In the second week one evening we were going towards Shankargarh when we found about 25 labourers sitting on a bridge and chatting. As one of us was trying to listen to what was going on, they invited us to join them. They were labourers working with the P W D on a daily wage basis. They had worked for a few weeks but had not been able to get their wages. In the meanwhile also the work had stopped and they had no answer to give to their families for the work they had already done and for which they had not received any remuneration. The previous three Mondays they were called to the Shankargarh Rest House and then they were told to come the next Monday. Also on this Monday 53 of them had come and waited till 7.00 p.m. and yet no one had come to disburse the wages. "What is to be our next move?" was their question to each other as we came to join them. The discussion went on for a while but no solutions were forthcoming. Then they asked us if we could suggest some method. We told them that we had already heard one or two of them suggest some solutions which the others had not heard. Gandraram, one of the

labourers suggested that they send a memorandum to Shri Larang Sai who is the local M P and at the moment, Minister for labour and Parliamentary affairs. Another man suggested that they should offer satyagraha in front of his house. At this point we asked them if they had contacted the officials at the Block and District levels, and they said no. Then one of them suggested that they write a memorandum to the District Magistrate. After preparing the memorandum the meeting disbursed. The same evening the Block Development Officer and the Gram Sevak met us and told us that we should not excite the workers or send any memorandum to anyone. News about our meeting these workers reached various government officials including the Engineer who had taken the contract for the road building work. He sensed some trouble and on the very next day disbursed the wages. All the labourers involved in this incident got interested in the activities of the team and a few of them have been working along with us ever since. From the literacy classes other programmes developed. Evening sports was one. In four of the villages Mahila Mandals got started. In Jamdi some of the farmers came together for joint cultivation. They contributed and started a joint piggery. Almost every house started keeping a few chickens and some of them even bought sheep and goats. Every Saturday and Sunday all these Samities get together and organise drama, dance and song programmes. After the programmes they have a discussion about all their problems and work out solutions for the same. In all the meetings the constant complaint was about a local landlord family known as the 'Lal Saheb'. There are four brothers, Arun Pratap Singh, Ashok Kumar Singh, Nilendra Pratap Singh and Krishna Pratap Singh. Their father was a tax collector for a few villages both during the days of the Maharaja of Ambikapur as well as the days of the British. Everyone in the locality used to call him Lal Saheb. Quite ruthless in his behaviour with the local people, he had his will and pleasure at the cost of anyone of them and no one

could even stand up or raise a voice in his presence. Through all his dealings he had accumulated about 300 acres of land and then he died leaving these four children. They had very little education and the four brothers followed the father's footsteps quite closely. One would find it awfully hard to believe, but these brothers walk into any family in any of the villages around and take anyone's chicken or goat or harass, molest and rape anyone's woman and no one would say anything. They also send the village Chowkidar or their servant or one of the Police personnel from the Shankargarh Police station to demand chicken, maize, vegetables, wood or anything else for that matter, on which their eyes fell and wanted for themselves. Anyone who refuses their demands is caught and beaten up very badly. One man was taken to their house and made to plough the field without any food or water for 48 hours because he refused to give him a goat. Another was asked for a goat because he stood in the way of the second Lal Saheb brother when he was walking on the road and so he had to make a penance by giving a goat. This man did not own a goat and therefore had to buy one from his neighbour to give it to the Lal Saheb. To have the money for the goat he had to sell his land. Shri Buddhu from Jamdi was threatened with death because he had not given oxen for ploughing for no returns. Almost every man had some complaint or other about this family.

The Lal Saheb brothers had got to know about the presence and activities of the team. As they usually did to the local government officials who came into the area, they invited us to their house for 'chai-pani' but we declined on good reasons. Having lost on the first trick, they began to send threats to the team members both through the local people as well as through the government officials. We went ahead with our activities in all the villages including Jamdi and Kharkhona where the Lal Saheb brothers have their houses.

On 15th September 1978, when we had gone to Shankargarh bus stand (2 km from Jamdi) to see off our Project Associate, the three elder Lal Saheb brothers came up and the eldest brother started shouting at us "we have heard all about your activities. No one is allowed to come into this area and do anything without our permission. We are the Lal Sahebs here. We do not want anyone to make the villagers educated, conscious or developed. Leave this area within three hours or else we will kill and bury you". Looking around we noticed that some of the local government officials who were also quite irritated by our presence were watching from behind trees and pillars of the shops as though some drama was going on. Anyway, we did not utter a word. Along with our Project Associate we went and met the District Magistrate and Superintendent of Police and submitted a report on the incident and gave a copy of the same to the Shankargarh Police station.

We came back to the village and carried on with our activities. During the next few weeks the people met very often to discuss various social issues. They cleaned up the common well in Jamdi village which had been lying unused for years. The oil seed crop which was being eaten by pests was protected with pesticides which they bought jointly. They got the hospital doctor to administer small pox vaccination and cholera inoculation. They also got purifiers for the village drinking water wells. In one of the meetings near Kharkhona village all the people raised the issue that they could not take their animals for grazing as the public road leading to the grazing field was blocked by a 'nalla' made by Lal Saheb for irrigating his field. They met the Patwary and got him to demarcate the original road and built it up through their own joint labour. In four villages they got all the Sarpanches and Panches to decide on the closure of liquor shops. People in these villages agreed that they would not buy or sell liquor.

In Kharkhona, Sarnadih and Amgaon literacy classes were started. We contacted the B D O as well as the Gram Sevak and asked them about the various schemes available and the B D O's only answer was, "these Adivasis are **stupid**. Doing anything for them is a waste of time". Also the Gram Sevak, though he has a bungalow built for him in Jamdi village, he never stays there, nor does he do any work for the villagers.

Time and again we have requested the doctors of the Primary Health Centre to help us out in conducting various health education programmes for the people but there has been no response and the sad part is that when a poor man who does not get even one meal a day and who has not even got the money to buy a new langoti comes to the Primary Health Centre for some medicine, he is asked to pay Rs. 2/- or else to bring a chicken or two headloads of wood. In case a penicillin injection is required, it takes at least Rs. 5/-. Many times having come across people with different diseases from which they were suffering greatly we would ask them to go and see the doctor. After a little while they would come back to the Beej Bhandaar and say that the doctor has asked for money, a chicken or wood. Some of them have come to the conclusion that it is better to die in their own house than go to the Shankargarh Primary Health Centre because even if they are not seriously sick the doctors there will make them so. There are many cases in which the assistant doctor has beaten up people for no reason whatsoever. Three months ago the same doctor got drunk and got into the house of Shri Buddha from Jamdi village and started to harass his wife. Shri Buddha being a more conscious one than his counterparts, beat the doctor and threw him out of the house and then reported the case to the Police station. From the people's experience, the personnel at the local Police station is in no way any different. If Lal Saheb

gets three chickens, one goes to the Primary Health Centre, one to the Police station and one to his house, that is the rule. There are many cases in which the Police constables themselves have robbed people of their chickens, rice, maize and wood. Relating to this Buddha said, "the Shankargarh one is not a Police station, it is not a place where one can get justice. Injustice is the rule there and if it is a Police station, it is meant only for the Lal Saheb family's welfare." Most of the people who go to the Police station to complain, return with either swollen cheeks or bruised backs. Shri Stephen had gone to lodge a complaint and the constable asked him "what is your name?" "Stephen", he replied. "Oh! you are a Christian!" and the next thing Stephen knew were two blows on his cheeks. The constable continued "why do you always come to this place with reports? You should come with chicken or some rice or fire-wood not with reports and complaints." The constable twisted and bruised Stephen's ears till they started bleeding and after all this he locked him up in a room for more than half an hour then he was told : "now go and never show your face again". With his ears bleeding and tears flowing from his eyes Stephen came back to us and reported all what happened and for a minute our image about the Police standing for justice and for the public vanished from our imagination.

Thus we saw that while all the adivasis who form about 85% of the population along with the Harijans who are another 10% or more are struggling to keep their bodies and souls together there is just a bunch of people comprising of the Lal Saheb family, few of the local government officials and their associates who exploit every bit of the situation to their advantage. All of them see the Team's presence and activities as the greatest threat to their interests. At one of their joint meetings they worked out a plan to outst the Team from the Beej Bhandear and

from the area. They made a joint deputation to the Project Office who had come to stay at the Rest House. Then they called a meeting of all the local shopkeepers and asked them not to sell things to the Team members. One day they got the inspector from the Police Station to come to the Beej Bhandaar asking the Team to leave. They also instigated the villagers to ask the Team to go. But not even a single villager co-operated with them. The villagers told them quite plainly : "We know the Team quite well; they are our friends and are working for our benefit. You don't have to tell us anything about them we know them well. The Beej Bhandaar is the property of the villagers, built by our own hands. The Team shall stay here as long as they please and as long as we want them to."

By December 1978 we got Yuvak Dals formed in five villages. In three of the villages they have set up literacy classes which are run by themselves. Each family contributes 5 paise each month for the Kerosene oil required for the night classes. In Jamdi village each house makes a small monthly contribution towards the joint fund for starting a co-operative shop.

15th March 1979

It was the day of Holi. In the morning we played Holi along with all the village youth. In the evening while we were playing Volley ball along with the village youth, we heard a cry from the farm nearby. What we saw was shocking. In the broad day light, Krishna Pratap Singh (the youngest of the Lal Saheb brothers) had caught hold of an adivasi girl called Sukhini from Jamdi village, removed her sari and was trying to rape her. The village youth looked at each other and then ran towards the place where this was going on. Krishna Pratap realized the situation and fled on his bicycle. The village youth got themselves

together, collected a few more people from the village and proceeded towards the house of Lal Saheb to tell the eldest brother about what had taken place. We went along. One of our Team members, Bhoop Singh was explaining, what had happened to the eldest brother Arun Pratap Singh when the other two Lal Saheb brothers Ashok and Nilendra hit him on the head with oiled bamboo from behind. Bhoop Singh collapsed unconscious. The villagers were shocked and terrified and took to their heels. A few of the boys turned around threw some stones at Lal Saheb brothers and then fled. Then all the three brothers along with Chandan, their associate for this kind of activities turned on the other two members. Taken absolutely unawares we were beaten badly. Another member of our Team, Ramanand Prasad was also beaten unconscious. And even in that state, they bet us all over the body. We came to our residence and then with blood all over us walked towards the primary health centre. The three brothers and their associate came in a tractor to the hospital premises and were shouting out abuses of all sorts. Seeing the condition the primary health centre doctors had big grins on their faces. As we returned from the hospital, they were again on our way. "You go to the police station and we will finish you" : One of them said. We were feeling tremendously weak and could not go upto the police station. We staggered into the tea-shop nearby and asked for some water and tea. Lal Saheb brothers came and told the tea-shop owner that he would not see the next day if he gave us water or tea. Two village youth along with Stephen went with the report. We have already mentioned earlier what happened to Stephen when he went with the report.

As we were not happy with the treatment given by the doctors at the Shankargarh Primary Health Centre we went to the civil surgeon at Ambikapur. He gave all the medicines and stitched the wounds. The Shankargarh doctor had written that Bhoop Singh had 1 1/2 c.m. injury which the Civil Surgeon found

was 5 c.m. and for Ramanand Prasad it was stated 3¹/₂ c.m. in Shankargarh and here it was 10¹/₂ c.m. In the midst of all the gruelling pain we wondered how even the noble profession of a doctor could be so much down with brutality and injustice !

Then we reported the matter to the District Magistrate and the Superintendent of Police at Ambikapur. When we got back from Ambikapur, all the village youth came to welcome us at the bus stop. "Lal Saheb has been walking around with gun and threatening everyone. He told me also that he would shoot me. But how many people can they shoot ?" said one of the village youth. The S D O Police came and met many villagers and us and took down a whole report. We have also reported the matter to some of the State Level Authorities. Along with all the poor people of the area we are anxiously looking forward to the action which will be taken by the authorities. "If they don't move, we will :" said one of the old men during a meeting held on 25th March by the villagers of 6 villages around to protest against the incident. With tears in his eyes, another villager said : "These Team Members are our own brothers. This blood which has been shed has been for our own sakes. And we shall ask justice for every drop of it."

P U R I

Report from Puri

Chandeswar is a village in Puri district a few kilometers from the Chilka lakes in Orissa. It is an ancient village with many paras. The antiquity of the village can be guessed from the two very old temples in the village.

The village has four distinct communities : fishermen and the Brahmins. They live in separate settlements in the village. Kabaris are somewhat more advanced than the Lodhas who are the most oppressed community in the village. The fishermen have better income than both the Kabaris and the Lodhas because of the proximity of the Chilka lake and Bhubaneshwar market which is 70 kms. away. They also have good export market specially for lobsters.

Separation of the communities is in a way complete and can be seen from the fact that each community has its own grocery shop within their own settlements. The only connections between the communities are in matters of business and production. The tribals work mainly as labour in Brahmins' fields and Brahmins buy fire wood collected by the Lodhas from the forest.

The Kabaris had received some land in 1976 from the government. The land that was given to them was fallow and stony. Reclamation of the land was difficult and expensive and therefore it remained fallow. Apart from being of stony the land had no source of water.

There are 97 acres of land which had been distributed to 53 families. The land had been given to them in the place of their agricultural land which had been declared as homestead. The Kabaris did not think it as fair and had applied to the government for a retransfer of their own land to them. The local Tehasildar had been approached by the Kabaris for this

purpose. The Tehasildar however expressed his inability to do anything on the matter. The Kabaris were infuriated about the whole affair but were unable to do anything.

It was at this point that we came into the village to try to organise the Kabaris so that they could make use of the land. On arrival at the village we looked for a room to live in. The regional rural bank was interested in the project and felt that a rehabilitation project would be useful for the Kabaris. Bank also wanted to organise a co-operative society for these people.

During this time one of the ministers of the Orissa government came to a nearby place called Balugaon. The Kabaris presented a memorandum to the minister requesting him to give their original land back to them. The minister carefully listened to the grievance and on the spot requested the Tehasildar to take action. The Tehasildar agreed to act in presence of the minister but declined when the Kabaris approached him later. He told them that the minister was not aware of certain rules and as such transfers could not be effected.

The Kabaris became very angry and wanted to gherao the Tehasildar. At this point the Spearhead Team intervened and persuaded the Kabaris not to take such action as such methods may prejudice the case. Instead the team suggested that they may try to improve the land they have got by their own effort instead of wasting their energies in fighting the beauracracy. The Kabaris were convinced by the argument. They realised that the land problem was not only their own but also of many other Kabaris living in the 28 different villages spread over many Sq. Kms. in the area. They felt that a united stand and action is necessary not only to solve the land problem. Therefore they started contacting Kabaris living in other villages

in the area. As a result of which the Kabaris from different villages started approaching the Spearhead Team to organise people in their area.

The Kabaris have thus started their action programme around the basic problem of land which touches all people belonging to the poorer section of rural area and have realised that only one isolated caste may not be able to achieve the objective against the formidably strong opponents in the local officialdom. The Kabaris felt that while the minister approved their request the officials were denying them.

However after a few meetings in the nearby villages, they realized that achieving unity of castes to form a class is not an easy process. The various caste groups lived separated and to a great extent alienated from each other in almost all the villages in the area.

The Spearhead Team took on hand the task of building the links between these oppressed groups as they felt that lasting unity will not be achieved merely by the coming together of various caste groups for a short term struggle or for a momentary agitation. Even within the oppressed groups there are oppressor - oppressed relationships. Sometimes the relationships are antagonistic and at other times hostile. Therefore many links are necessary to build a new communication pattern out of which new relationships would emerge. With all these in mind we took up a few linking programmes with the poor Kabaris in focus.

Towards Co-operative Farming

The first effort was towards the development of the land given to the Kabaris of Chandeswar. A loan of Rs. 300/- per acre was arranged from the Land Development Bank with the aid of which Kabaris worked on their own land and developed it sufficiently to take a crop of maize. A further loan of Rs. 50/- per acre was taken from the local rural bank. Advice on better agricultural practices were given by the V.L.W. the Spearhead Team and the bank's field officer. Many of the new ideas were put into practice and they had a good harvest. The Block development officer, Bank's field officer and many others came to see the good harvest that came out of the stony soil. The commendable part of the whole affair was that the Kabaris worked jointly on each others fields from the preparation of the land for cultivation to the harvesting. The Co-operative spirit with which the activity was undertaken did not diminish after the harvesting. This success strengthened the bond within the community. Then they prepared the land for a Kharif crop of paddy but under a new system. They have reallocated the land between themselves. There are 42 families of Kabaris in this village of which 16 families had not got any allocation of land while 13 families had received land in two places thus making their share double of what others got. When we raised a question about the landless people and how they are to be accommodated the whole community sat down for a meeting. After some discussion it was decided that those 13 families who have got land in two places should give up their right in one and thus 26 acres 13 x 2 acres each of land would become available. Landless families would get one acre each from the 26 acres and balance of 10 acres will be cultivated by the village committee. Soon after this decision on 12th May 1978 the villagers went to the site and demarcated and distributed the land amongst the landless people.

The Kharif cultivation has been done under this new arrangement and exchange of labour and implements took place. The harvest was shared amongst the members according to their land holding and labour contribution. All contributed their labour for cultivating the common land and thus a much needed common fund was started. It is worth mentioning that the highest yield was achieved on the common land.

The action on land development and agriculture has given the Kabaris, a little economic strength and has boosted their morale greatly. They have simultaneously launched themselves in a number of other activities and have taken actions against petty officials, labour contractors and village touts of various sorts. They had always accepted the deceipts of these people as their fate and their due in the past, but with their newly gained consciousness they have started challenging these deceptions. Contrary to experiences elsewhere and theoretical expectations, the success in economic activity is strengthening the community's co-operative spirit instead of giving rise to individualism. It has also not given rise to mere economism either. Other activities too got started.

The Night School

There is a school in the village. It has been there for many years. Hardly any Kabari children attend it. With the new consciousness they wanted to have a primary school of their own. Advantage of having such a school is that the children can study in the evening. The children have many errands to do like looking after younger children, collecting fire wood etc. during the day and therefore are unable to attend the school. There is a class VIII educated person in the community and he acts as the teacher while some others help him to maintain order if he is called away on some other work. If the teacher is absent on a particular day one of the elders of the community

takes the class. Since he may not know any of the lessons himself the children are asked to revise, recite or write what they may have learnt the previous day.

Initially there were two problems : They did not have a school room, and they had no fund for kerosene lamps. Both the problems were solved easily enough. They have built a school room by contributing labour and material. To solve the problem of lamps they have decided that one child out of four will bring an oil lamp by rotation. The decision is adhered to and the school every night lights up with flickering lamps with children crowding round them.

Whatever formal learning that is going on in the school may not be all that important. What is important is that a community is learning about education and co-operation. Each night the school is the brightest spot in an otherwise dark and drab street with rows of houses on both sides. After work, men gather around the school and have their conversation and gossip in ^{not}whisperes so that they do/disturb the school which is a great happening. The students are guiding each other and helping each other to check smoking, stop playing cards and abstain from using vulgar words. There are about 57 children attending the school. Old problems which had kept the children away are somehow disappearing. The parents and the community have already approached the head master of the government school in the village to take in the more advanced students into his school. The problems which seemed unsurmountable in the past and for which the children could not be sent to school earlier is not there any more. Newly developed interest in education has blown away almost all previous objections.

Dealing with a Corrupt Sarpanch

The Sarpanch of the village had approached the Kabaris and Lodhas 7/8 months earlier and told them that he would arrange to get land and goats for every family but that they would have to pay a bribe to the officials. The Kabaris and Lodhas paid Rs. 64/- per family (Rs. 50 for land and Rs. 14 for goats) to the Sarpanch. The total sum amounted Rs. 4,000/-. The Sarpanch pocketed the money and did not do anything either about land or about goats. When after months of waiting no land or goat was received the Kabaris protested to the Sarpanch but with no result. Consequently they gheroad the Sarpanch several times at the village entry point. Each time he was able to riggle out of the situation. This infuriated the younger Kabaris and they wanted to kill him. However the elders prevailed on them not to take such action. They went to the SDO and the collector, in a delegation and gave memorandum.

The SDO came for an enquiry and found the Sarpanch to be guilty and asked him to pay back the money. The Sarpanch paid up Rs. 1,200/- promising to pay rest of the money later. The Kabaris are holding the money in a trust. The money will be paid back to people when the whole sum is recovered.

During this whole period the Lodhas remained silent spectators. Even during the enquiry, except 2/3 people, none of the other Lodhas came forward to give evidence. This goes to show the difference between the two communities and problems for the formation of an united front for struggle. Rs. 64/- for a Lodha is much more valuable than it is for a Kabaris who has a slightly higher income but still the Lodhas remained inactive and expected the Kabaris to fight their battle for them.

Dealing with a Labour Contractor

Labour contractors are usually known as Sardars. A Sardar from Banipur (a nearby village) had engaged twenty Kabaris for construction work and had taken them away to a distant place. After the job was complete they were sent back. The Sardar promised to pay them Rs. 50/- each on a later day. But the due was never paid and for 2 years Sardar evaded the Kabaris. Finally the Sardar was located in a nearby village. The Kabaris decided to catch him and give him over to the police. The Sardar was caught and tied up and for a whole week kept prisoner by the Kabaris. He was taken to Tangi where he was to be handed over to the police. However after seven days, in the pretext of going to the field for toilet the Sardar ran away in the darkness of the evening and was never found again.

Mahila Samity and Yuva Sangha

They have also formed a Mahila Samity and a Yuva Sangha. The Yuva Sangha is constructing a two room mud hut for their own use. They have proposed to let a portion of the hut to the Spearhead Team so that they can stay closer to their part of the village. At present the team is staying in the Brahmin para which is somewhat away from the Kabari para.

Mahila Samity has tried to establish a link with the Lodha women by forming a coordination committee composed of the representatives of the Lodha Mahila Samity and the Kabaris Mahila Samity. Thus the women of the Kabari community are taking positive steps in forging a link between the two oppressed castes. The Mahila Samity wants to start some economic activity but none of the members know any craft. So they have asked the Block for some training programmes. To enable them to start some economic activity they feel that they will have to build up a small fund. And this they have decided to raise through their own savings.

Every time they go to the forest to collect fire-wood, they collect few extra pieces. They themselves have built a room and store these saved pieces of wood which they will sell when the rains come and the prices of wood will be higher.

Seminar of 26 Kabari villages.

The news about the success of the Kabaris of Chandeswar spread all around. People of all these villages started visiting Chandeswar and they wanted to do the same things. The Team explained to them that due to the vastness of the area, it would not be possible for them to be directly involved in all these villages. The people of Chandeswar had a solution to offer. One of them said : "we shall organise a Seminar for representatives from all these villages and we can tell them how we went about the whole thing". Everyone accepted the idea and from among themselves deputed people to visit and talk to other villagers. Then they set up the criteria for the selection of the representatives. Various qualities were discussed and finally they came to the agreement that every representative should be literate, patient, honest, socially responsible and good in communicating the message. For the next few days, the deputed persons went from village to village along with the Team Members and got the villagers together to choose their respective representatives for the Seminar. The Chandeswar Kabaris divided themselves into sub-groups and shared the various tasks pertaining to the arrangements for the Seminar. "This is a big event. Many people will come from other villages and they will be our guests:" one of them said. Each one of them contributed Re 1, 1 kg. of rice and a bundle of fire-wood each. After some thinking, they also decided to invite all the bank and government officials. "We are not inviting them as big Sahebs but as public servants and we would like them to explain to the

people themselves, what role their institutions can play in helping out with our developmental efforts : one said.

The Seminar was fixed for 18th to 20th December 1978. Some of our other friends from other Teams had also come to observe how this whole affair was going to be organised. In our minds we kept the objective of the Seminar very clear : Let all the people discuss freely about their own problems and solutions in the light of whatever had happened in Chandeswar and then formulate their own action plans for each village or all the villages together depending on the nature of each problem.

The school building was arranged for the meeting. Separate places were set up for common meetings, eating, staying and cooking. They had different committees from among the Chandeswar Kabaris looking after the reception, the cooking, the serving etc. On the fixed day early in the morning people started coming. There were 70 representatives from 22 villages. As the Seminar started, the members of the meeting-committee explained all about their efforts, achievements and failures in Chandeswar. The first reaction from the other villagers was : "No; no; it is not possible to achieve all that in such a short time". Then the Chandeswar people explained to them everything step by step. And then the others said : "Oh we see, that means you have unity and co-operation, but we don't have it in our villages". Again the Chandeswar Kabaris explained to all how they achieved unity and how they started Co-operating on various issues.

On the second day they divided themselves into sub-groups for discussions on Co-operation, unity, development and organization. Finally all the conclusions were brought together at the general gathering. This was followed by some music and then by role play depicting scenes of conditions in Chandesar before the unity and after. On the third day a bank official, a S F D A person, an agriculture specialist and a veterinary doctor spoke about the various facilities available from the institutions they represent. In the last session all the villagers discussed about future programmes for their own villages which they had started thinking about.

We have got to know about some of the after effects of this Seminar.

Three villages have decided to cultivate their lands jointly and have decided to give a better wage to their own distressed people when they work on their land. According to the capacity of each landowner he will be asked to pay a fixed sum of donation to raise a village common fund.

A few families (about 24) had received from the government 30 acres of land about ten Kilometers away from their villages. These families live in Natini, Sagarbaga and Marshampur. For the last ten years it had not been possible for them to use the land because of the distance. During this period they have sent many petitions. The Spearhead Team advised the villagers involved to shift to the new area as that was the only way they could get something out of the land. They also told them that there is no end to the petition battle and that ten years have elapsed and that they have neither got anything out of the land nor anything out of the bureaucrats. The villagers decided to move out of their present villages where they have nothing but a hut and to create a new village on their own land

ten km. Within three months they have built houses for themselves in the new location and have developed the land. They have also built a guest room for the use of the Spearhead Team Members and other visitors to the village. During the Kharif season they will shift to the new locations and sow the seeds for a crop of paddy.

By deciding to move they feel that they have taken control over their own destiny, which previously they had thought was in the hands of the government officials. They know that it is a big challenge but they feel that unitedly they will win.

Their one predicament is that they possess no bullocks or ploughs. Therefore they have approached the local branch of a bank for loan for a few bullocks. The branch manager who is new to rural banking has declined to advance any loan as he thinks that the tribals are not trustworthy people. Persuasion by the team and by the managers of other branches have been of no avail. However these people are determined to ^{find} a way to cultivate their land. They feel so far that the most complicated things were to construct houses and develop their land which they have done without external assistance and therefore they feel that they will also cultivate their land the same way.

The failure of the bank and the beauracracy to help the Kabaris is not an isolated incident but just another testimony of the approach and attitude of people who manage these institutions. The concern of beauracratc institutions are to function within their own sphere with their own ideas and the people are incidental to them. Therefore the people like Kabaris have but one way and that is to go alone on their own strength. The process of economic growth we feel will be slow but social progress will be much higher which will pay off in the long run.

PERSONNEL OF
RURAL ACTION PROJECT

Personnel of Rural Action Project

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|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Ratan Prakash | 25. Rabinarayan Dash |
| 2. Ram Asaro Diwakar | 26. Rabindra Kumar Ray |
| 3. Harlal Moona | 27. Raghu Nath Behera |
| 4. Yagnadatta Sharma Dadich | 28. Rama Chandra Dash |
| 5. Kamlesh Yadav | 29. Sankarsana Hota |
| 6. Rajender Kumar Kokcha | 30. Durlav Chandra Kalita |
| 7. Prem Singh | 31. Prafulla Tamuly |
| 8. Pitam Singh | 32. Badan Chandra Gogoi |
| 9. Mohammed Iqbal Saifee | 33. Siba Prasad Gogoi |
| 10. Bhoop Singh | 34. Narayan Prasad Das |
| 11. Ramanand Prasad | 35. Dilip Dhekial Phukon |
| 12. Shashikant Dwivedi | 36. Tripti Moyee Borah |
| 13. Rajender Singh Gorakhpuri | 37. Anima Saikia |
| 14. Raj Kumar Ray | 38. Girin Chetia |
| 15. Sanat Kumar Mal | 39. Dewan Singh Kochari |
| 16. Braj Kishore Bimal | 40. Sowaram Kelang |
| 17. Gadadhar Pal | 41. Jadav Chandra Borah |
| 18. Pushpanchala Sawa | 42. Prof. S Dasgupta |
| 19. Asit Kumar Bhattacharyay | 43. D S Savle |
| 20. Shwetashree Mukherjee | 44. Joseph Keve |
| 21. Kalyani Kandar | 45. Pradeep Patojoshi |
| 22. Debendra Nath Das | 46. Cynthia Simoes |
| 23. Tulsi Kumar Jana | 47. Sangitarani Guhre |
| 24. Niloy Kumar Bhattacharjee | |

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