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PEOPLE'S SCIENCE MOVEMENT

WEST BENGAL PERSPECTIVE

S. SARKAR

S. HALDAR

In West Bengal, People's Science is not just a recent slogan. Great scientists like / harya J.C. Bose, P.C. Roy, Satyen Bose, Meghnad Saha etc. were not just of men of laboratory. They felt strong commitment for the society all around. These leaders of science have bequeathed various ideas, programmes, institutions in West Bengal - which have made ground-work in the field of People's Science. Some of them were active in anti-imperialist struggle against British; even after independence many continued thinking and working in the interest of the people.

But the reality in present Bengal shows a gloomy picture altogether. West Bengal has gone down to eleventh position in literacy, position of electrical energy and productivity declining in proportion. Agony for social change is flowing underneath.

People's Science has been ushered and is being nurtured in West Bengal in a vigorous way. Various science organisations and science associations speaking in the interest of the common people were and are being formed. But men of dñdication and democratic spirit

are becoming gradually minority in these associations. Progressive and hopeful organisations have gradually become bureaucratic, traditional and basically isolated from the common people, about whom they talk so much.

In the name of party-politics and party interaction in social programmes, politicalisation has become all-pervasive in West Bengal. Many committed individuals and some voluntary groups have been found impatient in their emotion to form or join political parties, launch programmes in over-enthusiasm, ultimately isolating themselves from the people for lack of preparation.

People's Science attempts in West Bengal are to be understood in this perspective. To learn from the people is yet to be practised by scientists^{and} science-loving people of the state. They are yet to realize 'nfrastucture today is not developed according to people's aspiration and participation. Various forums, clubs and associations have been formed, which maintain mixed character. Various individualistic tendencies matched with radiant attitude of some and some with old, traditional belief are present in different platforms. Scientific Workers' Forum, Bangiya Vigyan Parishat, Bikshan, Chhandabрати, Gana-Vigyan Samannaya Kendra, Eastern India Science Club Association are some of the organisations which try propagation of scientific cultures among the masses through different media like bulletins, magazines, visits throughout the state, postering, direct contacts and programmes etc. There is definitely difference in approeches, but in many such platforms there are formal

scientists and technologists who want to positively contribute to people's struggle by people's power. There are also certain groups of activists, who are working at grass-root and are eager to contribute towards People's Science Movement. Due to lack of linkage and groups being limited to small pockets, co-ordination is quite feeble.

In this perspective, Eastern India Science Club Association (E.I.S.C.A.) has been able to affiliate nearly hundred science clubs of the state. Mode of functioning of E.I.S.C.A. is also in a decentralised way, so that science clubs have been found going from strength to strength gradually through this association. E.I.S.C.A. is trying a broad platform and an intimate link with grass-root activists working at different places. In spite of naivety at the initial stage, E.I.S.C.A. is ably trying to encourage, initiate different science club scattered throughout the state in villages and towns. These Science clubs alongwith voluntary organisations of genuine pro-people attitude can forge an effective People's Science Movement in the state. In spite of different sociological odds, today science is the strongest weapon which people of the State can use to struggle against social oppression. In this connection, E.I.S.C.A. organized seminars, cross-visits, common meetings and conferences of science clubs and encouragement of pro-people programmes of clubs. Audiovisual methods, befitting posters, dramas have also been utilised by many member clubs and friendly associations and forums.

In November last a meeting of the various science clubs in West Bengal was held in Chaksimultala work centre of Chhandebrati. In the past such attempts at bringing the groups together and co-ordinating their efforts has not been a happy experience. The reasons were: (a) Since various groups observed a closed pattern of operation, this did not encourage mutual education ; (b) High expectation from co-ordinating team and consequent disappointment and (c) Middle class temperament of organisers tended to be callous on co-ordination and correspondence affair.

The co-ordinators at Chaksimultala tried to change the tradition. Conference was open in nature. Topic of discussion was not pre-imposed as mutual education was to be given a premium. Every group gave a short account of what it is doing and how. Except for the location of individual groups, the co-ordinators did not attempt to give any other ready-made information about them. The idea was that the groups should know each other by mutual visits and correspondence.

The deliberations of the meeting evolved a plan for understanding each other's efforts. A small team of men volunteered to visit groups and prepare a report within March 1983. Main points of study was detailed out as follows :

- (a) 'what', 'how' and 'why' of the group;
- (b) Mode of leadership, relation between leadership and members, and members and people around;

- (c) Mode of operation: whether the group follows mainly protestive or agitative model, or takes economic programmes among common people, or conscientises people by cultural media or adopts all three or any two;
- (d) Problems the group faces within the organisation and outside in the social, economic and the political environment in which it works;
- (e) How the group perceives social structure of the country, what level of change it perceives and how it relates this programme;
- (f) Source of funds for groups' programmes and individual livelihood of member;
- (g) How the group plans its programmes;
- (h) Whether, and if so how, the group plans or undertakes inclusion of women in its fold or form separate women's organisation;
- (i) Type and character of programmes the groups plans in which other groups participate.

It was decided that the next conference will be held in April 1983. Conference came to an end with the hope that there will be better interaction among the groups in future.

THE GENESIS OF
PEOPLE'S INSTITUTE FOR RURAL ACTION

SANAT KUMAR MAI

Introduction:

People's Institute for Rural Action (PIRA) is an organisation voluntary youth: men and women located at Manasri in Howrah district of West Bengal. PIRA literally means the oppressed. Its objective is to strive for a change in the social, economic and political conditions of the oppressed and deprived people in the area. It endeavours to organise these rural poor and make them self-reliant through mass action. PIRA firmly believes that an all-round development of these deprived sections can be brought about only through organising the people.

Training Camp:

PIRA held a training camp for one week 12th to 18th June 1982, at its central office. Thirty-two young men and five women participated in the camp. The participants came from the interior and backward villages of Howrah and Hooghly districts. The villages are in Udaynerayanpur, Amta I and Amta II blocks of Howrah district and Khanakul I and Khanakul II blocks of Hooghly district.

The participants, whom we can call as cadres consisted of 5 agricultural labourers, 7 marginal farmers,

9 students, 10 educated unemployed, 1 teacher and 5 social workers. The educational qualification of the cadres was as follows : 5 Graduates, 3 Higher Secondary, 18 Madhyamik School, 9 Class-VIII and 2 Primary School. The age of the cadres ranged from 16 to 43 years.

The camp started at 6.00 P.M. on the 12th of June 1982, with cadres getting to know each other as every one of them gave a brief idea of their family, occupation, village etc.

Each day's programme was decided by the cadres. Principal agenda of the camp commenced from the 13th morning. Problems of each village was identified and written on the black-board. In all 27 problems were listed. The list generally indicated the lack of college, hospital, post office, road, bridge, credit facilities etc. Then came the question if these conditions are met can categorize a village/area as developed. It was then realized even where these facilities are available 80 per cent of the population did not make use of it and only 20 per cent of the relatively affluent section of the community benefitted. Nearly 70 per cent of the country's population is illiterate, the situation being worse in rural areas. It is not there are no schools. The problem is that most of our children do not get anywhere near the gates of these schools.

The facilities are inadequate. But the problem is more serious. Even the existing facilities are not utilised due to ignorance and lack of awareness. their present

state the poor are exploited from all angles. The various modes of exploitation, the conditions of agricultural labourers and poor farmers were discussed. How the agricultural labourers for want of gainful employment leave rural areas and are exploited by their industrial employers was debated.

The discussion on exploitation led the participants to ways of preventing it. It was soon clear that the voluntary cadres on their own cannot achieve much and any success would depend upon active participation and involvement of the oppressed people themselves. Therefore the first step the cadres would look forward is to earn the trust of agricultural labourers and poor farmers. There would be education of the masses, which will raise their consciousness. Mass consciousness would be translated into a mass movement, which in turn lead to a mass revolution. Finally there would be liberation of masses.

A whole day was spent discussing the problems of women and ways to solve them. At first, most of the male cadres were suspicious about physical strength and mental ability of women. Soon these suspicious vanished when examples of women's competency and breaking away from complacency in different countries were given. The participation and enthusiasm of women cadres on topic concerning them were redeeming. It was minutely discussed that a women can and does much more physical work than her male counterpart. She does it selflessly and gets no

recognition for the same. She is regarded as a servant without any wage payment. While men want to restrict women to four walls of her women, some of the women are against their emancipation and believe in the torture of their sect. Therefore, dowry and rape are on the increase in our country. Unless the women awaken and rise, these problems cannot be solved. Stressing the need for women's organization, it was accepted that the women cadre present there will have to play a major role in this direction.

We discussed the above mentioned topics dividing the cadres into 6 or 7 groups so that everyone could express himself/herself freely. There were two kinds of groups : those consisting of vocal persons and the other comprising of less vocal. In each group an experienced worker of PIRA was present to take notes of the discussion.

On the last day we discussed our gains from the camp. Everybody admitted that he/she has learnt to think in an entirely new manner about the problems of our society. Our idea of development got a new meaning. It was agreed that we should maintain close communication amongst ourselves and that cadres of PIRA would meet the first Sunday of every month.

The cadres also chalked out a programme of work to be carried out when they return to their villages. They would collect songs connected with mass-awakening and mass-liberation, evolve methods of adult and child education, initiate games and exercise for physical fitness and have

people's first-aid kit. The proposal for cultural activities in the villages was received with all enthusiasm by most of the cadres.

There was no place for lecture in our camp. The discussion was based on free and frank dialogue. There were questions and answers, case studies, role play and discussion of data relating to local, district, state and national environment. Even though everyone was given equal opportunity to participate, it should be admitted that agricultural labourers and women talked less.

The Cadres participated also in the management of the camp. They owned the camp as their own and at the end of it became the members of the PIRA.

Nothing was imposed; nothing was accepted blindly. Everything was considered and debated on the basis of our intellect and experience. Discarding the traditional teacher, student relationship, we tried to reduce and overcome our hesitation, fear and shyness.

Review of Six Months Activity after the Training Camp :

Work has been started in the district of Howrah and Hooghly in 35 villages of two blocks. These villages have number of organisations whose activities were confined to games and sports, physical exercise and some cultural programmes such as play acting, mono-acting, recitation etc. They also celebrate the birthdays of great men. The activists of PIRA went to those villages

and tried to change the programmes and method of work of these organisations. They have chosen particularly the villages where the low caste and oppressed people live. They did not respond to the activists in the initial stage because they were used to a different approach of local village political leaders and were influenced by them. But after their best effort they developed a close touch with the children and the youth who work as cowherd, agricultural labourer, etc. They also developed rapport with the young girls who collect cow-dung or collect shell from the river and to sell in the market. Through these young friend they became accepted by the people of the villages. Now they are trying to organise the people through education.

Existing youth clubs or libraries in the working area of PIRA had a lot rivalry and little understanding among them. One club did not know what the other club was doing. But competition was there which led to quarrel and arguments among themselves. There was wasteful competitions in expenditure of Pujas, therefore these youth clubs were of not much use in micro-level organisational work. But interaction with PIRA has taught them to come together and start work in co-operation with each other. Today there is a joint effort for organisational work encompassing the whole area. PIRA is working in 35 villages with 35 village level organisations, with an objective to bring them together to make the action stronger, and to learn from each other. Now these organisations are gaining confidence that non-political group also can work in the village and also can take up actions.

PIRA has successfully trained the workers who were frustrated and doubtful about working in village. The training has cleared their mind and freed them from fear. Now they have started working with the people by composing songs, writing play, etc. Village girls and youths are also asking for the PIRA's hand-written journal which is PIRA's Mouth-piece. They have enough confidence to talk in the meeting to put their views forward etc. One girl who had studied upto 8th class has written one play of about 50 pages on a Mahila Samiti which has also encouraged PIRA workers. PIRA is thinking to stage that play. PIRA have also composed few street drama.

Those clubs which were formed only to receive the benefits from Government and misappropriate them appears to have changed through interactions with PIRA. These clubs have started working on basic issues and problems of the people. They now approach the Government or other developmental agencies when need is felt. PIRA has started one night school after the camp. In this village there were no facilities for education. All the participants (age varies from 6 years to 16 years) contribute 10 paise each for kerosene oil. They have bought their books on their own. They have also started savings from that amount.

We have come over the differences between the boys and girls among ourselves as well as in the villages. In PIRA training camp there was no segregation between girls and boys. We have taken our food together, we danced and sang together. People have overcome their taboo "Do girls

o the meeting?" The girls are also proving their efficiency as school teachers in school organised by the village clubs. The girls have also overcome fear and hesitation of going out and thus they have gained faith of people. The girls have proved that coming out of home and work is not a sign of corrupt character. They have also felt that they have vital role to play in social development.

There is a village consisting of 30 families who were earning their livelihood by selling liquor. In spite of the non-co-operation of the political groups the villagers stopped preparing liquor through our effort. The women have started working in the field (harrowing) and proved that they can also work in the field. The work opportunity of male labour may have been adherely affected. The women have started trading of vegetables and selling rice. We (PIRA) think that these activities of women will lessen the dominance and exploitation of men at home and in society. It has been thought to give some more thought to develop programmes so that women can work alongwith men.

Few discussion camps were arranged within the period of last 6 months at Haridhara, Gurugarh, Balichak, Ambegar and Manashree and discussed common problems of the women of lower middle class. In all camps participants varied from 15 - 20. Common problems and solutions raised by the groups was independent income source for the women for which till now we don't have any plan. Though women of all classes are exploited but our initial target is poor class.

There are quite a few youth clubs who believe in ideology of Vivekananda including Manasree PIRA's head-quarter. PIRA arranged a meeting with all such clubs where it was discussed how we can use Swamiji's ideology in rural development. Swamiji devoted his life to organise people's power through education. But the many so-called Vivekananda clubs have started worshipping statues of Vivekananda and spent all their time in discussions which were confined to them only, keeping aside Swamiji's ideology. 70 people participated in the discussion including Maharaj of Ramakrishna Mission and others who believe in swamiji's ideology and its implementation. PIRA took this as a strong tool for rural development. Women cadres also participated whereas this participation was not normally allowed in Ramakrishna Vivekananda training camps. PIRA has printed a paper on the duty of followers of Swamiji.

Those boys and girls who were influenced by political leaders and were used as pawn, by these leaders have stopped going to them. Therefore the political groups have started commenting that PIRA is a new and different political party which has no relation with C.P.M. Congress and even Anand Marg. Those who were running after the political leaders understood that they were only running after mirages and that they had no independence of actions. Few member have already decided to work in the village with their own existing resources without any of high consumption. Many of them are giving time of PIRA by doing private tutorship. Few of them are thinking of joint ventures in industrial aspect. It is clear to

everybody that PIRA wants to get their support without promising anything in return. So whoever comes and joins PIRA is very clear that they are not going to get any job etc. Whoever is joining hand with PIRA are doing so out of personal interest and inspiration.

Programmes have been taken for children also. Apart from formal education, we are trying to train them through exercise, "bratachari" (an alternative to Boys Scout Movement) recitation etc. to bring out the talent in them. Through our programme they are not only learning to read and write but also learning other aspects of life. Our education programme is going on in 4 villages, main objective is to make future solidier of people's freedom movement.

PIRA arranges atleast one meeting in every month (for one full day or half a day) to discuss all the problems faced by the worker and help them to sort out the problems on their own. PIRA has arranged 8 meetings till to-date.

We are trying to tell the people that development does not come by having schools, colleges, hospitals, roads, bridge etc. On the other hand, we are trying to make them understand how to use their own resources for their own benefits without going to the political chamchas. We hope to make self-dependent societies. PIRA hates dependency because depending on others we are spoiling our energy and image.

All the workers are trying and preparing themselves to attend seminars/meetings at state level and national

levels. Few members have attended such meetings and have learnt about other organisation and helping each other to come together to work in broader way at state level.

Alongwith other activities PIRA has a programme for library, songs party, cleanliness, health and family planning, children and adult education, physical exercise, sports and games, to publish wall news, savings, etc. Every activity is geared to increase people's conscientization and people's power through pro-people education.

We are trying to use science in production and other economic activities apart from social activities. Programmes have been adopted for handicraft, gardening, plantation, animal husbandry, increase in production, etc. All the tasks have been done voluntarily by our workers. There is no paid worker at PIRA. Almost all the workers are from poor families (land-holding varies from 2 bighas to 10 bighas). We are encouraging the workers to become self-dependent. Few joint economic activities will be taken up.

Because of political affiliations of some and personal problems of some others, only 15 workers out of 37 who participated in the training camp are with us. Due to their own financial problems these workers are not able to devote full time for PIRA. We are not satisfied with our performance. But we hope, our consistency, confidence and honesty should help us to realize our goals.

YOUTH TRAINING CAMP AT BAVARIA COLONY - MUZZAFFAR NAGAR

(U.P.)

28th JANUARY TO 2nd FEBRUARY 1983

PITAM SINGH, BHOOP SINGH, RAJENDER KUMAR KOKCHA
AND ALOK SAGAR*

PIDT has opened a new area of operation in Un block of Muzzaffar Nagar district in Uttar Pradesh. In this area, we are working with Bavaria community, which is said to have migrated from Rajasthan. Bavaria's were labelled as criminal tribe during the British times. This badge still persists to be a burden on them and are harassed even for the wrongs they might not be doing. We had recently organised a camp in the area. A resume of the deliberations thereof are presented here.

In the following paragraphs, we have tried to present the deliberations of the training camp as they took place. Deciding of the agenda and revising the same, which involved an element of repetition have been authentically portrayed. Likewise issues raised and debated out of context from the topic at hand, appear as they occurred during the deliberations. While an attempt to critically evaluate the process of people's thinking may be absent, we have tried to reproduce here the process of deciding the issues for discussion, deliberating on them and arriving at decisions, evidenced by the Bavarias.

Except Alok Sagar, who is an independent activist, the rest are members of PIDT.

The participants at the camp were men and women from each of the 12 Bavaria villages. They represented honest enthusiastic persons who would take initiative in bringing about a social transformation of their oppressed community. It was agreed that they would attend all the 5 days of the camp. That many of the males were educated, was an advantage from the point of view of communication. The percentage of those who could read and write was lower among the females.

To identify the participants for the camp, meetings were held in different villages. The experience was varied. In some villages, meetings were well attended and as a result the selected candidates reflected people's choice. In others, where the meetings were thinly attended, village leaders made the choice. Further, while in some villages as high as 10 women were selected, in few others not a single woman's name was proposed. At the end, we had a list of 52 men and 22 women.

28th January 1983

A ceremonial function was arranged to inaugurate the training camp. Apart from the local Government functionaries, Shri S.K.Kaul, Deputy Commissioner for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe, Government of India and Shri Subhachari Dasgupta, Director, People's Institute for Development and Training were present. Due to inclement weather on the day, the Bavarias could not come to the function in large numbers as

expected. There was a discussion between them and the Government officials on problems of Bavaria community and their needs of development. An effort was also made to analyse the past attempts at uplifting the community.

At the end of the day we, the co-ordinating team, prepared the following list of issues for discussion on the next day :

- 1) Education, 2) Stealing, 3) Liquor Consumption,
- 4) Corruption by Police and Government Officials,
- 5) Irrigation, 6) Failure of Soap Factory and 7) Training in Tailoring Skills. As it turned out, we did not have to put-forth these issues. The participants themselves indicated them.

29th January 1983

Number of Participants : 50 males and 16 females.
 Co-ordinating team : Pitam Singh, Bhoop Singh,
 Rajender Kumar Kokcha, Subhachari Dasgupta and
 Alok Sagar.

Opening the discussion, we asked the participants to indicate the issues they would like to discuss. The following issues were identified : 1) Education, 2) Land Reforms, 3) Employment for the Unemployed. 4) Corruption by Police and Government Officials, 5) Child Marriage, 6) Electricity, 7) Social Evils, 8) Indebtedness, 9) Stealing, 10) Consumption of Liquor, 11) Religious Rituals, 12) Tailoring, Knitting and Embroidery, 13) Dowry, 14) Failure of Soap Factory, 15) Development of

Health Centre, 16) Postal Services, 17) Roads and
18) Family Planning.

As should be obvious, all the issues, we as co-ordinators had thought relevant, were included in peoples' list. It was agreed that the deliberations of the camp would commence on each day at 10.00 hrs. and close at 16.00 hrs. Lunch was fixed at 13.00 hrs. Everyday meal would be prepared for 50 people. In the event more number attended the camp, the participants decided that no extra-food would be prepared and the same quantity would be shared among all present.

The day began with the topic of education. Connotation of the term, problems encountered in acquiring education and the ways to overcome the problems were discussed. Since the first topic occupied considerable time, reservations were expressed whether all the topics listed could be covered in 5 days. A shorter list was prepared considering the priority of various issues and aggregating them. The new list included the following issues : 1) Education, 2) Land Reforms, 3) Corruption by Police and Government Officials, 4) Child Marriage, Dowry, Social Evils, Religious Rituals and Family Planning, 5) Electricity, Health Centre, Postal Services, Roads, etc. 6) Indebtedness, 7) Failure of Soap Factory, 8) Internal Conflicts, 9) Consumption of Liquor and 10) Employment, Tailoring, Kinitting and Embroidery.

The 66 participants present were divided into 10 groups, and each group was assigned a topic. Each group consisted of 6 or 7 members. Care was taken to distribute the female participants among all the groups. Group formation was left to the participants. The various groups discussed their assigned subject until lunch.

In the afternoon, all the groups assembled together. The group on education which presented its analysis emphasized the following aspects :

- 1) Everybody should have knowledge of letters,
- 2) Education is a must for women,
- 3) Free education should be provided to children in the age group 5-14 years and
- 4) Priority should be given to adult education.

An action plan drawn to achieve the above objectives detailed out the various steps :

- 1) Educated persons will be appointed as teachers.
- 2) Data on the educated and uneducated in different villages will be collected.
- 3) Payment to teacher's services will come from subscriptions from the villagers.
- 4) A place would be selected for the school to operate.

- 5) A Samiti, size varying with the population, would be constituted in every village, to liaise with the teachers and evolve a strategy for imparting education.
- 6) Samiti will also consider the suitability and involvement of the teacher in the functioning of the local primary level school.
- 7) Efforts would be made to have a school for girls in the colony with a lady teacher from Bavaria community.
- 8) Students will subscribe towards the salary of the lady teacher.
- 9) In the girls school, training in tailoring, knitting and embroidery would be provided, apart from the other curricula.
- 10) For tailoring, knitting and embroidery, the Bavaria community will seek assistance from the Government.
- 11) A demand would be made for Ashram school to educate the oppressed sections.
- 12) Government assistance would be sought to provide stipend, books for children and for raising the school structure.
- 13) Efforts would be made to have a library and reading room in the colony.
- 14) There will be an Anchalik Samiti to overview the education system in all the 12 Bavaria villages.

30th January 1983

Number of Participants : 61 males and 17 females
Co-ordinating team : Pitam Singh, Bhoop Singh,
Rajender Kumar Kokcha, Subhachari Dasgupta and
Alok Sagar.

Many of the points discussed during the previous day were reviewed. A few more ideas were added :

Data would be collected regarding the crafts-skills available within the community, such as mat making, tailoring, embroidery, charka, making of neval-string etc.

Bricks from the unused well of the colony would be used for building the library and reading room. PIDT's help would be sought to start a newsletter and also to arrange availability of few newspapers.

Shrimati Mousam from Khanpur Kala Village consented to provide the services of teacher in her village in the initial stage. Expenditure of the school would be borne from student subscriptions until the school gets the recognition and aid. PIDT would co-operate in the people's efforts.

Propagation of home science would be given priority.

The second group was concerned with Child Marriage, Dowry, Social Evils, Religious Rituals and Family Planning. Most of the participants evinced little interest in their presentation. Even though many argued, ensuing debate led nowhere. Nevertheless the following points were conceded to :

- 1) Transfer of assets from either partners of marriage should be curbed.
- 2) Only the invitios would attend he wedding celebrations.
- 3) Minimum age for marriage would be 17 and 15 for males and females respectively.
- 4) Efforts would be made to spread family planning education.
- 5) People will be educated on the religious aspect of their life.
- 6) Curb the present practice of entertaining anti social outside elements with liquor and such other things in the villege would be curbed.

Thereafter the group on Land Reform presented its report, which stressed the need for irrigation facilities, land development, converting follow lands into cultivable area, bullocks for ploughing, supply of seeds, fertilizers and pesticides in required quantities at right time. In addition, it was pointed out that lands belonging to Bavaria should not be sold to outsiders. It was felt that the last mentioned issue needed detailed discussions and the same can be postponed to February 1st.

31st January 1983

Participants : 67 males and 19 females
Co-ordinating team : Pitam Singh, Bhoop Singh,
Rajender Kumar Kokcha, Subhachari Dasgupta,
Niloy Bhattacharya and Alok Sagar.

The day started with three of the participants narrating some of their pressing problems. In one case the issue was harrassment by police. A lengthy discussion ensued but no definite conclusion could be arrived at.

In respect of the other two, the problem was related to inter personal conflict. It was decided that the issue should be discussed among all persons involved in the particular case. The concerned person from Rampur villago would be invited the next day and the matter would be decided when both the sides have presented their viewpoints.

At this juncture, it was realised that the time at our disposal is insufficient to discuss all the issues listed previously. Therefore, it was decided that the following 7 issues be covered : Collection of Data relating to Land Development, Land Levelling and Ploughing, Irrigation, Supply of Seed, Fertilizers and Pesticides, Internal Conflicts, Employment-Tailoring, Knitting and Embroidery and Soap Factory. Seven groups were formed to discuss these issues. The participants, on their own,

agreed that in the present group discussion efforts should be made to arrive at some concrete suggestions.

The group on collection of data relating to Land Development putforth the following suggestions :

In each village, a Samiti should be formed which should include the village pradhan. The function of the Samiti would be :

The Samiti would collect the required data relating to land from the lekhpal. The information would include data relating to land ownership, extent of irrigated and unirrigated land, yields, landless labourers, land development, consolidation of lands and illegal appropriation of lands. The food officers of tehsildhar would be used to influence lekhpal to provide his help.

Thereafter the group on Land Levelling and Ploughing putforth its suggestions :

- Those farmers who have the required equipment would level lands on their own and others would request for tractor services from the Government.
- Those farmers who have the necessary equipment would plough lands on their own and others would request assistance from Harijan Welfare Department.

The participants asked the group to obtain data regarding farmers lacking in equipment and the extent of land cultivated by them.

The group on Irrigation decided as following :

- A Samiti should be formed in each village.
- Data on irrigated and unirrigated lands would be collected.
- Demand for timely supply of canal water and electricity would be made.
- Demand for tube-well to irrigate the unirrigated lands would be registered.
- Demand for pumpsets for the tube-wells would also be pressed.
- Tube-well would be located in a place agreed upon by the Samiti.
- The beneficiaries would contribute their voluntary labour.
- The Samiti would decide the payment for the services of the tube-well operator.
- The Samiti would decide the size of boring, water charges and oversee the management of tube-well operation.
- There would be one higher level organisation to look after the aspect of irrigation in all the Bavaria villages.

The group which dealt with Supply of Seed, Fertilizers and Pesticides made the following suggestions:

- Every village should have one Samiti to look after the above aspect.
- The Samiti will find out the requirement of these inputs.
- The Samiti will endeavour to ensure timely supply of inputs.
- The Samiti will arrange for institutional credit for the purchase of inputs and ensure repayment of the loans.
- PIDT would be requested to open a centre for the supply of inputs. The Samiti would look after the management of this centre.

1st February 1983

Participants : 32 males and 14 females
Co-ordinating team: Pitam Singh, Bhoop Singh,
Rajender Kumar Kokcha, Niloy Bhattacharya and
Alok Sagar.

The day began with the discussion on inter-personal conflict referred to the previous day. Both the sides presented their view-points. After lunch, 10 persons selected by the participants deliberated on the issue. As agreed earlier, the decision of 10 was accepted by both the sides.

A woman from Khanpur Jathan complained of a person known as 'comrade' having come to the village and abused and scarred the women. Immediately, many other participants spoke of excesses of 'comrade' they have suffered. It was then decided 10-15 persons would go and meet 'comrade' and his allies the same evening to discuss the issue.

After that the group on Internal Conflicts presented its analysis. According to the group, consumption of liquor was the main reason behind these fights. Besides, ownership of land, political affiliations, stealing, unemployment and lack of education give rise to such differences. It was decided that these conflicts should not be taken to police. On the other hand, Village Panchayat should resolve them. If the Village Panchayat fails, the Community Panchayat should assume the responsibility of resolving the disputes. In the first instance, the neighbourhood should try to bring about an understanding between the parties fighting. It is the individuals involved in the conflict who should take the issue to the Panchayat.

The curbing of liquor was emphasized again. In a spontaneous response, three persons announced that they would forgo liquor for a period of time : one person for a month, the second for 3 months and the third for a year. Five others stated that in future they would not consume liquor during the day.

The next group to present its report was the one on Employment - Tailoring, Knitting and Embroidery. However, the group had discussed only tailoring in great detail and had very little to say about the other avenues of employment. The participants felt that the groups presentation was incomplete. They asked the group to obtain data on employment and quantify among these educated and uneducated. Further, the participants found it necessary for the group to look into the details of the following avenues : tailoring, knitting, embroidery, rope making, soap manufacturing, biscuit preparation, cycle repairing, radio repairing, motor repairing, ice manufacturing, shop, dairy, poultry, sheep rearing, pisciculture, typing, opportunities in Government jobs for the educated, bullock cart, horse-cart and Food for Work Programme.

The group on Soap Manufacture outlining the future strategy, took stock of the resources available with the community. These were : building, two pans and technicians : Puran (Mastgedh), Radhesham (Dudhali), Rajaram and Gobind (both from Khanpur Kala). They required other accessories for soap manufacture, financial aid, idea of marketing and a foreman at the factory. It was emphasized that the persons working in the soap factory should be needy, honest, social minded persons and should have some formal education. There would be a committee of 20 men and 6 women, with a president, vice-president, secretary and treasurer, to supervise the activity of soap factory. The managing committee

would consist of the manager, workers and sales persons. The profits would be utilised for repaying the old and new debts, payment of wages, social welfare and savings.

2nd February 1983

Participants : 36 males and 24 females

Co-ordinating team : Pitem Singh, Bhoop Singh, Rajender Kumar Kokcha, Niloy Bhattacharya and Alok Sagar.

The participants suggested to the group on Employment to include band party as a possible source of employment in their study. Also, to the 18 issues listed on the second day, the participants felt it necessary to add - publication of activities in the Bavaria colony.

On the previous day, a group of people had gone to meet 'comrade' at Ved-ki-gadi. They reported back that 'comrade' and his allies have assured that they have no ill feelings towards the Bavaria community.

The main agenda for the day was to review the proceedings of the camp and chalk out a plan for the follow-up of important decisions arrived at thereof. Reviewing the proceedings it emerged that there should be three Samities for : 1) Land Development, 2) Education and 3) Employment, in each of the Bavaria villages. In every village, the people would decide the size of the

DO POOR HAVE FRIENDS?

RATNA PRAKASH

Lakhnu is a poor man belonging to Dom caste. His house is located near the railway line north of Kari-muddinpur village in Gazipur district. For his livelihood Lakhnu makes bamboo baskets and fans and sells them. In this his family members help him.

The incident is two years old and the occasion was Lakhnu's daughter's marriage. Since the girl had attained youth, her marriage was a great concern for Lakhnu. The Harijans in the village had to safeguard their grown-up daughters from the lusty desires of Bhumihars.

Lakhnu was fortunate to find a match for his daughter in a nearby village and marriage was fixed on 5th of May 1980. The house was cleaned and the near relatives and friends were invited. The ladies sang songs and the atmosphere was filled with joy. The Barat also came at the scheduled time and after the ceremony there was the marriage dinner. There were a few rituals to be completed after the dinner. With that Lakhnu and family went to sleep. There was a sense of satisfaction mixed with happiness and relief.

The tranquility of the sleeping souls was however short lived. They were awakened by a fierce storm. There was now chaos all around. The storm stopped after some-time but more serious troubles were just to begin.

Near Lakhnu's house there is a well, which is the only source of water for the Harijan Basti. Early in the morning when the ladies reached the well to draw water, they saw a dead body floating on it. Amazed, ladies informed others and in no time the whole village had congregated near the spot. It took sometime to identify the dead body as that of Lakhnu's relative who had come from Calcutta to attend the wedding.

There was gloom all around now. Some of the women attributed the incident to Lakhnu's daughter. The bride now stood degraded. Her marriage was viewed inauspicious.

The Spearhead Team Members had organized in the village a Samaj Sudhar Samiti and also the Yuvak Mandal Dal. The members of the Samiti communicated the incident to police station. At the instance of the officer incharge, the Samiti members and the youth removed the dead body to police station where 'Pancha-nama' was performed. After fulfilling the necessary formalities, the police sent the dead body to Gazipur for post-mortem.

As per the orders of station incharge, the constable put Lakhnu into lock-up and allowed the others to return. When Lakhnu asked the constable why he has been arrested, the latter's reply was "It may be possible that after killing the man, you have thrown him into the well. You now want to tell us that he died by falling into well due to heavy storm". Hearing this Lakhnu trembled with fear.

In the meantime, the old landlord Badri Singh Rai reached Lakhnu's house. After the usual courtesies, showing his grave concern for Lakhnu and his family, he said "The darogaji (Policeman) is asking for Rs.1100/- to release Lakhnu. If the amount is not paid he will be beaten and sent to jail. Perhaps, you are aware after police beating no man has been able to work. Also in your family, leaving Lakhnu there is nobody to work. If he goes to jail your entire family will be ruined. But Lakhnu is my own man. I don't like that your house should be destroyed. You know, I never came to Harijan basti before. I have come today only because of my nearness to Lakhnu. You should not waste any time in arranging for the money. I will see that Lakhnu is released".

Lakhnu's wife tried to get the required money by pledging the ornaments belonging to her and a few close relatives. But that was not enough. Badri Singh Rai helped in borrowing the remaining amount from the Mahajan at a very high rate of interest.

Badri Singh Rai is known to be a notorious agent of the police. Some of the Samiti members and the youth could sense the conspiracy. They called a meeting in which it was decided that all of them could go to the police station. They also decided not to spend any money for the release of Lakhnu. All these discussions were conveyed to Lakhnu's wife.

Bihari Singh Rai is the Sarpanch of Karimuddinpur Nyaya Panchayat. He is a staunch enemy of Badri Singh Rai. When he came to know about Badri Singh's designs and people's preparation to expose him, he would not lose such an opportunity. Therefore, he too accompanied the people to the police station.

Approximately 160 persons marched together the one kilometer way. At the police station the following dialogue took place :

- Person from village : (With sorrow), Sir, Have you made a demand for Rs.1100/- for releasing Lakhnu from the lock-up?
- Station In-charge : (Angrily) No. Never. Who wants to defame me?
- Second person from the village : (Politely) Babu Sahib (Badri Singh Rai) was telling that he would set Lakhnu free if we can give money to you.
- Station In-charge : (Smiling) Babu Badri Singh Rai is an honourable man of your village. If he takes Rs.1100/- or even more on my behalf, what can I do? If you want to waste rupees, give him.
- Third person from the village : Sir, if it is not so, why have you locked Lakhnu?

Police Station In-charge : I am waiting for post-mortem report. This report will be available till evening. If the report says that the man has committed suicide, I will release Lakhnu with honour. If the man was killed and was thrown into the well, then we may have to think of a case against Lakhnu.

The people came towards Harijan Basti shouting the following slogans :

Badri Singh Ki Police Dalali - Nahi Chalegi, Nahi Chalegi
(Badri Singh's role as Police Agent - will not be allowed, will not be allowed)

Police Ke Dalal Ko - Ek Dhakka Aur Do, Ek Dhakka Aur Do
(To the Police Agent) - Give one more blow, Give one more blow)

Lakhnu's wife got her ornaments back from the money lender. In the evening the post-mortem report came and Lakhnu was released. But the police did not take any action against Badri Singh Rai. The bound ties of relation between the rich and the police are so strong nothing can shake it.

At night a meeting of the Samiti, Yuvak Mandal Dal and the people took place. In the meeting some old men heard saying that Bihari Singh Rai, the Sarpanch Sahib helped them in need. Though he was a man of repute,

he came to Harijan Basti and later accompanied people to the police station. But the youth had a different view " The people like Sarpanch have no sympathy for the poor. He accompanied us because he wanted to kill two birds at one shot - take his revenge against Badri Singh Rai and at the same time win our support. He would have never gone to the police station taking our case. And the police, they would **never** have released Lakhnu without money had we not gone to the station."

SAKHI-PHOOL

RAMANAND PRASAD YADAV

Every society has its own customs and traditions. Some of them have a long past and in many cases people may not be able to trace the origin. Sakhi-phool is one such custom, practised in many parts of Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. People only say that it has come to them from forefathers, without being able to ascribe any reasons to its origin.

Evidently the phrase sakhi-phool is a combination of two words where sakhi means friendship and phool means flower. Aside from the literal connotation of the words, perhaps the phrase can be taken to imply "Flower of Friendship".

We have tried to understand this custom of sakhi-phool in the context of our operational area viz. Shankargarh in Surguja district of Madhya Pradesh. While our stay in the area during the last nearly five years has brought to us sufficient knowledge of the life style of the tribals in Shankargarh, two villages were specifically selected to collect the relevant data on the custom of sakhi-phool. The extent to which sakhi-phool is practised in these villages and the incidence of borrowing was ascertained in respect of all the households. We interviewed 20 per cent of the households to obtain the qualitative information. Besides, we held some group discussions also.

Table 1: Population Characteristics of Selected Villages, 1971

Village	Population	Families			Total
		Tribal	S.C.	Other	
Sehar	645	101	2	17	120
Belkona	893	119	4	12	135
	<u>1538</u>	<u>220</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>29</u>	<u>255</u>

Table 2 : Extent to which sakhi-phool is Practised in Selected Villages

Village	Practising sakhi-phool	Not practising sakhi-phool	Total
Sehar	102	18	120
Belkona	120	15	135
	<u>222</u>	<u>33</u>	<u>255</u>

Table 3: Incidence of Borrowing due to Sakhi-phool in Selected Villages

Village	Borrowed	Not Borrowed	Total practising sakhi-phool
Sehar	45	57	102
Belkona	52	68	120
	<u>97</u>	<u>125</u>	<u>222</u>

The selected villages were representative of the area in the sense that the tribal population constituted a preponderant majority (above 80 per cent) (Table 1). In both the selected villages, nearly 90 per cent of the families practiced sakhi-phool (Table 2).

Generally it is the married people who get into sakhi-phool relationship. Since there is the custom of dining at each other, care is taken that the families have the same number of children. If the unmarried adopt sakhi-phool, it would be between the same sexes. Even though one mostly has sakhi-phool with his/her own caste, sometimes it takes place between families belonging to different castes. (One of the SHT members has a sakhi-phool relation with a tribal family). It is said that when you go and request somebody for sakhi-phool relationship, the same should not be rejected. In other words, it appears that the proposal is made only when there is an assurance of positive responses. Generally when one wishes to propose sakhi-phool he/she chooses a person from a village which is eastwards. Even though it is claimed that people can have sakhi-phool relation with trees or animals, we have not seen any such instances.

When two parties agree to have sakhi-phool tie, they fix a day for the purpose. On the particular day, both of them buy coconut, rice, incandescent sticks, molasses, betelnut and vermilion. They bring all these, and also a dhoti and sari to be exchanged with their counterparts. They assemble at an agreed place to perform some rituals. Sometime a priest is invited to

conduct the proceedings. After the rituals, they exchange the material and embrace each other. The ceremony ends with an oath from either side that they will be friends from that day onwards and remain so for ever. Later they invite each other for food. The coconut alongwith some rice and coins, are hung on their doors as the mark of sakhi-phool.

People could not give any information to us when and how the custom started. They only say that it has come to them from the day's of their grandparents i.e. more than 80 to 100 years before from now. While the sakhi-phool relationship is taken to imply binding friendship, more so particularly in bad times, interestingly, many of whom we interviewed stated that they would have sakhi-phool friendship when their conditions improve. As sakhi-phool partners invite each other for food sometime every year, the same inevitably entails expenditures. It looks that this burden, rather than the hope of getting help during bad times, looms very heavily in the minds of the people. Even so, we have observed that nearly 90 per cent of the families follow the tradition. A deeper probe has revealed that there are a few superstitions at play in the background.

There is a belief that there exists an old woman in the western side purveying the practice of sakhi-phool. It is said that she visits the houses of those who have not bothered to have sakhi-phool friendship. She has a broom, with which she sweeps the house and throws it away

when she has completed the job. The people fear that the visit of the old woman is followed by a death in the house.

Superstition behind sakhi-phool is backed-up by another story. Once a man went to jungle to collect firewood. On his way back, he met a bear. The bear proposed to the man to be his sakhi. The man refused stating that human beings cannot have sakhi-phool with animals. So saying, he went home only to find to his dismay all his children dead. The villagers gathered and persuaded the man to go back to the forest and accept sakhi with the bear. The man did and to his pleasant surprise all his children were playing when he returned home a second time. People believe that it was God who came in the guise of bear to convey the importance of sakhi-phool.

As earlier stated, we have been in this area for the last five years. Sakhi-phool has been the topic of discussion in innumerable conversations with individuals and groups. But when we thought of studying the custom, we had specific interviews with 50 individuals from two villages who have accepted sakhi-phool. Some of the typical responses are reproduced below :

Question (Q) : Did the old woman ever come to your village for inspection?

Answer (A) : No. Till today no old woman has come to our village.

- Q : Has anything gone wrong with the people who have not made sakhi-phool?
- A : No. Nothing has gone wrong with the families who have not made sakhi-phool. They are in the same conditions as we are.
- Q : Has anybody died for not having practised sakhi-phool?
- A. : No. We dont' know of any such case.
- Q. : Why do you make sakhi-phool?
- A. : Seeing others and for the safety of our children. We are afraid of sufferings.
- Q. : What is your opinion about sakhi-phool?
- A. : There is nothing wrong with sakhi-phool system. It helps us to come close to another family. Sakhi-phool families may stand by each other during times of need. Since sakhi-phool helps to create brotherly relations, we have less quarrels.

When asked how many of them had actually sought and received help from their sakhi friends, 80 per cent reported that they had not sought any help. Twenty per cent received help in the shape of loaning of cash, bullock, plough etc. The farmer who constituted a preponderant majority, also did not expect any help in future.

Even the custom of eating at each other has been waning. About ~~pinety~~ ^{twenty} per cent of the interviewed said that they took their own materials and cooked it themselves at their sakhi friends. But the initiation ceremony is observed by most. Roughly they needed Rs.45/- for the occasion. Nearly half of the respondents required to borrow money for this purpose (Table 3).

Only a minority did not observe sakhi-phool. Some of them did not find a matching family. Some had fallen sick on the particular day. In a few cases one of the spouses was absent in the village due to some engagements. Notwithstanding the liberal sanction, inter-caste ties and sakhi-phool with animals and trees being rare, non availability of a match within the tribe was another obstacle.

The practise of sakhi-phool is an annually recurring phenomenon. It occurs suddenly and runs a mild panic in the minds of the people, who rush to find their sakhi match if they have not done already. During the last 50 years, there have not been more than 4-5 such occasions. As yet, whenever it occurred, people have not enquired as to where, from the fever started. Such an enquiry at the next occasion would throw sufficient light on the reality of the situation and also help to remove the superstitions surrounding it.

Presently, the sakhi-phool system is supposed to cut across class barriers, even though such instances may be few considering that majority are poor and belong to the same class. Nevertheless, even such stray instances may turn out to be uncomfortable spokes in organising the poor and such individuals would be under the false illusions to keep their sakhi-phool obligations.

Even though the amicable atmosphere of material help in tribal areas, cannot be attributed to sakhi-phool and would have much to do with the native culture, the potentiality of this tradition to forge stronger bondage can be explored. When that is done, efforts should be made to reduce the formalities which entail costs.

