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AGENDA OF PARTICIPATION

Subhachari Dasgupta

In many community development blocks we find some rather dilapidated halls which were built as community halls. It was felt necessary to have community halls so that the community could participate in development. 'Development' of course was defined by Planning Commission and Ministry of Community Development and people were expected to participate to make 'development programmes' a success.

The condition of these halls suggest that the dream of community participation remained unfulfilled. On the other hand, 'development' is far from satisfactory. Larger number of people are poor today than were when Community Development (C.D.) projects were initiated. We would discuss in this short paper reasons for the above and how further frustration can be avoided.

Community

One of the basic problem of community participation was definition of the community. In C.D. programme whole village was considered to be a community which had same development objective and could participate together with a democratic spirit. This simply was not a fact. All village communities in India are stratified by several hierarchic arrangements such as caste, class religion etc., and thus harmonious democratic participation of all villagers in a common programme is not possible.

The fact that every village is stratified by different social and economic interest is not recognised by most government development programmes. Many voluntary organisations also do not recognise this

The fact that every village is stratified by different social fact. The society being hierarchic and stratified in the villages, people in the lower levels of the hierarchy cannot participate on equal footing with others. Number of people in the lower category are larger than those at higher levels and thus participation is restricted to them only. This arrangement of the society is not passive. Those who are at the top by virtue of caste or economic strength have a need to keep those who are at the bottom in their position. This is often done by oppression and by a threat of it. The Government programmes even when they are specifically meant for the poor, are dependant on the certification of the upper classes. Thus there is no way that poor may participate in projects.

It is necessary that those who wish to have participation of the people should recognise, that the interest of the haves and have nots are not the same and the two groups cannot participate together.

Participation

Nature of participatory process has to be understood to recognise it and to help it develop. It is a process which is spontaneous and ^{Spring}~~spring~~ from the lowest strata of the society. Participation cannot be achieved through incentive or manipulation by external forces as participation is a result of inner contradiction of a society. Conditions which give rise to participation may vary from economic to non-economic contradictions.

Participation should be distinguished from two other phenomena which resembles participative process in parts. These are people's movements in (1) development action and (2) protest actions. Development actions or protest action may mobilise people for a time and may be related to the development of a participatory process.

Participatory process develops through a progressive development of consciousness of the people through a process of action and analytical reflection. The process then moves on to a higher plane to solve more complex or difficult contradiction. Thus, a manipulative or persuasive development approach has no role in participation/^{which} is necessarily a collective process and thus development of collective consciousness is important to it. Collective consciousness recognises and deals with contradictions which strengthens the community and enriches their consciousness.

Through consciousness people are freed from economic, social, religious and scientific bondages by exploding myths which keep these orders alive and restrict possibilities of growth. Thus, the participatory process contributes to the development of a new order of the humankind. Understanding reality as it is and not as presented by practitioners of religion or religion of science helps the people to act to transform it.

Organisation

Organisation and participation is not synonymous as is often assumed. 'Organisation' is a means to develop and to sustain participation. Clear role of organisation has to be understood so that their characteristics do not impede development of participation.

Organisations are conceived at a point in time to solve contradictions recognised by them at the time and tends to get married to those contradictions only. People move on faster and develop new dimensions of action which may then be obstructed by the organisation. Organisations develop interest in preservation of itself rather than moving along with people to the area of unknown.

Thus organisations which are relevant to the participatory movement has got to be flexible and non exploitative.

Initiators and the people

Participation has been visualised as spontaneous process. However the process seems to have a recognisable beginning in an event or consciousness of a few people. From a small beginning the participatory movement goes on to gain strength through involvement of increasing number of people.

Initiators group whether they belong to the community or are from outside, make important contribution to the participatory process. It is important that their relationship with the people be non exploitative. Initiators can develop a sense of superiority and may move on to a power position, which has to be guarded against.

Power relationships are created by various means with little apparent power potential as the power is based on relative and not on actual strength. Thus, ability to articulate, access to knowledge or even availability of excess time all may create a difference between initiator and the people which can put the initiators into power position. Initiators as much as the community must guard against this by constant vigilance against concentration of power.

In a group of villages where a number of activities and organisations had come up, it was felt necessary to elect an area committee to co-ordinate the activity. A set of qualifications were developed by the villagers and accordingly a committee was elected. The qualifications included education, initiative, smartness etc. When the elected were seen together, some villagers objected to the idea of having a committee itself. They said that if a committee is elected only people who have potential of

becoming exploiters will be members of the committee and committee will become a source of exploitation.

This incident is worth analysing for it shows that the qualifications prescribed by villagers were in conformity with the norms of the establishment. The contradiction and its implications were articulated by the villagers themselves and thus was critical of their own action. Role of the initiators is in enabling creation of critical consciousness of reality through which consciousness of the people can progress.

Activists from outside the oppressed group have the additional problem of integration with the group. There is only one method of integration- that is being with the oppressed in their struggle, sharing their miseries and the oppression.

There is simultaneous question, which is often asked, relate to the question of withdrawal of the initiation. Integration and withdrawals are contradictory concepts. Truly integrated cannot withdraw, they can only become redundant or absorbed by development of peoples self-reliance.

Peoples Organisation

Concept of organisation of the people is dynamic and different from the organisations of the establishment. Organisation of the people are linked to their ever-rising consciousness and thus change in form and in content as compared to the static nature of organisations of the oppressed. The content of peoples organisations are more important to its form and have viable goals. The form of organisation changes as is felt expedient under particular circumstances. This makes pre-determining of the form irrelevant. But legal provisions do not allow for such flexibility. Thus vast number of peoples organisations are not recognised as such.

However, lack of recognition from the establishment is an advantage to the oppressed groups and reduces bureaucratic interference.

People's organisations are dynamic in form which continually adjust with the content of the struggle. The leadership is not restricted to a small group of isolated people but arises out of a pool of potential leaders who constantly come out of developed consciousness of the people.

The opposition

People's participation is a threat to the power of the oppressor and the bureaucracy and is therefore opposed by them. Purpose of this opposition is to maintain status quo of power and economic relationship. Opposition is stronger when the oppressors are able and wish to usurp all the fruits of the 'economic development'. In economically stagnant areas the maintenance of status quo in power relationship is the agenda for the oppressor.

Bureaucracy, whose lot lies with the oppressor, has been brain-washed to believe every genuine participatory movement of the people as dangerous as they are a potential source for revolutionary changes. Thus, efforts are made for co-opting any potential movement by legitimising, incentives distribution, official patronage etc. The other ways by which movements are neutralised is by creation of division amongst the people and leadership.

Political parties of no particular line has been in favour of a conscious participatory movement. As these movements tend to ask awkward question regarding the theoretical framework and policies of political parties. A major struggle against the political parties is that the political parties try to build dependancy relationship with the peoples movements.

Recently in one of the meetings in a village people discussed the question of emancipation of women which they felt was a serious obstacle to their struggle for higher wages. A local worker of a left political party who was present at the meeting opposed the move for any programme for consentisation of women as he said it was not in his directive.

It is also a common experience that whenever a participatory movement gains ground, pressures are brought from political parties using the same methods as are used by the oppressors and bureaucrats.

The Structure and Participation

Those who are active in making participation a reality ought to recognise that they are in a way acting against the forces of a superstructure which is anti-participation. We have seen that at local level the oppressors, the bureaucrats and the political parties do not favour participation. This is true both at national and international levels.

There are few laws, rules, guidelines, etc. which favour participation but there are many which oppose it. For instance, the whole premise on which our credit system is based (whether in commercial or cooperative sector) is anti-participation. Role of police, Panchayat system, Forest officials are as oppressive as that of Zamindars.

The international organisations such as World Bank who meddle in agriculture come up with programmes which are anti-participatory. Thus the activists of people's participation movements have to plough through a very large opposing force.

Participation was a long road to traverse before the strength ^{of} its force is felt and a society free from oppression becomes a reality. But those who do not wish to go from one bondage to another participation is the way to freedom.

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TRAINING PROGRAMMES
OF TRIBAL AND HARIJAN VILLAGE LEVEL WORKERS:
RAJAPARA, KAMRUP DISTRICT, ASSAM AND KARIMUDDINPUR
GHAZIPUR DISTRICT, U.P.

By

Jadav Borah

THE PRUPOSE OF THE PROGRAMMES

Rajapara:

A Spearhead Team has been working in this area from November 1978. As its activities have spread to 20 villages around Rajapara, the team members felt that a training programme for cadres from the village would mean a sharing of responsibility and a faster spread of the activities initiated by them. It would also promote unity and fellow feeling among youths from different villages and encourage them to broaden their horizons to include the problems of neighbouring villages also. Since both the sexes would come together as participants, they would get a deeper insight into the contributions each can make to socio-economic development. A better understanding between the Government agencies and the villagers was also attempted through the training programmes.

Karimuddinpur:

Another Spearhead Team has been working in Ghazipur area since 1978. Here the work of the team has been with the Harijans (Scheduled Caste) as they are the most exploited and poor. In Ghazipur, the team has worked only with young men of the village.

In Karimuddinpur, where the team has worked prior to its present posting at Malari, they organised village level organisations for socio-economic development. The team members felt that a training programme for the village youth would help them to form an organisation for a wider area^{to} facilitate their work. Some new volunteers at the village level would be identified at this programme. It was also felt that such an organisation would fight against exploitation in a more sustained fashion, as it would be less susceptible to the dissensions which were making other village level organisations ineffective.

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND OF THE TWO VILLAGES

We would like next to give a description of both the villages where the programmes were held. The participants in the two training programmes belonged to these and the surrounding villages. It will be, therefore, relevant to go into the social and economic background of the area.

Karimuddinpur:

Lies in the Gangetic plain. Its climate is hot. It has hardly any natural resources. It is a single crop area and only the rich peasants who have access to irrigation facilities can cultivate two or three crops.

Agriculture is the main occupation of majority of people. But, by and large, the low caste people possess small plots of land. The produce from this land is not sufficient to maintain their families and therefore, they have to do wage labour in the fields of the Zamindars (landlords) and the Mahajans (money lenders). Bonded labourers are found in Ghazipur. The work is also not enough for all those who need it. The wage rates are low i.e., Rs. 5/- for men and Rs. 4/- for women. Each caste has its traditional

occupation, but some castes like chamar (leather workers) and dhabia (washermen) are leaving it for reasons of social prestige, as traditionally these occupations are looked down upon as unclean by the rest of the society. Many people seasonally emigrate from Ghazipur for earning a livelihood.

Untouchability makes the social life of the lower caste people unbearable in Ghazipur. There are separate drinking water facilities for the upper castes and the untouchables.

There are 36 castes and sub-castes in Ghazipur. In addition to the divisions caused thereby, untouchability keeps the poor classes disunited and any joint action becomes difficult.

The dowry system is prevalent in this area and marriages are performed between the age of 13 to 16 years. Young men who do not possess any assets also get married early. The system of '15 annas' is very harmful as the rich people and the Chaudharies use it to their advantage. This system of social boycotting for extra marital relationship and breaking of caste rules is kept by the upper castes to render the lower castes divided. The status of women is low. They are extremely backward.

The poor people are exploited not only socially and economically, but also politically. The leadership of all political parties come from the upper castes and classes, though they may draw their cadres from the working class. Political parties of the right and the left are working in Ghazipur but since the leadership of each has an upper caste/class origin, their activities benefit to this section of the population.

RAJAPARA

Rajapara is a village in the Kamrup district of Assam State and has hills and forests surrounding it.

Rabha, Garo and Boru tribes are the main inhabitants of this area. Rabha and Boru tribals have adopted the Hindu religion, but Garos have become Christians. This religious factor is the only factor causing contradiction between these tribes. Garos feel superior to the other two tribes because they are English educated and also their economic condition is little better.

Garo is a matriarchal tribe while Rabha and Boru are patriarchal. But all the three tribes have the system of Gharjahai.* Generally, landless people and outsiders become gharjahais. This system leads to conflicts in the area.

Preparing liquor is a traditional occupation of the tribals. It is done on ceremonial occasions, as well as on other days for getting some money by its sale. But in reality it hardly yields any income to the tribals. On the other hand, liquor habit is used by the outsiders to take advantage of the tribals.

A majority of the people depend on the monsoon for cultivating paddy which is the main crop in the area. Animal husbandry is undertaken for the consumption of the family, silk worm rearing also used to be consumption oriented, but now some families have started doing it as a supplementary occupation.

Selling of forest produce e.g., bamboo, cane, straw, medical herbs and firewood also fetches cash income. Wage labour for Government and for private traders forms an additional source of income for a majority of people.

Money-lenders who are usually outsiders, lend money against paddy and the rate of interest works out at 100% in 6 months.

* Here the husband comes to live with the wife's family.

Marketing of the village produce is another source of exploitation of the people. Products like jute, paddy, endi worm cocoons, fruits and bamboo are purchased from the innocent tribals at a very low price.

The village has a General Committee to settle the disputes and a common fund for performing religious festivals. Women are active in the socio-economic life and have their own organisations. The people have had a bitter experience of the Government machinery but apart from this they are politically not very conscious.

TIME AND PERIOD :

The duration of the training in Rajapara was nine days, i.e., from March 10 to 18, 1981. This time was not quite suitable as the village youths were preparing for their school and college examinations. While the programme was well attended, many more who were interested could not attend the programme. It was also felt that ten days was not adequate for this type of training.

In Ghazipur the training period was eight days, i.e., 21-26th May, 1981. (Here again the team felt that July would have been more suitable month)

There were three sessions every day - morning, afternoon and night.

SELECTION OF THE TRAINEES :

In both areas, the trainees were selected by respective Spearhead Team working in that area. In Rajapara they come from the village level organisations in 20 villages and were predominantly tribal. Both the sexes were represented in the Rajapara programme.

In Ghazipur, the Harijan youths were selected as trainees as the Spearhead Team working there had concentrated its work amongst the Harijans.

As there were no village level organisations in Ghazipur, these young men were drawn from the different villages. There were no women amongst this group of trainees.

The educational level of the trainees in these two programmes ranged from illiteracy to college-level education.

In Rajapara, the total number of participants were 35, even though the team had invited only 30. These came from 20 villages around Rajapara. Two of those 35 were representing the Anchalik (Regional) Mahila Mandal and Yguth Club. The rest were sent by each village level organisations. All participants except one woman participated on all the days. This woman trainee was taken away by her husband on the 8th day of the programme as he had some problems looking after the children.

In Ghazipur, about 30 trainees from 10 villages were invited. Out of which only 20 turned up for the training. Only 11 could attend the entire programme. The rest had some personal problems like marriage in the family, attending examinations etc.

In Rajapara, all the trainees were living at the site of the training programme, whereas in Ghazipur some trainees came every day from their homes.

LANGUAGE PROBLEM:

In Rajapara, Garo trainees could not speak Assamese properly. Rabha and Boru trainees were also shy about speaking in their colloquial languages. This hampered a free discussion amongst the trainees. Attempts were made to overcome this difficulty by the non-Garo trainees learning Garo language.

The differences in educational level of the trainees also created difficulties for the illiterate members of the group.

In Ghazipur, the discussion was conducted in Bhojpuri and Hindi. All trainees were familiar with one of these two languages. The difference in educational level created difficulties in Ghazipur too.

PARTICIPATION OF GOVT. AGENCIES AND OTHER FROM THE VILLAGES:

In Rajapara, representatives of Government development agencies were invited to participate in the programme. The objective was to bridge the gap between the Government agencies and the people. The poor people are afraid of approaching these bodies and the rich in the village take advantage of facilities offered by the Government officials. This would help the poor villagers to overcome their fear of these officials and it would also make them aware of the limitations of these representatives of development agencies.

In Ghazipur, Government representatives were not invited. An invitation was given to the B.D.O. at Barachawar but he could not come.

In Rajapara, the women and youth from the poorer sections were coming to the programme as observer - participants. In Ghazipur, some upper caste people who wished to establish their leadership position in the village came to observe the camp.

SUBJECT (TRAINING) MATERIALS :

The Rajapara Team had not followed the traditional process of training but evolved the subjects based on the situation and condition of the area and the people. This encouraged more active participation from the trainees as well as from the other villagers who attended the programme. The subjects were organically linked to one another. The case studies which were taken up for analysis were also taken from actual situations around Rajapara.

The Ghazipur training material was prepared by the S.H.T. members at Delhi and the subjects were given by the team members. Role play was found more attractive by Ghazipur trainees than case studies. Theoretical discussions were also more prominent in Ghazipur. One trainee belonging to the C.P.M. sometimes initiated these theoretical discussions. In Rajapara, the discussions were concentrated on practical subjects which, were based on actual happenings in the area and so the participants felt a sense of involvement in the discussion.

OTHER ACTION PROGRAMMES:

In Rajapara, the trainees undertook a village study of Muduki village. The children's organisation at Rajapara was invited to give a performance one day. The trainees lived at the site of the programme and had a common and shared routine of work and relaxation.

In Ghazipur no village study was undertaken by the trainees. There was no set routine for each day and greater informality prevailed. Some 'Netas' (local leaders) tried to intervene in the training. One of them who came and had his meals, but did not participate in the discussion, was asked not to come there by the trainees. Another 'Neta' who offered to invite District Commissioner to the training was also rebuffed by the trainees.

THE TRAINING PROGRAMME

First day

GHAZIPUR

Began with informal discussion and songs. Nine trainees present out of 20 invited.

RAJAPARA

The informal discussion in the presence of Government officials who helped in developing the subject

S.H.T. members explained the need for training and the daily routine. Trainees expressed their desire to work for the development of their village but due to economic difficulties, could not devote time. A gap between the S.H.T. members and the trainees was visible. Also the latter were more self-conscious than those in Rajapara. The reasons for the absence of 11 invited trainees were discussed.

The familiarity of most trainees and S.H.T. members with Bhojpuri and Hindi meant better participation discussions.

The shyness of some participants due to their illiteracy was an inhibiting factor.

The need for self-help was stressed as the Govt., the rich people and the political leaders, are not going to help the poor.

matter. The topics covered were what is P.D.T., the need for the training of village youth, the type of training they required, whether the length of the programme was sufficient to cover all areas. The daily routine was also discussed on the first day. The merits and demerits of the Govt. sponsored training programmes were also gone into.

The diversity of linguistic groups among trainees made participation in discussions difficult.

The same factor was evident here also.

Here also the trainees affirmed the need for self-help.

Second Day

After reviewing the first days' discussion, the trainees were asked to fill up a form giving information about themselves. These forms provided the subject matter for a discussion of social customs. Since it was seen that most trainees had married between the age of 16 to 18 early marriage and its merits and disadvantages were taken up. Most trainees said that early marriages in families which owned very little land are harmful, unless the man has some other employment. Given the present caste and class system, a majority of families own only a small plot of land. Regular wage labour is not available.

The position of women in the present day society was also discussed. The role play technique was utilised to bring out the inferior status of women and

The day began with a discussion of the problems facing the people of the area. The case study method was used to help the trainees to identify these problems and to explore their solutions.

The position of women had been discussed in one-day seminars held prior to the training programmes. Women participated in both these forums, unlike

the low level of literacy amongst them.

in Ghazipur. The position of women was not equal to men. Early marriage and the 'Gharjohai' system were discussed. Role play and case study methods were used.

Third day

Leadership was the focus of the deliberations. The existing upper caste/rich leaders who use the poor villagers for their own ends was described by using the role play method. A working class leader who did not become an instrument of the upper castes/classes would be able to safe-guard the interest of the poor. The vigilance of the people as a check on leaders was also seen as a necessity.

Development was the topic of discussion on third day. In the course of the group came to the conclusion that the mere presence of facilities like electricity, market, schools, water supply, hospitals does not mean development. These facilities must reach the majority. The talk given by Agricultural Officer on H.Y.V. cultivation, and Small Farmers' Development Agency also made the trainees aware of the gap between the poor people and the Govt. schemes. The development of local resources was seen as a necessary-prerequisite of development. The role of leadership in promoting or retarding development was also discussed.

Fourth Day The exploitation arising from the caste/system was taken up. The harijans were identified as the lowest of the 36 castes and sub-castes in this area. Absence of property illiteracy and lack of political consciousness were the 3 main reasons for this state of Harijans. They saw that the exploitation by moneylenders, the role of Government agencies also arose out of caste/class interests. Role play was used to illustrate this point. Due to scarcity of natural resources in Ghazipur, wage labour becomes more important.

The development of local resources for better living for rural masses was possible through multiple cropping, horticulture in high level lands, small scale industries based on silk worm rearing making bamboo, cane articles etc.

Fifth day There was no village study at Ghazipur. The festivals and the expenditure on them were discussed. Most festivals were related to religion. Marriage and dowry system as well as their consequences were considered; as also the 15 anna system as a

A socio-economic study of a nearby village (Muduki) was undertaken by the trainees. Their report based on a visit identified the exploitation by outsiders and the traditional, low-yielding agriculture as the main obstacles to development.

cheaper form of marriage.

A demonstration by "Maina Parijat" the children's organisation of Rajapara and the trainees aware of the potentialities of this type of body.

Sixth day

The origin of the caste system and its overlap with the modern class system, were the topics on the sixth day. The trainees identified the common interests of the upper casts/class leadership and the Government machinery. Increasing population was seen as an asset by the Ghazipur trainees, in contrast to Rajapara trainees.

A member of the All Assam Tribal Sangha initiated the day's discussion illustrating how the Government development facilities fail to reach the poor and were taken advantage of the tribals by the outsiders like money lenders and by the rich was discussed in great detail.

The participants in Gajipur thought that a larger number will help the Harijans in fighting the rich upper castes more effectively.

The trainees said that that the Harijans were willing to fight and if necessary die in this fight. The importance of organisation

and political consciousness was explained through the case study method.

Seventh day

Organisation and communication were the topics of discussion. The importance of organisation in socio-economic development of the poor was highlighted. Role play method was used to illustrate the process of communicating with different sections of the poor, e.g. women, old people etc. In Ghazipur the discussion was more theoretical.

A coordinator of Nehru Yuvak Kandra explained the need for an Organisation for sustained rural development. This was followed by long discussion on the type of organisation needed for rural development and the qualities necessary in the members of such organisations. Every trainee had experience of successful functioning of an organisation in his/her area. This helped them to clearly

The trainees showed less confidence in organising as there are many divisive forces at work in their villages. The need of small scale cottage industries in occupation which were looked down upon e.g. chamars case were emphasised. Future plans were part of the last days programme.

understand the objectives and nature of different organisations. A few women came to attend the Rajapara camp and the S.H.T. members initiated the trainees to experiment with the communication techniques on these women observers and participants.

Women's organisation in which the mid-wives could take a lead, transformation of occupations traditionally looks upon as unclean into small scale industries, Common Funds for economic development and reform of the 15 anna system, were the concrete steps which emerged for follow-up action.

Eighth day

There was a follow-up meeting at Ghazipur on June 28, 1981 to discuss the formation of an organisation for future work.

The S.H.T. members and trainees discussed the need for self-confidence on the part of the poor for the successful and sustained functioning of their organisations. Incidents illustrating the importance of the village unity were used in the case study method.

Ninth day

Problems of animal husbandry were taken up by development officers of the state. Future plans formed the concluding part. It was decided to form a Jagrata Yuvak Yuvati Sangrami Bahin (A conscious Youth's Militant Wing) to fight poverty and exploitation as well to promote socio-economic development of the poor. The program

CONCLUSION :

In Rajapara the discussion about the common organisation of men and women of 15 villages was continuous during the training programme. The relationship of the S.H.T. members and trainees was close. This was not so in Ghazipur. The Rajapara trainees lived at the programme site and shared all the work including cooking. This did not happen in Ghazipur. There was not enough time for discussion of all the subjects that came up. But at Ghazipur, the scarcity of time was more acutely felt and many subjects had to be left untouched.

A STUDY OF CADRES IN PIDT'S OPERATIONAL AREAS

K. Dinker Rao
Niloy Bhattacharya

1. Introduction

It is now an accepted philosophy that rural development in terms of the uplift of the oppressed sections in these areas cannot be conducted from outside, but has to be managed by the people themselves. In this context, it is also accepted that the activists or the animators may have the limited role of initiating the process and performing as catalysts upto the point where people take over the responsibility.

In the people's movement, there would be individuals who take lead in mobilising people's opinion and ensure their participation in decision making. If this category of individuals can be termed as cadres, it has been an endeavour of the PIDT workers --- Spearhead Team Members (SHT), to identify them in their operational areas. An individual can claim the honour of being a people's cadre only when he has a strong conviction of purpose and has proved the same in action. Since the period of working of the SHT in any area is not long enough, it is difficult to categorize the individuals as satisfying the above criterion. Nevertheless, in selecting them and exposing

them to training, from the SHT's point of view, there is an implicit potential in these individuals. Perhaps, it would be more correct to state that the study refers to potential cadres.

The selection of cadres, has been broadly guided by the following criteria: The cadres should belong to the village and be living in the area. They should be coming from the working class. While caste is no bar, what is important is that a cadre should not be one who accepts caste hierarchy (More often than not, this would imply selection of cadres from socially oppressed castes). The SHT should try to identify both male and female cadres. As far as possible, the choice of cadres can be left to the people. However, people with proven record of social work and have associated with SHT do get identified. No special emphasis or premium be given to any age group or educational qualification, if there are overweighing other reasons.

Within the broad criteria stated above, SHT have used flexibility depending on the demands of the situation and their own ingenuity. A glimpse at the characteristics and variation in the same, among these potential cadre is attempted here.

The SHT are now working in Rajapara area of Kamrup district in Assam, Paburia area of Phulbani district in Orissa, Malari area of Ghazipur district in Uttar Pradesh and Shankar-

garh in Surguja district and Singhpur area of Shahdol district, both in Madhya Pradesh. Of these the last mentioned i.e. Singhpur is a new area where SHT have gone recently, and hence is excluded from the present study.

2. Age

All the cadres come within the age group 15 - 40 years (Table 1). However, only a few of them are above 30 years of age. Nearly 90% are of the age 16 to 30 years and within this range they are evenly distributed.

We now look at the cadres belonging to the areas of different SHTs. In Malari, about 70% of the cadres are below the age of 20 years and 90% below 25. In this order, next comes Rajapara where about 70% are younger than 25 years of age. In contrast, in Paburia and Shankargarh the modal age group of their cadres is between 21 to 30 years.

The SHT at Malari is of the view that there is under-reporting of age by 2 to 3 years in the case of their cadres as obtained from their school certificate. If this is true then Malari might fall in line with Paburia and Shankargarh. This would also influence the age distribution of cadres of all the villages taken together.

3. Sex

Except in Rajapara, where 52 percent of the cadres are females, in the other three areas: Paburia, Shankargarh and Malari all the cadres are males (Table 2). Since the SHT are preponderantly males, the same might have acted as constraint in approaching the females. The participation of females in Rajapara, is partly due to the traditional uninhibited nature of women in the north eastern tribal region. In the urban influenced Malari, the scheduled caste community coming within the caste hierarchy, perhaps imitate the higher castes in imposing restrictions on women.

4. Marital Status

More than 90 percent of the cadres in Shankargarh and Malari and about 75 percent in Paburia are married (Table 3). In contrast, in Rajapara where the cadres were relatively young, only 20 percent of them are married. Viewing that nearly half of the Rajapara cadres are females, (who marry at younger age than males), it looks that marriageable age in the place could be slightly higher than that in other areas.

The fact that 17 out of the 18 cadres in Malari are married, perhaps, supports the SHT's view about under reporting of the age of these cadres.

5. Number of Children

In Rajapara very few of the cadres are married. In respect of Paburia and Malari, where relatively few of the married have children, it was learnt from the SHT that these cadres were recently married. Therefore the analysis of family size, in terms of number of children, becomes relevant only in the case of Shankargarh. Since the cadres are generally young, it more or less follows that they would have few children. Nevertheless, the fact that 10 out of the 21 married and having children, have 3 or more children reflects a tendency towards larger families (Table 4).

6. Caste

Rajapara, Paburia and Shankargarh are classified as tribal areas where the tribals constitute the oppressed, it is required and expected that the local cadres belong to the tribal community. Nearly 90% in Rajapara and Shankargarh and about 77% of the cadres in Paburia are tribals (Table 5). A few belonged to scheduled caste in Paburia and to middle castes in Rajapara and Shankargarh. It is reported by the SHT that these middle caste cadres in Rajapara are outsiders.

In contrast to the above three areas, in Malari which is a non-tribal area, nearly 90% of the cadres belonged to sche-

duled castes, which is the oppressed community in the area.

7. Education

Less than 10% of the cadres have college education (Table 6). Even though 32% of them are matriculates, nearly 50% have education upto primary level or less.

There are considerable variations in the educational qualification of cadres from different areas. Shankargarh reflects the lowest educational qualification of the cadres with 43% without any formal education and none having crossed the higher elementary level. In the other three areas, the cadres mostly have either primary or matriculate level of education. Whereas in Rajapara, Paburia and Malari about 40% of them were matriculates, in Paburia about the same percent are in the primary education category. About 22% in Malari, having reached the college has to be understood in the perspective of relatively smaller number of cadres in the area.

8. Languages

The knowledge of language, for the present study, has been interpreted as the ability to converse or more precisely make oneself understood. With this liberal connotation, about 45% in Rajapara and 60% in Malari know four languages, mother

tongue, vernacular, Hindi and English (Table 7). In Paburia, about half are familiar with English, in addition to mother tongue and vernacular. The picture in Shankargarh is much different. None of its cadres know any other language outside their mother tongue and vernacular, which incidentally in this case is Hindi. The knowledge of languages, as expected, is broadly related to educational standards.

9. Occupation

Occupationally, most of the cadres, at least their households, are connected with cultivation. In Paburia, Shankargarh and Malari almost all the cadres are cultivators and farm labourers (Table 8). In the case of the first two areas seasonally they collect forest produce and are paid wages for that. In Rajapara besides cultivation on their own farm and working as labour on others farm, forest labour forms an important avenue of employment and income. The people at Rajapara engage themselves in fishing also.

Whereas their families belong to cultivator labour category, the actual cadres in Rajapara and Malari, being educated may seek white collar service whenever the opportunity arises.

10. Income

Income in the present study represents the value of the

product from farm and allied activities after deducting cash expenses, plus the earnings from wage labour. This definition was thought acceptable for the broad purpose of analysis envisaged here.

The cadres from the two urban influenced area viz. Rajapara and Malari have higher levels of incomes as compared with Paburia and Shankargarh (Table 9). Majority of the cadres in Rajapara areas have an annual income between Rs.1500/- and Rs.3000/-. All the cadres in Malari come in the category of annual income above Rs.1750/-. In contrast, in Paburia and Shankargarh, modal group has an income below Rs.1500/- per year.

Both in Rajapara and Malari, the wage rates are relatively higher as compared with Paburia and Shankargarh. Besides, in Rajapara people get wage employment under the forest department, while in Malari double cropping in certain cases provides extra yield and additional income, and for some other wage employments. Whereas the exact extent of lean period unemployment has to be estimated, it appears that the same is longer in Shankargarh and Paburia.

Part explanation for income differences may be in the differences in the yield of the major crop which is paddy in all the four areas.

11. Political Affiliation and Affiliation
to other Organizations

The political awareness among the tribals is generally low. In Malari where the scheduled castes form the oppressed community, there are some political influences. In this area two out of the eighteen cadres have leftist political affiliation (Table 10).

In Paburia and Shankargarh, one and five cadres respectively had affiliation to religious organizations. In the latter case, the fact that five out of the twenty eight had such affiliation deserves attention in the overall perspective of the objective.

12. Experiences

Not many are exposed to experience outside their occupation (Table 11). Two cadres had teaching experience in Rajapara, a couple of cadres have managed some business in Paburia and two had training in labour education in Shankargarh.

13. Skill

As reported there are no extra-ordinary artistic and other skills among the cadres (Table 12). Exception to this

perhaps is the ability to weave and knowledge of bamboo work and tailoring among the Rajapara cadres. It has, however, to be noted that at least the first two: weaving and bamboo work, are traditional activities carried on in almost each and every household in Assam.

4. Summary

Of the four operational areas of SHT covered here, Rajapara and Malari are situated near cities and hence reflect urban influence. Paburia and Shankargarh, in contrast are remote tribal areas. Only in Malari, the oppressed belong to scheduled caste, whereas in other three areas the tribals constitute the oppressed community.

Above geographic considerations, influence socio-economic aspects of life in the areas and hence indirectly are reflected in the cadres from them.

Apart from the constraints on efforts or access, imposed by the preponderantly male SHT, the traditional uninhibited nature of tribals in the north east region has shown itself in substantial number of female cadres in Rajapara, as compared to none in other areas.

The cadres from the remote tribals areas of Paburia and

Shankargarh, are relatively older, married and less educated as compared with those from urban influenced Rajapara and Malari.

If we accept a broad connotation of knowledge of language cadres from Malari ranked the best. In terms of English, symbol of Western culture, Rajapara cadres had an edge. Perhaps, cadres from Shankargarh had the least proficiency as they know tribal languages and Hindi.

Occupationally most of the cadres belong to cultivator-labour families. Seasonally, they collect forest produce in Paburia, Shankargarh and Rajapara. In Rajapara, labour under forest department and fishing are important avenues of employment and source of income. The cadres from Rajapara and Malari, though belong to cultivator-labour families, being educated may opt for white collar services when the opportunities come.

Income-wise the cadres from Rajapara and Malari, located close to urban areas, are relatively better off as compared with these from Paburia and Shankargarh. In the former case it is employment and wage rate and in the latter case double cropping in agriculture broadly explain the advantage.

Exposure to political parties and their influence is observed in Malari. But only two of the cadres had any affiliation to political parties. In Shankargarh not a very small number had formal connections with religious organizations.

Cadre do not have any varied work experience outside their occupation. Also, they do not possess skills worth mentioning.

Table No. 1 Age

	Rajapara	Paburia	Shankargarh	Malari	Total
15	1 (2.9)	-	-	-	1 (0.9)
16 - 20	16 (45.7)	4 (15.4)	1 (3.6)	13 (72.2)	34 (31.8)
21 - 25	9 (25.7)	9 (34.6)	11 (39.3)	3 (16.6)	32 (29.9)
26 - 30	7 (20.0)	12 (46.1)	11 (39.3)	1 (5.6)	31 (29.0)
31 - 35	2 (5.7)	1 (3.9)	2 (7.1)	1 (5.6)	6 (5.6)
36 - 40	-	-	3 (10.7)	-	3 (2.9)
	35 (100.0)	26 (100.0)	28 (100.0)	18 (100.0)	107 (100.0)

Table No. 2 Sex

	Rajapara	Paburia	Shankargarh	Malari	Total
Male	17 (48.6)	26 (100.0)	28 (100.0)	18 (100.0)	89 (83.2)
Female	18 (51.4)				18 (16.8)
	35 (100.0)	26 (100.0)	28 (100.0)	18 (100.0)	107 (100.0)

Table No. 3 Marital Status

	Rajapara	Paburia	Shankargarh	Malari	Total
Married	7 (20.0)	19 (73.1)	26 (92.9)	17 (94.4)	69 (64.5)
Unmarried	28 (80.0)	7 (26.9)	2 (7.1)	1 (5.6)	38 (35.5)
	35 (100.0)	26 (100.0)	28 (100.0)	18 (100.0)	107 (100.0)

Table No. 4 Number of Children

Number of Children	Rajapara	Paburia	Shankargarh	Malari	Total
1	2 (28.6)	2 (10.5)	7 (26.9)	2 (11.8)	13 (18.8)
2	1 (14.3)	4 (21.0)	5 (19.2)	-	10 (14.5)
3	2 (28.3)	3 (15.8)	2 (7.7)	1 (5.9)	8 (11.6)
4	-	-	4 (15.4)	-	4 (5.8)
5	-	-	1 (3.8)	-	1 (1.4)
6	-	-	-	-	-
7	-	-	1 (3.8)	-	1 (1.4)
8	-	-	1 (3.8)	-	1 (1.4)
Total	5 (71.7)	9 (47.4)	21 (80.8)	3 (17.6)	38 (55.1)

Table No. 5 Caste

	Rajapara	Paburia	Shankargarh	Malari	Total
Scheduled Tribes	31 (88.6)	20 (76.9)	25 (89.3)	-	76 (71.0)
Harijan	-	-	-	-	-
Scheduled Castes	-	6 (23.1)	1 (3.6)	16 (88.9)	23 (21.5)
Middle Caste	4 (11.4)	-	2 (7.1)	2 (11.1)	8 (7.5)
Brahmin					
	35 (100.0)	26 (100.0)	28 (100.0)	18 (100.0)	107 (100.0)

Table No. 6 Educational Qualification

	Rajapara	Paburia	Shankargarh	Malari	Total
Nil	1 (2.9)	2 (7.7)	12 (42.9)		15 (14.0)
Primary	10 (28.6)	11 (42.3)	10 (35.7)	5 (27.8)	36 (33.6)
VII to VIII	6 (17.1)	-	6 (21.4)	1 (5.6)	13 (12.1)
IX to Matric	14 (40.0)	12 (46.2)	-	8 (44.4)	34 (31.8)
College	3 (8.6)	1 (3.9)		4 (22.2)	8 (7.6)
Graduate	1 (2.9)	-	-	-	1 (0.9)
Post Graduate					
	35 (100.0)	26 (100.0)	28 (100.0)	18 (100.0)	107 (100.0)

Table No. 7 Language

	Rajapara	Paburia	Shankargarh	Gazipur	Total
Mother Tongue (M.T.)	-	-	11 (39.3)	1 (5.6)	12 (11.2)
Mother Tongue and Vernacular	14 (40.0)	10 (38.5)	-	-	24 (22.4)
Mother Tongue + Vernacular and Hindi	1 (2.9)	-	17 (60.7)	6 (33.3)	24 (22.4)
Mother Tongue + Vernacular and English	4 (11.4)	13 (50.0)	-	-	17 (15.9)
Mother Tongue + Vernacular Hindi + English	16 (45.7)	3 (11.5)	-	11 (61.1)	30 (28.1)
	35 (100.0)	26 (100.0)	28 (100.0)	18 (100.0)	107 (100.0)

Table No. 8 Occupation

	Rajapara	Paburia	Shankargarh	Malri	Total
1. Cultivation	8 (22.8)	9 (34.6)	10 (35.7)	6 (33.3)	33 (30.8)
2. Labour	-	3 (11.5)	-	-	3 (2.8)
3. Cultivation and Labour	-	10 (38.5)	17 (60.7)	11 (61.1)	38 (35.5)
4. Cultivation Forest and Agri- cultural Labour	21 (60.0)	-	-	-	21 (19.7)
5. Cultivator Trader	-	2 (7.7)	-	-	2 (1.9)
6. Cultivator Service	5 (14.3)	2 (7.7)	1 (3.6)	1 (5.6)	9 (8.4)
7. Cultivation and other	1 (2.9)	-	-	-	1 (0.9)
	35 (100.0)	26 (100.0)	28 (100.0)	18 (100.0)	107 (100.0)

Table No. 9 Income

	RajaRajapara	Paburia	Shankargarh	Malari	Total
Upto 500	-	-	1 (3.6)	-	1 (0.9)
501- 750	3 (8.6)	2 (7.7)	2 (7.1)	-	7 (6.5)
751-1000	2 (5.7)	4 (15.4)	5 (17.9)	-	11 (10.4)
1001-1250	-	4 (15.4)	6 (21.4)	-	10 (9.3)
1251-1500	2 (5.7)	7 (26.9)	4 (14.3)	-	13 (12.1)
1501-1750	10 (28.6)	1 (3.8)	1 (3.6)	-	12 (11.3)
1751-2000	5 (14.3)	3 (11.6)	1 (3.6)	3 (16.7)	12 (11.3)
2001-2500	4 (11.4)	-	2 (7.1)	4 (22.2)	10 (9.3)
2501-3000	6 (17.1)	1 (3.8)	2 (7.1)	5 (27.8)	14 (13.1)
3001-3500	-	2 (7.7)	-	2 (11.1)	4 (3.7)
3501-4000	3 (8.6)	2 (7.7)	1 (3.6)	3 (16.7)	9 (8.4)
4000	-	-	2 (7.1)	1 (5.5)	3 (2.8)
Not Available	-	-	1	-	1 (0.9)
	35 (100.0)	26 (100.0)	28 (100.0)	18 (100.0)	107 (100.0)

Table No. 10 Affiliation to Organizations

	Rajepara	Paburia	Shankargarh	Malari	Total
Religious	-	1 (3.9)	5 (19.2)	-	6 (5.6)
Political				2	2 (1.9)
		1 (3.8)	5 (19.2)	2 (11.1)	8 (7.5)

Table No. 11 Experience

	Rajapara	Paburia	Shankargarh	Malari	Total
1. Training Labour Education	-	-	2 (7.1)	-	2 (1.9)
2. Training Religious Christ	-	-	1 (3.6)	-	1 (0.9)
3. Account Keeping	-	1 (3.8)	-	-	1 (0.9)
4. Business	-	2 (7.7)	-	-	2 (1.9)
5. N.S.S. Camp	1 (2.9)	-	-	-	1 (0.9)
6. Medical (C.H.V.)	1 (2.9)	-	-	-	1 (0.9)
7. Teachers	2 (5.7)	-	-	-	2 (1.9)
	4 (11.44)	3 (11.5)	3 (10.7)	-	10 (9.3)

Table No. 12 Skills

	Rajapara	Paburia	Shankargarh	Malari	Total
. Bamboo and Cane Work	9 (25.7)	-	-	-	9 (8.4)
. Carpentry		1 (3.9)	3 (10.7)		4 (3.7)
. Tailoring	6 (17.1)	1 (3.9)	-	-	7 (6.5)
. Weaving	13 (37.1)				13 (12.2)
. Building Construction	-	-	1 (3.6)	-	1 (0.9)
. Knitting	1 (2.9)	-	-	-	1 (0.9)
. Rope Making	-	-	1 (3.6)	-	1 (0.9)
. Fishing Net	-	-	1 (3.6)	-	1 (0.9)
. Pumpset repairing	-	-	1 (3.6)	-	1 (0.9)
0. Basket Making	-	-	1 (3.6)	-	1 (0.9)
1. Music (Instrument)	-	3 (11.5)	-	-	3 (2.8)
	29 (82.8)	5 (19.3)	8 (28.7)		42 (38.3)

Awakening of Parsagudi

Bhoop Singh

Parsagudi village is located in Rajpur block of Surguja district of Madhya Pradesh. It is 5 Kilometres off the road linking Rajpur with Ambikapur. With a population exceeding 1500, Parsagudi is one of the bigger villages in Rajpur block. Population of this village consists of tribals and non-tribals. The former comprise of Gondhs, Bargah (Kharbar), Oraon, Kavar, Chikha. The non-tribals include Bania, Sahu, Amir and Pandit among higher castes, while scheduled caste populations belongs to Chamar, Lohar, Ghasian, Darji.

The tribals constitute the economically poor stratum. The non-tribal form the relatively affluent. The existence of poor tribals in Parsagudi was hardly recognised by the rich who lived next to them. On their own part, the poor had done little to ameliorate their conditions. If at all, there were a few exceptions of a few tribal families who had succeeded to break-even by individual efforts. There was a time when all the lands of the village and its wealth belonged to tribals. Now all that has gone to non-tribals.

Today the tribals have rice, their staple food, for only six months. During the remaining months they are compelled to live

leaves and roots from the forest. These poor do not look beyond satisfying the day's hunger. Scantily dressed they are removed from the sophistication of the present civilization. With the passage of time they have become silent about their miseries. This culture of silence has in a way withdrawn them from the world.

* * * * *

On reaching Parsagudi, Spearhead Team (SHT) observed that behind the miseries of these hapless people there is a man called Ramnath Sahu. When Ramnath came to know about the purpose of SHT's stay at Parsagudi, he did not lose any time in intimidating them. For this he chose his own unique way. Showing his lathi (stick), he told the SHT that all the villagers recognise it even if it is thrown anywhere in the village and let them not ignore it. The very fact the SHT continued to stay there implied that they did not succumb to these threats.

Even before SHT's coming, one school teacher had attempted to mobilize the people against Ramnath. But before he could register the people's strength, Ramnath had liquidated him. This shocked the people and instilled a fear into them. If anybody asked about the teacher's death, they only pleaded ignorance. Even though Ramnath was arrested, when the police came to Parsagudi no villager opened his mouth. In the absence of witness, the culprit was released.

After the incident of murder and his release, Ramnath became more atrocious. He disallowed the poor from grazing their cattle in the village lands. He grabbed the lands of cowherds who looked after these cattle. He appropriated all the mahua trees of the village and forbade the villagers from collecting mahua. Tribals would tolerate everything. But they would not take lying down deprivation of mahua, which is a source of food, drink and cash.

Ramnath knew that the tribals are sensitive on the mahua issue. But he was so over-confident that he threatened the people that anybody who opposes him would follow the teacher's path. The SHT who had come to organize the poor against the exploiters could not ignore the mahua issue. Taking the mahua case, SHT initiated weekly meetings on every Friday to discuss the problems of the village.

The tribals were scared of the police. They had the apprehension that Ramnath may influence the police against them. In order to remove the fear, SHT took them to the police station and made them talk to the policemen. The police were courteous. In fact, by then the police had come to know about SHT and their support with the people. The visit to the police station had boosted up the moral of the people and on one day they resumed collection of mahua again. To their pleasant surprise Ramnath did not show the courage to intervene.

Hailing from Aara district of Bihar, Ramnath had crossed over to Madhya Pradesh with his family nearly 16 years ago. For sometime he wandered in the tribal area before he settled down in Parsagudi. Here he started selling liquor and ganja, which soon won him lot of friends among the poor tribals. Not long after that one of his clients, Harijan by caste, lost his land on which Ramnath built his house.

SHT tracing the source of Ramnath's power, found that Gashiram, a Gondh MLA, a Pandit from Sinchera, Shantaram Tiwari, President of the Block and Dasarath Balsahu, a one time big goonda, now on of the bigger seller of liquor and ganja were his close allies.

To curb the people's power, Ramnath filed 11 false cases against emerging leaders of Parsadugi. However, the police had by then known the true credentials of Ramnath and his involvement in the murder of the teacher. When he did not get help from Rajpur police station, Ramnath appealed to Superintendent of Police in Ambikapur against the local police as also the people of Rajpur. However, his efforts failed again.

The Friday meetings, initiated by the SHT, had by then become a tradition in Parsagudi. Ramnath Sahu, his misdeeds and ways to circumvent them and methods to nullify his power, occupied good portion of these meetings. All these discussions were also recorded in the Panchayat register.

In one such Friday meeting, the tribals decided that they would unitedly refuse to work for Ramnath. They would decline to work in his farms, would not bring the fire-wood and would refuse to do the innumerable household chores which they used to do. They also influenced the surrounding villages not to help him. Ramnath and family, who for many years had done little hard work, could not strain themselves and were compelled to flee to Ambikapur. Needless to state, this brought some relief to the people of Parsagudi.

* * * *

In Madhya Pradesh, according to the states' law land belonging to tribals cannot be purchased by or transferred to non-tribals. But Ramnath Sahu has been able to skip this legal hurdle and appropriated tribal land in Parsagudi.

Ramnath's exploitative genius can be exemplified by a single case of duping his own servant Bimalshai. Bimalshai at one time owned 35 acres. When he started drinking alcohol and walked into the clutches of Ramnath, he first sold 6 acres. It is at this point he joined as contract labour with Ramnath, who then initiated the process of duping him of the remaining land. He transferred 7 acres of Bimalshai's land to Ruka another tribal from Sinchora village. Needless to state, Bimalshai did not get anything from the deal. However, in front of the Magistrate he was compelled to concede that he has received the money. In reality, eventually the land went into Ramnath's possession. If this was not enough, the rest of Bimalshai's land about 22 acres was mortgaged to the bank for a loan to dig

a well and install a pumpset. As expected, the money went to Ramnath and neither the well was dug nor the pump installed. On the other hand, this remaining part of Bimalshai's land also went into Ramnath's possession.

Three years later Ramnath made a false claim that his wife Sumitra Devi is a Gondh tribal and later transferred to her the seven acres of land now belonging to Ruka but originally belonged to his own servant Bimalshai. When a year after that Ramnath tried to take possession of the land, Bimalshai protest protested. As the villagers came to know that Ramnath has converted his wife into a Gondh, they appealed to the authorities in Bhopal. What if the law is with the poor tribals? Its implementers are on the side of evaders of law. When the so-called enquiry was made by the Government, the local M.L.A. vouched that Ramnath's wife is a Gondh. When the Sub Divisional Officer (S.D.O.) was approached, he only passed the buck on to Tribal Welfare Department.

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Ramnath had shifted to Ambikapur but used to frequent Parsagudi often. He used to visit the non-tribals and boast of his association with the village leaders. All this did not affect the morale of tribals. Friday meetings were held and attended most enthusiastically. They had not accepted the defeat. A close watch was kept on Ramnath's movement while deciding their own strategy of action.

When the fully ripe crop was standing on Ramnath's illegally appropriated land, 200 persons of Parsagudi got ready to harvest. However, on the particular day even before the women had completed cutting half the crop, the word had already reached Ramnath at Ambikapur through his friend darji (tailor) at Parsagudi. In no time Ramnath arrived in Parsagudi on a motorbike accompanied by the powerful Dasarath and one other man. On behalf of Ramnath, Dasarath threatened that anybody cutting former's crop would have to face legal proceedings. He also warned others supporting the tribals. Making their presence felt by riding on the motorbike in the village, Dasarath told Ramnath that in case, he cannot harvest the crop Dasarath himself can manage it with his workers from Ambikapur.

Dramatic intervention by Ramnath and allies, intimidation by Dasarath had its effect on the poor tribals. Some were mortally scared whether the latter would allow them to live peacefully. Still on Friday, the village congregated for its weekly meeting. The SHT suggested that the people should request the police for help to complete the harvesting of crop. Even though people had reservations about the prospects, they accompanied by SHT went to the police station. Assuring all help, police asked them to inform the station if Ramnath intervenes a second time.

This time everything was meticulously planned, people were appointed for specific responsibilities cutting the crop, taking it to the Khaliyan (temporary storage before threshing) waiting for Ramnath's arrival, blocking the road and so on. Thus on the fixed day 130 people cut the remaining crop and reached it to the Khaliyan.

As for the crop, the people and SHT decided that this would not be given to Bimalshai. It may be retained for expenses of court case which Ramnath may choose to file. The money left, it was decided, would be used to release Bimalshai's mortgaged land and register the same in the name of his children.

As expected Ramnath filed a case at the Sub Divisional Office. For people who have not seen much beyond their village, the court and the law-suit were unknown. Of recent they had stopped going to Ambikapur because of Ramnath's presence there and the fear of being beaten. Regarding the court case, more than the expenses what scared them was the prospect of being put into the jail.

Accompanied by the SHT, the tribals of Parsagudi went to Tribal Welfare Department in expectation of some help. Their hopes were soon belied. The officials there-in were not even prepared to hear and understand their problem. Tribals were told that it is a matter which has to be dealt with in the court and lawyers only can help. When a request was made for the Government legal aid for the tribals, they were told the relevant application forms can be had from the court.

Even though disappointed, from the Tribal Welfare Department the aggrieved people of Parsagudi went to the S.D.O.'s office. The old S.D.O. had gone and there was a new incumbent. The change was a boon to the tribals. The new S.D.O. heard their story with all the patience and interest. He answered all their questions. He told them that there is no necessity to appoint a lawyer. It is enough if the people give a written statement of their complaint. The S.D.O. also enlightened the people that Bimalshai is within his rights to claim his land back. Earlier, the Tribal Welfare Department had misguided them stating that this legal step was not possible since five years had lapsed.

In his judgement the S.D.O. ruled that in cutting the crop the tribals have not done any wrong. Further he clarified that the 7 acres of land did not lawfully belong to Ramnath. As there is no Gondh woman in the name of Sumitra Devi, the

registration of the land under this name is incorrect.

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The defeat at the S.D.O.'s court was not sufficient to deter Ramnath. He now appealed to the Commissioner placed at Bilaspur. Disillusion again spread over Parsagudi. It takes two days to go to Bilaspur and two days to come back. None of them had been to this distant place before. Further, how can the poor afford to go without wages and who will pay for the transport and food?

The state of hopelessness had to be reversed. Intervention by SHT and their catalytic role was called for. In the ensuing Friday meeting, a realistic assessment of the situation was made. It was pointed out that the reality is not a fight confined to Ramnath and Bimalshai. Reality is that Ramnath is exploiting all the oppressed tribals and Bimalshai only happens to be today's victim. The fight is between Ramnath and all the poor of Parsagudi. He has to be confronted whether it is Parsagudi or Bilaspur. It will be the decision of the village to help Bimalshai and send two other persons with him. Expenses would be borne from the returns of the harvested crop.

Yes - they did succeed in Bilaspur. But a what cost? - This is the way Government thinks of developing the rural areas and their poor people. To fight injustice and save themselves from deprivation, they were dragged to the commissionerate at Bilaspur. The Commissioner is a busy man but is anybody concerned about what expenses and unending miseries these visits would entail to the tribals?

Bimalshai is not a single instance. There are thousands of them happening everyday. Nobody observes them. There are few questions based on these instances which should be brought to the notice of the Government for a sympathetic understanding of the situation:

1. Did the Patwari know of Sumitra Devi belonging to Gondh tribe and who purchased 7 acres of land? How is it that it is proved later that there is no such Gondh tribal in Parsagudi village?
2. If on analysis the facts of last few years, one would find how and the extent to which the non-tribals have appropriated the tribal land contravening law.
3. The posting of inefficient and corrupt officials to backward areas where ignorant and illiterate live, would not harm the people. At least the record would not speak such

things. The silent oppressed would never muster courage to complain against the corrupt officials. Whatever 'Saheb' says is law.

4. The whole system of decision making and appeal against it, is a prerogative of the rich and is meant to to harass the poor. Where the poor have little access to funds is it anything more than a child's play to manipulate decisions against them?
5. Can the tribals expect help from the Government departments to fight the exploiters? Unfortunately, it is the system adopted for land re-distribution and the working of Revenue department which are the root causes of their sorrow.

Can We Save the Forests from Forest Officials?

Dilip Dhekial Phookan

Rajapara is one of the oldest forest villages under Barduar Reserve Forests of Kamrup district of Assam. The village and the surrounding area is an important forest region in North East India. Its rich forest resources consisting of Sal, Gamari and Teak are the result of unceasing care of the Rabha community living in the area.

The inhabitants of forest villages are entitled for certain privileges in the use of forests for their day-to-day life. Rabhas in Rajapara area are not able to enjoy these benefits. The Forest Department in league with businessmen not only appropriate forest resources illegally but also exploit the tribals.

Disregarding the rights of forest villagers, the Department employs outside labour only to keep the tribals suppressed and hungry. While there are quotas reserved for the tribals, the licenses are obtained by contractors in the name of tribals. As the contractors flourish in the lucrative timber trade the innocent tribals may be forced to pay their dues, for the small endorsement to which he has fallen a trap when signing the application for the license. The exploitation is not confined

to economic aspects. There is social exploitation of the poor women. As it always happens in such situation, a few families carry favour with the Forest Department. They are allowed to fish in the Government lakes and obtain wage employment in the illegal felling of trees.

The older people of Rajapara remember with nostalgia "In our young days we were worshipping trees and were afraid of cutting even a branch. The world has changed. Nobody cares for the forest. Even the educated join hands with the Department in destroying the forests. How can we fight corruption? Where can we demand justice"?

It is from this despair the struggle originates. That corruption among the forest personnel is one of the major hurdles in the path of development is known to many. The local youth were agitated about this. The Spearhead Team Members (SHT) only catalysed it into action.

On 9th February, 1981 a leading youth of the village, Rajan Rabha sold a truck of straw to a contractor. The Forest Beat Officer of Rajapara with a few forest guards came to Rajan's house and warned him against selling straw without the permission of Forest Department. Rajan argued that there is no law preventing the sale of straw. He challenged the Beat Officer that the latter cannot seize the straw truck and prosecute him. The forest staff, four in total, were drunk and

demanding that they will seize the straw. When Rajan refused to coincide, the Forest Beat Officer shouting ferociously rebuked Rajan's family. This drew the attention of the neighbour. Karun and Sridhar Rabha arrived just in time when Rajan and his old mother were being beaten by the Forest Beat Officer. When Karun and Sridhar warned the Beat Officer not to behave like a beast, they too were beaten. At that moment SHT members were sitting in the nearby school. This incident took place at a distance of about 200 metres from the school. Following the cry of Rajan's mother, SHT members rushed to the spot. On seeing the SHT, the Forest Beat Officer shouted angrily and asked them as to how they are permitted to enter the forest village. Moreover, the Beat Officer stated that nobody is entitled to interfere in forest officer's work or permitted to argue with him. SHT members admitted that a forest officer may have the power in a forest village or to seize forest produce, but he has no power to seize straw and create tension among the villagers and boldly stated that they will protect the villagers from the Department's atrocities. To this, the forest officer ordered his staff to catch hold of SHT members. The Situation became hot. The forest personnel who were under the influence of liquor made attempts to beat the SHT. Luckily none of them was hurt. The villagers, especially the young girls and boys, gheraoed the forest personnel. Later with the interference of a few old men the situation calmed down.

On 10th February, 1981 the people of Rajapara organised a village meeting and decided not to file police case against the Beat Officer, and instead, compromise the issue. But as the Beat Officer was absent, no talk could be held on that day about the compromise. People had least expected that the Beat Officer would file a case on his own. However, on 11th February morning, a few police officers of Palasbari Police Station (Mirza) with half a dozen of armed forces reached Rajapara in search of the local youth and SHT. The SHT came to know from the police officer that the Beat Officer had filed a case against them and nine youth of the village alleging attempt to murder him and obstruction in his duty. The SHT and the youth were arrested but were later released on bail. The Beat Officer intended to torture SHT members and Rajan Rabha. But the police could not get an opportunity to harass the members. Not satisfied, the Department issued a warning to the inhabitants of the village that they would be evicted if they opposed the Forest Department. At this time, a few close associates of the Beat Officer and a family which supplies liquor to forest staff made statement against the SHT and village youth before the police officer. The Beat Officer also produced a medical certificate certifying severe injuries on him during the incident of 9th February 1981. In this he is supported and protected by his Department.

The village youth ~~did not~~ want^{ed} to intend to expose all the corrupt officers to prevent the misappropriation of forest produce by black marketiers and also to inculcate a sense of social responsibility among the villagers to protect the forest produce. As they got organised, the youth started exposing the illegal activities of the forest personnel.

On 1st of May 1981, the local youth caught red-handed four persons engaged in illegal cutting of green wood. The youth brought the four persons to the village and informed the forest Range Officer. The Range Officer came and seized the illegal wood. From the statement of the four persons, it became clear that Jamini Rabha, the associate of Beat Officer and whose family had given witness against the village youth employed, had helped these four persons to cut wood at wages higher than the general rate. On the basis of statement given by these four persons, a departmental case has been registered against Jamini.

The Rajapara Youth Sangh demanded necessary action against the corrupt persons. But the Forest Department took no notice of their demand. Again on 13th June 1981, Rajapara Youth Sangh found 15 pieces of illegally cut sal wood under Rajapara Forest Beat area. They reported the matter to the Range Officer who accompanied them to the spot and seized the wood. The Youth Sangh demanded that the Government as well as

the Forest Department, should take necessary action against corrupt officials. But so far no step has been taken by the Government.

On 25th June 1981, a news item appeared in an Assamese daily: 'Dainik Assam', under the caption 'Government Disinterested'. It threw light on the genuine efforts made by the Youth Sangh, for protecting forest wealth from the corrupt persons and the miserable failure of the Government in controlling the black marketing of forest produce.

It is painful to state that the Forest Department after having gone through the news item, seized a few pieces of timber from the villagers who had earlier given witness against the Forest Department and gave a fresh news item to the press saying that illegal wood worth Rs.20,000/- was recovered from Rajapara village. But no case could be registered against any of these villagers because the so-called seized timber was actually the timber, the Beat Officer unscrupulously used to collect from the sawn wood. However, the Forest Department used this notorious means to browbeat the villagers. Later, the Beat Officer issued notice to 12 families of Rajapara village that they will be evicted from their unauthorised settlement within a week. The Youth Sangh sent a delegation to give memorandum to the Government requesting them to immediately withdraw the eviction notices. The Forest Secretary, Government of Assam

issued a circular in favour of the villagers and the eviction has been stopped until further notice.

The matter has not yet settled. For example, the Range Officer informed his departmental head that the news published in a Assamese daily on 25th June is baseless. Challenging this, the Youth Sangh on 6th July 1981, requested the Range Officer to visit Rajapara and study the situation himself. A reminder was sent on 11th July but the visit of Range Officer is still awaited by the Sangh.

On 17th December 1981, because of the joint efforts of the Youth Sangh and SHT a huge quantity of illegal Sal wood, valued over Rs.15,000/- was detected near Rajapara Beat. The Sangh brought the District Forest Officer (D.F.O.) and the Assistant Conservator of Forests (A.C.F.) to Rajapara, who seized 23 pieces of illegal Sal wood on 19th December. Under the rules, the Beat Officer is responsible if illegally cut wood is caught by D.F.O. in a Beat area. The D.F.O. assured the Youth Sangh that he will take action against the Beat Officer of Rajapara and his staff. Moreover, the Youth Sangh met the Chief Conservator of Forest (C.C.F.), Assam and demanded disciplinary action against Rajapara Forest Department Staff.

On 20th December 1981, the Beat Officer of Rajapara came with a Forest guard near the residence of SHT at about 7.30.p.m. and started abusing the members. The members told him to go back to his residence, but he did not and shouted more loudly. At the same time two forest guards came to the spot and requested the SHT members not to talk with the Beat Officer as he was drunk. The forest guard and the wife of the Beat Officer took the Beat Officer back to his residence. No unpleasant incident took place.

But to the utter surprises of everybody, the police with armed forces ~~showered~~ ^{surrounded} the residence of SHT members at about 3.30 a.m. The police then arrested two of the SHT members charging assault and trespass. The police also arrested Karun and Rajani of Youth Sangh and presented them in the court at about 10.30 a.m. Bail petition was moved in the court of Criminal Judiciary Magistrate (C.J.M.) but the C.J.M. did not grant the petition and the accused were sent to Gauhati jail. The advocates once again moved for bail on 22nd December 1981. An advocate from All Assam Young Lawyers Forum rendered his honorary service and convinced the Magistrate. The arrested were then released on bail.

During the stay in jail there were a series of talks with a sympathetic ex-Indian Police Service (I.P.S.) Officer and the Convener of All Assam State and Central Government Employees Association (A.S.C.G.A.). The SHT members told them all about

the illegal felling of trees and the black marketing of forest produce in Rajapara area with the connivance of higher forest officers. They also explained as to how the people are harassed by implicating false cases and issuing eviction notices. Both, the I.P.S. official and the Convener of A.S.C.G.A. praised the work of the youth and requested them to face the situation bravely to protect the national wealth from corruption. On 6th January 1982, an Assamese weekly (Nilachal) published a news giving specific documents of corruption under Rajapara Forest Beat. The news also reported about the involvement and indulgence of forest officers in corrupt practices. This time no complaint from the forest officer has yet reached to the editor of Nilachal.

On 25th January 1982, the SHT and Youth Sangh jointly detected about 500 c.ft. of illegal 'Sal' wood, on the top of a hill under Rajapara forest beat, valued over Rs.20,000/-. As All Assam Students Union (A.A.S.U.) had given a call for 'Assam Curfew' on 26th, no action could be taken on that day. So the Youth Sangh submitted a petition before D.F.O. to enquire the case on 27th. On 28th January 1982, D.F.O. and A.C.F. and the Range Officer with a few forest guards made queries of the case and seized few illegal logs. The forest staff was accompanied to the spot by a group of members from Dakshin Kamrup Students Union and Gansangram Parishad, Rabha Students Union, Rajapara Youth Sangh and a SHT member.

The involvement of forest officers became obvious because the Beat Officer and the Range Officer had inscribed identification numbers (No. 44 and 25) on an illegal log and made it legal. Answering to a question from the SMT member, the A.C.F. stated in presence of all the members and forest officials that the log contractor shall have to pay a penalty of fifty times more royalty on the illegally cut wood. Otherwise, the department would cancel his permit and the concerned forest personnel would be suspended from service for their misconduct.

On that day, the Chairman of All Assam Gansangram Parishad (A.A.G.P.) was present in Rajapara to discuss about the conservation of forest and ecological balance with the village people. The forest officials were invited by the youth to meet the gathering and they promised to meet the people. But the forest officers dramatically disappeared from Rajapara Forest Inspection Bungalow.

On 31st January 1982, in an interview with the C.C.F., the Chairman of A.A.G.P. briefed him about the happenings in Rajapara and demanded necessary action against the corrupt forest officers. Earlier to this interview, the Editor of Nilachal wrote a letter to the C.C.F. explaining the happenings of Rajapara.

The C.C.F. is yet to take any action against his corrupt officials. But the Forest Department has been quick and prompt

enough in influencing their counterparts in the Education Department. The Deputy Inspector of school Gauhati issued a suspension order to Rajani, the teacher of Government primary school who is the Secretary of Rajapara Youth Sangh. His involvement in the activities of the Youth Sangh and arrest by the police were sufficient reasons to warrant this grave decision.

Can the forest be protected from unscrupulous businessmen and the forest officials? The struggle is not over. Only the time can tell whether and when the success will come.

A VISIT TO PABURIA

K. Dinker Rao

I am on my way to Paburia in Phulbani district of Orissa, where the Spearhead Team Members (SHT) have been working for three years now - Among the passengers in the sleeper compartment of the Minar Express was a mill worker visiting his native place Behrampur, with his wife and four children spaced less than one and a half years between them, the eldest being six presently. I wasn't actually prepared for such a crowded company. To add to my discomfiture, our mill friend spreads his dinner, which formality could have been conveniently completed at home, as the rest of us had done. I despise my middle class sensitivities.

Minar Express changes its name to Konarak Express at Secunderabad next morning and we reach Behrampur at 6.30 a.m. on the third day. The bus to Paburia has left already. Since I am told that the next bus at 12.30 does not have the proper connections for onward journey, I decide to stay at Behrampur. The evening at Gopalpur - on - Sea brings back the childhood memories of coastal Mangalore and for the next half an hour I forget all painful thoughts of self pity. Return from Gopalpur-on-Sea to Behrampur town was by a private bus. The conductor takes money but does not issue the ticket. Whereas elsewhere it is only the proprietor who cheats the world, the system there allows the flexibility to the conductor to have a share and even the passenger the possibility of hoodwinking the latter. I don't know whether understanding this aspect or without, an American tourist quipped 'Saving on Paper'?

The route from Behrampur to Paburia is via G Udaigiri where you change the bus. Since, there is also an R.Udiagiri, I checked with atleast four different persons before boarding the bus. In G.Udaigiri there was a full hour to spare. A shopkeeper cum co-operative society secretary offers a chair to me, who rightly identifies me as visitor to the Research Team, the label which the SHT have adopted in the area. I am told later that the good Samaritan is a building contractor and a cool politician.

For its local eminence Paburia square has four roads and half a dozen shops littered around the vertex. The SHT are housed focally near the square in a building belonging to the Forest Department. Two of the SHT members go to G.Udaigiri by the same bus for encashing a draft and they will wait 8 hours for the return transport.

The pace of rural development crawls as the time in rural areas ticks. In contra-distinction to growth manja, we have in resp of rural areas uneasy reservations regarding enforcing the pace of change. The activists' ways have to be entirely persuasive to match with the rural culture, which is at once less bureaucratic and more informal. All these terms are subjective and each group and individual make their own judgements and satisfy their conscience or others' demands. Patience and persuasion become the badge of activists' culture. I wait for the SHT to broach the subject of work.

The uneasy silence is broken by the "Nadia Party", a dance group, a feature of the Kartik month in the area. Each village would have its own group or groups if the village is divided, which visits the surrounding villages and collect cash or grains for their performance. Presumably these groups must have originally started as kirtan singers but today they wear heavily painted paces

to embellish enact a monotonous step. If our assumption is right then the song, part is now unimaginably shortened and does not go beyond Radha Krishna, Radha Krishna The total lack of sophistication in the dancing, pride of its performers and the excitement and satisfaction it provides to the audience may give rise to a thought - Are we disturbing the blirs and tranquility of these backwaters of civilization? These doubts are cast aside by the question why only Krishna and not the Radhikas should wear goggles.

The religious fervour of Paburia is not confined to seasons. There are more perennial channels. Dayananda High School in the area though not run by Dayananda Saraswati Mission has a few followers in the management. The school had the ~~same~~ distinction of 100 Per cent failure in the last matriculation examination. The headmaster of the school for reasons obvious and others best known to him, scrupulously avoids filling the vacancies. The Hindi pandit is better known for the wealth he has accumulated through social welfare activities than his knowledge of the language. He is hated even by the crooked retired teacher who ~~to~~ SHT appears as the demon in Chandamama, popular children's monthly. Incidentally, the demon happens to be the most mobile person in the Paburia square. He sees the last bus off at night, however, late it comes, and is there to receive the first one in the morning. The teachers who were very cordial to the SHT in the beginning now dislike them to the same degree. Surprisingly, the pradhan of nearby Gutinga, one of the local cadres SHT have developed, is a member of Dayanand Saraswati Mission and is also under the close influence of these teachers.

An evening visit to Bagapara revealed the extent of assimilation of SHT among the tribals. Villagers, more particularly the children and the women, throng around us. The children has a special ~~corner for Didi, the female member of~~

corner for Didi, the female member of SHT. We exchange with the adults 'Nagi Nagi' - a form of 'How do you do'. I was told that some of the women greet SHT with Pedda Ladu. In their attempt to decipher the phrase the SHT have reached an impasse where they are unable to decide whether the phrase means 'Praise the Lord' or 'Pray the Lord'. They can know it only from the Christian missionaries who have taught the tribals.

In his small way the veterinary official in Paburia acts as the exponent of Yug Nirman cult, which works for the rejuvenation of Hinduism. Stressing the purification ^{of} life ~~of~~ style of individuals, it also endeavours to eradicate blind beliefs and fight corrupt traditions and customs. Our advocate of the cult has painted the walls of many a public buildings with slogans against liquor drinking. 'Man does not drink liquor. It is liquor which drinks the man', is one such slogan. The veterinary man is a friend of SHT. Apart from their common campaign against liquor and similarity of few other views, there is that amicability of the person. The team does not have similar relations with the other religious institutions.

The entry and assimilation of SHT with Paburia people has been an interesting process. For a long time they had to wait on the sidelines. Only when they decided to learn the key language they could make a realistic approach. In fact, the learning of key language became a sort of amusement for the children. Perhaps, it is by offering themselves as laughing stock to the children, the SHT gradually entered the hearts of tribal men and women. There was also an interesting episode in Kuttiguda, where the village pradhan and the panchayat would not let the SHT go without providing them bottles of liquor, a custom patronized by the local development agents in return for the obligation of calling the village meeting.

The SHT were ultimately let free when the pradhan was convinced that SHT were a different sort.

Liquor drinking was one of the main issues around which SHT succeeded in mobilising the tribals. This was rather surprising to the activists of some other groups visiting Paburia at the time. Their own experience with regard to self reforming activities in the initial stage of mobilisation has not been a happy one. On the other hand, SHT opine that this is only a matter of interpretation and hence liquor drinking can as well be viewed, and rightly so, as an exploiters' trap.

Whereas in the long-run liquor ruins the whole family and the clan, in the short run the men have the pleasure and the women, as always, have the suffering. Therefore, the campaign against liquor had to be found support among women. At a later stage the youth fell in line with the women. Notwithstanding its role as a tool in mobilizing the people, the claims of reduction in liquor drinking looked rather suspect when I encountered in the Sunday market at least half a dozen hovering around in sublime state. The worse happened when a couple of youths, in the process of being developed as cadre, were under the spell. To add, to my puzzle, the SHT explained that in People's Prohibition' exception has been made with regard to 'salap', a milder conception' and that too only during the season, which incidentally lasted six months. Objectively, the success of prohibition in Paburia has to be evaluated not by outside standards but by its own standards which prevailed before. Then, there was no waiting for the market day and all the days of the week were bestowed with equal consideration. All festivals and occasions of celebrations' commanded extra merit, finally ending with clashes and fisty exchanges at the Paburia square. That there is a drastic change is vouched by all local Government functionaries, as also by people who are not altogether sympathetic with SHT's presence and efforts.

Not the same set of issues and in fact dissimilar sequence of events and activities help in bringing the people together in different villages. Also different groups may have their own sub-areas of interest. Therefore, SHT had to use different initiating points to organise youth clubs and Mahila Sabhas. SHT have to manipulate the sub groups to forge the total strength. Whereas in the case of liquor drinking, women and youth were in a way temperari- pitted against men, in the case of Dindargarh (Gothul) it was women, young and old, against young men, with older men assuming a neutral stance. In this process, the SHT have brought about innumerable changes in the life style of the tribals. The lavish expenses on birth and death ceremonies maintained on borrowed monies which helped the money lenders and impoverished the tribals, have been considerably reduced. On the economic front, turmeric now leaves many a villages only after it is processed. The tamerind produce which was earlier flittered away by the tribal leaders to contractors, today belongs to the village. The pilfering of the minor forest products such as mahua and mahua seeds, mango, jackfruit etc. has now been stopped with the common consent and agreement of the people. The combined efforts of some of the development agents and the SHT, have encouraged vegetable cultivation and backyard horticulture. The village community has unanimously agreed not to use the trees in the vicinity for firewood and other purposes. The women, therefore now make leaf plates with greater diligence as the leaves are now available in plenty around the village.

In gist, the house where the SHT stays has become in its own way the focal point of many activities. Apart from the villagers, many Government agents visit them for help. The village agricultural worker and the veterinary man visit the team almost every day. The Block Development Officer and Bijlipathi (the electrician affectionately called so by the SHT) are very close to the team. The man from the Horticulture Department recently utilised the

services of the team in the distribution of coconut seedlings to the tribals. The District Industries Centre man came to the team to request them to select the women for training in tailoring. Presently, the relations are mutually helpful: they help the Government agencies to achieve their targets and help the SHT to get nearer the people. The relations may not remain the same as soon as the people claim a say in the development efforts.

All the while, SHT are conscious of their role as catalysts. The actual responsibility lies with the people. The SHT are there to foster conditions for spontaneous creative activity among people to overcome their diffidence, acquire skills for decision making and build organisations for sustaining this process. The youth clubs and mahila sabhas which have sprung up in the villages of Paburia are a result of such efforts. Linked with each village and its organisations, are the cadres who take the active part. As it stands, it is not easy to delineate the roles of SHT and people in the selection of cadres and SHT and cadres in building the village organisations. Apart from the absence of proper documentation of experiences, the subjectivity involved makes the task difficult.

To hasten the process, the SHT trains the local cadres in understanding social reality and developing their organisational skills. Some-times they are also exposed to the efforts of other activists groups and also formal orientation training programme. The thoughts and language of two such cadres were visibly influenced after such an orientation programme in Delhi and exposure to peoples efforts in a tribal area in the outskirts of Bombay. It was not possible to meet all the cadres visiting all the villages. Few whom I met at Paburia provided a variety. One of them who looked relatively calm and collected belonged to the socially higher Gondhs. The other three were Kois, one of them was sensitive and emotional, the second, a village mod and the third, a gay type who has seen quite a few parts of the country.

Of the four, only one of the Kois could be appropriately classified as belonging to workers class and the rest all had 5 acres of land.

Whereas the youth club and Mahila Sabhas initiate actions at the village level, for issues having wider scope and requiring combined efforts, there have to be organisations at higher levels. It is from these considerations that the cadres, the village organisations and the SHT thought of and have constituted the Anchalik Vikas Sangathan (AVS) at the panchayat level. The AVS is still at the formative stage after two years. It is yet to take up any concrete issues and hence there is less to show in terms of tangible results. The SHT are aware of the fluctuating interests of the cadres and its implications to peoples enthusiasm. Such ups and downs are inevitable features. In a recent meeting, the SHT and cadres cordially discussed the blemishes and shortcomings of their past actions to forge a strategy for the future.

From the broader socio-economic connotation of development, the stay of SHT had its impact on the life of tribals in Paburia. There have been, though marginal from outside standards, economic gains. Besides, the changes brought about in their customs in curbing wasteful expenditure and harmful habits, have contributed towards better food and health, which in turn would have favourable implications towards productivity and income. Perhaps, the most significant outcome is the new consciousness among the tribals about their social surroundings and a growing confidence in the efficacy of collective organization.

The process of peoples regaining their last confidence is gradual and requires sustained efforts. The tribals who have encountered their adversaries in the neighbourhood would eventually face exploitation at higher levels. The SHT is aware of the

uphill task and is becoming conscious of the imponderables.

Foremost, SHT is concerned with the fluctuating interest of the local cadres related to their selection, orientation and in a way the response they receive from the people. As regards the selection SHT appeared to have suffered from certain lack of clarity about the definition of the oppressed class, from where the cadres have to emerge. Nevertheless, it is being gradually realized that there is no single straight jacket answer to this question and hence the segments and alignment of proximate segments would depend upon the reality of the situation, which would differ from area to area.

Activists create conditions for spontaneous upsurge of talents and skills among the oppressed. The emphasis on persuasive measures is related to the need for peoples participation in decision making which, only can make the changes brought about acceptable to them. Even so, it is important to realize that the level of participation, acceptance of change and the consequent need for action, would increase at a progressive rate after a certain stage. If on one hand the activists have to faster the accelerated process of mobilization forging towards organization, on the other, they have to consciously reduce the element of dependency. The SHT are yet to grapple with these seemingly opposite variables.

Exploitation has to be fought at different levels and from various angles: social, political and economic, which are closely inter-related. The people at Paburia have taken up many socio-cultural issues and also a few grassroots economic problems. While changes in socio-cultural and political values will have favourable economic implications, the SHT feel it may be relevant to take up tangible economic issues in the short-run in order

sustain the process and peoples interest. Whereas SHT are aware that in a participatory system, the decision making and choice of issues should be left to the people, they are unable to fully reconcile the same with their responsibility in sustaining peoples interest in sustaining the process towards this goal.

Fluid state of AVS, perhaps, reflects the culmination of dilemma among many imponderables. The marketing of tendu leaves, explicit purpose for which AVS was thought of, never took concrete shape. As an inter-village forum for all other purposes, inactivity at the AVS level in a way could be related to the grass roots. After the initial upsurge and the sustained effort for sometime, the activity at the village has failed to maintain the tempo - The cadres, issues and SHT's methods would have contributed.

For obvious reasons, the entry point of the activists and their assimilation with the oppressed cannot be preplanned and can be achieved only through utilising realistic situations. Even while their influence on the local cadres and people increases, the initiative and decision making would remain with the latter. In these later stages, when the activities ramified it has been SHT's experience that more responding to the situations may not be able to sustain the momentum. On the other hand, they feel that systematic analysis of the environment and preparedness with alternative plans and strategies becomes inevitable. Needless to state, the skills of research and analyses which the activists have to muster will have to be gradually handed down to cadres and the people.

When People Ask Questions!

Ajit Kondvikar

"Dambhau, ninety labourers working on Bondhan village tank, have to be retrenched from next Monday. Khan Saheb told me this" said the muster clerk of the Bondhan Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS) Project.

Dambhau, an activist of Bhoomi Sena replied, "There is no reason why you should retrench them. There is sufficient work for all of them".

Bukane said, "I am implementing the order given by the Deputy Engineer. You better discuss the order with him". Dambhau said, "We will request him to withdraw the order".

In Bondhan village a tank was being dug under Employment Guarantee Scheme. The project started in 1980. More than hundred and fifty labourers from surrounding villages were employed on the project. It was expected that the work will continue for another six months. Suddenly the Deputy Engineer decided to reduce the number of workers working on the project to sixty.

On the next Monday, the day on which the Government wanted to retrench ninety workers, Bukane was not present and all the hundred and fifty workers joined the work. Though Bukane was

supposed to visit the project everyday, he visited the project on Wednesday. Soon, he realised that inspite of his order, all the workers had joined the work. He got annoyed and told them, "I will be able to pay wages to only sixty labourers. The other labourers will not be paid wages". When the labourers heard that some of them will not be paid they became angry and stopped work. They said, "Either all of us will work or we will stop the work", and they stopped work. The same evening some of them met Dambhau. Dambhau decided to meet the Deputy Engineer the next day. Since I was at the time studying the implementation of Employment Guarantee Sceheme I decided to accompany him.

When we visited the office of the Deputy Engineer we were told that he has gone out and was not likely to return the same day. We, then, decided to meet Khan the implementing officer of Bondhan project. We asked him, "Khan, why have you decided to reduce the number of labourers working on Bondhan Project?" Khan answered, "I have not made the decision, the Deputy Engineer has made the decision. You better discuss it with him". We said, "We came here to meet the Deputy Engineer. We thought in his absence, you might be able to help us". Khan informed us, "According to our records the project has capacity to employ only thirty labourers. We have far exceeded the capacity". "More than one hundred and fifty labourers have been working on the project. They have been getting good wages, since they are paid on piece rate basis there is no need to supervise. Hence,

in this case the argument about capacity becomes meaningless", we argued. Khan said, "It would be better if you talk to the Deputy Engineer. He has the authority to decide".

Since the Deputy Engineer was not in the office, we decided to meet the Executive Engineer. The Executive Engineer was very helpful. We explained him the problem. He referred to the official file on the project. The file contained a copy of the letter sent by the Deputy Engineer to the Tehsildar. In the letter the Deputy Engineer had stated that the work of filling the bund was completed and only dressing work was remaining and hence, he wanted to retrench the workers. As per our knowledge this information was incorrect. We pointed out to the Executive Engineer that filling work was not completed. He promised us that he would look into the matter and also ordered that workers on the project should not be retrenched. We realised that either the Deputy Engineer or the implementing officer was playing mischief. On return, we informed the labourers working on the project about the discussion with the Executive Engineer and the decision taken by him.

The next day Khan visited the project and told the labourers that about ninety labourers have to be retrenched. This annoyed the labourers and the angry labourers gheraoed him. They also sent a message to Bhoomi Sena office. We, Mangesh (activist of Bhoomi Sena), Deoram (village level activist of Bhoomi Sena) and myself went to the work site. It was about

forty five minutes walk from Bhoomi Sena office. All the while I was thinking how I should tackle the problem. Among the three of us, I was the only one who was present at time of the discussion with the Executive Engineer. In my mind I was calculating mandays required for completing the work and how to prove that there was sufficient work for all the labourers.

When we reached the work site, we found that the labourers were in high spirits. They were cracking jokes about the officer - Khan. The officer had gone to relieve himself and the workers had not allowed him to do so for quite a long time. When the officer came back Deoram said, "Saheb, you have been harassing our people. We cannot tolerate it". With this statement Deoram changed the dimensions of the problem.

Consciously or unconsciously Deoram had raised the real issue. I then realised that the issue was not retrenching ninety workers or not retrenching them or whether the filling work was completed or not. The main issue was fight between the officials who were harassing the labourers and the labourers who were being harassed; between the oppressors and the oppressed. Khan kept quiet.

Realising that we had won the first round I attacked. I said, "Khan, yesterday the Executive Engineer told you to employ all the labourers. In spite of his order you tried to

retrench the workers". Khan brought out a notice sent by the Deputy Engineer. The notice stated that the workers have to be retrenched from Bondhan site. I said, "You have been giving wrong information to Deputy Engineer and Executive Engineer. You know very well that filling work is not yet completed and it will take another 5-6 months to complete the work". Khan said, "I cannot contradict Deputy Engineer". Mangesh asked him, "Do you mean you prefer harassing people to furnishing correct information?" One of the labourers said, "This officer, he tells me that he would sack me because I touched him. Does he think it is his father's private project?" Khan said, "But you did not allow me to go out for relieving". One of ^{the} women workers said, "What do you do when we want to relieve ourselves. You tell us not to waste time. This serves you right. Now you will know what are our problems". Another worker said, "This officer always troubled us. He never paid our wages on time".

The labourers felt that they should meet the Executive Engineer and clarify the matter. They were also insisting that they should take Khan along with them. Khan, to save his face, was almost begging that we should let him go. We all discussed the matter and decided that about twenty workers should meet the Executive Engineer. We were still wondering whether to take Khan along or not. The labourers were standing around Khan suddenly started laughing. One of the women workers had borrowed a shirt of a male worker. Wearing it, she was imitating Khan.

The woman in man's dress told the other workers, "From tomorrow onwards you do not come for work". The other workers said, "Then what shall we eat?"

She said, "It is none of my business. I am Saheb. I do not care for you". One of the workers touched her.

She said, "Don't you know I am Saheb? You are not supposed to touch me. My father has started this project. I can sack you all".

Everybody started laughing except Khan, who was, by the time, totally demoralised. He was almost on the verge of crying. He said, "I have to visit another work site. I will visit the place and then come to the office of Executive Engineer". The labourers decided to have mercy and let him go.

Accompanied by twenty labourers we then went to the Executive Engineer's office. The Executive Engineer promised us that he would visit the work-site next day and will make the decision about retrenchment. The next day, the Executive Engineer along with the Deputy Engineer visited the work-site. He took the measurements of the bund and calculated manday's required for completing the work. His inspection also revealed that parge part of the filling work was yet to be completed. His calculations showed that there was sufficient work for the labourers for another 6-7 months.

The Deputy Engineer, to save his face, said, "Executive Engineer is empowered to make the decision. I could not have

made the decision and hence I had passed order to retrench the workers". The Executive Engineer's decision made the labourers very happy. This was no minor achievement for them. It was step towards freedom. Freedom from subjugation. Breaking away from a past when orders of government officials could not be questioned and which were almost equivalent to law.

MAINA PARIJAT CHHARA OF RAJAPARA

Niloy Bhattacharya

Introduction

If experience is any guide, few of the government measures and institutions live upto their publicized objectives. Many a times, objectives themselves are not clear and at other times these measures are a mere sop to the people, in order not to question the government's failures.

In Assam, for instance, it was the government's intention that all the villages in the state should have Yuvak Sangha, Mahila Samiti and Maina Parijat Chhara (MPC), an organization for the children. The fact, however, is that the idea has not percolated beyond the block headquarters level. At least with regard to MPC, one ^{can} broadly generalize that not many villages have this children's organization.

In this paper, we wish to present to you how the Spearhead Team (SHT) started the MPC in Rajapara village of Kamrup district. It is in place to explain, before we commence, the meaning of the terms in MPC. Maina is a very sweet voiced bird and can speak like human beings when trained. 'Parijat' is a flower which grows in the heaven and 'Chhara' means group.

SHT in Rajapara

The SHT has been working in Rajapara situated 60 Kms from Gauhati city in Kamrup district since 1978. The village is inhabited by tribal people, predominantly Rabhas. There are 113 families with a population of about 750. The main occupation of the people of the village is cultivation and wage labour.

In the village there is a Government dispensary and two schools: a primary and a middle school. Due to lack of education, villagers are very much superstitious and believe in old rituals. There were very few pupils, only 29 in both the schools, when the SHT started working. After a few months of their work, the ~~team~~ could convince the people the value of education. They could start one adult literacy centre and also influence the adults in sending their children to the school regularly. But the children were reluctant to go to school. They had not experienced such an atmosphere in the village so far. It is at this juncture, the team members decided to work with the children to make them disciplined and aware of their surroundings. The SHT then planned to ~~start~~ the institution of MPC for the purpose.

The Approach

The team members started mixing with the children during their off-time through various games. The children generally varied between the age of 5 to 12 years. As the SHT found acceptance, the number of children gradually increased. In their discussions with children, SHT talked about the society, culture and also about the persons who have devoted their lives for the upliftment of the village community. Often the team members communicated through stories.

The team found that the interest of children considerably roused and that they were eager to learn more. In order to accelerate the process, they thought of the formal organization --- Maina Parijat Chhara. It was decided that this children's organisation would meet once in a week. To give the necessary seriousness to these meetings, children were asked to enact the role of various functionaries such as, President, General Secretary, Cultural Secretary, Debating Secretary, Games Secretary, etc. In view of providing the opportunity to all the children, these positions were not made permanent. For every meeting different children are selected to enact the roles. The selection takes place in the previous meeting, so as to provide the children full week to prepare themselves.

The meetings are generally held on Sundays after lunch and last till evening. President, who presides over the meeting, has the overall responsibility. General Secretary opens the meeting with an address to the President and the participants. He briefs the agenda of the day. This is followed by a group song by the children. After that starts the formal programme which would include cultural items, debates and games.

Cultural Secretary's responsibility is to conduct the cultural activities. In the cultural programme, they usually sing various types of songs. In every meeting there is also a session for cultivating extempore speaking ability among the children. They write names of some topics on pieces of papers, which are neatly folded and kept on the table. The participants then pick their chit. Thereafter everyone is expected to speak for 3 minutes on the topic which has come to his or her lot. Needless to state, the exercise helps the children to reflect on various topics and organise their thoughts. In the debating session one subject is chosen before hand and the participants are divided into two groups, for and against, according to their liking. The children play games after the President has given his comments and summed up the day's proceedings.

Within a month, say after four weekly meetings, SHT observed considerable change in the thoughts, attitude and life style of children. They are now quite concerned about their families, the neighbours, village and the surrounding area. They now are able to perceive, in their own way, problems of their villages. Initially, the area was full of resources on which they could live on. They now realise that these resources are slowly depleting. Hence they start thinking of efforts for regenerating the lost resources.

The children were aware of the local bureaucrats taking advantage of the village girls, some of whom were their own family members.

Even they used to obtain gifts in the process. As a result of the MPC, the children now mustered courage to decline the gifts and also to protest. Therefore, when the forest officer gave some clothes to the female children they dared to tear them into pieces. As an explanation to this act, they state that they would rather starve than take gifts from corrupt persons.

ACTIVITIES:

People of Rajapara were hardly cultivating any Rabi crops or vegetables. They thought the cultivation of Rabi crop and vegetables a sort of hardship because they were used to eating roots, plants and fish, which are plentifully available in that area. With a change in their attitude, the members of the MPC decided to cultivate vegetables in a plot inside the school premises. They started collecting bamboos, fencing, and preparing the plot for cultivation. Seeing their earnestness, the Village Level Extension Worker (Agriculture) helped them by supplying seeds and fertilizers free of cost. Unfortunately, the yield was not upto their expectation because of the drought in that year. But the experience had an effect on the villagers. The following year, MPC cultivated mustard in 1/2 acres area and had a very good harvest. By selling a portion of the produce, they bought some musical instruments. Rest of the money has been kept in savings account in Purbanchal Bank. The Extension Officer, Woman and Child Welfare, Rampur Block, visited the MPC, Rajapara, and wrote a detailed report of the activities of the MPC, which was appreciated at the higher level. The latter, thereafter, sanctioned an amount of Rs.200/- as grant for musical instruments.

The members of the MPC also attend all the discussion and meeting held in the village, where they speak about their activities and experiences. They influence their parents not to sell liquor to the outsiders. By the end of 1981, the MPC has become popular and has drawn attention of school teachers and the people of the village.

The members of the MPC had taken a resolution to move door to door and explain the importance of the education to children (who are not the members of MPC), as well as the parents. As a result of this, the enrolment has increased considerably. It has come to a stage where the teacher is expressing his inability to get any more admitted because of space. It is also resolved that in no situation children should go out looking after the cattles during school hours.

Spread of the Idea:

The main objective of the MPC is to train children to shoulder the responsibilities. As the proverb goes 'Child of today is the father of to-morrow'. The experience of SHT in working with the children has been happy and rewarding. It is easier to educate the children at their young age, when they are free from the worldly fears, which become a barrier in the case of orienting youth and adults.

Whereas previously the attendance in the school was very low, now it has increased considerably. The children of MPC have started motivating the other children who still abstain from school. Once the members of the MPC also went to a meeting of Mahila Samiti of a nearby village and requested its member to send their children to school.

Thus the act of Rajapara MPC has made an impact on nearby villages. The children of other villages have also started going to school regularly. They have understood that only through education they will be able to improve their socio-economic condition. The members of MPC use every opportunity to talk about their organisation to other pupils who come to school from nearby villages. With this, children of other villages get inspiration for similar endeavour. The SHT members and the members of MPC are now thinking of starting children organisations in other villages.

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