

Janashakti

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THE 'WITCH DOCTORS' OF WAYANAD

Since January 1992 the Fedina office at Sulthan Bathery looks more like a hospital than an office. Asthma patients from different parts of the country have been coming to our office for treatment. Treatment, not from super-specialized foreign-retained doctors but from illiterate tribal doctors for succour from the dreaded and debilitating asthma. People from different walks of life approach these tribal doctors to get relief from asthma. Even formally trained 'MBBS' medical doctors do not hesitate to avail of their treatment. Patients from Bangalore, Madras, Salem, Coimbatore, Malappuram, Palghat, Kottayam and other far off places visit

Fedina office at Bathery to obtain medicine from these doctors.

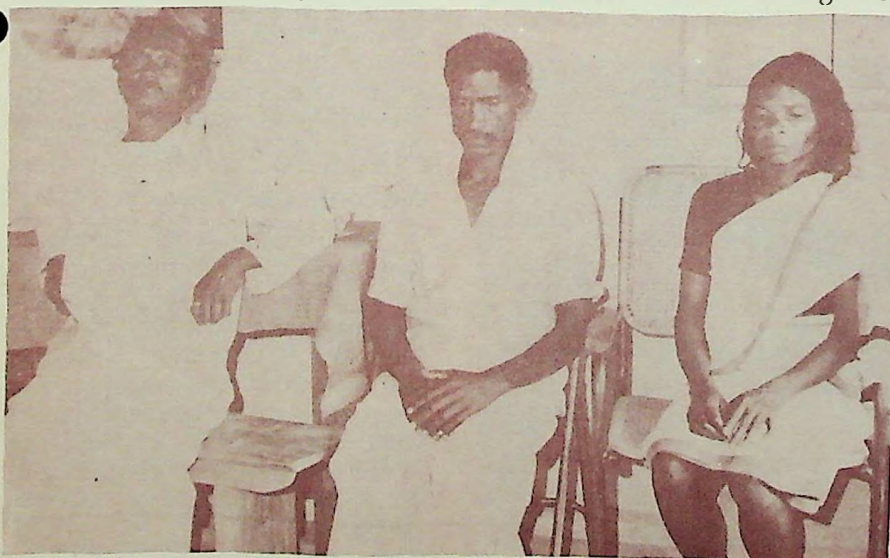
Nearly eighty percent of the patients who have taken treatment from these tribal doctors claim that their ailment has been reduced considerably. The tribal doctors on the other hand are confident that within six months they can cure this sickness completely using only herbal medicine.

Unexpected beginning

Though tribal medicine and traditional practices are priority areas of our research and study, it was by chance that Fedina took interest in the treatment of asthma. During this

study, we had the opportunity to meet traditional tribal doctors of Wayanad and to find out their medical practices. The depth of knowledge these doctors have about medicine is amazing. Many illnesses which the modern medical science has labelled as incurable are easily cured by tribal medicines. Proof is documented and is available. If facilities and opportunities are given to these simple illiterate tribal doctors, modern medical science may well be humbled by the 'witch doctors' and their 'mumbo-jumbo.'

The knowledge which they have inherited from their forefathers is kept sacred and is considered a divine gift. The tribal medicines and medical practices are not easily shared with anyone else. It is their belief that sharing this knowledge with others will cause its effectiveness to diminish. Naturally their ancestors will be angry with them!



Three of the Adivasi 'doctors' - Chakkiliyan, Vanchala and Belichy

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Through our constant interaction and involvement with the tribals of Wayanad, we were able to establish rapport and credibility with them. This has enabled Fedina to collect information regarding nearly fifty different types of sicknesses and their treatment.

Experience of Agnes

As mentioned earlier, the beginning of this asthma treatment was unexpected.

This is how it all began:

The couple Kavilan and Belichy are neighbours of Luckose Jacob who is our Programme Co-ordinator at Wayanad. For various reasons they used to come to the house of Luckose. Agnes, the wife of Luckose and a member of our team at Wayanad, has been suffering from asthma for the past seven years. She had not left any stone unturned to get relief from asthma during these years.

During a visit Belichy happened to see Agnes who was having a serious attack of asthma. Belichy was concerned and offered to cure Agnes from asthma. Agnes was sceptical of Belichy and her treatment as she had already spent much money going to various specialists in this field and getting their treatment. Since Belichy's treatment is purely herbal medicine Agnes agreed to try this out.

Next morning Belichy came with the medicine. The first course for three

days was given. After the third day Agnes felt relief, a fraction of which she never had from taking the expensive medicines from other specialists. Agnes continued to take medicine for one month and during the past one year she never had any attack of asthma. A few neighbours who came to know about the experience of Agnes approached Belichy for treatment. They too felt the effectiveness of the herbal medicine which Belichy prepared for them. These incidents have been a turning point for us as well.

'Asthma' at core team

The success of Belichy's treatment has been discussed among the core team members. The team which is already involved in the study and research of tribal medicine and traditional practices felt that the experience of Agnes and others cannot be ignored. Raju, a core team member working at Vazhavatta area, mentioned that Chakkiliyan and Vanchala from the same area are also known for their treatment of asthma.

It was in this context that a new idea emerged: why can't we bring these doctors together and organise a camp for non-tribals who are suffering from asthma? Meanwhile the effectiveness of tribal medicine for asthma was proved convincingly in a few cases. Another motivating factor was that among the adivasis, especially

among Paniyas, asthma is absent.

The team members had many discussions with both the tribal doctors and others regarding the asthma camp. It took a long time before we decided to organise the camp. It was only after much persuasion that the tribal doctors agreed to conduct the camp for the public. They have the inner fear that their hereditary healing system may become defunct if it is extended to the public.

The first camp

The Junior Chamber of Sulthan Bathery offered to collaborate with Fedina to organise the camp. Thus the first asthma camp was conducted at the Fedina office in Sulthan Bathery on January 22d, 1992. Only the first 100 patients who had registered their names for the camp were given medicines by the tribal doctors Belichy, Kavilan, Chakkiliyan and Vanchala. Kavilan and Belichy are husband and wife. All belong to the main tribal group of Wayanad – the Paniyas. Medical doctors Shenoy, Jithendranath, Mohan and Nayak (all members of Sulthan Bathery Jaycees) conducted various tests to find out if the patients who came for treatment really suffer from asthma. Only after confirming this would the tribal doctors give their herbal medicine.

Similar camps were conducted on February 22d and March 24th. Next camp is planned for April 28th. Meanwhile, the tribal doctors come to Fedina office every Tuesday to observe the condition of those who are under their treatment and to provide further medicine if required.

No foolproof claims yet

The first group of 100 patients who have taken tribal treatment are now under observation. The fluctuations and changes are noted and recorded. More than 80 of them have vouched that the medicine had very positive effect on them. The observation period will be for six months. It is important to find out how the patients react to the climatic changes during this period.

As far as the treatment of asthma is concerned, a new chapter has begun.



Velichy examining a patient

Yet Fedina does not claim that this is foolproof and without any limitations. This is still in the experimental stage. If we make any claim, it will be only after the observation period and after verifying each case.

Asthma patients who have undergone all kinds of treatment, including the famous 'fish treatment', have confessed that the tribal medicine has given them much better relief. Such remarks make us hopeful and optimistic.

Some limitations

This asthma treatment is still in the experimental stage. Therefore we have avoided making any active campaign in this regard. We need to prove the authenticity and effectiveness of the tribal medicine during the observation period of six months. It is only then that we can actively launch the programme. Though no attempt was made to advertise or campaign, the number of asthma patients who turn up to meet these tribal doctors is on the increase. However, due to the non-availability of some herbs it becomes an unpleasant task both for Fedina and for the tribal doctors to return the patients who have taken much trouble of traveling long distances empty handed.

In the past the herbs used for making the medicine were easily available on the banks of the ponds and streams in the forest. Consequent to the unscientific deforestation these herbs have become a scarce commodity today. The ponds and streams once abundant in the forest are seen no more. Most of the forests have been converted into agricultural land. Another reason for the scarcity of these herbs is the ecological degradation and inadequate rainfall. The inhuman forest laws do not permit the tribal doctors to collect the life-giving herbs available in the existing forests.

A turning point

From the so-called uncivilized and illiterate tribal society, the modern and civilised society has found rays of hope for a new life in the whole process. Many patients must have come to these tribal doctors with some apprehensions. What was uppermost

EDITORIAL

IMF AND WB AT THE VILLAGE SHANDY!

The time span of 1991-1992 has very specific implication to rural communities. This is the period manifesting the macro economic influences, in their direct proportion – on rural communities. Global and international economic influences, so far, were something - 'out there'. But not any more. It has come to the life of every individual in the villages. A case study done in a village 20 kms away from Bangalore brings out these manifestations in very specific forms. The first, is the large scale promotion of sericulture. The public sector credit institutions have a target of converting 20-25 percent of agricultural crops into sericulture, over the next three years. Any local resident is able to see the transitional replacement of ragi-eucalyptus-sericulture, in a quantum target approach. The second major manifestation is in the shortage of granite for house construction. The gulf reconstruction combined with the policies for liberalization has made granite quarrying predominantly accessible to mechanized hi-tech granite industries. The manifestation has other forms such as commodity control over natural resources. From the situation of water being sold in pots by women as a source of income generation, the situation over the past two years is one in which tanker operators have moved in to sell water.

All forms of infrastructural development for promotion of market economy could be observed here. An STD/ISD booth has been installed four months back. The main road leading to the town has been expanded in a big way. Issuing of pattas are being made easier. Even in the cities, issue of pattas to slums has been offered by the WB as a cost effective solution for slum clearance!

These changing situations have very specific message to the Non Governmental Development sector. The need of the hour is to revalidate a good amount of logical assumptions and ideological guidelines, on which we have been working so far. There is the need to update our understanding of communities in a macro mainstream context and decide what interventions could contribute towards a people-oriented approach for social justice and fundamental humanistic rights --coming under the constitutional provisions of the nation.

in the minds of atleast some of the patients was this: "am I going to be treated by these dark and shabby looking adivasis?" We need to look at the other side of the coin as well. Though they are tribal doctors, they feel uneasy because they are "uneducated tribals" who are called to treat the so-called "elite." A wound will always

show a scar. It will not be easy either for the tribals or for the non-tribals to forget the different roles each has been playing so far -- the exploited and the exploiter, the oppressed and the oppressor.

To eliminate their inhibitions and to build up their self- confidence,

Fedina had organised many training sessions for these doctors. Those who used to look down on the tribals have now begun to acknowledge their worth. Will the wisdom and knowledge of the illiterate open a new chapter for the modern society? Indications are that we can be optimistic.

(Translated by Kokatt)

SOUTH AFRICA IN TRANSITION

(An Interview with Philip Van Ryneveld)

Philip Van Ryneveld is a member of the African National Congress (ANC) who sees his role as that of offering 'policy options' for the ANC leadership in planning the future local governments. He was in India to learn of our experiences with decentralization. Interestingly, in South Africa, the ANC -- like B R Ambedkar -- is for centralization and Pretoria against it. He works at the University of Western Cape.

He made a presentation of the South African Polity tracing its roots from the often innocent laws to the draconian present state violence, always setting it off against contemporary social and economic imperatives.

After the presentation the Janashakthi team met him for this interview.

How does ANC's commitment and demand for democracy square with the street reality with regard to Inkatha movement and minority Indians?

I think that ANC at the moment has a very strong democratic tradition developing and people who are of South African origin will certainly be included in that vision of democracy. The way in which the ANC has been dealing with the threat from Inkatha and the violence coming from the State has been to expose the process and open it up to public as much as possible. Of course all instances of violence have to be brought to the attention of the independent judicial process and that always is for the commitment to democracy.

Is the ANC anything more than a tribal party?

It is not a tribal party. It is the only truly national movement in the country at the moment and includes people from many different ethnic groups, whites, asians, mixed trends, etc. Its ideology is to find the methodology of the urban industrial society more than anything else.

JS: You have no power - but you have majority. When you come to power how will you safeguard the rights of the minority?

I think they would be safeguarded on individual basis rather than on a group basis. Individual rights of the people would be protected and thereby peoples right to be a part of the associations that they are choosing. I also think that the conditions in South Africa do not really exist for a repressive state to emerge because a repressive state cannot exist when there is multiplicity of power centers and there are going to be multiplicity of power centers in South Africa.

Do you recognize the struggles of minority groups in various countries, especially in the context of India's harijans?

I am speaking here as a member of ANC and not as a representative of ANC. I would say that ANC likes to identify itself as a democratic movement and movements resisting oppression of all kinds, races, classes, religious oppression and would identify themselves in response to that. The extent to which we actually do that remains to be seen. Unfortunately South Africans are quite narrow in this respect and I don't

believe they are sufficiently conscious about struggles elsewhere and this is partly the result of isolation which has been due to the sanctions which though an important part of our struggle has had problematic side effects.

How much has international solidarity helped in your struggle -- materially and morally?

Immensely. The campaigns that took place show that local struggles exist. The pressure from campaigns outside the country and local struggles inside the country gave more force and I don't believe that the government would have embarked on constitutional talks as early as this had it not been for the international solidarity movements and the international campaign. Of course India was the first country to impose sanctions and for that reason India's contribution is very important.

Can you give some concrete suggestions as to how people can help on-going struggles by minorities?

I think what is really needed at this point is a much greater flow of people, information and ideas between India and South Africa. Understanding democratic people will help to develop new strategies and these new strategies have to be relevant to an increasingly international world, and an international world economy. I don't have very clear ideas of how people can support each other but I do think that India and South Africa face a lot of similar problems, problems of appropriate technology, problems of ways of doing things, and could benefit a lot by sharing.

India has a lot of technical expertise in dealing with these kind of problems. India and South Africa could draw on these very profitably.

What role can voluntary organisations play in this regard?

I think you can share and exchange ideas. There is a strong voluntary movement in South Africa. Voluntary movement in South Africa will change its form with the emergence of the new democratic constitution. I believe that this development issue will become independent and voluntary organisations will play a role in that.

Earlier the leadership was traditional. Now power has shifted more to a democratic one and the general secretary has a trade union background. Can you go deeper into the shifting in leadership and your outlook and the historical reasons for it.

I think that Nelson Mandela leadership and the leadership of the ANC people who were forced into exile developed really in 40s and 50s and South Africa was much less industrialized and urbanized at that stage. The leadership that emerged in the 80s has done so in the context of much more industrial and urbanized society and therefore follows that kind of logic.

JS: How does it affect your tactics, world view, strategy...

I think it tends to make traditional forms of leadership and social organization less important in ANC than was the case before. There is an important group within ANC, of whom Mandela is part, who are stressing the need to find ways of incorporating some of these traditional positions into the new constitution even if only at a symbolic level. The problem is that the apartheid regime used these traditional structures, more than anything else, to enforce apartheid.

LONG WAIT

She stopped her car at the red traffic light. The light turned green. Absorbed in her own thoughts, she did not notice the change, until the gentleman in the following car came out and politely asked her, "Madam, are you waiting for your favourite colour?"

FEDINA NEWS CORNER

BANGALORE

Our women staff at Bangalore

The month of February was unique for the women staff of Fedina. For the first time the women staff from all our project areas met at Bangalore office for two days (February 3rd and 4th). There was no pre-planned agenda for this meeting. This being the first meeting, discussions focused mainly on topics such as situation of women in Fedina, their relationship with their colleagues and how the women's programmes in general could be improved. This meeting was a pleasant change from their hectic field work. It is planned to have similar meetings in the future.

Financial Legislation for NGOs

A workshop on Financial Legislation for NGO's was conducted on 20th and 21st March at SCM House, Bangalore. Nearly sixty representatives from various voluntary organisations participated. Mr.K.N. Gupta, partner, Thakur Vaidyanath Ayer and Co., New Delhi and Major Michael, Executive Director of CASA, New Delhi, chaired the sessions. Sri.S.Senthamarai Kannan, Deputy Commissioner of Income-Tax, Bangalore and Sri.P.Govindarajulu, Chartered Account, Bangalore spoke about the income tax laws and FCRA regulations. Workshop was sponsored by Forum of Financial Management and Legal Regulation in India and hosted by ICRA/FEDINA.

High Financial Input - A Debate

There has been a rethinking among both the donor agencies and NGO's regarding the impact of high financial

input in the economic programmes. Will high financial input lead to self-reliance or dependency? To discuss this topic key persons from Fedina, ICRA and Pipal Tree met together on March 3rd and 4th at Bangalore. A thorough discussion took place on the pros and cons of the issue. Even though no concrete solution could be arrived at, everyone felt that strategies should be given serious consideration when planning and implementing long term economic programmes.

SARJAPURA

Persuasion Pays

35 year old Akkayamma from Billapura had the habit of chewing tobacco from her childhood and had now become an addict. This habit had its ill-effects on her health. She used to complain of constant backache and stomach ache. One of our field staff, Precilla, who used to visit Billapura regularly knew about her tobacco chewing habit. She suspected that the root cause of her problems was tobacco. Her constant counselling and advice regarding the ill-effects of tobacco helped Akkayamma to gradually reduce the intake of tobacco. Finally she was able to give up this habit completely. Mahadevamma from Kamanahalli too had the same experience. But constant advice and persuasion on our part and a strong will on their part did the job.

People Succeed Where Government Failed

Non-availability of drinking water was a crucial issue for the people of Sompura village. With the support and guidance of our staff the people of this village organized themselves to solve this problem. Constant visits to the government offices made the authorities concerned to look into the matter. Specialists were brought to identify the place to dig the borewell. Even after attempting at seven places these experts could not locate water and the government finally gave up.

This did not stop the people from

persuading the government again. However the people insisted that they would identify a place to dig the borewell. The government threatened the people that if they failed to find water the expenses will have to be met by the people themselves. This of course disappointed the people. Yet they did not give up their contact with the government. They convinced the government that there was water available in the neighborhood and a borewell nearby would give them water. Finally the government agreed for one last attempt and to their amazement water was found there.

Women's Day Celebrations

The women's day celebration this year was conducted at 2 villages - Kugoor and Sarjapura. Previously this event used to take place only at Sarjapura. The purpose of having at two places was to make it easier for women to participate without having to travel long distances. An important aspect of the celebration this year was the active participation of the hobli level women's committee which was formed recently. Members of this committee are those who have participated in our trainings. Many of them shared their experience of their involvement with Fedina and how this has helped in their overall development. A street play was enacted by these women which was immensely appreciated by everyone.

H.D.KOTE

Annual General Body Meeting

The AGM of Budakattu Krishikara Sangha took place on April 8th and 9th at Machoor hadi. Nearly two thousand tribals from all the hadis of H.D. Kote arrived on 8th evening to celebrate this annual event. Various cultural programmes (traditional songs, dance, street theatre etc.) kept the crowd entertained the whole night. The formal meeting began on 9th morning. Evaluation of the ac-

tivities of last year and chalking out future programmes were the highlights of this meeting.

Cultural troupe

Budakattu Rangavedike is a cultural troupe of youth which is concerned with the preservation of tribal culture. Since its inception they had conducted various cultural programmes at different places. So far only the youth from N.Begur were involved. But recently the youth from Annur area too have taken a lot of interest and have formed a troupe of their own. They too had actively participated in the one month jatha that was conducted in December. This troupe could create plays on the spot based on any issue they come across.

Women's Committee Meet

The women's working committee met for the first time in February at H.D. Kote where twenty five women participated. They divided into small groups and discussed about their achievements and failures. It was felt that due to the lack of active participation by women nothing concrete could be achieved so far. The importance of setting goals and adhering to the rules and regulations of the sangha was emphasized at this meeting. They have

decided to conduct similar meetings once in every two months.

WAYANAD

Adivasi Day

The Adivasi Aikya Samithy celebrated its 2nd birthday on April 8th. To mark this occasion they organized a one week programme at area level which concluded at Sultan Bathery on April 8th with a convention and a massive jatha through the town. Nearly thousand Adivasis from Wayanad braved the hot sun and expressed their solidarity and oneness. During the public meeting at Bathery town the Aikya Samithy members spoke about the need for a new tribal society free from exploitation and oppression. Even the political opponents could only marvel at the way these so-called illiterate tribals organized themselves on that day. They have decided to celebrate every April 8th as Adivasi Day.

North Indian Tour

The Adivasi Aikya Samithy president, Kumar Vazhavatta, along with other tribal representatives from Kerala visited various places in North India, especially Bihar. The purpose of



H.D. Kote: The General Body in session



Wayanad: The Adivasis taking out a procession on Adivasi Day

this tour was to have first hand information about their tribal counterparts in these areas and to find out about the activities that take place there.

SCIAF representative visits Wayanad

Mr. Desmond Fernandez of SCIAF visited Wayanad in the month of February. It was for the first time that a representative from SCIAF visited the area. Mr. Desmond was accompanied by Mahesh Lobo. He spent three days with the team and participated in the tribal model house inauguration at Vazhavatta. He also interacted with AAS representatives from all areas.

Tribal Insurance

During a function organized at the office premises 71 AAS members were insured under a special group insurance scheme of the New India Assurance Company. This scheme provides assistance when the insured incur losses due to death, accident or other natural calamities. The Sulthan Bathery Jaycees also collaborated with this programme.

NILGIRIS

"Udayam" - Adivasi Vanitha Samajam

Involving the women from all the units of Nilgiris a new Vanitha

Samajam has been formed and registered under the name "Udayam". Kum. Parvati has been selected president for this Samajam. All the development programmes for women are undertaken by this Samajam. Under their leadership some units have already started cash kuris for income generation.

Model House at Valad

Similar to the tribal model houses constructed at Cheeral and Vazhavatta in Wayanad, one such house is under construction at Valad, Nilgiris. Mammatty of Valad will be the beneficiary of this house.

Mothers' Day

International mothers day was celebrated with various functions. The programmes were organized in collaboration with the three balawadis that are functioning in Nilgiris. Conscientization seminar for mothers, cultural competitions for mothers and children were the main highlights of the day. A film on health education was screened as part of the programme.

OXFAM in Nilgiris

OXFAM representative Smt. Bella Rosario visited Nilgiris along with Mahesh Lobo and Mathew Kokkat. After visiting the project areas she interacted with the team members at the area office.

KITTUR

New Federation Formed

All the nine villages which constitute the Kulavalli cluster do not have basic facilities like street lights, drinking water, roads, hospitals, schools, etc. Unfortunately each village functioned independently and had no interaction with the other. Fedina felt that formation of a federation of these nine villages could help to solve many of their common problems. Various meetings to this effect were organized and people from all the villages were invited. Though initially the participation was rather poor, gradually the number of people who came for these meetings increased. These meetings helped to create an understanding among the people which in turn led to the formation of a 'Federation of the Kulavalli cluster'.

Jatha for Development

To draw the attention of the government about the overall development of the villages a jatha was organized on February 19th. A disciplinary committee was formed to ensure a peaceful jatha. More than 300 people assembled at Katrigudde road and proceeded towards Bailahongla via Kittur. The officials of Electricity Board, Road Transport, AEO, Tahshildar, BDO, and Assistant Commissioner met the people and accepted their memorandum. The active participation and outspokenness of the shy and hesitant women of this area won the admiration of all present.

Do Your Duty

Though the government rule states that the village accountants should go to the farmers and collect the revenue, in practice it is quite the opposite. Often the villagers had to go to these accountants and settle the accounts. However, the farmers of the Kulavalli cluster would not budge in to this and demanded that these village accountants should visit the villages and col-

lect it themselves. Surprisingly the village accountants visited each and every village and collected the revenue.

CHENGAM

School with a Difference

The people of Melthattapattu village had made many appeals to the government authorities to establish a primary school in their village. But all their attempts were in vain because the forest officials strongly opposed the establishment of the school. In spite of all the oppositions, the people have taken the bold step of constructing the school all by themselves. The work is in progress and the parents and children are looking forward to the opening of the school in the near future. Land and other infrastructural materials for the school are provided by the people.

Tribal Youth Beaten Up

The forest officer at Chengam always had some spite against one of our field staff (Thaniga). Recently Thaniga was arrested for no reason at all and he was beaten-up by six people from the forest department. He was also kept in jail for a day. Following this incident written complaints were sent to the higher authorities such as the Ranger, D.F.O, and District Collector. The Sub-Inspector of Police at Jamnamarthur was also informed about this atrocity done to an innocent tribal youth.

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Health Camp at Chengam



Tribal family at H.D. Kote



Women's day at Sarjapura