

Janashakti

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FEDINA NEWSLETTER

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Role of Voluntary Organisations in the Nineties

Desmond D'Abreo

Development is more than economic growth. It is people! Development is a process beginning and ending with the human person, requiring people's active and conscious participation. It is the grassroots people who must animate the whole process. Agencies and voluntary workers are only facilitators.

Some Issues to be Tackled Urgently

People's Organisation

When making people the primary agents of their development and liberation, it is essential to bear in mind that our main objective is to enable them to organise themselves. The community at the grassroots level must be awakened, trained and organised to become strong and to become masters of their destiny. Unfortunately, for many in the voluntary sector, the word 'organisation' has become a cliché like conscientisation, participatory research etc. Activists say that they are organising the people when all they are doing is forming a small group of dynamic youth, or gathering people regularly to have talks or discussions on various topics relating to village life.

Genuine people's organisation implies a number of factors:

» The action that is planned by the organised group must be done in



an ordered way, the work divided among different individuals who are responsible for its execution.

- » The leadership should be collective. One-person leadership can be abused, sold, bought or destroyed.
- » There ought to be regular meetings of ALL to take decisions and to see to its implementation.
- » Records of meetings must be maintained and read to see what

has been implemented, and who is responsible for what.

- » Tasks to be evenly divided among all, be they young or old, men or women. This used to be the case in organisation of traditional villages and families.
- » The community must raise at least part of its own resources, through voluntary labour, material or money. Sound accounting is essential, so that all know what is contributed, how it is spent, what remains and what is to be done with it.
- » The most essential element in organisation is a spirit of cooperation and unity. Power comes from unity.

Building up of people's movements

Development will be effective only if it leads to the formation of a people's movement. For such a movement,

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resources should be tapped locally and from the people themselves as far as possible. It has been proved that external resources deter any growth of authentic people's movements.

Community development and liberation, as well as social transformation must be the action of the people at the grassroots. It is they who must be the planning subjects, the primary agents and the authentic results of the whole liberation process. We who come from another background, are really outsiders, however much we might feel that we belong to them, and we must have the humility to accept that and give the power to them to be the primary agents of their liberation. All that the social activist can do is to enable them to have a critical awareness of their situation and of their own potentialities and limitations. We must be catalysts in the process of their organisation and in mobilising themselves. In this process we have to realise that our possibilities are limited. We are working with the unorganised and are hopeful of organising them. But this organisation will not be big or strong enough to make any sufficient impact on the system.

We, the representatives of development voluntary organisations, too often see ourselves as if we were some kind of saviours who have descended on earth and will be able to change it on our terms. We have not put ourselves in a realistic context.

When we try to organise the unorganised, we find that since we do not have a national united structure, our efforts are hamstrung. The people need an association that is already organised in order to get strength on a wider level. The only one they will find will be a political party which has a force that can have a national impact. We may be dismayed that the group we have been working with will go on to collaborate with a political party.

It is imperative that we have a critical perspective on this. We must enable the people we are working with to have a deeper perception which will bring to bear on the political party with which they are collaborating. Our role is an important one, though a preliminary "precursor" one. We have to organise the unorganised, so that they can, of their own free will and decision, join whatever organised institutions that exist and are powerful enough to help them effectively to win in their struggle for their rights.

Networking

To break away from the isolation that prevails among the voluntary agencies, it is important that networks be initiated at two levels: among voluntary agencies and groups, and among the grassroots people's organisations.

Other Issues

» **Issue-orientation** rather than programmes.

» Concentrate on the three weakest sectors of the society, namely, women, dalits and tribals. What are the values we proclaim with regard to these sections of people, especially women, in our own organisations?

» The need to give more attention to the **urban poor**.

» The fight against **communalism** and fundamentalism. How do we go about this? We must discover the right meaning of secularism and make the people aware of it. Secularism as it exists today is guided and controlled by the elite and has become a tool or weapon in the hands of the elite for their vested interest. This is the reason behind all communalism.

» **Ecological situation** must be given emphasis. Concentrate on local flora that the people are used to, for example, leaf plates, apart from the larger issues such as watershed management, water harvesting, forestry, alternative forestry etc.

» **Rediscover relevant and alternative approaches**, deriving from the traditional ones which are lost. For example, ecological farming and tree-cropping methods, soil conservation, water harvesting, etc. that is already part of people's culture. Also, look into alternative health care systems that protects the child from early mortality.

Bring groups together to focus on drought, and search for alternatives with regard to agriculture. These are some of the points that can be taken up by voluntary agencies in their search for developing alternative approaches.

» **Value-formation** is a strong point that ought to be emphasised especially in the fight against consumerism, which has permeated into the voluntary sector itself.



» Training and human resource development.

Finally, it is urgent that the voluntary sector enhances its own public image. There is a need for a better deal in voluntary agencies especially with regard to its integrity. A voluntary agency's credibility is derived from the congruence of its vision, objectives and its activities, the transparency of what it is, what it intends to do, and how the work is accomplished. Above all, there should be transparency in all its financial operations so that these can be open and convincing to the grassroots people, who, as has been said earlier, are the primary agents of the whole development process. The lifestyle of a voluntary agency should be simple and unostentatious. Definitely, its programmes should be cost-effective.

Such transparency and accountability must be directed to the people, as well as to the members of the agency and the resource agency. This calls for openness in its dealings, sharing of information through appropriate forums and continual dialogue. Any gap between promise and performance erodes credibility and such a gap can be bridged by constant reflection on reality as well as effective monitoring and evaluation. Ideology and action must be brought on a converging track.

Our wish, for this new decade that has dawned, is that the voluntary agencies throughout the country avert the crisis that is deepening within the voluntary sector. This can be effected by a clarity of vision, derived from an ongoing structural analysis on the micro and macro levels, and above all, a respect for the grassroots people with a faith in their potential to bring about a lasting and just transformation of society.

Extracted from NGOs in the Nineties

Economy at Crossroads

Can the PVN government cure the ailing Indian economy? There is a general consensus among a wide cross section of the society that India has reached the threshold of an economic disaster. It needs intensive care and transfusion to put it back on its rails. The process has begun. IMF, The World Bank and other international lending institutions are being approached for assistance and aid. They have shown great interest and willingness to reach India with fattened purses. In the course of one single week, the rupee was devalued twice. Liberalisation is on the cards. There is mixed reaction to all these from all over.

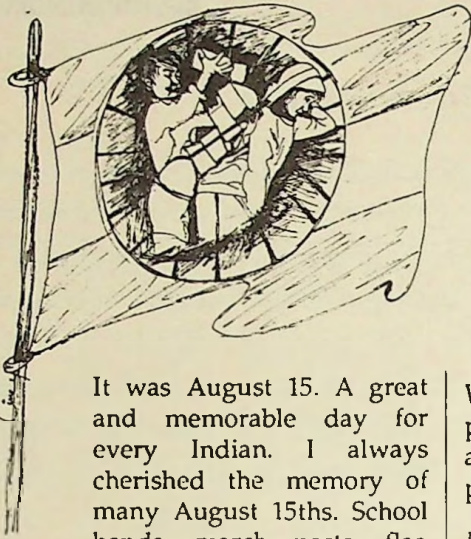
Where does the common person figure in all these wheelings and dealings? They are not overtly concerned about what happens in world capitals. For them, what matters most is what is going to happen at the ration shop, at the provision store, or at the milk booth. Can the government arrest the sky-rocketing prices? Can the Government machinery provide security to life and property? Can it contain violence, corruption and red-tapism? Can a clean and efficient administration be made available?

Will the government, in order to resurrect the dying economy, succumb to pressures from the IMF and World Bank? Though statements are made in the negative, one is hesitant to accept them. Scepticism reigns supreme in all quarters, especially among those who know the plight of other Third World countries where such massive aid was infused.

Strong and firm decisions are needed at an hour like this. The political will to implement them is equally important. Is it possible for the government to come down heavily on the smugglers, tax-evaders, black-marketers and others who subvert the economy of our country? Can the government contain inflation and black money? Can it sustain the hopes and aspirations of the poor, the tribals, the dalits and all those who are cheated, in some way or the other, by the so-called "plans and programmes"?

Meaningful and effective measures to put the economy back in command are called for. A high degree of restriction on non-plan expenditure, sustained effort to strengthen the weakened economy and united effort by every citizen are called for. We hope the forthcoming budget and the current planners will spell out these dreams, giving priority and attention to the basic needs of the poor.

August 15: The Illusion and Betrayal



It was August 15. A great and memorable day for every Indian. I always cherished the memory of many August 15ths. School bands, march pasts, flag hoistings, fiery speeches compensated with chocolates, sports and all the fun. It was a pleasant morning. Usual bhajans, marches and speeches. After a hectic discussion the previous day my friends and I decided to go to one of the nearby hills for a picnic. I always used to be fascinated by the mystic beauty of those undulating hills and the serenity of the plains beneath, filled with green vegetation. When the sun would sink between the peaks, the whole canopy of hills would be silhouetted against a blaze of colour and splendour. The colours, shades and the forms would lead me to dizzy raptures while standing on the hostel terrace.

"Heaven should be something like this!" I was at the bosom of it.

As we were climbing up, we saw a few children coming down with firewood loaded on their heads. We stopped. We just couldn't believe our eyes. Such heavy loads on such tender children. Shapeless, grubby, tattered figures with grave faces and wide gestures. We tried to smile at them. Looking at us there was an unknown terror in their eyes. We explained to them that we were college students and had come to see the place and the people. They were tired. They put the firewood down and sat under a tree with us. Murugan started with a wide grin:

We thought you were "mamool" people, sir. They normally threaten us and extract the little money our parents have.

How much money do you get for this?

Money, sir? No, sir. All these go to the landlord's house, sir. We are already *aalkarans*.

What do you mean by aalkaran?

It means slave, sir.

You! at this age?

Yes, sir. Last year my elder sister had to be married. We needed Rs. 500. The landlord would loan that amount only when my father took me to him as an *aalkaran*.

What do you do?

At four in the morning I am woken up to clean the cowshed and to carry water. When the cowman takes the cows I have to go to the fields to weed and to water the crops. In the evening when I am back, I have to carry water, wash the cows and feed them. I can go to bed only around 10.00 p.m. after helping in the household chores. I have to sleep in the cowshed.

Then how come you carry firewood?

The days when there is no work in the fields we have to climb up the hills, cut firewood and carry it to the landlord's house.

How much do they pay you?

Hundred rupees per year.

No! Per month you mean?

No, sir. I swear, per year.

What about your meals?

Once a day, in the afternoon the landlady will give us a bowl of porridge. If she is pleased, sometimes some leftovers in the evenings.

Don't you feel hungry?

When it's too much, I steal something and eat. If they catch, they will beat me. But it's okay, sir.

What about holidays?

Twice a year, sir. Deepavali and New Year's Day. On New Year's Day they will give us a new set of clothes and get our thumb impressions on a white paper.

Can't you ask for better wages and treatment?

(All of them laugh.)

That's the end of you, sir.

One of the big boys spoke:

Few months back by aunt was spoiled by the landlord, sir. My uncle was angry and complained to the panchayat. The panchayat was called. The whole village was there. The landlord ordered his goondas to tie us up to some trees nearby. The colony people were asked to stand at a distance. My uncle was asked to repeat the complaint. As soon as he finished mumbling a few sentences five men caught hold of him. They laid him flat on the ground and held him. Three people came with choppers. We started screaming and yelling. One started cutting his leg to pieces.

Another, his hands... (The boy started crying...) Then they came to us. We were pleading with folded hands to spare us. They hesitantly left us threatening, "Never open your mouths!"

That evening, the police came and repeated the same warning, "Never open your mouths!"

The next morning we were shocked to find aunt also missing. God only knows (not sure!) where she is - alive or dead!

A few more eyes were wet with tears. The boy's tender face was twisted with all the agonies and cruelties that he had endured. He would never be a child again. He would grow together with the others. But he would be different. The deep wounds of his tender heart would always be an unconquerable threat to the security of the society that is so indifferent. One of my friends went over and sat near the weeping boy and tried to console him:

Don't worry. You look bright and strong. You can become a great man.

The boy straightened up and said cynically,

Yes, a big *aalkaran*!

Did you ever think of studying?

I remember going to the school for two years. We would go and play under a tree and come back. The teacher would come to the village once or twice a year. I loved to watch the village children going to the town school. I used to ask myself, 'Why can't I dress like them, play and laugh like them.' I used to cry ...

By then, we were in no mood to continue our picnic. We decided to go with the children to the village. We wanted to carry the firewood. The children would not agree. We persisted. They reluctantly gave in. For us it was a sort of fun in the beginning. But soon, it started pricking our heads. It became more and more painful and unbearable. When we came near the village, the children took the load from us saying,

If they see you, we will be in trouble. You people stay there. We will go and drop these in their houses and come. We will take you to the colony.

As we were walking towards the colony, we heard some wailing. The children feared that something was wrong. Soon we came to know that it

was the death of the only child in a family. The mother was sobbing, "Munnu! Munnu!" The child, skin and bone, looked frighteningly malnourished. The children standing around did not look very much different either. Tiny distorted bodies with tormented little minds. (In India approximately 1,00,000 children die every month as a result of malnutrition!)

The hut was so small and miserable. The roof was just a few sticks covered with coconut palms and leaves, with gaping holes. There were three or four mud pots, two aluminum plates and a few rags of clothes hanging on a stick. That was all inside the hut. Few men who came found it strange to see us there. They politely asked us to leave the place.

We don't want any trouble, sir. The landlords won't be happy.

They refused to talk to us. They were adamant that we should leave the place immediately. The children who took us there agreed to take us to the nearest bus stop. While talking with them, we found that no medical facility was available to those people. When few social workers brought some free medicine to be distributed to them, the landlords' people threw stones at the jeep and chased them off. The colony people were not allowed to take water from the village well. During the summer months they have to get up early, walk a long distance to collect drinking water and report to the landlords on time for the day's work. We were dumbfounded. Our hearts were wrenched with pity for those people clinging with such desperate hands to a life that offers them nothing but sweat, toil, misery and starvation. At everything we were asking, "Why?", "Why not?" etc.

One of the boys innocently asked, Everything looks so strange to you, sir. You seem to know nothing.

What do you study in those big places, sir?

We tried to dodge and pacify the youngster. I humbly admitted,

I feel so much pity for you. But I should admit, I really don't know how I can help you. How we can bring about a change.

Change? No, sir. It is our fate, I would often imagine and say to myself, 'It would have been far better to be born as the cow of the landlord.'

While in the bus, one of my friends said, It is their money, their tax, their labour and sweat that pays for our education and comforts, for the landlords' luxuries and their children's education. Many slog and sweat without even the basic necessities of life so that a few can enjoy all the comforts and luxuries. It is their own labour and sweat that keep widening the gap between them and the basic necessities of life.

Back in the hostel I couldn't sleep that night. The faces of the children and Munnu were haunting me.

It is my indifference that killed Munnu, that keeps alive the system that tortures so many innocent human beings, a system that creates starved stomachs and packed godowns! Is it not this whole civilization, a broad daylight robbery? A cruel unjust system that denies humanity to the majority of human beings, that thrives fleshy and juicy sucking the blood and the life of the helpless humanity.

Gandhi was a prophet.

Make statues of him and cover them with flowers and garlands. Don't bring him down. Don't let his spirit intrude reality. It will be a disturbance, anti-national, anti-social that can lead to preventive detention, torture and brutality beyond human imagination. Don't disturb. Let the system go on.

Will it really go on?

How long?

(Reflections based on true and factual life experiences. Names, places and sequences altered for reasons well known).

Antony Swamy

The Need for Retrospection

Lukose Jacob

We live in stirring times. An irresistible wave of human freedom is sweeping across many lands. Not only political systems but economic structures are beginning to change in countries where democratic forces had long been suppressed. People are beginning to take charge of their own destiny in these countries. This trend of the people's movement all over the world resembles the changing face of voluntarism.

In the midst of these events, we are rediscovering the essential truth that people must be at the centre of all development. The purpose of development is to offer people more options. One of their options is access to income - not as an end in itself but as a means to acquiring human well-being. But there are other options as well, including long and healthy life, right to knowledge, political freedom, personal security, community participation and guaranteed human rights. People cannot be reduced to mere cogs in the wheel of state machinery that pursues only economic goals.

All such self-initiated and non-profit oriented activities aimed at human development are to improve the conditions of the oppressed and underprivileged sections of the society. One may call such motivated action by a group or organisation as

voluntary action.

Voluntary action is not a new phenomenon in India; it is embedded in our culture and has deep ideological roots. Through the centuries, religious traditions have instilled among the devout a sense of compassion and social obligation towards fellow-beings, the less fortunate and the disadvantaged. The range and scope of voluntary action thus appears to be as wide as it is complex.

Every official plan produced in this country for comprehensive development has ended up on the specimen shelf of still-born intentions, preserved in the formalin of public memory. In sharp contrast, voluntary agencies offer much promise and are generally characterised by timely and speedy action, creativity in approach, options based on experience, flexibility in functioning, innovative methods and meaningful participation of the people.

Voluntary action has undergone changes, depending on the needs, the systemic factors controlling them and based on the socio-economic and political situations. Consumerism, modernisation, mechanisation and industrialisation, etc. are some of the factors which have contributed to this kind of change. The on-going conflict between tradition and modernity on

the one hand, and between vested interests and awareness on the other, has intensified the demand and need for changes. Political control and manipulation of nature, ecology and environment adds to this dimension. In this process, some have adopted a preferential option for the poor, while some others have made voluntary action into an area of employment.

Even among voluntary agencies, the approach has shifted from offering relief and rehabilitation to being middlemen of awareness building.

Human development is incomplete without human freedom. Any index of human development should therefore give adequate weight to a society's human freedom in pursuit of material and social goals. Therefore, as partners, innovators, advocates, and critics voluntary agencies (voluntarism) should bring about a better nexus between needs and resources and generate people's participation in programmes directed towards their own growth.

The role of voluntary agencies as change-agents will gain importance in the years to come for the simple reason that there are many people whose commitment to society is deep and beyond suspicion. What we need is a deeper understanding on the concept of voluntarism in a situation which is constantly changing.

Do not walk in front of me
.....I cannot follow you

Do not walk behind me
.....I cannot lead you

But ...walk along with me and
We can make it TOGETHER

The purity of mind cannot be achieved by bathing,
even if one bathes a hundred thousand times.

The quietitude of mind cannot be achieved
by vow of silence, even if one goes in deep trance.

The fasting does not satiate the hunger for worldly goods,
even if one has all the riches of the world.

Not one out of a hundred thousand devices and
contrivances works to achieve unity with Him.

— J apji

Religion, Culture and Development

Some Reflections

Pramod

Together with the postulation that we are now living in a world where the human race has to "develop" or perish there is an equally strong stream vying for the attention of public consciousness - the greens who advocate ecofriendly or sustainable development.

Development has many inextricably linked facets. The causes and effects are also equally interlinked each proceeding from, and reinforcing the other symbiotically. Since, by virtue of domination of the global agenda at crucial junctures of history, it is the west that has brought its concept of development to the centre-stage as the global agenda, and that by virtue of its domination, development has come to be so closely identified with the western model.

Lop-sided View

All religions, at some stages of their development, have a messianic fervor. The crusades and the white man's mission to civilize the natives are but facets of this world view. This brahminical world-view carried to its extreme necessitated a denial of human qualities not only to other animate life but also to people of other races and women. It is in this cultural framework that the seeds of colonization bears fruit. The dehumanization of others and the divine mission entrusted to self became a potent wellspring for domination of the "less developed".

As long as a religion retains its original messianic fervor and amorphous assimilative nature, the tolerance which characterizes it will encompass nature. The loss of this messianic (revolutionary) fervour and ideology will result in that religion being identified with one established theology, much to the detriment of others. It is at this stage that religion becomes intolerant, inconsistent and

stifling. It oppresses both its adherents and the rest of the world. All religions go through these phases.

Progress is now quantified materially regardless of the social or other hidden costs. Rapid production of weapons of mass destruction is termed progress. Periodic wars become an economic necessity.

Technology, much like religion and culture, has too often been the handmaiden of destruction. Dominant trends of technology have helped in the "exploitation" of natural resources with devastating effect. Mainstream science and technology has helped reinforce and further the dominant world-view that has held that people must exploit nature. It is significant to observe that western science refers to plants and animals as "lower on the evolutionary tree". The inanimate is disdainfully ignored. This gradation is absent in bio-friendly science.

Capitalist

The largest beneficiaries of research funding has been the military and the military industrial complex. With sufficient arsenals to eliminate the earth itself this trend of scientific research is yet to show signs of abatement.

Even the much-vaunted seemingly altruistic green revolution had, as part of the package, tractors for regions with only two centimeters of top-soil. That western commercial interests were served by this transfer of technology, that it has resulted in the perpetuation of unjust structures of power, and that it served the interests of the west are no longer in dispute.

The dislocation of entire peoples by transferred technologies, toxic waste disposal by the West in Third World countries and the terrible price paid by the developing countries for the prosperity of the west are

well-known.

The substitute is an alternative system wherein the entire paradigm is changed to be more harmonious and cosmo-centric. In these tasks the enormous liberative potential of religions and the diverse forms of indigenous cultural resistance should be mobilised to defend, counteract and destroy the negative models of development so as to evolve a new philosophy where humans are seen as part of the living cosmos, to see development as the adapting of humans to the environment and where progress is measured in terms of harmony with ourselves, fellow beings, nature and the cosmos.



FEDINA NEWS CORNER

Action-Research on Tribals

Though Fedina has been actively involved in the development of the tribals, no concrete effort was made so far to identify specific issues related to tribal life. To offset this drawback, a meeting was arranged on 8th April where staff of Fedina, ICRA and Pipal Tree shared their views on the matter. It was suggested that the possible areas of study and research could be housing (including their habitat and the community), health, folk traditions, decision-making process, tribal spirituality, tribal rights, women, etc.

Trustees Meet

Trustees of Fedina met on April 23 1991 at the Bangalore office. It was an opportunity for staff to share their experiences in the field. The Trustees discussed the future and immediate priorities of Fedina.

Hazardous Drugs

To commemorate the late Dr. Olle Hansson, a symposium was arranged on June 22, 1991 at Gandhi Bhavan, Bangalore. This Swedish doctor's name is closely linked with his fight against hazardous drugs like mexaform. It was only natural for Fedina to give full support to this programme organised by Drug Action Forum Karnataka as we have been consciously fighting against the use of hazardous drugs in our health programmes. Our street theatre group from Sarjapura organised street plays on this occasion.

Area Coordinators' Meeting

All the area coordinators from our six areas met on the 3rd and 4th of June at Bangalore office to exchange their experiences with others. It was an enriching experience for everyone to hear about the various activities organised by our staff at various centres. Fedina Coordinator and the Bangalore office staff were also present at this meeting.

Staff Training: KISS

"Keep It Simple and Short" was the formula that caught the imagination of our staff at a workshop to improve writing and reporting skills organised by Fedina. The two-day training session was conducted by Mr. Koshy Mathew, a freelance journalist and publisher, on July 2nd and 3rd at our Bangalore Office. All area coordinators and those involved in report-writing participated in this workshop.

SARJAPURA

Summer Camp

Away from home for three days brought a pleasant change for the children of Sarjapura in their otherwise boring summer holidays. 30 school children in the age group of 9 to 12 years assembled at Gunjur from May 13th to 15th for this camp organised by our team at Sarjapura. The inauguration of this camp was done by the children themselves who lit the traditional lamp at 10.00 a.m. Environment, health and the importance of education were the main issues discussed during the three days. Songs, dance, posters and cultural programmes in the evenings made this event quite lively for the children.

Leadership Training

Fedina has always stressed the need for building up local leadership in all areas of its work. With this in mind, the team at Sarjapura organised a 3-day leadership programme at the Institute for Youth and Development, Koramangala, from 17th to 19th April. 21 young men participated in this training programme.

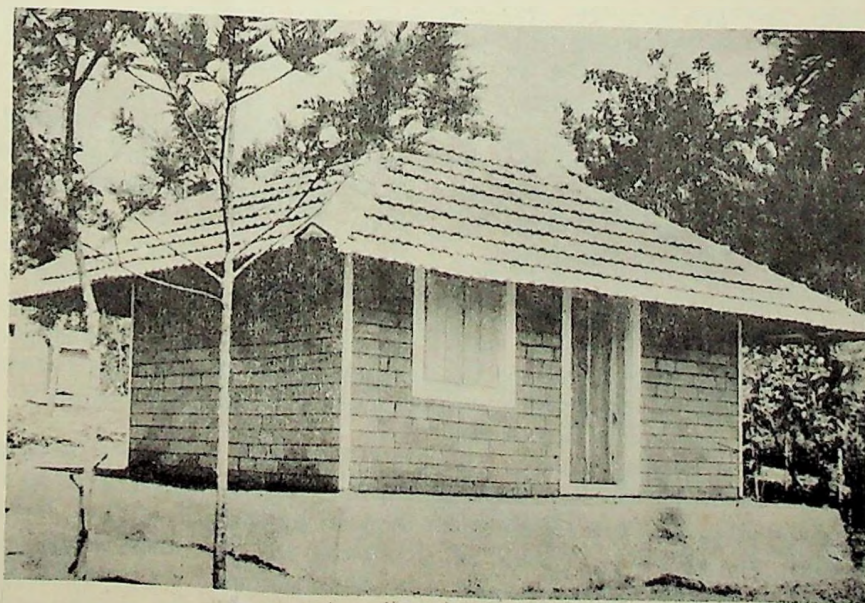
Giriraja Chicken

Small savings scheme has been in operation at Yamare village for quite some time now. To further this programme Fedina has provided nearly 50 giriraja chicks to 9 families. These birds grow fast and weigh much more than the ordinary chicken in a short time. Hence it is hoped that this scheme will help the women to earn additional income for their families.

WAYANAD

Voluntary Action Week

The state-level voluntary action week which was inaugurated on March 12th at Thiruvananthapuram concluded at Sultan Battery on March 17th. This function was organised under the joint auspices of VANI (Kerala chapter) and the Forum for Development Agencies (FDA),



Model Tribal House at Wayanad

Wayanad. Nearly 400 people representing various voluntary organisations in Wayanad were present at the valedictory function. The meeting decided to focus on environment as the main concern during 1991.

A Dream Come True

A home to live in - that is what everybody dreams of. Even the tribals have their dreams of a home. Chatti Miravan of Varikeri was really fortunate to have a house of his dreams - a house in tune with his beliefs, traditions and customs - an ideal Paniya house.

This model house with pressed mud blocks was unique in its design and appearance from the conventional type of tribal houses constructed by the government. The inauguration of this model house on 22nd April attracted a large crowd at Varikeri. This alternative model house scheme, initiated by Fedina, has caught the attention of government and other NGOs.

AAS Exposure

The Adivasi Aikya Samithy representatives after an exposure to the BKS convention at H.D. Kote has gained optimism for unity. The study tour which was held in May was a unique opportunity for the tribal leaders of Wayanad and Nilgiris to learn and understand the various activities which are going on among their brothers in the neighbouring state.

Balavadis Stopped

Has the Indian family planning programme attained its goal? Intensive family planning programmes among the tribals of Wayanad has resulted in the unemployment of three balavadi teachers of Fedina. Due to the lack of nursery school children, three balavadis had to be stopped recently.

Handicraft Workshop

It was a day of fun and laughter, productive as well. The handicraft

workshop which was held at Vazhavatta on May 21 for the traditional tribal craftsmen witnessed the production of craft items which the tribals were using in the bygone days. Nearly 20 such models were made on that day.

H.D. KOTE

Tribals Celebrate

May 12th was a day of celebration for hundreds of tribals who gathered at M.C. Tholalu, a remote village in H.D.



Tribal Home in H.D. Kote

Kote taluq. This was an unusual festival arranged by the Budakattu Krishikara Sangha and Vanavasi Mahila Sangha, the two tribal organisations at H.D. Kote. The youth of Budakattu Ranga Vedike, a street theatre group, performed many street plays highlighting different issues of tribal life. There was a lot of singing and dancing the whole night.

The annual general body meeting of the BKS took place the next day. The discussions focused mainly on people's organisation, rebuilding and strengthening the BKS and the role of women's participation. The meeting was inaugurated by the District Forest Officer. An exhibition on tribal medicines, health programme and organic farming was also arranged as

part of the programme of the day.

Collective Farming

After the displacement of the tribals from their original habitat - the forest - they had to engage in cultivation on their private lands. But the tribals of N. Beguru felt the need to cultivate collectively. They acquired 8 acres of land and have started a collective farm. The youth group of Budakattu Ranga Vedhike joined hands with the farmers and helped to plough and sow the seeds.

Children and Environment

Every year, the tribal children of H.D. Kote spend 2 or 3 days to understand the importance of education and a healthy environment. The two days get-together was arranged in the month of April at M.C. Tholalu and N. Beguru areas. The children took part in painting, singing and in identifying forest species.

In Annuru, Antharasanthe and B. Matakere areas the children organised processions. Hundreds of children walked from colony to colony spreading the message about education and protecting the environment.

NILGIRIS

50 minus 10 = 30?

50 minus 10. Is it 30 or 40? It was 30 in those days; but now the tribals have understood that it is 40. This understanding led to a clash between Kunkan and the local shop-owner. Kunkan was seriously injured in the fight with the shop-owner and had to be hospitalised. The news spread like wild fire and all the Adivasi Aikya Samithy representatives assembled and conducted a dharna in front of the shop and filed a case. Eventually the shop owner had to agree that fifty minus ten won't be thirty any more for the tribals of Nilgiris.

Anti-liquor Campaign

Excessive consumption of cheap country liquor produced locally in large quantities at almost every village in Nilgiris has claimed a few lives and many had to be hospitalised in serious condition. Our team at Nilgiris organised an anti-liquor campaign to convey the ill-effects of alcohol. Processions, film-shows and posters were used to draw the attention of the



Chengam : Training programme for women

people and the government to this problem. The government of Tamil Nadu has responded positively and all country liquor shops in Tamil Nadu will be closed from the 15th of July.



The Gowlis of Kittur at a group meeting

KITTUR

May Day Celebration

The inauguration of handlooms at Machi was the highlight of the celebration on May 1st. The mahila sangha of Machi had approached the khadi centre at Kittur and Bailhongal for a weaving centre in their hamlet as all the villagers were landless. The people themselves contributed money and free labour to build the shed for this purpose. Bailhongal khadi centre agreed to give a few handlooms. The mahila sanghas of

Gowlis

The newly initiated programme among the Gowlis is slowly gaining momentum. At present, seven Gowli wades (hamlets) have been identified and a survey is going on to assess their situation. Social and cultural aspects of the Gowlis will be given priority in this survey.

CHENGAM

Ration Cards

Illiteracy and inaccessibility to the government authorities have prevented the tribals from obtaining ration cards. Our team at Chengam has been constantly taking up this matter with the concerned authorities. Finally 296 applications were submitted to the government during March. It was a great relief for 158 tribal families to receive their ration cards. The remaining cards will be issued in the near future, it is said.

Training

Two training programmes conducted by Ms. Christy from RWWDS were arranged in the month of April - one for men and another for women. 36 women from 17 villages participated in the 3-day programme at our Chengam office. "The status of tribal people in the present political context" was the main topic of discussion. Mr. Krishnan, the Coordinator of WARM, was the main resource person for this training session.

Ningapur, Galaginamada and Kulavalli joined hands with the people of Machi on this occasion. Pooja was conducted, guests were garlanded and the women sang songs to celebrate this great event at Machi.

Ugani Creeper and the Fence

(*Lettaomia Aggregata*)

The ugani creeper which is found in bushes is useful to farmers in many ways. Farmers no longer need to search for ropes to bundle ragi husk, grass or firewood. Ugani creeper is within hand's reach in the rural areas.

The ugani creeper binds itself around different varieties of small plants in the fence and grips it tight to suffocate the plant.

Four years ago, in our backyard, a sapling of Ramaphala (*Anona Reticulata*) started growing near the fence. As its fruit is very tasty I cleared its surroundings and watered it every day. Soon the plant grew to my height.

Monsoon began and the ugani creeper in the fence reached Ramaphala and started tightening the grip. I loosened the grip and chopped the creeper. I expected that the Ramaphala plant to have grown much taller in a month,

but the plant was of the same height. When I checked, the creeper was again surrounding the plant curtailing its growth.

The tribals value this creeper for its medicinal quality. For example, it is used to cure dysentery and wounds. The extract of this creeper can be used to imprint designs either on cloth or body which lasts for quite a long time.

When I visited the tribal settlements to study their culture, children were playing with its juice. Children use this fluid to draw pictures on their forearms and then rub these drawings with burnt ash. It remains for one week.

To test whether the same effect is possible on white paper, I drew some figures with this fluid and then rubbed with burnt ash. To my astonishment, black lines appeared on the white paper. Ugani creeper is

identified by its leaves but is not known for its flowers.

In January of every year the Ugani creeper sheds its leaves and is left only with flowers appearing like a bride with pride.

Surviving the wrath of summer and being alive is possible only in the fence. Different types of plants, bushes and creepers grown in the fence create a cool atmosphere. The kachi plants (egg plants - *solanum melongena*) acts like stone pole and the ugani creeper like an iron fence. This is a kind of natural fencing which protects both animals and plants under its cover.

The basic ideology of natural farming is innate in the concept of fence. If we observe the fence very sensitively, we can understand many things that contribute to natural farming.

Ksheerasagar

Voluntary Organisations: Four Generations

	GENERATION			
	FIRST <i>Relief and Welfare</i>	SECOND <i>Community Development</i>	THIRD <i>Sustainable Systems Development</i>	FOURTH <i>People's Movements</i>
Problem Definition	Shortage	Local Inertia	Institutional and Policy Constraints	Inadequate Mobilizing Vision
Time Frame	Immediate	Project Life	Ten to Twenty Years	Indefinite Future
Scope	Individual or Family	Neighborhood or Village	Region or Nation	National or Global
Chief Actors	NGO	NGO plus Community	All Relevant Public and Private Institutions	Loosely Defined Networks of People & Organisations
NGO Role	Doer	Mobilizer	Catalyst	Activist/Educator
Management Orientation	Logistics Management	Project Management	Strategic Management	Coalescing and Energizing Self-Management Networks
Development Education	Starving Children	Community Self-Help	Constraining Policies and Institutions	Spaceship Earth

Sustainable Farming

(A collective experiment at Manti Hadi)

Reported by Vasu

During the past seven years, Fedina has been involved with the marginalised people at different places especially among the tribals. In H.D. Kote, Fedina has been instrumental in bringing the tribals together through a process of critical education.

Wronged People

The tribals of H.D. Kote have gone through untold hardships due to the wrong policies and priorities of the so-called "civilized society". Tribals here were forest-dwellers, eating what was available in the forest. Fruits and roots along with leaves and honey were their sustenance. The forest provided them their house, and it was their life and hope. Amidst the thickness of these forests, they found meaning to their lives, expression to their feelings and relationship with their gods. The forests sustained them, their culture and their beliefs.

The forest laws framed by the British as well as the Indian Government became stumbling blocks to the very survival of the tribals in the forests. In the name of reserved forests, game sanctuaries and Project Tiger, the tribals were sent out of these forests to the periphery, displacing them from their age-old traditional habitat. The Government failed to re-settle them in a proper way. Pushed outside the forests, they also became *persona non-grata* to the "civilised society". These tried to push them back into the forest, forcibly taking away anything that was given to them by the Government. This is not a story but the pitiable plight of the tribals of H.D. Kote and may be true to any tribal community.

Wrong Priorities

Development took another turn in our country. It saw the need for constructing huge dams by

submerging vast tracts of forest lands. Tribals had to run away from the submerging forests in order to survive. Truly these big dams damned the very survival of these tribals. The displaced were not properly rehabilitated immediately. In a way, these tribals were cheated by the modern paradigms of development.

United effort was needed to get these people their land so that they could have a place to live in to sustain themselves. With the support of these people, Fedina managed to get back the land rights wherever it was possible and also persuaded the government to distribute excess land in that region. To a very great extent these efforts were successful and most of the tribals today have some piece of land. Initiating them into agriculture was seen as a logical step to be undertaken.

Collective Action

Fedina felt that whatever it does should not in any way go against the principles of environment. Our involvement in this line should be ecologically sound and environmentally friendly. Hence, when it was related to agriculture, we had no other choice but to opt for sustainable farming.

About 12 km from H.D. Kote, in a sloping land, one can see some 20 houses in two rows. They were constructed recently by the Land Army and handed over to 19 tribal families. These were the families that were displaced and were not being re-settled properly. They had no other option but to become bonded labourers to a landlord at Ergalli in H.D. Kote Taluk. They were surviving in a miserable situation, with hardly anything to house them. They managed to survive in difficult situations facing untold miseries and hardships. Two years ago, Fedina staff

identified them and perceiving their miserable situation, pressured the local government to respond. The Jilla Parishad rose to the occasion, and granted them 22 acres of land for their rehabilitation after release. The Land Army built 20 houses in a place now called Manti Hadi.

Continuing Struggle

This is a sloping hillock, filled with thorny bushes and stones. One can also notice hundreds of mole-hills all around, in a word god-forsaken land. Seeing this, the tribals called this place "Manti" and thus it became Manti Hadi.

Unfortunately everything did not go well with everyone. The land rights for these 22 acres are written only in the name of 16 families leaving 3 families landless. Besides, out of the 22 acres, three to four acres are just rocky and unfit for any cultivation. Also, due to the non-maintenance of proper records, no family here knows which land belongs to whom. An equal division of this land would mean that each family may get about 1.1 acres of land, either somewhat cultivable or totally uncultivable.

It is at this juncture that Fedina began reflecting seriously with these 19 families belonging to the Soliga community. Fedina's staff began visiting this hadi regularly and initiated a discussion on sustainable agriculture that too in a collective way.

(to be continued)

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