

## 0101. FIRST PROGRESS REPORT (Sep 1978)

*Narrates the first 75 days of our experiences in central villages of Bagepalli taluk – Literacy Classes, Mana Patalu (our songs), Drama Practice, Kitchen Gardens, and discusses why we have started working with the Harijan community.*

We have been in the villages for 1 month after a 75 days intensive study/ orientation program. 4 Community Workers have settled in the Harijanawadas of their central villages and the 5<sup>th</sup> has been helping them in this tales. This month he too will choose a central village and settle down. Every Saturday, at our office in Bagepalli, we have a weekly meeting where we review the week and plan for the next.

Every evening from Sundays to Fridays (both days included), games and classes for children are conducted from 6 to 8 p.m. There are followed up from 8:30 p.m. for about 3 hours with adults literacy classes, songs, skits, and drama practices.

The daytimes is utilised for visiting the fields, tending to the people's kitchen gardens etc. Besides utilizing every opportunity – be it in the Community Workers rooms, the water taps, their places of labour, the tea shops or in the fields to have discussions and informal chats with the people, in order to gain as much knowledge as possible of the villages and its people. Below is an extract from the proceeding of a meeting we held at our office on 2 and 3 September 1978 to review our 1 month involvement. Problematic areas and the conclusions we have drawn from these have been emphasised in both, the meeting as well as this report.

### 1. LITERACY CLASSES

Literacy classes afforded us an easy entry in to the villages. The people could readily recognize and understand our Community Workers as "masters" and "teacher amma" they welcomed our determination to live in their midst and conduct the classes in the *Harijanawada* itself. In most cases, the Harijan *gudi*, where the deity is kept, became the class rooms, though these quite tumble down, small veranda hardly suffice. At this time of the year it is too cold to be comfortable outside in the open.

The people were fascinated by the Paulo Freire methodology we have adopted using key words selected from their common colloquial vocabulary, and in this past 1 month, most of them are able to read and write more than 20 words which have meaning and interest to them. However, we feel that we are not discussing enough in between the key words.

Some learners are sceptical as to why we are not starting with the alphabets, as they have seen children being taught in school, and why the literacy classes are always punctuated with innumerable songs and scissions. In spite of this, attendance has, by and large, been on the steady increase unto now. Except in one village where the youth are reluctant to allow women to participate (though they still follow the classes from the distance in spite of veiled threats from their men folk) women too attend the literacy classes.

The presence of children is a big problem in one centre they were thrown out by their ears and in another the adults refused to attend if the Community Worker encouraged the children to come. Children, being neo-literate, spoil the classes by monopolizing and by mocking those adults who make mistakes.

New the Community Workers are conducting special classes for children for 2 hours before the adult literacy classes commence. We are soon going to start using regular text books for the children, since the Paulo Freire methodology has certain limitations when it comes to teaching children. Most of these children are school drop-outs and have become cowboys

after finishing a year or 2 of schooling. The women attend these classes in between their cooking and are not embarrassed when their children addict them with a latter here or a word there.

But in spite of all these elaborate arrangement to weed out the children, they run home after their classes swallow their Ragi mudda or ganji, and rush back to participate in the adult literacy classes from a distance.

Literate in the villages (each of the Harijanawadas has a few) were feeling a little lost, though they too have been attending, mainly in order to take part in the discussions and to sing songs we are now going to give them the title of Assistant Teacher and the Community Workers will discuss with them for a while every evening to jointly plan the discussions on key words.

### **1.1. Mana Patalu (our songs)**

The response to a collection of songs we are using to depict the condition of the agricultural labourers, small peasants, the need for unity among them, etc. has been very encouraging. Not only have the people mastered and understood the tune and words, but in 3 of the 4 villages where are now involved, they have stopped singing popular film songs altogether. In the 4<sup>th</sup> village, Yellampalli while Mana Patalu are very popular, we suspect that it is the tune and the rhythm that has this leads us to drittly analyse the scope of songs however meaningfully they are composed. Perhaps songs have their role in helping the people to shake off their alienation and fear, but no so much in critical education.

In 2 villages the people are by themselves adapting the speed of these songs to suit kollattam practices (this is a local folk dance that the topping of small sticks to the music's beat while dancing). This shows that Mana Patalu has very easy cultural acceptance in the lives of this people.

Our one month experience with the songs in Yellampalli shows that it is possible for the people to get attracted by the tune and the rhythm, and yet not manfully or critically participate when singing. This led one of our Voluntary Workers (a student from Bagepalli who spends his free time in the ADATS villages) to initiate a new activity –drama practices.

### **1.2. Drama Practices**

This is a relatively new activity we have just introduced. Twice a week, situations will be described by the people to our Community Workers, and after a lot of discussions, there specific situations will be acted out by the people, with the Community Workers encouragement. Each drama practice day, not more than 2 situations will be taken up for acting. In a few months time, they will have 20 or 30 situations which when pieced together will form a complete drama lasting 2 or 3 hours.

In this manner, the drama will depict the precise and particular condition of each village, and not just a generalized rural scene full of exploitation and oppression. Thus the people will be able to re-live their lives, in our presence to facilitate critical discussion, and in the oppressor's absence to facilitate frankness.

Thus these dramas have an advantage over songs in the task of critical education, since mental involvement is required here.

### **1.3. Kitchen Gardens**

The above mentioned areas of our involvement are all secondary activities though we give them a higher priority at the moment since they do not directly effect production. It is necessary for us to have a primary activity that directly concerns and assists their production proc-

ess. Otherwise, even if we have a very encouraging start, we may soon find ourselves facing a bland wall all of a sudden, not knowing what exactly our next stop should be. Secondly, since our main objective is to search with the people to evolve applicable concepts capable of theorizing our villages, it is necessary that this search be conducted within the realm of their production process

To find an area of primary involvement among small Tenant-peasant is an evident and easy task-their cultivation, which could be assisted with agricultural education and advice n improved practices (getting them ownership rights for their lands is a much more fundamental primary activity, but is by no mean easy). But this is not so with agricultural labourers. Only a fractional percentage of the Harijans we are working with till even a few acres of leased-in lands as direct producers. Some of them are craftsmen, honey collectors (not bee keepers) etc. but not in the 4 villages where our Community Workers are living. They do not even have compounds with cultivable land to grow small plots of kitchen gardens.

Our problems were suddenly solved when we visited Pathapalya village where the Harijanawada of 65 huts is built right on top of a huge rock. On the sheer rock slope, the people have built Bund with boulders and fill them with soil carted from the bed of a nearby tank. On these terraces, they are raising kitchen gardens by themselves. So deep is their aspiration for land in this Harijanawada.

Drawing our inspiration from the Harijans of Pathapalya, we launched n a kitchen garden programme, and have now discovered that an amazing lot can be done even by people who "do not have any land at all", creeper beans have already sprouted and are climbing towards the thatching of huts in all our villages, drumstick cutting are germinating where vessels are normally washed, papaya nurseries will be ready for transplantation in a month and improved chilli, brinjal French beans, cabbage, and cauliflower have already replaced the low yielding chillies on the Pathapalya terraces.

## 2. WHY HAVE WE STARTED WITH THE HARIJANS?

A point that came our for serious debate among us is why have we started with the Harijans? Many of us have been confused and worried these past few weeks wondering if we are doing the right thing in staying in The Harijanawada, conducting literacy classes and cultural programmes in the midst of their huts, and thus in a way precluding the participation of agricultural labourers and small Tenant peasants from other caste groups. Is this not a serious deficit in a region where hardly a fifth of the population are Harijans? Where Harijans represent only less than half the labour force the villages? Each and every Community Worker has been asked by caste labourers why we are conduction the classes for Harijans alone, when they too would like to come and learn. Objection to this Harijan bias of ADATS from the richer section of the cat village have not been heard or reported, save one village where it has been very localized.

Out staff meeting on 2 and 3 September 1978 went into this question in as through a manner as possible, and also decided to keep the question open for further reflection and debate to culminate in a 2 day demeanour on 23 and 24 September. Our tentative understanding right now is as follows:

Understanding our village structures basically as class structures is absolutely vital in maintaining clear perspective. Otherwise our tools for analysing the socio-economic and political realities would be faulty, and we would run the risk of wrong diagnosis and incorrect actions. To study relations and inter-relations as production relations is very important in order to correctly identify classes and class interests.

Caste is a part of the superstructure; an institution that has been established in ancient Indian society to give justification to the then prevailing feudal economy. Production relations in

rural India have not been totally transformed, and by and large the same productive forces operate in our villages. Thus the caste system still plays an important function in maintaining the village order to a very large (though considerably reduced) extent.

In the caste hierarchy, we find a close overlaps at the higher levels between class and caste, but this is not at all so when we examine the lower stratum. Agricultural labourers—landed landless and part cultivators part labourers come from a number of caste backgrounds. Thus the caste system, as we find it in our villages, serves a feudal purpose of creating disharmony and disunity in the labour and small Tenant peasant classes. The Landlord class finds it extremely easy to economise and woo a small section of the labour class, throwing haywire the concept of a united labour class sharing in common their exploitation, oppression, and discontent for the order. This is in addition to their already alienated state of mind, whereby they have an apathy and fear of freedom.

Though the above is a reflection of a semi feudal reality, it is not enough to understand it in that contest alone, the caste system gives the structure not just a religious justification, but goes further to stratify the population and divide the lower classes. It is interesting to note that this same caste system when economic pressures demand (when there is a demand for greater production and the stifling of the rising productive forces inhibits this demanded increase in production) gives rise to feuds among the ruling classes based on caste and one of the contending castes ins forced to adopt more progressive production attitudes in order to gain a vantage over the other. And this, ironically, contributes to the eventual breaking of feudal economic patterns – of which caste is one super structural components. We have witnessed this in an almost classical illustration in a village close to one of our centres.

For the outsider, caste blurs class stratification of village society. It has been difficult for us to identify and distinguish the poor from the average and the well-to-do, after living in the villages for a month. And the subtle but real vertical lines of factions only contributors further to our difficulty.

In the beginning, it would have been impossible for us to identify even a vague “poor peoples sector” let alone the landed landless and part cultivators part labourers, small, middle and big peasants. In many cases it has been difficult even to recognise a leasing out Landlord in this drought prone region (this year is terribly affected). Perhaps this has been so, to some extent, because they were wondering if we had come to sanction loans or to identify undeclared surplus lands over the ceiling – in both cases their reluctance to appear affluent being quite understandable. In the event of our making the wrong judgement, we would not just be placed in an embarrassing position, but also perhaps in an irrefutable one as far as our objective of identifying with the poor is concerned.

When we were faced with this problem, the caste system proved to be useful. In the Harijanawadas we found a more or less homogenous Group of people, fractionally split in not more than two, all being labourers and small Tenant peasants.

Through these Harijans, with whom we are concentrating on building a close and trusting relationship, we will be able to identify the other economic groups in the entire village. Who else would know the ownership, central, and cultivation patterns of each and every acre of land in the village other than the Harijan labourers? Not just the central village alone, but we hope to have an insight into the surrounding villages as well. Once we have found out who is who, we intend working with all the labourers and small Tenant peasants. Thus ours is not a caste approach to development, but most certainly one based on class.

The question that still disturbs us is whether this approach is realistic or just ambitious. Once we have worded very intimately with the Harijans for a few months, would the other agricultural labourers and poor peasants from the main villages accept us?

A lot will depend on whether we have antagonized them during our exclusive concentration with the Harijans. It is necessary, therefore, to avoid caste issues and perpetuating conflicts based on caste, though this is a very natural development once we begin to get truly identified with the people in whose midst we are living and working. Is it enough to give a class interpretation to their day to day struggle for existence? These are serious questions which will shape the entire approach of ADATS in the next months.