

Organising Rural Labour Process and Experiences

Vol. **2**

EDITED BY
POONAM S. CHAUHAN
HELEN R. SEKAR
M.M. REHMAN



V.V. Giri National Labour Institute

Organising Rural Labour

Process and Experiences

Vol. 2

Edited by

Poonam S. Chauhan
Helen R. Sekar
M.M. Rehman



V.V. Giri National Labour Institute

ISBN: 978-93-82902-22-5

Copyright © V.V. Giri National Labour Institute, NOIDA

No. of Copies : 300

Year of Publication : 2015

This document can be downloaded from the Institute's website at www.vvgnli.org

Opinions expressed in the study are solely of the author and do not necessarily

Printed and Published by V.V. Giri National Labour Institute, Sector – 24,
NOIDA 201 301, U.P.

Printed at: Chandu Press, D-97, Shakarpur, Delhi -110092

CONTENTS

<i>Foreword</i>	<i>i</i>
<i>Preface</i>	<i>v</i>
1. Women Workers in the Beedi Industry: An Action Research Programme at Vellore – <i>G. Anuradha, K.V. Eswara Prasad and Syed Akhtar</i>	1
2. Re-orientation Camp at Halusai, District Hooghly – <i>D.C. Sarkar, Bhubaneswar Chatterjee</i>	21
3. Tribal Youth Camps in Rajasthan – <i>Prayag Mehta</i>	29
4. Promises to Keep: Repeat Camp for Freed Bonded Labourers in Palamau – <i>Arvind Narayan Das</i>	57
5. Freed Bonded Labour Camp at Palamau – <i>R.N. Maharaj</i>	63
6. Training and Development of Rural Women: Report of a DW CRA Camp – <i>Poonam S. Chauhan</i>	71
7. News from the Countryside – <i>M.M. Rehman</i>	76
8. Behind the Development Process – <i>Poonam S. Chauhan</i>	81
9. Together We Can Solve Our Problems – <i>Poonam S. Chauhan, M.M. Rehman and Rajesh Kumar Karn</i>	86
10. The Spark will not be Extinguished: Chittorgarh Experiment – <i>Sanjay Upadhyaya</i>	118
11. Rural Labour Camp at Rataul, Meerut: A Report – <i>M.M. Rehman & Poonam S. Chauhan</i>	130
12. We shall fight for our right: Report of Rural Labour Camp in Panipat – <i>M.M. Rehman & Poonam S. Chauhan</i>	139
13. The Desert Land: Sand, Stones and People – A Report of Rural Labour Camp at Bambore Block, Rajasthan, January 20-23, 1996 – <i>M.M. Rehman & Poonam S. Chauhan</i>	142

14. Life, Living and Times in Quarry Mines 146
– *M.M. Rehman, Poonam S. Chauhan*
15. Bundelkhand Gramin Majdoor Vikas Sangathan Marches Ahead 175
– *M.M. Rehman*
16. A camp report of Bhandar, Datia, MP 195
– *Poonam S. Chauhan and Shashi Tomer*
18. Addressing labour exploitation by organizing the unorganized: 199
the experience of conducting Rural Labour Camps in
Kancheepuram, Tamil Nadu
– *Helen R. Sekar*
19. Organizing Labour for addressing imbalances in the socio- 210
economic systems: Experience of conducting Rural Labour
Camp in select district of Northern Tamil Nadu
– *Helen R. Sekar*

Foreword

Progressive reduction in the incidence of poverty, unemployment and underemployment, improving the standard of living of the people in general and socially and economically disadvantaged population in particular, strengthening the redistributive bias of public policies and services in favour of the poor, deprived and handicapped have been the central objective of the 12 Five-Year Plans (1952-2012) which have been launched by the National Government so far. Empirical studies and researches conducted so far, however, have shown that the fruits and benefits of development have not uniformly, consistently and equitably percolated down to all the layers, causing in the process huge gaps in the social ladder and bringing in their trail many undesirable consequences. Inequality, inequity and indigence have emerged as the direct offshoots of inequitable distribution of resources on the one hand and denial of access to services, facilities and opportunities for total development of the people placed at the lowest rung of the social and economic ladder on the other. This process has been compounded further by a section of the indigent population getting bonded to those who constitute the rich, resourceful and influential sections of society. This imbalance or distortion in the development process has to be corrected if the central objective of planning is to be carried to its logical conclusion – i.e. promoting justice, equality and equity to the poor, deprived and disadvantaged sections of society.

Organisation of the rural poor is one of the instruments for removing this imbalance.

Conceptually speaking, an organisation is not just a mechanical assembly of women and men. It's a tool and instrument of change for something better, higher and nobler. It is an outlet through which the natural and spontaneous yearning of women and men for decent living accommodation, food, water, air, light, health, hygiene, environmental sanitation, long life and freedom for leading a clean and congenial existence for every human being has found expression for ages. This is how organisation of the unorganized becomes a powerful conveyer of the quest of millions of human beings who have been at the twilight zone of development, leading a subhuman existence, battling against poverty, deprivation, discrimination and subjugation for years. It is organisation which instils a sense of new awakening through which the individual wakes up from a culture of silence and helpless dependence for realisation of the dignity, beauty and worth of human existence.

The million dollar question which arises is this: Who mobilises and organizes the unorganized? Does government have any role in this process? What strategy and methodology is required to be adopted to mobilise and organize the unorganized? What steps need to be adopted to make the organisation sustainable and deliver the desired results? How does one evaluate the content, process and impact of an organisation on the health, happiness and security of millions of members who form it?

Organising the unorganized is certainly not a task mandated for any government. The latter may perceive and internalise the need for and importance of an organisation and may act as a promoter, facilitator and catalyst to promote and encourage organisations of the poor but may not be able to assume the direct responsibility of formation of organisations on its shoulders.

It was left to the late (Prof) Nitish Ranjan De, former founder and Dean of the National Labour Institute to conceptualise a strategy and methodology of organising the unorganized rural poor/labour in the early '70s which could be said to be unconventional and unorthodox. The strategy lay in organising a series of rural camps for those engaged in organising the rural labour including the sharecroppers and landless agricultural labourers. The first such camp was organized at a relatively underdeveloped and remote village, Bana Nabagram in the district of Burdwan, West Bengal, with support from the Ministry of Labour, Government of India and Government of West Bengal. Attended by 24 participants and with a duration of five days, the camp devoted considerable amount of time to the primary task – i.e. to identify the problems faced by the organisers of rural labour in the process of organising. This task was sought to be accomplished through discussion and churning of critical consciousness of participants in small groups. The groups discovered through discussion that some problems were tractable, some were not so tractable and solutions to both the problems were also found out by them. Identification of problems and their solutions led to the formulation of a strategy or plan of action for facilitating the process of organising the rural poor/labour. It also helped in identifying certain areas where support from various departments/agencies of the government such as the Department of Labour, Department of Land Records and Survey, Department of Public Relations, etc. was needed to facilitate and accelerate the process of organising. Evaluation of the content, process and impact of the five-day camp by the participants themselves was the best highlight of the programme. It brought out in a totally open and participative manner the strength and weaknesses which inhibit organisations of the rural poor/labour.

Over 45 camps followed in quick succession and the experiment conceptualised and translated to action by Prof. De continued even after he ceased to be Dean of NLI; and continues even after his death. This is on account

of the fact that there could be no two opinions on the rationale and strength of the basic principle guiding the design of these camps – i.e. ownership and participation which was sound and sensible. The natural, spontaneous and wholehearted manner in which the participants identified themselves with the camp and contributed substantially to the conclusions of the camp speaks volumes about the meticulous professional manner (which is also unconventional and unorthodox) in which the organizers of the camp proceeded to conduct the same. The camps brought out clearly and candidly the factors which contribute to the plight and predicament of the participants (landlessness, assetlessness, indebtedness, bondage). This awareness was further reinforced when the participants were able to articulate their concerns and entitlements before the agencies responsible for alleviating the misery and suffering of the rural poor/labour.

Holistically speaking, the central message emanating from the camps was loud and clear: organize and bargain for your rights. It reinforced the strength and efficacy of what Sri V.V. Giri (former Union Labour Minister, former President of India and an outstanding trade union leader of more than five decades standing) had observed way back in the '50s, **“It is in the capacity to combine that labour has its best strength and the wherewithal of deliverance from injustice and oppression.”**

Volumes have been written since such prophetic words came from the late Sri V.V. Giri on the myriad problems of numerous categories and sub-categories of unorganized rural poor/labour and on the undisputed need for their organisation. Innumerable grass root level organisations have also come into being. For years they have been relentlessly striving to break the narrow artificial walls dividing humanity, to arouse and awaken the masses from their culture of silence and dependence so that they can become partners of progress and advancement. Stumbling blocks which are mankind's own creation built on caste, creed, colour, religion and outmoded social customs and practices have no doubt halted the pace and momentum of this great journey of humanity in search of justice, equity, equality and freedom but have not been able to dislodge it from its great odyssey.

It is a very happy augury that the V V Giri National Labour Institute has compiled Rural Labour Camp reports/articles in two volumes, I congratulate Sri P.P. Mitra, IES, the Director General of the Institute, who has taken the initiative in this direction as also the leadership and direction provided by him to bring out these two voluminous reports. I wish him and the band of his dedicated colleagues all success in this endeavour.



(L. Mishra)

Former Union Labour Secretary

Preface

Problems and challenges faced by the rural labour in India are many both in terms of their magnitude and impact on the rural economy in general and rural labourers in particular. The magnitude and the growth of rural labour is also huge. The 1964-1965 according to the First Rural Labour Enquiry, the estimated number of rural labour household in the country was 17.9 million. Today this has increased to, according to the Eighth Rural Labour Enquiry: 2004-2005, 55.1 million. Another aspect of the rural labour household is the fact that almost 70 per cent (69.53) did not own cultivable land.

In this perspective NLI envisioned an imaginative programme in the form of holding rural labour camp with the view to conscientising the rural labour. The purpose was to assist the rural labourer, particularly the largest component constituted by landless agricultural labourers, petty agricultural producers, sharecroppers and rural artisans, belonging especially to the vulnerable sections, to critically examine the nature and character of reality through a conscious reflection of the reality of their existence.

First, the problem of rural labour should not be conceptualized merely as that of poverty. What emerged from the diverse experiences gained from camps organized at different places with rural labour belonging to different socio-cultural backgrounds is that lack of empathy on the part of rural labourers themselves and on the part of people, who are involved in the process of solving their problems as well, is one of the major obstacles to their development.

This resulted in a situation where, apart from conceptual complication, the understanding of causes of and remedies for poverty remained a half-hearted reflection and action for transformation.

Second, the socio-economic structure, designed and perpetuated by the socio-economically powerful and privileged sections was viewed as if emerging from without. Many policy, programmes and actions were mostly formulated and launched without disturbing the skewed nature of control over productive assets. In the existing socio-economic structure, the rural poor are unfavourably placed. As a result, they have been denied of their due share in the gains from the development process. What is perhaps more disturbing is that majority of the rural labourer is unaware of their hidden potential as collective. Their understanding of their potential was that, if they are organized, a vast regenerative capability would unfold and help them create a new reality thereby liberating them from poverty.

Third, it was amply clear that lack of organization is the most serious obstacle to taking up any conscious decision and decisive action on the part of the rural labour.

Fourth, it was also felt that mere conceptual awareness and imbibing organizational skills and information are not enough. What is required is to assist them understanding issues on which they should reflect upon for taking action for transformation. Therefore, the clarity of issues, which might range from social, political, economical, cultural and psychological and understanding their interconnectedness and dynamics are more important for any organization to form and sustain and getting it institutionalized.

More often it is being felt that the rural labourers are prone to expectation from above and accept their reality as given rather than to act upon it.

This very feeling did not allow them to organize themselves into a collective entity. As a result, a large chunk of the intended assistance was siphoned off by the delivery system.

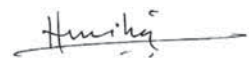
This clearly reveals how important it is to develop consciousness about one's due through conscientisation, which would help rural labour to educate themselves for realizing their potential through building organizations and taking up action for transforming the existing reality into a new reality.

The camp reports in the two volumes clearly spell the need and rationale for conscientizing rural labour. The reports also suggest relevant strategies to be adopted for organising rural labour.

For bringing out the two volumes of rural labour camp reports. I thank Dr. Lakshmidhar Mishra who has been kind enough to suggest the importance of the camps and also for his generosity to write foreword to these volumes.

I would like to place on record my gratitude to the editors and also to the members of the Editorial Team Dr. S.K. Sasikumar, Dr. Poonam S. Chauhan, Dr. Helen R. Sekar and Dr. M.M. Rehman for taking interest in editing and bringing out the two volumes.

I hope the volumes will be useful to researchers, students, academics, policy makers, trade union leaders and other stakeholders who are interested in the emancipation of the rural workers from their poverty and exploitation.



(P.P. Mitra)
Director General

Women Workers in the Beedi Industry: An Action Research Programme at Vellore

G. Anuradha, K.V. Eswara Prasad and Syed Akhtar

This article presents an account of the action research programme for women workers in the beedi industry conducted in Vellore from March 18 to 22, 1984. The action research programme was preceded by a survey of the industry in and around Vellore in order to acquaint ourselves with different aspects of production and also the position of women workers in the industry.

This article consists of three parts. The first part presents a comprehensive picture of the structure of production in the beedi industry. It also presents the views and opinions of a cross-section of people who are involved with the industry. The second part outlines the features of the action programme. The nature and type of follow-up action that should be taken up is suggested in the last part.

PART I: SURVEY OF THE BEEDI INDUSTRY

The survey of the industry had the following broad objectives:

- (1) To get baseline data which would form the context for our action research programme; and
- (2) To use the survey to broaden our base for the forthcoming beedi workers' survey in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.

The survey consisted of visiting women workers in the place of production and interviewing them, both individually and in small groups, in order to elicit details of (a) their position vis-a-vis the beedi contractor; (b) stages involved in the production of beedies; (c) wages and working and living conditions; (d) access to welfare facilities such as medical benefits, insurance compensation etc. Furthermore, meetings were held with a prominent trade union leader, medical officer of the beedi workers dispensary and members of the Department of Labour, Tamil Nadu.

Vellore town is the headquarters of the North Arcot district, Tamil Nadu. It has a concentration of beedi industries wherein a large number of workers are involved since beedi production is labour intensive. Some of the major brands of beedies being produced in Vellore are: 100 mark, 10 mark, R.K., Kada mark, Lakshmi, Samad, Sayed, Ganesh, etc.

Process of production

Beedi production is labour intensive and is done in various stages and at various levels. Usually a factory employs very few workers while a major portion of the beedi production is done typically outside the factory in the workers' homes.

The principal employer supplies the raw material – namely tendu leaves – tobacco and yarn to a contractor to supply a certain number of beedies. The contractor in turn distributes the raw material in smaller quantities to several workers who take these to their homes for rolling the requisite number of beedis specified by the contractor. The rolled beedies are returned to the contractors for which they are paid their wages. These are sent to the branch office of the principal employer. The branch office in turn distributes the beedies to the out-workers for labelling. They are supplied with labels, whereas the cost for the yarn and gum has to be borne by the worker. The out-worker supplies the labelled beedies to the branch where they are stacked, cured, finally packed and despatched to the principal employer.

(i) Rolling: The out-worker brings the raw material home and shares the work with the members in the family including small children and at times with other outside workers. This is necessary because the process of rolling beedies involves several stages all of which are time-consuming and it is not possible for one worker to perform all the work alone and produce the required number of beedies in a day.

First, the leaves are cleaned, washed and dried. This is done by old women and/or children for which they are paid 15-20 paise for the bundle of leaves required to roll 1000 beedies. Secondly, the cleaned leaves are cut as per the size required by the brands of beedies to be rolled. This is also done by old women and children, the wage for which is about 80 paise for 1000 leaves. Thirdly, the beedi is rolled using the tobacco and the leaf. This is done by men, women and children. Fourthly, the edges of rolled beedies are folded in, and is either done by the rollers themselves or by another set of workers who are generally women and children. The wage for this is around 80 paise.

Finally, the rolled beedies are tied in bundles of 24 or 12 beedies as per the requirement of the contractor. Thus, the raw materials are converted into rolled beedies and returned to the contractor. The wage rate per thousand beedies rolled is Rs. 8.10, the work of which is usually shared by a minimum of three or four members.

Given the fact that each contractor has hundreds of out-workers employed by him, large numbers of beedies pour out every day. Hence, physical counting of the beedies brought in by the out-workers is a laborious task for the employer, for which they have designed their own methods of counting. This counting is done in two stages:

- (i) Forty-two bundles of 24 beedies will make 1000 beedies (or variations of this).
- (ii) The bundles are stacked in trays of a certain size which are designed to hold a definite number of bundles. For example, a tray may be designed to hold 14 x 15 rows of bundles which would amount to 5000 beedies.

Thus, the contractor counts the bundles by stacking them in the trays. The cost of any shortage in the number of beedies rolled by the worker is deducted from the wage at the rate of 50-75 paise, which differs depending on the brand.

The rolled beedies are sent either to the factory or to another branch from where they are distributed to a different set of out-workers for labelling. Labelling: The beedies are given in large numbers to out-workers for labelling. They are also provided large sheets of labels. The sheets have to be cut into thin strips prior to labelling on beedies. The cost towards gum and yarn for making bundles of beedies is borne by the worker,

The wage for labelling 1000 beedies is 45 paise. The women are usually supplied with thousands of beedies and they share the labelling work similar to beedi rolling, with other members of the family or sub-contract the work to others at the rate of 15 paise plus gum and yarn.

The cost of gum and yarn for labelling 3000 beedies is 45 paise. In other words, when they label 3000 beedies they are paid only for 2000 beedies.

Thereafter, labelled and bundled beedies are returned to the branch wherein they are counted as explained above. It must be mentioned once again that the cost of any shortage incurred in the number of beedies labelled is deducted from the wages of the worker.

In the branch the bundles are stacked in mesh trays and cured. The cured bundles are individually labelled and repacked in large cartons of 20 bundles. For making 200 cartons and packing them in gunny bags, a worker is paid Rs. 9.60. These gunny bags of beedies are sent to the factory from where they are despatched to various markets in India.

Problems related to wages

Problems related to wages comprise: shortage of raw materials, improper counting of bundles of beedies, incorrect entries in the passbooks, irregularity of work, seasonality of work, payment of bonus to workers, indebtedness and pledging of children.

(a) Shortage of raw materials: It is an accepted fact that 800 gms of leaves and 350 gms of tobacco will be required to roll 1000 beedies provided the tendu leaves are not defective. Usually the tendu leaves are given to the workers without weighing them or checking for their quality. Poor quality or damaged leaves in the bundle given to the worker would necessarily mean shortage of leaves to roll beedies. Similarly, a sudden gust of wind may blow away some amount of tobacco from the open trays the workers use which would once again result in shortage of tobacco needed for filling beedies. In either case, the out-worker is held responsible for the number of beedies that fall short of the required quantity specified by the contractor and wages are cut accordingly.

For example, if a worker is short of one bundle, the wage cut varies from 50 to 75 paise. On the other hand, if a worker buys the raw material on his own, the average cost of one bundle would come to 30 paise. By and large, workers are usually short of leaves and tobacco and prefer to buy the raw material on their own to replenish the shortage in order to avoid large wage cuts.

(b) Improper counting of bundles of beedies: While stacking of bundles in trays for counting, a lot of mischief is played by the contractor on the pretext that a large number of beedies need to be collected and counted from a number of workers in a limited time. Usually, more bundles are stacked in a tray than what the tray should hold with the result that, in the final count, a number of bundles of beedies always fall short. Furthermore, the out-worker though present at the spot is not allowed to do the stacking and counting.

(c) Incorrect entries in the pass book: In some factories each out-worker is allotted a number and provided a small notebook containing the number of beedies the out-worker has turned in and the wages due to her. This notebook is attested by the Inspector of Excise. In all cases, the details of wage cuts due to shortage or, in other words, the details of actual wages paid is never entered in the pass book. The details of shortage of beedies are maintained in a separate paper. In other words, details of wages entered in the book do not necessarily mean that the said wage has been paid to the worker.

(d) Irregularity of work: The supply of raw material in a number of branches is reported to be only for four days a week. Furthermore, the amount of work given to the worker depends on the sweet will of the contractor. In either case the worker is put to a lot of hardship.

(e) Seasonality of work: During the monsoon there is no beedi manufacture. In view of this workers do not get any wages.

(f) Payment of bonus to workers: There is no payment of bonus to the workers. Some branches do pay the bonus in the following manner: A sum of 20 paise per day is deducted from the wages and eventually some Rs. 30-40 is paid as bonus per year.

(g) Indebtedness: The shortage of raw material, seasonality of work and intermittent lay-offs force the workers to seek loans at very high rates of interest (40% per month) from local moneylenders. The result of this situation is that most of the families are chronically indebted.

(h) Pledging of children: The occurrence of any religious or social function such as marriage, automatically involves additional expenditure for the worker often ranging from Rs. 600 to 2000 or more. In order to meet this requirement, the workers often resort to borrowing from their employers by 'pledging' their children to work for them. The child is forced to work for the 'employer' for a very low wage (Rs. 1.50 for 10-12 hours of work per day) till such time the parent is able to repay the amount borrowed. Although a small portion of the

wage is paid to the child, the remaining money is treated as interest on the loan and not as payment towards the principal. If the worker wants to release his child, he can only do so by repaying the full amount.

There are instances of ill-treatment of such pledged children by the employers.

Case studies of women beedi workers

We present case studies of a few women who are struggling to eke out a living working day in and day out for the benefit of the employer. What needs to be recognised here is the painful fact that it is they who have to bear the brunt of maintaining the family regardless of the presence of male members in the family. Despite this, these women do not seem to command any respect in their family or society.

(1) A 26-year-old Muslim illiterate woman, Zarina, lives with her three small children in a small thatched room in her father's house. She was married to a good-for-nothing fellow when she was 14 years old. She took up the work of rolling beedies at her in-laws' home to supplement her husband's meagre earnings. She was sent back to her father just four years after her marriage. Abandoned by her husband and with three children to raise she was left to her own resources. Zarina at present works for the No. 10 brand beedi factory rolling beedies.

She manages to roll 1500 beedies every day. The factory distributes raw materials six days a week, Friday being a holiday. It is not possible for Zarina to do all the pre-rolling work on her own. She takes the help of her mother and sister for which she pays them wages. The mother cuts the leaves for which the wage is Rs. 1.50 and the sister folds the edges of the rolled beedies for which she pays Rs. 1.20. Thread for tying the beedi is not supplied by the factory. This costs her 40 ps for every 1500 beedies. Therefore, for rolling 1500 beedies she gets Rs 12 out of which she spends Rs. 3.20 on wages and thread. To add to all this are the frequent cuts in the wages for shortages. She was given a bonus of Rs. 30 in 1983 for which she says, 20 ps were cut from her wages every day.

What worries the frail looking Zarina most is her children's education which looks like a dream to her, with her present earnings. "Can you give me some extra work?" she asks.

(2) Sushila, a pretty woman of 25 years, works 10 hours a day labelling beedies of the Kaua mark brand. She is up at 4 O'clock in the morning and is off to the branch office to collect her daily quota of work at 8 a.m. If her luck holds good she gets nearly 20,000 beedies to label a day. She is helped by her three small children in her work. Even with four working hands she cannot manage to label all the beedies that she gets. So she sub-contracts work to neighbouring women to whom she pays 15 ps for every 1000 beedies labelled.

The gum and thread is supplied by her. In this way she somehow earns around Rs. 9 a day, six days a week.

Sushila is the wife of a milk vendor who used to earn reasonably well. Her eldest child, a daughter, was studying in school. Her husband fell into bad ways two years back, started drinking and gambled away many of the expensive household articles too. She discontinued her daughter's studies when her husband stopped earning. In desperation, she learnt the work from a neighbour and started labelling beedies just two years back. Now she is skilled in the job and is able to give her children at least one meal a day. The husband is a habitual drunkard now, who eats the food she gives him. With no contribution from him, the burden of running the house rests on Sushila's young shoulders.

(3) Thirty-eight-year-old Savitri lost her husband, himself a beedi worker, when she was 26 and has been labelling beedis since she was 19 years old. She, along with her three unmarried daughters and a minor son, label around 18-20 thousand beedis a day working for 12 hours. She has not been able to send her children to school since their help is required in labelling.

The daily quota of beedis she gets for labelling depends purely on the fancy of the branch-incharge. She would get 20 thousand beedies on some days and sometimes just half of that. As a consequence her daily earnings vary and on an average she makes Rs. 30-40 a week working for five days a week with which five mouths would have to be fed.

Her major worry now is regarding marrying off her daughters for which she has no money. She cannot take a loan from her employer for want of surety. At best she could pledge her child to her employer but then the money she would get out of this would not be sufficient to marry off three daughters.

The above cases are just samples of the large majority of women out-workers who struggle constantly and compromise with every type of hardship to eke out their living.

Union and official viewpoint

Our pre-programme survey also included discussions with officials of the department of labour, both at Madras and at Vellore, staff of Tamil Nadu. Institute of Labour Studies (TILS), trade union leader connected to the beedi industry and medical officer of the beedi workers dispensary. We record below a gist of our discussions:

Trade union leader: From our discussion with Mr. V. Kannan, General Secretary, Tamil Nadu Beedi Workers Federation (CITU), four major issues having implications for the beedi industry in general and welfare of the workers in particular surfaced.

(i) Inadequacy of the Beedi and Cigar Workers Act of 1966. It was felt by Mr. Kannan that this Act's definition of establishment has been twisted by the employers so that it ignores in toto the existence of the home worker. In reality several beedi manufacturers sub-contract their work to contractors who in turn distribute the work to home or out-workers. As the out-worker's name is found nowhere in the record of either the sub-contractor or the principal employer, neither of them feel responsible for the welfare of the worker.

(ii) The proprietors of the beedi factories manage to escape the clutches of the Beedi and Cigar Workers Act by sub-contracting the beedi production work to contractors. While holding and trading of tobacco requires only an excise permit, it does not automatically demand the existence of an establishment. In other words, it is possible for anyone to merely have an excise permit and manufacture and market beedies without having any establishment at all.

So Mr. Kanan was of the opinion that before an excise permit is granted for anyone the central excise authorities should take a clearance from the labour department to the effect whether the incumbent has an establishment or not and if so whether the establishment is covered by the Beedi and Cigar Workers Act of 1966.

This is a matter of co-ordination between the Central Excise Authority and the Ministry of Labour which requires some very definite thinking.

(iii) The women workers of the beedi industry are not members of any trade union, according to Mr. Kannan, because they have not been identified or because their husbands are already members of the union. When we pointed out the fact that many women workers are either destitute or with husbands not necessarily employed in the beedi industry, he was of the opinion his union would be willing to enroll these women in the union if they came forward on their own. It was apparent that his union had never involved itself with the problems of the women workers.

(iv) The trade union leader gave examples of self-mortgaging by male workers in this. The worker, for obtaining loan from his employer, pledges to work for him at half the wage. He has to work for the employer in this way till he repays the full loan. The only way that a worker can repay the loan is by borrowing from another employer and thus the self-mortgaging continues.

Finally, on being asked about the activities of his union, Mr. Kannan said that the union was involved in suggesting amendments to the Beedi and Cigar Workers Act of 1966 to Parliament, fighting for the compensation of workers when the cases come to their notice, etc.

Beedi workers' dispensary: The beedi workers' dispensary is situated 4 kms. off Vellore town. We had a discussion with Medical Officer there regarding extension of medical facilities to women out-workers.

Initially, the Medical Officer was of the opinion that women workers were entitled for medical benefits as their husbands would have been identified by the trade unions. However, when we pointed out that many women are by themselves beedi workers and not their husbands, the Medical Officer pleaded his helplessness in such a situation. As per rules the branch officer of the beedi establishment is supposed to identify the beedi workers. This is not being done presently for obvious reasons and hence the trade unions have taken upon themselves the task of identifying the beedi workers who are members of their unions.

As pointed out previously, the trade unions do not recognize women beedi workers, and as such they have no identification cards. Also, the Medical Officer was not in a position to treat any patient without the identification cards.

He was of the opinion that if the women out-workers could be identified by the District Labour Officer in consultation with the Regional Welfare Commissioner at Hyderabad, they could be extended medical facilities.

District Labour Officer: The District Labour Officer and the inspector expressed their inability to help the out-workers because of the inherent lacunae in the Beedi and Cigar Workers Act, 1966.

First, they do not have the means of identifying the out-workers because of their sheet numbers, absence of any records with establishments etc. In the event of any establishment being prosecuted for any violation of the Act, the establishment either denied the charges or paid a meagre fine. Therefore, the Labour Officer pointed out that there was no way by which they could enforce the Act.

Secondly, the Act demands that any factory worker be given a service book. There is blatant violation of this rule in every establishment. When workers who have been employed by the factory for years have not been provided service books, the question of providing a service book to an out-worker is out of the question.

During an inspection, if an inspector asks the worker whether he has a service book, the workers are found saying that they did have this, although actually this was not so. The workers are so much under the control of the factory owner that they would rather vouch for the existence of the non-existent service book than deny it and lose their jobs. Should a worker have to give proof against their employer, there was every chance of his life (and his dependents' lives) being in danger.

Finally, the Labour Officer expressed his helplessness in identifying the women out-workers for the purpose of medical benefits as he has no authority to do so and legally he was not in a position to stand by it.

The Commissioner of Labour, Madras, pointed out about certain inherent difficulties in enforcement of labour laws effectively in the state. First and foremost, he mentioned that his department is heavily understaffed and thus unable to function satisfactorily. Secondly, in addition to the inspection regarding enactments, field inspectors had the additional burden of enforcing the Weights and Measures Act in establishments. This caused divided attention bestowed on their work which made administration of the several Acts ineffective.

The Commissioner also pointed out about a study conducted by a former Commissioner of Labour on the conditions of women workers in the beedi industry. This report is yet to receive the attention of the government.

The staff of the Tamil Nadu Institute of Labour Studies appeared totally ignorant of the conditions of labour in the unorganized sector in Tamil Nadu in general and in the beedi industry in particular. Since training of labour department staff has been their major concern, they were not able to devote any attention to research. As such they were quite receptive to our experiences in Vellore and looked forward to conducting research in labour-related problems provided the state government permitted them to do so.

To sum up our survey of the various beedi pockets in Vellore, our discussions with women out-workers, trade union leaders and other officials related to the industry revealed the following issues:

- (i) the weak bargaining position of the workers in general and women home workers in particular involved in the various stages of production of beedi;
- (ii) non-recognition of women as an important segment of the labour force contributing substantially to production by both the employer and the trade union organisation;
- (iii) total lack of organisation of any kind among the women workers to fight for/protect their interests;
- (iv) total dependence of the workers on the industry in view of the fact that there are no alternative sources of employment;
- (v) incidence of chronic illiteracy among workers;
- (vi) high incidence of alcohol abuse by the men thereby adding greater misery to the women workers;
- (vii) total apathy of the people who matter towards recognising their problems or coming forward to help them in any way; and
- (viii) incomprehensiveness of the Beedi and Cigar Workers (Employment Conditions) Act, 1966 to have any impact on the welfare of the workers of the beedi industry.

Given the distressing situation they are in, there is no single solution to the range of problems they face either as out-workers or as individuals. Certainly, disbursement of loans on a selective basis is no answer to their problems. What is required is helping them to help themselves. The first logical step in this process is to facilitate an awareness in the commonalty of their problems and in arranging a forum for the same.

It was precisely this thinking that led us to conduct an Action Programme for the women workers of the beedi industry in Vellore.

PART II: ACTION PROGRAMME

Selection of participants The preliminary survey outlined in the first part to familiarise ourselves with the area and working conditions of women workers in the beedi industry. After the survey we once again went to the areas to propose our intention of holding an Action Programme. The areas visited were Saidapet, Chowk Maidan, Virudhampatti and Satvanchari. In each area we called for a group meeting of the women workers in which we explained to them the purpose of conducting an Action Programme.

The immediate impression that the women workers had about us was that we had come from Delhi to give them something in the form of either loans or employment. However we made it clear that we had come there not to offer them any special assistance but rather to bring the women workers from different areas of Vellore together to reflect on their problems collectively. We also informed them that we would pay them the minimum wages for five days to compensate for their absence from work. This included:

- (a) from different sub-occupations in the beedi industry such as cutting, rolling, labelling, folding etc;
- (b) willingness to participate for all the five days;
- (c) able to vocalise community problems; somewhat educated;
- (d) in the age group of 18-50.

We selected a total of 44 participants. Their level of education was so low that only 10 had some formal education and a few others were able to read and write.

We visited the selected women again on the eve of the programme which was to be held from March 18-22 to remind them. We nominated one worker in each area to take the responsibility of bringing the other workers to the venue of the programme and paid her the bus fare for the group.

At this juncture in one predominantly Muslim locality the women expressed reservations about their participation. The local contractor had spread a rumour to the effect that those women who were going to the programme would be converted to Christianity and would also be made to eat pork. Our

lady colleague dispelled their fears by stressing that there was no substance in the rumour and nothing could be done against their will. And, in another locality, the workers expressed the fear that the contractor may not re-employ them after an absence of five days. We suggested to them that it would be better if they informed the contractor about their absence in advance. In any case they were left to make their own choice.

The venue for the programme was a large marriage hall located in the heart of Vellore town away from beedi pockets. It was easily accessible by local transport.

The pedagogical process

The programme started with 100 per cent participation. The events of the programme encompassed: problem identification, sources of problems, need for collective action, features of an organisation, dynamics of collective action, issue of leadership, interface and action plan.

(i) Problem Identification: The participants were subdivided into five groups, each consisting of women from different localities and from all sub-occupations. The task before them was to reflect on their problems. It was purely a brain-storming session without any structure provided to them. We made sure that every group had at least two educated women so that they could list problems posed by all group members on flip charts.

As soon as the small group work was complete, participants assembled together. One representative from each group presented her group deliberations to the larger community. These presentations were followed by discussions in which participants were invited to give their comments based on their experiences.

From the discussions that followed a number of common problems emerged which would be classified broadly as under:

Employment problems

- (a) Non-implementation of revised minimum wages.
- (b) Improper disbursement of wages.
- (c) Abysmally low wages for labelling.
- (d) Inadequate supply of raw materials.
- (e) Purchase of gum and yarn, for labelling by themselves.
- (f) Improper counting of beedies.
- (g) High wage cuts for shortage of beedies.
- (h) Irregularity of employment and illegal lay-offs.
- (i) Seasonality of work.

Health problems

- (a) High incidence of TB, asthma, isophelia, nervous disorders etc.
- (b) No access to beedi workers' Dispensary for women workers.
- (c) Improper medical attention in government hospitals.

Socio-economic problems

- (a) Dowry
- (b) Alcoholism and gambling among males
- (c) Destitution.
- (d) Child labour.
- (e) Pledging of children for loans.
- (f) Problems of underemployment of educated youth in beedi industry.
- (g) High incidence of indebtedness.
- (h) Exorbitant rates of interest on loans (40 per cent per month).
- (i) No alternative sources of employment and income.

Government-related problems

- (a) Exploitation of women by panchayat members regarding allotment of land, etc.
- (b) Bungling in fair price shops.
- (c) Dissatisfactory functioning of mid-day meal and nutrition schemes.
- (d) Non-existence of night schools for children.
- (e) No facilities for adult education.
- (f) No co-operative society for women.

A close look at these problems indicates a strong similarity with the finding of the field survey. During the discussions the participants came to understand that their individual problems were not unique to themselves but were faced by others too.

To heighten participants' critical awareness of their problems we intervened to focus on two statements which they had made during their presentation. For instance, they had said that "For generations together we have been working in the beedi industry, yet we are not happy." Another statement was "Howsoever good work we do, we do not seem to be reaching anywhere." We restated these statements so that participants could reflect upon why they began to examine these problems only now and not earlier.

From what one older worker pointed out, it was apparent that they were becoming aware of the changes in the relations of production in the beedi industry and related these changes to the persistence of their weak bargaining position vis-a-vis employer. She further explained that during the 50s, the production of beedi was characterised by a feudal relationship between the

employer and the worker. There was no strict check on the amount of raw material supplied to the worker. Whatever number of beedis he or she brought to the employer was taken back by the latter and wages paid accordingly. Wage rate was indeed low but the workers had no complaint about the working of the system despite apparently low wages.

In 1959, workers went on strike and a wage hike was demanded from the existing Rs. 1.50 to a new Rs. 1.75. The strike was a success in that the employers agreed for the hike in wages but not before compelling the workers to agree to a system of checking the quantum of raw materials supplied to them and specifying a predetermined number of beedies rolled for the same. This began the downward slide in the bargaining power of the workers. Now they were compelled to produce a certain quantity of beedies specified by the employer or contractor for a given quantity of raw materials. Any shortage, either due to defective leaves or lack of tobacco for filling etc., meant a wage cut because the workers alone were held responsible for this.

Furthermore, with the legislation of the Beedi and Cigar Workers Act, 1966, several large factories wound up and a new type of production pattern in beedi manufacture set in with the ascent of the middle man or contractors. The contractor collected the raw material in large quantities from the employer and in turn distributed the raw material in smaller quantities to the out-workers for them to return the same as rolled beedies. The rolled beedies are given to another set of workers for labelling.

The contractors by and large supply less raw material and fix a target for the number of beedies to be rolled. Thus, either due to defective leaves or shortage of tobacco for filling or due to both, the workers generally fall short of the target for which they face a wage cut. Added to this is the plethora of devious means the contractor adopts while counting the beedies, giving beedi for labelling, etc. All these mean wage cuts for workers or money gain for the contractor. The contractor also gets a commission from the employer for arranging his requirement of rolled and labelled beedies. Thus, from the commission of employers and wage cuts of workers, the contractor is doubly assured of monetary gain. While employers can afford the commission they pay to the contractors, the workers on the other hand suffer enormously. If they protest they stand to lose their jobs especially since (1) many others are in the queue; (2) there are no alternative employment opportunities; and (3) they are unorganized.

The discussion provided an opportunity for older women workers to communicate their experiences of having worked both under the old informal system and under the clutches of the contractor. As differences between these were emerging clearly for them they felt at this juncture to think in terms of the roots for their weak bargaining position.

In the process of analysis the participants realised that employers (contractor/branch manager/factory owner) from whom they had been expecting fair wages, medical facilities, housing compensation etc., have been, on the contrary, exploiting them. They then turned their attention to government agencies and politicians believing that they would come to their rescue. But once again their experience with these agencies and politicians was not encouraging enough to depend on them. They now found themselves in a situation of extreme helplessness where they thought that we, as organizers of the programme, could be relied upon for assistance. For instance they said:

- (a) "We are happy that we have given you all our problems. We feel lighter for having unburdened ourselves."
- (b) "Nobody has come forward thus far to ask us about our problems. We are pleased that you have given us a hearing. This has given us confidence."
- (c) "We will still be more pleased if you could get us a raise in our wages."
- (d) "We feel that you would do something good to us."

These statements are indicative of their dependency. They transferred their dependency from the employer to the government and from the government to us. To counter such dependency we made it very clear to them that we cannot do much for them other than being with them. At this stage they became hostile towards us demanding an explanation as to why we came there at all if we could do nothing for them. In return we clarified our expectations once again by saying: "We are here to get you together to deliberate on your problems collectively." They continued with their hostile attitude mentioning that hearing us say that we cannot do much for them makes them feel more disturbed and distressed.

The situation was dramatic: on the one hand they expressed their disbelief in external agencies which promised them the moon and did not even give them a morsel while, on the other, we were reiterating our position of our inability to do much for them and yet they were unwilling to believe us.

At this juncture, to help them come to terms with reality we posed the question that if they were to depend on us for solving their problems what would they do after we go away? They bounced back to say:

- (a) "Even if you go away we have the confidence that you are with us."
- (b) "We are certain that the 40 of us can bring together 4000 ladies if you want us to do. We will unite and fight for our rights."

The last statement reflected their dependence once again on us and to counter it we replied that the issue now was not what we wanted but rather what they desired.

They said that it was their desire to organize themselves for their own betterment. We hastened to add that it was not so easy to unite and stay together given the existing situation of exploitation. They might want to probe into sources of exploitation before coming to think of unity. We consciously made this suggestion because we perceived that their talk of unity was more a reaction to our countering their dependency on us than a well reasoned answer to their situation.

(ii) Sources of problems: The discussions on the sources of the problems were done in smaller groups as before. From the discussions that followed in the larger group four major sources were identified:

- (a) establishment, politicians and government agencies;
- (b) scarcity of alternative sources of employment;
- (c) excessive supply of labour and limited employment opportunities in the beedi industry and hence the weak bargaining position of the workers in general and women workers in particular; and
- (d) lack of unity among the workers.

These could be further grouped into external and internal sources. The external sources were the establishment, politicians, government agencies, multitude of workers and lack of alternative sources of employment over which they have no control. The internal sources were their weak bargaining position and lack of unity. Once they recognised the internal sources, they realised that they too were a part of their problems over which they could exercise some control.

(iii) Need for collective action: The issue of unity therefore came up once again but differently. The difference was that they were fully conscious of the difficulties involved in organising themselves and taking effective action. They believed that any attempt on their part to come together would invite the wrath of their employers. They feared that they would lose their jobs and an attempt to organize themselves would be scuttled and crushed. It was perfectly within the reach of employers to disrupt their activities and take revenge against them because even the police were in league with the employers. Given this situation, they felt they were at the bottom of the sea from where they had no escape. Even the idea of unionising themselves did not appear to be a viable alternative.

Having sensed their acute helplessness we enquired whether they could think of some other approach to their problems in case organisation was not a viable method. They reflected for a while and came up with the notion that they perceive the need for organisation but under the present circumstances it had a limited role to play in their lives.

Next, we asked them to list the issues which their organisation could take up in its limited role. This they did in smaller groups. A number of issues they mentioned were that their organisation should:

- (a) think in terms of alternative occupations in order to improve their economic position;
- (b) seek the aid of the government in case they went on strike against employers;
- (c) demand from the government fair-price shops, medical facilities, night schools for children, housing and aid for the destitute;
- (d) seek aid from the government so that they can run a women's co-operative;
- (e) arrange for loans with low rates of interest for the purchase of raw materials;
- (f) procure raw materials;
- (g) demand government specified wages from the employer;
- (h) demand for wages during weekly holidays;
- (i) ask for recording shortages in the number of beedies and the proportionate wage cuts in the pass books;
- (j) fight against social evils such as dowry, alcohol, abuse, wife-beating, etc; and
- (k) remain united irrespective of caste, creed or colour of its members.

In the course of the discussion we brought to their notice the large number of issues they had listed and thus helped them perceive how wide the scope of organisational activities could be though they had initially attributed a very limited role to the organisation.

At the same time we noticed that most of the issues they had mentioned were basically demands to be met once the organisation was perceived as something separate from themselves. This meant transference of their dependency from us onto the organisation.

In order to help them see how they were hooked to an abstract concept, we asked them whether there could be an organisation without people. This question further made them reflect on the issue of membership and their participation in organisational activities. It gradually dawned on them that they had been rather unwilling to take on individual responsibility and sought organisation as a medium of collective action.

By now it was apparent that participants had undergone a definite change in their thinking. They realised that they could no longer rely on external agencies for their betterment and perceived the necessity of collective action by themselves.

(iv) Features of organisation: As the next step, we discussed with them what they thought would be the salient features of an effective organisation. The features that emerged out of their discussion were members' responsibility,

finance, unity, equality, rules and regulations and leadership.

The implications of these features were debated further in detail.

(v) Dynamics of collective action: By now the discussions had spread over the issue of unity in the context of forming an effective organisation by themselves for collective action. In order to illustrate the dynamics of collective action we conducted an exercise. The exercise focussed on experiencing gains of maintaining unity and losses due to conflict between individual and group goals.

For this, the exercise participants were divided into two groups. Each group was given a set of dummy arrows to play against each other in 10 rounds. A round consisted of playing any number of arrows by each group against the other. The numerical difference in the number of arrows played between the groups was paid for in terms of cash to the group which played a higher number of arrows. If the number of arrows played were equal, both the groups paid Re. 1 each to the trainer. On the other hand, if both the groups decided not to play arrows against each other the trainer had to pay Re. 1 to each group.

Each group had a leader. There were observers on both sides from whom two women were asked to act as spies by the trainer. The spies' task was to instigate the members of either group to play more number of arrows.

At rounds 3, 7 and 9 the leaders of both groups were given a chance to discuss among themselves a common strategy to be adopted in throwing of arrows at each other.

In the process of the exercise, the trust between the two groups gradually decreased and distrust was accentuated by the presence of spies who played a double game. Despite three meetings between leaders, prior to the beginning of the 4th, 8th and 10th rounds, a common strategy for gaining larger pay-offs generated only distrust. Leaders and their respective group members were keener to outwit each other rather than think in terms of a strategy for both groups to maximise gains from the trainer. At the end of 10 rounds, when the total loss and gain of both groups were calculated, it was found that trainers had gained the maximum.

This was followed by a detailed analysis of the results. The important issue at hand was regarding the failure of the participants to maximise their pay-offs. Some of the reasons they furnished were:

- (a) "Each group was concerned about its own welfare rather than thinking about the welfare of total community. It led us to a rivalry between us, despite the option of not fighting and winning money from you."
- (c) "We were unconsciously willing to go to the extent of killing each other for somebody else's gain."
- (d) "We were simply not united."

(e) They further identified trainers with employers or contractors and spies with their henchmen. With this dawned in them their real-life situation. They now clearly saw how employers and their coterie could divide them and disrupt their unity. For them, unity now acquired a new meaning. It meant inter-personal and inter-group trust and thinking about the welfare of a wider community.

(vi) The issue of leadership: The participants saw the possibility that employers could have their henchmen among the workers to achieve their destructive ends in terms of creating distrust, buying up their leaders, creating a faction within them, etc. The whole discussion narrowed down to the issue of leadership. They discussed whether a leader should be someone from amongst them or be an outsider. Some were in favour of an outsider as leader because she could be easily punished and thrown out if she was bought by an employer. However, the rest of the participants hastened to counter this statement by arguing that they could definitely have more faith in their own persons as a leader than in an outsider. They saw the necessity of electing a leader who is educated, capable, trustful, honest, sympathetic and able to treat everyone as equal.

To overview, we have thus far outlined the processes involved in helping the participants to:

- (a) think critically about their problems and their sources;
- (b) realise the futility of their dependency on external agencies for solving their problems;
- (c) perceive the strength of collective action as compared to individual action;
- (d) visualise the features of a women's organisation;
- (e) experience the dynamics of conflict and collaboration in collective action;
- (f) understand the merits of having a leader from among themselves;
- (g) spell out the qualities of a leader.

In other words, from a situation of extreme helplessness, the participants gradually moved towards having self-confidence and belief in the strength of collective action.

(vii) Interface: This was the time when the participants were ready to have an interface with officials and experts to enquire about their legal rights with regard to inheritance, payment of wages, worker's compensation, women's rights, rights with regard to marital discord, loan facilities, welfare measures by the government, etc.

We therefore invited a leading advocate who was a former member of the district legal aid committee, Industrial Development Officer of the lead bank in the district, namely Indian Bank, District Social Welfare Officer, and the Labour Officer and the Inspector of Labour to address the participants.

The Inspector of Labour however informed us about his inability to address the participants as he felt that he would not be in a position to answer their questions. Thus, the department of labour at Vellore opted out of the interface.

We had also made a request to the Medical Officer, Beedi Workers' Dispensary (Ministry of Labour), Vellore, to address the participants about the extension of medical facilities to them. He felt, however, that since the women workers have not at all been identified for this as beneficiaries and since they are not entitled to any medical benefits, it would not serve any purpose talking to them.

The interface began with the talk of the Industrial Development Officer, Indian Bank. He focussed on the following issues:

- (a) Bank's lending schemes for individuals and organized co-operatives with or without guarantees;
- (b) The low rates of interest being charged compared to the exorbitant rates of interest charged by private moneylenders;
- (c) Special schemes for educated and unemployed youth, both men and women;
- (d) Loan schemes under the Prime Minister's 20-Point Programme;
- (e) Schemes under Tamil Nadu Economic Development Corporation for Backward Classes; and
- (f) The advantages of borrowing loans from the bank on a co-operative basis.

The officer spoke at length about the bank having lent the money to individual beedi workers in Guddiyatam and handloom weavers of Ranipet, Tamil Nadu.

The participants were generally receptive to the talk and raised a number of pertinent questions. However, the reaction of some participants were dramatic; one of them for instance asked the officer the following question:

“We people who live a few miles from your bank have never heard of your schemes till now whereas your bank seems to be helping workers like us elsewhere and in other places. How come your bank, situated so close and having been established years ago, has never cared for us? Did it have to take someone from Delhi to make you come and talk to us? What have you been doing all these years? These friends have come all the way from New Delhi to make you pay us a visit?”

The second session in the interface was with an advocate who was invited to speak to the participants on issues relating to women's legal rights. The talk focussed on the following:

- (i) The district legal aid committee and its functions especially towards lending legal assistance to the poor.
- (ii) Different Acts, according to Hindu and Muslim law which have been introduced for the protection of women and their implications for women's rights.

(iii) Acts introduced by Parliament for the protection of workers such as the Minimum Wages Act, Workmen's Compensation Act.

His address was accompanied by illustrative examples drawn from the everyday experience of the participants. At the same time he also stressed the point that group action would strengthen their case rather than sporadic individual attempts for adequate legal assistance. This session was totally appreciated by the participants.

The last session in the interface consisted of an address by the District Social Welfare Officer. She appeared to be very eager to know and much concerned about the plight of women beedi workers especially since she had not been exposed to them so far. Her detailed talk to the participants focussed on the following:

- (a) Schemes for women including the very poor and destitute towards alternative sources of employment.
- (b) Educational aids for females with various levels of formal schooling.
- (c) Schemes for starting women's co-operatives for a variety of items.
- (d) Loans for group co-operatives.
- (e) Training schemes in tailoring, typing, shorthand etc.
- (f) Special schemes under the Prime Minister's 20-Point Programme.
- (g) The variety of assistance that she could extend in her official capacity.

The District Social Welfare Officer stressed on the importance of organized group action and offered her full involvement in their formation of co-operatives for the production of various items including beedies. In this context she also mentioned about the existence of the Tamil Nadu Women Economic Industrial Development Corporation which also arranges for the marketing of the products through the corporation.

Action Plan: To plan collective and concrete action, participants from different areas of Vellore thought of having immediate meetings in their localities inviting members of their community to form an organisation. They would then collect a representative from each area. These representatives in turn would meet and discuss what issues to take up first. They believed that they would consider in the beginning now-controversial issues so that they do not invite the wrath of the employer. Some of these issues are:

- (i) imparting education to illiterate women;
- (ii) fighting social evils like dowry and drunkenness; and
- (iii) approaching District Social Welfare Officer to seek assistance to form women's cooperatives for alternative sources of income.

The representatives would meet once a month to review the progress of their collective action.

Re-orientation Camp at Halusai, District Hooghly

D.C. Sarkar & Bhubaneswar Chatterjee

Object

A re-orientation camp was held at Halusai in Polba P.S. in Hooghly district for three days from May 18 to 20, 1978. The objective of the camp was to highlight the fact that various developmental efforts in the rural areas had not actually reached the large number of sharecroppers and landless labour. The government legislation regarding land holdings, introduction of modern technologies in agriculture and utilisation of loans and fertilizers, and improved varieties of seeds, had not produced the expected results. The condition of the vast majority of the rural poor remained almost the same during the last 30 years. Of the various explanations for this state of affairs, one thing that seemed to underlie the entire situation and was all-pervasive was the lack of proper motivation and organized effort on the part of sharecroppers and landless labour to utilize the facilities provided by the governmental and non-governmental agencies. It was considered desirable that officers engaged in land reforms work in the field should have direct interaction with the beneficiaries for whom they are expected to work in a camp where officers and a group of selected sharecroppers and landless labourers would stay together and discuss the common problems of the rural people. The officers could thus appreciate the actual difficulties that the intended beneficiaries had. With a proper understanding of each other's point of view it could be easier for the officers to carry out the programmes specially catering to the needs of the rural poor. This could also enable the potential beneficiaries to realise what they could get under the law and various other schemes formulated by the government for their benefits.

Camp site

The camp site was selected in a typically rural environment. There was no electricity. There was scarcity of drinking water. There was no spacious accommodation in the camp. We intended to live as the rural labour lived and to share their experiences of daily existence. That is why we selected a backward area and a poor village for holding the camp far away from the block headquarters and Thana office.

Participants

Thirty sharecroppers and landless agricultural labour and 13 officials engaged in land reforms work in the field, were selected for participation in the camp. One Special Revenue Officer, Grade II, seven Kanungos, Grade

I of Settlement Department and two Junior Land Reforms Officers, two Circle Inspectors of the Land Reforms Wing and one Kanungo of the Tribal Welfare Department were selected by the Collector and the Settlement Officer for participation in the camp. The 30 non-official participants came from 24 villages of Polba and neighbouring thanas. They were selected by a committee consisting of the local Block Development Officer, Junior Land Reforms Officer and Special Officer, Tribal Welfare Department, and the Settlement Officer. Most of them were bargadars or landless labour. Particulars regarding their occupation, income, etc. are furnished in Annexure I.

On the evening of May 17 all the participants reported at the camp. Arrangements for their food and lodging were made free of charge. The non-official participants were divided into four groups consisting of 7/8 persons. The official participants were also divided into groups to help them in the deliberations.

On the morning of May 18th, the camp started functioning. There was no formal inauguration. The participants introduced themselves:

1. Shri Ramdhan Tudu was a tribal bargadar, of village Patna Bhairabpur. During the current Settlement Operation he recorded his name as a bargadar. His claim was challenged by the landowners. Ramdhan cultivated the lands which were formerly cultivated by his uncle, Sambhu Tudu. Ramdhan, who lost both his parents when he was a mere child, was brought up by his uncle Sambhu Tudu who had no offspring of his own. Sambhu Tudu died in 1966 and his land was cultivated by Ramdhan Tudu. In 1975 the landowners obstructed him from going to the fields. Ramdhan approached the Thana several times but no police came to his help. The D.I.B., Hooghly, sent an adverse report against Ramdhan. The landowners brought pressure on him by instituting a number of criminal cases. The owner cultivators apprehended trouble from Shri Tudu and he was arrested under M.I.S.A. Other cases against him were still pending in the High Court and in the lower Courts. Ramdhan and his family members were subjected to inhuman torture. But Ramdhan Tudu still survived and continued to cultivate the land. The M.I.S.A. order against him was later revoked in November 1975 and Ramdhan Tudu came out victorious.
2. Shri Hahul Hembram stated that he was cultivating as bargadar the land of one Hyder Ali who held about 300 acres of land. Shri Hyder Ali somehow managed to bring injunction orders from the court and the process of recording barga rights in his land as well as vesting the surplus land were stayed by the court till date.
3. Shri Doman Mundi recorded his name as a bargadar. But the owner with the help of the police threatened him. They instituted a suit in the Civil

Court against Doman. He had to fight out his case alone and no help from the government was rendered.

4. Shri Lakshman Pakre recorded his name as a bargadar. The result was that four criminal cases were instituted against him by the landlords and the cases were still pending.
5. Shri Shibu Soren started weeping when he narrated his painful tale of how he was beaten by the landlords for recording his name as a bargadar and for not signing a paper denying his barga claim. The High Court issued an injunction restraining him from cultivating the plots in which Shri Soren recorded his barga rights. The other participants also narrated their experiences which were almost the same. Many of them had experienced poverty at its worst.

Minister's address

Shri Benoy Krishna Choudhury, Minister-in-charge, Land Utilisation and Reforms, Land Revenue Department, addressed the gathering. He stated that implementation of land reforms was a very difficult task and complicated too. But as Minister he wanted to go into the depth of the problems and felt that frank discussion was necessary with the beneficiaries before taking any important step. It was a common habit to shift responsibility to others and ascribe the reasons of failure to others. But actually we should identify the concrete difficulties in implementing the land reforms work in a camp like this. The Revenue Officers could see their own faces in the mirror and they could know how the people for whom they worked, would react to them. An atmosphere had to be created in which they could speak freely. In a re-orientation camp, in which all the poor people who were mentally shaken are present, there would be scope for a change of outlook of the officers engaged in land reforms. The land reforms did not mean improvement of the condition of the sharecroppers or the agricultural labourers only. Land reforms aimed at total development of the rural people. If there was sincerity and a strong will there would be no difficulty in recording the names of the bargadars because no one could conceal the truth. The officers should not waste time in discussing intricate interpretations of laws but they should admit the facts revealed during local enquiry.

The Minister was visibly moved when some of the participants broke into tears; but he advised them not to weep but to organize themselves to strengthen their positions. Mere legislation could not do any good until they were united and free from economic burdens. History did not create man, man created history. One of the participants seemed to have lost faith in himself when he stated that he could not understand whether he was a man or a beast while he was being kicked by the landlord from one place to another. To restore his confidence the officers in the field would have to appreciate his feelings.

Methodology

The participants were divided into eight groups. Our first task was to understand and appreciate the problems of the rural poor. What were their problems and what were their experiences? There was certainly a struggle for existence but beyond that there was also a need for human dignity, self-confidence and ability to assert their basic rights. Unlike the conventional approach to teaching, no formal lecture was arranged. Our pedagogy of education was based on the assumption that people who experienced realities were in a better position to reflect upon their experience, to identify and diagnose the problem areas and to seek meaningful solutions. There was a free and open exchange of ideas and information among the participants. The participants worked in small groups and were asked to identify their own problems. They worked till the evening on the first day and could identify common problems as mentioned below:

Problem identification

1. Homestead lands: Labourers were allowed to erect small huts on the lands of the landowners. They were recorded as permissive possessors and the landowners could, at any time, evict them from their homestead lands. Secondly, as they got no permanent right in their homestead land, they remained in perpetual obligation to their landlords
2. Recording bargas: Many of the share-croppers could not get their names recorded as bargadar during the current Settlement Operation due to the following reasons:
 - (a) Economic pressure;
 - (b) Intimidation and threats;
 - (c) Social relationship between the landlords and the bargadars;
 - (d) Possibility of launching cases—criminal and civil—even in the High Court against the bargadars;
 - (e) Ignorance of the bargadars regarding plot number, khatian number etc.
3. Getting possession of government vested land allotted to landless labourers: Lands for which pattas were given, were not clearly demarcated; possession of such plots of land in many cases still remained with the ex-intermediaries and no possession was taken.
4. Problems of the Scheduled Tribes.
 - (a) Untouchability still persisted in the villages.
 - (b) There was no road communication in the tribal villages.
 - (c) To get drinking water, tribal labourers had to go to the house of the landlord. A tubewell became an instrument of oppression.

- (d) Village schools were usually run by teachers belonging to the higher castes. They did not, it is alleged, take care of the tribal boys. The relationship between the landlords and bargadars was reflected even in the classroom. They demanded a separate education system for themselves.
 - (e) The lands of the tribal people were scattered in different places and so improved methods of cultivation could not be used.
 - (f) A group of jotedars used to open country liquor shops near the paddy fields. The tribal labourers while coming back home after the day's labour were tempted to take glasses of liquor, very injurious to health, at a very low price. The result was that many of the tribal labourers after the age of 35, became physically invalid.
5. Minimum wages: As there was no unity among the agricultural labourers and as the laws regarding minimum wages were not effective, the agricultural labourers could not get minimum wages.
 6. Mortgaged land: Before commencement of the Settlement Operations in the villages, the village moneylenders used to take mortgages of the land of the poor in lieu of the loans by executing sale deeds. For the time being they took possession of the land also and during Settlement Operations, got their names recorded as owners and possessors of those lands.
 7. Employment and under-employment: The rural people remained unemployed for about five months in a year. There was no cottage industry or other sources of income to provide them two meals a day.

This was a summary account of the problems raised and issues discussed in the groups on the first day.

During discussion in groups, the participants felt that if the government has a sincere intention and if the people took an interest, there would have been no difficulties in implementing land reforms.

The preliminary decisions taken by different groups on the second day of training may be summarised as follows:

- (1) There is a lot of work to be done for rural development. But before anything else, the rural poor needed sufficient food, sufficient drinking water and education.
- (2) What was needed was not education in the conventional sense, but knowledge about agriculture and modern cultivation, information about land laws and the land utilisation system. It should be problem-based education.
- (3) Land reforms were the primary need. Agricultural reforms were of secondary importance. Unless and until the landless agriculture labour

gets a piece of land of his own, the slogans for improvement of cultivation would be meaningless to the rural people.

- (4) The wage rate of the agriculture labour should be improved. An Act in this respect should strictly be enforced and agriculture labour should be united.
- (5) Village industries like the manufacture of baskets, chatai, mats etc. from palm leaves should be encouraged.

During discussions, the participants raised the following problems:

- (1) The jotedars in many cases took shelter in the courts of law. How could this be solved?
- (2) The jotedars resorted to harassment of the bhagchasis by instituting false cases on multifarious grounds. What should be done about this?
- (3) The bargadars were still afraid of the jotedars; they were not coming forward to get their names recorded. What could be done about them?

The participants again discussed the issues in groups. The following was the outcome of the discussion:

- (1) There should be a judiciary and any aggrieved person should have the right of getting the protection of the court of law. But the laws with which the judiciary dealt out were actually the creation of legislature. Government should see that the laws were enacted for the actual benefit of the poorer sections and there were no loopholes in legislation. The legislators should be compelled to listen to the needs of the rural poor.
- (2) The jotedars who intended to harass the bargadars should be boycotted and the agriculture labourers should stand united against them.

Secondly, if the charges brought by them against the bargadars proved false, they should be penalised and be compelled to pay compensation.

If any bargadars were being harassed in criminal and civil courts, they should be assisted by the government in every way during trial

All bhagchasis cases and cases involving bargadars should be decided by a tribunal in the field and no appeals should lie in the higher courts.

- (3) The sharecroppers should organize themselves. They should be conscious about their rights. They should fight, if necessary. Land was a gift of nature.

In getting possession of the land cultivated by him, a bargadar should not be considered to have committed any offence in the eye of God.

It was suggested that if a special drive for barga recording was made by setting up camps in areas inhabited by sharecroppers and agricultural labourers belonging to backward classes (Bouripara, Bagdipara, Santhalpara in the village), the bargadars who were afraid of recording their names, might come forward for registration.

On the closing day the non-official participants were asked to state what they intended to do after going back to their respective villages. They were unanimous on the following action plans:

- (1) They would discuss with their co-villagers about the information received and the issues raised in the camp.
- (2) They would try to make the villagers conscious about their own rights.
- (3) They would organize village people and would try to solve their problems by united efforts.
- (4) They would ask the bargadars who had not yet recorded their names, to get their names registered.
- (5) They would collect information about the ceiling surplus lands held by the jotedars in benam and would furnish that information to the authorities, so that surplus lands could be distributed among the landless labourers.

Conclusion

The re-orientation camp at Halusai was a grand success. The participants took a keen interest. One of the basic objectives of this training programme was to help the elected rural labourers to take up educative roles in order to arouse and expand the level of consciousness of the rural poor. Factual information about the rights of landless labourers and bargadars was given to the trainees to help them form a nucleus for spreading the information in the rural areas.

We hoped that we could set in motion the organizing process in Polba P.S.

Follow-up action

During discussions in the re-orientation camp at Halusai it came to our notice that many of the bargadars of the locality were afraid of their landlords and could not get their names recorded during the Settlement Operations in the year 1974-75. Some of the participants held that if a Special Camp could be organized in the area, the bargadars who did not record their names earlier might, under the changed circumstances and after this Training Camp, come forward and register their names.

As such, a special joint camp was organized in Mouza Patnabhairabpur, P.S. Polba on 8th and 9th June, 1978. The Settlement Officials, J.L.R.O. and Kanungo of the Tribal Welfare Department spent two days in the camp and conducted the operation. There was a wide publicity by beating of drums, by distribution of leaflets and by personal contact. The participants of Halusai fully helped in organising the peasants. About 200 bargadars mostly belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, came in groups and got their names recorded. During the two days of the camp, the landlords were given time for filing objections, if any. About 35 objection petitions were filed. They

were disposed of on the spot and the names of 191 bargadars were recorded in Patnabhairabpur Mouza.

Being encouraged with the results we decided to hold special camps for barga recording in other parts of the district also in the near future.

Participants in re-orientation camp at Halusai

Non-Official		Official
1. Ramdhan Tudu	2. Ram Hamram	1. Prabir Kumar Chatterjee, C.I., Polba,
3. Konda Saran	4. Stinhir Adak	2. Nagendra Nath Choudhury, C.I., Pandua.
5. Panchanan Patra	6. Subal Patra	3. Bankim Hazra, J L R.O., Mogra.
7. Lakshman Pakre	8. Kalicharan Pakre	4. Naren Das, J.L.R.O., Pandua.
9. Nirapada Roy	10. Laso Murmu	5. Ranjit Kumar Dutta, Kgo. I, Tribal Welfare Dept.
11. Mangal Saren	12. Rahul Hembram	6. Prafulla Kumar Paul, S.R.O.-11.
13. Matilal Hansda	14. Naren Majhi	7. Anandamoy Banerjee. Kgo. I.
15. Doman Mandl	16. Shibu Saren	8. Hiranmoy Pandit, Kgo. I.
17. Sambhu Tudu	18. Baidya Nath Saran	9. Santosh Ranjan Das, Kgo. I.
19. Chandi Charan Hansda	20. Mangal Hembram	10. Jayanta Bose, Kgo. I.
21. Sagar Rhumij	22. Supriya Kora	11. Nazrul Islam, Kgo. I.
23. Basudeb She.	24. Subal Chandra Bag	12. Biolab Acharjee, Kgo. I.
25. Joydeb Ruldass	26. Sufal Ch. Pakirah	13. Kalikesh Mitre, Kgo. 11.
27. Guru Charan Hansda	28. Thakurdes Murmu.	

Tribal Youth Camps in Rajasthan

Prayag Mehta

It is now beyond doubt that the gap between the rich and the poor in developing countries, including India, has been increasing. The various development projects launched from time to time have not benefitted the poor, much less the rural poor. The rich and the powerful have succeeded in converting such development opportunities and infrastructural facilities to their advantage, thereby further increasing their power and wealth.

One of the main reasons for the poor not getting the benefits of development is lack of organisations of their own. We know from our experience in India that moneylenders, rich peasants, landlords, establishment controllers and officers singly and/or jointly manipulate the various situations, and deprive the poor of the fruits of developmental activities. The poor are not able to resist such an unjust situation because they are unorganized. This alarming situation prompted the ILO to come forward with the Convention 141 calling upon the member-countries to help the rural working people to get organized in order to effectively intervene in socio-economic processes and to reap the fruits of their labour.²

Education for organisation

The Government of India has ratified the ILO Convention. The Ministry of Labour and the Planning Commission have instituted forums to promote thinking and concrete actions in the direction of promoting effective organisations of the rural poor.³

Education plays a crucial role in helping the rural poor in getting organized. Lack of proper skills, traditional timidity and fear of failure, ignorance about social reality, protective laws and their rights contribute substantially to prevent them from organising themselves. The National Labour Institute has been engaged in organising rural labour education camps for the last few years.⁴ These camps are organized to help the rural poor develop necessary social awareness and to help them towards developing their organisations.

Camps in the tribal areas in Rajasthan

Like the rest of the rural society, the tribal people have also increasingly got pauperised. There has been substantial land alienation and increase in the number of landless agricultural, casual and forest labour among them.⁵ Indebtedness among the tribal people is well known. The fruits of development have eluded them as with other rural poor. The various tribal development schemes do not seem to have made much difference in their living and working conditions.

Rajasthan as a whole is a socio-economically backward state as compared to most of the rest of the country. Several districts and tehsils in Southern Rajasthan, such as Banswara, Dungarpur, Chittor and Udaipur, largely inhabited by tribals, have remained traditionally backward.⁶ These areas are historically known for their Bhil population. The stories of courage, chivalry, and sagacity of the Bhils are part of common folklore.⁷ Like the rest of the country, there has been a continuous land alienation and increasing landlessness and poverty among the Bhils also. It was decided to institute an adult education and leadership development programme in these areas to help train young tribals and other rural youth, thus enabling them to start a process of organising themselves. A series of three educational camps was held during August 1978 to June 1979. Each five-day camp was preceded by an intensive pre-camp survey in the respective areas.⁸

The first camp was held in July-August 1978 at Partapura in Garhi Tehsil of Banswara district. It was an erstwhile princely state which was merged into Rajasthan as a district. It is known for its Bhil population. With approximately 73 per cent tribal population, it is situated on the border of Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat with counterpart tribal populations in the bordering areas. Of late, there has been an increasing urban influence in these areas due to massive construction work under way for the Mahi Dam on the River Mahi. The camp at Garhi was attended by 44 participants, As seen in Table 1, it was a maximum group of participants with 21 Meenas and Bhils, 12 belonging to scheduled castes like Balai, Chamar and Harijans and 11 from upper castes.

The camp at Kotra was held in February 1979. This was also preceded by an extensive pre-camp survey of Kotra tehsil. It is almost entirely a tribal area. It has been traditionally known as katapani (exile) where government officials were transferred on punishment. Till recently, it used to be cut off from the rest of the state because of a lack of transport and communication. It is a hilly area with several small rivers and streams flowing particularly during the rainy season. The Kotra camp was attended by 54 participants, 52 of whom were Meenas and Bhils.

The camp in Partapgarh was held at Ambamata in June 1979. Partapgarh was also a small princely state. It is now a tehsil of Chittor district. Partapgarh is very close to Mandsaur in Madhya Pradesh. Due to the commercial crops of cotton and opium in this area and nearby in Madhya Pradesh, there has been quite a bit of urban influence. The Ambamata camp was attended by 48 participants of whom 41 belonged to scheduled tribes.⁹

The principal occupation of the tribals and other poor people in these areas is agriculture, supported by a secondary occupation of casual labour. There are two main crops — rabi and kharif — and the main products are maize, rice, black gram, wheat and jowar. At some places they also cultivate some cotton.

The areas are surrounded by forests with several kinds of forest products like wood (peepal, babul), mahuwa, tendu leaves (for beedi making), kattha, gum, honey and dholimusti (a root used for making tonics). According to the current information made available by the respective Block Development Officers, during the pre-camp surveys, there were some 168 primary schools, 28 middle schools and five high schools in Partapgarh tehsil of Chittor district; some 115 primary schools, 27 middle schools and 10 secondary/higher secondary schools in Garh tehsil of Banswara district and 72 primary, 12 middle and one secondary school in Kotra tehsil. During the field work, some members of panchayats (village councils) including some sarpanchs (chairmen, village councils) and the poor themselves gave moving and vivid descriptions of growing exploitation and destitution in those areas.¹⁰

Pre-camp surveys and selection of participants

Some 10-day pre-camp surveys were conducted in each of the areas prior to holding the camp. These were conducted with a view of collecting some relevant information about the areas, to develop a few meaningful case studies of destitution, indebtedness and such other problems. The field workers visited homes of the tribal poor, talked to them individually and in groups, talked to members of the village panchayats and the government officials in order to collect relevant information. They also contacted some known social workers in the respective areas and sought their co-operation for the camp. In the process of such visits and discussions, young people with at least some education and leadership qualities were spotted. One of the criteria used to identify leadership qualities and social commitment was whether the person talked only of his personal difficulties or also verbalised community and village problems. All the camp participants were selected during the pre-camp surveys. They were also briefed about the dates, venue, purpose and some other details about the camp.

Socio-economic background

As mentioned above, the pre-camp survey visits were used to select participants for the respective education camps. The effort was to select young and somewhat educated persons with a view to involving them in future educational, organisational and developmental activities. Table 1 gives some data concerning the socio-economic background of the participants.

As seen in the Table, some 54 per cent of the participants at the Kotra camp were between 18 and 20 years and 28 per cent between 21 and 25 years. The rest were all below 35 years. The picture was somewhat different at Banswara and Ambamata. However, there were also near about 70 per cent or more of the participants who were below 35 years of age. All the participants at Kotra were educated, most of them up to middle standard or above. The picture was

not the same for Banswara participants where nearly one-third were illiterate. One-fifth of the participants at Ambamata were also illiterate.

However, most of the participants at these two camps were also educated. Almost all the participants at Kotra belonged to scheduled tribes (Meenas and Bhils), whereas 85 per cent at Ambamata were tribals. Some 48 per cent of the Banswara participants were tribals and 27 per cent belonged to scheduled castes. Some upper caste participants were also present at the Banswara camp.

Economic conditions

Table 1 shows that most of the participants were marginal farmers possessing up to five-six acres of land. Interestingly, there was no landless participant at Kotra, whereas 16 per cent of the participants at Banswara and some 15 per cent at Ambamata were reported to be landless. The principal occupation of the participants, as given by them, was farming with casual labour as the second principal source of work. With meagre land in the hilly tribal areas in their possession, it was but obvious that the participants found it difficult to derive their livelihood solely from farming. Their reported yearly income was meagre. Most of them appeared to be earning up to Rs. 500 per year. Interestingly, some 60 per cent at Kotra and 57 per cent at Banswara reported their yearly income to be only up to Rs. 200. The income pattern appeared to be slightly different at Ambamata where many did not reveal their income and 31 per cent reported earning between Rs. 200 and Rs. 500 per year and 15 per cent Rs. 500 and above. As can be expected, in view of the landholding pattern and in view of their reported yearly income, there was indebtedness. The participants reported varying degrees of indebtedness. However, more than 50 per cent of the participants at Kotra and at Banswara were reported to be indebted up to Rs. 300. Some 35 per cent of the Kotra participants and some 23 per cent of Banswara participants reported indebtedness above Rs. 500, several of them reporting indebtedness above Rs. 1,000.

Viewed in the context of self-reports on individual and village problems as discussed below, the participants' socio-economic background was significant. They were young, somewhat educated without much substantial work, without enough income from land and under constant threat of indebtedness. The participants' background contributed substantially to the success of the camps. They facilitated the various group discussions and action planning by bringing their better experience and youthful enthusiasm to bear upon the various camp activities.

Objectives of education camps

The tribal youth camps, like the other rural labour education camps, were organized in pursuance of certain specific objectives. These objectives are

based on the basic assumption that education should help rural poor develop necessary skills, readiness and motivation for moving towards organising themselves in various ways and for various purposes. In a way, therefore, the programmes of such educator camps has been designed to cater to a specific socio-economic and human situation. The major objectives of the rural workers' education camp can be described as follows:

Table 1
Participants' Socio-Economic Background

Age (years)	Kotra (N=54) Number of cases	Banswara (N=44) Number of cases	Ambamata (N=48) Number of cases
18 to 20	29 (53.7)*	4 (9.1)	4 (8.3)
21 to 25	15 (27.8)	10 (22.7)	10 (20.8)
26 to 30	9 (16.7)	11 (25.0)	17 (35.4)
31 to 36	1 (1.9)	6 (13.6)	4 (8.3)
36 and above		13 (29.5)	13 (27.1)
Education			
Illiterate		15 (34.1)	10 (20.8)
Up to Primary	20 (37.0)	14 (31.8)	16 (33.3)
Up to Middle	26 (48.2)	10 (22.7)	15 (31.2)
Above Middle	8 (14.8)	5 (11.4)	7 (14.6)
Caste/Scheduled Tribe (Meenas and Bhils)	52 (96.5)	21 (47.7)	41 (85.4)
Scheduled Caste Chamar Harijan	2 (3.5)	12 (27.3)	4 (8.3)
Others	None	11 (25.0)	3 (6.2)
Landholding			
Pattern (in acres)			
Landless	Nil	7 (15.9)	7 (14.6)
Up to 2 acres	20 (37.0)	13 (29.5)	0 (0.0)
Above 2 up to 4 acres	22 (40.7)		9 (18.7)
Above 4 up to 6 acres	7 (12.1)	2 (4.5)	12 (25.0)
Above 6 up to 8 acres	5 (9.1)	2 (4.5)	5 (10.4)
Above 8 acres		6 (13.6)	6 (12.5)
Not known		7 (15.9)	
Reported yearly			

Income (in Rs.)			
Up to 100	17 (31.5)	13 (29.5)	1 (2.1)
101 to 200	16 (29.6)	12 (27.3)	4 (8.3)
201 to 500	5 (9.2)	4 (9.1)	15 (31.2)
501 and above	1 (1.9)	1 (6.8)	7 (14.6)
Not known/given	15 (27.8)		21 (45.8)
Reported Indebtedness	-	-	5 (10.4)
100	4 (7.4)	10 (21.7)	5 (10.4)
101 to 300	24 (44.4)	14 (31.8)	6 (12.5)
201 to Fr.0	7 (13.0)	3 (6.9)	3 (6.2)
art 10CI:	9 (16.7)	8 (18.2)	4 (8.3)
1001 and above	10 (18.5)	2 (4.5)	4 (ii.3)
No response		7 (15.9)	21 (45.1)

* *Figures in parentheses are percentages.*

Helping participants develop participatory skills: The education camps seek to help the participants develop readiness and skills for participation in various socio-economic and developmental activities¹¹. We have been talking for a long time about the need for mobilising participation of the people in developmental activities. However, besides certain structural changes, some specific participatory skills are also needed for bringing about such participation. The rural labour education camp as a whole is designed to give experience of participation to the trainees. All the camp inputs are designed to encourage them to participate more and more in the various activities of the camp. In other words, instead of talking about the need for participation, the camp inputs are designed in such a way that the participants develop skills of participating. This is, therefore, a continuing objective of all the inputs in the camp.¹²

From individual to collective problem diagnosis: As mentioned above, the camp is based on the assumption that such experience-based problem-solving-oriented training is likely to work as a means for promoting readiness for organising themselves. The rural poor are faced with all kinds of problems. There is, therefore, a tendency on their part to speak of their individual hardships. The camp inputs seek to encourage them to open up and verbalise their problems. First, they do this individually. Thereafter, they are encouraged to move from individual to collective problem diagnosis. The camp inputs seek to help them understand that their individual problems are not only theirs but part of a total community problem. In the process of this exercise, the participants develop:

- (i) skills in group work;
- (ii) readiness for identifying one's own problems with those of the community and understanding the community's problems as one's own;
- (iii) focus on community thinking, on communityness; and,
- (iv) skills in understanding and identifying important problems with a view to move towards problems-solving and action-planning.

Weakening dependency syndrome- increasing sense of efficacy: Our experience of working with the rural poor and several researches in this regard suggest a long drawn tendency of such people to depend on some significant others like government officials, moneylenders, landlords, etc.

Such a dependency syndrome can be described as one of the major impediments to organisation of the rural poor. Promotion and sustenance of organisations require initiative, resourcefulness, action orientation, desire for improvement in the quality of individual and community life, hope of success, understanding of their strengths and limitations, certain degree of personal and social awareness and above all the realisation that it is possible to develop effective organisations for solving their various problems and for obtaining better living and working conditions for themselves. The camp inputs seek to develop and strengthen such efficacious thoughts and action tendencies in the participants.¹³

Courage and skills for interfacing with officials: We know that the rural poor have to deal with a whole host of government officials, contractors, moneylenders, rich peasants/landlords and others, Their structural conditions and dependency syndrome prevent the poor from boldly facing their exploiters. They may also lack skills in presenting their viewpoint and in understanding the various techniques of manipulations which others use on them. The camp, therefore, seeks to bring about some kind of a thaw in their relationships with the officials. They are encouraged to question the officials, seek relevant information from them, give them feedbacks on the functioning of various development schemes and also to narrate their various grievances to the officials during the camp. Incidentally, the camp also provides an opportunity to the government officials to have first hand information about the grievances of rural poor. Hopefully, such an opportunity and interaction with the participants help the officials develop a more positive attitude towards the problems of the rural poor.

Training strategy and process

The training strategy was designed in pursuance of the educational objectives, as discussed above. The principal goal was to help the participants develop readiness, motivation, awareness and skills for developing and working in participatory organisations.¹⁴ As for the participants, as it was

the first such exposure, it was necessary to institute a process to draw them out of their timidity, shyness, and a sense of cynicism. The various inputs used in the three camps were designed keeping in mind this context and the overall objective. There were not many lectures. The visiting faculty worked only as facilitators of the training process, designed to draw out the best from the participants. Some inputs of the training process thus generated, are discussed below.

Briefing about the camp objectives

After the initial formalities were over, the facilitators briefly introduced the objectives of the training camp. Some of the participants were already partially aware of objectives because of the contact with the field workers during the pre-camp survey. In fact, some of them had helped in conducting interviews with grassroot people and the field survey. In the process, they got briefed about the purpose of the pre-camp survey as well as of the forthcoming camp. However, the contacts were reinforced and a brief presentation was made at the outset to take the participants into confidence about the general objectives of the camp. Their attention was particularly drawn to the growing poverty and the gap between the rich and the poor and the failure of development projects in this respect. The participants were also told about the nature of methodology that was to be followed in the camp. Thus, from the very beginning, efforts were initiated to encourage the educational camp.

Individual work on problems

After the initial briefing on the purposes of the camp, participants started working on verbalising their problems and difficulties. The literate participants were encouraged to think and record some pressing problems faced by them in their daily lives at home and at work. Some of the illiterate participants were paired with literate counterparts from the same village. Thus, the educated participants helped the rest of them to think about various problems and difficulties.

The facilitators encouraged participants to think, examine the given situation and record some of their pressing difficulties. This was more or less an individual task without much interaction and discussion. After a while, they gathered in the entire group where some participants were encouraged to read out from their individual recording problems. After some initial hesitation, several of them stood up, one by one, and read out what they perceived as their problems. As the participants heard such reports they started perceiving a certain amount of commonality in the reports of “individual” problems and grievances. At this stage, a brief presentation was made to help participants understand the common nature of their individual problems. What was perceived as only their problem was really a part of wider community problems and grievances.

During this period of individual work, the facilitators went round and supplied a proforma to each participant. They were encouraged to answer the various questions regarding their schooling, the size of their landholding, income, employment, indebtedness, etc. Some of the data thus obtained have been summarised in Table 1. The proforma provided them with a common frame of reference and guided their thinking about burning problems of employment, work, income, land. etc.

Small group discussions on village problems

They were now ready to discuss the common problems which they faced in their everyday lives. This was done in small groups of participants coming from a cluster of villages located together geographically. In each small group, there were several educated participants who recorded the summary of their discussions. It was clear that even the illiterate participants were quite actively participating in the discussions. Each group then recorded a summary of its main problems on chart papers which were displayed for everyone to see. Someone from each group then reported the gist of their discussions to the entire group followed by clarifications and discussions. The facilitators again pointed out, while summarising, the running commonness in such problems. Thus, the various small groups at the three training camps verbalised their main problems.

The perceived problems

Small group discussions (see Appendix) revealed the deep insight which the participants brought to the training programme. Their perceptions and exchange of notes bore the impact of their daily life experiences. As reported elsewhere,¹⁵ the individual and small group perceptions of the socio-economic problems faced by the rural poor emerged as a microcosm of the national problems faced by the poor in the whole country. The participants very effectively pinpointed the priorities in hardships faced by them. They collected data to document the growing starvation and destitution, landlessness, unemployment and ever-dwindling income of the rural poor, particularly the tribal poor. They brought out the strangulating grip of moneylenders and shopkeepers over their lives and brought out the increasing extent of indebtedness among them. They bitterly talked about their very unsatisfactory conditions of life marked by lack of hygienic drinking water, housing, education, medical and health facility and respect and protection from the system. In these discussions they not only brought out their problems but also referred to their helplessness and lack of unity and talked about the need for organisation among themselves.

Story writing: discussion and analysis

The individual work, small group discussions and the discussions in the large group about their various problems enabled the participants to

open up. Their initial shyness had receded by now and they increasingly became active in asking questions and in participating in the various tasks. At this stage, they were involved in a story writing exercise. They were provided with a set of pictures and a story writing booklet. They were shown a picture for a few seconds and then asked to write a story in the booklet. Some of the illiterate participants were helped separately by the facilitator(s) to tell a story after copying the picture which was recorded by the facilitator. However, most of the participants were able to write stories without much difficulty.

In this way, they wrote six stories on six pictures. After the story writing was over, they were naturally anxious to know the purpose of the exercise. They were then encouraged to read out their stories so that the purpose could be clarified. Several of them volunteered. The facilitators then helped them to understand some of the goals in the story. Their attention was drawn to the content and nature of their thoughts as revealed in the stories. Do they think about improving their living and working conditions? Do they think about providing good education to their children, to get better training for themselves, stable work for themselves, think about improving the living conditions in the village? Do they think how they can solve their problems? Do they think of influencing the on-going situations to solve some of their problems; to overcome difficulties created by the establishment, moneylenders and others? Or, do they feel helpless and reconciled to their poor conditions of life and work? They were gradually helped to understand the importance of these various goals and thoughts. As the stories were being read and conceptual clarifications given to help them understand the various goals, etc., the problems earlier verbalised were brought in to illustrate the various points. Thoughts in the stories and the thoughts contained in the various perceptions about problems were compared and put together to bring out the importance of the thoughts as contained in their stories.¹⁶

Generating experience by simulated games

Between small group discussions and story analysis, the participants were involved in a series of games. These were specifically introduced to generate experience concerning competitive and collaborative situations; individual and collective action; personal and group goals for problem-solving. They got actively involved in these games deriving both fun and meaningful learning interactions. The data from the games were analysed to facilitate appropriate learning. This was done with particular reference to the need and importance of collective action, teamwork and participatory organisations. The experience thus obtained was integrated with the ideas generated through stories and small group discussions for problem identification.

Need for organising

Participants were now ready to discuss various issues relating to group problem-solving and the need for participatory organisations. They were encouraged to see that problems posed by them cannot be solved without their initiative, personal and collective actions. Their day-to-day experiences were recalled to bring home the futility of expecting outsiders, particularly government officials and the rich, to come to their rescue in solving their problems. They were also helped to see that it was their right to have a minimum quality of life and that the resolution of their problems and grievances was their right. It did not help much when they “begged” for some facility here or there or for some work. It only increased their dependence on the moneylenders and other exploiters who got a chance to further tighten their grip over them.

Awareness about legal and other rights

Throughout the various discussions and exercises, the participants were helped to become aware of the various protective clauses and rights bestowed on them by laws of the land. They discussed these in order to understand that it was their right to: form appropriate associations and organisations; get them registered; ask for minimum wages; get medical facilities; get schooling for children; get a small piece of land for a house; get membership into various co-operative societies, and refuse to serve as bonded labour; refuse to do any kind of beggar (work without any remuneration) for anyone.

Interface with officials

Towards the fourth day of the training camp, arrangements were made for the participants to interact with certain concerned government officials from the various departments, particularly those operating at the district level. The participants talked to the district officials such as Block Development Officer, tribal development officials, project officers and sometimes to the police officials. Such interface between the participants and the officials helped the “excluded” (e.g. the rural poor) to confront the officials responsible for the various development activities. It was an experience for the visiting facilitators to see how effectively the participants could question the government officials on various issues. They asked them searching questions and gave them concrete cases of injustice and atrocities suffered by them and other villagers. On their part, the government officials, who were briefed in advance, also tried to come up to the level of the challenge thus posed by the participants. They were candid in giving them information about the various development activities and their legal rights about wages etc. While giving such information, they invited the participants to collaborate with them in implementing the various development schemes. They called upon them to continue contacts with the officials and to bring to their notice by meeting them personally or by writing about any unjust acts committed against them in future. They assured help

and co-operation in participants' efforts to solve some of the problems. They also offered assistance in getting their association registered and in preparing a constitution if they desired

From individual to community sensitivity

It could be perceived, as the various camp inputs unfolded, that the participants gradually moved from perceiving personal problems and goals to perceiving larger problems and issues. They thus gave evidence of an emerging communal sensitivity about such problems and issues. Their attention gradually focussed on the need for improving living and working conditions by collective action and participatory organisations backed by awareness of personal and social phenomena. A sense of optimism was visible in facing and overcoming of problems

Visiting “educators” from Kotra at Ambamata camps

One of the noteworthy features of the camp at Ambamata was the presence of three youth leaders from Kotra tehsil who had participated in the Kotra camp held some five months ago. These three visiting “educators” stayed and lived with the participants at Ambamata. They took part in the various discussions. One of them, who had been very active in organising their association, gave a detailed account of their activities since the Kotra camp. His interventions proved very effective¹⁷ with the participants. Being himself a tribal like them, he was able to give concrete illustrations to help the participants understand the need for active organisations and for collective action. He gave instances where and how they had been able to resist unjust activities of the landlords and the moneylenders. He talked about their continuous representations to the district authorities regarding their various grievances. He also told them about their programme for resisting and fighting social evils like drinking, giving and taking of dowry and bride-price, unnecessary expenditure on feasts, etc. The presence and participation of the Kotra youth was helpful in promoting considerable learning among the participants at Ambamata and in enhancing hope in collective action and organisation.

Action plans

Towards the close of the camp, the participants started thinking about what they would do after they return to their respective villages. In fact, various inputs described above sought to strengthen their action-orientation. They sat in small groups to thrash out an immediate and simple action plan. Thus, some decisions were taken at each of the camps. These are described below.

Decisions at Banswara camp

1. The participants decided to form an association and named it Adivasi- Harijan Ekta Sangathan. All of them became members of the association there and then. Each of them paid the yearly membership subscription of Re. 1.

2. At the request of the visiting officials, the participants resolved to bring to the notice of the government their grievances, problems and difficulties. They also decided to represent and bring to the officials' notice acts of any injustice done to them.

Decisions at Kotra camp

1. The participants decided to form their association and named it Adivasi Ekta Evam Vikas Sangathan. All 56 of them enrolled themselves as the founder members. Each contributed Re. 1 as the yearly membership fee.
2. They named a small committee to consult one of the visiting officials from the Department of Tribal Area Development and to prepare a written constitution of the association. The official concerned had volunteered to give the necessary assistance.
3. They decided to fight against social evils like alcoholism, giving and taking of bride-price and dowry and holding of funeral feasts.
4. They resolved to fight against the landlords and moneylenders by collecting evidence of their unjust activities and to bring these to the notice of the concerned officials.
5. They proposed to help such villagers who had been working for moneylenders in lieu of certain debts.
6. They resolved not to give any nazarana (contribution or gift) to the rao, i.e., the jagirdar (landlord) of the area.
7. According to a prevailing custom the rao had been appointing his own mukhias (headmen) in various villages. They worked as agents of the rao. The participants decided to resist this practice and to support only the elected panchayat and the elected Sarpanch.
8. The local landlords had been interfering in the enforcement of law by giving shelter to thieves and offenders. The participants decided to expose this practice.

Decisions at Ambamata (Partapgarh) camp

1. The participants at the Ambamata camp more or less took the same decisions as those taken at the Kotra camp. They also formed their association and named it Adivasi Ekta Evam Vikas Sangathan. All of them became founder members and paid Re. 1 as their fee for one year. They also decided to have a constitution and to get the association registered.
2. It was decided to convene a follow-up meeting after two-three weeks at the office of the social worker-cum-doctor stationed at Devgarh.
3. They decided to establish and maintain functional links with the association at Kotra.

A brief follow-up report

As mentioned above, three of the Kotra camp participants had also attended the camp at Ambameta. They gave a report of their various activities following the camp there. One of the facilitators accompanied them on their return journey for a brief follow-up visit to Kotra. There was a quick get-together of some of the Kotra participants. The following activities were reported at the follow-up meeting:

1. The constitution had been prepared and typed. They were trying to get the association registered at Jaipur.
2. Paid membership of the association had increased to 250 by then.
3. They had been quite active in collecting evidence about atrocities and acts of injustice and had sent representations to the concerned officials. Copies of such representations were also sent to the Institute at Delhi.
4. The tendu leaf (for bidies) contractor, as usual, did not pay the legal minimum daily wage of Rs. 5 to the workers. The association intervened and persuaded the contractor to pay the minimum wage.
5. The association had been resisting the vice of drinking. Its volunteers persuaded the tribals to give up this bad habit. They visited homes and other meeting places to educate people in this regard. At one such place, one of their workers was beaten up by those who were drinking. The association took care of this worker, got him admitted to the nearby district hospital and looked after him till he recovered.
6. The association had established communication channels among themselves in order to get quick reports of atrocities and people's grievances.
7. The association was successful in rescuing some village girls from the clutches of the landlords and in arranging for their marriage.
8. During the period of the training camp at Kotra, the participants' mess was arranged at one inn-cum-make-shift hotel. Thereafter, this had become the meeting and halting place for the workers from various villages when on visits to Kotra in connection with the work of the association.
9. The association had also helped the selected Antyodaya families.

Antyodaya families to get their rightful claims as sanctioned to them by the scheme.

As a result of the camp and the activities of the association, the workers reported that they were getting respect and better treatment from the police and patwaris. The officials made it a point to talk to them politely and listened to them with respect. The workers also revealed that they were planning to start adult education classes to spread literacy as well as social awareness among the various sections of their people.

Thus, the camps helped the participants to become aware of some of their legal rights; to analyse and verbalise their problems; to understand the commonness of their difficulties; to understand the need and importance of organisation; to strengthen their skills in organising themselves; to think about action plans to help themselves and to move towards forming associations. There were some indications about their being active in the post-camp period towards organising themselves.

The education and organisation of rural poor are apparently beset with several known and unknown difficulties. However, the poor themselves have to take the initiative in this regard. Educational efforts, like the camps described here, may, at best, stimulate them to take some steps in the direction of organising themselves. Several kinds of activities would be required from time to time to reinforce such efforts.

Notes:

1. Raj Krishna, "Nehru Gandhi Polarity and Economic Policy", *Mainstream*, August 5, 1978, pp. 2-12 and 34. Also see papers circulated by the Ministry of Labour for the meeting of the Central Standing Committee for Rural Unorganized Labour, January 29, 1979.
2. International Labour Office, *Structure and Functions of Rural Workers Organisations* Geneva: 1978. The General Conference of the ILO adopted the Convention No. 141 on June 4, 1975. This concerns organisations of rural workers and their role in economic and social development. The Conference noted that "in many countries of the world and particularly in developing countries, there is massive underutilisation of land and labour and that this makes it imperative for rural workers to be given every encouragement to develop free and viable organisations capable of protecting and furthering the interests of their members and ensuring their effective contribution to economic and social development..." (p. 152).
3. Planning Commission, *Sixth Five-Year Plan Draft Document*, 1973, pp. 15, 31-32, 274-75. Also see papers circulated for the Central Standing Committee for Rural Unorganized Labour, *op. cit.*
4. National Labour Institute has been conducting rural education camps for educators and organisers of the rural poor. Several camps in different parts of the country have been organized for this purpose. The camp participants are selected on the basis of pre-camp surveys. Some reports on such camps can be seen in the *National Labour Institute Bulletin*, 1975, 1976, 1977 and F: 7 8.
5. There has been a growing land alienation of the tribal people in various parts of the country. See, Dubey, S.N. and Murcha, Ratna (eds), *Land alienation and restoration in tribal communities in India*. Bombay: Himalaya Publishing House, 1977. See Appendix to the present report.
6. Some relevant data for determining prevalence of backwardness have been provided by the Planning Commission. Compared to all India averages,

- Rajasthan appears to be socio-economically backward. Within Rajasthan, its southern areas inhabited by tribals are still more backward. See Draft Five-Year Plan, Govt. of India, Planning Commission, 1978, Annexure, pp. 113-116.
7. Several instances of Bhil chivalry and resistance to encroachment of their freedom are given in Shyamaldas, Vir Vinod. Available at Udaipur. Saraswati Sedan Library. The book was written between 1880 and 90. Also see N.N. Vyas, et al. *Bhils in Rajasthan*, Tribal Research Institute, Udaipur. 1978.
 8. Several field workers and facilitators were involved in organising those camps; among others R.N. Maharaj, Abhimanyou Tambar, Mahaveer Jain, Syed Akhtar, Narendra Gupta, Prayag Mehta, R.S. Joshi and Devi Lal.
 9. For some further details see Jain, Mahaveer et al Akhter S. for individual reports of the rural labour camps) NLI Bulletin 1979.
 10. For some data and brief case studies, see my papers, *Participation of Rural Poor in Rural Development*, NLI occasional paper 3/79; and "Young Workers, Education and Development," *Indian Journal of Youth Affairs*, 1979. 1 (1). 1-14.
 11. For the role of participation and participatory skills in socio-economic development, see *Strategy and Programme Proposals*, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), Geneva, 1977: UNRISD 77.37, Mimeo.
 12. For a comparable description of training inputs for development of leadership and participation, see Mehta, Pareek and Sharma, "From Impotent Anger to Potent Self: A Student Leadership Laboratory," *Indian Management*, December, 1972, 1-9: and my paper, "Education for Promoting Worker Participation: The Case of a Public Sector Organisation." *ASCI Journal of Management*, 1977. 7(1), 12-22.
 13. For some details of social achievement, motivation and influence see, Mehta. Prayag, *Personal Achievement, Social Achievemant and Influence Motivation: A Manual for Motivational Profile*, New Delhi: National Labour Institute, 1979. Mimeo.
 14. See my papers, "Dynamics of adult learning and development," *Yojana*, XXII (18). October 1978: 'Workers' rising aspirations and work organisation," *Yojana*, May 1978.
 15. See my paper: *Participation of Rural Poor in Rural Development*.
 16. Some stories thus obtained have been reported in my papers, *Participation of Rural Poor In Rural Development* and "Young Workers, Education and Development." op. cit.; see also for some case studies, Bhopal Mehta and Avdhesh Prasad, "Rural Exploitation in Rajasthan," *Rajasthan Economic Association*, University of Rajathan, Jaipur, 10th Annual Conference, 1979.
 17. Mahaveer Jain revisited Kotra in June 1979 and collected the relevant data.

APPENDIX 1a

SELF-REPORTS ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS*

A Few Cases from Banswara Camp July 27—August 1, 1978

1. **Haldhar (Kushalganj Tehsil):** There is no house. We cannot get wood from the forest. They do not give free pass. Farmers have been given land but no allotment. At many places the forest department has taken over the land and therefore we are landless. There is no drinking water facility. We have to bring water from a long distance.

We need a lake for water, a hostel for our children and some small industries for work. There are collective accounts for land. We want individual accounts for each piece of land. Some families have been selected for Antyodaya Programme, but they have not received any land yet.

In the settlement, land has gone under demarcation. We have to pay a penalty for using it for farming. They have confiscated the land for plantation. We are beaten by them. The forest people are very cruel to us. They do not even allow us to use the land for our cattle. They are themselves destroying forest and at the same time taking away our land for plantation.

2. **Udai Singh:** Generally Harijan families have many children and no land. A few of them may have one to two acres. They earn about Rs 3 a day and have to spend more than this. To get work for one day we have to wait and sit at home for two days. Children go to schools without proper clothes and the teacher throws them out from the class. There are boys with education up to VIII to X class, but have no work.

We have neither bamboo nor wood for our huts. One bamboo costs eight rupees and we may make three baskets from one bamboo. It is, therefore, not at all paying.

Nobody listens to us, neither the Minister, nor the Sarpanch nor the Patwari.

3. **Baldev (Kankarbari, Kurbalghar Tehsil):** In Banswara, 90% people are tribals and Harijans. Out of 120 houses in our village only four families have land. The rest of them have to do majduri (labour) getting Rs. 2 and 2.50 for a day for males and Rs. 2 and even less than this for females. There are no fixed rates. We have to steal wood from the forest in order to survive. Most houses are made of wood and bamboo which are now in a very bad condition. They can be completely washed away by rains. This is the condition of the entire area. It is a hilly area. There is no facility for irrigation. The people of the tehsil are always in trouble, sometimes due to

* Translated from the original text written in spoken Hindi mixed with local dialect.

floods and sometimes due to drought. There is no fixed work. The relief work goes for 15 days in a month. In the rest of the days, there is no work. There is no facility for transport. We do not get any seed or fertiliser. The co-operative stores sell these to the traders who charge Rs. 105 for one bag of fertiliser, whereas they pay only Rs. 85 to the store. The relief work gives Rs. 12 in a week. This is given on the basis of napti, i.e., digging of pit measuring 10' by 12'. Five persons dig one pit a day. Some people working on tar roads get 15 days' wage and about 20 kgs of wheat per month.

He is educated up to class X and is working on a farm.

4. **Kanhya:** Most people are tribals and Harijans in the Tehsil. Most of us are engaged in farming. The government does not provide us with necessary means and facilities for farming. Due to poverty, people are not able to purchase seed, bullocks, etc. We do not get loans. We have to give fees (bribe) for everything including for education, for getting admission to schools. Not even 25% have regular work. Officials spoil all for us.
5. **Mansukh:** He makes bamboo baskets. One bamboo costs about Rs. 7. Three to four baskets can be made out of one bamboo. One bamboo fetches 2 paili grain, about 2.50 rupees. We have nothing — neither a house, nor a cow, nor a bullock — just nothing. The daily wage is between 2 and 2.50 rupees.
6. **Bala Ram (Bagidora Tehsil):** Some have five to six acres. There are no means of irrigation. People do not have any income; therefore they live on debts. That is why the sagri system comes. They are having social evils and wrong activities. The moneylenders force them into wrong things and then they are forced to take loans from them. Persons in the village are born as indebted, live in indebtedness and die as indebted. Houses are of bamboo and wood. Harijans suffer from many diseases. The barbers do not cut their hair. If they do so they charge more money. They are given sagri by the farmers, i.e., grain for one year in lieu of wages.

The village itself is responsible for its difficulties. There are so many government rules, but implementation is not there. The scheme for giving loans is just nothing. Two years ago I filled a form for getting a loan. I had to go twice to the town for this purpose and spent Rs. 200 in the process. The loan has still not come.

7. **Bansrat (Bagidora Tehsil):** I am a barber. I earn my livelihood by shaving others. The sevak indulges in untouchability. He abuses me. He has also beaten me. I have no house, no wife. I live with somebody in some way. I lodged a complaint against the sevak. The law suit is now going on. This was against untouchability law. He also threatens me and prevents me from going to work. The cases have been going on for the last 12 months.

The sevak does not want to come to a compromise. He threatens to kill me.

8. **Nathu Ram (Bagidora Tehsil):** Everywhere there is bribery. The government is doing so much for us but the government officials demand fees for everything. I have five to six acres of land. I have five sons, all of whom are married. None of them has a tapra (hut) nor land. One boy works as a peon in a school. He has not got his salary since last four months.
- 9 **Bidla (Village Bansala, Tehsil Bagidora):** I was a sagri, later the government gave more land. However, it was stony. The Collector told the Patwari to change the land. However, the Patwari has still not done it. The Sarpanch also gave an order, i.e., the land lying idle may be used for farming. There are 20 acres among four persons who have been recently freed from sagri. Now we must get this land.
10. **Ramank (Village Fonda, Tehsil Sajjangarh):** We are three brothers and have five acres of land among us. We all live in one tipri or hut. We do not have any bullock. We work for making bricks. We go from village to village with the contractor for making bricks. We have to eat on our own. He gives Rs. 12 for making 1,000 bricks. Four persons have to work the whole day for preparing 1,000 bricks. The wage, therefore, comes to Rs. 3 for one person for one day.
11. **Kalu (Village Mandela, Tehsil Garhi):** Traditionally a grinder, I have been operating an indigenous grinding machine for atta. New machines have taken up this job even in villages, and, therefore, nobody wants my machine. One person earns and five persons eat in the family.

APPENDIX 1 b**SMALL GROUPS WORK ON VILLAGE PROBLEMS****Specimen from Kotra Camp (Rajasthan) February 3-8, 1979**

Sixty-odd participants were divided among five groups on the basis of their Panchayat and village cluster. They sat together, discussed their perceptions about their problems and came to a consensus.

One of them was named by them to report the conclusions of their discussions to the community. The following is briefly the points raised by the various groups:

Group 1: Report by a participant from village Badli and by Anil Kumar, former Dy. Sarpanch from Gopeepla.

1. Faced continuously with the problems of shortage of grain. Our crop does not come properly on time. We do not have any food, any work. Many a time we live on pooy ar (a type of grass) and sometimes also eat chapati made of grass.
2. We don't have any land. The Patwari harasses us all the time. He threatens, even beats people and gets their land vacated. For taking possession of surplus land bribe has to be paid to him.
3. No adult education facility. Education is lacking. There are two primary schools, one in village Badli with 30 children and another in village Gopeepla with 32 children up to class V.
4. No hospital. We cannot come to Kotra in the rains. Have to go without any treatment most of the time.
5. No irrigation facility. There are three to four wells in Badli and six to seven in a nearby village. But the level is higher than the river. Water does not come into wells. Sabar River is nearby, but no advantage.
6. Our village Gopeepla is surrounded by two rivers and there are no roads. We need a dam on the river in Umaria village. Without a road we will not get electricity. We see all these facilities across the river in Gujarat area. To our great misfortune we see the water from Vakal River flowing wastefully like blood from our body.
7. The Co-operative Credit Society in Badli is captured by one family. Secretary is the son, father is the Chairman and their muneem (accountant) the Treasurer. These shopkeepers have monopolised the Credit Society and give us loans at high interest. They give Rs. 400 and take a receipt for Rs 500. Sometimes they take a receipt for even Rs. 800 by paying only Re. 400. Sarpanch is trying to get the building of the Panchayat Bhavan constructed next door to his shop and residence. This will obviously benefit him in his business.

Hari Krishna, Sarpanch, reported that there was not even a primary school in Bordi Khurd and Bordi Kalan.

Group 2: (Sundrap, Kotra Chhavni, Kandi, Gandhi Sarana and Nayabas). Report by a participant from Kandi village.

1. Grim problem of unemployment. Some people get work on road construction in exchange of two to three kilos of grain. Here also the Sarpanch deducts his share. The labourers thus employed are about 190 spread over four villages (Nayabas, Subri, Gandhi Sarana, Kotra Chhavni).

There are no agricultural workers here. No scope for employing them on these small farms. People have to go out of their village to far off places in search of work and have to be away for about eight months in a year. Many go to Gujarat to Himmat Nagar and other places and do odd jobs.

We feel that there should be factories and small industrial type work as well as more facilities for agriculture in the area.

2. All kinds of illegal taxes – i.e., loot – is going on. The police treat the thieves and sahuakar (honest) in the same way, and take bribes from both. The police ask for tampa (bribe). This is a tax which they take for responding to a complaint and to take any work in their hands for the villagers. They do not work without such bribes and illegal takes.
3. Public hospital is small. We want a big hospital with adequate medicines and doctors.
4. Continuous harassment by the shopkeepers. They weigh things in such a way that they take more when we give them and give less when we take. No accounts are kept. This is loot vyapar (dishonest trade). We take small loans from them and have to pay back two rupees for one rupee in two days. Failing this, the shopkeepers depute their naukars (servant musclemen) who are their pathans. The common saying here is that naukhar bhai is coming. He will now beat us. In this way village people are terrified and intimidated by the shopkeepers. There are instances where a villager (in village Kandi) took some chillies worth 25 paise. He could not give these paise within two days. The naukars then came and the villager was forced to work for one full day without any wage.
5. In village Gopepla a villager took 40 rupees from a shopkeeper. He could not pay. His servant beat him mercilessly and called him filthy names. In this quarrel, the shopkeeper also got slightly injured. A case was registered against the villager. He ran away from the village. Ultimately he was caught. He paid 20 rupees to police, returned 40 rupees plus 10 rupees to the shopkeeper and in addition he was challaned. The case is still pending in the court. The villager will have to spend much more money by way of

bribe or fees to the vakeel in order to get released from this case. Failing this he might be sentenced and put into jail.

6. The soni (goldsmith) is another source of harassment. He would not give any loan without some gold ornament or silver ornament mortgaged to him. He charges 10 paise as interest for one rupee per month. The time limit is usually from one to two years. Many a time he plays tricks and sees to it that the villager is unable to take the ornament back within the time limit. In this way he gets the ornament for just nothing.
7. There should be an arrangement for sarkari vyaj (government interest), some kind of back arrangement from where we can draw loans at reasonable interest.

Group 3: (Representing Khajuria, Mandva, Koo- kara, Jhand)

1. No work. Some of us are getting work for food but from where to get clothes and other necessities? No facilities for pillai, i.e., irrigation. Wells are without water. Not enough even for drinking.
2. No facilities for adult education.
3. No hospital. Doctors never come from Kotra. We have always to go to Kotra. It is difficult to go in the rains. Many a time, we have to physically carry sick persons on our shoulders across rivers and hills to go to Kotra. We do not get medical treatment.
4. No post office.
5. No work for the educated. There are some educated up to class XI.
6. Difficult to get forest work without bribes. No forest land for cattle. The forest people have put their gote (boundary) everywhere, leaving no land for us.
7. There is no bus service. There are some private buses, who charge so much money.

Group 4: Report by Hari Krishan, Sarpanch of village Mahidi.

1. Problems concerning our homes and families:
 - (i) Our families are large, generally five to seven children, and we have no land and no houses. The land is hilly and not fertile. It is not levelled, therefore, not good for agriculture.
 - (ii) No facilities for fertiliser. In the absence of this, our crop is meagre. We do not get enough food. The crops are jowar, kadru (a kind of coarse grain), cotton, mustard. All these depend on rains. When there is more rain, all is washed out, when there is less rain everything is burnt. Generally, therefore, we have a poor crop and not enough food.

2. Problems of villages:

- (i) No facility for irrigation. There are about hundred wells in the Panchayat. While digging wells, we are faced with stones. There is only one compressor machine in the Panchayat Samiti; we send it here and there, with the result that no one properly uses it and most wells remain incomplete. There are only rainy season wells with kachcha pani, i.e., no permanent use of water. Out of 100 wells, only 25 are in working condition with kachcha water and 75 are out of order. There are only three pucca wells in three villages. Others have to go there even for getting drinking water. Fifty percent of the wells have been built on loans from the Small Farmers' Development Agency; 75 wells are incomplete even after the grants were given.

3. Problems of the Panchayat:

- (i) There is no Panchayat building. We are in a rented building. No road is connecting Kotra with panchayats and other places. We are in between Gujarat (Himmat Nagar) and Rajasthan (Udaipur), the two district headquarters. We don't know where to go. In between these two we are treated as lavis (orphans). Dividing four villages there is a small plot of land which belongs to Gujarat. This creates a lot of difficulties for us. We do not know where we belong. Many of us, therefore, feel that those neighbouring villages should go to Gujarat, so that our problems can be solved. We see a lot of development work going on there. At the same time we have to come by crossing rivers and nullahs because there are no roads in the village. Even during sickness we have to go to Kotra with our sick people. Many times we could not go there.
- (ii) No facilities for cattle and their treatment. We can go to Lambadia in Gujarat 10 kms. away, where we can get treatment, but it is also far off. There was a nurse at the sub-centre of the Primary Health Centre in our area. Now that nurse has also been withdrawn and has been posted at the PSC Headquarters. Her salary is charged to the Panchayat budget. It is necessary that the nurse is posted back at our Panchayat and steps are taken to give us a hospital.
- (iii) Some time ago a foundation stone was laid for a dam. This was done during 1974-75 by one of the then Rajasthan Ministers. Even a canal has been built. But unfortunately there is no dam. It is almost like building doors for a house even when there is no house. Not even a map of the house. They have put stones here and there but there is no boundary or dam anywhere. We hear that there are 29 lakh rupees for this dam. This was mentioned in November last year by Shri Boru Lal, MLA from Gogoonda. He also told that Rs. 1 lakh has been released for this purpose. However, no work has still been started.
- (iv) Shopkeepers, mostly grain merchants, harass people very much. These persons enter one area with just one pod (small peg) and gradually spread

their legs all around. They make money in all transactions, give loans on our products and charge more from us when we purchase the same from them. For example, they would pay only Rs. 2 for one kilo of cotton, whereas the market price is Rs. 2.50. They would say either cotton is not good or that Rs. 2.50 is a wholesale price and not retail price. They have many other ways of cheating us. They may say cotton is phindkar (wet). They therefore, deduct five kilos from one quintal of cotton and take away in this way several kilos of cotton. If we ask for proper price, they threaten not to take our goods.

Group 5: (Villages Sikladairi, Mandi and Mathara). Report by Mani Shenker.

1. Harassment by the shopkeepers and businessmen. The cloth which costs Rs. 9 per metre is sold by them at Rs. 10 per metre. They try all methods to get customers indebted to them.
2. No hospital in the area.
3. As there is no bridge on the Saber River and no roads available, no transport facilities are there. There was a proposal for building a bridge on the Saber River or on the Waav Naka and it is heard that a budget of Rs. 40 lakhs was sanctioned for this purpose. Nothing so far has come of it.
4. There are two wells with only kachcha water. As there is wheat crop near the wells, it is difficult for our cattle to drink water. They don't get water even during the rains. There is an urgent need for a tank in the area. There is a sickla tank, but it is khoda, i.e., without water.
5. There is no post office.
6. Primary school is housed in a kachcha building which leaks throughout the rains. It is difficult to go to the school.
7. The forest people include even the revenue land in the forest area just to harass the villagers and to get some bribe.
8. In the Khajuria Panchayat, Kolia village has a population of 300, but there is no school. Many other villages like this are without a school.
9. The co-operative society asked for Rs. 600 back for a loan of Rs. 300 for two years, some four years ago. One tribal sold a buffalo to a shopkeeper. After four years the buffalo got sick. The shopkeeper brought it back to the tribal saying that he had done some kind of magic on the cattle and that he should take it back and return his money. All pleas that the buffalo had been with the shopkeeper for four years and he had got all the milk and ghee from it proved of no use. The policeman sided with the shopkeeper by taking a bribe and he put the tribal in jail.

APPENDIX 1c

SELF-REPORTS OF SMALL GROUP WORK ON VILLAGE PROBLEMS

Specimen from Ambamata (Pratapgarh Camp) June 3-7, 1979

Group 1: (Villages Gopar Pura, Sawnli Putar, Lalpura, Panch Imli). Reporter: Suraj Mal, about 22 years, educated up to 10th class.

We ST people (Meenas) do not get service (jobs). We go for interviews but are excluded by manipulation. We do not have land and so no farming. Some people have some land but there is no irrigation, no canal. There is no light (electricity) here. Do not get kerosene oil. The forest ranger harasses us and prevents us from taking wood. He wants bribes. We have made an application for a loan for house building. We have to go from place to place and person to person. Still no loan has been given. The contractor gives only Rs. 3 when we work on tank construction, whereas the minimum wage is Rs. 5. We do not get any justice from the courts. They go on giving us different dates and then call us in the rainy season. It is then difficult for us to go. They harass us in order to get some money. When we are attacked and/or are caught in a fight or quarrel we go to the police station to report, then they ask for money. Even after giving Rs. 400-500 they do not do our work. I took land from a Harijan on a mortgage of Rs. 2000. The land belongs to a bhangee (Harijan). Now we cannot do any farming on the land; he is not giving back the money.

There is no school in Lalpura. The nearest is about two kms. There is no arrangement for adult education.

Kanhaya Lal taught for about 2 years in adult education in Panch Imli. He was not paid any money. We do not know who has taken away this money.

Group 2: (Villages: Pandva, Gamada, Dolle, Damakundi, Jolar, Mungri). Reporter: Ram Chander, about 28 years — Sarpanch.

Patwari wants bribe for everything. Police do not do anything for us without money. We are illiterate and therefore we pay Rs. 400-500 even for very simple matters. We have to arrange for this money by selling our cattle or putting land on mortgage. The Forest Department does not help us at all. There is a rule that we can take some wood from the forest for building our houses. This is allowed free. The Ranger comes in the way. There is no end to the loans we take from mahajans. We took some loan from the Panchayat Samiti. Somebody came and took this money from us. He did not give any receipt. We trusted him. He is now not seen anywhere. We have to still return the loan to the Panchayat Samiti.

There is no school in Damakundli. The nearest is in Pulia 4 kms. away. Population of the village is 250. We have many social evils like dapa (bride

price). This dapa is given by the boy's family and they take a loan for this purpose.

We have formed an Adivasi Samiti to fight against social evils. We have some 200 members in the Pandva Tehsil. It is registered at Jaipur.

There is no arrangement for adult education. We have tried and, going from village to village, have prepared a list of people who would like to attend adult education classes. We had sent this list to a person who came here; in this connection. Nothing has happened thereafter.

We ourselves can run these classes and we can do this easily in Rajpuria and Dam Dumri.

We have land but it is not of much use because of lack of irrigation. There is a tank in Jalar village, but water does not stay. Wells also need to be deepened. There is a river Sangla in the area and it is possible to put a dam there. We have been corresponding for this purpose. It is necessary to keep godowns of fertiliser in villages. We have to go six to eight miles for getting fertiliser. A Primary Agriculture Co-operative Society is there, but some have become members wrongfully. Some of us want to become members but we are not given the chance. Some Panchayat members are also elected wrongfully.

We do not have any post office and no facility for a nurse or compounder. During rains, there is water everywhere and we cannot go anywhere.

Group 3: Report by Shanti Lal, 22 years.

There is a middle school in the village but no building. No seating arrangement for children during rains. They are therefore given holidays. All 150 children and eight teachers sit in one room. There are a total of two rooms. One is adjoining a nullah which is flooded during the rains and children cannot cross it, preventing them from going to school. There is an urgent need for a bridge over this nullah. In Ambamata there is a well in the Khera area. This can irrigate some 300 acres of land. We have collected six to seven thousand rupees and already installed a motor there. Connections have also been made. Unfortunately, there is no water in the well which requires digging and deepening. This was to be done by the government, as per the understanding, as their contribution. They have done nothing to carry out this project. The result is that the motor has been lying idle and may be spoiled. The government officials say that there is no need for deepening the well, as the purpose would be served by collecting water at the nullah. This has never happened and collecting water is a difficult task.

The BDO has also been transferred since then.

There is a primary health centre, but there is no building for it. It is housed in a rented building. The landlord wants this to be vacated. Some time back we

came to this place (the venue of the training programme at Ambamata — the Dharmshala) and wanted to occupy it for the health centre. The temple priest objected and prevented us from doing so. We also broke open the room but did not occupy it because there would have been a quarrel.

We don't have any co-operative here for fertiliser. I myself wanted to become a member of such a society and the Panchayat wanted Rs. 20 as membership fee. I was not taken up as a member in another village and now my village also does not take me as a member. The manager does not agree and the Panchayat wants a bribe. The Panchayat gave us some government land and we have been using it for the last five years. The Sarpanch has taken a bribe from us but he has still not given possession of the land to us.

A boy stood up and reported: Under the Antyodaya they gave 10 milk goats and one he-goat. The doctor took Rs. 100 as bribe for passing these cattle. The cost of these cattle was estimated at Rs. 2,000 for which a receipt was taken. In fact, the cattle cost only Rs. 1,500. The rest has been taken as bribe including the fee for the doctor. Thus, our loan is for Rs. 2,000 which we have to pay back in instalments of Rs. 300 each.

One year ago another person (Sukhlal) from Batmeshvar village got a card under the Antyodaya scheme. He was to have been given a loan of Rs. 2,000 for opening a small shop for beedies. This loan has not been given.

Group 4: (Villages: Birawali, Arned, Gومتेश्वर, Cilpat) Reporter: Kanhyafai, 20 years, educated up to class XI.

We don't have any adult education classes. No village in this area has such a class. Two days ago we held a meeting and some 50 to 60 people came showing their desire to attend adult education classes. We have also a teacher (Phool Chand). He is educated up to class VIII. We propose to start classes on our own.

For our cattle there is no drinking water. The wells get dry very soon. We have to bring water from about a mile away. We have land with black soil and we get one crop during the rains. We get cotton crop.

This is not enough because there is no irrigation. People in Antyodaya go for construction work. They get Rs. 5 per day on road construction. Now workers get only Rs. 4. We have built a school under the Food for Work Programme.

Group 5: (Villages: Panmori, Amblikhera, Dorr, Gorla). Reporter: Amrit Ram, 20 years old, educated up to 7th class. Great difficulty of drinking water. There are some wells. No water. There is a tank and it is possible to put a motor. For this the villagers of Panmori had collected Rs. 10,000 but the government did nothing. The money had, therefore, to be refunded to the villagers. Some time ago there was a fire in the village and there was no way to contact officials.

Nobody can get admitted to the Pratapgarh Hospital without giving a bribe. I myself went for 10 days. I also took the Sarpanch. Then also the doctor took Rs. 20 and gave me a prescription. I was then admitted. There is a demand of bribes everywhere. (He told this with a great anger.)

The Patidars have taken all the land. There is no land even for building houses for us. The Patidars have snatched away lands of the tribals. This is totally illegal and many a times there have been fights. In one case we collected Rs. 40 by contribution and gave it to Shri Sharma to get a medical certificate. Now the case is going on in the court. The Patwari has taken land from chamars and kept this with Barani. They go to farms with guns in hand. In the Garnaria village people have paid Rs. 100 to Rs. 200 as bribe to the Patwari. Half the people do not have any land. We have gone to the BDO and have also met the Patwari. From people the land has been taken back after they had possessed it for three years. We also met the MLA, but he did not do anything.

In Rathagana village, people gave receipts with their thumb impressions to some official without getting money from the Co-operative Society. The official obtained all this money from the society and then disappeared. In another, someone took away the share of a loan which the co-operative gave for house building by giving false receipts to the society. This has been going on for the last four years. In yet another case, everyone deposited Rs. 150 with (they named the person) the Secretary of the Co-operative Society. Some 45 persons gave this money. He told us that he would get us Rs. 4,000 each for building a house. Thereafter, he just ran away with the money. We reported the matter to the Panchayat Samiti, but nothing has happened so far.

There is a Vakil Sarpanch (they named him also) but he does not take any interest. He hardly comes to the village. I myself am a Sarpanch, but what can I do alone? People are afraid.

In Rathagana village, Bhagirath took loan of Rs. 60. He gave back Rs. 50 and after two years, paid back Rs. 10 by way of interest. Now the mahajan wants Rs. 300. He himself is a Meghwal. The villager had worked for the mahajan for two years. After all this the mahajan insists on taking Rs. 10 per month from him. All his prayers have failed.

Promises to Keep: Repeat Camp for Freed Bonded Labourers in Palamau

Arvind Narayan Das

Old man Muni and his wife were starving. He had grown too old to work. He had no sons to care for him. He was about to convert to Catholicism in the hope that the church would take care of him. That miserable old proletarian asked us a question which we are unable to answer: “You come here and ask me questions and write in your book. What is the benefit for us? Only you yourself will benefit in your career.”

Muni is dead now. May he rest in peace. “What the benefit for us?” he asked.

Goren Djurfeldt and Steffan Lindberg*

Ever since we visited Palamau in March, 1976 in connection with the rural labour camp for freed bonded labourers, the question posed by old Muni to Goren Djurfeldt and Staffan Lindberg had been bothering us. Is it enough to visit the wretched of the wretched, the poorest of the poor, meet them, find out their problems, try to get them to articulate and concretise their situation, explain to them the plethora of laws and schemes in their favour, sow the seeds of conscientisation among them, and to go back after our camp is done, folding our tents behind us and shaking off the dust of the field? Does conscientisation stop at imparting some understanding to the participants of the camp or does it also include the awakening of the conscience of those who go to conscientise, and what do we do about it?

It was with these questions haunting us that in May 1976 we received a copy of a letter from some of the participants of the first camp regarding the denial of work to the freed bonded labourers in Semra, the very village where our camp had been held. We decided that within our means we must carry on the investigation and conscientisation, for awakening the conscience, it can never be a half-hearted process.

One of us visited Daltonganj in June. Although he was not able to meet more than one of the participants of our camp, the information he got from local people — students, teachers, journalists and administrators — was highly disquieting. Although some of the bonded labourers in Palamau had been freed, some had even been involved in a few rehabilitation schemes and a fewer number had attended our first camp, the information was that almost all over the district a systematic attempt was being made by the former employers of

*Goran Djurfeldt and Staffan Lindberg, *Pills Against Poverty: A Study of the introduction of Western Medicine in a Tamil Village, 1975*, Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies. Monograph Series, No. 23, Preface.

bonded labourers and other landowners to ruthlessly boycott the freed bonded labourers, ostracize them socially and deny them employment. Among the mofussil middle class of Daltonganj he met with nothing but scepticism about our camp.

The feeling of uneasiness was intensified by the fact that the number of freed bonded labourers in Palamau stood at the seemingly unchangeable figure of 581, which seemed to have acquired mystical significance in the eyes of officialdom. A few reports about the bonded labourers which appeared in the metropolitan periodicals, e.g. *Dinman*, also spoke of not much having been done for changing the condition of the freed bonded labourers for the better in any perceptible measure.

With this information we went to Daltonganj again in September 1976 to hold the Repeat Camp for some of the freed bonded labourers, who had earlier attended our first camp. But on reaching there, we found that we had been preceded by an act of God – a tremendous flash flood which had smashed bridges, washed away houses, covered vast tracts of land with sand, and, through its devastation, immeasurably escalated the misery of the already poor people in Palamau. In the face of this natural calamity, it was not possible to hold our camp and we came back without meeting any of the freed bonded labourers whom we had gone to meet. Our uneasy conscience continued to be uneasy.

Finally, in November 1976, we collected 21 of the freed bonded labourers who had attended our earlier camp, to hold a Repeat Camp for three days.

The purpose was (1) to investigate what had happened to the freed bonded labourers since our first camp, (2) to try to arrange a meeting between them and the local district administrators so that they may be able to sort out some pressing problems which might be confronting them, and (3) to carry on the process of conscientisation, which we had irrevocably launched in March 1976.

For this camp, for the selection of the participants, we followed a cluster approach – i.e. we selected a number of sub-regions of the district and drew a small number of freed bonded labourers from adjoining villages so that only they might be able to give a picture of the general conditions of Palamau and of the specific conditions obtaining in their own areas, but they may also be able to participate meaningfully in the rehabilitation process being undertaken in a co-operative manner. Thus, the participants in the Repeat Camp came from only six blocks of Palamau district.

What transpired in the camp was so unexpected and so exhilarating that it is necessary to check our enthusiasm in describing it by recourse to a few cold statistics which give an idea of the persons who attended the camp.

Table 1
Economic Background of the Bonded Labourers

Description	% Distribution
1. Bonded Labourers whose parents were also bonded	28.34
2. Bonded Labourers whose parents were not bonded	55
3. Bonded Labourers who do not even know if parents were bonded or not	16.66
	100.00

Table 2
Purpose-wise distribution of debts

Purpose	Average size of debt	‘Y’ Distribution
1. Marriage	184	58.34
2. Consumption	114	15
3. Medical treatment	92	10
4. Funeral/others	101	6.66
5. Others	158	10
	156	100
Range of indebtedness (in Rs)		Minimum = 10
		Maximum = 500

In concrete human terms, the participants in our camp were those who had been bonded for years for paltry debts for the barest needs of social survival and who had more than discharged their debts through arduous toil for the masters. It was lucky for them that they had been included in the 581 bonded labourers who had been officially freed in Palamau, for through this they had been able to get some help from the official sources. Their debts had been liquidated and they had been provided with some land, some animals, and in a very few cases, some money for consumption needs. Let us bear in mind that the debts were of such magnitude as to average Rs 156 and the average period of bondage was seven years. The land given to them was mostly uncultivable hillside tracts, far removed from their habitation and animals were exotic breeds which, in most cases, were not known even to the urban residents of Daltonganj, far less the bonded labourers who had lived their lives in remote villages.

It was with such participants that the Repeat Camp was held in Daltonganj.

While in the previous camp we had met with people who were completely submissive, totally inarticulate and almost always obsequious due to long years of slavery, the Repeat Camp held after less than a year of their emancipation presented a completely different picture.

This time, there was no folding of hands, no keeping their heads bowed, no mumbling when asked to speak. Freedom had worked wonders as far as their self-confidence was concerned. They are still miserably poor and at the very verge of human existence but they have ceased to be the *instrumentum mutuum* of the land owners. The participants, this time, spoke up, and although the tale which they told was not always a happy one, the very fact that their voices were heard without constant prodding on our part showed that things had changed.

Another aspect in which there was change was in their dress. In the first camp, most of the participants had been clad in dirty, tattered rags, and while even this time their dress was nothing to be very thrilled about, at least the risk of their being arrested for nudity was not there. And there was a transformation even in their faces. While in the first camp diffidence, fright, oppression, suffering and a little wonderment was writ large on their countenance, this time there was a look of serious purposefulness, of confidence and, perhaps, a little amusement in their eyes.

It was a three-day camp which was visited by a number of dignitaries from the Central and State Governments, including the Labour Minister of Bihar, Mrs. Ram Dulari Sinha, who had attended the earlier camp also. However, even with the little time at their disposal the participants got an opportunity to exchange their experiences, to find out about each other's problems and to formulate amongst themselves certain basic tasks which would lead to amelioration of their condition.

The very first day we were told about the fact that in most villages where the bonded labourers had remained disunited, even after emancipation, the landlords had boycotted them socially and denied them work. In Semra village, where 44 bonded labourers had been freed, the landlords had preferred to import labour from outside at depressed wages rather than give work to the freed bonded labourers. They had launched a campaign of retribution on the freed bonded labourers. The manager of a local quarry had been persuaded to deny employment to the freed bonded labourers who went to him when they got no work in the fields and in all these activities the landowners had counted on the connivance, if not the support, of the lowest levels of the administration, in particular of the police machinery.

In Mahuadaar, in spite of the fact that the sale of liquor had been banned by the government, liquor was still being brought in and the poor tribals were being forced to consume it and thus get into the vicious circle of indebtedness,

bondage, low wages, and further indebtedness. Liquor contractors are still using pahalwans to perpetuate their nefarious trade.

In Patan Block, the land given to the freed bonded labourers was not allowed to go under their control and the landowners had staked their claims on the mahua trees which had been given to the freed bonded labourers.

In Hariharganj, a bonded labourer who had participated in our earlier camp was still not freed by his master, a doctor practising in Ranchi.

In Ranka, the freed bonded labourers who had tried to carry on a campaign against the illicit sale of liquor had been harassed in various ways by the local policemen and when they had tried to propagate the Bonded Labour Systems (Abolition) Act and the Minimum Agricultural Wages Act among the poor people, the rich overlords had also organized counter-meetings attended by political bigwigs of the district to nullify their attempts.

And all over the district the report was that the Minimum Agricultural Wages Act was not being implemented.

But the picture was not as gloomy as this. That there was one improvement in the situation was acknowledged by all the participants, namely, that the very act of their emancipation had pushed up agricultural wages in the area from the earlier level of two kachi seers of coarse grain to three kachi seers or from Rs. 1.50 in cash to up to Rs. 3.00 in certain places. Taking the individual wage rates reported by the participants, while the earlier bani (daily payment to bonded labourers when work was taken from them on the masters' fields) was on an average Rs 1.49, the average majoori (wages of free labourers) was now Rs.2.28, indicating an increase by 63.02 per cent. Thus, even taking the denial of employment to the disunited freed bonded labourers in some places, the average earnings had gone up and the fact that debts did not have to be paid back nor interest on loans, had somewhat, if only marginally, improved their material condition.

Further, the fact that at least all the bonded labourers who had been freed in the area and who had attended our earlier camp had been designated as "Sarkari Aadmi" by the landowners was not an unmixed curse, because while it led to a boycott in certain cases, it also gave to these ex-bonded labourers a certain intangible authority by which the landowners in the backward areas of Palamau, in most cases almost as ignorant as the bonded labourers themselves, were scared into submission to a certain extent. The result was that while the landowners retained control over the economic means, their social power had diminished. They were no longer the automatic arbiters of disputes among the rural poor. Nor did they get a chance to aggravate such disputes to their advantage. In many places, the freed bonded labourers who had imbibed the idea of co-operation and unity were able to sort out their own problems, arbitrate their own disputes, and not get caught in the web weaved by the wily

landlords which would lead them into costly litigation, indebtedness, and back into bondage. We also found that, to a certain extent, the participants of our earlier camp had taken to heart a 'slogan' coined by themselves at Semra, viz. "Increase income. Reduce expenditure. Avoid bondage". While they were not able to do very much to increase their income by themselves and their task was made even more difficult by the haphazard and ad hoc rehabilitation measures, they were, in many cases, able to drastically reduce expenditure by cutting down costs of marriages and funerals and by waging a campaign, difficult and dangerous as it was, against the purveyors of liquor. Out of this understanding of their problems and of the commonsense solutions worked out on the basis of the above 'slogan', there had arisen among the freed bonded labourers, a spirit of co-operation with each other which had manifested itself in letting other poor people in their areas get the message of the legislative and administrative measures in favour of the rural poor. In many places they had launched systematic campaigns through the use of traditional mass media, like the beating of drums, to propagate the Acts relating to the abolition of the bonded labour system, the prescription of minimum wages and the liquidation of debts.

In sum, we found that, from a situation of no consciousness, a number of those who had attended our earlier camp had progressed to the stage of native consciousness.

After discussing their problems and the possible solutions, the participants reiterated the understanding reached in the first camp and formulated a modest action plan for improving their conditions with practically no support from any quarter (except some administrative personnel) and in the face of active opposition by the former masters and other oppressors.

The freed bonded labourers, who are making an attempt to better their situation, and to attain just the minimum levels of human existence, have to be cautious in their steps. The solid achievement of the two camps has been the realisation by the participants of the odds they are fighting against. It is with this realisation that critical consciousness arises.

The process of conscientisation of the bonded labourers in Palamau has just begun.

Freed Bonded Labour Camp at Palamau

R.N. Maharaj

Those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable.

–J. F. Kennedy

Palamau is one of the largest districts of Bihar. Scheduled castes and scheduled tribes constitute 45% of its total population, the largest in Bihar. It has an equally large infiltration of upper caste Hindus and Muslims from other parts of Bihar. The Assam Tea Gardens Association had been regularly indenturing labour from this district till 1956. The immigrants, on the other hand, were busy seizing control over large areas of land for cultivation, for trade in agricultural, forest and livestock produce. What stood in their way was the availability of cheap and tractable labour. The indigence of the local population and the introduction of money and trade greatly facilitated their tasks. The five landlord families who controlled the destiny of Palamau were also of immense help to the immigrants. The result was the emergence of a new institution of kamiauti which finds mention in all survey and settlement reports conducted by Forbes in 1874, Sander at the end of the 19th century and Bridges in 1920-21 and others.

The Bridges Report (1920-21) looked deeper into the question of kamias. It enumerated the kamias together with their dependents and found that the final figure stood at 63,000. They were all drawn from scheduled tribes and castes. Debt was the noose to bind them. These reports contain eloquent accounts of the destitute condition of kamias and the situation in the beginning of the second decade of the present century was found to be so appalling that the Bihar and Orissa Kannauti Act, 1920, had to be enacted in order to free them from the clutches of those rural sharks. Ten years later – i.e., in 1930 – Radhakamal Mukherjee conducted a survey to ascertain the incidence of kannaut in the district of Hazaribagh and found that 20% of the population consisted of Kannas.²

Recently, Arun Sarkar, Deputy Commissioner, Palamau, identified and freed 581 bonded labourers – i.e. kamias who are also known as sevakias. The National Labour Institute has been conducting various rural labour camps in different states to educate the rural poor about their rights and measures designed to better their lot and finally to help them organize themselves so that they may emerge as a countervailing power in the village and claim what was due to them. This was, however, the first occasion when we were asked to conduct such a camp for freed bonded labourers. We did it in collaboration with the Union and State Labour Ministries and the district administration

from March 20 to 26, 1976. The venue was a village called Semra, 13 miles from the district headquarters and accessible only by jeep. Mr. Baliram Bhagat, Speaker of the Lok Sabha, was kind enough to inaugurate the camp. It was not an inauguration in the formal sense. Mr. Bhagat moved freely among the ex-sevakias and discussed the problems relating to their lives and rehabilitation. Apart from our own faculty, we were helped by persons from the A.N. Sinha Institute of Social Studies, Patna, Ranchi University, Bihar Tribal Research Institute, Ranchi, Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi, and the Commissioner, Patna Division, and a number of his colleagues. Dr. Philip Herbst from the ILO was a great help to us.

Another significant feature of the camp was that the junior officers in the District Administration dealing with identification and rehabilitation of bonded labourers were also involved for two days, both, separately and jointly with the ex-kamias.

There were 60 participants (see p. 10). Their ages ranged from 14 to 70 with the largest number being in the 20-40 age-group. Again, their periods of bondage also varied from one to 30 years. There were also 17 cases of generational bondage. They were all drawn from the scheduled castes, tribes and backward classes of the lower order. Bhuiyas alone accounted for nearly 50% of the total number of the freed sevakias, followed by Dusadhs and Nagesias. Only one of them was a tribal Christian. Over 33% of them were completely landless. In other cases they were semi-landless or possessed only the homestead land. There was a single case of an ex-sevakia who still owned six acres of land.³ They were wholly illiterate.⁴

Most of the ex-sevakias had been living a life steeped in the culture of repression. To them the world hardly existed except for the landlord and the hamlets in which they lived. They were taken by surprise when asked to attend such a camp. It was evident from the fact that they did not come on their own. They had to be brought under the surveillance of State fiduciaries. It was a shock to see them. They were hardly better than what someone has called *instrument vocale* on the landowners' farms. The amount of clothes they were putting on was so scanty that many of them would attract the charge of nudity while walking along the streets of any city. Their personal possessions could hardly fetch Rs. 5 in the market. In spite of the night being cold, hardly any of them had anything to cover their persons. They all looked emaciated. It was clear that they filled their bellies but did not eat. A sense of utter helplessness and fear was writ large on all faces. They were tongue-tied and if they spoke at all they spoke the language of utter obsequiousness. Hands were always kept folded while muttering even a word. To a large number of them it was still a surprise to learn that their poverty was not ordained by fate and a bright future lay ahead of them.

In order that a dialogue should ensue between them and us, we had to repeatedly assure them that a new era had dawned for them; law and the entire State power was on their side. Our repeated assurance could result in imparting courage to some youngsters to break the ice. We wanted them to talk and not remain mere passive students. It was clear on the first day that not all had been imbued with enough courage. They still felt highly inhibited to talk about their lives. To thaw the atmosphere we procured for them the usual musical instruments they played on. We requested them to sing folk songs, dance and stage small one-act plays as they liked. This had a very positive effect on their attitudes and involvement was almost total. While some of the songs were devotional, others vividly portrayed their plight. The one-act play lasting for not more than 30 minutes was a marvel of the peasant's sense of humour and his understanding of the problems of life. One of them acted as the usurer, two as his musclemen, and two prospective borrowers. The way they presented the whole thing clearly highlighted not merely that the usurers exploited but also how one got into debt-bondage and was treated subsequently. Even the fact of generational bondage was brought into sharp focus. Even though it was a play, the response from some of the participants was commendable. Without any prodding from any quarters many started hurling abuses at the ex-sevakia who was playing the usurer and offering gratuitous advice to the prospective bonded labourers. The ground for a meaningful dialogue had been prepared and the mistrust that stood between them had finally melted.

The next day we divided them into six groups on the basis of geographical contiguity and asked them to discuss among themselves the problems of their lives. Since they were illiterate, one of us had to be with each group with the warning that he must act as a self-effacing co-ordinator and write down whatever they discussed. By all accounts we could say that involvement was very deep and wide. It was followed by a plenary session where two spokesmen from each group gave the gists of their discussions. In most cases we found that illiteracy was no barrier to help people contemplate over the quality of their lives. They spoke of their working hours which started from 6 in the morning and continued till 9 in the evening, with a small break for lunch. They spoke of the wages they received — two kachcha seers of paddy or any inferior grain.⁶ (Converted into standard measure it would come to about 900 gms. We physically checked it to find out the level of wages in standard measure.) Another problem with regard to their wages was that they were always paid in kind. To meet their cash needs they had to forego their day's wages which fetched them 50 paise in cash. Even if they wanted to sell their paddy or any other grains received as wages to the local grain dealer the price would be the same. In case they bought the same grain the

price would be thrice as much. In order to get some clothes for themselves and their womenfolk they had to rely on edibles from the forest which they sold to obtain cash for wages.

Apart from the drudgery of work, and extremely low wages, they had to suffer social exploitation at the hands of their masters. Even the slightest delay in returning after lunch would invite threats, and sometimes they would even receive a thrashing. Recalcitrance would be easily put out of their heads.⁷

For a man struggling to keep off starvation, education, medicine and housing etc. hardly had any place in their priorities. However, insofar as illness was concerned it could not just be wished away. The result was a search for some illusion, rather than a solution – i.e., going to the witch doctors. It also perpetuated superstition among them.

How did they get into bondage? It was another question that was discussed in the group and the plenary meet. They frankly admitted that for this, apart from stark poverty, their social practices like payment of bride-price, promiscuous consumption on social occasions, etc. were equally responsible. Alcoholism was another contributory factor.⁸

Since on the second day we had worked from 6.30 a.m. to 7 p.m. with usual breaks for tea, breakfast and lunch, there was no cultural programme.

On the third day they were asked, as on the second day, to have group sessions and plenary meetings to search for solutions to their problems. It was again a pleasant surprise that, even though not with the statisticians' precision, with intelligent calculation they could approximately find out how much grain and cash each family would need. On an average they calculated that they would broadly need an income of Rs. 6 a day for a family of four. To tide over the crisis during lean months or to forestall starvation when the monsoon failed they wanted unfettered right to collect mahua flowers and fruits and other kinds of edibles available in the forest. While coming to this conclusion they had to heavily cut down expenses on social ceremonies. As for alcoholism, many of the younger ones promised to give it up altogether, whereas the older ones insisted on a phased programme of reducing liquor intake.

In order that they might have the requisite income they wanted a minimum of two acres of cultivable land for each family and the necessary agricultural implements including seeds and a well. Some of them had already been allotted two acres of land by the Deputy Commissioner. However, the land allotted was rocky and had yet to be developed and made cultivable. The Deputy Commissioner had instructed the Soil Conservation Department to give priority to such lands and to employ only those persons as labourers as would be the ultimate beneficiaries. The forest and other departments employing labour had been issued similar instructions – i.e., to give priority in

the matter of employment to ex-bonded labourers.⁹ It was necessary because the ex-bonded labourers were being boycotted by their erstwhile masters in matters of employment.¹⁰

In addition to these measurers the Deputy Commissioner had also distributed among them some poultry, Yorkshire pigs, and milch cattle. Our participants could testify to the correctness of all these. From our side we also gave them some feedback. They were told of the minimum wages fixed by the Government of Bihar and other ameliorative measures planned to subserve their good. With the help of a pair of scales, paddy and standard metric weights, we could clearly demonstrate to them how much they had been cheated in the matter of payment of wages.¹¹

On the previous day they had expressed a keen desire to see a film which the Deputy Commissioner was kind enough to arrange. It was a Bihar Government documentary with a rural theme depicting how crafty landlords tried to hoodwink voters to win panchayat elections and how they were ultimately frustrated in their attempts.

On the fourth day one of our faculty members administered some simulated exercises to emphasize the various contexts in which conflict and co-operation constituted the keys to the solution of the problems. These exercises had a tremendous effect on them and we could clearly see that the message that they had to get organized as widely as possible had been fully driven home.

On that very evening they had very serious but informal chats amongst them for two to three hours to discuss the problems of organisation.

On the fifth day, the Bihar State Labour Minister, Smt. Ram Dulari Sinha, came to address them at 9 in the morning, in spite of her many preoccupations. The pre-breakfast session had just been over and our participants were having their breakfast. The Minister sat with them on the bare earth and took breakfast with them. Just as we and the participants ourselves threw the leaves we ate on, she also did likewise. After breakfast she addressed them and informally asked questions to many of them.

It was very heartening that some of the freed sevakias could stand up and put their case succinctly before the Minister. The Minister's speech evoked profound response from the participants. She promised them that her government would not lag behind in helping them have a better future. After the Minister's departure we again settled down to discuss organisational problems. Our dialogue revealed that they would make a real effort to eradicate untouchability practised among them and would make a constant endeavour to increase the frequency and intimacy of social interaction. While they emphasized that they would consider it their solemn duty to reduce their dependence on moneylenders, they also decided that they would slowly enlarge the extent

of their contact with all those who suffered more or less the same fate. When asked to identify such persons, they named sevakias, casual labourers, poor peasants, alternating in their roles as peasants and agricultural workers, and finally those peasants whose farming was based on family labour and who employed agricultural hands only during the peak season and casually. Another attribute which each one of them without exception added was that he should not be a person who would abuse or look down upon agricultural labourers.¹²

The last day we dispersed after lunch. The participants were paid their travel expenses and daily wages at the rates prescribed by the government for the days they stayed in the camp. The Deputy Commissioner delivered the valedictory address emphasizing that he would spare no pains to see that they did not relapse into bondage again. We had been able to establish such a kind of rapport with our participants that the send-off was really painful. Apart from the exchange of greetings, tears rolled down many eyes on both sides.

Notes:

1. Hazaribagh is a district in Chhotanagpur. Radhakarnal Mukherjee found that kamia population consisted of aboriginals, quasi-aboriginals and exterior castes. They were “in a state of perpetual dependence and subjection” quoted by Kamat K. Ghosh (*Agricultural Labourers in India*. Calcutta. 1969, P. 269).
2. The then Deputy Commissioner of Palamau in 1957 in his book *Famines in India*, also mentioned the existence of kamias in parts of Palamau. Mr. S P. Sinha of Tribal Research Institute, Ranchi, who attended our camp, had conducted surveys recently and found that kamias or bonded labourers were still existing. (Personal interview with the author.)
3. Many of the land-owning sevakias had their lands mortgaged with their moneylenders, banias, upper caste Hindus, Muslims etc.
4. The then Deputy Commissioner, Arun Sarkar, in many places had made provisions for night schools to teach freed bonded labourers the 3-Rs (Reading, Writing arithmetic). As such a few of them had learnt to sign their names after they were freed from bondage.
5. One of our colleagues who had a blanket round his body and was still shivering in the morning was advised by one of the well-meaning freed bonded labourers to take off his blanket to ward off the cold; his argument being that if you were not used to a blanket you would not feel the cold so much.
6. Land Settlement and Survey Organisation’s Malley writing in the District Gazetteer in 1926 mentions that kamias those days were getting rent- free houses, 1/6 of an acre of bait land, a small piece of rice land locally known

as palhat, and two to three kachcha seers as their daily wages in “whatever foodgrain the master may find it convenient to give”. Paddy harvesting, which did not last more than two days, brought them 15 kachcha seers of paddy. Over time the wages have declined. As sevakias they were getting 900 gms. of unhusked rice. Payment was mostly in kind. In some cases they got a little bit of breakfast called lukma, i.e., a few morsels of cooked grain. The practice of granting palhat or bari land has almost disappeared. Also see Kamal K. Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 166.

7. In one case one of the oxen of a bania had fallen ill. To carry his commodities to market he yoked a young kamia in place of the ox. Another freed bonded labourer bore visible scars of severe beating. Both of them were participants in the camp.
8. The total debts owed by the 60 ex-kamias amounted to Rs. 9,368. Debts for marriage and corruption were the most important items. The range of debts owed varied from Rs. 10 to Rs 500. The Deputy Commissioner in the course of our interview with him pointed out that he had discovered a case where a man had served as sevakia all his life in lieu of a debt amounting to only 0.56 paise.
9. As a matter of fact, ‘freedom from bondage’ alone had increased the earnings of 53 per cent of the participants.
10. The employers were very sore that kamiauti system was under attack. In the course of his field visit a very senior government officer detected a sevakia and took him to the Deputy Commissioner to secure his release. The latter advised the sevakia to go back promising to send a magistrate after two days to secure his release (in reaching home the poor wretch found that his wife had been very vulgarly abused and his own life was in danger. The threat to his life was so real that under the cover of darkness he ran several miles to reach our camp.) The Deputy Commissioner was again approached and told of the situation. The poor sevakia could be reassured about his security only when a posse of police headed by an Inspector of Police accompanied him to the village. In one village, which teemed with sevakias (many of them called themselves dhatmaru – i.e., catch hold and thrash), we found that there was hardly anyone who had ever been beaten. In that village the big boss did not advance even a single pie as loan. He converted free labourers into kamias through sheer use of force.
11. In order to popularise the provisions of the Abolition of Bonded Labour Act and to identify the sevakias, the Deputy Commissioner had made use of the publicity vans which also screened some films in the villages. The masters spread the canard that all those who would go there would be sterilized irrespective of their age. This had its effect on the sevakias. It

was thus an event that our participants themselves came with the request that some film should be screened for their entertainment. This signifies the transformation that had taken place. “You may now tell the farmers you’ll be slave no more. The starvation wages you will not endure. Though you worked night and day, you would not satisfy and he treated you worse than a pig in the sty”. (Roy Palmer, (Ed.) *The Painful Plough*, Cambridge University Press, p. 57).

12. Man to the plough; Wife to the cow; Boy to the now (barn). The last category of peasants resembled the one attribute added by the kamias (Roy Palmer, *op. cit.*, p. 16).

Training and Development of Rural Women: Report of a DWCRA Camp

Poonam S. Chauhan

NLI & DWCRA

The National Labour Institute has been organising programmes and camps for the progress of various vulnerable sections of the labour force, such as agricultural labourers, women and child labour. It is against this background that NLI with its rich experience in the area of rural labour and rural development, and under the dynamic guidance of Shri A.P. Varma, Director, decided to organize a special orientation and training programme to evolve strategies for developing personal capabilities of the rural women, under the Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) scheme for their empowerment at the grassroots level. Apart from this, one of the purposes of this endeavour has also been to experiment with the Institute's methodology, evolved over the decade, for developing contextual strategies to help the rural poor women for their betterment, and make the strategies tested and available as a set of systems to others — individuals and organisations — for wider application in the alleviation and progressive elimination of poverty in all forms.

The DWCRA scheme came into existence in 1982-83 as a sub-scheme of the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP).

The goal

The main goal of the DWCRA is to bring about some changes in the quality of life of women and children in rural situation.

The programme

A five-day training programme entitled Leadership Development Programme for the DWCRA Group Organizers was held at the Regional Institute for Rural Development, Chirgaon, Jhansi, Uttar Pradesh, from September 6 to 10, 1993, which was attended by group organizers representing Jhansi and Hamirpur districts. The majority of the participants were newly selected DWCRA group organizers. The following were some of the highlights of the programme:

Experience of a process

On the very first day, the training programme began on a note of uncertainty, for the trainers were initially apprehensive of whether they would be able to meet the expectations and needs of the participants. On the participants' side, there was mixed feelings of inhibitions, insecurity, reticence

and shyness. One predominant fear among most of them was of being ridiculed for their expressions which might be seen as irrelevant by others. Apart from this apprehension, they were not sure what they expected. All of them, in the beginning, thought or believed that the NLI would provide them with direct resources for their economic well-being. Amidst all these apprehensions and expectations, the process of animated participation began with the self-introduction of the participants. This energized a gradual process of breaking through the inhibitions. During the process of helping the participants to open up, a song “*Dariya ki kasam, Maujo ki kasam, Yeh tana bana badlega*” was sung. This helped motivate the participants to a great extent towards building an atmosphere of collective cohesion and consciousness. Thus began the process of sharing, though cautiously, yet with a note of promise.

In the afternoon session of the first day, the participants were divided into small groups and the task for each group was to identify the problems and causes related to different aspects of their lives through intra-group interaction. This process continued till the noon of the second day. One representative from each group was invited to articulate her group’s problems. At one point, a middle-aged participant was discussing about the problems related to social values and pressures specially relating to ‘purdah’ and thereby their restricted social movement. Suddenly the entire atmosphere was surcharged with sparks of pointed questions. An 18-year-old married girl, overwhelmed with emotion and total involvement, asked: “Kya aap mei itni himmat hi ki aap ish kaksha se bahar jakar smaj mein bepardah ghoom sakti hain?” (Do you have enough courage to face the society outside this class without a veil?) “Kya aap apni bahoo ko yeh azadi de sakti hain ki woh bhi ghar aur bahar bina ghoonghat ghoom sakti hain?” (Will you allow your daughter-in-law to move in and out of house without purdah?) “Kya aap mein itani himmat hai ki aap apane parivar aur samaj mein aapke prati ho rahe anyaya aur dabav iske khilaf awaz utha sakein?” (Can you raise your voice against the familial and societal injustices and pressures experienced by you every day?) “Isthriyan hi isthriyon par zulum karti hain, ish bare mein aapka kya vichar hai?” (‘Women exploit women,’ what is your opinion?).

These bold statements were enough to light a fire in the mind and heart of every participant. Suddenly one woman at the peak of her excitement, raised her hands high and chanted a slogan, and with that all the participants became alive with emotion, and in unison chanted the slogans: “*Hum Bharat ki Nari Hain, Hum mein hi hai jawalamukhi ki chingari, Hum ek hokar apana hak lekar raheinge!*” (We are women of India; we have the fire and the flames of a volcano in us; we shall unite and fight for our rights!)

At that moment of time, it seemed as if a revolution had taken place. This initial emotional impetus, derived from the grassroots reality of their raw

existence, proved useful in building a climate of trust between the participants and the trainers. From here began the process of shading inhibitions. The majority of the participants started expressing themselves, and shared their viewpoints on a host of problems which directly affected them. This became the ground work for other sessions that were to follow. Thus, the process of getting them interested in the designed tasks and sustaining it had begun.

After this exercise, a discussion on the topic “Analysis of Society and Women’s Position in it”, was held. The session was more participative and the trainers had sensed their feelings or in other words, their needs. In the night of the second day of the programme a recreation activity was organized for the purpose of unshackling the last string of their inhibitions.

From the third day onwards a comprehensive and participatory course, on various aspects of leadership building skills and techniques was introduced. It was followed by a simulation exercise on decision making. Initially, the participants found it a bit difficult, but in due course, they found that they could relate it to the reality. In addition to this, an exercise on communication skills was carried out which was related to their everyday activities. By that time, the momentum had developed to such an extent that the participants started showing self-sustained eagerness to know more. On the fourth day, the session began with a discussion on the law and rural women. This was of great interest to the participants because there was a deep quest in them to know the legal technicalities which concerned them. In the subsequent session, the processes in an organisation and its building was dealt with. This session was based on a lecture-cum-simulation exercise. In this session, the need for an organisation, its critical aspects, and various components of leadership and supervision were dealt with at length. This was designed, keeping the DW CRA group leaders’ role in mind. Everything went at a slow but steady pace, for the minds that apparently remained closed for years, were opening up slowly, and it was not possible to grasp everything in a single attempt.

On the concluding day, further stress for ‘broader unity’ through group work among members was given, and a game called “win as much as you can” was introduced. The main focus was on developing an understanding of all-round solidarity among the participants. All of them showed much enthusiasm during the exercise. It was observed that their learning was now much faster and more participative. Even the reticent ones were found reacting earnestly to the simulated situations in the group work. Immediately after, feedback of the entire programme was elicited.

The impact

One distinct change that was perceived by the participants at the end of the programme, articulated individually by each of them, was their openness and increased level of motivation. They seemed more aware and confident now than

they were earlier. The majority of the participants exhibited virtual absence of inhibitions while communicating with the trainers and among themselves. The promise of their being well-equipped leaders of their respective groups thus appeared amply clear.

In the very first hour of the first day, it was found that the DWCRA group organizers were totally unaware of the scheme, its objectives, etc., and their expected roles and functions. Some of them did not even know that they were group leaders till the time they were summoned by their officials to attend the NLI-conducted training programme. Some participants also expressed that they had learned that they were DWCRA group organizers only a month or two before, and their names had been recorded in the register at the BDO's office. This clearly indicates that there is a serious information gap between the officials and the beneficiaries. This perhaps may be one of the factors which is hindering the speedy success of the DWCRA programme. Another important point which emerged is that the women under the DWCRA programme have had limited options for selecting the economic activities which they are likely to pursue. The impressions gathered out of the participant's discussion indicate that, more often than not, economic activity was imposed on them. Similarly, leadership was also thrust upon them, ignoring the participative selection process. These are some of the critical issues which are to be examined and addressed, and their solutions found for the effective functioning of the scheme.

Suggested approaches

The first step towards effective implementation of the DWCRA programme could be made by making the selection process of organizers fair. Only women "below the poverty line" would become meaningful.

The second step should begin with the process of awareness-generation at the time of group formation. This could successfully be implemented by introducing the participatory interaction process. Moreover, there should be room for constant interaction between group leaders and the DWCRA officials.

Frequent exchange of information and ideas may prove to be very useful. When group organizers are chosen, they should be given all related information about the DWCRA scheme, the expected functions and roles of group leaders, their responsibility and working areas. Selection of economic activities should be based on mutual discussion among group members. The Assistant Programme Officers and the Gram Sevikas may provide guidance and help in locating possible market for procuring raw materials and selling of finished products. Reconnaissance of 'demand and supply' for the chosen product may be done continuously, for this will add to the viability of an economic activity. Training should be imparted in right perspective by

rigorously and continuously sensitizing and motivating both the functionaries and the beneficiaries alike.

In addition to this, the leadership training, followed by entrepreneurship, may be given regularly. Unless their personality, as effective leader and entrepreneur, is developed, achieving economic gains would be difficult. Entrepreneurial training should involve both personality and environment development. Environment includes, broadly, the market and the 'know-how' about the banking and credit system. Experience shows that ignorance about banks is the greatest hurdle in the economic development of the DWCRA women.

Institutes like the NLI having expertise in rural research and development should take up this programme in a phased manner, in various parts of the country to train the DWCRA group leaders within a certain specified period. At the same time training of trainers may be facilitated on a regular basis. As a strategy, some nodal institutions can build their own networks. The DWCRA group leaders could be trained for better performance. It is indeed high time that all concerned with rural development come together to alleviate the conditions of the rural poor women and children through their expertise and capabilities.

Dr. Poonam S. Chauhan, Associate Fellow, was the Director of the Programme. Shri Subhash C. Bajaj, Associate Fellow, and Dr. M.M. Rehman, Fellow, were the faculty resource persons.

News from the Countryside

M.M. Rehman

The situation

“Pashbic tha athyachar, tikha tha Sangram” (brutal was the oppression and bitter was the struggle). These words of Shri Surya Narain Singh, Member of Parliament, from Begusarai, Bihar, clearly epitomize the beginning and continuation of Begusarai’s struggle for justice, fairplay and survival. It was a long haul. The once all-powerful landlords defended their sprawling landed property fiercely and tenaciously. Their social and economic control mechanism which was once thought to be invincible slowly began to crumble under the pressure of a mass upsurge of the exploited. The caste-based social structure began to crack at the dawn of independence. The underprivileged rose and fought for their lost rights and dignity as tenaciously as the landlords defended theirs.

This process could be found written everywhere on the face of Bakhari, an outback area of Begusarai district. Though apparently the edifice of the feudal system has crumbled here, the vicious cycle of poverty and exploitation still continues unabated.

“Hame kuch bhi nahi mile” (we received nothing), said Sunder Sada, a member of Bihar’s most oppressed social class called mushari (the rat eater). Sunder Sada is a landless ‘amphibian’ agricultural labourer. His morning begins at 6 a.m. and ends at 6 p.m., and all he earns is a paltry sum of Rs. 15 or 18, far below the minimum prescribed wage of Rs. 30 in Bihar. Sunder Sada does not have any choice or alternative. He is free to live or die. His side of supply is far greater than the demand side of his landlords. His number is innumerable. If he bargains, some other Sadas will be there to work at far less wage than what might be demanded by him. His bargaining power is absolutely marginal.

For his wife Para the day too begins much before dawn, of course, much earlier than her husband. She makes some maize gruel, the usual staple food of the family, and feeds her half-a-dozen look-alike children and husband and prepares to leave for the field to collect wild vegetables, roots, rats and fuel. Their house is surrounded by lush green agricultural fields where patches of emerald green wheat and maize field present a paradoxical picture of abundance and deprivation. The miniature hamlet made of twigs and mud and thatched roofs that go as shelter, stand mysteriously elusive in the surroundings. The lands on which houses are constructed do not belong to them. Many of them have got only a ‘patta’, a simple document certifying their occupation. The crop-laden agricultural fields surrounding the Sadas huts do not belong to them, not even an inch of it.

A house-to-house visit to the ‘mushars’ village revealed some more not so-desired situations: most of the young adults, some with their whole family, migrate every year, after the Diwali festival, to Haryana and Punjab (their “Canada” and “America”). Small and rusted locks dangling on some sort of doors to their huts clearly showed that the inhabitants have left for a long interval. Old and infirm men and women are left behind either to look after themselves or to die. The migratory trek to Haryana, Punjab or Delhi does not bring any apparent change in their lives and livelihoods. It has simply lengthened the shadow of their precarious existence without giving or adding any new meaning and means to their lives. Their appalling poverty is indicated by their children’s utter nakedness in the December cold. The semi-frozen purple lips of the small children, shivering and huddling together, showed the depth of their abysmal poverty, misery and uncertainty of existence.

The socially lowest of the low, the ‘mushars’, have their own mutated means of self-inflicted oppression: degradation of women and surrender to liquor. Raghu Sada, an underweight man of 30, a profile of a severely malnourished man, has three wives, the youngest wife being 12 years old. Poverty and sexual harassment were singled out as the main culprits. And “Raghu comes back every year to impregnate his wives and to enjoy his mug of country liquor in the local passikhana,” said one of his wives in dismay.

School nahi hai

“Hamara yehan school nahi hai, saab (in our place, there is no school),” was the clear answer given by the 10-year-old Kalo when the author asked him whether he goes to school. The four villages that the author visited have had hardly any school. Education, like water and any other basic needs, is a scarce commodity. In one village, it was found that a small school without any wall, as small hut having six persons’ seating capacity, is functioning as a government primary school. It was alleged that the two teachers employed in the school come once in a blue moon and that just to fill up their records.

No member of the ‘mushar’ community could dare to question them simply because the teachers belonged to some upper caste. The caste-based politics of Bihar has further widened the social division and the lowest of the low socio-economically weakened sections of the society, like the mushari, have been placed once again in a highly disadvantaged position.

In one mushari village, it was found that the skyline of the village is criss-crossed by dangling electric wires. On enquiry it was found that electricity never appeared in the village.

In the late evening the falling darkness slowly enveloped the village and almost all the huts vanished into darkness. In a few households the author came across some lifeless little fire, struggling intermittently to rise, spreading its smoky and yellow light. In those houses women could be found cooking

their frugal evening meals. This is the other side of Bakhri's outback where thousands of underprivileged grovel in the darkness of abysmal poverty and deprivation.

Then there are the front view of Balch and a busy market place, brisk business hours, ever widening shopkeepers, petty hawkers, pedlars and sellers of vegetables and other items. The Bakhri market both appeals to you and appals you: everything is unorganized. The rickety rickshaw pullers, many of them as young as 13 or 14 years, are sweating day after day to make ends meet. The rickshaws do not belong to them. They are labourers and pay a fixed amount to the owners, and over and above the fixed amount is apportioned by them.

It is in this perspective that an awareness camp for the rural labourers, particularly for agricultural labourers, was organized at Bakhri Block of district Begusarai, Bihar.

The process

The five-day camp began on December 27 and concluded on December 31, 1993. The main purpose of the camp was to educate, organize and prepare the participants for empowerment against external and internal obstacles to their self-actualisation and development.

Moreover, it was also envisaged that a proper framework would be developed in the context of the situation and contextual inputs be identified as necessary prerequisites.

Prior to holding the camp, participants from different villages located in the Bakhari Block were identified. A total 36 participants, most of them belonging to landless agricultural labour households, were selected. In the beginning, an open-ended discussion was initiated on problems which were affecting them directly or indirectly. Right after this discussion all the participants were divided into five groups and each group was asked to prepare a consolidated document highlighting problems of various categories as given below.

Social problems: • Oppression of women • Untouchability • Ignorance, customs and traditions • Prevalence of dowry system • Religious bigotry and fanaticism.

Economic problems: • Unemployment • Minimum wage is not paid • Lack of irrigation facilities • Lack of institutional credit facilities • Rising prices

• Rising population • Rising use of narcotics and drugs • Lack of electricity • Lack of proper technology in agriculture • Lack of small-scale industries in rural areas.

Political problems: • Increasing terrorism • Increasing corruption and bribery • Ineffectiveness of government and Panchayat system • Rising and widely prevalent nexus between politicians and government officials.

Educational problems: • Lack of education • Children from poor families cannot go to school due to shortage of money and material • Every village or hamlet is not provided with a school • Women are far less educated than men • Lack of education is the cause of growing population in the country.

Infrastructure problems: • Lack of roads • Lack of water • Lack of sanitation • Lack of telephone.

Health problems: • Lack of health centres in villages • Even where health centres are available there are hardly any medicine • Proper care of the patient is hardly taken.

Some very interesting points emerge from the list of problems identified by the participants. It can be noted that, though land is the basic means of production and survival, there is virtually no mention about possessing some land. The economic issues are focussed on employment and minimum wage payments. Besides, what else could be observed here is that the participants were absolutely unaware about the need for organising themselves despite the fact the area has been dominated for over four decades by Left parties.

After identification and articulation of the problems, a further exercise was attempted to reason out the causes of the problems and their possible resolution. The result of this exercise was more ascriptive and in the nature of effects of various problems than their causes.

With regard to the resolution of the problems the required prerequisites like education and organisation were more or less overlooked. A picture of dependency on external agency was demonstrated by their perception of resolution of the identified problems. The participants themselves underestimated their own role and capacity.

Keeping these problems and their perceptions by the participants in view, a thorough participatory dialogue was initiated. The context was the evolution of society, its structure and pattern of production relations in the world in general and India in particular, with special focus on rural society in India with reference to rural labourers. The exercise generated serious discussions as many of their perceptions came directly into conflict with the exposed nature of the reality of their existence. And step by step they were self-educated to perceive the reality in a more holistic fashion with a universal perspective. The idea behind this exercise was to create awareness among the participants about self-generating capability to organize themselves for a struggle towards development both materially and mentally – i.e., to realise their human potential to a fuller extent.

The major idea which emerged in the awareness camp during the discussion on problems was that the problems were highly inter-connected and resolution of them had to be evolved and a specific strategy would have to be developed

involving themselves (the participants) in the contexts in which they live and interact with others.

In order to substantiate and realize the idea, an animated discussion was held focussing on the need for information and skills for educational attainment and organisation building. Initially, the participants were pessimistic about any discussion on organisation. They had had the idea that since they were already organized in a community situation for living, beyond this any organisation was a political party. Their perceptions did not go beyond party organisation. That there could be various types of organisation to take care of their interests, was particularly absent in their mental horizon.

However, the pessimistic situation slowly evaporated, and there emerged slowly that some of the problems identified by them could really be resolved by their organized effort on their own level.

To stimulate them further and to test whether they could really organize themselves for achieving some goals which they attempted to establish in the context of their problems, a further exercise was attempted. The exercise was well-received and a great deal of discussion was followed in regard to in which areas organisations could be built. After a prolonged discussion it was clear to them that there was a host of issues in the society which could be addressed in an organized manner to make their society a better place to live in. They also felt, for the first time, that the potential capacity which they possessed individually was not fully understood by them earlier. They were now in a position to see and think for themselves as collective and their capability to resolve many problems which they were facing and many of which had been identified during the “problem identification” session.

By now it was clear to them how an organisational structure could be built upon and what sort of organisations could be suitable for them. Besides, each participant prepared an action plan to act upon returning back to their respective villages.

Behind the Development Process

Poonam S. Chauhan

Introduction

Tikamgarh district, untouched by development, is an outback of Madhya Pradesh. Predominantly rural, the villages of the district are pockmarked by despair, hunger, thirst, lack of clothing, physical and psychological insecurity and hopelessness. In a nutshell, the very basic minimum need for a decent survival is grossly missing from the lives of the majority of the people residing in the villages of the district.

National Labour Institute with its pioneer concern for rural labour, has recently selected Tikamgarh for its future research and training interventions. The sole objective is to uplift the landless agricultural labourers from the darkness of manifold miseries and exploitation. Empowerment of powerless and resourceless people will be the basic concern of this intervention.

The first step towards this empowerment strategy was holding a rural labour camp with the aim to conscientize and develop leadership capabilities among the target group. This camp was held from February 2 to 6, 1994, at the Technical College located at Tikamgarh town. The programme was attended by 36 participants of whom 14 were women. They represented four villages namely, Sundergarh, Burkikhera, Ajnaur and Samarrah. Out of the total number, about 50 per cent participants were illiterate. Almost all the participants belonged to the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe communities.

The participants arrived one day before the programme. They had come gripped with the fear of losing their 'selves' in the jungle of knowledge, freedom and dignity. This fear was further exacerbated in them by the elderly persons of their villages. Some participants were told that they would be sent to such faraway places that their return would not be possible. Such threats hung heavy like Damocles' sword over their heads. Their minds and souls were also gripped with unknown fear

However, slowly but steadily, there began the process of shedding inhibitions: the initial procedure was tough and lengthy. But with the passage of a few hours there appeared a little warmth and animation in their frozen state of communication. This was indeed a difficult problem.

Problems

“Rusia ko dhotia bana denge” (Rusia shall be turned into a piece of loin cloth). These words symbolize the constraint in the attempt to penetrate the minds of the rural people of Tikamgarh. Mr. P.N. Rusia, an eminent educationist and a very committed social worker, is living among the people

of the district with a high concern for their development. Mr. Rusia was our local friend, philosopher and guide. He was instrumental in many ways in organising this camp. During the pre-camp survey he helped us a great deal by introducing us to the prospective participants. When the landlords of some villages came to know that Mr. Rusia was helping the agricultural labourers to attend an awareness camp at Tikamgarh, to be organized by the National Labour Institute, they began to threaten saying that if he again dared to enter their village they would turn him into a dhotia (loin cloth). This indicates that the task of bringing the deprived together was not an easy one. A lot of difficulties had to be encountered. One can imagine how difficult it could be when a person like Mr. Rusia faces a threat like this. The entry of a new person into their area would be a much more difficult task. Such angry protests and threats came from the so-called elite and powerful persons of the rural community. This affluent class does not have any wish to uplift and liberate the poor people from their never-ending poverty. And the poor are not only poor in economic terms, but in power, confidence, thinking, and living too. These problems are vicious and the chains of oppression are experienced by almost all the participants. Against this backdrop it was thought that a session should be fully devoted to the identification and assimilation of problems which the participants might be facing in their lives. The problems enlisted by each group of participants can be categorized into the following groups: (a) **economic**, (b) **social**, and (c) **political**. Details of the problems are provided below:

Economic problems: Under this category, problems like poverty, lack of housing, agricultural land, migration and frequent unemployment, lack of small scale industries and increasing prices, etc. were listed.

Migration is an acute problem in Tikamgarh district. A large chunk of the working population of the district migrate to Delhi, Bhopal, Jhansi and other parts Madhya Pradesh, seeking employment. The migrating persons often take along with them their entire family. Mostly they get work in the construction sites. The employment is intermittent, contract based and uncertain. Besides, wages are minimal and irregular. Migration has many implications: when the husband migrates to a town or city and if the wife and children remain back home, the woman is likely to face some difficulties especially protecting her 'honour'. Long absences also make the woman undergo heavy psychological tension. This results in high rates of divorce cases and separated families. Migration also encourages child labour, because all the members have to take up some kind of work to earn and sustain their living. 'A penny is better than no food' is the notion that guides their thinking which signifies their extreme vulnerability.

Social problems: The participants expressed that even today, the caste system played important roles in their daily existence. In fact, it was an

'insurmountable' obstacle to their development process. It generated and strengthened the 'untouchability' phenomenon. It is quite surprising that despite the legislation on 'untouchability', it is still a predominant feature of the social structure of village communities in Tikamgarh. It breeds discrimination. For example, people belonging to SC and ST communities are not yet permitted to draw water from the hand pumps of the 'higher' caste neighbours. Water, the essential commodity here, becomes the most scarce resource for the poor class partly due to geographical reasons and more so because of caste differentiations and retrogressive attitudes.

Participants admitted that people belonging to high castes showed strong hatred towards the adivasis and other low caste people. Women of lower socio-economic strata experienced greater oppression and sufferings. Their overall household time-consumption profile showed that they were the ones who spent more time working. They also lived under a constant threat of losing their honour. The irony is that the lower caste poor women become the means of pleasure for the elite class; but if the same women fill water from their wells or hand pumps, they are abused, beaten up and lose their pots and pitchers. Child marriage among the people of lower social classes is associated with this problem. In this way they try to avoid the impending danger of rapes which might jeopardize the chances of marriage of their daughters.

In Tikamgarh district, one finds that all the young girls get married very early (around 8, 9 or 10). Early marriage thus seems an honour-saving device. Purdah and dowry are another set of social evils that considerably affect women's lives.

Factors like religion, superstition, traditions and customs also blind the perceptions of the people and tend to impinge on development. The practice of the bonded labour system is an example of this regression. This problem exists and flourishes in many parts of the district. All this results in utter deprivation and inferiority complexes among the poor people.

Lack of education constitutes a major constraint in the path of development of the people. Illiteracy is very high in the district. Four to five children per family is the minimum norm. High illiteracy prepares the ground for ignorance, which in turn makes the people dependent and helpless. This leads to, as expressed by the participants, the development of a feeling of worthlessness. Apart from this, illiteracy has a direct correlation with economic backwardness and population growth. "Kids are god's gifts," "many hands, better economy," such notions indicate their concept of family, ideology and action.

Political problems: It was pointed by the participants that corruption was rampant and they stated that government officials ignored the rural people. They also mentioned their lands were given to them at a price. The officials always demanded bribes. Caste factor also influenced the attitude of the people

in the government departments. All attention, respect and prestige were given to affluent persons while the resourceless classes were ignored.

The change

It can be noted that many such constraints created a dependency syndrome among the rural people. Expectations from the others was very high. This was confirmed by the participants' behaviour pattern. During the initial period of the training programme the participants looked upon us as their 'Masiha' (the saviour) and again and again requested us for providing them employment, land, wells, hand pumps and money. By the end of the second day of the training a change was visible in their expectation pattern and behaviour. The demotivated and listless faces began to show the light of interest. Towards the end of the third day, the earlier expectations were found featuring less in their dialogues. There was the beginning of a new thinking. For the first time, the participants experienced that their shattered confidence was being restored. There seemed to be appearing the understanding in them that the help that they were looking for from others, had had to come from within themselves. We call it a beginning because their dependency syndrome was gradually disappearing.

When the issues like organisation and its utility for the rural poor were dealt with, a majority of the participants began to show immense interest. It worked like an eye-opener for them. They found the strategy a very important tool in their hands. During the tea break one participant came forward and told me "Aaj mera janam hoa hai (I am born today)." Three more participants stood up and made a solemn promise that each of them would teach at least five persons immediately after the training. When the session resumed again, at one point of time, there was a slight murmur among the participants. Suddenly, the oldest person among them stood up and said: "Cup sab, zindigi mein aaj pehli bar kam ki bat sun rahein hain, undue mat dalo (Keep quiet, for the first time in our entire life we are hearing something worthwhile, do not upset and disturb)."

Women, who had been the picture of hopelessness earlier, brightened up and showed attention and concentration. In fact, some of them raised questions and sought clarifications. This was a healthy sign with a promise of future action.

The most surprising thing occurred in the evening of the fourth day of the programme. We were taking a stroll and observing the activities and behaviour of the participants in their free time. Suddenly, we came across a group consisting of six women and three men discussing some subject very intensely. On coming closer, we discovered that they were discussing 'how to build an organisation' immediately after going back to villages. The women were weighing the pros and cons of the new effort of organising. They were

discussing the strategies for dealing with the obstacles which might appear in the way of organising. It was a promising experience because all the women were illiterate but their concerns about their responsibilities were very high. Some participants in other small groups were also discussing the same subject. The sight was quite refreshing and reassuring because, for the first time, they had completely forgotten their demands of employment and other economic gains. This indicated high motivation and inspiration among the participants. This new awakening was also the indicator of their learning.

Strategy

In this perspective, an attempt will be made to empower the deprived rural workers in a Panchayat setting following an 'auto-participation' strategy aided by an external agency through internal animators, educated and intellectually prepared within the setting. In the first phase, an intensive survey of the deprived households will be conducted so as to configure the conditions in which they are presently living. This exercise will identify the problem of poverty, ignorance and unemployment, so as to measure them against certain yardsticks of development indicators and to underline their solution with a certain input-mix to be constituted by education, training and employment generation activities.

Together, We Can Solve Our Problems

Report of a Rural Labour Camp held at Kumher, Bharatpur

Poonam S. Chauhan, M.M. Rehman and Rajesh Kumar Karn

Introduction

Rural labourers, particularly the agricultural labourers, live in a highly disadvantaged situation. Though they constitute the largest segment of the workforce in the country they still lack bargaining power. According to the National Commission on Rural Labour, a little over one per cent of rural labourers is working in the organized sector while the great bulk is in the unorganized sector.

Apart from this disadvantage in being unorganized, they are also illiterate and socially segregated and economically underprivileged. Various studies and research conducted in different parts of the country have shown that the main problem of the rural labourers is their lack of power over their lives and non-participation in the decision-making process for their development. Against this background, it has been suggested by many research findings that by the conscientization process, focussing on political and production awareness, the problem of rural labourers could be eradicated.

Keeping this in view, V.V. Giri National Labour Institute conducted a rural labour camp in Kumher, Bharatpur district from November 10 to 14, 1997. The report of the camp has been brought out in three chapters. The report also consist of a number of Appendices and Annexures.

Chapter one provides a comprehensive profile of Kumher Tehsil. Chapter two gives a brief account of a short pre-camp survey, and chapter three provides a day-to-day account of the camp process.

The report is the outcome of an effort of a number of persons. We express our gratitude to all of them.

We, however, especially thank Ms Uma Pillai, Director, who has been a constant source of inspiration in successfully conducting the camp and persistently encouraging us to bring out the report in its present form.

We also express our gratitude to Mr. Yaduvendra Mathur, I.A.S., D.M., Bharatpur, for his kind cooperation and enthusiasm.

Our thanks are due also to Mr. Rajesh Chaudhary who extended his cooperation from day one, to make the camp successful.

We also thank Mr. K.K. Mathur, Mr. Singh, Mr. Rajesh Kumar Karn, Mr. Gopal Rampal and Ms Indira Rathore for their cooperation in bringing out this report in such a short time.

Kumher: a profile

Kumher Tehsil is located in Bharatpur district of Rajasthan. It is near the historic city Mathura. A landlocked Tehsil, it has vast land resources but its underground water resources are not of good quality as it is mostly brackish and largely unsuitable for cultivation. So far, watershed development activities have not yet been taken up seriously.

In this chapter we have made an attempt to present various aspects of Kumher Tehsil's profile so as to make it useful to any individuals, organisations and officials who are engaged in the development of the people in the Tehsil. The purpose is to provide basic information and data which are essential elements to and prerequisites for micro-level planning for development activities and their implementation.

The area: The total area of Kumher Tehsil is 454.51 sq. km. Out of this area, 440.16 sq. km and 19.35 sq. km. are rural and urban areas respectively. The urban area consists of Kumher Municipality only (Table 1.1).

The households: According to the 1991 census, the total number of occupied residential households was 20,843, out of which 18,338 and 2,505 were rural and urban households respectively.

The population: According to the 1991 census, the total population of Kumher Tehsil was 1,45,414 out of which 79,542 (54.70%) and 65,872 (45.3%) were male and female respectively. The important point that could be noticed in Table 2 is that the difference between the male and female population is very disturbing, for the females are short of around 10 per cent as compared to their male counterparts (for details, see Table 1.2).

Children

The census of 1991 shows that out of the total population, 30,970 were children in the age-group 0-6. These figures symbolically indicate what would be required in terms providing education and other services to its growing population and their development in the near future. Conservative estimate suggests that the drop-out rate is still considerably high, being around 60 per cent in general, and among female it is still very high.

Caste background

The total population of Kumher Tehsil, according to the 1991 Census, was 1,45,414 out of which 21.90 and 2.21 per cent were Scheduled Castes (S.C.) and Scheduled Tribes (S.T.). The Tehsil has also a sizeable proportion of population belonging to backward classes (Table 1.4).

The caste configuration: Kumher Tehsil is dominated by the following caste compositions: the Jat and the Jatav, the latter belonging to the Scheduled Castes. This Tehsil had witnessed a serious caste conflict only a few years ago.

Still, an undercurrent of tension runs through the recesses of social relations in the area. The figures in Tables 1.5 and 1.6 show that in 1991 the total numbers of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe population were 31,858 and 3,228 respectively.

Educational profile

Kumher is still educationally backward. The figures in Table 1.7 are the telling examples. It could be seen that in 1991 only 36.43 per cent of its total population were literate. The rural urban distribution shows that in 1991, 35.54 and 43.40 per cent rural and urban population were literate respectively.

The figures also show that 54.72 and 6.50 per cent male and female population were literate. A similar situation could be observed in rural and urban areas also.

The point which could be noted is that female literacy rate is at a very low level which requires very urgent attention. Though a great deal of effort is under way, made by both the government and NGOs, still an enormous stride requires to be made if faster growth of rate of literacy is expected.

The workers

According to the 1991 census there were 38,379 main and 15,014 marginal workers in Kumher Tehsil (Tables 1.8-1.21). The interesting point which could be noticed in Table 1.8 is that out of the total main workers, 91.80 per cent were males while 8.2 per cent were females.

With regard to the marginal workers it could be seen that out of the total 15,014 workers 97.48 per cent were female while 2.52 per cent were male (Tables 1.8 and 1.9).

Social category of workers

Main workers: According to the 1991 census, out of 38,379 main workers in Kumher there were 7,383 (19.23%) and 780 (2.03%) were S.C. and S.T. workers. Further distribution shows that for all and S.C. and S.T. categories, the majority of the workers were cultivators, followed by agricultural labourers, workers engaged in other services and other than household industries (see Table 1.11-1.19).

Marginal workers: It could be observed in Table 1.9A that in Kumher there were 15,014 marginal labourers out of which 19.51 and 2.37 per cent were S.C. and S.T. workers.

What emerges from the tables on workers is that in Kumher Tehsil cultivation is still the mainstay of the population. As a result, we see that the number of cultivators is very high. It may, however, be noted that a majority of cultivators are in the marginal and small-size classes of holding. For example, in 1985-86, the marginal holding was 47.91 per cent followed by 21.04, 18.25,

11.68 and 1.12 per cent small, semi-medium, medium and large holdings. A similar situation existed in Kumher villages.

Another important aspect of the economy of the area is the average size of holding which is very insignificant in the case of marginal holdings. As a result of this phenomenon, production suffers and large-scale land development activity remains absent.

Kumher Tehsil*

**Table 1.1
Total Area and Total Number of Household**

Total area (in sq. k.m.)	No. of occupied Residential Houses	No. of Households
454.51	20843	20999
440.16	18338	18465
14.35	2505	2534

**Table 1.2
Total Population**

	Persons	Males	Females
T.	145414	79542	65872
	(100.00)	(54.70)	(45.30)
R.	129059	70678	58381
	(100.00)	(54.76)	(45.24)
U.	16355	8864	7491
	(100.00)	(54.19)	(45.81)

**Table 1.3
Total Population in the age group 0-6**

	Persons	Males	Females
	30940	16439	14501
	(100.00)	(53.13)	(46.87)
R.	27584	14646	12938
	(100.00)	(53.09)	(46.91)
	3356	1793	1563
	(100.00)	(53.42)	(46.58)

* All the figures in Tables (1.1-1.21) are based on *Census of India, Bharatpur District Handbook; 1991.*

Table 1.4
Caste-wise distribution of population in Kumher Tehsil

Category	No. of Population	% of the total
All	145414	100.00
S.C.	31858	21.90
S.T.	3228	2.21

Table 1.5
Total Scheduled Caste Population

	Persons	Males	Females
T.	31858	17656	14202
	(100.00)	(55.42)	(44.58)
R.	26317	14626	11691
	(100.00)	(55.57)	(44.43)
U.	5541	3030	2511
	(100.00)	(54.68)	(45.32)

Table 1.6
Total Scheduled Tribe Population

	Persons	Males	Females
T.	3 ² 28	1780	1448
	(100.00)	(55.14)	(44.86)
R.	3190	1762	1428
	(100.00)	(55.23)	(44.77)
U.	38	18	20
	(100.00)	(47.36)	(52.64)

Table 1.7
Total Literates in Kumher Tehsil in 1991

	Persons	%*	Males	%	Females	%*
T.	52977	36.43	43521	54.72	9456	16.50
	(100.00)		(82.15)		(17.85)	
R.	45878	35.54	38436	54.38	7442	12.74
	(100.00)		(83.77)		(16.23)	
R.	7099	43.40	5085	57.36	2014	26.88
	(100.00)		(71.62)		(28.38)	

Table 1.8
Total Main Worker

	Persons	Males	Females
T.	38379	35234	3145
	(100.00)	(91.80)	(8.20)
R	34167	31181	2986
	(100.00)	(91.26)	(8.74)
U.	4212	4053	159
	(100.00)	(96.22)	(3.78)

Table 1.9
Caste-wise Distribution of Workers in Kumher Tehsil

S. No. Category	All	S.C.	S.T.
1 Total workers (Main)	38,379	7383	780
	(100.00)	(100.00)	(100.00)
2 Cultivators	24123	3383	615
	(62.85)	(45.82)	(78.84)
3 Agricultural labourers	4495	2333	24
	(11.71)	31.59)	(3.07)
4. Livestock, forestry, etc.	332	99	5
	(0.86)	(1.34)	(0.64)
5 Mining quarrying	35	23	
	(0.09)	(0.31)	
6 Manufacturing	674	149	3
	(1.75)	(2.01)	(0.38)
7 Other than H.I.	1669	445	10
	(4.34)	(6.02)	(1.28)
8 Construction workers	642	235	1
	(1.67)	(3.18)	(0.12)
9 Trade & commerce	1438	59	7
	(3.74)	0.79)	(0.87)
10. Transport, storage, etc.	841	126	25
	(2.19)	(1.70)	(3.20)
11. Other services	4130	531	90
	(10.76)	(7.19)	(11.53)

Table 1.9A
Distribution of Marginal Workers by Castes

Category	No.	
Total Marginal Workers	15014	100.00
Total S.C. Marginal Workers	2930	19.51
Total S.T. Marginal Workers	356	2.37

Table 1.10
Total Cultivators

	Persons	Males	Females
T.	24123	22246	1877
	(100.00)	(92.21)	(7.79)
R.	23284	21428	1856
	(100.00)	(92.02)	(7.98)
U.	839	818	21
	(100.00)	(97.49)	(2.51)

Table 1.11
Total Agricultural Laboures

	Persons	Males	Females
T.	4495	3631	864
	(100.00)	(80.77)	(19.23)
R.	3989	3150	839
	(100.00)	(78.96)	(21.04)
U.	506	481	25
	(100.00)	(95.05)	(4.95)

Table 1.12
**Total No. Livestock, Forestry, Fishing, Hunting and Plantations,
Orchards and allied activities**

	Persons	Males	Females
T.	332	330	2
	(100.00)	(99.39)	(0.61)
R.	281	279	2
	(100.00)	(99.28)	(0.72)
U.	51	51	
	(100.00)	(100.00)	

Table 1.13
Total No. of Mining and Quarrying Workers

	Males	Females
T.	35	35
	(100.00)	(100.00)
R.	30	30
	(100.00)	(100.00)
U.	5	5
	(100.00)	(100.00)

Table 1.14
Total No. of Manufacturing, Processing, Servicing and Repairs in Household Industries

	Persons	Males	Females
T.	674	594	80
	(100.00)	(88.13)	(11.87)
R.	503	453	50
	(100.00)	(90.05)	(9.95)
U.	171	141	30
	(100.00)	(82.45)	(17.55)

Table 1.15
Total Manufacturing, Processing, Servicing and Repairs in other than Household Industries

	Persons	Males	Females
T.	1669	1563	106
	(100.00)	(93.64)	(6.36)
R.	1298	1211	87
	(100.00)	(93.29)	(6.71)
U.	371	352	19
	(100.00)	(94.87)	(5.13)

Table 1.16
Construction Workers

	Persons	Males	Females
T.	642	635	7
	(100.00)	(98.90)	(1.10)
R.	352	350	2
	(100.00)	(99.43)	(0.57)
U.	290	285	5
	(100.00)	(98.27)	(1.73)

Table 1.17
Trade and Commerce Workers

	Persons	Males	Females
T.	1438	1412	26
	(100.00)	(98.19)	(1.81)
R.	633	611	22
	(100.00)	(96.52)	(3.48)
U.	805	801	4
	(100.00)	(99.50)	(0.50)

Table 1.18
Transport, Storage and Communications Workers

	Persons	Males	Females
T.	841	840	1
	(100.00)	(99.88)	(0.12)
R.	693	692	1
	(100.00)	(99.85)	(0.15)
U.	148	148	
	(100.00)	(100.00)	

Table 1.19
Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Population

Category	No. of Households		Total Scheduled Caste Population		
			Persons	Males	Females
S.C.	T.	4220	26317	14626	11691
			(100.00)	(55.57)	(44.43)
	R.	4220	26317	14626	11691
			(100.00)	(55.57)	(44.43)
	U.	-	-	-	-
S.T.	T.	475	3190	1762	1428
			(100.00)	(55.23)	(44.77)
	R.	475	3190	1762	1428
			(100.00)	(55.23)	(44.77)
	U.	-	-	-	-

Table 1.20
Total Caste-wise Population in the age-group 0-6

Category		Persons	Males	Females
S.C.	T.	5943	3256	2687
		(100.00)	(54.78)	(45.22)
	R.	5943	3256	2687
		(100.00)	(54.78)	(45.22)
	U.	-	-	-
S.T.	T.	648	359	289
		(100.00)	(55.40)	(44.60)
	R.	648	359	289
		(100.00)	(55.40)	(44.60)
	U.	-	-	-

Table 1.21
Literates

Category		Persons	Males	Females
S.C.	T.	6526	6106	420
		(100.00)	(93.56)	(6.44)
	R.	6526	6106	420
		(100.00)	(93.56)	(6.44)
	U.			
S.T.	T.	1041	919	122
		(100.00)	(88.28)	(11.72)
	R.	1041	919	122
		(100.00)	(88.28)	(11.72)
	U.			

Table 1.22
Total Main Workers

Category		Persons	Males	Females
S.C.	T.	7383	6414	969
		(100.00)	(86.87)	(13.13)
	R.	7383	6414	969
		(100.00)	(86.87)	(13.13)
S.T.	T.	780	727	43
		(100.00)	(94.48)	(5.52)
	R.	780	737	43
		(100.00)	(94.48)	(5.52)
	U.			

Table 1.23
Cultivators

Category		Persons	Males	Females
S.C.		3383	3128	255
		(100.00)	(92.46)	(7.54)
	R.	3383	3128	255
		(100.00)	(92.46)	(7.54)
S.T.		615	580	35
		(100.00)	(94.30)	(5.7)
	R.	615	580	35
		(100.00)	(94.30)	(5.7)

Table 1.24
Agricultural Labour

Category		Persons	Males	Females
S.C.	T.	2333	1824	509
		(100.00)	(78.18)	(21.82)
	R.	2333	1824	509
		(100.00)	(78.18)	(21.82)
S.T.	U.			
	T.	24	16	8
		(100.00)	(66.66)	(33.34)
	R.	24	16	8
		(100.00)	(66.66)	(33.34)
	U.			

Table 1.25
**Livestock, Forestry, Fishing, Hunting and Plantations,
Orchards and allied activities**

Category		Persons	Males	Females
S.C.	T.	99	98	1
		(100.00)	(98.98)	(1.02)
	R.	99	98	1
		(100.00)	(98.98)	(1.02)
S.T.	U.			
	T.	5	5	5
		(100.00)	(50.00)	(50.00)
	R.	5	5	5
		(100.00)	(50.00)	(50.00)
	U.			

Table 1.26
Mining and Quarrying

Category		Persons	Males	Females
S.C.	T.	23	21	2
		(100.00)	(91.30)	(8.70)
	R.	23	21	
		(100.00)	(91.30)	(8.70)
S.T.	U.			
	T.			
	R.			
	U.			

Table 1.27
Manufacturing, Processing, Servicing and Repair in Household Industries

Category		Persons	Males	Females
S.C.	T.	149	133	16
		(100.00)	(89.26)	(10.74)
	R.	149	133	16
		(100.00)	(89.26)	(10.74)
S.T.	U.			
	T.	3	3	
		(100.00)	(100.00)	
	R.	3	3	
		(100.00)	(100.00)	
	U.			

Table 1.28
Manufacturing, Processing, Servicing and Repairs in other than Household

Category		Persons	Males	Females
S.C.	T.	445	364	81
		(100.00)	(81.79)	(18.21)
	R.	445	364	81
		(100.00)	(81.79)	(18.21)
S.T.	U.			
	T.	10	10	
		(100.00)	(100.00)	
	R.	10	10	
		(100.00)	(100.00)	
	U.			

Table 1.29
Construction

Category		Persons	Males	Females
S.C.	T.	235	234	1
		(100.00)	(99.57)	(0.43)
	R.	235	234	1
		(100.00)	(99.57)	(0.43)
	U.			
S.T.	T.	1	1	
		(100.00)	(100.00)	
	R.	1	1	
		(100.00)	(100.00)	
	U.			

Table 1.30
Trade and Commerce

Category		Persons	Males	Females
S.C.	T.	59	56	3
		(100.00)	(94.91)	(5.09)
	R.	59	56	3
		(100.00)	(94.91)	(5.09)
	U.			
S.T.	T.	7	7	
		(100.00)	(100.00)	
	R.	7	7	
		(100.00)	(100.00)	
	U.			

Table 1.31
Transport, Storage and Communication

Category		Persons	Males	Females
S.C.	T.	126	126	
		(100.00)	(100.00)	
	R.	126	126	
		(100.00)	(100.00)	
	U.			
S.T.	T.	25	25	
		(100.00)	(100.00)	
	R.	25	25	
		(100.00)	(100.00)	
	U.			

Table 1.32
Other Services

Category		Persons	Males	Females
S.C.	T.	531	430	101
		(100.00)	(80.97)	(19.03)
	R.	531	430	101
		(100.00)	(80.97)	(19.03)
	U.			
S.T.	T.	90	90	
		(100.00)	(100.00)	
	R.	90	90	
		(100.00)	(100.00)	
	U.			

Table 1.33
Marginal workers

Category		Persons	Males	Females
S.C.	T.	2930	76	2854
		(100.00)	(2.59)	(97.41)
	R.	2930	76	2854
		(100.00)	(2.59)	(97.41)
	U.			
S.T.	T.	356	3	253
		(100.00)	(0.84)	(99.16)
	R.	356	3	353
		(100.00)	(0.84)	(99.16)
	U.			

Table 1.34
Non-workers

Category		Persons	Males	Females
S.C.	T.	16004	8136	7868
		(100.00)	(50.83)	(49.17)
	R.	16004	8136	7868
		(100.00)	(50.83)	(49.17)
	U.			
S.T.	T.	2054	1022	1032
		(100.00)	(49.75)	(50.25)
	R.	2054	1022	1032
		(100.00)	(49.75)	(50.25)
	U.			

The pre-camp survey

The idea of conducting a rural labour camp in Bharatpur district of Rajasthan was conceived by Ms Uma Pillai, Director of the Institute. In one of her interactions with the present DM/DC of Bharatpur, she found him encouraging and interested in the development of rural labourers in the district. Apart from this, Bharatpur is one of the underdeveloped districts of Rajasthan. The majority of its population still depends on agriculture. Besides, agricultural labourers are not at all organized. Trade union activities, either among the labourers in rural areas or in urban areas, are quite limited. Hence, a decision was taken to activate the rural labourers through the camp-based orientation process in the area to help in building organization and awareness among them.

Immediately after the decision was taken, two faculty members went to Bharatpur on October 15, 1997. We met the DM/DC of Bharatpur and told him of the purpose of our visit and explained the objectives of our rural labour camps, and the process involved in its conduction. The DM immediately called the ADM and the Development Planning Officer (DPO) and briefed them about the visit. Then the DPO was asked to accompany us. Before leaving the district headquarters, we collected the District Census Handbook Statistical Profile and some other reports from the DM. The DM suggested that the camp could be held in the Kumher Block of Bharatpur, in the premises where the Panchayat Bhawan and Centre of Lupin, an NGO, were located.

Immediately after this meeting, we went to Kumher with the DPO. Kumher is situated at a distance of 14 km. from the Bharatpur town. Within half an hour we reached the Lupin Centre where we met two of its office bearers. Here two more persons joined us. They were the panchayat's officers. Once again the purpose of our visit was explained by us and it was done again and again as we went on meeting new people. We explained our requirement for the programme. One of the officers, Mr. Rajesh Choudhary, agreed to help, accompanying us to different villages for identification of prospective camp participants. It was late afternoon when we started our journey towards the villages located in and around Kumher and Bharatpur. We visited seven villages and interviewed a number of workers. They were mainly agricultural labourers, construction workers, self-employed-cum-wage labourers, etc. The meeting ended late in the evening. Some highlights of the pre-camp visit are given below.

Village Belara Khurd

We reached Belara Khurd around 3:15 p.m. The village, located near BharatpurKumher road, is connected by a semi-pucca stretch which enters the village unobtrusively. The road and the village meet at a huge pot-hole. Sewer-

water from the households is made to flow through the village lanes dotted with garbage dumps. The villagers do not bother though they bemoan the state of affairs regarding the sanitation problem.

“It is government’s negligence,” they said. That they could at least maintain the lanes dry had never dawned in their minds. This is how the village scenario appeared before us.

As usual, we first entered area of the village which is predominantly inhabited by the Scheduled Caste population. The surroundings did not appear promising at all. Ramshakle houses, dilapidated huts, half-naked children, all that conjured up the scenario.

Being located on the main road and frequently visited by many outsiders, our arrival did not raise any curiosity in the minds of our prospective camp participants.

After our arrival, a meeting was called and with the cooperation of some elders, the prospective campers were selected. Initially, they were reluctant, particularly the women, because they had never before attended any such camp meeting for five days together. However, our persuasion prevailed and they agreed to come to the camp. Well, they had expectations in their hearts. Perhaps, the camp would show them a way out of their daily wretchedness. We selected four participants from Belara and left for other villages where a similar situation prevailed.

Village Nangla Manjhi

Our next interaction was with Shrimati Narain Devi, Sarpanch of village Nangla Manjhi. A middle-aged woman with enough courage and determination, she promised us her co-operation. We, thanked her and reached the area of the village where landless agricultural labourers were concentrated. It was a sowing season at its peak. Everybody was out and busy in the field. Women were busy picking weeds in their vegetable patches, their heads covered with colourful scarfs (dupattas). Men with spades, hoes, and tractors trailed by hundreds of egrets and birds busy picking insects completed the scenario. It was a picture-postcard scenario. We managed to meet a number of young labourers working in the field. After a brief discussion with them they agreed to participate in the camp. During our conversation with them they expressed their curiosity about the aims and objectives of the camp and about its possible outcomes.

Village Ranikund Rarah

After identifying the prospective participants we went to village Ranikund Rarah. Interviewing several persons who could be prospective participants in the camp, we took a round of the village and found that the village is sufficiently developed in terms of infrastructure and other facilities.

Agriculture is still a main source of livelihood in the village. But the agricultural scenario is no more the same. Today bullocks have been replaced by tractors and one could hear the sounds of tractors everywhere.

We found that today, though agriculture is still the mainstay, but, for agricultural labourers, other avenues of income are equally open. Many nascent industrial activities in the District Headquarters and Tehsil towns have opened up employment opportunities to a significant level. This diversification in the employment situation has created a great deal of demand for new skills and higher levels of awareness among them for better standards of life and then before.

Village Takha

After Ranikund Rarah we went to another village which is called Takha. The village is quite known in the area, for legend has it that the village was the original site of the mythological kingdom of Takshila where the king of snakes used to live. It is still believed that if anybody is bitten by a snake and is within the boundary of the village he would not die. Even people having snake bites in other villages visit the village and as soon as they arrive so soon, the impact of poison dissolves and the patient recovers. This was told by the village Sarpanch, an educated man who live mostly in Bharatpur Tehsil.

In this village our visit did not bear any fruit, however. Labourers were all away, and they had little freedom to attend the proposed camp. We had a meeting with the village Sarpanch to whom it seemed everything was fine in the village. "The labourers are a very happy lot here," he said nonchalantly.

Village Ajan

Spending an hour or so in the village we moved to village Ajan. It is quite a large village and a section of its population is comparatively rich. Ajan is a known village. One of its teachers was awarded the Radhakrishnan Award for the best teacher in 1993. He is Mr. Dori Lal Sharma. Mr. Sharma gave us a first-hand account of the village and promised us that any number of participants could be sent from his village. We, however, insisted that we would meet our prospective participants and select them ourselves. He reluctantly agreed and we moved to the Harijan basti, a dilapidated conglomeration of mud huts in a state of decay, all round. A look around the area tells one the tale of deprivation among the Scheduled Caste households. It was found that most of the households were landless. Their only source of survival is their labour. A majority of the able-bodied (including women) are agricultural labourers or work as daily-wage labour in Bharatpur town in any activity – from mechanics shop to building construction. They, in fact, do any odd job to supplement their income.

In this village we selected several men and women after a few hours' discussion with them. They promised that on the appointed day they would

attend the camp. They were, however, eager to know the contents of the five-day camp. We explained it to them and then they nodded their agreement.

Village Pichoomar

We then visited another village known as Pichoomar. The lanes and by-lanes of the village were full of mud and water. The lanes are not only meant for walking but are also used as gullies for carrying sewer water. Despite the pucca houses that are dotting the village landscape it wears a look of dirt and decay. Like any other village, here also pucca houses and dumping grounds existed cheek by jowl.

In this village, we called a meeting and about a dozen young men gathered. Out of them we selected five who evinced a keen interest in the camp when we explained to them our mission and the objectives of the proposed camp.

Within two days we visited about several villages and identified our prospective camp participants.

What emerged

Our visit to several villages in the Kumher Block brought one thing to the fore: increasing population, expanding frontiers of economic activity and escalating ambitions, expectations and exploitation. The problem that surfaced was one of imbalance and the result was a search for alternative avenues of employment and over and improper utilisation of resources. Our observation also brought another aspect of the reality into sharp focus: lack of information among the people about what they could do with the available resources. It was obvious that human resources have to be qualitatively improved by fostering in them an organisational ability and capability of generating awareness about the requirement of balanced and sustainable development in a given material existence.

The Panchayat Officer assured us after the survey, that he would help us in arranging other facilities for conducting the camp. We had specified some criteria for choosing the participants. These were:

1. The participants should be wage earners, especially landless agricultural labourers and artisans;
2. They should be from the age group of 18-42;
3. If literate, preference was given to them;
4. The participants should be prepared to stay for five days as the camp was residential;
5. Participants with articulative and leadership potentials skills were to be preferred; and
6. Workers from the 'below poverty line' families were to be given priority for selection.

During the meeting with the workers and Panchayat Officer it was decided that the actual camp could be held from 10 to 14 November, 1997. These dates were acceptable to all the persons involved in the camp. The venue of the camp was decided to be the Panchayat Bhawan at Kumher. Other responsibilities like arrangements for food and tent house were thoroughly discussed and entrusted with Mr. Rajesh Choudhary who extended his full co-operation during the pre-camp visit as well as during the camp process itself.

The Camp

Introduction

On November 9, 1997, at 10.30 a.m., we reached the Panchayat Bhawan at Kumher. The weather was cool, the sky was covered with black clouds and soon after, it started drizzling. After half an hour of our arrival Mr. Rajesh Choudhary joined us. He informed that, due to three successive rains, the crops had suffered unprecedentedly and again and again sowing was taking place because whenever seeds were sown, they were washed away by each spell of rain which followed one after the other. The workers were in great demand. Hence the possibility of their joining the camp might be very low. He said that about 20-25 participants might turn up. In the gloomy mid-day of mid-November, the news made us gloomier.

Since we had some time on our hands, we decided to revisit some of the nearby villages and contacted our prospective participants. These visits helped reassuring us. The participants' assurance, "Fiqar na karna" (do not worry), gave us enough strength for the camp's preparation. Though on that evening no participant turned up, we remained optimistic and made all the necessary arrangements. Mr. Jagdish Prasad and Mr. Harvan Singh, two of our local participants, cleaned the spit-stained Panchayat Ghar and stockpiled quilts, pillows and mattresses. This year, November was chilly, so all winter arrangements were made carefully. The camp was scheduled to commence on 10th November, 1997. At 8.30 a.m., the first batch of participants arrived and with them they brought rays of hope. By 10.30, the number swelled to 37. We registered 37 for the camp and soon the camp was opened. Before going into the camp process, a brief detail about the participants are given here:

Personal information

Thirty-seven participants attended the camp. There were 10 women among them. They were from 12 villages of Kumher Block of Bharatpur district. The participants were in the age group 18-40. About 90 per cent of the participants were married. About 70 per cent of them were having kids. On an average, five to six children were in each family (see Table 2.1).

Social profile

A majority of the participants were from the Scheduled Caste category. Illiteracy was high among them. All the women participants were illiterate. Among males only one was totally illiterate who used a thumb impression. The remaining males could sign their names only. Only a few of male participants could read and write properly. The malnourished bodies and hunger-stricken contours on their faces were ample illustration of destitution and poverty in their lives.

Economic profile

All the participants were economically backward. They were from the below the poverty line families. Employment opportunities are extremely limited in the area, thus a considerable level of unemployment prevails. The participants had only seasonal employment opportunities in agriculture. When employment in agriculture is scarce they migrate to other places in search of work. In season, when demand for labour is more, they get more wages than the rates prescribed by the State. But in the lean season, they are paid wages which are much below the State-prescribed minimum wage rates. Economic deprivation was acute among the participants. Their living conditions, especially their dwelling places, illustrate this aspect poignantly.

Level of awareness among the participants

Lack of knowledge and information among the participants about different labour laws, government programmes and schemes, their rights and various ways and means available for improving their status etc., were the major impediments to their development. Many of the participants had not even heard about the existence of labour laws. The existing social milieu in which they were living was accepted by them as something divinely ordained.

**Table 2.1
Family Profile of the Participants**

Total No. of Participants	Population			Caste Backgrounds	
	Female	Male	Total Population	S.C.	S.T.
35	40	122	212	35	0

**Table 2.2
Participants Landownership Pattern**

Total No. of Participants	Ownership of Land (in hect.)					
	Yes	No	Not clear	Irrigated	Unirrigated	Total Land
35	5	20	10	x	5	4 Hect, 3 Bigha

Table 2.3
Educational Profile of the Participants

1.	No. of participants	37
2.	Literate sign	18
3.	Read and write	4
4.	Primary	2
5.	High school	6

Table 2.4
Occupational Distribution of the Participants

1.	Total No. of Participants	37
2.	Agricultural Labourers	35
3.	Wage-labourers/housewives	2

Methodology

The methodology of the camp was based on interactive participation. The camp process included:

1. Group work;
2. Simulation exercise;
3. Learning through games;
4. Self-induced participative activity;
5. Conceptual lecture and discussion; and
6. Field experience.

THE CAMP PROCESS

First Day of the Camp

On November 10, 1997 at 11.00 a.m., the camp was initiated. It was inaugurated by the Gram Pradhan and the Panchayat Administrator. In the inaugural speech they emphasised the role of workers in their own development. They also stressed on the unity among the workers and emphasised that after the camp all the participants should strive to organize as many workers as possible in the area. During this inaugural session the objectives of VVGNLI's rural labour camp were spelt out by the faculty members.

After the inauguration we started the process of introduction. Each participant was called up to the dais to give his/her introduction. It was found that participants were experiencing difficulties in introducing themselves. Only a few showed confidence. Many were nervous and tongue-tied. Some of them even faltered in giving their names, instead of pronouncing their names they gave their village names as their own – they were so confused. Women

participants showed more nervousness. Half of their strength was spent to build confidence to talk about themselves. With such constraints and hesitancy the introduction process was over.

Then we asked about their expectations from us and the programme. For a good five minutes there was complete silence in the hall. Thirty-seven persons sat as stone statues without even flickering their eyelids. Suddenly a low voice emerged, "I want full-time work." Getting encouragement from this statement two more persons spoke out, "We want to improve our status and life." Slowly, more persons started speaking. Since many people spoke at the same time the conversation got confused. We intervened here. Then, one by one, they started expressing their expectations. In nutshell, they wanted work, wages, land and better life. Interestingly, one participant quietly uttered, "Hum janwar hein. Hemein insaan ki jindagi chahiye (we are like animals. We want to live like human beings)."

Knowing the levels of expectations of the participants we clarified to them that we could not provide them employment and wages or land directly. But we could together work out means and ways and effective strategies to improve their socio-economic status and overall quality of life.

Subsequently, a business session was held. In this session we asked for volunteers from the participants who would be entrusted with the task of looking after boarding facilities, cleanliness of the classroom and in and around the camp hall, proper distribution of food, etc. Three committees were formed:

- (i) Food Committee
- (ii) Class-room Committee
- (iii) Miscellaneous task Committee

The members of the committees were changed every day in the evening. In this way every member was involved and got an opportunity to show their capability to work in an organized manner. This was the first lesson in organisation building. By this time it was 2.00 p.m. and we broke for lunch.

At 3.00 p.m. we reassembled. We started the session with the general feel of the problems of the participants. Then, to make the task more specific, we divided the participants into five small groups. They were asked to discuss their problems in their respective groups. The groups were left on their own to identify their problems. This session was known as 'Identification of problems, their articulation and consolidation'. For problem identification, enough time was provided because this process is very slow. The thinking process takes time to open up. Once the discussion was through, the participants of each group wrote down their groups' problems on large white sheets. The sheets were pinned on the walls for everybody to see and articulate what they had conceptualised.

Each group sent its representative to present its problems and explain them to all the participants. Once the articulation was complete the groups were asked to discuss the causes of the problems.

Working out the causes of the problems was still a difficult process for the participants. Many of them sat with blank expressions. Time stood still for a while. Participants showed expressions of inability and monotony in the process. They were unable to move further as their mental framework was blocked. They looked totally confused. After a great deal of effort they began to discuss the causes and wrote them down. In the similar manner the articulation of causes took place, the new representatives of the groups came forward to explain their charts which were displayed on the wall. The respective group members supplemented other information where their representatives failed to articulate. The members of other groups sought clarifications if any or raised questions for further clarification of any point. This helped them in understanding and conceptualising the problems and their causes better.

After the problem conceptualization, effort was made to consolidate the problems. The faculty facilitator raised certain questions as to what kinds of problems these were which had been identified by them. How could they categorise them? Was there any similar pattern in the category? And if not, what was the dissimilarity?

Then the facilitator moved to the explanation of the causes of the problems. Here it was observed that in finding the causes of the problems the participants had come out with fresh problems. They could not differentiate between the two very carefully. Many problems were shown as the source of other problems. The facilitator explained to the participants about the causes of exploitation and helped them to understand that the root cause of all problems was the exploitation, and other problems were an outcome of social laws and structure. Inequality at both levels created all sorts of socio-economic and political problems. During these processes it was noted that the participants were showing a high level of dependency. Thus, when we raised a question such as: "who will solve their problems?", they immediately answered saying that the government or we would solve their problems. We said that the government had been there for the last 50 years, yet, instead of lessening the problems, they had been multiplied. We also explained to them that, since they were not our problems, why we should solve them.

These questions shook the participants out of their uncalled-for belief and after a long pause a woman participant, named Saroj, said, "We understand now that these are our problems and we have to solve them." Then some more voices poured in. But the problem was 'how to solve these problems'. We discussed this aspect for some more time. And slowly it appeared that they had understood that by their collective action they could solve their problems. The evening session was over and we all retired for the day.

The Problems Identified by the participants are given below group-wise:

GROUP I

1. Problem of unemployment and minimum wages
2. Problem of livelihood: labourers do not get their minimum wages and all other facilities. They can't build house to live in.
3. Problem of education: poor labourers are not able to educate their children due to economic crisis.
4. Crisis of basic needs: for example, food, clothes, home, health, etc.
5. Work status and wages problem: their wages are not paid in time. Their working conditions and working hours are not equally distributed.
6. Lack of knowledge: workers do not have knowledge of labour laws, planning, programmes etc.

Causes of problems

- i. Lack of general knowledge
- ii. Illiteracy
- iii. Lack of help from the government

GROUP II Problems

1. Labourers are not getting profits and facilities given by both the Central and the State governments.
2. Lack of employment or work for the whole 365 days of the year. They get work for only 40-45 days.
3. Rich landowners exploit the labourers. They do not pay minimum wages to them. On the other hand, rich landlords abuse and insult them and even torture them physically.
4. Poor villagers always live in crisis.
5. They are not able to meet their basic needs – i.e. food, health, clothes, education, home, entertainment etc.
6. The custom of untouchability and seclusion is still prevalent. No respect for poor in our society. Our social structure is based on hierarchy. Poor labourers feel helpless without money.
7. The teachers behave very roughly with their children in educational institutions.
8. They are not aware of family-planning devices due to lack of education and general knowledge.
9. They are forced to take loans from rich landlords for the marriage of their children.
10. Lack of unions, organisations and unity.

11. They do not get any facilities due to the communication gap.
12. The village Panchayats are unable to give them justice. There are big zamindars and landowners in the Panchayats and their justice is delivered only by sticks.
13. They do not get any capital, subsidy or any other economic support from the government.

GROUP II

Problems and solutions

- i. Lack of labour unions and the process of unity.
- ii. No group discussions among the labourers.
- iii. No help from the government.
- iv. Interaction with the capitalists by some labourers.
- v. No cultural background.
- vi. The government should make welfare plans for the labourers and it should encourage small village industries.
- vii. Government should provide the capital, develop organisational skill and provide economic-moral support to the labourers.
- viii. The government should provide loans to labourers.
- ix. The government should give other necessary facilities.

GROUP III Problems

1. Agrarian problem
2. Unemployment
3. Livelihood problem
4. Educational problem
5. Fulfilling their basic needs
6. No labour union

Causes of the problems

- i. Increasing population.
- ii. High inflation rates and low wages.
- iii. Labourers know nothing about their rights, laws and powers.
- iv. No labour unions or organization.
- v. Unequal distribution of land.

GROUP IV Problems

1. Unemployment
2. Economic crisis

3. Problem of livelihood
4. Education problem
5. Family problem
6. Liquor related problem and drinking habits

Reasons and solutions of the problem

- i. Equal distribution of land between the zamindars and the labourers.
- ii. Government should provide loans and other facilities to the small-scale industries.
- iii. Government should provide equal rights and minimum wages.

GROUP V

Problems

1. Problem of unemployment
2. Economic crisis
3. Problem of education
4. Land-related problems
5. Problems related to family economy
6. No fulfillment of their basic needs.

Causes of the problems

- i. No labour unions or organisations
- ii. Lack of knowledge of their rights and laws
- iii. They do not know about family planning devices
- iv. Due to economic crisis their children can not go to the school
- v. They never get their wages in time

IInd Day: November 11, 1997

The second day started with a patriotic song which was followed by the analysis of previous day's activities. After this, a conceptual discussion was held on 'Evolution of Society'. In this session all stages of human society's development were discussed and production relations existing in each stage was explained. How the exploitation process developed and how it has affected society, economy and finally human being themselves were explained. The participants actively took part in the discussion and began to ponder about their own existence.

After the lunch, the session on 'structure of society' was started. It was dealt with through a simulation exercise called 'Star Power'. This game helped in breaking the participants' reservations and inhibitions on the one hand and generated fast learning on the other hand. Through this game the participants understood the structure of our society and the processes that sustain such

structures. They also understood the dynamics which were embedded in the present social structure.

This exercise continued till 5 p.m. After giving the participants a break of 15 minutes, we resumed a discussion on the important economic issues relating to rural areas of the country in general and Rajasthan State in particular. After this session, an hour's rest was given to our participants.

Then, in the late evening of the same day, the participants organized some cultural functions. An outside agency had organized some issue-based programmes like drinking, dowry and family planning. The participants sang and danced to the regional tunes. Women participants took a lead here – they all participated enthusiastically. The cultural evening proved very fruitful. Participants felt close to each other and developed informal relations with the facilitators. Thus a great deal of inhibition disappeared from the minds of the participants.

IIIrd Day: November 12, 1997

Rural society undergoes exploitation in myriad ways and many a times people caught in this vicious snare do not understand the process and hence they resign themselves to their fates. Against this background, an exercise was taken up with participants known as 'Let Us Hunt Together'.

This exercise was conducted in five stages. At each stage a drawing was shown to the participants and their reactions were recorded in detail. The drawings were of animals and human beings with weapons marked in both inward and outward directions. The drawing of Stage V was of an ugly person with a cage in one hand in which a human being was caged. At this point, we asked the participants how they would attain freedom from the exploitative traps and fight the affluent exploiters. Immediately came the reply: by collective strength and action.

On this note we began a session on '**Organising: the concerns, problem and issues**'. This was a technical session and went at a slow pace initially. Participants were listening with rapt attention and curiously at the man carrying the cage and another man trapped in it. With probing questions, the participants' reactions and opinions were sought. The end result was that the participants identified themselves with the captive man in the cage. They further stated that the ugly and cruel man was their enemy whom they generally mistake as friend in the real-life situation: the big landlord and moneylenders. The participants also expressed that they desired to be out of the cage and fight the people who exploit them. We then asked: how would they attain freedom from the exploitative traps and fight the exploiter? Immediately came the response: "By collective strength and action."

After the exercise the participants were clear about their position vis-a-vis the society in which they were living.

Another game was played known as Tower Building. In this game a group of three persons played different roles with the help wooden blocks: one of them played the role of a labourer who builds a tower as big as he/she could make. This tower symbolizes organization.

The other two in the group are supposed to help the worker by providing direction and motivation. In such a game, the role of help assumes maximum significance.

The analysis of this game process made the issues of organisation building more clear to the participants who understood the nitty-gritty and pitfalls of organization building. The session continued till late evening. The once-silent participants were now enthusiastic listeners and learners, to whom a new horizon of learning and anxiety began to appear. The session was over at 6 p.m. and an hour's rest was given to the participants.

At 7, we reassembled again to discuss the Panchayati Raj System as a mode to empower rural labourers. This continued for one and a half hours. By now, participants were picking up. The session was over by the dinner time.

IVth Day: 13 November, 1997

The morning session began with a song on collectivism. After the song, 15 minutes were spent on recapitulating the previous day's activities. On this day we started the session from 7.45 a.m. The first session of the day was an exercise on leadership styles. The purpose was to understand the impact of different leadership styles on group behavior. It was a group activity. During the session, three types of leadership behavior were exhibited – i.e. autocratic, laissez faire and democratic. To the participants it appeared that democratic leadership were more effective and successful. They also felt that functioning in a democratic manner, everybody got an equal opportunity to share and express themselves.

After this exercise, the participants were left on their own for organisation development in their area.

Organization building - the practical action through participation

The participants had by now begun to show an interest in building their own organisations and asked us how to go about it.

We then suggested that they develop their own organization, first by selecting a name, framing objectives and determining its goal. Thereafter, participants were left on their own. We silently observed them and for some time remained absent from the class so as to give them the freedom to do their own work without any outside interference.

The participants took a great deal of time. So many times they got stuck. There were many contenders for the President's post. At one point of time there were three in one group and they were trying to negotiate with each

other. Then, with the intervention of one participant, they came together once more. In selecting the office bearers the participants used certain parameters. Persons with the following qualities were considered:

- (i) Person with articulation skills;
- (ii) Person who could devote time to organizational activities;
- (iii) Person with the ability to lead the group;
- (iv) Person with a helpful attitude;
- (v) Person without any caste bias;
- (vi) Person who could take risks;
- (vii) Person who has the ability to provide problem-solving insight; and
- (viii) Person with intelligence, knowledge and diligence.

Keeping these parameters in view, the participants elected the members of the executive body of their organization. Their selection was very carefully done. They shortly, yet quietly, avoided the pressures of two persons, who were vocal, literate and apparently 'confident'. But these two always projected themselves as above the others. Though they belonged to the Scheduled Castes, they differentiated with the lower category of caste in the SC community. Thus an organization was built, its office-bearers selected, objectives framed and goal determined. This process was completed by 12.30 p.m. The participants were given a break of five minutes.

The next session was on "Interaction with the concerned government officials."

The first one to interact with the participants was the District Planning Officer (DPO). He discussed about the development programmes under Kumher division. He also discussed about various projects being run in the area. He talked about income generating activities through which the workers could get employment. The DPO explained very clearly about 'how to approach', 'whom to contact', 'how to apply' and 'how to be a beneficiary' in a development programme or project. The participants showed deep interest in the session, as a majority of them began raising questions about the bureaucratic delays and non-caring attitude which leads to 'non-hearing' situations.

After lunch, the DPO, Block Development Officer, Sarpanch and Gram Pradhan came together on a common platform to address the participants and hear about their problems from them.

The felicitators sat quietly, observing the process and proceedings. The Participants were face to face with their concerned development agents. After some time the situation became charged. Some of the participants became a little agitated in expressing their plight and difficulties. The development officers were explaining things calmly. This continued till 5 in the evening. We broke for half an hour.

Reassembling, we began a session on 'rural labour and law'. It was addressed by a Labour Inspector along with a faculty member. The session continued for two hours. After this session we asked the participants what they would do after going back. First, the participants were a bit confused. But after a while they began to discuss among themselves and slowly began to write about various activities which they would undertake back home.

Another session was addressed by Mr. Rajesh Kumar Karn on rural development. He spoke about how people remained in poverty after 50 years of independence. He graphically mentioned various causes of under-development and suggested means by which problems of under-development could be mitigated from the rural society in which a majority of our people live.

Vth Day: 14 November 1997

The fifth day of the camp began at 8 a.m. The morning session commenced with a token celebration of Pandit Nehru's birthday. This was followed by a motivational song on organization.

Thereafter, discussion on action plans took place. It is important to note here that the participants had spent more than half the night in preparing their respective village action-plan. One person from each group came to the dais and presented the action-plans.

Almost all plans had emphasized on the need for education, family planning, organization building, and women's development. The action-plans also contained strong inputs on spreading the training of VVGNNLI in their respective villages.

Feedback

After discussion on the action-plans, feedback from the participants were elicited. Most of participants gave a positive feedback about the programme. According to them, the programme was first of its kind in their lives and in the area. They had never received training in any camp. They also shared that they had never imagined that the camp would be of such a serious nature. In fact, a few of them stated that "initially (first day) we thought it to be a sarkari mela or sammelan where speeches would be delivered and they would be passive listeners".

At noon (12 o'clock) Smt. Uma Pillai, Director, (IAS), along with two VVGNNLI faculty members arrived at the training centre. The officiating BDO, Mr. Singh, the District Planning Officer, Mr. K.K. Mathur, and the Gram Pradhan also joined them. One of the NLI Faculty, Dr. Mahaveer Jain, asked the participants what they had learnt from the camp. One by one, a few participants answered him. Dr. Jain asked the participants about the change in them. "What

was the difference in them from the first day?" Participants were a bit hesitant but said that "Pahale hum inhein (government officials) apna saahib samajhate the par aaj yeh hamara naukar hein (We thought they were our masters but now they are our servants)." This candid admission took everyone by surprise. Dr. Jain further spoke about the need for workers' organization and the importance of collective action in development. To strengthen his point he cited instances from his earlier experiences.

After Dr. Jain, the Gram Pradhan was invited to speak. The Pradhan appreciated VVG NLI's programme and promised to extend all help to the participants.

Mr. K.K. Mathur (DPO) welcomed our Director and thanked her for gracing the camp in Bharatpur district. Addressing the participants he spoke about the development programmes that could be available to them easily.

He also mentioned that while applying for loans they did not give full information and required certificates. He assured them that they would be given full co-operation by the department.

Thereafter Mr. Singh, the officiating BDO, addressed the participants. He too promised to extend help from the panchayat to the participants. He assured them that he would personally look into their various grievances.

Then the camp director, Dr. M.M. Rehman, requested the Director to address the camp. Ms Uma Pillai stressed upon collective action by the participants for their development. She expressed her concern for their development and emphasised on the need for promotion of education among the rural workers, especially of women.

She further stated that government had not been able to succeed in its effort to develop the underdeveloped areas of the country and eradicate overall poverty existing among people. She especially focused her attention on the women participants, telling them about the 'self help' groups developed by other women elsewhere. She also highlighted that development of women would lead to the development of entire families and ultimately society. She raised the issues of child labour and pointed out that the problem could be solved if they endeavour collectively. She wished the participants good luck and promised to help them in conducting more such training camps, if they were prepared to conduct them on their own and informed them that soon VVG NLI would initiate an action research project in the area.

Ms. Helen R. Sekar, VVG NLI faculty member, also spoke and asked the participants about the existence of child labour in the area.

After the Director's valedictory address, a song called Dariya Ki Kasham was sung with the participants. They participated with full enthusiasm. After this song, Dr. M.M. Rehman thanked the Director for sparing her valuable

time on a holiday and travelling so far to be with the trainees. Dr. Rehman also expressed his gratitude to the DPO, BDO and Gram Pradhan, and his colleagues from VVG NLI and to the participants.

The Outcome

On the first day of the camp the participants were uncertain. Apprehension was writ large on their faces. Some looked lost and others started with questions in their eyes. In fact, for full two days, many of them were taking things lightly.

On the third day, the clouds of doubts and uncertainty began to disappear, and pessimism was replaced by optimism. As the day passed, the trainers became serious, their participation and interest in the session increased. They began to participate with renewed confidence. By the late afternoon on the day they began to talk about collectivism. This realization was really a very positive sign on their part.

As a result of this understanding an organization emerged. They named it: “Akhil Bharatpur Mazdoor Sangathan”. It has already been mentioned how this organization evolved. The participants prepared action plans which were to be executed under this organization.

In brief, there was a distinct change in the personality and behaviour of the participants. The streak of independence was quite visible. The earlier thoughts, attitudes and desires to be dependent on external agents disappeared. The participants understood that they would have to play a vital role on their own as an organized body.

The Spark will not be Extinguished Chittorgarh Experiment*

Sanjay Upadhyaya

One of the important objectives of the 'Action Research Project on Organising Rural Labour for Effective Participation in Development', undertaken by the V.V. Giri National Labour Institute was to promote the organisation of rural labour through motivation, education and awareness programmes. Organising the unorganized in rural areas of Rajasthan like Chittorgarh, where feudal tendencies still exist, illiteracy is very high, fatalism still haunts the minds of the people and abject poverty exists is quite difficult. It requires a multi-pronged strategy, planning and patience on the part of all those who venture into this area. Sustaining the organisation once built is all the more difficult. But it does not mean that the existence of such characteristics could not be changed for the better. The chronology of activities undertaken in Chittorgarh depicts how a situation reacts to any forward moving strategy.

Genesis of organisational process

This paper gives a brief account of the gradual unfolding of the organisational process in the Chittorgarh Block of District Chittorgarh in Rajasthan initiated with the holding of the first rural labour camp at Bassi in the month of October 1998. A total 23 male participants representing eight villages from four village Panchayats surrounding Bassi, participated in this camp. For the purpose of selecting participants for this camp, a total 12 villages spread over four village Panchayats were visited during October 6-9 in 1998. The villages visited included: Arjunpuria, Mayra and Kanwar ji ka Kheda of Pal Panchayat; Sonagron Ki Khedi and Sangrampur of Ghosundi Panchayat; Babri Kheda, Garol, Phusaria, Bhungadia and Devdoongri of Keljer Panchayat and Bassi which is a village and Panchayat both. As during the time of our intervention, harvesting season was on, the people were not easily available during the day. Hence, informal meetings were held in these villages in the evenings. During the meetings, the team members comprising of the project faculty and three other local persons, based at District Headquarters, established a rapport with the villagers and explained to them the purpose of the visit, requesting them to select from amongst villagers three to four suitable persons for the camp. The team facilitated a free and frank discussion. A total 35 participants were identified by villagers from different villages out of which finally 23 persons reported for the camp. The participants of different age-

* Source details: This is an edited excerpt from the study by Sanjay Upadhyaya on Action Research Project on: Organising the Rural Labour for Effective Participation in Development (Mimeo), Noida, V.V. Giri, National Labour Institute, 2003.

groups, belonged to socio-economically backward communities comprising of Bhils, Meenas, Berwas, Jatias, Telies and Salvis.

The camp started on October 10, 1998. Initially, the number of participants was very small but by 11:30 a.m. 18 participants had joined. It was thought proper to postpone the process by some more time and by lunch 23 participants had joined. The actual process could start only in the afternoon after lunch. Once again, the participants were explained in brief the purpose of the camp. After this, as the participants had come from different places they were asked to share with each other, information about themselves. Initially, they were quite hesitant but the hesitation gradually started withering away. After the informal discussions, we requested them to articulate their problems one by one. They were then divided into several groups and asked to discuss their problems and subsequently to make a presentation of their problems on the flip charts. This kind of exercise helped the participants in reflecting on their problems and also in the realisation of the collectivity of their problems. The session ended at 7 p.m.

Next day, the session started at around 10 a.m. with a folk song “Aayo raj chorani ro, ki rishwat khorani ro”. After the folk song the participants were asked to reflect on the causes of their problems, first individually, then again by dividing them into different groups. In the second half of the day, the participants were asked to have a discussion on the issue: Who will solve their problems? Initially, there was silence on their faces. But after a pause, some of the participants started pointing out that leaders could solve their problems. Some of them also held the view that bureaucrats could solve their problems and yet others were looking towards us as if we were there to solve their problems or at least to tell them who would solve their problems. The session on this day continued up to 6:30 p.m. with a request by the facilitators to the participants to think on the ways and means to solve their problems.

Realisation of “Eka”: first step towards organizational journey

The session on the third day started with the discussion among the participants on the ways to find solutions to the problems. This was really a brain-storming session. In between, the project faculty facilitated the process of understanding among the participants that, since independence, the leaders and the bureaucracies have shown a luke warm interest in solving the problems of rural labour. Thus the existence of several problems that are still unresolved. At this stage itself some of them realised that their problems could be solved only by themselves, by their organized and collective efforts or “Eka” as they called it. This really was a very crucial moment. During the same session, the project faculty shared with the participants the gains from the organized efforts and success stories from elsewhere. After the participants were convinced that their problems could be solved only by way of collective efforts and

organisation, they were asked whether they wanted to form an organisation.

Formation of Mazdoor Kisan Chetna Sangathan

Organisational process in motion: After this, the participants were left alone in the hall where the camp was being organized and after two hours they reported that they had formed an organisation with the name Mazdoor Kisan Chetna Sangathan. They were further asked what they would do with the organisation. In response they told that they would hold a meeting on October 15, 1998, at one particular place during which they would spread the organisational message. The meeting was held as per the promise and some more rural workers joined the organisation. This is the first step towards the organisational process.

Initiation of organisational process

Beginning of village meetings: After the first camp, from October 15 to November 6, 1998, meetings were held in various villages of four Panchayats from which participants had attended the first camp and also other villages of those Panchayats which were not represented during the camp and people were asked to continue their struggle against common problems through collective efforts and also to expand and strengthen the organisation. One such meeting was held in Sangrampura, which was attended by about 50 persons and during the meeting, emphasis was laid on getting organized and united. Such meetings were held in Babri Kheda on October 20, in Garol on October 22, in Phusaria on October 26, in Ghosundi on October 30, in Songar on November 3, 1998 and again a large collective meeting of workers from all the four Panchayats was held on November 6, 1998, at Bhoot Bawaji in Bassi.

Apart from such camps various other efforts were also made to foster organisation in the area.

SOME CONCRETE ACHIEVEMENTS

Objective achievements

Under the project a total 241 rural labourers attended rural labour camps. Out of the total participants 170 were males and 71 females. The four-day camps process helped in inculcating and developing leadership qualities and skills amongst those who attended these camps. The skills and qualities included: articulation, reflection, critical thinking, initiative to take collective action, etc. Thus, various inputs provided during these camps had varied impact on different participants, but certainly helped in initiating the organisational process.

A selected group of persons from the camp participants was also given further training at the V.V. Giri National Labour Institute in an advanced-level Cadre Development Programme in two different phases and also in one of the

rural trade union leadership programmes organized at the Institute. The inputs provided during these programmes at the Institute further helped in upgrading and sharpening leadership qualities and skills required for discharging responsibilities as rural organizers. All those who attended these programmes benefited from these programmes and had been actively involved in various organisational activities.

As a result of various interventions made under the project a block-level organisation of rural labourers, namely, Jai Chittor Mazdoor Kisan Sangathan was formed and by May 2000, the organisation was having an effective presence in more than 130 villages out of the total 218 villages of the block. At the level of the Chittorgarh Panchayat Samiti, it was having a membership of over 1000 persons and was functional in more than five villages. The village committees or the organisation met quite frequently, discussed the common problems and took these problems either directly or through the block-level organisation to different officials and government departments.

Interventions thus made helped in initiating and developing the process of collective discussion on the common problems. During the first phase of the project, more than 60 petitions and memoranda were given to the concerned officers belonging to the departments like administration, public works, health, education, public distribution, sanitation etc. on behalf of the organisation. The process of giving petitions and memoranda started in the beginning of 2004. Various issues were taken up by way of these petitions and memoranda, such as allotment of agricultural land to the landless; allotment of house sites to the homeless; demands for installing handpumps or repairing the existing handpumps; getting electricity connections; demand for proper implementation of widow pensions; old-age pensions and handicap pensions; demand for proper implementation of the public distribution system; and seeking information about various development programmes and schemes. In addition, demand for the construction of link roads in the villages, for the regular attendance of teachers and deputing an adequate number of teachers to the schools and payment of wages for work done under various development schemes, and so on were also made. The memoranda were taken collectively to the administration in order to make the administration realize the gravity, magnitude and genuineness of the problems. These memoranda and petitions helped in solving a number of problems for which the credit definitely went to the organisational efforts. It may, however, be noted that all the problems raised had not been redressed. However, the beginning of this process had substantially helped in removing the hesitation and the culture of silence from the rural workers.

Initially, the meetings used to be held quite sporadically and at irregular intervals. Later on, it was decided to hold regular monthly meetings at one commonplace for all the active members of the organisation so that decisions

based on collective discussions could be arrived at and individual responsibilities could be assigned, and the experiences at the village level could be shared. All the important decisions used to be taken in these meetings and a review of organisational activities used to be made in these meetings as well.

Initially, the presence in these meetings used to be very limited but gradually it went on increasing with the formation of a co-ordination committee comprising all the office bearers of small organisations and other activists who joined later on. Some of the monthly meetings were attended by as many as 100 activists.

During the project period, in addition to a large number of village meetings, four large protest meetings were held. The strength in these events varied from 150 to 750 participants. All the four public meetings and demonstrations helped in mobilising the rural labourers in getting organized for their collective problems and issues. These meetings were also attended by a number of women workers. Their number thus gradually increased in many such meetings held subsequently.

As a result of interventions, the involvement of rural labour in the local self-governance increased considerably. This was manifested in the elections for Panchayats held subsequently. The organisation took an active part in the elections and 24 ward members/Sarpanches out of the members of the organization won in the election.

Subjective achievements: perception of activists

One of the objectives of the project was to develop a team of activists with understanding and perspective to carry forward the activities of the organisation after the project life was over. In order to assess their understanding about organisation we interviewed randomly 19 activists of various standing with the help of a pre-designed questionnaire. A brief analysis of the data collected for this purpose is given below.

Profile of the activists

The activists interviewed were by and large young as more than two-thirds of the respondents were in the age group of 19-40 years. All the activists interviewed were males. They belonged to landless and poor families. More than 40 per cent of them were landless and the rest were small and marginal farmers owning between one to three bighas of agricultural land. About three-fifths (60 per cent) of the activists did not even have an electricity connection in their houses and an overwhelming majority (about 80 per cent) lived in kuchha houses. However, the activists were relatively educated. Only two activists reported that they had never gone to school, out of whom one was illiterate and the other literate. About 30 per cent had education up to the primary school level. Another 16 per cent were college educated and the rest attended schools

up to the 10th to 12th standards.

Out of the total 19 respondents, 15 had participated in rural labour camps and 10 had attended an advanced level cadre development programme held at VVG NLI, Noida. There were three respondents who had not gone through any formal training.

Organisational awareness and participation

The general awareness about the organisation was found to be satisfactory. They could correctly give the full name of the organisation and were aware about various activities of the organisation. Their participation in the organisation varied quite a bit. Whereas a few joined the organisation right at the beginning that was in the year 1998 itself, a few others joined the activities of the organisation as late as in April, 2000. The responses by the activists suggested that the organisation did not have a very clear-cut policy with regard to membership and collection of membership subscriptions. For instance, as far as the number of members was concerned, the responses varied from 50 members to over 2000. Perhaps the new entrants were not very clear about the spread of the organisation. Similarly, it seemed that there had been no clear-cut policy with regard to membership subscription. About two-fifths (40 per cent) of the member activists reported that no membership fee was collected from them. On the other hand, about 50 per cent reported that the subscription a fee was Rs. 5. The rest said that it was Rs. 10.

We also enquired about their awareness regarding the objectives of the organisation and its structure. The main objectives enumerated by the respondents include: (a) awareness creation; (b) organising the rural labour; (c) struggle for their rights; (d) make villagers aware about government schemes/programmes; (e) help eradicate poverty; and (f) fight against corruption. It would be pertinent to note here that it was an open-ended questionnaire to which the respondents spelt out the objectives. This indicates that the activists were fairly well aware of the main objectives of building an organisation.

Most of the activists were also well aware about the spread of the organisation. About three-fourths of the respondents said that it worked both at village and Panchayat Samiti levels. When asked specifically about the number of villages in which the organisation had its presence, the response varied from five to 218 villages. The majority, however, said that it had a presence in 150 or more villages. This was further corroborated by the query regarding the month of their association with the organisation. About 30 per cent respondents joined the organisation less than six months prior to collection of this information.

In order to understand their commitment towards the organization, we enquired about the time, energy and the money spent for the organisation. We asked them how much time normally they spend on organisational activities

in a week. It was found that about 15 per cent spent about two to three days a week. The majority spent about a day every week. Most of them also reported that they had participated in the public meetings, processions, dharna, rallies etc. Only a little over half the respondents said that they participated in village committee meetings.

One of the important indicators of assessing the level of consciousness of the organisation is the type of the issues that the members take up and debate. An overwhelming majority reported that they debated on the issue of the socio-economic conditions of labour. The other important issues reported related to the land problem. It would not be out of context to mention here that the organisation also took up the issue of land allotment in one large area comprising about 40-45 villages. A small minority also reported the functions and roles of the organisation as one of the issues of debate. This reflected their level of awareness with regard to the importance of collective action. For building and strengthening the process of widening the cognitive map of the activists and their critical reflection, we had built a small library. Through a question we also enquired about their awareness and use of a library. About fourth-fifths of the activists were aware and reported that they had used the library.

When asked about the achievements of the organisation, the following were mentioned as achievements: the formation of village committees; giving petitions; organising successful rallies and dharna, holding of regular monthly meetings; benefits from government schemes; generating awareness among rural labour about rights; and enhanced level of confidence.

Finally, the respondents were asked about the future of an organisation. A majority of the respondents said that an organisation was likely to be successful in the future. A little over 30 per cent even said that the organisation would become a district-level organisation soon.

Learning from the Project

The Action Research Project on 'Organising Rural Labour for Effective Participation in Development' was initiated with twin objectives, one with the objective of promoting rural workers' organisation in the selected area, and the second with the objective of drawing lessons from the study and observations of the social and economic conditions prevailing in the area and also lessons for carrying out similar kinds of intervention in any other part of the country in future.

In order to achieve the above-mentioned objectives, the Institute undertook a number of activities. In addition, a study of socio-economic conditions was also conducted in the area in order to grasp and understand the realities at the grassroots level, the conditions of acute deprivation and poverty in which a majority of people live – that too in a state which proclaims itself to be a

welfare state and in spite of all the constitutional guarantees and assurances to preserve and protect human dignity.

As has been mentioned above, one of the key objectives of the project was to promote and develop an organisation of rural workers. This was not an easy task especially in the area with which the faculty was totally unfamiliar and which has feudal remnants, where illiteracy is very high, fatalistic tendencies still haunt the minds of the people, abject poverty exists and the area is very sparsely populated. It required much planning, a lot of patience, a positive outlook and collectivity of efforts.

Learning from pre-camp survey and camps

Under the project, a total number of 10 rural camps was conducted for various clusters of villages covering all the 39 village Panchayats falling under the Chittorgarh Panchayat Samiti of Chittorgarh District in Rajasthan. Out of the total 10 camps only two were held exclusively for women. The simple reason for this was that, due to the prevailing socio-economic conditions of the area, women were not forthcoming to participate in these camps – though, during the pre-camp survey meetings held in late evenings in various villages, they were found to be inquisitive about the programmes. They could not talk to us in the presence of the menfolk due to the ‘parda system’ but some of them were able to understand what we were conversing with others in the group. We gathered this impression from their conversation with other women. In one of the earlier camps four women participated on the first day but, on the second day of the camp, they did not turn up as somebody spread the message that we had called them for birth control operations. The purpose of sharing this information is that in the rural areas women are not still allowed to move out of their homes and, if some of them try to do the same, they are stopped from doing so by adopting all the possible means.

It is basically due to this reason that it was thought proper to hold a few camps exclusively for them at a later stage after the menfolk from their areas had attended the camps held by us. Accordingly, two camps were held for them in which they participated in substantial numbers but in subsequent events and activities their involvement was quite limited as compared to men, though in dharnas and rallies their presence was substantial. One of the reasons for this could be that it is difficult for them to spare the time quite frequently due to their dual role and also due to their limited mobility outside the family or village.

Another important lesson from the pre-camp survey and camp was that, during a few of the camps, the participants we identified actually did not turn up for the camps and in their place elders from their family – father or uncle or elder brother – turned up. This simply indicates that elders in the family think that only they are suitable to attend such kinds of programmes.

This incident at times had an adverse impact on our objective as the main objective of holding these camps was to prepare a team of young and educated persons.

So far, we have been holding the view that only the educated and younger ones can play an important role in the organisational process. On the contrary, we found that in the rural areas, age is still a very important factor and elders in the locality or society command more respect and attention compared to youngsters. Some of the participants who attended our camp and who were in their 40s and 50s proved to be quite effective in the entire organisational process and mobilising the masses.

Learning from the processes

When we entered the area with the anchor persons to identify the participants for forthcoming camp, it was noticed that the people were shy, docile and quite pessimistic. They did not have any hope that their conditions can ever change. They held strong feelings that their socio-economic conditions could improve only if the politicians and the government desire to do so.

To help the rural poor to get rid of these kinds of negative and pessimistic feelings was not an easy task. For this we had to use a number of methods and strategies. The most important of these was the technique of conscientisation, to help them critically reflect about their conditions of existence, to help them strongly realise that these conditions can be changed, to help them realise their own collective strengths and finally to help them to take collective initiatives for the solution of their own problems. For this we had to use a number of simulation exercises and other behavioural science techniques and finally we succeeded, though not completely, in starting a process of change within them, in removing their inhibitions, in arousing in them a feeling of confidence and assertion and in making them demand their dues. It was only the result of various interventions made by us under the project which finally culminated in organisation of a number of dharnas, public meetings and rallies. It also finally helped in the development of a group of rural organizers who could and can talk face to face with government officials from various departments, and make them realise the importance of their problems and grievances.

Many of the persons joined the organisation with personal expectations and when those expectations were not met, they lost their interest in the organisational activities. This is substantiated by the fact that many of the persons who initially joined the organisation lost their interest. They did not have the patience to wait till the moment the organisation becomes strong and collective benefits as a result of continued and collective efforts, start flowing.

Organisational process and the State

Though by virtue of ratifying the I.L.O. Convention on promoting rural workers' organisations, it is the obligation of the Indian State including all the organisations and instruments of the State to promote rural workers' organisations but still the experience while dealing with various government departments at the District level in connection with implementing the project, suggests that the State should not be approached at the initial stages even for an interface during rural labour camps because, except for a few exceptions, state functionaries are not interested in this kind of activity. During the project, a number of government officials were contacted a number of times to come and have a dialogue with the camp participants at least for an hour or so on the last day of the camps. But very few of them could find the time to talk to them. Even the Block Development Officer of the Panchayat Samiti, selected under the project, could come only once though he was requested during almost every camp.

Process of empowerment

The process of empowerment is not an easy process. People are used to the culture of silence. Fear haunts their minds and the experience from the organisational process from Chittorgarh has been that even the most active rural organizers are fearful of facing the reactions of the influential people in the area. For example, even Bheru Lal of Village Khor, who had been elected as the President of the organisation Jai Chittor Mazdoor Kisan Sangathan and who was otherwise also a very active member of the organisation, was not in a position to confront the influential persons from his village. There were a number of persons in and around village Panchayat Jalampura, in which village Khor also falls, in which prima facie bonded labourers were there. A list of them was also given to the district administration. Though there existed a Block-level organisation to support Bheru Lal, he was not sure of its strength. There was therefore the need to further strengthen the organisation.

There exist two distinct classes in society. A tussle always continues between these two classes, the dominant class always occupies a dominating position and uses all methods to continue with this position. The ultimate objective of promoting workers' organisations is to raise the consciousness of the working class and make them realise their collective strengths so that they can fight for their rights and entitlements. Efforts were made to make the workers understand the class question and social antagonism arising out of it.

The facilitator also facilitated the understanding that there are exploiters and exploited classes. The social dynamics is that the exploited class is at the receiving end. This class is deprived of everything that counts for decent survival, the only power or tool in their hands is their collective strength.

Conclusion

The various interventions made under the rural labour action research project taken up by the institute have been considerably helpful in initiating the organisational process in the area selected under the project. These interventions have also helped in developing a group of almost 40 persons predominantly men who are aware about various government schemes, plans and above all in making them realise the importance of rural workers organisation as an effective tool to solve the majority of their problems. These interventions have also been considerably helpful in initiating the process of critical reflection and taking collective action to solve the problems. There is no doubt that people in the area have started giving petitions and memoranda etc., for their problems to various concerned officials and departments, a phenomenon which was quite rare before we intervened in the area. The credit naturally goes to various interventions made under the project in order to educate, make aware, facilitate and promote in organising the rural labour selected in the area. In terms of numbers the various gains and achievements are evident from the fact that in various meetings, dharnas, rallies and demonstration, etc., people from the area marked their presence in substantial numbers. The various interventions have also resulted in formation of a formal organisation namely “Chittor Mazdoor Sangathan” with a membership of approximately 1000 and a formal structure.

But there have been a number of stumbling blocks and hindering factors too which have been constantly responsible in arresting the growth of the organisation. These factors create a sense of apprehension whether the organisation would be able to continue with these stumbling blocks. Some of these are as follows:

1. In some meetings of the organisation many of its active members strongly felt and expressed that fear still haunted the minds of the people which impeded the organisation from taking up some of the important issues such as bonded labour.
2. A few of them expressed that though they were substantial in numbers even then they felt alone, and were really not in a position to fight against injustice and exploitation by the influentials who had contacts at all levels and who had their own organisations.
3. Those whose interests were going to be affected did not leave any stone unturned in convincing the newly emerging rural organizers that the situations were not going to change which definitely had a discouraging impact on the organisational growth and strength.
4. Economic compulsions also played a very important role in arresting the growth of organisation and the same had been found true in case of the area

selected for the study which is characterised by high levels of illiteracy and was low on all indicators of development.

5. Those who attended the various programmes conducted by the Institute under the project did not organize sufficient meetings in their respective villages. Though almost 400 meetings were held but this was also true that all the meetings were held at the initiative of the Social Organizers engaged under the project. The activists trained by us had not been able to develop required capability for holding meetings.
6. The fact that the area taken up for project was very wide and scattered has also been a stumbling block as meetings could not be held at regular intervals in different areas. The activists from the entire area could contact with each other only during mass meetings and demonstrations, etc. The monthly meetings of various active members were held but it seemed that the discussion that took place in the meetings did not percolate down.
7. Some of the active members expressed in a meeting that the government functionaries too at times had been responsible for discouraging the organisational activity. They argued that the problems were to be attended to by them, not by the labourers or by their organisations.

Rural Labour Camp at Rataul, Meerut: A Report

M.M. Rehman & Poonam S. Chauhan

The National Labour Institute, since, its inception, is playing a very important role in creating awareness among rural workers, who have been forced to become vulnerable – socially, economically and politically. The purpose is to conscientize rural workers for their own development through their participation in planning and action.

To translate the Institute's mandate into real action, rural labour camps have been organized since 1976. Keeping the Institute's mandate in mind a camp was organized in Rataul, Meerut, Uttar Pradesh, from 23 to 27 October 1993. The main objectives of the camp were to generate awareness among the rural workers, to generate critical awareness among the rural workers through their participation for self empowerment.

Prior to the camp, a pre-camp survey was conducted to identify the camp participants.

Participants' profile

In all, 36 participants attended the camp. There were women and men. Except for two women, the rest were from rural workers' households. The participants were drawn from six villages.

The participants were from backward and Scheduled Caste communities. Almost 50 per cent of the participants had some literacy. Among women, only a few could read and write.

Camp process

Methodology:

The camp methodology was based upon dialogical conscientization. It included small-group work, simulation, role play, group discussion, educational games and conceptual lectures.

Camp duration

The camp was organized for five days. It was residential. Boarding and lodging was provided by VVG NLI.

Inputs of the camp

Micro lab

1. Small-group work: problem identification, articulation and aggregation.
2. Simulation experience: Star Power.

3. Group-work: who can solve the problems and how.
4. Organizing process: conceptual lecture
5. Organization building: Tower Building game.
6. Rural labour and law.
7. Action plan

Participants on the first day

The first day began with uncertainty, apprehension and aloofness. Participants were giving strange looks. Micro-lab was found to be a tedious job because gender differences ruled. It was next to impossible to get men and women to talk with each other during the first hour of the camp. The social reservations were clearly written on their faces.

After the second day's evening, there was a little unfreezing among the participants. By the end of third day, their articulation improved a lot. Even women became vocal.

Change in participants' behaviour

The group started moving from individualistic feelings to group cohesion. During the movement, the participants got stuck several times, they could not think further. However, they realized that collectively they could solve their problems and this understanding energised them. This increased their participation in the camp also.

By the fourth day of the camp the participants looked so motivated that their articulation not only increased, but improved to a great extent. They started questioning and seeking clarification as and when required. Their confidence also improved.

On the fifth day the participants discussed their action plan. Then the programme was concluded.

Details of problems identified by the participants are given in annexure I. The women participants seemed quite enthusiastic and motivated. They proposed to teach the illiterate women in their area. They also showed a keen interest in developing a women's organization in the region. With these notes of promise, the five-day camp ended. There seemed a silver lining in the grey horizon.

Annexure I

Group 1 problems:

- 1) Lack of education.
- 2) Problem of unemployment.
- 3) Poverty.
- 4) Backwardness of women in society.
- 5) Lack of small-scale industries.
- 6) Problem of women working with men.
- 7) Lack of medical facilities at village level.
- 8) Problem of blocking dirty water in drains.
- 9) Problem of transportation.
- 10) Problem of religion in politics entering National development.
- 11) Population growth in India due to lack of education.
- 12) Problem of bribery.
- 13) Problem of electric supply.
- 14) Problem of drugs.
- 15) Problem of the day by day increasing prices of common goods.
- 16) No proper guidance for educated persons.
- 17) Problem of discrimination.
- 18) No job opportunity for technical hands.
- 19) Problem of terrorism to the Nation.
- 20) Lack of modern technical facilities in agriculture.
- 21) Lack of H.Y.V. variety seeds.
- 22) Problem of vocational education in villages.
- 23) Lack of telegraph service in villages.
- 24) Lack of means related to games.
- 25) Problems of government aid for educated persons.
- 26) Lack of a veterinary hospital in villages.

Reasons for problems

- 1) Lack of education: lack of schools in rural areas and poverty.
- 2) Unemployment: lack of education, poverty, no proper guidance, population growth etc.
- 3) Backwardness of women in society: Lack of women's education, 'Parda Pratha', narrow mindedness.

- 4) Lack of small-scale industries: poverty, lack of electricity supply and raw materials.
- 5) Problem of bribery: Inequality is main reason of bribery.
- 6) Population growth: Main reason of population growth is lack of education and superstition.
- 7) Linking of religion to politics: Main reason of this is getting the votes from people.

Group 2

Problems

- 1) Problems related to health and health centre.
- 2) Minimum use of government institution.
- 3) Non-availability of facilities related to development
- 4) Exploitation by bank and block's officers.
- 5) Lack of skill development opportunities
- 6) Lack of adult education
- 7) Oppression and exploitation of widows

Causes of problem

- 1) Absence of medical facilities
- 2) Indifference of government officials
- 3) Lack of information related to development work for public sector.
- 4) Display of their own roles to the public by the banks and block officers.
- 5) There is no institution for sewing, spinning and weaving.
- 6) No adult education centre in villages.
- 7) Non-co-operation from the in-laws

Group 3

Problem of rural areas:

- 1) Lack of means of education.
- 2) Unemployment.
- 3) Lack of transportation.
- 4) Lack of medical facilities.
- 5) Narrow-mindedness and social customs
- 6) Abuse of national property.
- 7) Evils of dowry.
- 8) No availability of rural banks and co-operative societies.

- 9) Problem of electricity supply.
- 10) Lack of proper implementation of laws and absence of security.
- 11) There is no interest in voting.
- 12) No proper arrangement of roads.
- 13) Social discrimination.
- 14) No proper supply of postal service in rural areas.
- 15) Problem of irrigation.
- 16) No proper wage for labour classes.
- 17) Lack of awareness about rights.
- 18) No proper utilization of money given by government to 'Gram Sabha'.
- 19) Economic disparity in rural areas.
- 20) Population growth.

Causes of problems in rural areas:

- 1) Lack of education: poor economic conditions, carelessness of teachers, children's growth in family, lack of study materials and money for fees.
- 2) Unemployment: Lack of education, lack of occupational education, more population, no work availability according to qualifications. Non-availability of information related to government planning and employment in the rural areas.
- 3) Lack of transportation: Proper and regular transportation is not available due to bad roads. No proper attention on the public roads.
- 4) Lack of medical aid: Lack of doctors, hospitals and medicines.
- 5) Narrow-mindedness: Lack of education, superstitions, social evils.
- 6) Evils of dowry: Lack of education and self-dependency in women, greediness.
- 7) Problem of electricity supply: Lack of electricity supply and electricity instruments, misuse of electricity by public.
- 8) Misuse of aid provided by government to the 'Gram Sabha'; no proper utilization of government aid for public welfare.
- 9) Population growth: superstition, lack of education, poverty etc.

Group 4

Problems

- 1) Problem of unemployment.
- 2) Lack of education: At least 70% people are uneducated.
- 3) Lack of schools (male and female).

- 4) Lack of medical facilities and no means of transportation for patients.
- 5) Lack of awareness, veterinary hospital and electricity.
- 6) Absence of skill development for sewing, spinning and weaving.
- 8) Lack of transportation.
- 9) Problems of proper electricity supply.
- 10) Problem of proper postal service.

Causes of problems

Reason of educational problems: People are unable to educate their children due to poverty. If they send their children to school, teachers do not come to the school. There is no one who can check the teachers. There are some private schools which charge high fees.

Reason of postal service problems:

- a) There is no post office in the area.
- b) Due to carelessness of postmen, letters do not reach on time.
- c) There is no one to check the working of postmen.

Annexure II

The district of Meerut is situated in the centre of the Meerut Division in Uttar Pradesh. It lies between 28°47' and 29°18' north latitude and 77°8' and 76°7' east longitude. According to the Surveyor General of India, the area of the Meerut district is 3,911 square kms. According to the 1981 census, the district had a total population of 27,67,246. The population density in the district was 708 persons per square km in the same year. In 1981, Scheduled Caste population in this district was 16.77 per cent of total population while the percentage share of ST population in the total population was 0.01. According to the 1981 census, the percentage of people living in rural areas in Meerut district was 68.78.

In 1981, the literacy rate in this district was 34.68 per cent (46.73 per cent amongst males and 26.30 per cent amongst females). In rural and urban areas in the district, literacy rates were 30.01 per cent and 44.97 per cent respectively in 1981.

This district comprises of four Tehsils – namely Meerut, Baghpat, Mawana and Sardhana with 26 towns. The Baghpat Tehsil had 222 villages (i.e., 24.47 per cent of total number of villages in the district) and six towns (i.e. 23.08 per cent of the total number towns in Meerut district) in 1981. In the same year, around 83 per cent of people were living in the rural areas in this Tehsil which was 29.69 per cent of the total number of people living in the rural Meerut. The population of this Tehsil was 6,82,582 in 1981 which was 24.67 per cent of the total population in the district.

In 1981, the literacy rate in Meerut district was 34.7 per cent and in Baghpat Tehsil this rate was 33 per cent. In the district the literacy rates for males and females were 46.7 per cent and 20.3 per cent respectively whereas in Baghpat Tehsil these rates were 46 per cent and 17.3 per cent respectively. Comparatively, literacy rates, both for males and females, in rural Baghpat were higher than that found in rural Meerut. However, it must be noted here that the literacy rates for females, both in the district and Baghpat tehsil were very low. As far as the literacy rates in the urban areas were concerned, there was not much variation in Meerut district and Baghpat Tehsil.

Size of Panchayat

This Panchayat comprises of six villages out of which one village is uninhabited. The remaining five villages are: (1) Basi; (2) Rawan Urf Baragona; (3) Khaila; (4) Mubarikpur; and (5) Norozpur Aima. Among the five villages Rawan Urg Baragaon is the biggest village (in terms of geographical area) and Mubarikpur is the smallest one. In all, the Panchayat covers an area of 3,862.05 hectare in 1981.

Population

In the Panchayat the total number of households in 1981 was 2,135 in 1981 out of which the village Basi had the largest number of households and the village Norozpur Aima had only 11 households.

In 1981, total population in this Panchayat was 14,428. The village Basi had 5,770 persons which was 40 per cent of the total population in the Panchayat. Norozpur Aima had only 746 persons in the same year which was 5.2 per cent of the total population in the Panchayat. However, there was not much variation in the distribution of males and females in the five villages in Rawan Urf Baragaon Panchayat in Baghpat Tehsil.

Scheduled Caste population

According to the 1981 census, the total number of Scheduled Caste population in the Panchayat was 1246 which was 8.64 per cent of the total population in the Panchayat. As far as the distributional pattern of Scheduled Caste population among the villages was concerned, the village Basi had the largest number of SC population (i.e. 32 per cent of the total SC population) and the village Norozpur Aima had only 7.2 per cent SC population. However, it should be noted here that in this Panchayat not a single ST was found in 1981.

Occupational profile

The main occupation of people in this Panchayat happens to be agriculture and animal husbandry. In 1981, a total of 2200 people were engaged in cultivation and the number of persons working as agricultural labourers was 573. A majority of females were engaged in household activities. As the Panchayat has no major industry, the number of people engaged in manufacturing, processing, servicing and repair was very small. In 1991, we had conducted a census survey in one of the villages in the Panchayat, namely Khaila, which also reveals the above pattern of occupational distribution in the Panchayat.

In the village Khaila, the rate of workforce participation of females was very low, especially in wage employments. In participating in various on-farm and off-farm activities, the total number of females was 412 which was 40.83 per cent of the total. However, it should be noted here that more than 50 per cent of the working females in this village were engaged in household chores, though they also worked in their family farms which they did not consider as employment. Moreover, females in this village were not at all participating in occupations such as small trading, business and government jobs, and their representation in the skilled jobs, jobs in the private enterprises and in teaching was almost marginal.

The percentage share of females in the on-farm paid activities was only 28.57 as agricultural labourers and 14.76 as cultivators. So far as the off-farm employment was concerned, except the household occupation, the numbers of females engaged in skilled jobs, private office jobs and teaching were one, three and one respectively. Thus, almost all the females in this village were engaged in both on and off-farm employment, they were not considering themselves as workers, except the few who had paid jobs.

We shall fight for our right: Report of Rural Labour Camp in Panipat

M.M. Rehman & Poonam S. Chauhan

November 22-27, 1993. The V. V. Giri National Labour Institute has always been helping individuals, organizations and institutions who share similar concerns for the working class.

At the request of the workers' union in Panipat, VVGNI organized a Rural Labour Camp at Panipat, Haryana, in November 1993. Panipat has a history of fight for the right. The workers' union is quite strong there. The grassroots activists were quite active in the area. They were quite serious about their workers being concientized for furthering organizational activities.

Pre-camp survey

A pre-camp survey was conducted from 9 to 11 November 1993. The purpose was to identify the potential participants for the camp and also to get acquainted with the socio-economic conditions of rural Panipat and also to understand the class dynamics of the rural society in the region. During the survey we visited five villages in the area. These villages were representatives of Panipat's rural societies. We identified workers who were young, energetic, motivated, articulate, literate, if possible, prepared to work for social cause, etc.

We selected 42 participants.

The camp

The camp was organized during 21-25 November, 1993

Participants' profile

The camp was attended by 28 participants. There were 10 women and 18 men. About 50 per cent of the participants were literate. They were within the age-group of 18-42 years. A majority of them were from the Scheduled Caste communities. They were mostly landless wage labourers. All participants were married except two and all had children. The family-size, on an average, was seven per unit. As compared to other regions of India, people of Panipat are slightly economically better off. But socially they are extremely backward. Women are highly deprived.

Camp process

Methodology

As mentioned in earlier reports, the methodology of the camp was of a dialogical nature. Techniques of camp conduction included group work, simulation work, educational games, concept discussion and role play.

Camp duration

As mentioned earlier, it was a five-day camp and residential in nature.

Camp inputs

- i. Introduction and expectations of the participants.
- ii. Problem identification, articulation and aggregation.
- iii. Dynamics of society: – Star Power.
- iv. Understanding class relationships in rural society.
- v. Organising process — issues and concerns.
- vi. Organization building (Tower Building game).
- vii. Rural labour and law.
- viii. Action plan preparation.
- ix. Action plan presentation.
- x. Valedictory.

The process

The inputs of the camp were not structured. They were decided by assessing the needs and demand.

The beginning

The introductory session was very difficult. The participants were shy, reserved, a bit afraid, hesitant and also pessimistic. Most of them tried to introduce themselves with bowed heads. The introduction was a long process.

During the session on problem identification, articulation and summation, participants were very slow. By coaxing and motivating them, we improved their movement. While finding the causes of the identified problems the participants were stuck. For half an hour there was no discussion among various group members.

Most of the participants were showing signs of tiredness, boredom and monotony. Noticing this, we gave them a break and later on sang a motivating song. After refreshing, again the task was resumed. However, there was no difference between their problems and causes. To make them understand the actual reason for their problems we played a game called Star Power. This increased their participation.

They understood that exploitation generated through inequality in economy and society, was the crux of their problems.

When we asked who could solve their problems, they again sat in their respective groups and discussed. Each group came out with an answer –

God, government and finally their dependency shifted to us. After more discussion from their side and facilitation from our side, they realized that problems were theirs and the same for everyone, so they will be solved by their collective action.

Then a detailed information on the organizing process, types of organizations, membership questions, rights and duties of members of the organization, problems in organising etc. was provided to the participants. This created a flutter among the participants. They started showing a keen interest for developing organizations among the working class. This was followed by the Tower Building game. The participants looked charged and activated.

Then discussion was held on labour legislation for rural works. Participants were very interested in this session.

Maya and Roshni never wore a veil again

During the initial period, the women wore long veils. It was an uncomfortable and pathetic sight. Maya and Roshni were two young women whose uncle-in-law was also a participant. Where other women participants started shortening their 'parda', these two still kept on putting on long veils. Their uncle-in-law kept them under tight scrutiny. At face value he showed himself as a very progressive man but, in his heart of hearts, he was totally conservative and against women's liberation. So, on the third day of the camp, the man's face was covered and so was the faculty's who was facilitating at that moment. Losing eye contact with the concerned faculty, the participants began feeling uncomfortable. They could not follow whatever was being shared. The old uncle-in-law covered in a veil was uncomfortable within just 15 minutes.

He started mumbling, "I feel suffocated. I can't see the world. I feel I am blind." The veil was removed and he was shown the light. We gave him good reason about his behaviour. As a result he went to Maya and Roshni and uncovered their veils. This encouraged them so much that they promised that they would never wear a veil again. Also, they will make other women aware about it.

Outcome

It was an important outcome of the camp. Another significant change was the eagerness among the participants to be part of the existing workers' union. The strong general behaviour of first two days paved the way for open behaviour and shedding 'man-women' reservations. The change from an 'I' to a 'We' feeling was a positive indicator. Amidst the new-found strengths of the participants and their euphoric state of mind, we ended the valedictory session. Shri Navin Chandra, who was a Senior Fellow of the Institute, delivered the valedictory address.

The Desert Land: Sand, Stones and People: A Report of Rural Labour Camp at Bambore Block, Rajasthan January 20-23, 1996

M.M. Rehman & Poonam S. Chauhan

Rajasthan with the heritage of rich ancient and traditional culture is known as the land of brave men and women. It is the land of 'Rajwaras' (kings), gaiety and color at one hand and on the other hand of conservative attitudes, old rituals and 'Sati Pratha'.

V.V. Giri. National Labour Institute held a camp in Bambore block of Jodhpur district.

Bambore is a remote block with extremely poor amenities. It looked almost deserted. On reaching Bambore, the first thing that comes to the visionary senses a shabby, bad smelling and full of smoke tea shop. The owner, cook and cleaner who were obviously child labour were equally dirty and smelling. They were easy object for the flies' feast.

Behind this teashop was a building that stood straight in the quiet atmosphere. It was DWCR Bhawan, the building lying unused. We were told that the DWCR Bhawan was our camp venue. We entered the building. It was spacious, but badly maintained. With the help of two persons we cleaned the place.

As the day passed by the quietness of the place engulfed us. The sunset was a refreshing sight. In the golden orange light of the sun, the sand shone beautifully. After the sunset the entire Bambore plunged into complete darkness. There was no electricity, with falling darkness ten participants turned up. We arranged for two lanterns. We had candles with us. These we also used for light. Occasional passing of trucks' with blowing horn was the only sound audible. The DWCR Bhawan was new. We were its first inhabitants. Our words were echoing, whenever we talked.

The participants' profile

By the 20th morning all other participants reached. They were 24. There were eight women and sixteen men. Predominantly, the participants were from scheduled caste category. Three were Rajputs and two were Jats.

All the participants were working in various stone quarries across the Jodhpur region especially from its rural populace. Except four persons, all others were illiterate. Majority of them were landless, they survived on casual

wage work. Except two, all participants were married. In the fertile age their average family size was six to eight. Majority of the participants were under debt bondage for years. They shared with us that in Jodhpur district alone there are over one lakh fifty thousand bonded labourers in quarry mines.

The camp

Methodology

The camp methodology was based upon two-way communication leading to reflection. The methods were: group work, group discussion, simulation exercises, educational games, concept lecture etc.

Camp duration and nature

The camp was for four days, and it was residential in nature. Inputs given in the camp

Day One 20.1.96	Introduction Problem identification
Day Two 21.1.96	Problem articulation and summation Star Power
Day Three 22.1.96	Who can solve problem and how: small group work organising process
Day Four 23.1.96	Organization building (Tower Building) labour laws for stone quarry workers action plan Valedictory

Some of the problems identified by the participants

During the camp the participants shared the following problems:

- 1) Dowry
- 2) Liquor
- 3) Poverty
- 4) Population rise
- 5) Caste differentiation
- 6) Parda system
- 7) Illiteracy, especially very high among women
- 8) Scarcity of drinking water
- 9) Women's suppression
- 10) Minimum wages not being paid
- 11) Unemployment
- 12) No compensation for accidental death in stone quarries

- 13) No medical aid for quarry mines
- 14) No security on job.
- 15) Inflation
- 16) Bad communication
- 17) Lack of hospital and medical amenities in rural areas
- 18) No visits by Labour Inspectors
- 19) Tough working conditions
- 20) Lack of information regarding labour legislation, government programmes and schemes. Exposure to dangerous diseases in stone quarries etc.

Entire Rajasthan faces water problems, but in Bambore block its scarcity is absolute. We also experienced extreme shortage during our stay. All four days none of us (26 persons) took a bath. Drinking water was sparingly used. Nobody wasted even a single drop of water. One drop of water was considered to be more valuable than a hundred kilograms of gold.

The participants shared that they were born in the desert. As they grew up, they started working in quarry mines. The stone quarry has made them stone puppets. The wood sandstone are an integral part of their lives.

On the question of ‘who can solve their problems’, the participants’ first reaction was – complete silence. They were divided in small groups. All the groups were initially silent. Then they started discussing. First, they proudly shared that almighty God would solve their problems but, after some reasoning, all made the government responsible for solving their problems. Then they said that, “You people from VVG NLI will solve our problems.” Then, after long reasoning and discussion in one group, one participant spoke with an insightful expression on his face, “These are our problems, and we should solve it.” After this realization we enquired how they can solve their problem. They looked puzzled. Then came the answer, “Together, we can.”

On this note we began the discussion on the organising process, concept, problems, issues, techniques and strategies.

This knowledge helped the participants to understand the importance of their new-found collectivism. Their new belief and realization was further strengthened by the Tower Building game. This helped them to understand the importance of their own confidence and specific help that builds the ground for a strong organization.

On the demand of the campers, labour laws were discussed. Towards the end of the camp, the participants prepared their action plans and presented them.

The difference

The camp helped the closed participants to open up to a great extent. The inhibited and silent persons started voicing their opinions, ideas and concerns. The initial incoherent articulation began to change into coherent ones. There was clarity of thought and expression in a number of participants. The participants looked motivated and confident. They showed their preparedness to fight against exploitation at all levels collectively. They shared that they are better informed.

The outcome

In Jodhpur in district Jodhpur, there exists a trade union called Jodhpur Zilla Pathar Khan Mazdoor Union. The campers showed an interest in joining this trade union. They showed that in their respective villages they would sensitize people and build a workers' organization and join the union. The participants expressed that they would fight to release themselves and other bonded labourers. Their send-off was simple yet overwhelming. After this camp we have trained some of the participants with greater potential for leadership in our trade union programme.

This camp was coordinated jointly by Dr. M.M. Rehman and Dr. Poonam S. Chauhan.

Life, Living and Times in Quarry Mines

M.M. Rehman & Poonam S. Chauhan

The report is dedicated to Ms Lakshmi Meghawal of Khichan Village, Faludi, Jodhpur, who has courageously withstood the sad and untimely demise of her husband in an accident in which he was crushed to death by stone slabs while unloading a truck

Acknowledgements

We express our gratitude to all the participants of the camps. Our special thanks are due to Mr. Kalu Ram Bhati, Mr. Jetha Ram Lawa and Mr. Chimna Ram. We also thank Ms. Shilpa Tiwari and Mr. Gopal Ram Pal, VVG NLI, for their kind cooperation.

Our thanks are due also to Mr. Rajesh Kumar Karn who laser typeset the report in a very short time. Thanks are due also to our Director, Ms Uma Pailai, who constantly kept her pressure on us to bring out the report as early as possible.

Introduction

They are non-beings, exiles of civilisation, living a life worse than that of animals since the animals are at least free to roam about as they like and they can plunder or grab food whenever they are hungry but these out-castes of society are held in bondage, robbed of their freedom and consigned to an existence where they have to live either in hovels or under the open sky and be satisfied with whatever little unwholesome food they can manage to get, inadequate though it be, to fill their hungry stomachs. Not having any choice, they are driven by poverty and hunger into a life of bondage, a dark bottomless pit from which, in a cruel exploitative society, they cannot hope to be rescued (Bhagwati, 1987).

The march of human civilisation has been basically the march of transformation of three important natural components – stone, iron and wood. As the civilisation progressed from the past to the present and towards the future, old structures gave way to new structures to house human beings' material needs and fancies. And the structures have been provided by stones and earth, the two most important components of existence of human civilisation.

The process of this transformation of stones into fit inputs for the construction of physical structures was a difficult and complicated task because the stones have to be snapped from their umbilical cord, the hills and mountains. It was done by labour of both human beings and animals. This process is known as quarrying. From time immemorial, human beings have been excavating stones and minerals from the womb of earth and using them

for the fulfillment of their ever-growing needs and fancies.

Since the task was a difficult one, a person, who is not threatened by sheer survival, will not undertake this work which is so hazardous and arduous. The result is the exploitation of vulnerable people. As society is divided between the 'haves' and 'have-nots', it is the 'have-nots' who have been forced by others, directly or indirectly, to undertake the arduous task in the mines to quarry stones for building palaces and mansions for the 'haves' for thousands of years in the past and in the present.

The Pyramids, the Colossus, the huge palaces and aqueducts, the splendid Greek and Persian structures, the Great Wall of China, the magnificent Taj are some of the landmark results of labour of people and their animals who have simply disappeared into the dark recesses of the untold and unrecorded history of human civilisation.

The history of Rajasthan is a microscopic example of such an endeavour. The land is dotted with innumerable mansions and palaces made of stones quarried from the vast and sprawling Aravali Hill ranges across the desert landscape of the state.

However, behind the graceful stone tapestry and splendour there lies a terrain of untold misery, suffering and exploitation of a huge number of socio-economically vulnerable people whose flesh, blood and bones have withered away in the eerie silence of Aravali's gorges and holes.

Here, we have made an attempt to retell the story of such people in black and white. The story lines are delimited to the district of Jodhpur, the sun city of Rajasthan. Legend has it that the city was the birthplace of Ravana's wife Mandodari.

According to Mineral Statistics of Rajasthan, 1980-91, "Rajasthan possesses one of the earliest civilisations having a glorious heritage in the field of minerals and mines. This is evident from the occurrences of old mine workings and heaps of stages found at many places throughout the Aravali Hills". Hence, consistent efforts have been made by the Rajasthan State Government to increase the output of minerals to meet the domestic as well as international demand of minerals. At present, 23 varieties of minor and 42 major minerals are produced in the state.

As per the above publication, "the state is the sole producer of jasper, garnet (gem) and wollastonite in India. Almost the entire production of zinc concentrate, gypsum, fluorite (graded), asbestos and calcite is reported from Rajasthan. Besides, Rajasthan is the leading producer of lead concentrate (77%), tungsten concentrate (56%), phosphorite (62%), kaolin (44%), ball clay (55%), soapstone (85%), ochre (66%) and felspar (70%) in the country. Other useful minerals produced are barytes, bentonite, vermiculite, fuller's earth, copper ore, dolomite, limestone, marble, mica, pyrophyllite, quartz and

silica sand, granite and steel-grade limestone. Rajasthan continues to be the leading State contributing 50 per cent of the total value of minor minerals produced in the country” (IAMR, 1993).

Employment

The minor minerals provide fairly large employment in the State. They had generated employment to the tune of 3.10 lakh persons per day in 1990. The production of minor minerals has also registered an increasing trend of the order of 4.3 per annum. It was 234.2 lakh tonnes in 1986 which had gone up to 274.8 lakh tonnes in 1990. Masonry stone occupies the first position in terms of providing employment followed by sandstone. The share of employment of masonry stone, sandstone, marble stone and limestone to total employment was 32 per cent, 29.3 per cent, 13.1 per cent and 6.1 per cent, respectively (ibid).

Although the employment in major minerals remains stationary, on an average it provided employment for about 28.7 thousands persons per day during the period 1986 to 1990. However, the production of such minerals has shown a steadily increasing trend. Their production in 1986 was 391 lakh tonnes which had gone up to 819.4 lakh tonnes in 1990. The first four major minerals in terms of providing average number of employment per day are: copper, ore, lead, zinc and silver, soapstone and asbestos. They provided about 57 per cent of the total employment generated per day. In terms of production, limestone constituted about 50 per cent of the total major minerals production in the State in 1990.

Revenue from minerals

The minerals are a most important source of revenue to the State Government. The revenue from them has shown a continuously increasing trend. It was Rs. 14.54 crore in 1986-87 which rose to Rs. 55.99 crore in 1990-91. On an average, it registered an increase of 71.2 per cent per annum during the above period. The share of minor minerals in the total minerals revenue is higher when compared to major minerals. Their perspective share of contribution is 60 and 40. The revenue from major and minor minerals during the years 1986-87 to 1990-91 is provided in the table below :

Table
Revenue from Major and Minor Minerals 1986-87 to 1990-91

Years	Major Minerals,	Minor Minerals	Total
1986-87	907.26	1547.05	1454.31
1987-88	1660.38	11863.23	3523.61
1988-89	2088.02	2459.70	2547.72
1989-90	2124.58	2986.49	5111.07
1990-91	2222.18	1376.19	5598.50

Source: Minerals Statistics of Rajasthan State, 1990-91, Deptt. of Mines & Geology, Udaipur (Raj.) August, 1992. Table No. 7.3, page 48.

Profile of the place: Jodhpur city is surrounded by hills of various shapes and sizes. The district is also dotted with innumerable hills with high- quality stones suitable for construction. As a result, quarrying has been an activity spanning several hundred years. But, in the last 200 years, the activity has increased, both in volume and magnitude, because of unprecedented construction activities triggered off by population growth and mounting development requirements.

As a consequence, one could see the opened-up hills all along the national highway from Jodhpur city to Jaisalmer city.

The Arna-Daijar Plateau, a diagonal ridge, running about 30 kilometres long and four to six kilometres wide, constitutes the major mining belt. The important locations are Chonka, Barli, Kadamkandi, Kaliberi, Soorsagar, Chopasani, Kailana, Jodhpur Fort, Kaga Bhadasia, Balsamand, Mandore, Beni Ganga and Daijar. They are dispersed in about 140 sq. kms. in the north-east, north and west of Jodhpur city. Further details of location of quarry mines are given below:

Mandore Block	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Balsandhar Bano — Ka kata Chino — Kabaria Uto ki — Ghati Lakshman — Ghati
Soorsagar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Fidousar chaupal — Deoria — Raj khane
Pabu Magra	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Barley — Borami — Kairo chopal — Naya area (Kairo) Kairo new allotment — Purana area — Baba Randioji ka Mandir
Baleshwar (Shergarh Block) Baleshwar satta	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Baleshwar qui — Baleshwar India — Kalwaka area — Baleshwar Naya area
Shetrawa Dhuchu	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Jhadia ka khane — Bhilo ki dhania — Kumhar ki Bas

Profile of the workers:

Jowara Ram

Here we have made an attempt to provide a profile of workers both at micro and macro-levels. Two representative case studies have been given which is followed by the main findings of a study.

He is just a five-foot figure, hunchbacked by the burden of age and stone, wearing a printed cotton turban, hiding his bald and emaciated skull supported by an equally emaciated body and ricketty feet. He began his great stone-career at the tender age of 10 with his father. His father died when the boy had just seen the 10th summer of his life. Since his father's death, he has seen two places on this earth – the quarry mine, located 15 km. away from his hovel, and his village. And he has known only two persons – one unseen, the god, and the terrorist 'munchwala' owner of the mines.

At the ripe age of 60 what he does and what he did before, Jowara Ram narrates his past and present:

I started working in the quarry mines with my father. My work consisted of removing earth from the mine either by a spade or by carrying it in a basket. "Subah se sam tak kam karta tha. Thak ke chur ho ke ghar lautata tha bapa ke sath. (I used to work from morning to evening. After a hard day's work, I came back with father)," he said.

After one year of my joining work in the mine, my father passed away leaving behind my mother, my grandmother, my two brothers and three sisters. I cried a lot, night and day, but then I had to stop.

My mother joined me, and what we together earned fell short of what my father earned alone because my father used to dig up huge slabs from the mine all through the day. It was a hard and difficult work and such a worker was paid higher than any other workers doing work in mines. I had always seen either his hand or his fingers or his feet bandaged. It was rare that he did not have an injury. When I asked him why his hands or feet were injured he would say: "Achche kamane ke liye thora sa khun to bahana hota hai." This used to frighten me. And I was more frightened by the sounds of blasting mines.

However, after my father's death I was virtually the head of the family. Everybody looked up to me for their future, because I was the eldest son. At times I had nightmares just thinking how I would do such arduous work. I did not find any alternative. Either I worked in the quarry or die without food. And I never wanted to die.

The barren quarry mines, the cold stones in winter and their heat in summer, made me like one of the stone slabs. Every morning I trekked with a dozen of the workers in the quarry mines with a small bundle of food consisting of two

home-baked millet breads and a few pieces of onion with some green chillies. They made me cross the age 16. My mother was worried.

Because I came of age to get married, a girl was duly found. But the question arose: where would we get money from? Even the sale of our few goats would not be enough to cover my wedding expenses.

We ultimately borrowed money from our quarry owner. The amount was only Rs. 5000. Till date I could not pay it off. The malik says the amount has increased up to Rs. 2000.

Now I cannot work. I beg or eat at my son's place who also does not earn enough. My wife is also old. She looks after somebody's cattle and gets some food, in lieu.

At 60, I cannot find any work. If I request my former malik for same work, he says, "Tere andar to khun hain nahin, to kya kam karega? (You have no blood in you, so what work will you do?)" And I am to beg on the road? Today my companions are this road and the future of uncertainty.

Sona Ram

It was around noon when we reached the Kairo quarry mine in district Jodhpur. The merciless sun was in a fierce mood. The temperature was hovering around 42 degrees centigrade. Suddenly, we noticed someone walking towards us. He was sweating heavily and looked just like a bundle of bones minus flesh and blood, his posture was half bent as if he was dragging his lifeless body somehow. The man gave us a startled look, then greeted us quietly and sat down in a corner like a frightened animal. Every now and then he coughed. The paleness of his face clearly showed that he was seriously ill. He was Sona Ram, aged 33 and a quarry mine worker. Hardship was writ large on his face. The person who took us to the Kairo quarry mine introduced us to him. He reassured Sona Ram that we were not the mine owner's friends and also stated the purpose of our visit to him. First, Sona Ram gave a quizzical look and then smiled faintly. In the late evening, Sona Ram came to the place where we were staying. He showed us his chest X-rays and requested us to help him financially and medically. When we were talking with Sona Ram, a few others from the village joined us and sat on their haunches on the sand dunes where we were sitting. For a while our conversation was interrupted. Sona Ram became quiet. Probably he did not want to share anything in their presence.

Next evening Sona Ram came back to us again with two of his acquaintances. All of us sat on the sand dune. Darkness had already enveloped the village.

The moon shone brightly. Sona Ram sat quietly engrossed in deep thoughts with his left hand dug deep in the sand. We enquired about his health. He nodded passively. One of the acquaintances of Sona Ram began the dialogue.

Initially the conversation pertained to the tough working conditions in which the quarry-mine workers work. Sona Ram spoke in monosyllables.

Thus two friends started speaking about Sona Ram's problems. He started working in quarry mines from the age of 13. He belongs to a Scheduled Caste community. The family was poverty-stricken, so earning their bread and butter became an essential and prime necessity for Sona Ram at the tender age of 13. Instead of going to school he went to the mines.

Another important reason for starting work in such a tender age was the burden of bondage. Sona Ram's father also worked in quarry mines and on several occasions borrowed money from the mine owner. Repayment was very slow and most of the time impossible. Thus, the chains of bondage got strengthened over the years. When his father became weak with age and strenuous work, the son (Sona Ram) was crucified on the altar of exploitation. The indebtedness cost him his childhood. Sona Ram worked from 10 to 12 hours a day. He was getting only Rs 12-15 per day then. The mine owner was a merciless exploiter. He sucked the blood of the workers to build his fat surplus. The labourers were not provided with water, toilet and rest facilities. Open sky above with an angry sun and the rock-hard ground was their working place. There were no security measures for them. Even today the situation remains exactly the same. In summers, working in quarry mines is like roasting oneself in fire. Sona Ram was 17 when he tied his nuptial knot with a young girl of 10. For some years after the marriage, Sona Ram's wife Gouri bai, remained in her parents' house. When she turned 14, she came to her husband's house. Initially she remained a housewife. When survival became too difficult she too joined hands with her husband to supplement the meagre earning, working as an earth remover. As a female worker she suffered more. Wage discrimination was the practice of the day. Ill treatment by the employer was part of their daily existence.

One day the mine owner's eyes fell on Gauri while she was working. He summoned her and enquired about her whereabouts. She told the owner that she was Sona Ram's wife and had newly joined the quarry-mine.

That evening the mine owner called Sona Ram and told him to stay in his mines. The owner said that he would build a mud-hut for the couple, and they didn't have to pay any rent for it. Without suspecting the foul game of the owner, simple Sona Ram agreed to stay there with his wife. Gauri had to stay with her husband. Then began the process of sheer exploitation. The mine owner started pestering Gauri. The owner also started mixing opium in tea given to Sona Ram. When he got completely intoxicated the owner forcibly took Gauri in her hut. Generally, the intake of opium is very high among the quarry-mine workers. It is believed that it helps in withstanding the hardships in which they work. The mine owners feel that their workers work more if they

are intoxicated with opium. Most of the employers have their nexus with the tea stall owners. They give some commission to them for mixing opium in the tea that they serve to the quarry-mine workers.

So Sona Ram had had his regular intake of opium in addition to the quantity supplied through his “ma”. In this way whenever the owner wanted Gauri, he forced her to give in. She could not raise an alarm for fear of losing the only source of livelihood. The thought of an empty stomach was more dangerous. Sona Ram was aware about what was happening but he was too weak to react. Physically and mentally he was continuously being weakened by his employer. Deprived Sona Ram could not raise his voice against the mine owner. He could not leave the mine as there was no other means of earning. No other mine owner was prepared to give him work because they were with Sona Ram’s owner. He was caught in the bondage of debt and his wife Gauri was trapped in the bondage of lust of the mine owner.

Years passed, but the situation remained unchanged. Rather, it worsened. The mine owner was not prepared to leave Gauri. Sona Ram was ill. The opium and tension together made him a TB patient. Physically he was broken. Working in quarry-mines was now impossible for him. The mine owner was deaf and blind to his illness. The amount of debt was increasing. Some people tried to free the couple but failed. Gauri and Sona Ram became free from the clutches of the tyrant employer only when he died. But then came the mine owner’s kin to own the mine and the workers. During this period, some villagers again tried to free them. This time they could succeed in freeing Sona Ram and Gauri. Now Sona Ram cannot work. At 33, he is awaiting his slow death. The work in quarry mine has disillusioned him and Gauri. His wife now goes to a distant village to work. She is the only earning member. The couple is childless. The quarry mines have burned them out completely.

By the end of the conversation Sona Ram became very bitter. The tears of bitterness could be seen in his eyes and the pain was written on his face. The pale yellow face in the moonlight looked lifeless. Sona Ram’s hopes were completely shattered and life fully battered. Bondage of bitterness had crippled them.

Like Sona Ram, there are thousands in Rajasthan’s hell mines awaiting their slow death. They are all bonded. Their exploitation has gripped them like the grip of an octopus.

The load-bearers of Soorsagar

Quarry-mine operation does not end in quarries. The transportation of quarried stone is another arduous task. In Jodhpur, the largest stone market is located at Soorsagar. Here, thousands of workers assemble early in the morning every day, to seek work as loaders and unloaders of quarried stones.

“Most of the workers belong to two communities – Bhil and Muslim,” says Sukha Ram, himself a Bhil from District Barmer. “Workers from these communities are considered sturdy and eligible by the stone thekedars,” says Dana Ram, another Bhil from Barmer.

They work in a gang of four and load and unload stone slab weighing as much as four to six quintals each. It is a most difficult and arduous work. An accidental slip of a foot on the footboard may lead to major injury.

How much do they earn per day? They earn between Rs. 125 and 130 per day. But the area where they work is atrociously inhuman. Water and food are in perennially short supply. Some deplorable dhabas (dingy eateries) operate in the surroundings of Soorsagar. Here, one gets millet bread (bajre ki roti). Vegetable is nondescript. Onions and red-chillis are the two staple items other than the roti.

On an average, a worker spends Rs. 30 to 40 per meal. Besides the meal, the workers spend a sizeable amount of their earning on opium, beedies and country liquor. “They spend 40 per cent of their earnings on opium and liquor,” said Sukha Ram. It is alleged that both the items give the workers enough strength for such arduous works. They work 10-12 hours a day, and sometimes seven days a week. Maybe they want to forget the ferocity of their surroundings by burying themselves in intoxicants.

Most of the workers are migrants from Barmer, Jaisalmer, Nagaur and Jodhpur. They stay here under the open sky, be it a rainy day or a sunny day. These workers are not provided any accomodation.

They cannot work regularly – maximum 15 days a month. If they work regularly, death will knock at their hovel’s door before their 40th birthday.

Between the devil and the deep sea

Nobody likes working in mines. It is a killing field. Hunger and starvation propel them into the mines’ ditch every day. In summer, when the temperature hovers around 40 to 45 degrees centigrade, the quarry mines become blast furnaces. Necessity of survival forces thousands of workers into these furnaces. It is not only the heat but also a killer disease that stalks quarry mines, the silicosis. Today hundreds of workers have been afflicted by this disease. A study reveals:

“The radiological investigations coupled with socio-economic and other aspects worked out in this sample survey of mine workers revealed a very alarming health scenario of mine workers. A large number of workers were found suffering from silicosis, silico-tuberculosis and tuberculosis. These findings are commensurate with the startling fact that there are villages in which young widows of mine workers outnumber the female population since their men have died after working in sandstone mines.”

It is probably because of this extraordinary health hazard to which mine workers are exposed that the State Government had framed strict legislation to protect and compensate the sandstone mine workers way back in 1955 called Rajasthan Silicosis Rules, 1955. If the health problems of sandstone mine workers is assessed under the existing situation, the incidence of silicosis, silico-tuberculosis and pure tuberculosis is much high compared to normal situation” (Mohnot & Jaitly, 1994:15).

Wages

Besides health hazards, wages paid to the workers are not at all commensurate with the type of hard work put in by the workers. Work and wages are highly differentiated. A skilled worker earns more than an unskilled worker. Here, we present some important findings of a study of quarry mine workers conducted by Mohnot and Jaitley (1994):

Profile of mine workers

Age-wise distribution of workers: Workers interviewed were grouped into four categories. This categorization was done to know the presence of child labour, age and period of work. A majority of workers, 229 (83%), were in the age group of 16 to 40 years, the most productive period of their lives.

The number was much less: 29 (11%) in the age group of 40 to 50 years. It seems that after 40, the capacity to do hard physical work goes down considerably. We found that at the age of 50 or so, only a few (6.2%) continue to work. In this sample we found 10 (4%) child labourers below the age of 15. The general practice in this occupation appears to be that the young boys join mines as helpers (to remove scrap and rubble and gradually learn the art of making holes and breaking big slabs, lifting, etc.). This is the age at which these boys need to go to school, yet they have to undertake very hard work of breaking stones, lifting slabs, rubble removal, etc. This leads to illiteracy and exploitation besides being exposed to a variety of health hazards.

Composition of workforce: The workers, who can break big slabs from rocks or those who can run the pneumatic drill, are considered as skilled labourers. Those who can run the drill but cannot break slabs are considered semi-skilled and those engaged in removing hard soil, scrub, rubble, etc. are considered unskilled. In this sample of 264 workers, there were 168 (63%) skilled, 56 (21%) semi-skilled and 40 (16%) were unskilled workers. There is no organized training to climb up this ladder, it is only through the practice and learning that workers acquire their due status.

We picked up only one worker from one mine. In this sample of 264 mines we found over 1322 workers. Thus, the average number of workers per mine comes out to be five.

Caste composition: To understand the caste composition of the workforce a specific question relating to caste was put to know how many workers belong to which caste? The maximum workers were from the Scheduled Caste, particularly the Meghwal (156 : 50%) and Bhil (34 : 12.8%) communities followed by Muslims (18 : 7%), Beldar and Rajputs (10 each : 3.7%) and so on.

Ownership of mines: During the course of our survey a specific question was asked to all the 264 workers. Do you own a mine? Or the mine where you work is allotted to you? Workers replied in the negative.

This is contrary to the claims made by the State Mines Department that in the Jodhpur area, of over 9000 sandstone mines, some 2150 mines have been leased out to SC and 230 to ST.

Landholdings: Most of the workers were from the rural sector. A majority of the workers involved were either landless or had small landholdings. In our sample, 107 or 40.5% were landless and 91 or 34.4% had less than five acres of land.

Residence of workers and distance from mines: 80 workers (30.3%) of our sample belong to villages living in the close proximity of the mines whereas 46 (17.0%) have come from more than 100 kms to work in these mines and 138 (52.1%) cover 20-50 kms one way to reach to mines.

Annual income: During the monsoon months of July-September/October most of the mines are non-functional as water gets logged in these mines. Workers get employment only for eight months in a year in such mines. The average yearly income of a worker from mines is around Rs. 3650 or Rs. 456.25 per month during the working period. The annual income of mine workers' families from agriculture and allied activities is estimated to be Rs. 3300 per year in the four months when they are unemployed – average Rs. 825 per working month which is much more than the income received from mines that ranged between Rs. 10,000 and Rs. 20,000.

Housing status: Our survey revealed that out of 264 workers, 171 (64%) workers were living in small huts and only 75 (28%) had 'pacca' houses made of sandstone.

Reasons for working in mines: Out of 264 workers interviewed, 258 (98%) reported that since they do not have any other choice or alternative employment near their villages they have to work in mines. They further stressed that in our villages scope of craft, cottage and earnings is declining fast because of the destruction of vegetation.

Problem of indebtedness: Since these workers are from the lowest strata of the society and their wages are very low, these workers have to take loans.

During the survey, the team found that the mine owners do provide loans for non-productive purposes. In this sample, we found 179 (45%) workers took loan from their employers for domestic purposes including medical treatment, 45 workers (26%) for marriages and 33 (10%) for rituals and rites to be performed after the death of a kin in the family (See Mishra, 1997).

The study reveals that out of 264 workers, 172 (65%) took loans from the owner. The amount of loan varied from Rs. 1,000 to Rs. 20,000. Maximum workers 56 (32.5%) were found to have taken a loan between Rs. 6,000 and Rs. 10,000, and 37 (21%) workers between Rs. 11,000 and Rs. 20,000. There were 16 (9.3%) workers who took loans of more than Rs. 20,000. In order to ascertain the effects of indebtedness and their status in employment, it was found that 135 (51.5%) cannot quit their jobs because they have taken loans, 40 workers (15.15%) said that their wages were reduced due to loans and 65 (25.62%) workers were frightened hearing this question and refused to give their opinion on the issue.

Generation of workers and work-span: In this sample of 264 workers, there were 68 (25.7%) workers whose fathers or sons have been employed in the mines.

The maximum working-span averaged 20 years for hardy individuals.

Use of intoxicants: During this survey it was found that as many as 237 (90%) cases were found to consume alcohol daily. The shops of country liquor were located in and around the mining area. Workers consuming alcohol said they consume liquor to get rid of pain and fatigue because of the very hard work they do every day in mines.

(b) Working conditions and implementation of laws

Working hours: No regular working hours are observed. 197 (75%) workers said that they work for eight hours but 57 (21%) said that they work for 10 hours and 10 (4%) said more than 10 hours.

Mode of wage payment: Out of 264 workers, 183 (69%) were working on daily wages and 81 (31%) on piece-work basis.

The wage-related problem: Records of attendance are not kept properly. 26 (10%) workers said that their names do figure in the attendance register. 53 (20%) had their names on rough note books and names of the remaining 132 (50%) workers do not figure anywhere. The remaining 53 (20%) workers were employed on piece-work basis.

168 (63.6%) workers said that their wages are fixed by the mine owner and in 89 (33.7%) cases, it was found that both the parties fix wages by negotiation. It is seldom done by the workers alone. The whole lot of workers expressed their ignorance about the minimum wage, labour laws, health safety, etc. stipulated by the government, and said that there is no health facility, group insurance, ESI, PF, gratuity, etc.

Women workers: A large number of women workers work in these mines on a daily basis. Their wages are low compared to men. Maternity leave or any other leave is not given to women workers. Almost **all** the workers showed serious concern on the exploitation of women workers.

The whole lot of workers expressed their ignorance about the minimum wage, labour laws, health, safety, etc. stipulated by the government and said that there is no health facility, group insurance, ESI, PF, gratuity, etc.

Absence of facilities and weekly off: 66 (25%) of the workers reported that they do not have any shade to rest under and not even a first aid box in case of injury. Almost all workers said that a basic amenity like drinking water is not provided by the mine owner.

Workers informed that there is no system of holiday or weekly off.

250 (94%) workers reported that, if they fail to turn up, no leave is given and wages are deducted. As such, there is no question of any leave applicable to mine workers.

Compensation: It was reported that, according to their knowledge, not a single legal case of compensation or for providing any other facility for which they are entitled has ever been made or filed in any of the courts. It is also strange that not a single case of silicosis or silicosis-tuberculosis has been reported and compensation given. This was cross-verified from the State Labour Department (see Rehman, 1992).

THE CAMP

The atrocious and inhuman working conditions, exploitation and oppression of the quarrymine workers and lack of their organisation provided sufficient justification for organising the present labour camp. The camp was held between June 16 and 20, 1997. The site was the middle school of village Utambar, located at a distance of 60 km. from Jodhpur city. It was a residential programme. Participants stayed together and shared their meals together. Food was prepared at the camp site and camp organizers and participants ate together.

Sitting arrangement was made on the ground. Different groups were formed. And each group was entrusted certain aspects of camp activity. This was done with the purpose of drawing some lessons for them for running an organisation.

Profile of the participants

A simple household survey schedule was administered to the participants of the camp to elicit some basic information pertaining to their income, education, etc. The purpose was to know their conditions and status, thereby to assess their needs and problems. Out of 26 participants 24 responded. Here, an

attempt has been made to present some important aspects of the participants' households and their level of knowledge about labour laws and various programmes and schemes floated by the government.

Caste background

Table 1 shows that out of 26 participants 15 belonged to the Scheduled Caste and 10 to the Scheduled Tribe communities. Only one was from backward classes. In quarry mines the workers are mostly from these communities.

Table 1
Caste-wise Classification of Participants

Total No. of Participants	Scheduled Castes	Scheduled Tribes	Backward Class
26	15	10	1

Educational level

Of the 26 participants 19 were illiterate and of the 19 illiterates the majority were women. Out of the seven literate, the education level of two participants was up to 10th standard. The rest did not cross the thresholds of primary schools of their villages (see Table 2).

Table 2
Educational Level of the Participants

No. of Participants	No. of Illiterate	No. of Literate
26	19	7

Population of the respondents' households

The total population of the respondents' families was 133 of which 71 were males and 62 females. It could be seen that the number of males outnumbered females thereby showing gender disparities (Table 3) in the population composition.

Age-wise classification of population

Table 4 shows that majority of the population are in the age group 21 and above followed by 5-10 and 15-20. It was further elicited from the participants verbally whether they were sending their children to school. A majority of the participants expressed that they were not sending all their children to school. Girls were not at all being sent. For instance, the school where the camp was conducted, had 800 students enrolled out of which only 60 were girls.

Table 3
Distribution of Participants' household population

Male	Female	Total
71	62	133

Economic activities

Working in quarry mines was not the only type of activity they engaged themselves in. They also worked as agricultural labourers and engaged in other activities during the months when work in quarry mines was not available (see Table 5).

Participants' income

Out of the 24 respondents 12 participants earned between Rs. 100 and 500, six earned between Rs. 500 and 1000 per month. Another three participants earned between Rs. 1000 and 1500 and the rest was in the income group of Rs. 1500 and 2000 per month.

The important point that emerges from the table is that a majority of the participants were in the lower income groups and consequently their socio-economic conditions were worse off.

Table 4
Classification of population according to age-groups

0-4	5-10	11-14	15-20	21 and above	Total
20	28	15	24	47	133

Table 5
Type of economic activities performed by the participants

No. of Participants	Agricultural Labour	Any labour quarry	Worker
24	20	19	20

Table 6
Income-wise distribution of participants (p.m.)

No. of participants	Rs. 100-500	Rs. 500-1000	Rs. 1000-1500	Rs. 1500-2000
24	12	6	3	3

Housing conditions

It could be seen in Table 7 that 10 participants had kachcha houses while 14 had pucca. The houses are not well ventilated. The desert sand does not allow them to have many windows. Most of the time they remain outside of their houses. Only during the rains or winter do they stay indoors.

Household items

Table 8 shows that the participants did not possess any costly items. Except cots and torches, most of the respondent households did not possess any item of significant value.

Agricultural implements

The level of deprivation of the participants could be gauged by their lack of possession of agricultural and other implements. Table 9 clearly highlights this deprivation. A majority of the participants virtually did not possess any important items.

Table 7
Type of houses owned by the participants

No. of participant	Kachha	Pucca
24	10	14

Table 8
Participants' household possessions

No. of Participants	Cot	Torch	Motor Cycle	Cycle	Radio	Tape Recorder
24	24	14	-	2	3	2

Table 9
No. of participants owning agricultural implements

No. of Participants	Plough	Thresher	Spinning Wheel	Bullockcart	Others
24	1	-	1	1	3

Livestock

Livestock is one of the important possessions of rural households. But today, this possession is dwindling fast. The livestock possession of the respondent participants shows that, except goats, they did not own any other livestock in any significant number (see Table 10).

Table 10
Live-stock possession of the participants

No. of Participants	Bullockcart	Buffalo	Cow	Donkey	Goat	Pig	Chicken
24	1	1	12	1	20	-	-

Works taken up other than quarry mine work

Table 11 shows that when employment in the quarry mines is scarce the respondent households generally preferred agricultural labour, followed by search for other wage work in cities.

Willingness to work in occupations other than in quarry mines

In Table 12 it could be seen that participants would be more interested in agricultural activities provided they had the opportunities.

Table 11
Types of work taken up by the participants when work is not available in the mines

No. of participants	Remain unemployed	Go to city for work	Agricultural labour
24	1	6	14

Table 12
Distribution of participants according to their willingness to take up work other than work in the quarry mines

Charkha	Wage	Agricultural	Sudhari	Work of	Quarry	Domestic	Animal
	Labour	Labour		Goldsmith	mining	work	Husbandry
1	11	19	1	3	1	1	1

Knowledge of labour law

The respondent participants were asked whether they knew anything about labour laws. Table 13 shows that none of them had ever heard anything about labour laws.

Knowledge about government's programmes

Table 14 shows that, except for three (who only knew about IRDP), none of the 23 participants had had any idea about programmes like EAS, DWCRA, etc.

Knowledge about minimum wage

The Minimum Wages Act was passed in 1948. The purpose was to give labourers an amount for a 'somehow' survival. But since then, 50 years have passed and a very negligible number of labourers might be receiving the State-stipulated minimum wage. They do not even know about the Act's existence. Table 15 is an eloquent example.

Table 13
Whether they know anything about labour laws

Yes 0	No 26
-------	-------

Table 14
Whether they know about all govt programmes

Yes 3	No 23
-------	-------

Table 15
Whether they had any knowledge about minimum wage

Yes 0	No 26
-------	-------

The camp process

After registration, the camp was inaugurated Mr. Ashraf Fauzdar and Mr. Mahesh Bora, both of them activists from Jodhpur Khan Majdur Union. They spoke at the inaugural session and briefly highlighted the existing problems of the quarry mine workers. They also expressed their willingness to extend their co-operation in organising the quarry mine workers in areas where there was a total lack of organisation.

Before their presentation, the faculty members of VVGNI explained in detail about the Institute and its activities. They also outlined the objectives of the camp and various activities that would follow during the five-day programme.

After these preliminary activities, the participants were asked some questions. The purpose was to understand their opinions and attitudes and measure their levels of knowledge with regard to some specific issues such as: knowledge of labour laws, government's programmes and projects, their contractual obligations to the quarry mine owners, etc. It was done by putting questions to them and asking them to answer them in groups. The main purpose was to focus the camp process on building organisability of the workers in the backdrop of the existing scenario in which the workers found themselves.

They were asked whether the society in which they live provided them with facilities for development as human beings. A great deal of discussion took place and the participants realised that the situation in which they were living was not congenial to their development and self-actualisation.

After this exercise, the participants were divided into five groups. Each group was entrusted with the task of identifying its problems, conceptualizing them and these problems show that still the basic needs of the workers have remained unmet. Today these problems have created a sort of vicious cycle in the socio-economic and political life of the workers and contributed to a perennial deterioration of living standard for a large number of people in the country. The group-wise details of the problems identified by each group were also presented here. The participants first discussed individually and then put them together. What emerges from these is that they are having more or less similar problems. After discussion on them the participants also realised that their problems are similar to each other. The group-wise details clearly indicate this.

Group No. One

- (1) Lack of education
- (2) Lack of employment
- (3) Lack of water
- (4) Lack of electricity

- (5) Lack of wheat
- (6) Lack of training in the field of sewing.
- (7) Lack of veterinary hospitals.
- (8) Lack of conveyance.
- (9) Lack of vegetation cover in the habitat.
- (10) Lack of proper vegetation.
- (11) Ignorance regarding the government policies and laws set up for quarry mine workers. This is directly linked with illiteracy and lack of education.
- (12) Discriminatory tendencies.
- (13) Inadequate wages from the quarry owners.

Group No. Two

- (1) Lack of electricity
- (2) Lack of conveyance
- (3) Lack of water
- (4) Lack of sewing-training
- (5) Lack of employment
- (6) Lack of housing facility due to unemployment
- (7) Meagre amounts of wheat received from the government
- (8) Problem in wells
- (9) Inadequate wages

Group No. Three

- (1) Inadequate wages vis-a-vis rising prices day-by-day.
- (2) Public distribution system does not supply ration on time.
- (3) Lack of relief facilities in drought-prone areas.
- (4) Lack of water and electricity in villages.
- (5) Lack of education in villages.
- (6) Pathetic situation in the old age when there is neither employment nor money as security.
- (7) Injustice with quarry mine workers and incorrect behaviour with female workers.
- (8) Exploitation of labourers by the owners and disregard for the labour laws.
- (9) Lack of pure water inside the mines along with lack of shade.

Group No. Four

- (1) Lack of employment
- (2) Non-availability of rations
- (3) Lack of water supplies
- (4) Lack of electricity
- (5) Lack of health-care facilities
- (6) Lack of education
- (7) Lack of conveyance, roads.
- (8) Discrimination observed in villages

Group No. Five

- (1) Lack of conveyance
- (2) Lack of water
- (3) Lack of education
- (4) Lack of electricity
- (5) Lack of wheat
- (6) Inadequate wages
- (7) Lack of treatment and doctors
- (8) Lack of veterinary hospitals

Here also the participants made an attempt to outline some causes of the problems identified by them. They are presented group-wise below:

Group No. 1

Lack of education

India is an agriculture-based country. Most of its population resides in villages. Unemployment is a major cause of poverty. As a result, children are not sent to school. They are, instead, being sent to mind cattle in the surrounding areas. Therefore, either the children totally abstain from going to school or do not go on a regular basis. Since a mother is always more close to her children, an educated mother would have been instrumental in educating her children in an effective manner. But they are themselves illiterate.

Lack of veterinary hospitals

There are two types of vocations in the rural areas, cultivation of land and animal husbandry. Animal husbandry is our main source of earning. Therefore, a good income depends on the good quality of animal breeds. Poor breeds result in their poor health and lack of veterinary hospitals only adds to the continued ill-health of the animals as well as wastage of money for getting them cured.

Discrimination

Due to lack of education and widespread illiteracy we find the attitudes of discrimination amongst people widely prevalent. Some people are identified as 'Bhils', some 'Chamars' and some are 'Brahmins'. Such a structure was given to us by our Vedas. If God has given us one form, that of a human being, then where is the question of discrimination? Low castes are treated worse than animals. They are not let inside the houses of well-off caste people. This is inhuman. The cause is only the lack of education. This sense of discrimination is mitigated in the urban areas by the spread of education. The same would prevail in the village areas too when all will be educated. Therefore, everybody must be literate and all children must be sent to school.

Group No. Two

Lack of electricity

For a very short duration electricity is provided. People are illiterate, therefore the government officials do not pay heed to their difficulties. Ultimately the people suffer.

Lack of water

The government is more concerned with the development of urban areas. Rural areas are attended only in the times of elections. Fake assurances are given and frequent visits to the officials produce no results.

The second problem is increasing population which leads to scarcity of water for both human beings as well as animals. How can the government manage water or electricity on a larger scale?

Group No. 3

Due to the irresponsibility of the Panchayat heads, the development-funds are mismanaged. Because of the lack of unity amongst labourers the general problems remain prevalent.

Due to lack of education there is a constant increase in the problems like alcoholism, over-population, blind faith, negligible interaction with welfare centres, etc.

Group No. 4

- Lack of education
- Lack of knowledge
- Dictatorship of the rich
- Unorganized public
- Lack of interest amongst the government officials and their nexus with the rich or moneyed class.

- Communalism
- Alcoholism
- Disintergration with Nature.

Group No 5.

- Irresponsible Panchayat wards.
- MLAs can bring about amelioration in water and electriciy needs.
- Lack of communitcation; telephones may help solve their problems.
- Need of sewing machines to get rid of monetary problems.

The causes and solutions

After identification of problems and their conceptualisation, the participants were asked to identify various causes of the identified problems and their solution. They pinpointed four causes of all the problems, as could be seen above, namely:

- (i) Lack of education
- (ii) Unemployment
- (iii)Corruption
- (iv)Lack of unity among the workers

In the beginning they sought to find solutions to these problems through external resources. Somehow, their own potential and locally available resources did not attract their attention. When the solutions to their problems were sought within their capacity to mobilising their resources collectively, they found that they could solve their problems by protecting their interests in workplace and mobilising their own resources allotted to them by government and other agencies.

Slowly it emerged during the process that collective and united strength of their own would help them solve their problems. They also felt that a platform was needed.

After this session, the participants were acquainted with the situation of society, their status and role, causes of the present situation, discriminatory social practices, etc.

After this sharing session, they realised that socio-economic discriminations are the handiwork of men and they had been divided by men themselves to subjugate other men, particularly the labouring class, to extract their labour.

This enlightenment gave them a new dimension to their understanding of prevailing production relations and complicated exploitation mechanism of the society. This session was backed by a simulation exercise known as Star Power. Through this game, the rich participants become richer and the poor still poorer. They also understood how the ownership of the means of production

accentuated the existing social and economic system. In the afternoon session of the second day, the game was played. The participants were given five coins each, but with different denominations. The rules of the games are such that, together, the equal number of coins with differing values and rules generate the policies of inequality and the economically deprived ones become more deprived and their number increases. As the game progresses a three-tier structure of society clearly emerges.

The game also helped unfreezing the participants' minds as they participated with great enthusiasm and zeal. Most of the faces became quite animated. With the help of some questions the participants could draw similarities between the game and real society. The exploitative processes became clear to them because while trading for profit maximization they themselves tried to exploit their fellow beings by cheating and deception. Thus, the game proved quite useful in generating insightful learning for the participants.

After this session various aspects of building organisation were discussed with the participants. This discussion gave them an idea of the way out of their present predicament of exploitation and oppression. This was followed by a game called Tower Building on the fourth day. In this game the participants are divided into small groups and assigned with three types of roles. In the group the one who is playing the role of a 'worker' builds the tower. She/he is blindfolded and supposed to use the wrong hand. In this game the role of 'help' in terms of motivation building and providing direction was very important. This game basically measures the level of confidence in a person and his/her expectations in performance.

When the exercise was over the data given by the participants were analysed. The participants clearly perceived that the performance was best in two groups where the worker was constantly motivated and directed. In these groups the level of confidence among the workers also played a vital role in meeting the targeted goal, and thus satisfying the fulfilment of their expectations.

The participants also learned that use of information helps in optimal target setting thus resulting in optimal performance. Henceforth, their roles in organization building became clear to the participants.

Further, they were acquainted with the skills, techniques and methods required for running an organisation.

They were also acquainted with various labour laws and particularly the Bonded Labour (Abolition) Act, Minimum Wage Act and Equal Remuneration Act which have specific relevance to their working situation.

Besides discussions on topics such as family planning, environment and ecology improvement, available government programmes and schemes were also held. These gave them both knowledge and information, and the skill needed to alleviate their conditions by their collective efforts.

The outcome

In the concluding session, the participants were asked to envisage a plan as their future activities. They were given an hour to chalk out their activities. After an hour-long discussion the participants decided to form an organisation which they named:

Rajasthan Mazdoor Seva Sanstha

Its headquarters was decided to be located at Village Judiya, Baleshwar. The participants selected its Convener and other associate conveners to conduct the activities of the organisation properly. They proposed to open as many branches as possible, at different places to bring a large number of workers under the umbrella of this organisation.

“Aaj ke bad ghar phe chen se baitha nahi jayega, (After today, it will not be possible to sit peacefully at home),” said Bhola Ram at the fag end of the programme. Bhola Ram’s mind was full of questions. He never before thought that he was equal to other well-placed human beings. His world was limited to his few donkeys, an oppressor mine owner and unending poverty. Today he was feeling both, remorse for the lost past and hopeful of a brighter future. He was inspired by the fact that he discussed his problems at par with others and created an organisation of which his was not only a member but a convener.

Action plan

The following action plan was prepared by the participants for a duration of four months beginning from July, 1997.

Activities	Months			
	July	August	Sept.	Oct.
Survey of all quarry mine workers around Kairo & Utambar villages.				
Enlisting more members to the organisation				
Sending Report to VVG NLI every month	•	•	•	•
Sending participants to VVG NLI’s programme		•		
Conducting street meetings of the workers				
Forming sub-committees in villages				
Fund collection				
Opening a thrift society				

Information centre

The above action plan was suggested by the participants themselves and they all pledged to work for its success wholeheartedly.

They also collected some funds during the camp itself for their Sangathan.

The beginning

The opening dialogue in the concluding session was made with a reference to the Taj Mahal. The reference was in the form of a question: who built the Taj Mahal? Everybody said it was built by Emperor Shahjahan. The participants were then asked again: "Did he carry stones and mortars?" "No," was the answer. "Then who did carry stones and mortars?" "The labourers," came the reply. Was it then not built by the labourers?"

For a moment, there was a pause. Then all said in unison. "Yes, yes, it was labourers who built the Taj Mahal, the innumerable forts and buildings in the country."

What could then the labourers of the country not do? Perhaps they could achieve anything impossible.

The hands which have created both the sublime and the splendid, hands that have carved flowers out of lifeless stones, and the hands that made magnificent tapestry of designs out of stones, those hands can obviously build a beautiful abode for humanity both at present and in future on this very Earth.

The letter from the activists of the Rajasthan Majdur Seva Sangathan shows the silver lining on the grey horizon of the great Thar Desert of Rajasthan foretells a beginning. Though it may go a long way, but a beginning has been made.

Are they bonded? A postscript

They are bonded to quarry mines and its owners. They are bonded because they have no alternative other than the quarry mines. They are bonded to mine owners because they have borrowed from them when they were in need. And thus they are trapped.

Today, mine operation is an ever-growing activity. Similarly there are growing, side by side, the ever-growing number of labourers seeking employment – albeit, the growth of the latter is higher than the former. This has created a serious situation of dependency of an ever-growing number of unorganized labourers. This is one of the reasons of their bondage.

Their lives are full of uncertainties and they can confront them only through others who are better off than themselves. In this dependency situation the workers slowly and steadily get into the vortex of a vicious circle from which they never come out. Their living and working conditions, the wages

they receive, the food they eat, the insignificant medical facilities they get and scant educational opportunities they are provided and abysmal insecurity and poverty they live in can only indicate that a majority of the quarry mine workers are bonded labourers either by their apparently own volition or by indebtedness to the quarry mine owners.

But the district administration of Jodhpur district does not recognise this glaring fact. According to it, there were only four bonded labour households in Jodhpur during 1993-94. Maybe their definitions do not allow them to recognise the fact. In this context Justice Bhagwati's statement could be quoted: "Ordinary course of human affairs would show, indeed judicial notice can be taken of it, that there would be no occasion for a labourer to be placed in a situation where he is required to supply forced labour for no wage or for a nominal wage unless he has received some advance or other economic consideration for which he is required to render service to the employer or is deprived of his freedom of employment or the right to move freely wherever he wants. Therefore, whenever it is shown that a labourer is made to provide forced labour, the Court would raise a presumption that he is required to do so in consideration of an advance or other economic consideration received by him and he is, therefore, a bonded labourer. This presumption may be rebutted by the employer and also by the State Government if it so chooses but unless and until satisfactory matter is produced for rebutting this presumption, the Court must proceed on the basis that the labourer is a bonded labourer entitled to the benefit of the provisions of the Act."

Going by this definition, one could well imagine how many bonded labourers there could be in the quarry mines in the Jodhpur District alone.

The level of their exploitation could be measured by the following statement of Jamna Ram:

"We are paid Rs. 20 for digging and breaking shin (stone slab) of the size of 10 feet length 8 inch wide and 6 inch thick. The mine owners sell it at Rs. 125130 each."

This was verified by the author at several places and he found it to be true. It is an irony that though the mines are nature's creation, one has not invested a paisa to improve it. But just because somebody has leased it from the government, he becomes the owner and is empowered to fleece and exploit the workers as per his wishes and desires.

The situation has to be reversed. And to reverse it the following should be done:

- (1) An all-out effort should be made to organize the quarry mine workers.
- (2) The organisation should be geared to seek empowerment in the area of:

- (i) Political power
 - (ii) Economic upliftment
 - (iii) Educational development
 - (iv) Cooperative ownership of mines by the workers themselves
- (3) Creation of awareness among workers about, labour laws, health and safety measures and employment generation opportunities.
- (4) A comprehensive survey should be conducted to systematically assess the conditions, problems and present and future needs of the workers.
- (5) Trade unions, NGOs and concerned individuals should be involved to highlight the problems of quarry mine workers.
- (6) V.V. Girl National Labour Institute should be continuously in touch with the quarry mine workers through the organisation Rajasthan Mazdoor Seva Sanstha.

Appendix I

Problems of the quarry mine workers*

- (1) Hard labour but less wage is the main feature of quarry activity.
- (2) In comparison to the high inflation rate the wages are very low. As a result, most of the workers do not even get their daily necessities met.
- (3) No compensation is given by the mine owner at the time of accidents.
- (4) Attendance register is not maintained by the employer.

Details of the above problems

- (1) In spite of hard labour, the quarry mine worker gets less wage because the workers grow old quickly and leave the world sooner than expected. If wages are appropriate then a quarry mine worker can eat good and proper food and remain healthy. Then he can force the employer to give one day as a weekly-off.
- (2) About a decade ago there was some solace in the lives of quarry mine workers because wages increased to some extent. Inflation rate was not very high at that time. Today, the wages remain constant as they were 10 years ago, but the inflation rate is touching the sky. Therefore, the workers are unable to meet their survival needs. Their children cannot go to school, cannot wear good clothes, and cannot have two square meals a day. Owning a house is a distant dream for such labourers. Presented below is the table showing details of wages, inflation and expenditure pattern.

Year	Wages of a quarry worker	Vegetables	Grains	Medical expenses	Bus fare
A 1985	Rs 30	Rs 2 per kg.	Rs 3 per kg.	Rs 5	Rs 2
B 1995	Rs 30	Rs 20 per kg.	Rs 6.50 kg.	Rs 40	Rs. 8

Source: Shri Mangilal Rao's own experience based analysis.

- (a) When accidents occur at the worksite, the employers do not care to provide any medical facility or pay the compensation. Because of this many workers have become handicapped. Their families are suffering. This problem is continuously increasing.
- (b) The employer does not keep any workers' attendance register. Every mine owner earns very high profit every month by getting work through quarry mine workers. The employer abuses and beats the workers without any fault. The harassed worker files a case in the court. During the court proceedings the employer gives false statement:

* The information on this piece was provided by a participant. Since some of the informations are very relevant, we thought it appropriate to provide it here (the authors).

“This worker is not working in my quarry-mines, I cannot recognise him.” The court demands from the worker to certify his own case. In such a situation, the worker becomes defenceless because no register is maintained. Thus, the employer succeeds in exploiting the workers the way he wants.

- (3) Keeping these problems in view the workers’ organisation should fight for workers’ rights, should force the employers to maintain the workers’ attendance register, and should create pressure for amendment in the Mines Act 1952. The employers should be strictly punished for violating the laws.
- (4) Problems in building an organisation
 - (a) Lack of economic resources.
 - (b) Quarry mine workers are scattered: The quarry mine workers work at different sites according to the work availability. Because of this the employer takes advantage. By sweet talk they fool the workers and play a ‘divide and rule’ policy, so workers cannot think of collective action for solving their problems.

Thus the mine owner prepares them against unionism.

Most of the workers in mines are illiterate. Because of this they do not understand the meaning of organization. They do not come forward to attend meetings, thinking that by doing so they would lose their one day’s wage.

References

1. Institute of Applied Manpower Research (1993): *Socio-Economic Conditions of Stone and Clay Quarry Workers: A Case Study of Four Districts of Rajasthan State* (mimeo).
2. Mishra, Lakshmidhar (1997), *Burden of Bondage: An Enquiry into the Affairs of Quarrymine Workers of Faridabad*, V.V. Giri National Labour Institute and Mank Publications Pvt. Ltd., Delhi.
3. Mohnot, S.M. & Jaitley, Harish (1994): *A Profile of Sandstone Mine Workers of Jodhpur and Dust Born Diseases*, Jodhpur, Gramin Vikas Vigyan Samiti.
4. Rehman, M.M. (1992): *Society, Economy and Education of the Deprived*, Anamika Publications Pvt. Ltd., Delhi
5. V.V. Giri National Labour Institute (1997) *Bonded Labour in India: A Manual on Identification, Release and Rehabilitation*, Noida, U.P.

Bundelkhand Gramin Majdoor Vikas Sangathan Marches Ahead

M.M. Rehman

Acknowledgements

A number of persons have extended their cooperation in writing this report. Among them I am especially grateful to Dr. Poonam S. Chauhan, Mr. Dasharath Kushwaha, Mr. Rajab Ali, Mr. Jagdish and Mr. Michael Rehman who provided some basic information.*

I am also grateful to Mr. Gopal Ram Pal who tabulated data for this report. My thanks are also due to Mr. Rajesh Kumar Karn who typeset this report.

“Recall the face of the poorest and most helpless man whom you have seen and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he be able to gain anything by it? Will it restore him control over his own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to Swaraj or self-rule for the hungry and also spiritually starved members of our countrymen?”

– *M.K. Gandhi*

The backdrop

The first camp for the rural labourers of Tikamgarh Block of district Tikamgarh was organized in the month of February, 1994. A total of 36 participants from 16 villages of the Block were selected through a three-day pre-camp visit. Organising the first camp was not an easy task. The prospective participants were hesitant to attend the camp because they were not sure about what would be the outcome. In fact, they were reluctant and apprehensive. But, in spite of these constraints, the camp was held and successfully concluded (see Dr. Poonam S. Chauhan’s report on this camp in this volume).

It was in 1994. But since then a few years have elapsed and meanwhile in place of reluctance, a vigorous and enthusiastic response has appeared. They are no more reluctant. They are now eager to attend any meeting or camp anywhere. This is the brighter side of the existing scenario today.

Here some questions arise: How has this been possible? How has such a scenario emerged? What went into its emergence? The answer is: a three-year effort by the local animators, identified, picked up and groomed by the Institute through its first rural labour camp held in the month of February, 1994 and subsequent follow-ups by the Institute’s faculty members.

* Fellow, V.V. Giri National Labour Institute, Noida

However, before going into the process of “reluctance to response”, a few paragraphs may be necessary to highlight the rural scenario in Samarrah Panchayat where the Bundelkhand Gramin Majdoor Vikas Sangathan has been set up.

Samarrah knew only two facets and patterns of human existence and interactions. One facet was marked by subjugation and another facet was characterised by the existence of a large section of acceptors of the subjugation. This scenario has an ironical side: as usual, the oppressors are small in number and the oppressed are in a large number and, despite their numerical strength, the latter has undergone all kinds of oppression without raising their voice. The whole oppressive ambience is etimotised in the phrase: “Raja beta pani pilana”. (My dear lord, give a glass of water.)

Here, every landlord (Thakur) is a “raja”. He is over and above all classes and human beings. In Samarrah panchayat he emanates from every corner. He may be a peon in an office or a chaprasi whose work is to fetch water for his bosses. But if the boss happens to belong to other sections, especially the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, then the latter has to address the former as his “raja”. Today in many places in Tikamgarh this feudal practice of social obeisance prevails and this clearly shows the oppressive nature of social system of the area (see Box)

Within this hostile and uncongenial scenario, the Bundelkhand Gramin Majdoor Vikas Sangathan emerged. The Sangathan emerged as the voice of the voiceless. The emergence was not an easy task. Initially, the well-placed landlords, belonging to the advantaged strata, did not welcome it. They mocked and laughed at it and thought that gradually the association would fall and fly away like the dry mahua leaves.

Box 1: The complexities of inequality

In village Ajnor, the surveyors were collecting information at the house of some higher caste person. Five, 10 other people of the same mohalla also gathered there. At the same time, two persons were seen coming towards that side. They took off their shoes from a distance and took them in their hands. They passed from that house barefooted. Both saluted the higher caste people gathered there and went away bending their heads. After going some steps, both of the persons put on their shoes. Noticing this, one of the surveyors asked, “Dau Sahib, why did those persons take off their shoes from a distance?” Dau replied, “The ancient clture is still prevalent in our village. Both of the persons were Harijans who could not go with shoes on their feet before this house. We are Thakurs, therefore they pay us respect. We are quite aware of our culture and are trying to maintain it.”

One scheduled caste teacher told that he reached the house of a pandit while performing the survey work. There were two chabutaras outside

his house, one was bigger but was a bit lower. The panditji was sitting on this chabutara on a dari. The other chabutara was opposite it but was a bit more in height. The teacher saluted the pandit from a distance and in order to collect the information of the survey, began to open his register sitting on the other chabutara. A gentleman sitting there cried loudly, "You teacher, you have passed the examination in vain. After all you are a Harijan." Hearing the cry of that gentleman the teacher stood up. He replied in a fearful voice, "I am sorry, if I have committed any mistake. I myself am sitting on this other chabutara far from you people." The other gentleman remarked, "What is there if the chabutara is small? The chabutara where you are sitting is higher than the one on which panditji is sitting." Hearing this remark, the teacher at once got down from that chabutara and sat on the ground.

Source: Rusia, P.N.(1993), Microplan for hundred per cent coverage of elementary age group children of Tikamgarh Block, Sanskar Shiksha Samiti; Madhya Pradesh, Bhopal.

The beginning was made by three activists, namely, Shri Dasrath Prasad Kushwaha, Shri Rajab Ali and Shri Jagdish. These three youngmen became very active. They, slowly but steadily, kept the momentum alive through thick and thin and gradually began to spread the message that organized the strength of the workers that was the key to their deliverance from abysmal poverty, deprivation and oppression, and for achieving a proper place in the socio-economic and cultural milieu as human beings with dignity.

Samarrah Panchayat is steeped in poverty and illiteracy. Unemployment is the hallmark of the society and every year a significant number of people migrate from their villages to other states and cities. In a year, the workers generally do not get employment for more than three months. For the rest of the year they fend for themselves with great difficulties and hardships.

Even for whatever period the employment is available, especially during the sowing and harvesting seasons, the wages are generally very little. Steep increase in population and a resultant increase in the supply side of labour, keep the wage rate as low as a bare minimum.

Moreover, employment avenues are limited. Except agricultural activities, which are seasonal and limited, other non-farm activities are also not many to absorb any sizeable part of labour-force. This leads to an unemployment and starvation situation. All this was in the backdrop of the emergence of the Sangathan.

Since its formation, the Sangathan has been vigourously trying to contact workers from different villages through meetings and individual contact. This has resulted in enlisting a large number of workers as its members.

Several members of the society, especially its office bearers, have been prepared as trainer-animators. They, in turn, have been organising awareness

and leadership development camp among the rural labourers in different villages in the Panchayat.

Two camps were partially organized by the animators on April 26 and 27, 1997, consecutively in two villages, namely, Samarrah and Dari. In both camps, the Institute's faculty acted as a facilitator while the animators and members of the Sangathan acted as trainers. Here, details of the activities that took place during the two follow-up meetings have been presented.

The proceedings

Village: Samarrah, Tikamgarh. Date: April 26, 1997, Time: 9 a.m. Place: Middle School hall

As usual, the camp began with the welcome of the guests and participants. The guests included Shri P.N. Rusia, an eminent local educationist, Mr. Suraj Prakash Pastor, a freedom fighter, Mr. Sharma, a retired high school principal, Mr. Hargobind, a journalist and editor of the local daily "The Orcha Times", Dr. Harihar Yadav, another local journalist, 'Raja' Ghanshyam Singh, the Sarpanch, and Dr. M.M. Rehman, Institute's faculty.

There were 36 participants, mostly belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. A few belonged to the Muslim community. Almost all the participants were landless and worked as agricultural labourers to eke out their livelihood. Out of the total 36 participants, 22 were women.

In fact, the number of male participants was less than the female participants. Just a few years ago, it was impossible to bring together women at a meeting. Now the scenario has changed and the indication is the higher participation of women in the follow-up meeting. Many participants had attended earlier labour camps conducted by the Institute.

The literacy status and educational achievements of the participants were very disappointing and disturbing: out of the total participants the majority was illiterate and belonged to the S.C. and S.T. communities.

Mr. Dasrath Prasad Kushwaha welcomed the guests and the participants. The welcoming event was a ceremony in itself which shows the preparedness of the participants and organizers. A heap of garlands from bougainvillea flowers were made by the members of the organisation. Each guest was garlanded and his forehead was dabbed with the gular mark (coloured dust).

After the ceremony was over, Mr. Hargobind made a brief statement highlighting the problems of the area. He mentioned that "due to lack of organisation" among the villagers, they were not only exploited and oppressed by the socio-economically well-off sections but also unable to take advantage from various government and non-government programmes. He further promised that his paper *The Orcha Times* would always work as spokesperson of the Bundelkhand Gramin Mazdoor Vikas Sangathan.

Then Mr. P.N. Rusia, who is one of the patrons, gave a detailed account of the achievements made by the Sangathan. He expressed his happiness by saying that though the Sangathan was only two years old, it had, within a very short period, made significant progress especially by giving a voice to the hitherto voiceless people. He then pointed out that only a year ago, people belonging to socio-economically disadvantaged groups could not think of talking to the advantaged sections. But now the scenario had changed. The Sangathan had given them confidence and strength. "They are not afraid of anyone any more," he reiterated.

After Mr. Rusia, Dr. M.M. Rehman, from VVGNI highlighted the purpose of the follow-up meeting and requested Mr. Dasrath Prasad Kushwaha, the Secretary of the Sangathan, to present the Sangathan's activity report to the participants.

Mr. Kushwaha briefly presented the report to the participants. His main submission was that he was still to receive full co-operation from all the members of the Sangathan to a desired extent and also mentioned that the Sangathan's activities were not very much liked by the landowning classes of the villages in the Panchayat.

The activities undertaken and completed by the Sangathan during the last one year are, as presented by Mr. Kushwaha, given below:

- (i) Opened a night school in the premises of a member's house where children, who do not go to any normal school, are admitted and some members volunteered to teach the children in shifts. Today there are about 56 children who have been enrolled.
- (ii) Some office bearers of the Sangathan met the District Labour Inspector and requested him to visit the village and explain various labour laws, particularly the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, Equal Remuneration Act, Bonded Labour Act, Contract Labour Act and Migrant Labour Act.

The officer visited the village and explained the contents of the Acts to the workers. He also made them aware about the procedures and methods of taking advantage of the laws.

The result of this effort has yielded a very good result. Today the minimum wage paid to the workers is around Rs. 38.50, an increase from Rs. 25.00 which prevailed just a couple of months ago in the area.

- (iii) The Sangathan office bearers also visited various development departments of the district, particularly the Horticulture, Animal Husbandry, Khadi and Village Industries etc. The concerned officers of the departments assured them that shortly they would extend their assistance to such families who were needy and deserving as would be identified by them.
- (iv) Some of the office bearers had also undergone some preliminary training in poultry farming, mushroom cultivation, nursery, dairy farming, bee-

keeping, sericulture, etc. and they were planning to take up some of the above activities shortly.

- (v) The Sangathan also had undertaken a survey of all the villages in Samarrah Panchayat.

The same has been completed and the schedules have been sent to VVG NLI. The purpose of this survey was to assess the conditions of the people in the villages of the Panchayat pertaining to their education, occupations, incomes, health, communications, level of awareness about labour laws, development programmes and schemes, etc.

- (vi) The Sangathan undertook a “Jana Jagriti Abhiyan.” The purpose was to create awareness among people and motivate them for taking up various activities in furtherance of the objectives of the Sangathan.

- (vii) The office bearers of the Sangathan conducted one rural labour camp for labourers from different adjoining villages of Samarrah Panchayat. It was not easy for them to conduct the camp as they had to face a great deal of hostility from the landed class of the village. However, despite the hostility, they made an effort to organize the camp on the line of VVG NLI methodology. They began with the identification of problems of the labourers by the labourers themselves. They also discussed the need for strengthening the Sangathan. Topics like Minimum Wage Act, Leadership Building Process, untouchability etc. were discussed by them. The participants were also made aware of various development programmes meant for them.

It was mentioned in the report that they also used the Tower Building game in the camp. It was indeed heartening news.

‘There is a writing on the wall’

The voices of the oppressed are expressed in many forms. Even their silence is a language which remains unheard by others but could be perceived by the discerning ears and eyes. Once, in Samarrah village, a feudal stronghold of the advantaged sections, nobody from the disadvantaged sections could ever imagine standing against oppression perpetrated by the strong against the weakened. Today, however, the situation has dramatically altered. The white and grey mud-washed walls of the lanes of the village are witnesses to a radical change: they are now the living pages of a situation emerging slowly in the social and political milieu of the village. The walls are covered with a number of slogans indicating the feelings of intolerance towards oppression and injustice and also a desire vision of a new life. The wall-writings are graphically proclaiming the workers’ rights and demands.

These writings are both portentous and ominous. It is portentous because, somewhere in the rugged recesses of the Samarrah hill ranges, a song

of new life is struggling to proclaim its right place in the hitherto oppressive ambience, with the old and oppressively outdated social structure looking at it as an ominous indication.

Whatever the scale of impact, the wall-writings by the members of the oppressed social groups will nonetheless herald a new era.

Today, Mr. Dashrath Prasad Kushwaha's tenacity, Mr. Rajab Ali's courage and Mr. Jagdish Kumar's calm visage show that there are potentials in every human being. An appropriate nurturing will simply help them to unleash that potential. Rajab Ali's declaration: "Ham khan ka har katra dene ke liye taiyar hain is samaj ko sab ke bhale ke liye badal ne ke", epitomises the changing contours of an emerging social milieu and its direction. And the wall-writings are indeed providing that signal.

Till 1 p.m. various aspects of the report were discussed. The meeting was adjourned for lunch break and resumed at 2 p.m. again.

The lunch

Eating together in a village amongst different castes was a taboo. It was always a difficult proposition. In fact, three and half-years ago when the first camp was held at Tikamgarh, even within the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, intra-caste discrimination was found widely practised and prevalent. Today the situation has changed: now, they eat together, share the same plate, sit on their haunches on the same mattress in a real solidarity. Yesteryears' attitudes and practices seem to have disappeared in the curled up smoke of the chullah, which was cooking their meal, and has gone up and disappeared in the blue sky.

After lunch, all the participants were back in the school hall. It was an interface session with 'Raja' Ghanashyam Singh, Sarpanch of Samarrah village. It was also the first time that the Sarpanch sat and ate with them.

The session began with a submission by the Sarpanch that each of the participants should state their problems and also express their willingness to take any new programme and scheme available in the Panchayat. He mentioned that he has received instructions from the department to enlist some deserving families.

After the Sarpanch's statement there was a pause for a while since it was the first time that the participants, belonging to the socio-economically weakened sections, had had an opportunity to talk to their Sarpanch on equal terms and that too face to face with him. After the momentary silence the small school hall reverberated with hails of questions and complaints.

The questions were:

- (i) "We do not know what programmes and schemes are available in our area."

- (ii) “Why has nobody informed us about any assistance by the Panchayat earlier?”
- (iii) When the participants were asked about the State-stipulated minimum wages, nobody could answer. Then they asked the Sarpanch why he himself did not inform them and why he was not paying the labourers the minimum wage too.

The questions were raised in a volley and the Sarpanch was in a quandry. First, he did not expect that the participants would feel so agitated and ask him questions so pointedly and in such a demanding manner. For a while he was upset and tried to raise his voice. But within a moment he calmed himself.

The Sarpanch said, in reply to these questions, that he did not find much enthusiasm among them earlier and many of them did not come forward to take up development schemes available in the Panchayat.

These replies from the Sarpanch rather added fuel to the flame. The participants were in no mood to accept his version. Now, instead of questions, he was showered with complaints, such as:

- (i) They put their signature or put thumb impressions on some forms for getting loans for house building, amar charkha, old-age pension, purchasing goats and cows. But since then they had not heard anything about it. Some of them even said that they had been waiting for almost two years hoping that some day they would get a positive response.

The Sarpanch had a hard time wiggling out of this difficult situation. Since none of excuses given by him turned out to have any visible impact, he ‘promised’ in front all of them that from now onward, such things would not happen. He also ‘promised’ that he would look into the cases mentioned here personally and very soon convey to them personally and to the Secretary of the Sangathan.

This was followed by a session for formulating an action plan for the next four month – i.e. from the month of May 1997 to August 1997.

The participants sat in groups, first, and discussed with each member of their groups (among the group members) what activities should be taken up and who would be responsible for various tasks.

After the individual group meetings (there were five groups) were over, all the groups sat together in a plenary session and discussed each group’s action plan and assignment pattern of various tasks to different members of the Sangathan.

The most heartening feature of this process was that the Sangathan members conducted themselves in a businesslike manner and conducted the meeting in a lively, disciplined and democratic manner. This was indeed a great achievement in their endeavour to build an organisation.

The outcome of the session was the preparation of an action plan. Salient features of the plan are given below:

- (i) Membership drive in different villages among agricultural and other rural wage labourers;
- (ii) Holding short-duration rural labour camps in identified villages;
- (iii) Forming a thrift society;
- (iv) Forming a separate society for women, named: “Mahila Vikas Sarnia”;
- (v) Survey of all rural labour households in the Samarrah Panchayat and other adjoining villages in the Block to assess the conditions of the labourers;
- (vi) Contact different development agencies located at the District Headquarters, Tikamgarh;
- (vii) Visit Sagar for the registration of the Sangathan

After presentation of the action plan, the meeting was concluded. The concluding speech was delivered by Mr. Dasrath Prasad Kushwaha, the General Secretary of the Sangathan. In his remarks, Mr. Kushwaha thanked all the participants and guest for their kind co-operation in holding the meeting and completing it successfully.

Blossom in the dust

Samarrah village is situated on a slope of a denuded hill. Even in the month of April the weather is not very hospitable. Heat and dust conjure up an image of all-round disappointment. Except some sturdy bushes the surrounding looks like a desert, only some remaining stately mahua trees stand erect to tell that there exists great possibility of a new life. The old feudal and decadent social mores and oppression are not an everlasting reality. It could be changed. The oppressed could look upon themselves with confidence and courage to thwart the oppressors’ instincts for exploitation. Though whatever scale, the Bundelkhand Gramin Mazdoor Vikas Sangathan has shown that way. Today the ensuing questions to and complaints against the Sarpanch and his clan members who have thought themselves divine ordained to rule the working but disinherited masses, give a seminal signal that it is time now to take stock of the situation and the blossom in the dust to have its course of growing to give shade to all under a humane and democratic tree.

A day in village dari

April 26, 1997, time 9 a.m., Panchayat Ghar: Village Dari is an ordinary village with an extraordinary surrounding. The mahua trees have shed their leaves and are now covered with new pink leaves. Surrounded by hills, the scenic beauty of the village does not show that people here are so poor, and its surroundings bring out two facts: one, it is nature’s lovely nest; and two, it is inhabited by some of the most poverty-stricken people.

These two facts indicate another fact: resources are not properly utilized. Both human and natural resources have not been harnessed to their fullest and proper extent. As a result, the natural resources have remained lacerated and human resources underdeveloped and disadvantaged. The mismatch is the existing gap created by all-round poverty and discrimination between the 'haves' and 'have-nots'. (For details see Appendix II).

At 9 a.m., we reached the Panchayat Ghar, a one-room structure adjacent to the village primary school. The room was already full of people, a majority of them half-naked, wearing just dirty shorts, waiting to welcome us. Once again it was a bougainvillea welcome – each of the six guests including the NLI faculty member, was garlanded. Once the welcome ceremony was over, only the participants remained in the meeting hall and the rest left. The meeting began by the address of Mr. Dashrath Prasad Kushwaha, Secretary, Bundelkhand Gramin Mazdoor Vikas Sangathan.

Mr. Kushwaha once again welcomed the participants and mentioned that organising this one-day camp-cum-meeting was not an easy task. When the villagers were contacted, they expressed reluctance and apprehension and further stated that, after a lot of persuasion, they agreed but on the actual day they again refused. However, they were persuaded by his colleagues and himself to try and see what happened in the camp.

He also pointed out that earlier they had a meeting with some people of the village who took a keen interest in organising this camp. Amongst them, Mr. Ram Chander, took more interest and spent a great deal of time in persuading the prospective participants to attend the camp.

Mr. Kushwaha also explained the objectives of the meeting and pointed out that the very purpose is to build organized strength for their own development.

He was followed by Mr. P.N. Rusia who exhorted the participants that they should make education as one of their most important priorities in life. "It is education only which can assist them in the quest of their new and higher quality of life for their children and for themselves," he emphasised.

Since it was the first meeting and initial interaction was very less, the first session was begun by identifying problems, their causes and solutions by the participants.

The participants were divided into five groups and each group had had discussions among its members, first individual problems, then common problems faced by each group. After completion of their discussion, each group nominated one of its members to present the identified problems and explain it to other participants. The main problems identified by the five groups are as follows:

- (i) **Lack of water:** This is a perennial problem. There are only two wells supplying water to more than five to six hundred residents. A visit to these wells was a shocking experience: their water was muddy and on a closer look at it was disgusting. Even the villagers who had to drink it every day were quite scared and often felt disgusted. “We know that it is dirty but we do not have any way out,” said Ram Chandar. And he was right.
- (ii) **Lack of road:** From the main Sagar road, the village is located at a distance of 9 km. This stretch of road snakes through hills, jungles and ravines. It is almost unthinkable to walk on this road during the rains and in the night. The participants were outraged that after 50 years of independence, they were living in a village which was not connected by even a properly maintained mud road.
- (iii) **Untouchability:** The social formation is characterised by untouchability.

The Lodha caste (with the amalgamation of some sub-castes) dominates the social scenario – the Scheduled Castes and Backward classes lead almost a segregated life in the village.

Inter-caste interaction is very restricted. As a result, the homogeneity of the village social set-up as a human society was miserably missing. “Yah to bher-bakrio ki zindagi achhi hai. Kam se kam yoh to ek sath rahte hain Hum inshan banke bhi ek sath nahi rahe sakte hain. (Here life of cattle is better than ours. At least they stay together. But we despite being human beings, don’t),” said Belo Singh with a sigh, while explaining the problem of untouchability. Apart from these, other problems as given below were also highlighted by the participants:

- (iv) Unemployment
- (v) Migration
- (vi) Lack of irrigation facilities
- (vii) Lack of health services
- (viii) Absence of education
- (ix) Teachers mostly remain absent
- (x) Lack of awareness about the value of education among the people

After discussing these problems the participants were requested to find out the causes of the problems. They mentioned four causes, namely:

- (i) Corruption
- (ii) Lack of knowledge
- (iii) Indifferent attitude of the officials
- (iv) Sarpanch’s negligence, etc.

When asked for causes the participants came out with fresh problems.

They seem to be caught in a 'vicious circle'. They were unable to differentiate between the two. To some extent cause and effect could be established among certain problems, but the root cause of all problems is exploitation, which they understood with the help of VVGNLI faculty's facilitation. The process was time-consuming but helped in creating new understanding among them.

They were then requested to find solutions to these problems. Almost all of them said: "Rojgar milne par sab samasyo ka hal ho jayega (Employment will solve all of our problems)."

On the basis of this assumption further discussion was held on the perspective of individual solutions and collective efforts. Slowly it became clear that as long as they remained unorganized, they would not be able to solve their common problems such as, poverty, ignorance and exploitation.

Hence an organized force was needed; and they should strengthen the Bundelkhand Gramin Mazdoor Vikas Sangathan, which was instrumental in organising the meeting.

Thereafter discussion was held on various programmes and schemes meant for them, resources available in their villages and the proper and sustainable utilization of resources, the need for small families, danger of ever-growing scarcity and dwindling natural resources.

The camp/meeting was concluded late in the evening.

Then reluctance

It was in 1994. The day was February 1. We reached Tikamgarh early in the morning, a day before the beginning of the camp. Till 10 a.m. nobody dropped in. But by 2 p.m. the participants began to trickle in and by 5 p.m. all 36 of them were together. We were eagerly waiting for them and as soon as they were together we met them and asked about their journey to the camp site from their respective villages.

The first impression that we gained was not encouraging. Doubt was writ large on their faces. They were not sure what was in store for them in the coming days. And we came to know a 'disturbing fact': many of them came to the camp with great 'reluctance', and anxiety despite a rigorous pre-camp visit and continuous interactions thereafter by one of our local resource persons.

However, the scenario changed within five-days of the camp. New rays of hope appeared and reluctance was turned into eagerness.

And now

Since then, three-and-a-half years have elapsed and, during this period, there has developed a relation based on feelings and expectations that a new social milieu has to be created and fostered for their development.

The situation has dramatically altered. They are courageous and eager – eager to reshape their lives by themselves free from exploitation. They want their just and rightful place with due responsibility.

They are not afraid. The old world has disappeared. They are ready to attend as many camps and meetings as possible and ever eager to explore beyond what they had not seen and heard. Today they have realised that the socio-economic, cultural, religious and educational differentiations are all man-made. The status, high or low, depends on what you possessed and how you acquired them. “Jab sab ka khun ka rang ek hai tab ham ek dusre se alag, kaise huein? (When the colour of blood is same, then why are we different?),” Rajab explained with dignity at the meeting. “Hamein ek sath ho ke apna haq lena hoga (We have to claim our rights together),” he pleaded.

Three years ago, the fear and apprehension which were writ large on their faces, now there appears on the same faces hopes and aspirations. Like yesteryears’ old leaves which have fallen on the dust, their decadent apprehensions seemed to have fallen and, in its place, there have appeared new leaves of hopes and expectations though they looked fragile. But nevertheless they are the signs of a new of life on the barren landscape of the Bundelkhand plateau.

Appendices:

In order to provide some idea about the Samarrah Panchayat and Dari village, some primary information pertaining to population, caste backgrounds, occupational patterns, etc. have been given in the appendices.

Appendix I**Introducing Samarrah****Population**

There are 391 households in Samarrah Panchayat with a total population of 2429. Out of the total population 1267 and 1194 are male and female respectively. The average size of household is six members per family. The figures in Table 1 show the distribution of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes households and their population distribution. Almost 90 per cent of the households belong to these three categories. This clearly indicates the reasons for backwardness of the area. In a feudal social structure, it is always these sections of the population who have been exploited and oppressed.

Table 1
Population Profile of Samarrah Panchayat

Items	Names of the villages						Grand Total
	Samarrah	Futera	Kusham Khera	Mordi Khera	Hardia Khera	Madan pur	
I. Population Profile							
1. Total No. of Households	273	21	36	27	8	26	391
1.1 Total Population	1673	146	220	184	36	170	2429
2.1 Total Male	883	71	114	94	17	88	1267
2.2 Total Female	810	75	106	90	19	82	1194
2.3 Total S.C. Households	34	Nil	Nil	8	8	Nil	50
2.4 Total S.T. Households	32	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	17	39
2.5 Total OBC Households	175	21	36	19	Nil	19	270
3.1 Average Size of Households							6

Land-holding pattern

The landscape of Samarrah is barren and lacks irrigation facilities. The concept of water-harvesting is absent. Hence, the amount of land owned by each family is inadequate to provide their livelihood. The figures in Table 2 on landholding pattern shows that out of 391 households 17.13 per cent are landless, 39.13 per cent own land between one and three acres and the rest (43.73) own four acres and above. A majority of the households is,

therefore, in the marginal category. As we have noted, irrigation system is not being developed, the crops mostly depend on rain which is precarious in this region.

Table 2
Landholding Pattern in Samarrah Panchayat

Items	Names of the villages						
	Samarrah	Futera	Kusham Khera	Mordi Khera	Hardia Khera	Madan pur	Grand Total
II. Land Holding Pattern							
1. Total No. of Households	273	21	36	27	8	26	391
1.1 No. of Landless Households	46	Nil	7	2	1	11	67
1.2 No. of Households with 1-3 Acres	116	9	8	10	5	5	153
1.3 No. of Households with 4-7 Acres	111	12	21	15	2	10	171

Housing pattern

It may be observed in Table 3 that out of 391 households, 170 households have kucha houses and 217 pucca houses. Only four families are houseless. It may be noted here that pucca houses are built by, most often, mud and stones. During our survey, it was also observed that houses were not well-ventilated and mostly congested.

Table 3
Housing Pattern

Items	Names of the villages						
	Samarrah	Futera	Kusham Khera	Mordi Khera	Hardia Khera	Madan pur	Grand Total
III. Housing Pattern							
1. Total No. of Households	273	21	36	27	8	26	391
1.1 No. of Households with Kuchcha House	83	10	33	18	8	18	170
1.2 No. of Households with Pucca House	186	11	3	9	Nil	8	217
1.3 No. of Households with no Housing	4	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	4.

Education profile

Even after 50 years of independence more than half of the population of Samarrah Panchayat is illiterate. Still the drop-out rate is as high as 75 per cent in Samarrah village itself. In 1993, there were 533 school-going children in Samarrah village of which only 136 were in school and the rest 397 were not going to school or once attended and dropped out (Rusia: 1993: 15). This is indeed a grave situation. A number of reasons have been cited out of which inability to afford text material followed by irregularity in school/NFE functioning and teachers'/instructors' indifference are mentioned as major causes (ibid). This is true. Our visit to the schools located in the Panchayat brought out this fact more clearly. The shabby ambience of all the schools indicated that education is still the least issue of concern to many villagers and particularly the authority – be it the Panchayat or Education Department.

Table 4
Educational Profile of Samarrah Panchayat

Items	Names of the villages						
	Samarrah	Futera	Kusham Khera	Mordi Khera	Hardia Khera	Madan pur	Grand Total
IV. Literacy Level							
1. Total No. of Households	273	21	36	27	8	26	391
1.1 No. of Literates	621	32	57	43	7	38	798
1.2 No. of Illiterates	1070	114	163	141	29	132	1649

Occupational profile

The main occupations of the households in different villages of Samarrah Panchayat are two: cultivation and wage labour. Most of the cultivators are in the marginal category with very limited operational holdings. As figures in Table 5 show, most of the wage-earners are agricultural labourers. In the local areas their daily wage never exceeds Rs. 25 even during the peak seasons. During our observations we came to know that wage-earners do not get employment in the area for more than three months in a year, that too intermittently. As a result, a significant number of wage-earners migrate to neighbouring towns and states.

Table 5
Occupational Pattern of the Survey Households of Samarrah Panchayat

Items	Names of the villages						
	Samarrah	Futera	Kusham Khera	Mordi Khera	Hardia Khera	Madan pur	Grand Total
V. Occupational Pattern							
1. No. of Households	273	21	36	27	8	26	391

1.1 No. of Cultivators	118	21	21	21	10	13	204
1.2 No. of Wage-Workers	100	4	19	8	1	12	144
1.3 No. of Businessmen	45	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	3	48
1.4 No. of Servicemen	13	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	13

Health awareness

Health is a neglected aspect, especially the family planning aspect. Today the population is growing by leaps and bounds. But, despite this fact, the awareness level about family planning is a disturbing phenomenon. Figures in Table 6 are both an indictment and indication. It could be seen that out of 391 respondents, 294 were found to be not aware about various family planning measures. This is despite the fact that Samarrah Panchayat is located on a highway only 18 km. away from District Headquarters. This is indeed a disquieting situation.

Table 6
Health Awareness of the Respondents

Items	Names of the villages						
	Samarrah	Futera	Kusham Khera	Mordi Khera	Hardia Khera	Madan pur	Grand Total
VI. Health Awareness							
1. Total No. of Respondents	273	21	36	27	8	26	391
1.1 No. of Respondents with Awareness of Health Facilities	226	20	34	22	1	26	329
1.2 No. of Respondents with no Awareness of Health Facilities	47	1	2	5	7	Nil	62
1.3 No. of Respondents with Awareness of Family Planning	66	1	8	15	Nil	7	97
1.4 No. of Respondents with no Awareness of Family Planning	207	20	28	12	8	19	294

Organisational awareness

Respondents were asked about their knowledge about organisations in their areas. The figures in Table 7 show that they were only aware about the existence of Mahila Mandals which we found mostly defunct in the area. Other type of organisations – for example, trade union, co-operative etc. – were totally absent in the Panchayat.

Table 7
Level of Awareness about Organisations

Items	Names of the villages							
	Samarrah	Futera	Kusham Khera	Mordi Khera	Hardia Khera	Madan pur	Grand Total	
VII.Organisational Awareness								
1 Total No. of Households	273	21	36	27	8	26	391	
1.1 No. of Households with Awareness of Mahila Mandals	239	10	13	9	Nil	10	281	
1.2 No of Households with no Awareness of Mahila Mandals	34	11	23	18	8	16	110	

Appendix II

Introducing Village Dari

Population profile

Table 1 shows the total number of households and distributions of population between male and female. It can be noted that there are 80 households in Dari village with a population of 401. Out of the total population 265 and 136 are males and females respectively.

Table 1
Households and Population

No. of Households	Total No. of Males	Total Number of Females	Total Population
80	265	136	401

Educational profile

Dari is educationally backward. Out of 401 people only 71 persons are literate. It has a primary school which rarely opens. The only teacher happens to visit the school as rarely as possible. In 1993 a survey was conducted which found that out of 83 school-going children only 16 children attended the school and rest 67 did not attend school or dropped out without completing the primary level. This is indeed a disturbing situation.

Table 2
Educational Status of People in Village Dari

Total Population	Literates	Illiterates
401	71	330

Social set-up

It may be observed in Table 3 that out of the total number of households (80), 70 households belonged to Scheduled Castes, eight families were in Other Backward Class (OBC) and two households were from the general category.

Table 3
Caste-wise Distribution of Population

No. of Households	Scheduled Castes	Other Backward Class	General Category
80	70	8	2

Table 4 presents the age profile of the people in Dari village. It can be noted from the table that majority of the people were in the age group of 5-10

followed by age groups of 15-20, 25-30, and so on. For details see table given below:

Table 4
Age-profile of the Population in Dari

Age group	0-5	5-10	15-20	20-25	25-30	30-35	35 & above
No. of persons	-	47	43	30	39	37	166

It can be observed from the table 5 that 216 persons of village Dari work as agricultural labourers. The village not being connected with road, interaction with outside world is limited on regular basis. Besides, employment in agriculture is only for a few months. As a result, most of the families migrate in search of work.

Table 5
Employment Pattern of People in Dari Village

Agriculture Labourers	Others
216	-

The findings of the survey indicate that the total population is constituted by Scheduled Castes. Mass level illiteracy prevails in the village, only a small proportion of the people are literates. Among these literates, some are semi-literates. The employment opportunities in and around Dari village are absolutely limited. The only type of work available is in agriculture as wage-earners.

In brief, the village is marked with acute social, educational and economical deprivations. Human rights are simply absent here. The social structure is totally feudal and oppressive.

References

1. Chauhan, P.S.(1994) 'Behind the Development Process', National Labour Institute Newsletter, Vol. I, No. 9
2. Rehman, M.M. and P.S. Chauhan (1996) Development and Dilemma (Report of the Project: Empowerment of Rural Labour with Special Reference to Rural Artisans - Towards Evolving a Strategy: An Action Research Project, VVG NLI, NOIDA (mimeo)
3. Rusia, P.N. (1993) Micro plan for Hundred Percent Coverage of Elementary Age Group of Children of Tikamgarh Block, Sanskar Shiksha Samiti, Taldarwaza, Tikamgarh (M.P.) - 472 001

A camp report of Bhandar, Datia, MP

Poonam S. Chauhan and Shashi Tomer

Introduction

The camp was organized in Bhandar in a temple premises of village Tigra Khiriya, from August 23-26, 2013.

Objectives

The objectives of the camp were:

- To detect local problems and grievances;
- To impart knowledge and skills required for taking benefit from the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005;
- To impart knowledge of laws relating to minimum wages, bonded labour, and tenancy rights, etc.;
- To impart basic leadership skills for building grassroots level organizations.

Participants

A total 42 participants attended the camp. The participants were rural workers who had worked in MGNREGA scheme. They highlighted the problems faced by them regarding MGNREGA.

Reading materials

The participants were given the following materials:

- (a) A Question-Answer Manual on MGNREGA in Hindi;
- (b) A Manual on MGNREGA in Hindi;
- (c) Other information in Hindi on development schemes and programmes were also given.

Camp methodology

The methodology of the camp was based on interactive participation. The camp process included:

1. Group work;
2. Simulation exercise;
3. Learning through games;
4. Self-induced participative activity;
5. Conceptual lecture and discussion; and
6. Field experience.

The Camp Process

After 66 years of India's independence, a sizable proportion of its population is residing in rural areas and living in poverty and exploitation. The people in Datia and Bhind districts are living in an absolutely precarious condition. On all counts of development, Datia block is backward – because of abysmal poverty, illiteracy, lack of health facilities, limited options of employment, poor functioning of Mahatma Gandhi NREGA, bad roads, electricity and water constrains and poor drainage system etc. All are part of the people's lives.

The continuous rain also brought havoc in the rural people's lives, as excessive rains washed away the small mud bridges and as the water flooded the houses of the people, all their materials got washed away, and many lost their houses and became homeless. The physical conditions of Datia block are quite deplorable.

Against this backdrop, the rural labour camp was conducted in the Hanuman Temple. There are some rooms constructed for organising religious functions. We hired three rooms for our camp. In one room we conducted the camp, and in the other two rooms, the participants stayed.

We were staying in Bhandar block township. The distance between the venue and our staying place was only two kms. but the road was in a pathetic condition. It was a muddy road, with huge potholes. At both sides of the road, there were huge quagmires with a stinking smell. On top of it, it seemed that all the cattle of Datia block occupied the road. However way you tried, they would never move from the road. All the vehicles had to adjust to the space for driving. At the beginning of the road from Bhandar block, there is road tax collecting chungli, with a hoarding "Please pay the road tax, before proceeding further." It is a private body. On the second day I asked the fellows, "Where is the road for which you are collecting the tax?" They looked sheepish and embarrassed.

42 participants attended the camp out of which 12 were women, who were MGNREGA workers. The camp participants had come from Bhind, Bhandar, Datia and Jalaun blocks.

The camp started with an unfreezing exercise. This helped the participants to introduce each other in a creative manner. We found that mixing of men and women was really difficult. Their gendered behaviour was clearly evident, though slowly some women interacted with male participants. They were veiled and their communication was quite hesitant, but subsequently the courage that they showed was remarkable.

Once the introductory session was over, the facilitator divided the participants in small groups on the random basis. The group work was on 'Problem Identification and Articulation'. The participants were asked to discuss in detail about the problems they faced often:

Problems

Each group discussed the problems. The duration of the discussion was one hour. Once the group discussion was over, each group was given a white chart and a marker. They were asked to write all their problems point-wise. Then the groups were asked to choose one person as their group leader. The group leaders, one by one, presented their group's problems. Other groups sought clarifications and raised questions, if any. The problems expressed by the participants are given in Appendix 2.

Once the group work on problem identification was completed, the facilitator intervened and asked the campers if they had any problems which had not been discussed by the groups. The learning from the group work was consolidated. Then the facilitator asked the participants to discuss the causes of the problems. After discussion the campers again highlighted new problems. The facilitator helped them to reflect over the causes for some more time, but when they were unable to do so, the facilitator played a game called Star Power, the game of unequal exchange. With the help of the game the campers understood the class structure, its inherent inequality and the process of exploitation. Although women participants wore veils, they actively participated in the game and the discussion.

- The campers said, "Oh, this is how we are exploited and oppressed by the powerful people of the village. The women complained, "We are exploited by our employers and oppressed and harassed by our family members."
- With this exercise the campers' participation increased. The day ended here. We started the new day with songs by the participants. Then the discussion on MGNREGA began. Its philosophy and need was the first part of discussion. Then the Act was discussed in detail. The participants asked questions for clarity. The lecture ended just before lunch. In the afternoon, the session was on leadership. The trainer in very simple language discussed about leadership and its importance. Then an exercise on leadership was conducted. All the participants actively participated in the session. Once the activity was over, the processes of leadership in each group was discussed in detail. The outcome of three different leadership behaviours was also discussed with the campers. It was almost 6, so we called it a day.
- The third day began with the session on 'Organization Building Need, Process and Technique'. Since the need for organization had already emerged from the workers (participants), we discussed it in detail covering all aspects of 'Organization'. The post-lunch session also continued on the nitty-gritties of organising MGNREGA workers. We began quite early on the fourth day, and started with a game on organization building that brought more clarity among the campers.

- Then the discussion on problems in implementation of MGNREGA, took place.

After this session the participants were left on the own to form their organizations. They discussed about the tentative structure, name and office bearers. After one-and-a-half hours of discussion, the campers gave details of their organization. The details are projected below:

Feedback

- The training helped to boost the confidence of the campers. They also showed their optimism. The participants expressed that they were quite clear about MGNREGA
- They had also understood the importance of ‘organization’. The most remarkable thing which was observed was women’s increasing confidence. One of them recited. “Bundele harbole ki hamne suni khani thi, khoob ladi mardani who to Jhansi wali rani thi.”
- They wanted to become like her to build a new society. But, they also knew the hurdles and blocks were numerous and it would be a time- consuming process of change. The participants committed that they will make sure to ensure effective implementation of MGNREGA and stop all corruption inherent in the delivery system. Definitely, there was a silver lining in the dark horizon.

Addressing labour exploitation by organizing the unorganized: the experience of conducting Rural Labour Camps in Kancheepuram, Tamil Nadu

Helen R. Sekar¹

Rural Labour Camps, which are conducted with the objective of conscientizing rural labour, have been acclaimed as an effective method of organizing the unorganized. Kancheepuram in Tamil Nadu was selected as one of the four geographical locations in India for conducting rural labour camps during the years 1998 to 2000. The camps were conducted as a part of the action-research project of V. V. Giri National Labour Institute (VVGnLI) titled “organizing rural labour for effective participation in development”. The purpose was to enhance the organizability of rural labour through critical consciousness of their collective existential being which, in turn, would increase their articulation and assertiveness. The aim was also to create committed, effective and informed leaders, animators/facilitators, initially from outside and subsequently from within.

Geographical location and area of the Rural Labour Camp

The Rural Labour Camp was conducted for four days from September 29th to October 2nd, 1998 in Keelaottivakkam village of Walajabad Block in Kancheepuram Taluk in Kancheepuram District (bifurcated from erstwhile Chingleput District). Kancheepuram is known world-wide for silk weaving. Adjoining the city of Madras (the present Chennai), Kancheepuram District is the most northern district of Tamil Nadu with 13 taluks (a taluk also named as Kancheepuram Taluk is one of these 13 taluks), 27 blocks and 2227 villages and with eight municipal towns and four municipal townships. Walajabad Block, which is one of the blocks in Kancheepuram Taluk, was formed in the year 1961 with 11 revenue villages, 61 village panchayats and one town panchayat. As per the 1991 census, the total population of this block was 1, 05, 808 with 52, 859 males and 52, 949 females. The total population of the scheduled castes was 35, 545 comprising 17, 418 males and 17, 627 females. The population of Scheduled Tribes was 1007 with 488 males and 519 females.

¹ Co-ordinator (Tamil Nadu) Action Research Project on Organising Rural Labour for Effective Participation in Development & Faculty, Senior Fellow, V.V.Giri National Labour Institute

Methodology and social, economic, cultural and political aspects

Prior to the camp, preliminary visits to select were undertaken to the villages with the broad objective of understanding existing agrarian relations and the prevailing wages for agriculture labour. Persons who were particularly well-informed on different spheres of village life were approached to elicit information on the villages. Some of the major aspects of social, economic and cultural life in the selected villages were observed spending substantial time.

The Tamil language was spoken with a strong regional accent in these villages. Inhabitants were of different caste groups namely Mudaliar, Naicker, Chettiyar, Nadar and also Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Each caste group live in distinct clusters of dwellings and they could be easily identified as different caste localities. The villagers by and large followed one of these religions namely Christianity, Hinduism or Islam.

Visits to the villages gave some insight into a range of social, economic, cultural and political factors. These visits also gave an idea on the nature and intensity of tensions building up in the agrarian scene in the villages in general and particularly of the villages Manjamedu, Thenneri, Poosivakkam, Kattavakkam, Varanavasi Thollazhi, Natanallur, Seyamangalam and Keelaottivakkam. The challenge was to mobilize the available resources to resolve these tensions.

The villages visited had segregated residential areas, and were observed to have been maintaining physical distance between the higher castes and the scheduled castes. The physical structure, residential patterns, and the physical distance clearly demonstrated the social composition, social structure and social distance in these villages. The Mudaliar caste was reported to be the dominant caste in the entire district. Scheduled castes were found to be living in adverse socio-economic conditions. Ownership of land within the circle of some caste groups for centuries certainly has made imbalances in the economic systems of these villages. It was ascertained that in these villages caste was used as an instrument to perpetuate exploitative economic arrangements. The agricultural labourers were disintegrated and economically vulnerable because of their landlessness and the landlords exploited their dependency.

Along with the ascribed traditional services such as drummers at marriages, funerals and village festivals; grave diggers; scavengers; village watchmen etc., they were employed as agricultural labourers and were reported to be carrying out all agricultural work. Thus, the scheduled castes are the backbone for the agriculture economy in this geographical region. They were found and observed to be working from morning till night in the rice fields. It was ascertained that they received a pittance as wages for their hard work involved in tilling, ploughing, fencing and reinforcing the bunds, sowing, weeding, pumping water and harvesting. Women of the scheduled castes were

reported to be engaged in weeding, transplantation, and harvesting and also cleaning the grains of their masters on the threshing floor. Employment in agriculture was found to be predominantly informal. Almost all the scheduled caste households in the villages visited were earning their livelihood, on mere agricultural wages from more than one type of agricultural activity, without owning or cultivating any land themselves. The living and working conditions of the unorganized landless agricultural labourers were found to be precarious with their entire family starving most part of the year and their vulnerability was ascertained to be linked to lack of access to land and other assets and productive resources and also their inaccessibility to benefits of governmental schemes.

Housing in the villages varied from permanent concrete buildings built by large landowners to huts built from such material as mud used for wall plastering and thatched roofs. The type of housing is closely associated with the size of the landholding. Living conditions were pathetic in the scheduled castes' locality which were crowded, cramped with very poor ventilation and drainage in some and the remaining with no ventilation, illumination, and drainage or sanitation system. For example, in Seyamangalam village it was found that because of poverty and lack of land ownership, 16 to 20 members were living in a house, where the space was hardly sufficient only for five persons. It was very obvious that the entire development process has by-passed the scheduled castes in this locality. A very few households belonging to the caste groups namely Chettiyar and Nadar were also found to be living in huts. But their dwellings were much more spacious than those of the scheduled castes.

Next to agriculture, weaving was found to be the main economic activity in the villages visited. Even though routine agricultural activities were carried out by members of household, during the peak agricultural seasons, even small peasants happened to hire labour to work in their agricultural fields. In the context of agriculture, the households in these villages could be broadly classified into different predominant forms of labour and can be divided into four groups; i) managerial-cultivators who hire labour; ii) owner-cultivators who work on their own land (mostly with the family labour); iii) owners and owner-labourers who live on holdings too small to support them; and iv) landless wage labourers.

Among the land owners who perform managerial tasks were very few. It was reported that most of their household members had to undertake wage labour. Some of them work as daily-wagers and others work on an annual contract. Even though they had experienced exploitation of their labour, i.e., meagre income for their hard work of long hours most of the days, they preferred annual contracts, because it not only offers work and wage security that keeps them and their households from starvation through most part of the year but also helps establishing a sort of rapport with the landowners.

Agricultural labourers are employed for six months of the year. Daily wage rates vary from and Rs. 15 to Rs. 40 in the peak season. The duration of work varies because of the excess supply of labour. Employment growth in agriculture was not keeping pace with the growth in work force in these villages.

They face severe problems of subsistence due to unemployment or under-employment when the agricultural season comes to a close. In the off-season, work becomes scarce and wage rates drop substantially. This is the period when they fall back on their savings. Some of them, both men and women migrate to Kunnoor, Chattinoor, Sattoor, Kulattoor, Madhuavayal, Pondhur and other far off places for work. Their work places are scattered and they hardly get work continuously in one place. Therefore there is no definite and stable employer-employee relationship and there is no integration or unionization of workers.

In-depth discussion with the local people revealed that a system of contract labour prevails during the harvest and transplantation periods. It assures the landowners of a supply of labour at a time when it is scarce. Each contract workers' group has a leader, whose duties include making the contract agreement, collecting the payment from the cultivator for distributing among the group members. The leader is not paid anything over and above his/her normal share of wages for these duties.

The traditional servant-master relationship tends to have taken a different form which may be called as contractual service. In this a poor labourer consents for a contract to serve the wealthy landlord for a period ranging from one to three years. The terms of service, including the wages to be paid by the master, are usually recorded in writing. At the beginning of the service, the master advances a certain sum of money to the poor labourer (servant) or the person who gives an undertaking for ensuring his labour. The amount advanced is deemed to have been repaid by offering work that is spread over the period of time of the contract. Usually, no interest is charged on the advance unless the poor labourer (servant) breaks the mutually agreed contract. The sum paid excludes food and clothing, which is the master's duty to provide.

The servant has certain well-defined duties in relation to the master and his family. He has to work in the master's fields, look after the cattle, clean the cattle-shed both in the morning and in the evening, and perform other similar tasks. In most of the cases, the servant's wife and the children may also work for the master as a part of the contract. Frequently, before the period of service runs out, the servant borrows another sum of money from the master and their service is prolonged.

There are two types of tenant farmers: i) those who have no land of their own and they do not own the land they cultivate; and ii) those who are marginal

farmers. The marginal farmers cultivate their own land. In addition some of these marginal farmers cultivate the land of others, who require them to do so. The marginal farmers incur all expenditure towards cultivating their own land as well as that of the others. Very often they take loan to meet this expenditure. They receive their payment for cultivating others' land only at the time of harvest and this payment is made in kind (paddy). This system benefits the tenant only if the yield is above average. They are not in a position to repay the loans taken if the harvest is not reasonably good.

Pre-camp survey and the process of selection of participants for the camp

We interacted with the Panchayat board president, village elders, community leaders and other key informants to elicit information on the socio-economic situation of the village. Since the purpose was to establish rapport and also to select participants for the camp, we visited the villages mostly during the early mornings and in the evenings. Visiting them during these hours (after their agricultural work of the day and on completion of their domestic chores) enabled us to have several rounds of meetings with the villagers particularly with the agricultural labourers. We requested the villagers to come together for an interaction at a time and place convenient to them. We conducted such interactions with the villagers in different locations in different villages such as i) a place near the village shop; ii) a place where the agricultural land ends and the village starts; and iii) places which are normally used as threshing floors. It was encouraging for us to see the positive and overwhelming response of the villagers wherein they had voluntarily shared various issues that have been bothering them for a long time and also encouraged others to supplement. These village-gatherings also helped the team to choose the potential participants for the camp. Subsequently, the team also visited the houses of landowners and had in-depth discussion to ascertain their perspective.

Thus, a total number of 56 participants were chosen from nine villages of Walajabad Block in Kancheepuram district of Tamil Nadu. On an average there were five to seven participants from each village. Efforts were made to ensure participation of women. All the participants were of rural origin and were mostly drawn from lowest strata of peasantry. The chosen participants could broadly be divided in the following categories:

- a. Activists among agricultural labourers.
- b. Attached labourers, who could articulate their grievances.
- c. Poor peasants who had identified themselves with the agricultural labour.
- d. Women who could articulate and contextualize their gender-specific issues.

The Camp

The camp was conducted in the premises of Keelottivakkam Grama Sangam located in Keelottivakkam village of Wallajabad block.

Most of the participants who attended the camp were landless labourers with only 9 out of 56 participants reported to be owning a piece of land. Women constituted 62% of the participants. Six participants had their primary education, 25 had studied up to High School, four participants had completed Higher Secondary and the remaining 21 were illiterates.

At the inauguration of the camp, Mr. Navin Chandra highlighted the benefits of collective bargaining. In her keynote address, Dr. Helen R. Sekar explained the objectives of the camp in detail and flagged the need for organization and the possible challenges in the process of organizing labour. Mr. Iraianbu, District Collector, Kancheepuram, delivered the Valedictory address.

The approach to the camp was based on a dialogical process between the faculty members of the V.V. Giri National Labour Institute, the resource persons and the participants. The first session of the camp was on identification of the problems of the rural labour. Working intensively in small groups, the participants indentified some of the problems faced as follows:

- Improper disbursement of wages
- Irregularity of employment
- Seasonality of work availability
- Absence of educational infrastructure
- Non-availability of health-care facilities
- Unemployment of the educated
- Lack of public transport service
- Buses not stopping. Though they pass through their villages, they do not stop at their villages
- No houses and no land, homestead or farmstead
- No approach roads
- No public path to carry the dead to burial ground and cremation grounds
- No facility for irrigation. Lake water does not reach our fields
- No Community building
- No facilities for medical treatment of cattle
- School is about 5 to 10 km. Children have to walk long distance
- Non implementation of minimum wage
- Higher incidence of T.B. and asthma

- Dowry
- Alcoholism (country liquor)
- Destitution
- Child labour and pledging of children's labour for taking loans
- Indebtedness
- No alternative source of income and employment
- Non-availability of safe drinking water
- Water from many wells became useless because of pollution from chemical wastes of silk-dying
- Untouchability

Problems common to all villages

There is no land of one's own for homestead. In the name of a house, there stands a hut made out of mud and Palmera leaves and roof, where nine-14 people stay. In the forms of daily wage, the labourers get Rs. 25 or lowest quality of grain/paddy of about 1kg. There were a few labourers who had been working for more than three generations. They had been forced to work. They were neither able to provide proper livelihood for their family nor educate their children. Gender discrimination in payment of wages was widely prevalent. For example, transplantation of paddy crop was generally done by females and they were paid Rs. 20 as wages. Weeding work was done by both male and female workers. For the same duration of weeding work (seven hours), while a male worker was given Rs. 20 and the female received Rs. 12 or 15 depending on the discretion of the landowner. For harvesting paddy crop, while the male worker was given 8 ½ *maracals* of paddy, the female workers got 6 ½ *maracals* (one *maracal* = four litres of paddy). Depending on the type of agricultural work performed, the duration of work, and the time of beginning and ending the work varied.

During the harvesting time, both men and women had to go to far off places like Kunnoor, Chattinoor, Sattoor, Kulattoor, Madhuavayal and Pondhur. Due to impoverishment and economic compulsion women go to work in the paddy field even at an advanced stage of pregnancy and/or during early months after child-birth. In addition to the long hours of wage-work they had to carry out the domestic chores, child-care, caring for the poultry, collecting, cutting, drying and storing firewood etc. Kancheepuram is a cyclone-prone district and gets torrential rains due to the North-east monsoon which is a major period of rainfall activity. Whenever a deep depression forms in the Bay of Bengal, life comes to a standstill but not for these women. They toil caring for the old, sick and the dying. They face the worst due to the brunt of heavy rains. Firewood gets damp. Women blow into the fire using hollow funnels in their three-stone firewood cook stove to flare the fire. As they stop blowing the funnel to cough

uncontrollably, thick grey smoke spreads all over their windowless one-room thatched huts. The hardship of women continues further during the off season. When they are left with no food to eat, women pawn a few utensils for getting some rice. The pawnbrokers refuse to take the utensils as pawn if they are not of brass or bronze and the women return home in despair.

Village-specific Problems

Thenneri: No health care facility in this village and the villagers walk for over seven kilometres to reach the nearest dispensary. Acute shortage of drinking water was found to be another major problem in this village.

Kattavakkam: Some women are deserted by their families and they live in a state of continuous depression and deprivation. There is no school, dispensary or Primary Health Centre in this village. Children have to walk up to six kilometres daily to the primary school.

Poosivakkam: There is no access to roads to burial and cremation grounds due to land grabbing by the adjacent landowners and the villagers carry their dead walking through the paddy fields and they face a lot of difficulty when these fields are under cultivation. The burial grounds are covered fully with wild plants and are unhygienic without electricity and water. Homelessness is another major problem. Most of the married people continue to stay with their parents for want of the wherewithal to buy land and/or build a house

Natanallur: The basic problem of the Natanallur village is that the number of houses is inadequate for the natives to live in. It was reported that after repeated requests and persistent persuasion the District Collector had agreed to give a plot of land approximately 440 sq. ft. to the landless poor. However, on ascertaining from the concerned authorities, the villagers came to know that land sites that are to be allocated to them are not connected with approach roads. The river Vellakkarai obstructs the villagers from reaching the main road especially during winters and the rainy seasons when the river overflows because of torrential rains. Though this village has a school with classes up to 8th standard, the number of teachers sanctioned for this school are not in position.

Manjamedu: Acute drinking water crisis, absence of public conveniences, No approach road to cremation/burial grounds, unusual number of widowers in the village due to death of many women during child-birth are expressed as the main problems in this village. Homelessness is another major problem. Some of the villagers live in thatched huts with their infants. These huts are located very close to the cremation grounds.

The problems were bifurcated as social problems and economic problems. The participants were asked to think of solutions to these problems. The participations expressed that, "It is only now we realize that since we are not

organized we are isolated from participating in the development process. We are not able to benefit from the development schemes and programmes to meet our needs. The participations came out with a realization that they must organize a village committee, which would take steps to solve the problems of rural labour in the context of socio-economic exploitation of their life situation.

Simulation exercise

The Star Power game was introduced to the participants to enable them to experience the exploitative social hierarchy which exploits them after depriving them of their opportunities and denying them of their fundamental rights. Star Power is a simulation exercise in which a low-mobility three-tier society is built through the distribution of wealth in the form of chips. The mechanism of moving up the ladder of vertical mobility was found invariably operating and a person having moved from a lower to higher rung forgot his earlier status group and also changed his group or clan identification. During the process of reflection, the participants identified the less privileged group as landless agricultural labourers and scheduled castes. They also felt that in the existing society, a less privileged person or group is always exploited by those in the upper status groups. They could realize that exploitation is in-built in the system and that institutional changes are necessary to be brought about if poverty has to be eradicated. They could identify the exploitation in the society and also realize that the exploited would have to be united in order to put an end to exploitation by others. The participants complained that the poor were not able to benefit adequately from welfare measures initiated by the government. They also planned the anti-poor attitude of state functionaries.

Some of the State functionaries were invited to have an interaction with the participants. Mr. Irai Anbu, District Collector, the Revenue Officer, the Tehsildhar of Kancheepuram Taluk, Mr. K.R. Chandran, Block Development Officer, Walajabad Block, Mr. Koteeswaram, Extension Officer, were present along with and seated on the floor along with the participants and the VVG NLI faculty Dr. Helen R. Sekar and Mr. Navin Chandra and the resource persons Dr. Gopal Iyer, Mr. R. Vidyasagar and Prof. Jeevanandham who facilitated the interaction. The participants were encouraged to share their problems including those that were identified by them in groups. The problems shared include:

- The complicated relationship between the landless agricultural labourers and the landlords
- Oppression and domination of economically stronger and politically powerful people in their villages
- Landless agricultural labourers are degraded as lacking intelligence and as being unfit for anything but manual labour

- Government programmes and policies do not reach them because the landlords and government officials are all united in their efforts against the landless agricultural labourers.
- The government schemes and the government apparatus are taken for their own advantage by the landowners.
- The accessibility, reaction and response of the Block Development Officer clearly varies and it is different for the landowners and for the landless labourers
- With the promise that they would be taken care of by the landowners during famine, drought and times of hardship, some of the landless agricultural labourers are tied to particular plots of land and are kept in a state of no freedom
- Some of the landlords even claimed the ownership of the small plots of land where the landless labourers lived, for generations on the outskirts of their villages and even the plots which were allotted to them by the government. They face threats of eviction whenever they assert their rights.
- Deprivation of landless labourers and absence of alternative livelihood is mainly due to the nexus between landlords and government functionaries
- The interference of any outsider in the rural practices and anyone supporting the cause of landless labourers are vehemently opposed.

Though initially surprised on the way that the participants articulated their problems and negated many of them, later the officials responded to several questions raised by the participants. They further explained to them various existing Central and State Government welfare and development programmes and the criteria and procedure to avail the benefits of those schemes. Based on their vast and varied experience, the officials highlighted some of the problems in implementing those programmes. The participants deliberated upon these problems and also examined the possible ways and means of getting access to the benefits of development programmes and schemes to meet their needs and resolve some of their problems.

The camp ended with participants preparing a six-month action plan. Some of the highlights of their action plan were:

1. Forming village committees;
2. Securing government assistance for improving conditions of their villages;
3. Securing household land *pattas* for the homeless;
4. Work towards ensuring equal remuneration and prescribed minimum wages;
5. Collecting data on surplus land in the villages.

The participants were paid their travel expenses and daily wages at the rates prescribed by the government for the number of days they stayed in the camp. On our request for their frank views about the usefulness of the camp, a representative of each group spoke during the valedictory sessions. They found the camp very enlightening and were willing to risk everything in a on-going effort to transform the conditions of their existence.

We were enriched by our understanding of rural Tamil Nadu and the harsh reality of landless agricultural labourers. These camps resulted in locating a group of young, committed, inspired and motivated social organisers who worked towards the collective action of rural workers on a sustained basis. They went around organizing awareness generation programmes, combating child labour, facilitating interface between governmental officials and representatives of newly developed rural labour organizations.

The concerned VVG NLI faculty continued orienting and sensitizing the local administration and other development agencies in Tamil Nadu motivating them for extending their support to organizations of the rural poor. These and other efforts resulted in the overall development of rural labour in these villages and one can see the difference by visiting the same villages today. Based on the experience gained in Kancheepuram, a number of orientation and sensitization programmes were conducted across the country, beginning with the coverage of 10 districts in Uttar Pradesh.

Organizing labour for addressing imbalances in the socio-economic systems: Experience of conducting a Rural Labour Camps in select district of Northern Tamil Nadu

Helen R. Sekar²

As a part of Action Research Project “Organising Rural Labour for Effective Participation in Development”, the second Rural Labour Camp was organized at Uthukad village in Wallajahabad Block Kancheepuram District. As a preparatory work of the camp the villages were visited several times in the year 1999 to understand the socio-economic situation in the context of agrarian scenario in these villages. During the visits, participants were selected for the rural labour camp from a cluster of villages namely Singadivakkam, Marutham, Chennivakam, Naikankuppam, Puthagram, Valluvapllam, Kidiripet and Uthukad.

Pre-camp Survey and the Profile of the Villages

The villages were visited either early in the morning or in the evenings as they were busy in agricultural work during the day time. However, the Village Leaders, Panchayat Leaders, Teacher, ICDS workers etc. and government officials were contacted during the day time.

The total population of Singadivakkam village was 1275 with 646 males and 629 females. It had a total number of 194 households, out of which 60 belonged to the Naikar Caste, 30 Vettaikaran, 22 Mudaliayar, 60 Schedule Caste, 7 Schedule Tribe and the remaining 15 were Christians. While 80% of the people in this village had agriculture as their main occupation, the remaining were engaged in embroidery and silk-weaving.

The panchayat leader was approached for eliciting information about the village and for labourers’ participation in the Rural Labour camp. He expressed that labourers of his village would not be able to participate in the residential camp because of the peak agricultural season. True to his statement, despite the rapport established during the base-line survey, there was no participation from this village in the Rural Labour Camp.

The next village Marutham had a total population of 716 with 315 females and 366 males. Out of the total 180 households of this village, 80 belonged to Naikar

² *Co-ordinator (Tamil Nadu) Action Research Project on Organising Rural Labour for Effective Participation in Development & Faculty, Senior Fellow, V.V.Giri National Labour Institute*

community, 25 belonged to Mooduvar, 40 Vettaikaran, 35 families belonged to Scheduled Caste and the remaining four households belonged to the Naidu caste. The total area of village 316 sq. km. It was reported that this village was known for the frequent occurrence of caste conflicts. When different agricultural labourers were approached for the rural labour camps, they assured their participation but none of them participated. Later on it was ascertained that they were to comply with the direction of the landlords and therefore did not participate in the camp.

The village Chennivakkam has a total population of 458 with 235 males and 223 females. Most of the people in this village belonged to Christianity. The ICDS centre was also visited during the pre-camp survey and discussions were held with different villagers. People here narrated the problem of illicit liquor being prepared on the outskirts of their village by outsiders and they were not in a position to deal with this issue. Lack of transport facilities was expressed by the villagers as their other major problem.

The village next visited was Naicken Kuppam which was inhabited exclusively by people belonging to the Schedule Castes. The total population village was 290. When we had discussions with the village leaders during the pre-camp survey, fire broke out in one of the houses. The entire village was in action to put out the fire taking spontaneous directions from the Panchayat president. There was a maximum participation from this village in the rural labour camp including the one who was a ward member (elected representative of Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI).

Caste conflicts were reported to be occurring frequently in one of the villages visited, Puthakaram. Polarization of class/agrarian structure was very prevalent with concentration of the means of production (in land in particular) on one side and formation of the absolutely landless labouring class on the other. Feudal/caste oppression being most intense the struggles were also most intense in this area. Historically this region presents a picture with the relatively high level of caste consciousness. This village had a total population of 1744 with 842 males and 902 females. Of the 485 households 450 belonged to backward castes. Even though the Schedule Castes were in the minority, there were a few community leaders who were politically active. The Ambedkar Pasarai an organization of Dalits was rooted in this village and has branches in almost 300 surrounding villagers. Three participants from this village attended the rural labour camp.

Valluvapakkam was visited during the early evening. Except very old men and small children all the others had gone for work in the paddy field. While we were discussing the prevailing agricultural wages with the elderly men, some of the women agricultural labourers who had returned from the transplantation work also joined the discussion. One woman showed ten rupees and mentioned, "This was my wage. When we go in a large number, that was more than the actual number of workers required by the landowner for the work that day, we request him to allow all of us to work in the field. The land-

owner gives only the wages as per the number of labourers required. We share the wages among us equally.” Though these women were enthusiastic about attending the camp they needed the permission of their husbands. The village was visited once again in the late evening but some of the key informants and potential participants were found drunk. Therefore fruitful discussions could not be held during the visit.

Kidiripetti was one of the big villages in the area selected for the second Rural Labour Camp with the total population of 1308 with 623 males and 685 females. There were 288 households in the village out of which 36 (18 %) were of Scheduled Castes and the remaining were of backward castes. Most of Schedule Castes in the village belonged to the regional political party namely MDMK (Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam). Out of 36 households, the members of six families were in government service. The remaining households were engaged either in agriculture or in construction works or both. The standard of living in this village was found to be better than other villages. They were found to be aware of their rights and were assertive. Because of the demands on their time by the agricultural work none of the villagers could attend the camp.

Uthukadu, was one of the villages located in the cluster selected for the camp has been visited several times during the pre camp survey. This village was better developed in terms of infrastructural development, transport educational facilities, market etc. The panchayat president of this village belonged to the Schedule Caste. Though eight participants were identified for participation in the Rural Labour Camp, none of them attended. The reason being (as it was found later) that the villagers had some misunderstanding with the management and staff of CASA resource centre, where the Rural Labour was conducted.

Participants profile

Out of 17 participants 11 of them were women and six of them were men. All the participants claimed to have attended school. Some had primary level of education; five participants up to middle school level and the remaining up to 10th Standard. Though some of the participants had claimed to have studied up to eight standards they were not able to read and write. They remained illiterate despite having attended school for some years and dropped out.

Regarding the age profile of participants, 41% were below 20 years of age, 24 % in the age group of 21 to 30 years. Those who were in the age group of 31 to 40 years constituted 24% and 12% of the participants were above 40 years. As regards the marital status 8 out of 17 of them were married and were having children.

About the occupation of the participants 16 out of 17 participants had their primary occupation as agriculture. Only four of them had own land and the remaining were landless labourers. Among those who owned land, the

maximum land holding was up to two acres. Regarding their housing 14 out of 17 participants lived in mud huts, with thatched roofs, two of them were living in tiled house and one in concrete house. Out of 17 participants, 15 lived in their own houses and two lived in rented houses.

Rural Labour Camp

The four-day Rural Labour Camp was commenced on January 30, 1999. The participants were from three villagers namely Chennivakkam, Naikenkuppam and Puthagaram. The basic objective of the camp has been to help rural labour to get organised and to enable some of them to take up leadership roles in order to expand the level of consciousness of the rural poor with regard to socio-economic conditions, distribution of land and agrarian relations.

The camp methodology was a free and cordial dialogical process of exchanging information and experience between the participants and the resource persons and amongst the participants themselves in small groups. The programme was conducted in Tamil. Most of the time participants were facilitated in identification of problems, raising questions, diagnosing various aspects of the problem and searching for solutions.

The first session of the camp started with a micro-lab to break the socio-economic, religious and caste barriers among the participants. It was followed by the enquiry as to what they expected from the rural labour camp. Sharing of expectations continued through the forenoon and provided direction to the thinking of the participants.

In the afternoon, the participants gathered in the entire group and the facilitators encouraged the participants to think and record some of their pressing difficulties. After some initial hesitation, a participant from the village named Puthagaram narrated the problem of frequent caste-conflicts and caste-oppression which was agonising them. She mentioned that the children from scheduled castes were very often chased by the upper castes from the only primary school which was located in the upper caste people's locality. Children used to run with fear and some of them fell in the pond while running towards their villages. She further informed that in her village and surrounding region, the temple lands, which extends to hundreds of acres, were cultivated by the dominant Naicker caste.

The participants were divided into different groups and after discussing with group members they prepared a list of identified problems and presented in the plenary session. The problems identified by participants from Chennivakkam village were: drinking water; unemployment; lack of health facilities; addiction of liquor; family disputes; wife-beating; lack of transport facilities; and low wages. The problems identified by the participants from Puthagaram village were: no street light; incomplete construction of group housing; scarcity of

drinking water; no approach road to cremation/burial site; lack of educational facilities; very limited transport facilities; caste-conflicts; and low wages. The problems identified by the participants from Naikenkuppam village were: caste oppression; corruption; economic dependency on others; landlessness and lack of other economic assets; illiteracy; prevalence of dowry system; unemployment; men's addiction to liquor; absence of medical and health-care facilities; early marriages; large family size; scarcity for firewood; gender discrimination in wages; denial of fundamental and basic rights; absence of electricity; inability to avail loans and benefit from schemes of the government.

Subsequently the participants were ready to discuss the common problems which they faced in everyday life in small groups. In each small group, the literate participants in each group were chosen to write the summary of their discussion. One member from each group made a presentation on the problems faced after writing them on chart papers which were displayed for everyone to see. Some of the common problems identified were: caste discrimination and prejudice; lack of effective communication between employers and employees; addiction to alcohol/liquor; lack of educational infrastructure; lack of medical and other health-care facilities; problems in getting loans and financial help; Lack of proper shelter, clothing and food; unholy nexus between the landlords and the state authorities against the labouring class; unemployment, underemployment and lack of alternatives to earn livelihoods; scarcity of potable drinking water; lack of motorable roads and inadequate public transport; absence of street lights; family income much less than subsistence-level; early marriage; scarcity of fuel, firewood and fodder; problem of landlessness; occupational segregation and gender discrimination in wages; and family disputes.

Later, the groups were asked to present their problems through skits or songs or through any other medium they were familiar with. The participants were given 40 minutes for the preparation. At the time of presenting the skits some participants were hesitant initially but their group members motivated them. The skits enacted by the groups depicted problems of illicit liquor, atrocities and discrimination against women, poverty and deprivation.

Poverty, unemployment and low wages were neither listed as the major problems nor prioritised. The participants complained that they were not able to benefit from the government schemes. They were very critical of poor medical facilities in their villages and narrated numerous cases to prove that untimely death had occurred for want of timely and adequate medical care.

A considerable time was devoted in the identification and diagnosis of the problems shared. The session continued till the second day forenoon. In response to the question as to who can solve the problem and how can the problems be solved, the participants brought the following after working in small groups.

S. No.	Problems	Causes	Solutions
1	Caste conflict	Inequality	Making collective effort by the representatives of different castes
2	Ineffective Implementation of government schemes	Corruption	By approaching the government collectively
3	Large family size	Infant mortality and the need for more hands to work in order to supplement the family earning.	By adopting small family norm
4	Illicit liquor	Addiction to drinking	Counselling and de-addiction treatment
5	Housing	Landlessness	By approaching the government collectively for land
6	Unemployment	Lack of employable skills	By approaching the government to implement skill development and income generating schemes
7	Drinking water	Non-accessibility to water sources in the village because of the prevalence and practice of untouchability in dormant forms	By approaching the government to provide drinking water in their localities.

In the afternoon session of the second day participants were imparted experiential learning through the simulation exercise Star Power. During the processes of reflection the participants identified the less-privileged group as labourers and weaker sections and they also identified various situations which could be compared with the society outside. The situations identified were: the rich exploit the poor; the ignorant were easily cheated; the rich always want to become richer; the poor were vulnerable to be cheated and exploited; the poor were large in number and they were on the increase; the rich take advantage of the vulnerability of the poor and were becoming arrogant; the existence of unequal distribution in the society; during unequal exchange while some gain and many lose; the poor aspire to become rich; the gap between the rich and the poor continues to get widened; a large share of benefits from the government schemes goes to the rich; and grievances of the poor were neither heard nor addressed.

To make a clear picture of the situation the expenditure for cultivating one acre of land and income from the land was worked out as informed by the participants as follows:

Sl. No.	Expenditure	Rupees
1	Cost of seed	240.00
2	Labour cost	
	Transplanting	500
	Weeding and other related work	1000
	Harvesting	1450
3	Cost of Fertiliser	1000
4	Pesticide	500
5	Miscellaneous expenditure	625
Total Expenditure		5315

Income

Price of yield from

I acre land (30 bags of paddy) 1 bag costs Rs. 450

30X450 = 13,500

Price of straw = 1,000

Total income 14,500

Total expenditure 5315

Net income 9185

Participants felt that without offering any labour the landowner gains Rs.9185 only by owning the land and this amount goes to only one family, whereas Rs. 3000, which was the labour cost for cultivating the land, goes to several families where the landless labourers were drawn from. They could realise the need for getting united to get their wages increased and to conduct campaigns against habits and rituals which do not promote health and efficiency.

Towards the end of this exercise the participants came to the realization that inequality should be done away with and they expressed that “exploitation is in-built in the social system which has cunningly placed them in the lower rungs of the social hierarchy. We have suffered a lot from the oppression and suppression of higher castes and indifference of government functionaries. We continue to remain downtrodden and backward because we are not organized to assert and claim our rights”.

In the next session was focussed on the benefits of collective bargaining through a behavioural session and the Tower Building exercise. The exercise enabled the participants to the realization of the facts that: building organization was not an easy task; there would be obstacles on the way; it is a reality that

members join and leave the organization; organizations can be strengthened with the support by well-wishers, but it was necessary to get support from the right people; and organizations can be strengthened step by step based on the experiment gained.

Participants were now ready to form an organization and elected their President, Secretary, Treasurer, and Executive Secretary. Their newly formed organization was named as Labour Sangam. A unanimous decision was taken that Rs. 3 per person, would be contributed as a monthly subscription to their newly formed organization. The participants were asked to identify the possible problems that might come in the way of building their organizations. The identified problems were: illiteracy of the members; lack of interest and motivation; gender discrimination; lack of support from the family members; interference from party politics; and bad habits of the members;

Objectives set by the participants for their newly formed organization were:

1. Upgrading the standard of living of the rural labour;
2. To make the villagers aware of the government schemes;
3. Act as a mediator between the people and the government;
4. To fight for their labour rights especially for the wages and equal remuneration;
5. To get the labourers insured;
6. To fight against illicit liquor.

The participants then prepared the action plan for the next three months:

First month

1. Conducting meetings in the village.
2. Conducting meetings exclusively for agricultural labourers.
3. Expand the organization by adding members.

Second month

1. Organizing meeting for the members.
2. Making people aware of government schemes.
3. Create awareness about minimum wages.
4. To find ways and sources for self-employment

Third month

1. Take up action-oriented programmes
2. Demand for transport facilities especially asking the management of the local transport corporation to arrange for the local bus to stop in their villages.

3. To arrange for adult education.
4. To help the physically challenged and the senior citizens.

The participants expressed that if the Rural Labour Camps were conducted during lean agriculture season more labourers could attend and benefit from the camp. A seasonal mapping was done with help of participants.

Seasonal mapping

The festival called Pongal falls on 14th January which is also considered as the Tamilians day *Thamilar Thirunal* that marks the beginning of the agricultural cycle in Tamil Nadu. January to February marks the peak agricultural season and is a highly employment potential period. During this period activities such as ploughing, sowing, planting and transplantation are carried out. March is the lean season for agricultural labourers. During April-May harvesting is carried out and the wages for harvesting is generally paid in kind, i.e., paddy. The lean season for agriculture starts from June up to October. The workers migrate to different parts of the district and states in search of employment such as construction work, wood cutting, loading and unloading, work in brick kilns, etc. The pattern of inter-district migration in search of labour is that while workers from Puthagaram go to Uthukadu, Poosivakkam, Kidiripet, and Naickenkuppam, those who are from Naickenkuppam go to Chennivakkam, Puthagaram, Ottathangal, Kattavakkam, Pillaiyar, Kuppam and workers from Chennivakkam go to Thennari, Odatangal, Uthukadu, Marudam, Chiruvakkam, and Alappakam.

During this period due to excess supply of labour the workers are exploited. Since the workers are from different places the collective bargaining capacity is extremely weak. At times people work for even Rs. 2 per day as reported from several villages visited. During this time the labourers plough the lands without any purpose for meagre sum. Due to the normal failure of the South-West monsoon in this region one yield is generally missed. November is the period for the North-East monsoon and the entire month is the rainy season. After the rains the activities such as sowing, ploughing and planting transplantation are carried out from December to January 15th. People worship the Sun God with the products of harvest on the Pongal day.

Another simulation exercise was introduced to enable the participants to realize through experiential learning that only by helping others to win one can win and fighting among them does not bring any gain but will only weaken their efforts of collective bargaining. The camp was an experience and learning for both the participants and the resource persons. During this particular camp interface with officials could not be organized because of their non-availability due to their other pre-occupations.



ISBN 978-93-82902-22-5



V.V. Giri National Labour Institute

Sector 24, NOIDA-201301

Uttar Pradesh, India

Website: www.vvgnli.org