

GOVERNANCE
The Marup:
A Traditional Socio-Economic Security System
MANIPUR

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Introduction

The practices of traditional systems of co-operative organization may provide many socio-economic developments in every society. Most of such organizations are based on the concept of traditional social solidarity and the diffused obligations that are thought to characterize such traditional groups based on traditional forms of social organization. There seems to be a difference, however, between the social basis for traditional co-operative solidarity and co-operative model with the implications of a self-conscious, deliberate and rational organization. Moreover, the limits and extent of the traditional modes of social organization are often misunderstood or perhaps unexamined. They have been seen as based on seamless, diffused relationships without precise context, relationships deriving from the past practices and loyalties, and not based on present practices and successful performance.

Today, it is also seen that many of the modern formal co-operative enterprises like Public Sector Bank, Regional Rural Bank, All Scheduled Commercial Bank etc. fail to practice successfully in those societies where there is a strong social bond of traditional social solidarity. In striking contrast to the failure of such modern formal organization is the success of other informal pattern of co-operative associations. The associations which are predominantly, (i) Rotating, Saving and Credit Institution and (ii) Saving and Lending Institution, commonly known as Marup among the Meiteis of Manipur, are notable for their successful performance in both rural and urban life of Manipur. In Manipur, Marup system is one of the most important and effective forms of traditional socio-economic organization for mutual help, including reciprocal gift giving, exchange labour pattern, neighbouring assistance in death, illness, marriage and other personal crisis. It is, thus, much more than a simple modern economic organization. It provides both economic and social security of an individual in every sphere of social and economic life. It not only provides economic development in the region but also act as a means for strengthening the overall solidarity of the society.

Manipur, with an area of 22,723 sq. kms, borders Myanmar in the far eastern part of the country, has two distinct geographical features viz. the oval shaped centrally situated valley and the surrounding ranges of hills. The valley

comprises of 9 % of the total area and hills constitute the remaining 91% of the total area. This distinct geographical division is a determinant factor in the socio-economic and historical development of the different communities in the state. The valley is inhabited by the Meiteis who are predominantly Hindus, and the hill areas are inhabited by various tribes such as the Nagas, the Kukis and other small tribes (altogether 29 in number), most of which adopted Christianity. The density of population in the valley is very high i.e. 505 persons per sq. km and the density of population in the surrounding hills are to low i.e. 34 persons per sq. km. More than 70 % of the total population is also concentrated in this small area of the valley. Thus, it made the resources very limited for the valley people.

As per the 1991 Census, the state has total population of 18,37,149 persons. Of this the Meiteis constitute nearly 55.17 %, the Meitei Pangals (Muslim community) constitute nearly 7.27 %, tribal communities constitute nearly 34.43% and remaining 3.13% constitute others who migrated in the later time. More than 80 % of the total population is in the rural area. As per the report of 1991 Census, the state has recognized 41.18 % of the total population as working class and 33.78 % of the total population as below the poverty line. And the large section of rural population has less knowledge about the modern saving facilities provided by modern formal financial institutions. These institutions are also absent or in some areas are too remote for the large section of the population. (See Table: 1 given below). For them, the traditional self-help organizations confined in their localities are the only institutions providing banking facilities. Thus, the primary focus of the present paper is to study the structure and functions of this self-help organization of Marup among the Meiteis of Manipur valley. Similar such institutions are also found in other small communities but the scope of this paper is limited to this Marup institution found among the Meiteis.

The Meiteis who inhabit the valley are predominantly Vaishnavite Hindus. Their social life is characterized by various ceremonies, which are very expensive, and only a few rich families can afford it. Therefore they cooperate among themselves to meet the expenses of these ceremonies. Any problems related to various life-cycle rituals like death, marriage, birth etc., are taken as common problem, and also tried to solve collectively. For this they use their pre-existing social relationships among individuals to minimize these problems to a maximum extend. In this regard, all the individuals are equally responsible for any help related to these problems. Thus, collective effort made any possible way to resolve any problem in the society.

An interesting aspect of the village socio-economic organization in Meitei society is the Marup system (literally means friendship association), a type of co-operative saving and credit institution. It originated as one of the most important institution for mutual help at the time of death, marriage, birth and other personal crises. It stands as an institution for socio-economic security in

every stage of their life. However, these people commonly view the Marup system more as social institution than as an economic institution whose main purpose is the strengthening of social solidarity. But over time it expanded its activity much more than the social sphere and covers most of the economic sphere of every individual in the valley of Manipur. Today, it is very hard to find out any socio-economic sphere, which is not touched by Marup system in the valley. It is one of the most important and effective socio-economic organizations in the life of every individual in the society.

During the last few decades, the Meiteis have introduced various types of Marup serving different purposes and fulfilling many needs. The nature and type of these Marups are still based on their traditional system of social organization. However, the precise form of Marup system varies in a number of ways according to the needs of the society. Generally, the Marup system can be divided into two forms as regard to its nature of organizations and functions. These are:

Classification of the Marup System in Manipur

Intra-Village Marup

Inter-Village Marup

Singlup Marup	Leikai-Marup	Thouni-Marup	Non-Thouni-
Family-wise Leikai-Chanura Marup	Chanura Marup	Keithel Marup	Bor Lukmaiphambi Marup
Luhongba-Thouni Marup	Epal-Thouni Marup	Sorat-Thouni Marup	Churakaral-Thouni Marup

1. Intra-Village Marup

The Intra-Village Marup system stands as permanent socio-economic institutions whose memberships are non-voluntary in nature, and they are also responsible for any help regarding the life-cycle rituals like death, marriage birth etc. of the community. This Marup is based on some already existing permanent social relationships like kinship, neighbourhood etc. and is also confined within a particular territory. And every member in a village is a compulsory member of one such Marup. This is because, this organization, is always ready to provide any possible help related to these life-cycle rituals like death, marriage, sacred thread investiture, birth etc. It is also responsible for any help regarding the needs from time to time. In this regard this Marup can be again classified into two groups. These are:

- (a) The Singlup and
- (b) The Leikai Marup.

(a) The Singlup

This type of Marup, in Manipur, is the oldest form of traditional social organization to cover all the costs to be spent for the performance of dead ceremonies. And the organization of this Singlup institution is usually at the Leikai (locality) level, and every family is also the member of his Leikai Singlup. This Singlup stands as a permanent social organization for providing any required help regarding the performance of death ceremony of a member of the Leikai. Therefore, this organization is functionally limited to the ceremony of death.

In Meitei Philosophy, death is an inevitable phenomenon, which can be occurred in every family. It also brings uncertainty, fear, disruption and emotional stress and strain, not only in the family in which the death occurs but also in the entire community. This fear of death, which can be expressed as 'primary fear', is present in each and every mind of individual. And to bring back them to the normality, related rites and rituals have to be performed. Every Meiteis feels that it is their responsible to help the family in regard to the performance of such rites and rituals. In this regards the organization of the Singlup tradition is functionally meaningful that the entire responsibility of such rites and rituals related to death are to be conveniently shared by all the members of the community.

As the Meiteis of Manipur valley are Vaishnavite Hindus, certain rites and rituals associated with death, are to be performed when one person dies, which can be categorized into four stages.

These are:

- (i) Potloiba
- (ii) Asti Loukhatpa
- (iii) Sorat Shonba
- (iv) Phiroi.

Potloiba, which means the cremation of the death, is the first stage of the ritual to be taken up regarding death of a Meitei. When a person dies in a family, the news has to be sent first to the Singlupmapu. Then, he will deliver this news to all the members of the Singlup. There is another form of this Marup, which is called Singyelmarup. This Marup is formed in addition to the traditional system of the Singlup. While Singlup exists as a male institution, the Singyelmarup includes both the sexes. Divorces or widows without a male head of the family may also join it. They are exempted from the service of the cremation but expected to contribute other subscriptions. This is also an ancient custom of the Meiteis, which requires every household to send one male member to attend the cremation in case of a death of a member of his Singlup. Each household also pays a small sum of money for buying firewood needed for the cremation. The amount of the contribution may vary from Singlup to Singlup depending on its size. But generally at present it ranges from Rs.10 to Rs 20. per household. In case any member is absent from this

service, he will be fined with double the amount or triple according to the norm of the Singlup tradition.

On the fifth day after the death the ritual of Asti Loukhatpa, which means the collection of bone and ash, is performed. This ritual is not a very big one and so only few relatives attend the ritual. It is also not so much expensive one as compare with other rituals. Therefore, there are not many roles to be played by Singlup. However, at least every household of the Singlup tries to attend the ritual as a sign of their Singlup solidarity.

The third stage, called Sorat Shonba (the term Sorat is a corrupted word of Sarddha ceremony of death), is performed on the 13th day after the death or 14th day in the case of Lamboiba. This third ritual is one of the biggest and the most expensive among all the ritual related to death. For Sorat Sonba the Singlup becomes important, as it has to perform many responsibilities. This institution of the Singlup is responsible to cover most of the important costs to be spent on it.

For this ritual, each member of the Singlup will come with a bamboo and they also will help in pegging a Mandap (canopy), under which the ritual of the Sorat has to be performed in presence of the relatives and invitees. Besides, the institution also needs to arrange some corrugated sheets (locally called Zingha/Tin), for it's roofing, long reed mats (called Phakshang), for sitting purpose. These materials are the permanent property of the Singlup. Over and above, many of the material items needed especially for the purpose of the ritual such as rice, betel nut are also contributed by the members of the Singlup. Above all they also contribute some fixed amount for financing some other items. However, the amount of monetary contribution, and the items and quantity of the material contribution may vary from Singlup to Singlup. Unlike other Marup in which the number of the chance of receiving the distribution is only one for every member, this Singlup will provide help for every death in the family of the Leikai. Thus, it enables every family to conduct the ceremony of death without physical and financial burden.

And the fourth stage of dead ritual called Phiroi is taken place exactly on the same date of the next year from the date when the person died. This is the ritual for the first anniversary day of the death. On this day the deceased family organizes a grand feast called Phiroi Chakchaba. In this ritual the Singlup may not be directly responsible for it. But in case of the arrangement of the ritual hall, the family can take the help from the Singlup regarding the required materials. Thus, the Singlup provides many articles like corrugated sheets, long reed mats, big cooking utensils, drinking water glasses, etc., which are to be used for the ceremony.

As the weak economic condition of the general population; over and above, the need of elaborate requirements in the form of goods and services when a

person dies, their economic condition does not permit the observance of such an elaborate act of funeral ceremony. However, the collective effort of the Singlup makes a family enables to perform the required ritual activities. All the members of the Singlup join to work unitedly on such occasion, and they equally share the responsibility of getting through the above four various stage of death ceremony. In this way the organization of the Singlup is so smooth that the individual burden is minimized to the maximum extend and the sense of mutual help and co-operation strengthen the bond of the community.

(b) The Leikai Marup

The Leikai Marup, which literally means the Marup for the locality, is a more sophisticated and permanent form of saving and lending institution in the village of Manipur. Like Singlup, this Marup is confined within a particular Leikai. However, the function of Leikai Marup is not limited to a specific ceremony and problem. Its function is much wider than the Singlup regarding the nature and scope of the problem. It helps the members in common and this type of the Marup may not be found in all the villages because of its functional non-specificity. Sometime, in some village, it cannot be differentiable from the Singlup. The Singlup may take up the function of the Leikai Marup. And this type of the Marup is organized to response to the various problems and crisis faced by any family in the village.

All these Leikai Marups are organized to achieve a particular target; sometimes they achieve above the targeted goals. This type of Marup helps the members in two forms i.e. monetary and material helps. It is also oriented to help the members in common regarding ceremonies and festivals. All the members meet regularly on a scheduled basis and a minimum equal fixed contribution is required for each year, until the minimum target is reached. In the rural areas, they contribute in terms of paddy during harvesting and sold it when the price is high. Then the money is kept as fund of the organization and also used for many purposes in common.

This Marup also keeps many articles and tools, which are required in common. They buy cooking utensils, drinking water glasses and long reed mats for communal ceremony, and agricultural tools, which are considered to be needed by the Leikai in common. And the remaining money is lent at low interest among the members of the Marup. Some of this fund also went to pay the fee for the village Lai-Haraoba ceremony (pleasing of God, which is the biggest intra-village ceremony). And some equal amount is also distributed among the members during festival and crop-failure. In this regard the Leikai Marup organization is functionally wider than the Singlup whose function is limited to the ceremony of death. This organization is a permanent body, which is formed to provide any need in the Leikai. This is also one of the most important socio-economic organizations, which fastens development in the Leikais of Manipur.

2. Inter-Village Marup

The above two types of the Marup are organized on the basis of Leikai or Khul level, as family is the member of the Marup. However, during the last few decades the Meiteis have introduced various types of Marup serving different purposes and fulfilling many needs of individuals. This type of Marup is non-permanent type whose membership is voluntarily involved and is also organized for a particular targeted goal as its objective with a specific period of time. Once the objective goals are achieved the Marup is dissolved or reorganized. It is also organized among the friend circle. It is a form of Rotating, Saving and Credit Institution as found in many other parts of the world. Unlike Singlup and Leikai Marup in which the family is the member of the Marup, these Marups are not confined in a particular village, and individuals are also the members of the Marup. It is an inter-village network system embracing individuals from a multi-geographical area.

In this Marup, each member of the organization contributes some fixed amount on a regular basis (weekly or bi-weekly or monthly etc.), and the sum of each time contribution is given to different members in rotation, as he or she wishes to finance a ceremony or to buy a bicycle or a radio or a T.V. etc. Once a member has received his/her turn of the receiving the sum, he/she is not eligible for subsequent distribution but is expected to continue making regular contributions until all the members also have had a turn at receiving the equal sum. The nature of distribution may be on rotary basis or on emergency basis.

The basic principle of this Marup system is that each member receives an amount equal to his or her contribution altogether made in all the subsequent terms. Thus benefits are also usually equal to his/her contribution. But, groups in which larger amount are contributed and distributed, there are more variations in contribution and distribution. Those members who had received their turn of distribution will have some extra payment from the next contribution. Therefore those who receive later will receive more.

Such traditional institutions flourish where no legal Leviathan stands ready to punish defection. Therefore one can ask questions like why should not a participant drop out once he has received his turn of receiving the sum of distribution? Seeing this risk, why would anyone else contribute in the first place? All these things are, of course, not made possible by a particular system of society. A Marup institution obviously cannot function unless all members contribute to keep up their obligations.

Not every member of the village is regarded as eligible for participating this type of Marup. The risk of default is also well recognized by each participant, and organizers select members with some care. Thus, a reputation for honesty and reliability is an important asset for any would-be participant. One important source of reputational information, of course, is previous participation in another such Marup, and acquiring a sound reputation is one important side-

benefit of taking part in Marup. The intimacy of village life enables knowledge about the most reliable members, and maximizes their chances of success. Both reputational uncertainty and the risk of default are minimized again by strong norms of the society and by dense network of reciprocal engagement.

One of the problems of this type of Marup is that sometimes some members stop their contribution after they have had their turn of receiving the sum of the amount. In case a member fails to pay his contribution after he has received his turn of distribution, the Marup practices the system of Potmatpa by snatching away some valuable objects (equal to the value of the amount, which he had received),s from his house as compensation. Sometime the Marup also follows the custom of the Enthokpa, which is a practice of socially ostracism. In such a small and highly personalized society like Manipur, the threat of this custom of ostracism from the socio-economic system is a powerful credible sanction. This custom is called Maruptagee-enthokpa, expelled from the membership of the Marup. Once the person is expelled from one such Marup, he losses from the future chances of being member in any other Marup. This system of the control of membership is also important in the success of these co-operative organizations.

The Inter-Village Marup system varies widely in size, social composition, organization and procedures for determining the payout. It is mostly for the purpose of the formation of small-scale capital to finance one's business or to finance for buying some important items and meeting all sort of needs. This is not a permanent body and it is dissolved after all the members have had equal turn of receiving the sum of contribution. This type of Marup can be again classified into two types on the basis of their contribution and distribution. These are:

- (a) The Thouni Marup
- (b) The Non-Thouni Marup

(a) The Thouni Marup

Apart from the Marup for both the sexes, there are Marups for women only. The Thouni Marup is one of these several Marups formed by women only. This Marup is formed by some women (ranging from 30 to 50), for providing monetary and material help on a particular life-cycle ceremony like death, marriage, birth etc., in the family of the member. For this each member needs to give a particular name of a person (among her relatives), known as Thouni, on whose ceremony, the association will give their contribution. Once a name is given as Thouni, it cannot be changed. The contribution is made when the particular ceremony of the person occurs. Then this sum of contribution is given to the person to finance the ceremony. Once she has received her turn, she in no more eligible for receiving on any other ceremony in her family, but she is expected to contribute until all members also have had their turns of receiving the sum of contribution on the respective ceremony. After all members have received their turns of distribution the Marup is dissolved.

Thouni Marup members agree to contribute a fixed amount and fixed quantity of rice when any of the particular ceremony of the Thouni is occurred. This is a Marup to help each other on emergency. It is a ceremonial basis Marup for ceremonial insurance. The Thouni Marup is also different from the Singlup organized for financing dead ceremony. It is not a permanent body but its function does not confine to a specific ceremony. It covers most of the rituals related to different life cycles. In this regards it can be classified into four important groups.

- (i) Sorat Thouni Marup.
- (ii) Luhongba Thouni Marup
- (ii) Epal Thouni Marup
- (iv) Churakoron Thouni Marup.

Note: *The numbers may be more but these are the most important Thouni Marups found in Manipur.*

The Sorat Thouni Marup is organized by some women who resolved to contribute some fixed amount or some fixed quantity of rice or both on the particular ceremony of death of a person among the relatives of a member of the Marup. For this, each member give a particular name of a person among their relatives (may be parent or parent-in-law), on whose death the association will give their contribution as the help of the ceremony. Thus, every person is expected to get the distribution only once, when the particular ceremony occurs. And the contribution is made on the monetary or material basis or both.

In similar fashion, some women to help each other on the marriage of their son/daughter also form the Luhongba Thouni Marup. So each member gives a particular name of a son or daughter, on whose marriage ceremony the institution will give the contribution. Even the woman who has no son or daughter may join this Marup by giving a name of her nephew or niece. This is a Marup for helping each other on the marriage of their son or daughter. It reduces the financial burden of the parent to be spent on their children's marriage.

The Epal Thouni Marup is also formed by some women who agree to give some fixed amount or quantity of rice or both on the ceremony of the birth. For this, each member will enter their membership in the name of their yet to be born child on whose birth, the association will give the contribution. Not only young women but also the old women can join this Marup by giving a name of her grand children. Like this the Churakoron Thouni Marup is also formed by some women for helping each other on the ceremony of the Churakoron. For this, members also give a particular name of a child on whose respective ceremony of Churakorol, the institution will give their subscription.

The above four types of Thouni Marup are almost same in regard to its function. The only difference is its nature of ceremonial grouping. Each Marup is formed on the basis of one particular ceremony related to the different stages of life. Thus, these Thouni Marup is particularly formed for giving mutual help on these life cycle rituals. The system associated with these types of Marup enables every individual to perform their rituals of their relatives without any financial burden.

(b) The Non-Thouni Marup

The Non-Thouni Marup is also quite similar with that of the Thouni Marup. The only difference is that of the distribution basis. It is not based on ceremonial distribution. It is often decided by lottery system. In this Marup each member agrees to contribute some fixed amount on regular basis (weekly or monthly), and each time contribution is given to a particular member, often decided by lottery system, to finance for buying one particular item. And when all the members have received their respective turns, the Marup is dissolved. There are various sets of this type of Marup. Some of these Marups are given as:

(i) The Keithel Lukmaiphambi Marup

Various women attending Keithel (Bazaar), also formed many Marups called Keithel Lukmaiphambi Marup, which are exclusively for women trader. Each of these woman-trading groups holding trades of different commodities formed different Marup confined within their groups. However its membership usually covers a multi-village network embracing women from a multi-wider geographical area. An average Bazaar trader joins more than one Marup according to her economic ability and necessity. And each group of trader specializing in one kind of merchandise like vegetable, fruit, fish, handloom product etc. has at least one Marup.

The nature of the Keithel Lukmaiphambi Marup is to provide the financial help for their daily business. In this type of Marup each member contributes some fixed amount on regular basis (daily, weekly, monthly etc.), and each time allotted contribution is made to one individual to finance in her business. And every member also has only one chance of receiving the distribution. It is dissolved after all members have received their turn of receiving the sum of distribution. And the amount of the contribution and distribution varies a great deal. Those who had received the distribution will contribute with some extra payment from the next contribution. Thus the members who receive later will get more amount along with the extra payment made by others who had already received. The distribution is also often decided by lottery system. However, the Marup will give special consideration to a member in case of an emergency.

This Keithel Lukmaiphambi Marup is a short-term basis of co-operative saving and credit institution for small capital formation among the woman traders. It provides an economic security to every trader in her daily business. It also enables them to expand their business and thus makes their business successful.

(ii) The Chanura Marup

Although all the above Marups are of the married men and women, the young boys and girls who are ready to get married also form different Marups for their own benefits. One such Marup is the Chanura Marup formed by unmarried girls to ensure a large sum of money for themselves when they get married.

Weaving is the second main economic activity of the people in the state. Unmarried girls mostly do it because married woman has a greater burden of the new family. A Machanupi (daughter) learns weaving from the age of nine or ten from their elders. They are the most active weavers in Manipur. And the motivation of earning also runs high among them. Now at present a full time weaver earns above Rs.1000 in a month. This earning of the Leishabi (unmarried girl), is also meant for her own personal use and a portion is saved to buy her own bridal paraphernalia.

The money, so earned by Leishabi during their pre-marital period, is being saved through Marup system. Thus they formed many Marup for their own development after marriage. In such Marups most of them contribute from their own earnings. One such Marup in a village has a Marup with a membership of 35 girls in which every girl contributes Rs 100 on monthly basis and each time contribution is given to one girl (decided by lottery system) for financing a Cooking Gas for their own. Those girls who have received the item will give their contribution along with some extra payment. They contribute Rs 120 from the next month. At the end when all the girls have had their respective turn of receiving the Cooking Gas, they also arrange a common feast called Marup Chakchanaba (feast for the membership of the Marup). Thus, under this Marup, each month a girl is given a cooking gas. This Marup is called Chanura Cooking Gas Marup.

In similar way, there are various types of Chanura Marup, which are for the purpose of financing one such item of their own. These may be Chanura Korfu Marup (Marup for financing a cooking utensil), Chanura Baltin Marup (Marup For financing a Bucket), Chanura TV, Marup (Marup for financing a TV), Chanura Refrigerator Marup (Marup for financing a Refrigerator), Chanura Fi Marup (Marup for financing of different clothes), etc. In all these Marups the respective item is distributed in rotation, often decided by lottery system. However the Marup sometimes give the item without lottery if a member get married suddenly. In this case the family of the respective girl will pay the later contributions. Thus, the main motive of this Chanura Marup is to arrange the dowry for their marriage. It provides a saving opportunity to every girl for her

future development. Thus it is the most important and effective saving and credit institution for these girls.

The above Marups of these girls are non-permanent in nature, and are also formed for financing different items for their use when they are married, but there is one particular Marup of these unmarried girls, which is called Leikai Chanura Marup. Like Leikai Marup this Marup is also local based Marup and is also a permanent body. But the difference is that it is exclusively for unmarried girls of the Leikai. Thus every girl (above 10 years old) in the Leikai is a compulsory member of her Leikai Chanura Marup and ceases to be member only after when she gets married. Every Leikai in Manipur has its Leikai Chanura Marup. As it is already mentioned above, this Marup is formed as a permanent body by the girls of the Leikai for organizing some of the public festivals and games like Yaosang Thabal Chonba, Ningol Pali of Rathrayatra, Kang Shanaba, Likol Shanaba etc. These Marups are oriented toward the organization of these festivals and games. For this, every Leishabi above 10 years old, in a Leikai, contributes some fixed amount for every year or for every festival and game, and this sum of amount is lent at low interest among the local people. Some of this money, thus saved, is used for organizing the above festivals and games. Every year, at the end of the Yaosang Thabal Chongba festival, these girls also arrange a common feast in which some selected elders and brothers, who are expected to give donation for the association, are also invited. Thus, they generate fund for the institution and some of these portions are also spent to organize a Sumang Leela. This Marup reduces the financial burden of the community to be spent on this festivals and games.

(iii) The Bor Marup

Like Leishabis who have the Marup to finance their marriage, the unmarried young boys also form many Marups for their marriage. Young Pakhangs (bachelors), who are ready to get married, formed a Marup called Bor Marup (Marup for the Grooms), to finance their Luhongba (Marriage ceremony). This Marup is formed within their friend circle. In this Marup, each member contributes some fixed amount in the marriage of a member of the Marup. This particular sum of contribution that is made on the basis of the marriage ceremony is given to the person who is getting married in order to finance his marriage.

This Bor Marup enables every unmarried person to save some amount for the financing of his marriage. This also reduces the financial burden of the parent to his son's marriage. Therefore, this system of Bor Marup is widely practice in every parts of the valley of Manipur. The young boys to ensure a large sum of money for their marriage, thus, form this Marup. Besides the financial function, this Marup also serves an important function of providing a strong and permanent bond among the friendship. The friendship, which is developed during their pre-marital life, is sustained even after their married. Thus the

married person does not get separated from their unmarried friends and ready to help each other on their marriages.

(iv) The Yumsa Marup

Traditionally, Meitei has the system of the nuclear family. As soon as a married son has a kid, it is the custom to have a separate house for them (but not for the youngest one). This system enables every young couple to earn enough for their own, before their children have heavy demand for their education and other expenses. Therefore, every young married couple formed a Marup called Yumsa Marup for financing their housing.

In this Marup there are usually from 30 to 50 members, in which, each member contributes some fixed amount on regular basis (may be monthly or bi-monthly etc.), and each time contribution is given to one member (often decided by lottery system), for financing his housing. And those persons who have had their respective turns of receiving the sum of amount are expected to give their contributions with some extra payment until all members also have received their turns of receiving the sum. And all the members have to give their contributions on the day of Sangaaba. They bring their contributions on this day and join the common feast of Sangaaba. Thus, the Yumsa Marup enables every young couple to have a house of their own. This Marup is a very important institution for housing finance in Manipur.

Conclusion

The widespread occurrence of varied sets of Marup system in Manipur is clear-cut evidence in itself of successful performance of this traditional basis of socio-economic organization. The primary criterion of the success must be, however, the material benefit provided by or through the co-operative association to its members. And another may be the strengthening of the traditional bond, which is generated by a particular system of the society. The main benefits of the membership are the saving discipline that the structured contribution system imposes on the members and the saving security that it offers. Thus, it serves both the functions of the economic development and social control. Other benefits may be more potential than actual for the concerned individuals. Among the potential benefits, mentioned can be made of the right to borrow money under some specified conditions, to recruit the group as labour team in the erection of the community hall and in other various activities in the village, to deposit extra funds and earn interest, to participate in the deliberation and decision of the group and to share in the entertainment program like feast at the last draw of the Marup. Thus equalities among the members are present and the opportunities for exploitation are also limited in the long term. Co-operation is, thus, found on a very lively sense of the mutual value to the participants of such co-operative organization, not on a general ethic of the unity of all men or on an organic view of society.

One of the unique and noticeable aspects of this society is the collective spirit of women in this socio-economic sphere, a bond, which can be traced throughout their life cycle. This age-old Marup of women accommodates itself to the different socio-economic options available during their life cycle of a woman. Thus, the Marup system in the context of Manipur is an important and effective socio-economic organization, which provides security to every individual at every stage of his or her life. As banks and other formal sectors, financial institutions are absent or in some cases not within the reach, people have less knowledge of its benefits. However, this traditional system of Marup institution, which is meant for mutual help, is the only institution that can provide these saving and lending opportunities. And the Marup system in this society performs much more than this economic function; it is more social in its nature as regard to the function of strengthening the bond of friendship, kinship, neighborhood, etc. Individuals are not so away from their informal social groups like friendship. The comfort that is felt in sharing one's intention with a fellow group adds the strength of the group in reinforcing the institutions. Therefore, the Marup system, in the context of the Meitei society, provides a lot of developmental goals by providing the socio-economic security in every stage of people's life.

Thus, the Marup system illustrates how a particular system of traditional basis of socio-economic organization can help the development of a society by using its pre-existing social connection between individuals. It provides every individual a chance of small capital formation for expanding their economic sphere. It also shows how these people use their pre-existing social relation between individuals for the development of society. Lacking in physical assets to offer a surety, the participants in effect pledge their social connections to expand the credit facilities available in this community and to improve the efficiency of development. However, it is available only in those areas where there is no access to ordinary credit markets. Thus, this can be suggested as an alternative model of the development for many such societies.

GOVERNANCE
**Striving for Creative and Child-Centered Alternatives:
The Vision and Experiments of Integral Education**
PONDICHERRY

Ananta Kumar Giri

Almost all over the world at present, as people are becoming more and more aware of the gods that have failed them, the heroic in them is searching for alternatives, an alternative in science and technology, alternatives in political and economic patterns, and also an alternative in education. Man everywhere has never been so rude and ruthless in throwing away the old idols as he is now. It seems there is going to be a total leap, a decision in direction of the vertical. And in the direction of the vertical, lies the spiritual, the integral, the intrinsically human. Education must have a spiritual base; in other words, it must start from the basic faith that what is intended to be brought about is already involved within. In actual practice, this faith will mean freedom, love and commitment. Only those who are free can help others in the right way to grow with freedom.

Chitta Ranjan Das (1980), "Searching for an Alternative," p. 14.

This cannot be *taught*; it has to be *stimulated*. It can arise only out of the affective attachment of children or adolescents to a reference group who makes them *feel* deserving of *unconditional* love, and *confident* of their capacity to learn, act, undertake projects and measure themselves against others--who gives them, in a word "self-esteem." The subject emerges by virtue of the love with which another subject calls it to become a subject and it develops through the desire to be loved by that other subject. This means that the *educative* relation *is not a social relation and is not socializable*. It is successfully achieved only if the child is an incomparably singular being for the person educating him / her, a being loved for him / herself and to be revealed to him / herself by that love as entitled to his / her singularity: that is to say, as a subject-individual. Andre Gorz (1999), *Reclaiming Work: Beyond the Wage-Based Society*

Introduction

Our educational systems are in a crisis now. This is evident in all levels of education--from the primary to higher. A major part of the problem lies in our education lacking a soul-dimension as pedagogical methods lack a relation of love, mutuality, care among the partners and fellow-travelers and educational objectives lacking the goal of the five-fold integral development of the human person--physical, mental, vital, psychic and spiritual. The vision and objectives of integral education strives for integral and child-centred alternatives in this

regard. It draws inspiration and insights from the vision, experiments and works of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother and as a humanistic and spiritual pedagogy is in tune with the *gestalt* and integral educational movements of nineteenth and twentieth centuries pioneered by such educational visionaries as Kristen Kold, Rabindra Nath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi and others. Integral education is a vibrant social, cultural and educational movement in a state like Orissa with thirty years of continued striving to build on and now around 300 schools in different parts of the state--rural, urban and tribal. In this essay we shall describe the ideals and hopes that animate this striving for alternative and child-centred alternatives. These schools provide a soul-touching and child-centred education from pre-nursery to the high-school level (up to standard X). Probably first time in the country, these schools have achieved autonomy in terms of having their own syllabi and methods of examination upto the 7th standard. The first effort in integral education in Orissa began with the establishment of Integral Education in the state capital of Bhubaneswar in 1970 which had its model Sri Aurobindo International Center of Education of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry. In Orissa, now integral education has attained a level of grass-roots mobilization but integral education is a striving in many other parts of the country as well. For example, the Mirambika school run by Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Delhi is a radical experiment in child-centred and soul-touching education where there is no set syllabus till the 7th standard.

Integral education submits a radical and evolutionary challenge before humanity that education is not only for children but for all of us, the adults, and it is for the whole of our life. Thus declares Mother, Mira Richards, the spiritual fellow-pilgrim of Sri Aurobindo: "The education of a human being should begin at his very birth and continue through out his life" (Mother 1956: 96). She further tells us: "Education to be complete must have five principal aspects relating to the five principal activities of the human being--the physical, the vital, the mental, the psychic and the spiritual. Usually, these phases of education succeed each other in a chronological order following the growth of the individual, this, however, does not mean that one should replace the other but that all must continue, completing each other, till the end of life" (ibid: 96-97). For this, Sri Aurobindo enunciates three principles of education:

1. "The first principle of true teaching is that nothing can be taught. The teacher is not an instructor or task-master, he is a helper and a guide. His business is to suggest and not to impose. He does not actually train the people's mind, he only shows him how to acquire";
2. "The second principle of education is that mind has to be consulted in its own growth"; and
- 3 "The third principle of education is to work from the near to far, from that which is to that which shall be" (Sri Aurobindo 1956: 20-21)

The Mother describes for us the further contours of integral education as integral development of body, mind, the vital, the psychic and the spiritual. Physical education is a core dimension of integral education as it seeks to create a supple and healthy body which becomes an instrument of the Divine here on earth.¹ Mental education or education of the method has five phases:

- i) "Development of the power of concentration, the capacity of attention";
- ii) "Development of the capacities of expansion, wideness, complexities and richness";
- iii) "Organization of ideas around a central idea or a higher ideal or a supremely luminous idea that will serve as a guide in life";
- iv) "Thought control, rejection of undesirable thoughts, so that one may, in the end, think only what one wants and when one wants it"; and
- v) "Development of mental silence, perfect calm and a more and more total receptivity to inspirations coming from the higher regions of the being" (The Mother 1956: 114-115).

The Mother further writes about mental education "...learning is only one aspect of mental activity; the other, at least, as important, is the constructive faculty, the capacity to give form and therefore prepare for action" and for her, "control over the formative activities of the mind is one of the most important aspects of self-education" (ibid: 118).

The education of the vital is an important part of integral education which involves education and development of the senses. "The child must be taught to observe himself, to note his reactions and impulses and their causes, to become a clear-sighted witness of his desires, his movements of violence and passion, his instincts of possession and appropriation and domination" (ibid: 112). In integral education, art, songs, painting, music and drama play a great role in the education of the vital. Psychic education is the recognition of the psychic force in one's life and it helps one to pull out of the "barriers of egoism" (ibid: 124), spiritual education helps one to realise life as "light and balance, beauty and joy." Spiritual education also enables seekers for a radical universality where one recognizes the Divine in each and all: "The Divine is the fourth dimension. The Divine does not come and go. He is there, always, everywhere."

Integral education in Sri Aurobindo and The Mother is an aid in the integral evolution of humanity. For Sri Aurobindo, "Humanity in its education of children has chosen to thwart and hinder the rapidity of its onward march" (Sri Aurobindo 1956: 35). In this context, integral education aims at "not merely in a progressively developing formation of human nature--but a transformation of the nature itself, a transfiguration of the being in its entirety, a new ascent of the species above and beyond man towards superman, leading in the end to the appearance of a divine race upon earth" (Mother 1956: 131).

To this core of the vision, the participants of the integral education movement of Orissa have added their nuances and emphases. For many of them integral education is a method and a field of *yoga*. Where the conventional methods of *yoga*, spiritual union and spiritual realization had visualized individuals sitting cross-legged and doing *yoga*; in Sri Aurobindo's path of spiritual striving, *yoga* has to be *karmayoga* and integral education is a method and field of *karmayoga*. Integral education is a *sadhana* for the participants in which one tries to realize the divine in oneself by establishing loving and life-elevating relationship with one's students. For the participants of integral education, school is itself the literal embodiment of Divine Mother and many of them have a literal conception of school as Divine Mother. This view of integral education became clear to me during the annual meet of integral education activists in Matrubhavan, Cuttack in October 2000. In this meeting Lambodara Bhai, a longtime activist of integral education, said: "Earlier the *Rishis* were going to the forest and were doing their *tapashya*. In integral schools, we are doing *tapashya* through our children. Unless we realize this our education cannot fructify itself."

Chitta Ranjan Das is a devoted participant and engaged leader of the integral education movement of Orissa. Das himself is a great experimenter in many radical efforts in child-centered and soul-touching education and in order to understand different dimensions of integral education we shall do well to get to know his elaboration of this agenda of human communication and evolution (on Das see, Giri 1996: Giri 2001). In his educational practice Das combines the best source of inspiration in the world--Kristen Kold, Gandhi, Janus Korchak, Tagore--and he brings all these rich sources to have a dialogue with the pathway of integral education. Twenty years before joining the integral education movement in Orissa as the first Director of Institute of Integral Education in Bhubaneswar Das had himself started a new school in the forests of Anugul called *Jeevana Vidyalaya*, school for life. Das brings loving and life-affirming relationship with children and creating proper environment--outer and inner--for the integral development of the human person to the heart of the vision and experiments of integral education. In the words of Das: "..the object of concern in integral education is the total child, the whole person in him that waits to be attended and unfolded. The stress is on each individual child with a style, a rhythm and a pace of his own and no effort is made arbitrarily to groom every budding soul to a uniformity that the adults around him have decided to hold as very significant and sacred. Integral education assumes that a really alive, alert and awakened person has a child within him and it is the business of all good education to perpetuate it" (p.iv). For Das, "Integral education deals with the human child as an emerging person, not as a thing. A person is never a thing, he is a totality, a unit as multiplex, with a dimension of depth suggesting the innumerable possibilities latent in him and divinely decreed to unfold in its own way."

Earlier we have listened to Mother's elaborations of the five-fold processes of integral education-physical, vital, mental, psychic and spiritual. Das adds his own originality while elaborating these dimensions. On vital education he writes: "vital education will engender in the child the penchant to develop a discipline of his own which would further his growth and take care of distractions and deviations. This education rules out all coercion and compulsion and aims at making the child willing to collaborate in his own growing up process, cultivating in him the right taste, right sensibilities and the right awareness of the fulfillment and joy that will be his if he is able to listen to the best in himself and co-operate with it" (Das, Preface, iii). Furthermore, "Vital education takes care of the vital emotional surplus in the child as a being that grows, that discovers and establishes the many threads of relationship that invisibly govern the development of the part in him that gives itself to others and shares in order that he can more wholesomely live" (ibid: xi). In the integral schools, mental education provides the child with the "clues to inherit the legacy of knowledge that is man's, to organise it around an aim that one has chosen for oneself." Mental education makes "the head equipped and ready to serve the heart, the real heart of man. The spontaneous love to learn, to know and to be linked with the world in a sense of genuine concern are the aims mental education has in view" (ibid: iv). For Das, "psychic education brings the human person to himself, to the center that unites him with the whole universe." But Das urges us to realize: "...psychic and spiritual education in the total plan of integral education is not a separate segment in it.

It is the total climate that pervades everything that is done in an integral school, and characterizes the quality of rapport that exists in all its educational and human situations." Recently there is a relational redefinition and reworking of spirituality where spirituality refers to the quality of relationships and institutions rather than a thing (Giri 2001a; Wuthnow 1998). Das's interpretation of spiritual education makes spirituality an aspect of our relationship and urges us to be aware of the quality of it. Das therefore writes: "There should be a total feeling of involvement and togetherness that should permeate everything that is meant and taught in the entire gamut of the school programme and the quality of that feeling will be spiritual, recognizing the truth that is in everyone and that is being explored in the daily relationship between person and person" (ibid: xi). The new relational matrix that integral schools strive to create is not confined to either the class room or the school. For Das, "The integral school tries to incorporate much of the child's home within it and also tries to incorporate a bit of itself to the child's parental home situation" (v)

Das now describes for us the special methods of teaching in integral schools and integral education. These are:

1. All teaching is primarily a learning situation. In integral schools, "Encounter

between the pupils and the teachers are not confined to the formal class room teaching only. Even the so-called formal teaching tends not to be formal at all."

2. "The class is a group situation where the teacher gets an occasion to learn more about the child as well as about his capacity to really come close enough to the child in order to be able to really impart something useful to the child and where the child makes himself more and more exposed to the available occasions of learning without being abhorrently conscious that he is being taught."

3. "The various subjects are introduced to the child not as abstractions and soulless scraps of foreign matter, but as mysteries waiting to be discovered and made one's own."

4. "The aim of all method in integral schools aspires to create an attitude of affirmation, towards life and towards the world, towards knowledge and its incumbent challenges" (ibid: vi). For Das, methods of education, including integral education, are "meant to help the children to find their own inherent way to learning, never to fit the child brutally to adult formations of methods."

An alternative educational practice which seeks to recognise the many-sided potentialities of children needs to have an alternative method of assessment and evaluation. For Das, "The Integral education centers in Orissa have already made a beginning towards change in the traditional pattern of assessment because they are convinced that a new education ought to have a totally new approach to this also." It must be noted here that Integral education schools in Orissa have earned autonomy of internal evaluation and assessment upto class seven and they are not required to go through the state examination board for this purpose. In his introduction to the Comprehensive Syllabus of Integral Education, Das writes about the method of assessment which would be gradually adopted in all schools: "...tests will be through-out the year and the cumulative results will tell us how a child has fared in a particular subject and in the aggregate." Furthermore, "Besides the so-called academic performances, a pupil's performance in the so-called non-academic fields has to be taken into account. xxx Thus, our pupil's performance in games, sports, music, painting, occasions of leadership, his cheerfulness, capacity for endurance and even his sense for humor and an attitude of non-complaining non-exhibitionistic equanimity will all be taken into full account in assessing him. Personality and attitude tests can be made use of to make the teachers more scientific in their judgments."²

The Experiments of Integral Education

The first center of integral education was established in 1970. The initiative was taken by some of the devoted followers of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother who were searching for an alternative in education and also for a more meaningful field for embodying one's devotion. Many parents and interested members of the community take a lead role in forming centers of integral education. They begin from scratch and most of the teachers work almost

honorary in these schools. The experiment of establishing integral schools followed a vibrant study circle movement in Orissa in the late 1950 and the 60s when the ideas and works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were being socialized. *Pathachakra* is a study circle where interested people join and read the works of Mother and Sri Aurobindo together. This common reading creates a basis of solidarity and intimacy and it helps in a shared and sometimes deeper understanding of the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Prapatti writes about it: "The Pathachakras were centers where groups came together regularly to read Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, imbibe their vision and enlighten themselves with it upon the total context of their lives claimed and spend a few minutes in collective meditation. This went a long way to invisibly lay a foundation of a community, that was to emerge as a sort of catalyzer in the larger community. The Pathachakra gave them the inspiration that things could be different, that things will change if we are ready to change, change ourselves and the level of our relationships" (Prapatti 1980: 25). What Prapatti further writes gives us an intimate picture of the birth of this educational movement: "This togetherness went on for quite a few years. This brought about a sense of mutuality and mutual concern that gradually came to take a concrete shape in the form of a school. By now many had been to Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry, had chanced to have a close look at the working of the International Center of Education there and had an idea of what might be, provided the human factor was willing. This really gave a leap and the first school was born" (ibid).

Some of the distinguishing features of these new schools which distinguish these from the traditional schools are:

1. "The goal is the all round development of the child and the curriculum is oriented to that goal as far as possible. The new schools deal with the total environment, inner as well as outer..";
2. "These schools try to take parents along with them."³
3. The new schools have a new method of examination and assessment and to help "underscorers to fall in with the rest as quickly as possible, there are also special classes independently planned by the teachers concerned."
4. Physical education is one of the main programmes in integral schools and here there is no discrimination between boys and girls. "Besides, there are music, painting, handwork etc." All the schools have classes of music, painting and dancing which create a deeper aesthetic environment. This aesthetic environment creates a deeper aesthetic sensibility in children's lives and begins to realize that it is not only a lamp or a temple which is work of art, his life itself is a work of art⁴
5. Integral schools have a low teacher-pupil ratio. This "greatly facilitates individual attention, personal concern and above all, better educational and growth-promoting encounter and rapport between teachers and the pupils"

(Das, tryst, p. 13).

6. In integral schools, there are regular staff meetings. Subject teachers sit together to discuss and solve

Integral Schools

Sri Aurobindo Centre of Integral Education, Gopinathapur, Cuttack.

Sri Aurobindo Centre of Integral Education at Gopinathapur was established in 1974 just four years after the first school in Bhubaneswar. It was the first integral school in a rural area. The school began with the initiative of members of Puthachakras who were interested in an alternative education. Vira Bhai was an enthusiastic young man then. It was 1967 when Vira Bhai, his elder brother and some young men of the village wanted to activate the local pattachakra. They were inspired by Babaji Maharaj and Prapatti, two legendary and inspiring sadhakas of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry who were working hard to socialize and bring to common people the ideas and visions of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.⁵ Vira Bhai, even after thirty years, embodies the same spirit of youthful enthusiasm when I visited him and spent a night in his school at Gopinathapur.

In one fine early morning last spring (March 2001) Vira Bhai took me to the outskirts of the village where the school has an orchard and a piece of land. On the way he told me the tumultuous history of the school and the Ashram. As a young man, he was much interested in education and he wanted to establish a high school in the village. It must be noted that the decade after independence in Orissa was a period of building of new schools and institutions to which socially concerned educated people used to devote themselves. Vira Bhai was not interested in a government job. But after spending few years in the school he himself had founded he felt disillusioned that his school was one of the many ordinary schools in the locality. In the mean time, Vira Bhai and his friends from the village visited Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry and saw the sports of the students of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education in Pondicherry and thought that they can also build a similar school in their village. That is how the seeds for building an Ashram and a school grew in their minds. Vira Bhai's family took a lead role in this. The two young girls who came to join the school to start stayed with his family in the establishment of the school in the village. One of them is Anjal Tripathi or Anjali Apa who is the principal of the school now. On this Vira Bhai says: "When we started the school Babaji Maharaj clearly told us that we should do with teachers who come from outside and can stay here fulltime with students and teachers as members of a community. On hindsight we feel that this was a wise decision. There were many young graduates in our village also. But if we had started with them we could not have obtained from them the same commitment."

The integral school at Gopinathpur began with twenty students. Initially, the

teachers did not have much to eat. The students would bring lunch for the teachers and in the evening their parents would send dinner. But parents of twenty students would take care of the dinner of teachers for twenty nights only and the rest 10 days they would have to manage somehow. Anjali Apa, the present principal of the school who had come there in 1974 tells us: "In some evening we would share pieces of bread with each other." But this lack of resource and food was not the only obstacle they had to go through. What was about to crush their backbone but for their will power and divine grace was the stiff opposition to the Ashram and the school from the villagers. Initially, it involved the land on which the school was built. The villagers were interested to build an Ayurvedic hospital there. Says Anjali Apa: "We would build the walls of our school building and the next day they would come and destroy it. There was threat to our life also. Villagers would boycott those who send their wards to us."

The struggle for growth, survival and transformation here was as much collective as it was individual. Anjali Apa had left her home to join the school without her parent's approval. She had just passed matriculation and as a young Brahmin pretty girl, she was subjected to harassing remarks when she would ride her bicycle in the village. She was assigned the task of managing the Ashram departmental store in the village. The school-cum-ashram in Gopinathpur was running a department store with whose profit the organizers were planning to take care of the expenses of building of the school. While working in the departmental store and packing groceries in the old books and newspapers the desire for further study got rekindled in her. Anjali Apa would read from 10pm to 1 a.m. every night and through this she completed her intermediate, graduate studies and finally obtained her master's degree in education.

Through this struggle and striving slowly the school grew and so did the individuals who are part of it. Today the school and the Ashram are spread into the village and the activities of the school give new energy to the village. Through process of confrontation the villagers have begun to appreciate the good work that the school is doing. The school has classes from pre- nursery to 10th standard and 160 students coming from different parts of Orissa stay in the hostel. It is one of the most distinguished integral schools in Orissa and it draws students from far away places. The School-Ashram constellation has different components and branches spread out in different parts of the village – the relics center, the library and guest room, the school, hostel, playground, the garden and Auro orchards.

Many of the teachers stay in the Ashram as ashramites. Their life is intertwined with the lives of the students. The life of the Ashram begins at 5:30 A.M. in the morning. Their day begins with the daily offering of their labor for

one hour. Both the students and the teachers work together. In fact, all the construction work of the school is also done by this offering of labor. Through devotional offering of labor, the school has been able to build a common ground of well-being both for itself as well as for the village.

Anjali Apa tells us about the active routine of the *ashram* and the school. In her words: "Before the village awakens in the morning we are active in our works. At one time we are at work in 10-15 places in the village." The school has also planted trees in the village main road and every morning students water these trees. Says Anjali Apa: "our students know most of the work--from cleaning the latrine to cultivating the land. So they will not feel despondent in life even if they do not get any job which is scarce anyway. They love to work because we work with them. If there is dirt in the latrine, instead of advising students to clean it, we clean it ourselves and this has an impact." She tells us further: "Education is not confined within class room only. We apply integral education at every moment of our lives."

The school did not initially have a playground and only few years ago it has purchased same land near the village middle school for this purpose and has developed this into a play ground. The school emphasises on appropriate physical education. For vital education, it has classes in painting, music and drama. In fact, the school also runs an art and music school called *Matru Kala Niketan*. Anjali Apa is a spiritually impassioned writer of poems and dramas. In fact, every year Anjali Apa writes a new drama for the children to enact. In order to popularize the vision of integral education, Anjali

Apa also writes *kabalis* for children to enact. The *kabali* that she has written on integral education has the following lines:

Oh my brother listen, listen with attention
Do you know about our education
Its name is integral education
But its work is not only teaching

Our first education is physical
We have taken the vow to play everyday
We play everyday at the end of our study
We play *Khoko*, *Kabadi* and football
Once a year we conduct our annual sports function

Our second education is vital
It takes away all our sorrows and suffering
We get energy from the education of our vital
In one Saturday every month we sit down
We all watch each other dance here

All of us together
enact a drama once a year

Then...
Mental education makes our mind strong
We acquire all the knowledge of the world for ourselves
But oh brothers!
however educated mind, vital and body may be
If we do not understand our soul
It is no use at all

(Translated from Oriya by the author)

Two distinguishing features of the integral school at Gopinathapur are: the intimate relationship that teachers have with students and the beautiful physical and relational environment it has created for the growth of both the students. Says Anjali Apa: "We want to come down to the level of the students and create an appropriate environment so that students can learn and study without fear and hindrance. Small children are staying in the hostel and it is important that there is no fear in the environment. If there is slight trace or shadow of fear they cannot grow." Anjali Apa further says that children are not afraid of examinations: "They do not know when examination would be conducted and are ever alert!" "After years of trials and experiments we know how to turn the mind and open their hearts to study and learning."

Anjali Apa told me during our discussion with her last March (2001): "We want to make the best use of the autonomy we have. We are now thinking of varieties of educational innovations. we have introduced the project method of teaching in KG (1st level of kindergarten). In project method of teaching we do not follow any set syllabi but have projects on different topics and through this we teach students. For example, during the rainy season we have projects on water. Through project on water, we teach them literature, mathematics, science and social science. We also involve students in drawing. In the spring season, as there are so many flowers around, we do projects on color. One great advantage of the project method of teaching is that students are not confined within the class room but a great disadvantage here is that students do not get enough opportunity to grow in mathematics and literature."

The integral school at Gopinathapur has introduced the project method two years ago. Initially the teachers were afraid that they would be met with resistance and lack of co-operation from parents. But they faced none of these. Says Anjali Apa: "The guardians have trust in us that what we are doing is for the good of the children".

In her reflections which were inspiringly meditative Anjali Apa gives emphasis on establishing inner touch and inner contact with students and on inner growth on the part of all concerned. After nearly three decades of struggle and striving the school has established a materially secured foundation and it can take care of the minimum needs of fifty spiritual *sadhakas* and *sadhikas* who devote themselves to integral education. Says Anjali Apa: "When we began twenty-seven years ago, we did not have food to eat but now our institution can shoulder the responsibility of fifty people with security for the future. But what is important now is that what fifty people do with their mind and what is their inner growth." Says Anjali Apa: "Our success does lie in how many buildings we have or build. Our success does not lie in how much we are able to discover the Psyche in us and how much open we are to Mother. If that is not happening and all these external things grow, I feel very small inside. I look at myself and think: isn't my inner life taking a back seat in the face of these external growth and success? Inner mobilization is the core of the matter in integral education."

In a self-critical vein Anjali Apa says: "The graduates of our school have entered life and society for the last twenty years. Most of them have scored first divisions but they have not been full bearers of the vision of integral education in their lives and society. The inner call which drove us away from the security of our homes, if only we had been able to transmit it to our students then at least some of them would have come forward to be contagious bearers of integral education in the wider society." Anjali Apa wants to build a workshop and industrial training center in the school which would provide useful training to the unemployed alumni of the school and make them much more involved with the vision and activities of the school-ashram complex.

Anjali Apa thinks that after thirty years of striving for a child-centred spiritual education, now a ground and climate has been created in Orissa for it. Now people of Orissa have accepted integral education and many are open to it. But, at the same time, integral education suffers from the danger of being made into a routine and there is a crucial challenge now to deepen it: "I feel we need something else to take this movement into a new height and depth. I am not able to express this in words."

As Anjali Apa was taking me into these new horizons of challenge and responsibility, Sun was setting down behind the banana trees of the Ashram and both of us set out to the neighbouring village of Satyabhamapur to meet with some students and their families who were to take part in the high school board examination. Integral schools have attained autonomy only upto 7th standard and the activists of the educational feel sad that they and their students have to go through the torture of a faceless examination system at the 10th standard. The parents of the students were overjoyed to see Anjali Apa.

One of the mothers said: "My dear sister! Both of us are of the same age but I got married and became entangled in my marriage and raising my children. But you have grown into so much depth spiritually. I always feel identified with you and I wish I had a life of your spiritual aspiration and seeking."

There is a middle school and a high school in the village at the stone's distance from the Gopinathapur integral school. There are schools in the neighbouring villages. Though there is still jealousy and unspoken hostility around, different creative experiments of the integral school of the village is also having an impact on these. Vira Bhai, the founder secretary and still the dreaming young man of the village as well as the integral education movement of Orissa, helps us understand this: "In our village schools (i.e., Govt. run schools) they have introduced and drawing and painting. The teachers of the Govt. school are realizing that if they do not do something now then they would be extinct. In our school we spend time with students and do not charge fee for extra time and classes. In the local high school, the teachers are also beginning to realize the significance of spending more time with students without charging extra tuition fee. The teachers of the Government school have begun to be self-reflexive."

Sri Aurobindo Nabdyama School, Markona

Nabodyama which means new striving is an innovative school and enjoys a high esteem among all the integral schools of Orissa. It began ten years ago and it has a revolutionary origin. Dhinendra Bhai and Mayadhara Bhai two of the founder of this school were earlier working in the integral school at Raghunathapura, Sora, at a distance of twenty kilometer from this place. Along with another committed activist Narayana Bhai, late Narayana Pangrahi, they had built this school from the scratch. But shortly ideological differences cropped up. Dhirendra Bhai wanted to teach the book *Mother* by Maxim Gorky along with Sri Aurobindo's *Mother* in the school. He also argued that children should not be forced to sit in meditation and they must be first taught. Dhrendra Bhai also argued that the management should not dictate terms to teachers. Dhirendra Bhai believes that one who has the chalk and duster in the classroom should also run the school. On these issues he was thrown out from Raghunathapur Integral School. On their way back, not knowing where to go, they stopped at the bus-stop of Markona. There a local leader invited them to take rest for a few days. During this time, Sudhanshu Sir-an engaging poet and writer of drama--joined them and they decided to open a press. This was the their means of survival and also to mobilise resource to build a school. Their determination to build a school was stirred by the comment of Chitta Bhai (Chitta Ranjan Das) who used to visit the group every now and then "just keep a vigil that your teacher's heart does not remain hungry."

Dhirendra Bhai and others built a small roof on the piece of land donated by a villager. Now the school has a beautiful campus and exists in the midst of the paddy field. The small campus of the school has many beautiful trees and flower gardens all over the place. The school and the hostel are taken care of by ten to eleven *bhais* (brothers) and *apas* (sisters). They stay in the school and take full care of the children. The school has classes from nursery to 7th standard and even small children of 4 years stay in the school hostel. The teachers of the school take care of these children in the hostel as well as teaching them in the classroom. It is a full time--twelve hour-- job for the teachers and a major portion of the task falls on the sisters.

Nabodyama has many innovative pedagogical methods. One of these is the idea and practice of mobile schools. In the mobile school programme children are taken to beautiful places near a river and a mountain such as Kaptipada. In this programme they observe nature and write literary pieces-- poems, short stories and essays. It must be noted that the school has a knack for creative literature as Dhirendra Bhai and Sudhashu Sir are intimate and passionate poets and writers of dramas.

This love for literature has created an artistic and aesthetic environment in the school. Sudhanshu Sir, Manoj Babu and Gayadhar Gochait come here to teach drama, songs and musical instruments to the children. They come on a part-time basis and serve the students and the school without any payment. Manoj Babu, the part-time music teacher of Nabodyama, says: "There is a lot of talent among the children and it is our duty to provide them appropriate and adequate opportunities. Developing artistic qualities help the children to attain power of concentration."

The music, songs and dramas here help in self-awakening and development of the soul. In another context, Chitta Ranjan Das had posed a creative challenge in the field of vital education before the practitioners of integral education: "Till now, our programmes of music, dance and dramas have been mostly imitations of familiar bazars. xx We should perhaps sit together to evolve a stage style of our own, a definite pattern which is inostentatious but deeply suggestive, an inward directing performance which not only entertains but also elevates"(Das 1981: 4). When we talk to the teachers of songs and dramas in the Nabodyama school we see an aftermative response to the challenge posed by Das and see efforts to realize the following insights of Das: "We ought to remember that vital education is an education of the vital to make it more and more ready to be in touch with the psychic. And more than anything else it is the psychic that has central place in all good education." Sudharshu Sir, the inspiring teacher of drama in the school, tells us that whatever dramas they do here, they bring a spiritual dimension to this. For example, while enacting the familiar story of Rama and Ravana what gets emphasised is spiritual elevation and spiritual transformation. In the words of Sudhanshu Sir: "Rama and Ravana become

different aspects of the human soul, they symbolise two different powers. In the drama here Ravana addresses Sita as mother. Sri Aurobindo has written in *Durga Stotra* that we should have in our body the power of a giant. Similarly in our drama the giant in Ravana is seeking to touch the soul power of Divine Mother. This becomes clear when we listen to the songs written by Susdhanshu Sir. One of the songs goes like this:

*As Rama, Atma Rama, Hasa Rama Priyatama
Padadhoidebi Luha Kalasire, Mala Gunthidevi Bhakati Phulare
Sevadesi Hebi, Snehe Basaibi
Sajadi Hruda Asana*

Oh Rama, my soul Rama, come, and smile
I shall wash your feet with my tears
and shall weave a thread with my flowers of devotion
I shall serve and make you sit in my heart throne

There is a participatory and dialogical method of teaching at Nabodyama. Says Sudhanshu Sir: "We discuss the methods of acting with students. We do not impose anything on the students. Before writing a drama we discuss what would be its impact on students."

An alternative socio-cultural movement has to have an alternative music and song to bring to people's heart an alternative worldview, an alternative knowledge system and an alternative way of perceiving and relating to the world (Eyerman & Jamison 1998). In integral education movements heart-touching songs and music give both students and teachers a new *weltanschauung* and an identity. In one of the lower classes children were singing with their teacher Arpita Apa:

*Ame Sabu Sathi Tikitiki Kali
Emati Mara Dhana
Ajisina Sana Bayasare Ame
Sana nuhe ama mana*

We are all friends
Small buds as we are
We are the voice of this Mother Earth
We are small in our age
but our mind is not small

*Gotiye sutare guntha ame sabu
khilikhili phulahara
Ameje batoi gotiye batore
Agami kalira swara*

We are all woven into a thread of small flowers
We are all travelers in the same way
and we are the voices of tomorrow

Arpita Apa in whose class I listened to children singing the above song loves to work with children. She is a young woman of 24 and has worked at Nabyama for the last eight years. She loves being with children and the like many other sister teachers of the school such as Mamata Apa and Pravasini Apa, take care of the children as mother. I attended one of the classes in geography that Arpita Apa was teaching in class six and she followed a discussion mode of teaching. What was striking was that not only there was diadic dialogue between her and another individual student but also a multigonal and multilateral conversation. Students themselves were posing questions to each other and in the process finding an answer. But such a dialogical pedagogy requires a dialogical spatial and sitting arrangement. I suggested Arpita Apa that instead of students sitting on rows-- one after another -- facing the teacher it would be helpful if students can sit in a circle.

Arpita Apa is busy with children from dawn to late in the night. But she enjoys being with children. In her words: "I learn so much for myself even while giving children a bath. When they point out our mistakes, we try not to be angry and learn." Despite her busy schedule she finds time out for her own self- study and self-development.

Like Anjali Apa, Arpita Apa had seen the advertisement for teachership in this school in *Naba Prakash* and against the will of her parents she came running to work with this school. She was a member of the village *pathachakra* and her participation in the *pathachakra* had sown seeds in her mind for the work of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. At this point it must be noted that a majority of teachers of integral schools in Orissa have grown up with the *pathachakras* in their young days. This association gives them necessary moral and spiritual perseverance to follow the path of integral education where there are so many obstacles and where one does not get much financial remuneration anything worth the name of a salary. On the other hand, the school demands so much of involvement and labor from the teachers. In the words of Arpita Apa: "We have never been afraid of hard physical work. When we first came here there was water upto knee in this place. But we filled this place. I myself have done this by using the spade."

Arpita Apa and Mamata Apa joined the school after one year of its establishment. Once they joined they took care of the kitchen and the small children which provided the school an anchorage. The actors of Nabyama make clear that the school here is part of a wider spiritual movement. There are two *pathachakras* once a week--one for the inmates the other for the wider public. On Sunday the teachers of the school meet for two hours, and discuss

educational matters and read from the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on education.

One distinctive aspect of *Nabodyama* is that it is run and managed by the teachers. The schools which are managed by the influential and wealthy sponsors of the community sometimes suffer from the problem of domination, control and interference from the management. In many an integral school, this is a crucial problem. But in *Nabodyama* there is no hiatus between the managers and teachers as teachers themselves manage the school. Rabi Bhai is one of the enthusiastic supporters of the school. Rabi Bhai has a drug store but he is deeply committed to integral education. He tells us that only attending Pathachakra is not enough for one's spiritual growth and development. In the words of Rabi Bhai: "Pathachakra can provide us a temporary sensation but it cannot provide a stable ground to us."⁶

Rabi Bhai, Dharendra Bhai and Sudhanshu Sir are not only satisfied with the building of a school. They also want to build an Ashram where those who devote their whole life to this path of integral education can stay as members of Ashram. It must be noted that committed teachers of the school such as Arita Apa are in the midst of a crisis now. They do not get any fixed salary from the school. Of course, the school takes care of their minimum requirement such as provision of their dress and their pocket money. But a bleak future faces workers such as Arpita Apa in terms of conventional standards of securities of life such as marriage and financial stability. Keeping this in view *Nabodyama* is now planning to build an Ashram called *Navajata Ashram* in a village near Tihidi. Ten years ago when the printing press was in full swing, the actors of *Nabodyama* had purchased a piece of land near Tihidi. They have named it Savitri Vihar. There is a Pathachakra there named *Madhumayee Pathachakra* and there is also an evening school here run for the children of the surrounding villages. Most of the parents of these children are refugees from Bangladesh and they have difficulty in getting adjusted to the regular schools. The evening school helps these children. But *Nabodyama* has a far radical vision for the school. It realises that integral education imparted through predominantly residential schools such as *Nabodyama* is only for the rich and the middle class. What about those parents who would like to give quality education to their children but cannot afford? What about those children who are orphans, who do not have any parents at all? Savitri Vihar wishes to offer hope to such children. It wishes to have sufficient amount of land by cultivating which the children who would study in Savitri Vihar would earn their bread.

There are two or three children in *Nabodyama* now who stay in the hostel but

do not pay their hostel fees. *Nabodayama* manages to take care of these children out of the fees other students pay. The fooding of the teachers is also dependent upon the hostel fees that the students pay and the school do not have much source of income of its own. It can well be appreciated that the school has its limit in offering assistance to all the needy students. But Dharendra Bhai makes it clear that the school cannot abandon its commitment to students like Lalit. Lalit is studying in standard six now. His parents had left him in the school when he was studying in standard one and had gone to Delhi in search of a livelihood. But in Delhi, his mother was raped and murdered. Not being able to bear this, his father lost the balance of his mind and became mad. But *Nabodyama* continues to support Lalit and take care of him. *Nabodyama* has a few Muslim students in the hostel also. It wants to arrange courses in Urdu for these children.

Sarojini is an enthusiastic student of *Nabodyama*. Her father has a liquor business in the district town of Bhadrakh. But Sarojini had had an influence on him and he has started realising the value of education. His another daughter i.e., Sarojini's younger sister, is also studying in *Nabodyama* now. Apart from the hosteliars there are a few day scholars from the neighbouring village studying at *Nabodyama*. But *Nabodyama* always does not find it easy to work with day scholars as their parents supposedly do not cooperate with the school on matters of discipline. The proportion between hosteliars and day scholars differs from schools to schools. Many integral schools which are located in small towns and cities have a major portion of their students as day scholars. Even some of the rural integral schools such as Kanthibhauri in the northern most part of the district of Balasore actively seeks for local students. But the same active seeking for local students is not noticeable in *Nabodyama*. Part of the reason may be that the founders of the school such as Dharendra Bhai do not come from the village itself and they have an all-Orissa catchment area in mind in terms of attracting interested pupils. They are also sincerely trying to build it as an ideal integral school founded and run by the teachers themselves where money and power of the management does not dictate terms.

Integral schools are established with the initiative of the interested devotees of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. Many a time those who establish it are either influential persons in schools and they have either a high position in the Government or resourceful persons in society in terms of wealth and land ownership. This enables them to establish the initial infrastructure for the school. The secretary of the managing committee of the school is a powerful position with sometimes-unlimited power to hire and fire teachers. Many a time they do not continue to grow with the same initial enthusiasm which has motivated them to start an integral school in the first place. They then tend to apply a managerial approach to their schools and treat teachers of the school as hired peons. Dharendra Bhai, the co-founder of *Nabodyama* integral school is an intense critic of such a managerial approach to integral education and

has consciously striven to build his school as an alternative integral school. Here he draws inspiration from Chitta Bhai who writes in one of his many writings on the current state of integral education in Orissa: "The managers of integral school often complain that teachers are not sufficiently committed to Sri Aurobindo and Mother but how it would be when teachers start asking whether the managers are sufficiently committed or not."

Dhirendra Bhai is a man of many parts but he combines in him fire of social struggle and the rose of creative literature. It is his passion for literature which had first brought him to the public sphere as he established literary associations and carried out popular literary meetings in his native Tihidi, a place which has a pride in being the literary center of Orissa. Through this work Dhirendra Bhai has made many friends such as Sudhanshu Sir, Rabi Bhai and Gayadhara Bhai--friends who are part of the experimnt of Nabodyama now. They stay near Tihidi and come regularly to the school covering a distance of nearly forty kilometer.

But founding and nurturing Nabodyama has demanded much from Dhirendra Bhai as it continues to demand from his fellow teachers. Nityananda Bhai, Mr. Nityananda Nayak, is another such teacher. He comes from the neighbouring village of Bari. He is married and he has a small son. He comes to the school early in the morning and leaves for home only ten in the night. He is always busy--from the class room to the field. He gets almost nothing as his remuneration for working with *Nabodyama*. Sometimes he is not able to bring medicine to his ailing son and his wife understandably is at times angry with him. He has tried his best to bring his wife also to the net of integral education but she continues to maintain a cautious distance from such paths of idealism. Say Nityananda Bhai, "Sometimes when I return home I find that my wife has put water into the cooked rice but I do not complain. I fill myself with whatever is left in the kitchen and stealthily retire to the bed."

For the financial security of his family Nityananda Bhai has recently taken to pisciculture. He draws inspiration from the writings of The Mother and has the satisfaction that he is taking part in a great experiment. He is a man of dignity and tells that it is better to die than to beg. He has a similar relationship of dignity even with God: he does not ask him any favour. He says that in the conventional schools teachers give more attention to parents and children who have more resources. He, coming from a poor background, was a victim of such class bias during his own childhood. He therefore wants to make sure that this does not happen to any of his students.

There are nine schools in the vicinity. All these schools have created a climate

for child-centred education in the locality. The nearest is Matrurpuram, Sri Aurobindo Integral school in Bhagia, Markona. This is the oldest school in the locality. It started in 1980 with the initiative of Mahendra Bhai. Mahendra Bhai is one of the senior most activists of the integral education movement of Orissa. Currently in his 70s, Mahendra Bhai does not have a doctrinaire approach to Sri Aurobindo and he strongly feels that the followers of Sri Aurobindo should learn from Gandhi's emphasis on manual labor. Mahendra Bhai told emphatically to the participants of Surhrut Shrama Sibira held in his school in May 1999 that a new chapter on labor should be added to Sri Aurobindo's Mother. In Mahendra Bhai's school there is a strict emphasis on physical work which sometimes students and teachers find hard to cope with. The school has few cows and it is part of the tasks of the inmates of the school to take care of these cows. But Mahendra Bhai feels sad that sometimes when he is not in campus the cows are not properly taken care of. But Mahendra Bhai even at this ripe age of seventy plus cleans the cowshed and then takes his food. In this identification, Mahendra Bhai is influenced by the thought of The Mother that to be spiritual is to be conscious of the whole world at the same time.

A distinctive aspect of Matrurpuram School is that the school has an excellent library, perhaps one of the best collections among the rural integral schools and there is a monthly literary wall magazine here run by the students and teachers. The school has also been the formative ground for many important activists of integral education in the locality. Dhrendra Bhai, Malati Apa (currently principal of the integral school in Kadabarang), Rashmi Bhai (founder of the teacher-managed integral school in Salabani in the district of Keonjhar)--all have initially worked with Mahendra Bhai at Matrurpuram. All of them have left him not being able to cope with him and his strict discipline but all of them acknowledge with gratitude the hard work, perseverance and persistence they have learnt from Mahendra Bhai.

Dulu Bhai, Mahendra Bhai's son, is currently the secretary of Matrurpuram and is now trying to loosen some of the strict disciplinary norms of Mahendra Bhai. I discussed with Dulu Bhai about the problem of management in the integral schools and asked him whether he finds a new management emerging in integral school which considers itself as a spiritual partner in the running of the school rather than as boss over the teachers. Dulu Bhai did not give a direct reply to my question but said that let there be no bossism from the managers and let the teachers not misuse their freedom. Dulu Bhai also regrets that integral schools themselves are in competition with each other and some of them have a very narrow individualistic approach to the well-being and excellence of their school rather than considering themselves as part of a movement.⁷

Like the Nabodyama integral school, a majority of students of Matrurpuram integral school also come from far off places and stay in the hostel. But Dulu

Bhai now wants to have a much more vibrant contact with the local villagers. Says Dulu Bhai, "From the beginning the school has never cared to involve the local village. But now we would have to involve this village in both the happiness and sorrows of the school." Dulu Bhai also says that for strengthening Sri Aurobindo integral education movement there is a need to strengthen the *Pathachakra* movement. It must be noted that the *Pathachakra* movement which had founded the integral schools have lost its initial enthusiasm probably as a response to the "space-time compression" (cf. Harvey 1989) of the time and all concerned in integral education movement any trying to revive and reactivate the *Pathachakra* movement. For example, during my visit to the Kadabarang school there was a meeting of the activists of the Block Pathachakra movement (of Banta block of District of Bhadrakh) and they were discussing various ways of making the *pathachakra* movement active. One of the proposals which came up in this discussion is that *pathachakras* instead of just reading the books of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother should also undertake concrete projects of voluntary and devotional labor for the collective well-being of the local community such as building of road etc. It must be noted here that *Suhrut Gosthi*, a new movement within the Sri Aurobindo Pathachakra and integral education movement combines reading of Sri Aurobindo's works with devotional labor for the building of foundations of collective well-being such as school building or a pond for the school and this has created new streams of consciousness and energy within the movement. We shall come to the vision and work of *Suhrut Gosthi* a little later in the text.

The integral school at Divyabhumi, Kolha, a small town 15 kilometer away from Bhadrakh is product of a vibrant Pathachakra movement and still keeps alive the spirit of a vibrant Pathachakra. The teachers and managers of the school meet every night at 9.30 and hold a *Pathachakra* i.e., they read something from the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. In this, Ashok Bhaina (Mr. Ashok Nayaka, the main sponsor of the school) and Mr. Suryamani Nayak, another founder of the school, also take part. But Ashok Bhai not only joins other teachers in the daily *pathachakras* he joins them in their every trials and tribulations. He joins them in their physical work. *Dibyabhumi* has a beautiful campus, perhaps one of the most beautiful in the state, where the relics center of Sri Aurobindo has been founded in the middle of a pond. The school has also a beautiful play ground for children. Like Nabodyama all this has been built with the voluntary and devotional labor of teachers, members of the managing committee and students. It seems in this school both the teachers and managers consider themselves as spiritual partners in their conjoint striving for creative and child-centred alternatives. The school has committed young teachers such as Pradip Bhai and Basanti Apa who work with children from dawn to late night and whose enthusiasm is really contagious. During my visit

they told me that they interact with students as friends. The school has a hostel where students from far off places stay but the school has also a large proportion of students who come from the local area. It is a dream with the activists of this school to make the school self-sustaining in such a manner that no poor student will be returned from the school because of lack of funds. Their objective is to build an integral university where there would be classes from "K.G. to P.G." under one roof.

The integral school in Chandbali is called *Divyadhama* where the school has a relics center. The school is approximately 10 kilometer away from the integral school at Kolha. This school was established in 1992 and Mrs Nirupama Nayak is one of the founders of this school along with her late husband. Nirupama Apa and her husband were earlier in Basta, another small town in the district of Balasore, when interested followers of Sri Aurobindo and Mother took the initiative to establish a school. Nirupama Apa had left her studies long ago and was a fulltime housewife when she was called upon by the local *pathachakra* to be the principal of the integral school to be founded in Basta. In a moving autobiographical essay Nirupama Apa tells us how she became a teacher of the integral school and started offering her whole life to the cause of integral education. She had forgotten much of what she had learnt but she taught herself. Over the years she also learnt to be caring and non-violent towards the children. She comes from a high-caste background and initially she used to maintain distance from the low-caste students. Even she was not directly handing over the slates to low-caste students of her school lest she would touch them. But one day a scheduled caste boy came running and told her that he does not know to do subtraction of sums. Tells Nirupama Apa: "On seeing the pure and sinless face my whole being was moved and the trace of casteism and untouchability that I had got melted."

Kalpana Apa is a deeply mediative teacher in this school and she tells us some of the difficulties teachers like her go through. As they do not get much salary from the school in order to survive they would have to do tuition. So they do not have much time for their own self-study and self-growth. Because of financial problem, they are not even able to join the teachers training programme conducted by the New Life Education Trust, the co-ordinating body of all integral schools of Orissa. Kalpana Apa believes in the free progress system and does not believe in imposing anything on children. She has a colleague who has got five-year training in the free progress system of integral education at Mirambika, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Delhi Branch. Kalpana Apa has a deeply mediative personality and when one talks to her one cannot but notice the field of intensity that she creates. Is the pedagogy of integral education confined to the integral schools only? When we meet with young enthusiastic activists of integral education such as Ashok Bhai and Bina Apa we realise that integral education is slowly becoming a wide- spread cultural and pedagogical movement where we can embody integral education in our relationship with each other and with the students without uttering its name. Ashok Bhai works as an officer in the local State Bank of India, Chandbali, and has been part of *Suhrut Gosthi* for the last ten years. Ashok Bhai met his wife Bani Apa in one of the *Suhrut* camps. Bani Apa was first working as a teacher in the integral school of Matrupuram and now works in a Government primary school. There she applies method of integral education and slowly this is having an impact on her other colleagues. They moved to Chandbali in 1996

and in the mean time brought to the world two beautiful daughters. Even though there exists one integral school in the town Ashok Bhai, Bani Apa and some enthusiastic friends have started another small school called *Ananya--Different*. They send their children to *Ananya* which combines child-centred education with aesthetic education. Ashok Bhai and his colleagues have taken a piece of land in the middle of a paddy field and they are eager to build a cultural and educational centre there. Ashok Bhai is keen to sensitize the parents and guardians of the locality about treating and teaching children with love and care.

During our luncheon meeting Ashok Bhai told me: "Education is a means of self-development." We then proceeded to the neighbouring village of Chandbali where Ashok Bhai works with the village high school. The high school has been working in the village since 1992 but has not but obtained Government grant. The teachers are working without any salary. Earlier, as the common practice all over the state, students of the school were going to tuition masters of the locality after the school hours. They had to pay exorbitant tuition fees to those outside tuition masters. Ashok Bhai suggested that instead of students going to the outside tuition masters, the teachers of the school can take coaching classes in the morning and in the evening. The money that students used to give to the tuition masters could be shared with the school teachers which would help them to keep their body and soul together. Students would also get quality education from their own teachers. Much more than that the extra time they spend together would help them to establish further intimacy and deepen their solidarity. Ashok Bhai reaches the school early morning at 7.00 to take his classes in mathematics. He then comes back home covering a distance of six kilometres, has a quick bite and rushes to his office in the local state bank.

Ashok Bhai has built up a devoted team around him and there is both firmness and suppleness in his method of organizing. When we talk to him, we see a fire of dream in his eye. He is moved by a sense of mission, of belonging to an alternative movement. He is critical of the *pathachakra* and integral education movement of Orissa where Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have been made objects of ritual worship. He and the members of the *Suhrut Gosthi* to which he belongs are now trying to overcome routinisation and ritualism that has crept into the Sri Aurobindo movement in Orissa and want to make the movement a people's movement where all seekers should have the same recognition and encouragement and where the movement is a vehicle for self-development and social transformation rather than a means for accumulation of social prestige and ego-aggrandizement. There are two different kinds of educational movements now--one is integral school and the other is *Saraswati Sishu Mandir*. *Saraswati Sishu Mandir* is being run by the agents of the Sangha Parivara and has close affinity with the Hindu fundamentalist groups. For Ashok Bhai, parents and guardians in the local community are looking for an

educational alternative and for them these are the two alternatives. But in Saraswati Sishu Mandir there is an effort to brainwash the small children into a fundamentalist mode. But it seems there is a contestation between integral schools and Saraswati Sishumandir in the local communities.

Ashok Bhai is a member of the managing committee of another innovative integral school in the locality, Matrubiha integral school in Kadabarang. Laxidhara Bhai, Mr. Laxidhara Pal, who has founded this school was part of Sri Aurobindo Student Mission when he was in his college in the late 60s. His children were studying in the integral school at Markona (Mahendra Bhai's school) in the 1980s and few years later in (1988) he could not resist his spiritual temptation to start a new school in his village. He himself has been working as the headmaster of the village Government Middle school right after his graduation for the last twenty six years. But he is not satisfied with the education imparted in the Government high school. He also realized that though he is the headmaster of the school his ability to make changes in the school is limited. In order to create an alternative space of being, becoming and learning, Laxmidhara Bhai founded this school with support from his father (who donated land for it) and some villagers. Laxmidhara Bhai comes everyday to the school after completing his duties in his Government teaching job and works as laborer in the school campus doing a variety of chores-- constructing building, cleaning the cowsheds, catching fish and watering the plants. Laxmidhara Bhai has given his blood and sweat to the school but in him there seems to be no trace of possessiveness. He is no more the secretary of the school managing committee, he has offered this position to a fellow villager who was once a great opponent of the school. Laxmidhara Bhai has made himself totally available to the integral school of his village as well as to the integral education movement of Orissa as a humble servant. In his *Essays on Gita* Sri Aurobindo has spoken about the life and works of a divine worker and when one spends a moment with the activists of integral education such as Laxmidhara Bhai who are silently working in the remote corners of the state without any craze for name and fame, one comes reassured with a feeling that the divine worker is not only a lofty ideal, it is also a reality. It can be made a reality in our lives if we offer ourselves to a cause beyond our own ego-aggrandizement and preoccupation with securities.

Laxmidhara Bhai is known in the circle of both Suhrut Gosthi and the integral education movement of Orissa for his humor, sometimes titillating youthful humour but this is just an iceberg. Beneath this lies a depth of wisdom--a wisdom born of years of struggle to build the school and a commitment to integral education. Taking inspiration from Chitta Bhai, he says that he has opened his school to the village. He himself has founded two other educational institutions--Kadabaragn Girls' High School and the B.Ed. Training College but because of politicking in these institutions he has resigned from these educational institutions.

Laxmidhara Bhai does not want to be confined to his school only. He wants to move around in the circle of integral education in Orissa and wants teachers of integral schools to have an all-Orissa perspective. He is also an involved, connected critic of the integral education movement: "There is bossism here. If integral education is a reality in Orissa, it is because of the work of the *Apas* (sisters / female teachers). Ninety-five percent of teachers of integral schools are women. But where is the recognition of their labor and sacrifice?"

One woman who has worked hard and struggled quite a lot with Laxmidhara Bhai is Malati Apa—Ms. Malati Jena. Malati Apa comes from a very poor family background and had not completed even her high school when through a series of circumstances she landed in the house of Mahendra Bhai in Markona. She had not taken her food for one and half day the day she landed in Mahendra Bhai's house in September 1978. Mahendra Bhai provided her succor and when Matrupuram school was started in July 1980 Malati Apa looked after the kitchen and the cowshed. But when she was observing the students and teachers of the school, her desire for learning got rekindled. She also wanted to be a teacher instead of being a cook. She completed her high school in 1983 and slowly started teaching in the integral school at Markona. I had first met with Malati Apa when we had assembled for the first summer camp of interested readers of Sri Aurobindo and Mother in May 1984. But after four years Malati Apa had a dramatic turn in her life. She was carrying a child, a divine child, a gift from the love she had with a fellow teacher of the school. Some how the marriage between the two could not take place which was partly due to Malati Apa's devotion to an alternative life and not to be bound by the conventional systems of marriage. But under this circumstance she was no more a welcome in the Mutrupuram integral school in Markona and Mahendra Bhai, a strict disciplinarian as he was, wanted to say goodbye to Malati Apa. At that point, Laxmidhara Bhai whose children were then studying in Mahendra Bhai and Malati Apa's school came to Mahendra Bhai and said: "She is my sister. I wish to take Malati Apa to my house." During this critical juncture, Chitta Bhai and members of Suhrut Gosthi were with Malati Apa and the divine child to come. When she came Chitta Bhai probably could not have chosen a more appropriate name for her than *Preetisikha*, flame of love.

I had met Malati Apa and Preeti Sikha together for the first time in a children's camp in 1999 and a year later it was a joy for me to watch Preetisikha grow into a beautiful and inquisitive human person. She was then in her 7th standard and she was the reader of the class. She is very good in geography, music and songs.

Malati Apa's case shows the difficult pathway through which integral education movement in Orissa passes and in this love, mutuality and sharing have been the capital with which fellow travellers proceed. Because of poor financial

condition, teachers of integral school have difficulties in getting married and setting a household. But some sympathetic leaders of the movement such as Chitta Bhai do not judge the relationship between male and female teachers of schools with the yardstick of conventional morality.⁸

Malati Apa has already worked with integral schools for the last twenty-one year. She is now struggling with an inner discontent. She is sad that in integral residential schools such as Nabodyama, Markona and her own, it is the children of rich parents who can afford to study. But how to make integral education a process of freedom and enlightenment in the life of those who are poor? She acknowledges that with the generous support of Laxmidhara Bhai she can give free studentship to four-five deserving students every year but she thinks this is not the solution to problem of affordability and access to integral education on the part of the poor.

Integral education is a pedagogy of love and the loving relationship between the teacher and the taught is its distinctive characteristic. But what is the place of beating in this pedagogy of love? Malati Apa tells that in the initial years she was beating the "wicked students" sometimes mercilessly but not now. Now, it is becoming difficult for her to gauge who is a wicked student. For her, every child is a ray of potentiality. In Dhinendra Bhai's much acclaimed Nabodyama integral school, there is still the persistence of beating in which, according to an insider, both male and female teachers participate. But it must be noted that in the past in Nabodyama Dhirendra Bhai has taken stance against continued merciless beating done by one teacher. For Dhirendra Bhai, sometime teachers have their frustration against the management including the frustration of not making enough money and they take it on children. Finally, the concerned teacher who was beating children mercilessly in Nabodyama had to leave. But there is still beating in Nabodyama as in some other schools. One way to understand this is that teachers of integral education do not take a doctrinaire approach of non-beating but through the dialectic of love and beating slowly develop themselves and adopt a non-violent approach. Even the legendary Chitta Bhai has beaten, sometimes, mercilessly young children when he was the Director of the Institute of Integral Education in Bhubaneswar. So there is a dialectic of love and beating, violence and non-violence in the practice of integral education but what is certainly a distinct ray of hope here is that this dialectic is characterized by critical self-reflection. The teachers who beat children in integral schools do not defend beating as a mode pedagogical engagement and pathway to success.

During my visit to Kadabarang integral school, I had a very touching conversation with Sabita Apa, a devoted activist of integral education. She was earlier working as Principal of the integral school in Markona but she left on some ground of principle.⁹ But she now wants to go back to the Markona school, the school which is the mother of all the integral schools in the locality.

She told me with tear in her eyes: "I have given my best to that school. I wish to still do all my best to set that house in order. This is my school, my home. I want to recreate as a beautiful garden and make it an exemplary place where people from all over Orissa would feel attracted to come." The striving for creative education that goes in the paddy fields of the remote village of Kadabarang is incomplete without listening to the enthusiasm of Fakir Bhai. Fakir Bhai is a good artist and he comes every Saturday to the school, covering a distance of more than twenty kilometres, to teach painting and drawing to the students. Integral education and creating a condition of love and sharing is very dear to Fakir Bhai's heart. There is a commitment in Fakir Bhai's eye and this commitment gets expressed not only through ideological rigidity but through heart-touching smile and humor. On this point Fakir Bhai shares a lot with Laxmidhara Bhai whose cousin sister he has married. But it is integral education which has transformed Fakir Bhai from a status-seeking son-in-law to a loving seeker for a new path of a education and a shared subjectivity. It is the actors like Fakir Bhai who constitute the seeds of hope in the integral education movement of Orissa.

From the integral school in Kadabarang let us come briefly to the integral school at Ganeilo in the district of Cuttack. The school is part of an Ashram and teachers here stay and work as Ashramites. Minaprava Ojha or Mina Apa says: "This is my goal, my home. Integral education is an inner quest with me. The *karmis* (the Ashramites) here carry a higher mission. However, those inmates of the Ashram who are not open towards truth leave on different excuses. They are not able to resist the temptation of the outside world." The teachers in the school look at themselves first as spiritual *sadhakas*: "We realize that instead of being a hard task master we have to become a helper and a guide for the children which would facilitate the development of their inherent qualities." She also tells us that the co-operation of the guardian is vital for integral education. Because of non-cooperation from the parents of day scholars, the school wants to make it fully residential. Mina Apa further says: ". , despite one's all limitations, if one has accepted the path and seeks God's help then she is able to contribute to the working of a higher force in her life.

Ganeilo integral school has multiple activities--diary, stores, canteen, orchard, gobar gas plant etc. All this is being manned by the teachers. Do the teachers of Ganeilo integral school have any feeling of insecurity about their future? An Ashramite brother replies in the negative: "All this depends upon what you value in your life. If your goal is *sadhana* and this is your way of life than you do not need much money for this."

Institute of Integral Education, Bhubaneswar

This was the first school of integral education in Orissa. Let us meet with some of the devoted activists of integral education in this school. Let us begin with Milli Apa. Milli Apa comes from a well-to-do family background. Being

immersed in integral education for the last thirty years, she had not had time to get married and start a settled family life. But she makes it clear that her decision not to marry was not a sacrificial decision. The school has two senior spinsters--Milli Apa and Jyotsna Apa--and both of them make it clear that not marrying has not been a sacrificial act on their part; rather it has facilitated in their lives a more joyous participation in Mother's love and integral education. Milli Apa has a special sense of mission that by participating in integral education she is contributing to the evolutionary transformation of humanity. Every child has an inner truth and integral education strives to express it. "Suppose a small child is doing painting and her father comes from the office and tells her to stop painting and do mathematics as she is not doing well in this subject. This is antithetical to the spirit of integral education. Here the father is not realizing that through painting the child is striving to express herself and if she does well in painting she would do well in mathematics also. Whatever interest the child has--if only we can enkindle it as a flame." But this calls for living by the ideal of integral education rather than just beating its drum. This also calls for co-operation between students and teachers. It is helpful if the school becomes residential as students and teachers can spend a lot of time with each other but in a metropolitan city like Bhubaneswar it is not easy to make the entire school residential. Milli Apa says that integral education is the education of the future. "In the school we practice the art of sharing with our students. During Tiffin break we share food with each other our Tiffin. In our schools we do not encourage competition among students. Those who are better students are encouraged competition among students. Those who are better students are encouraged to help the weaker ones."

As we shall see shortly, the pioneering integral school in Bhubaneswar is now going through a lot of difficulties. A major difficulty revolves around the conflict between the teachers and management on the issue of teacher's salary and job security. A court case is now pending in Orissa High Court on the issue of suspension of a supposedly errant teacher from the school. The whole teaching staff is divided into three groups--pro- management anti-management, and neutral. Those who are with the management have given a written undertaking to the school authorities that they are not employees of the school but devotees and for their work they will not legally demand for a regular salary on a fixed scale of pay but an honorarium. Those who are fighting against the management want a much more secured service condition and democratic accountability from the school authorities. Only four or five teachers who occupy a neutral ground and they strive for a reconciliation. But to come back to Milli Apa, for her, these difficulties do not mean that all is over with the experiment of integral education and the flame is out. No she is optimistic. Whenever she feels depressed the face of her children takes her out of such a slumber and despondency. To those of her colleagues who fight her suggestion is "Yes, we must not accept any injustice but there are different ways of fighting injustice. We should never make the children the scapegoats for our

struggle. We should never skip their classes. What is the mistake that the children have committed and why should we penalize them? We should never forget that children are our sources of inspiration."

Satyabhama Apa is a colleague of Milli Apa in the school and is the principal of its Kindergarten section. She has been with the school almost for the same time as Milli Apa. Satyabhama Apa gives us a glimpse of many intimate striving that constituted the experiment of integral education in Bhubaneswar in the early days. She says: "Earlier we used to go regularly to children's homes and interact with the parents on every Sunday. Through such home visit we were also able to observe the behaviour of children and the attitude of parents. We used to tell the parents to regularly pray with their wards. We were telling parents to spend more time with children and also involve themselves in their studies." But she is not able to continue this home visit any longer now. In the early days the school was in the heart of the city so distance was no bar. But now the school has been shifted to Khandagiri at the far end of the town. The number of students has astronomically increased now and definitely there is the difference of a generation. Thirty years ago teachers like Satyabhama Apa were young, mostly single, and they were fired with a zeal--the zeal of working with an alternative educational and cultural movement. But now a process of routinization has set in so that the striving for the ideal could be spoken of mostly in past tenses.

Another story from the past that deserves our attention here is the way teachers were then spending their vacations. According to Satyabhama Apa: "We were using our vacation time for self- enrichment and self-development. There was a number of seminars, conferences and workshops on integral education. There was summer teachers' training programme for a month. We were getting very little money but the management was making our participation possible." Seminars and conferences still continue but for most of them these are no more fields of creative self- growth and slowly it is becoming a ritual. To energise integral education in this domain a new experiment radical dreaming and inter-subjectivity has emerged such as the study-cum-work camp of *Suhrut Gosthi*. In this interested seekers of a new way of life meet for ten days twice a year during summer (May 22 to May 31) and winter vacations (December 22 to December 31), study the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and offer their devotional labor in completing a concrete project of construction and reconstruction such as digging a pond in an integral school, or constructing a school building or constructing a boundary. If participation in conferences and workshops is declining on the part of some, especially the old timers, the new entrants and the young are taking part in such alternative modes of experimental sociality and the discovery and realization of meaning made possible by the study-cum-work camp of *Suhrut Gosthi*--the Friends' Collective.

We shall have more detailed description of the vision and experiments of Suhrut Gosthi a little later but as we are in the integral education school at Khandagiri, Bhubaneswar we must have a spiritual fellowship with Rabi Bhai. Rabi Bhai is a young man and his radiance and equanimity is truly inspiring and one would think that it is much ahead of his age. Rabi Bhai was in touch with the Pathachakra movement in his remote village in Bahadrakh and during his childhood. He came to Puri for his higher studies. After completing his post-graduate studies in English he got in touch with Prapatti. This initial contact with Prapatti was a turning point in his life as he describes it in a heart-touching book of poems of him entitled *Smrutira Samuka--Shells of Memory*. He joined the integral school at Puri and then like most of the radical youths of Orissa came in close personal touch with Chitta Bhai and slowly took integral education as a vocation of his life as his *brata*. In the process, adding to the sadness of his many admiring friends, he has forgotten to get married.

Rabi Bhai is currently the Principal of the Institute of Integral Educaiton, Bhubaneswar and it can well be appreciated that this has been a thorny task for him as the school is now ridden with factionalism of various kinds. But Rabi Bhai is a creative seeker and he strives to embody love and mutuality in his relationship with students, fellow teachers and the non- teaching staff. For example, he addresses lower rung workers of the school such as the peons as brothers and this plays its part in the making of a relational revolution that is the other name of integral education. Rabi Bhai is a soul-touching composer of poems and songs. As we have earlier noted, an alternative educational and pedagogical movement calls for alternative music and song and Rabi Bhai's songs are sung in many integral schools. His songs like "*Ananta Premara Parabara Tume Mo Jeevana Belabhui, Bipula Taranga Barabara Taba Jaye Mote Chuichui* [You are an ocean of infinite love, your vast waves touch me time and again]" touch the innermost core of those who sing and listen. He has composed many children's songs also which go a long way in creating an altitude of respect to children. In one of such songs, a child sings:

*Jedina sikhili chaka gadai
Chitara Anki Au Gita Mu Gai
Jedina Sikhili Gachare Chadhi
Kabita Anki Au Nai Pahari
Sokhibara Maja Kahire, Siikhibathu Maja Nahire*

[The day I learnt to run my wheels
to draw my painting and to sing
The day I learnt to climb the tree
to compose a poem and to swim
Where is the fun other than learning
That is no greater fun other than learning]

Rabi Bhai is an active participant in the Suhrut study-cum- work camp. There he leads the study of the books of Sri Aurobindo and Mother and also the singing of *Rabindra Sangeeta*. Rabi Bhai also visits the youth groups in different parts of the state and leads the study of Sri Aurobindo literature. While the earlier generation of integral school teachers are going through a process of routinization new generation of actors such as Rabi Bhai are bringing new creative energy to the movement in the process preparing to make themselves much more worthy instruments of the Divine.

In my work with the integral school in Bhubaneswar I had discussion with some other teachers who bring us to the ground and urge us to understand the difficulty of practising integral education in a metropolitan context where parents are competitive and their only adored value is the value of success. Pratap Kumar Mati teaches English in the school and he loves teaching his subject in a systematic and involved manner. For him, teaching English is not summarizing in Oriya what is written in English but teaching the language--use, grammar, syntax and so on. But this is what the tuition teachers of the market do not understand. Parents are sending their wards to tuition and in a place like Bhubaneswar it has become a craze. So, students are now overburden with classes. They study in the school and before coming to school and after the school hours they are sent to tuition classes most of which are group tuition classes. Says Mati: "The tuition masters do not give individual attention and in the school itself because we have large number of students we are not able to give individual attention." Moreover, says Mati: "The student is sandwiched for time from both the sides. He has no time to play and to think. He has no time for reflection." Speaking of the predicament he faces because of tuition class, Mati tells us: "I tell my students not to study the subjects in English in advance because when students know the subject in advance, as they do as in most group tuition classes, they complete half the syllabus itself in the summer vacation, they lose the charm and sense of wonder when I teach the same subject in the class. But the greatest danger comes from the fact that the tuition masters are not experts in any subject, they do not have love for the subject. They cannot instill in the children a love for subject." Mati shares with us his understanding of the distinction between conventional education and integral education. In mainstream education, the only education that is emphasized is mental. In his words: "But in integral education we are sensitive to both the education of the physical and the vital."

One of the alumni of the integral school in Bhubaneswar has now joined the school as a teacher. He is Mr. Sachidananda Parida. He has joined the school out of his choice and love for the Divine Mother. His parents are also members of *Pathachakra* in their village. He could have opted for business life and earned more money but that would have, as he says, destroyed his creativity. As he does not get much from the school by way of salary, he has a small part-time business of making of *rakhi*.

Integral Education Movement in Orissa

Wider Environment of Influence and Interaction

The actors of integral education movement of Orissa have a vibrant and emotionally inspiring link with Sri Aurobindo Ashram Pondicherry. In fact, in the both the movements, Babaji Maharaj and Prapatti, two *sadhakas* of Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry Ashram have played an important role. Prapatti had pleaded with Mother to start this special work in Orissa--first the *Pathachakra* movement and then the integral education movement. During his lifetime Prapatti led this movement. Most of the actors of the integral education movement are devotees of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and they draw inspiration from visiting Sri Aurobindo Ashram and having a glimpse of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education. Many of them come to spend time during vacation in the Ashram and discuss pedagogical issues and experiences with the educationally inclined *sadhakas*. For example, during our discussion Anjali Apa of Gopinathapur integral school was telling me that she comes to Sri Aurobindo Ashram every summer. Now she is collaborating with a *sadhaka* of the Ashram in preparing a textbook in Sanskrit for the primary as well as secondary schools. The writings of Manoj Das, internationally acclaimed educationist and short-story writer, are also a source of inspiration to the integral education movement in Orissa. *Nabaprakash*, the magazine of *Navajyoti Karyalaya*, the department of Sri Aurobindo Ashram dealing with Sri Aurobindo's work in Orissa, also plays an important role in working as a connecting link among the actors of integral education.

In recent times, actors of integral education also have established a vibrant link with the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Delhi. This got started with the holding of the first all India integral education meet at Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Delhi. In the meeting Prapatti had suggested that the Delhi Ashram can open a teacher's training programme in which teachers of integral schools of Orissa can take part. With this in mind the foundation of Mirambika, the innovative teachers' training programme and centre for creative children's education, was led. Over the last twenty years many young people of Orissa have joined the Mirambika teachers training programme of creative and child-centre education. Sulochana Didi, earlier Principal of the Integral school in Gopinathapur, has been with Mirambika right from the beginning and she has certainly played a foundational role. A sociologist in Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, who is currently carrying out a research project on innovative education in India says: "It is the teachers from Orissa in Sri Aurobindo Ashram here who are so committed and they provide the soul to its educational programmes."

Let us listen to some of the engaging voices Mirambika. Vijaya Bharati has been with Mirambika almost from its inception in 1981 / 1982. Bharati says: "Integral education is the answer to the deepest seeking in your life. If you want to be a teacher awaken your deepest self and also touch the soul of the

students." For Bharati, in integral education what is important is not only communication but also silence. But for her, "silence is not keeping mum; in it we see another part of ourselves." For Bharati, the role of a teacher in integral schools is that of a facilitator. "I am not the only information provider. Let the student also seek for answers and let her involve the parents in the whole process." She further says: "If I am teaching Akbar, Akbar should not be a dead historical subject. I would have to make him alive in my presentation. Akbar can be a factual person or represent a level of consciousness. During teaching we need to establish linkage between the soul of Akbar which was open to all religions and the soul of the children."

In one's relationship with children Bharati says integral education makes you more compassionate which for her is different from being sympathetic. This compassion is much more vital now as the world is much more complex and challenging compared to a generation ago. In her words: "The temptation of consumerism is much more now compared to when we were growing up. There are so many brands of pencils from which she had to make the choice. On the other hand, the child has to fight with boring teachers and boring parents." For Bharati, "Integral education is not an experiment but a test of faith. It is a faith that the child is not a thing but a soul which has come to the world for some divine purpose." "If I have forty students in my class I would have to realize that I have forty flowers in my garden and my role is that of a gardener only. I would not scream at the child when he breaks the glass. I would have to sit down with the child and understand that what made him do so. If a child hits another child then I would not just scream at him. I would try to find out why he has done so. If he has enjoyed hitting then it is a much more serious business." Mirambika has been running a teachers training programme for the last sixteen years. Its objective is to prepare teachers who will bring the pedagogy of integral education to various educational settings--Government schools, integral schools and the non-formal schools. At some points, it had recognition from Devi Ahalyabai University, Indore for its B.ED programme but after the scrapping of private BED its teachers training programme does not have any recognised Government value. At some point, Mirambika was trying for some sort of formal governmental recognition for its teacher's training programme but it proved to be full of so much bureaucratic hassle that Mirambika now proceeds on her own. It selects those who are genuinely interested in pedagogy of love and spiritual transformation of integral education. Says Bharati: "We are a teachers training college with a difference. Its time has not yet come but the time will certainly come."

Shila Didi is the principal of the Mirambika teachers training college as well as the innovative school. This has classes from the nursery to 7th standard then the school does not go by conventional standards. Mirambika does not have any fixed syllabus. It teaches through the project method and the free play system (Please see the Appendix). Since the school does not follow any set

syllabus those who send their children to this school undertake a lot of risk but they have trust in the whole process. For studying in Mirambika the monthly tuition fee is Rs.550. Children get their lunch in the school which costs one Rs.500/- per month and in addition to these, they also have to give a computer fee. Even the principal agreed with me that the poor cannot afford this.

During my first visit to Mirambika I could not sit down and spend more time with Sulochana Apa, the other member of the Mirambika core staff. Sulochana Apa was earlier the Principal of Gopinathapur integral school and she has been with Mirambika for the last twenty years. She says: "There is a much more wider environment of learning here. There was some limitation for the expansion of my mental horizon in Orissa and therefore I came here. But the situation here is different. Here teachers have a much vaster mental and educational background. This is important because in order to understand the vastness of integral education, one has to develop oneself much more mentally and educationally." But at the same time Sulochana Apa says: "In Orissa they give much more emphasis on the inner while here it is much more directed towards the outer. From the point of view of external environment there is a lot more scope here but for you own inner growth there is much more inner preparation in Orissa."

Frames of Co-ordination Movements of Transformations

From the beginning New Life Education Trust has been carrying out the art and work of co-ordination among the centres of integral education of Orissa. It has been establishing liaison with the Government as well as organize training for teachers. The Trust in the earlier years has spearheaded a struggle for autonomy on behalf of the integral education movement of Orissa. The Trust from the beginning has never been a controlling body issuing *diktats* and guidelines to the integral schools. It has envisioned its role as that of a facilitator and a co-ordinator. Of course it grants affiliation to the integral schools but it must be noted that there are some schools which have broken away from the Trust. The Trust has encouraged variation rather than stressed for mechanical uniformity. Prapatti thus aptly writes. "The second school came up at Rourkela in 1973 and the third at Sambalpur in 1974. Rourkela opted to have English as the medium of instruction. The other two had gone in for Oriya. This brought in, almost those very first years, the necessity to decide whether these schools were to be developed in a uniform way under a single central management and supervision or each school had to grow its own way though always sharing the experiences of others and gaining from them. The second alternative appeared more appropriate" (Prapatti 1980: 24-25).

Those are now 261 integral schools affiliated with New Life Education Trust and if we add to this many schools who have applied for affiliation the number will easily come to three hundred. I had a discussion with Mr. Ramakanta

Sahu, the co-ordinator of the New Life Education Trust. Sahoo told me that the Trust has prepared one teacher's hand book for primary teachers and text books in English upto standard. The Trust is now working on textbook in other subjects and standards. This has become crucial as the integral schools have attained autonomy upto 7th standard. The trust organizes annual meet of teachers of integral school and organizes different educational meets both at the state level and the zonal level. The state of Orissa has been divided into seven zones for the purpose of integral education.

Fifty integral schools are now receiving some kind of Government support in form of grants. But managing this grant has become quite cumbersome and involves a lot of wastage of time and mental energy. Says sahu: "If we spend the same amount of time in mobilising resources on our own we shall do better. So we are telling new schools not to waste time in running after Government grant." This has also been the position of Chitta Ranjan Das from the beginning and he and the members of *Suhrut Gosthi* have worked with many integral school in alternative resource mobilization. Suhrut study-cum-work camp has dug ponds in many schools across the state and the concerned schools have started pisciculture. This has helped concerned schools in having an alternative source of income.

One of the continuing problems in integral schools is the distance between the management and the teachers. This has led to many difficult situations, in some cases different groups within management going to the court for control over the school and in other cases, like the integral school in Bhubaneswar, some teachers have gone to the court against the management of the school. There are also instances where members of the management committee have come to the school and physically assaulted teachers. In my discussion with Sahoo I was interested to know what the Trust is doing in these fields. Says Saho: "We are trying to bridge the distance between the management and teachers. We are organising an annual meet of members of management as well as the teaching staff as the meeting of the Mother's workers. We want to make both of them realize that their first identity is that of Mother's workers."

Babuli Bhai, Mr. Prasad Tripathi, is the secretary of New Life Education Trust. He is above fifty years of age but he has an inspiring youthful spirit. He works in the Census Department of Government of India and works closely with the entire Sri Aurobindo movement in Orissa. Babuli Bhai was born into a poor Brahmin family and has gone through many trials and tribulations in his life. He takes seriously integral education as a striving in not trying what others have done but doing what others cannot do. He takes pride in the fact that integral education does not promote unhealthy competition among students as they do not take part in scholarship examinations.

There are various expectation of the Trust on the part of actors of integral

education. A radical proposal comes from Dullu Bhai, the current secretary the integral school in Markona: "Let the land and building of the school be registered in the name of the Trust, New Life Education Trust." He expands on this: "A major problem of integral school is the problem of egoism of the management. Because of this they are reluctant to change. If the trust can have the ownership of land and school building the builders of schools can not use those any more for their personal ego aggrandisement."

The other set of expectations revolves around academic direction and leadership. Now that there are so many integral schools and the movement has been at work for the last thirty years it requires a new direction. The Trust should be able to provide this. This point of view is most forcefully expressed by Anjali Apa, the principal of Gopinathpur integral school. She says: "Earlier academically more competent people were members of the Trust. But now there not many people in the Trust to provide educational leadership. The Trust should also evince more interest in research on the pedagogy of integral education. The expansion of integral education calls for more research into different dimensions of integral education." But no such initiative is being taken by the Trust.

Suhrut Gosthi

Suhrut Gosthi means a friend's collective or community. In the text we have referred to it many a time. It is a community of friends helping each other in their own development as well as preparing themselves to be worthy instrument of God's work in society. As has already been mentioned *Suhrut Gosthi* organizes study-cum-work camp twice a year in which interested seekers for creative meaning in life join together in studying the work of Sri Aurobindo and Mother and engaging themselves in a concrete act of construction and reconstruction such as the digging of a pond or the construction of a school building. This study-cum-work camp is called *Suhrut Sibira* or *Suhrut* camps. The Suhrut Gosthi and the Suhrut Sibiras are also creating deeper threads of connection among the activists of integral education in Orissa. It has created spaces of radical hope and enthusiasm. Without making noise it has sought in a quiet manner to provide a deeper opportunity for self development and development of a deeper mutuality of sharing and love. In another context, philosopher Emmanuel Levinas has written: "Ontology as a state of affairs can afford sleep but love can not afford sleep. Love is the incessant watching over of the other" (Levinas 1995). In Suhrut Gosthi and in the life and thought of its main source of inspiration Chitta Ranjan Das one can see such a permanent wakefulness. There are innumerable difficulties in the field of integral education now but a major difficulty relates to a lack of personal and relational revolution in the life of the actors.

Traditional Orissan society is a hierarchical society and the onset of modernity in Orissa has not done much to destroy traditional feudalism and hierarchy. In

the changing context of modernisation and post-independent developments, the officers and power holders of society replaced the earlier feudal lords. The managers of integral schools belong to the affluent sections of society and most of them have higher position in the Governmental machinery. They continue to be bound to feudal attitudes and frames of relations. They look down upon other fellow participants on this movement of becoming. What has retarded Sri Aurobindo movement in general and the integral education movement in particular is the postponement of a relational revolution. In words of Chitta Ranjan Das: "No homogeneous school community is possible as long as the organisers and the teachers function as two different groups though it is formally professed that both have the same end. The organisers belong to the old society, they are somewhat successful in the old society and are people who matter in the old order of things. But there has been no personal revolution in their lives though they may sincerely wish a change and show sufficient gesture in favor of a change. One has to be very much in the process of change if one realises that there should be a change. Integral education in Orissa has yet to be freed of this dichotomy and come of age. Most of our problems are to a large extent those ensuing from this distance. It appears, a solution will come when both the sides really decide to grow. It is self-growth that engenders better understanding and annihilates the distances. The ideal will be when a whole group of people who have made a decision to take up an experiment live together on the spot very much in the pattern of an intentional community" (Das 2001). *Suhrut Gosthi* has stressed to create experimental grounds for the germination and generation of a relational revolution and through this to create transformative webs of connectedness and mutuality among all concerned.

If New life Education Trust is the formal centre of co-ordination of integral schools, *Suhrut Gosthi* is a node of co-ordination which lies on the margin and being on the margin it strives to interrogate the centre not for ego-aggrandizement nor for acquisition of political power but for transforming the establishment of integral education in the direction of continued divine mobilization. After thirty years of work, a process of routinization has set into the Sri Aurobindo movement of Orissa and *Suhrut Gosthi* seeks to create ripple in the still water of the pond by creating new waves of relationship and consciousness. *Suhrut Gosthi* visits integral schools in different parts of Orissa twice a year but whenever it visits a school it brings a set of books to present it to the school library. In addition to building a common ground of well-being such as the construction of a pond in the school premises, the gift of books to the school library goes a long way in creating an environment of enrichment in the school. Many of the teachers of integral schools have vulnerable financial position and are continuously stung by poverty. In case of a slight disturbance in their life space such as visitation of sickness or illness they have no-where to go. To provide a ray of hope here the participants of *Suhrut Gosthi* have created a modest fund out of their humble contributions and efforts such as publishing book on behalf of *Suhrut Prakashan* or *Suhrut publications*. *Suhrut Gosthi*

provides financial assistance to the needy teachers of integral schools in moments of crisis.

In this context the case of Mantu Bhai deserves our careful attention. Mantu Bhai was an enthusiastic young activist of integral education. He along with some of his friends from the village of Kanthibhauri--a remote village near the Bay of Bengal in the northern most tip of Orissa--started a school in Kanthibhauri. Unlike many of the integral schools we have met so far this school is not primarily a residential school as it has a large number of students from within the village itself. Mantu Bhai was a moving spirit behind his village integral school and he along with Kalapataru Bhai who is an innovative science teacher and Sabita Apa they transformed a desert of sand into an oasis. I had first met Mantu Bhai in May 1990 when the integral school at Kanthibhauri was hosting the Suhrut camp. But two years later Mantu Bhai was struck with a debilitating nervous illness. There was a bending in his neck and after sometime he became bed ridden. As this tragedy befell Mantu Bhai his family and the integral school of Kanthibhauri, there was great sadness in the entire circle of integral education in Orissa. Suhrut Gosthi mobilized resources and helped Mantu Bhai but Mantu Bhai could not survive this illness. Suhrut Gosthi organised its summer 2000 study-cum-work camp in Kanthibhauri in the memory of the inspiring struggle and dedication of Mantu Bhai. With tears in our hearts we went to the cemetery of Mantu Bhai and placed flowers on his immortal and adventurous soul.

But what is to be noted that the initial support for Mantu Bhai's medical treatment came from the selling of a book that Suhrut Gosthi had published and that Madan Bhai, one of the earliest participants in the Suhrut camp, had written. It was a small book entitled "Our children, our school." Over the last ten years, Suhrut Prakashan has published many books and it has published another book of Madan Bhai named *Jane Sikhkanka Kahani*, The story of a teacher. It is a story of Janus Korchak, the legendary doctor and loving friend of destitute children of Poland who offered to accompany his children to the concentration camp of Hitler. In the preface to this book Madan Bhai who is a medical doctor and an activist in the integral education movement of Orissa writes that when he was growing up there were simultaneously two ideals of becoming before him: to become a doctor and to be a teacher. From Janus Korchak he got the inspiration to combine both the vocations of a teacher and a doctor. Writes Madan Bhai in the first paragraph of his heart-touching preface to the book: "It was 1980. At that time I was a student of Revenshaw College, Cuttack. My youthful mind was in the whirlwind search for an appropriate ideal of life. I had passed thorough many religions and social organisations since my childhood. For acquiring the confidence to serve people I was reading the biography of great men. But I was in a dilemma as to whether I should become a teacher or a doctor for serving people better. From my childhood seeing the Bengali Compounder in my village giving injection to

villagers I had a desire to become a doctor. But when I started knowing the world more and more the role of a teacher became more significant for me. At the same time I was also dreaming to unite both the lives" (Pradhan 1998). The life of Janus Korchak inspired Madan Bhai to combine the dedication of both a doctor and a teacher and Madan Bhai has been striving for this.

Suhrut Prakshan publishes books and its members bring copies of it--ten or twenty--to their respective villages and towns. They sell those books in the local communities and the proceeds from the sale go to the enhancement of the humble *Suhrut Panthi*, the Suhrut Fund. Sometimes members do not take their task of selling books seriously which leads to stockpiling of books and sadness in the heart of enthusiastic Suhrut leaders such as Kumudini Apa (Mrs Kumudini Guru who teaches in a Govt. school in Bhubaneswar), Barendra Bhai (Mr. Barendra Narayana Sahoo who works in a bank in Cuttack) and Ashis Bhai (Mr. Ashis Pathy who works as a teacher in a Government primary school in Berhampur). Kumudini Apa is however not dampened in her enthusiasm and during a meeting of the mid-term Suhrut study circle in October 2000 in her own house in Bhubaneswar she told me that she now wants to donate some of her jewelry to the Suhrut Panthi.

Ashis Bhai edits the Suhrut journal *Suhrut* which is published twice a year in which many teachers and participants of the integral education movement of Orissa write. This handy journal has created a forum for critical self-reflection and discussion on integral education in Orissa. In one of the issues one activist writes how in some schools the management spends all the collected donations in building relic centres (relic centres are the places where Sri Aurobindo's relics are kept. Many integral schools of Orissa as such as Chandbali, Kolha and Gopinathpur have relic centres in their campuses) where students and teachers study and teach under leaking roofs and when the teachers are not paid any salary for years. "In a recent issue Santosh Bhai (Mr. Santosh Kumar Panda of Dhenkanal Integral School) critically writes that in integral school not much effort is made to involve the parents in the decision-making process and in the evaluation of the performance of teachers. For Santosh Bhai, a deeper involvement of parents and teachers, instead of a mere tokenism, is a must if integral education is to overcome its many current difficulties--financial as well as relational.

In recent years, Suhrut camp is becoming a festival of togetherness and singing of *Rabindra Sangeet* (songs of Noble Laureate Rabindra Nath Tagore) early morning before dawn is an inspiring part of this festival. This festival is enriched by the mobile bookshop that Bhagyadhara Bhai--Mr. Bhagyadhara Sahoo--establishes during the Suhrut camps. Bhagyadhara Bhai brings bag loads of books on his sturdy shoulders. This provides an opportunity to the participants of the Suhrut camp to see many important books on life and light and to purchase these albeit on credit. Bhagyadhara Bhai's efforts to make

Chitta Bhai's books available to the seeking community of students, teachers, guardians and managers of integral school establishes a connectedness of heart among all concerned. In the last four years Bhagyadhara Bhai himself has taken the initiative to publish many books on behalf of *Pathika Prakashan* (Traveller's Publications)--a publishing house that he has founded.

Bhagyadhara Bhai has a very humble beginning. He was thrown out of an integral school in Hindolo on some pretext. On getting resettled in Bhubaneswar, he and his family of four sharing a one bed-room apartment with his younger brother, he started selling life-enhancing books riding the bi-cycle. After many years of working as a vendor of books, the aspiration to publish books which would transform our mental blocks and the grammar of lives struck him deeply. This led to his starting of *Pathika Prakashana*. His journey and growth in all these years have been inspiring, especially the journey from a book seller on a bicycle to a publisher of books and the aspiration and activities of actors like Bhagyadhara Bhai create a new space of togetherness in the field of integral education in Orissa.

Overcoming of distance and creation of a space of genuine mutuality is the continuing challenge before the integral education movement of Orissa. Suhrut Gosthi is striving to make a difference in this regard especially in the line of distance that exists between managers and teachers. While by and large the leaders of integral school come from an affluent background of position and power and hence impart an elitist character to integral education members of Suhrut Gosthi have a much more radical openness and are striving to give a dignified place to the poor, especially the poor teachers, in the scheme of integral education. Apart from the two annual study-cum- work camp it organises it also organises two-day mid-term study meet and hosts an annual student meet.

Integral Education and the Spaces of Hope

Primary and secondary education in India, especially in rural India, is in shambles now. The dismal situation in which we are in is movingly portrayed by A. Vaidyanathan and Gopinathan Nair: "Eradication of poverty and illiteracy figured prominently in the political rhetoric of Indian nationalist movement even before Independence. Achieving universal elementary education within 10 years was included as one of the Directive Principles of State Policy in the Constitution of the Indian Republic. The rhetoric continues but the goal remains elusive even after 50 years of planning. Governments, both at the Center and the states, irrespective of their ideology, have not pursued this objective seriously and with vigour. Resources allotted to education have been woefully inadequate, and with higher education absorbing a rising proportion of allocations, elementary education has remained on a semi-starvation diet. The idea of making legally compulsory for all children has not evoked much enthusiasm. Some states have enacted the necessary legislation but none has

exerted itself to get the law enforced. The prospects of a dramatic turnaround in this situation do not seem bright" (Vaidyanathan & Nair 2001: 23). In this context, expansion of primary and secondary education for accelerating human development in India is on everybody's lip now. Amartya Sen has been one of the leading votaries of such an agenda of education and human development. For Sen, an expansion of primary and secondary education is critical to the realization of autonomy and well-being of millions of people. This expansion is not possible without political mobilization for primary education on the part of the poor and the underprivileged. As Sen & Dreaze tell us: "The more privileged groups, who clamour for further expansion of higher education, are politically much more powerful and better organized in pressing for what they want. To counter this resilient stratification, what is needed is more activism in the political organization of the disadvantaged sections of Indian society" (Dreze & Sen 1995: 95). But what is the pedagogy of this desired expanded education. And here is political mobilization, as important as it is, enough? Sen has not raised these questions and here the case of integral education movement provides us important lessons. This has been a movement from within local communities and civil society and this movement has drawn inspiration and continues to function because of spiritual mobilization of individuals and communities. A commitment to a higher purpose of life in which one wishes to be an errand in the evolutionary transformation of humanity, an evolutionary engagement however concretely manifested in loving and caring relationships with oneself and one's students is a primary motivation behind innumerable young men and women of Orissa who have given their lives to this pursuit without much material gain in the process. Their pedagogical strivings teach us that it is not enough to have schools, what is important is to build a school which would be a school for the subject, a subject who is not subjected to multiple determinations of society and history, but a subject who contributes to the making of this world as a more beautiful and dignified place of being, becoming and transformation. Recently Alain Touraine has also spoken about the need for establishing a school for the subject but in Touraine, the subject is a subject of reason. The school that integral education movement builds is not only a school for the subject of reason but also a school for the integral human person whose full realization requires not only mental education but also physical, vital, psychic and spiritual. Our ethnography of this movement shows that the movement still has a long way to go in terms of radically interrogating and transforming power within and without but there is no doubt that it has made an important contribution to the development of a new education and a new pedagogy--a pedagogy which truly respects the integral person within the taught and contributes to her multi-dimensional unfoldment.

In his recent reflections on education and mis-education, Noam Chomsky raises some fundamental questions. Chomsky regrets that schools have been agents of socialization and miseducation and avoid "important truths" (Chomsky 2000: 21). In this context, it is the intellectual responsibility of

teacher--or any honest person, or that matter--to try to tell the truth" (ibi). Chomsky further tells us: "One should seek out an audience that matters. In teaching, it is students. They should not be seen merely as an audience but as part of a community of common concern in which one hopes to participate constructively. We should be speaking not *to* but *with*. That is the second nature to any good teacher, and it should be to any writer and intellectual as well. As good teacher knows that the best way to help students learn is to allow them to find the truth by themselves" (ibid: 24). Integral education strives for a practice of learning which is a practice of learning and discovering with and it is a striving to discover truth both within and without. The following lines of Chitta Ranjan Das contain creative response to the anxieties and concerns admirably posed by Chomsky about education and human destiny:

We have taken to education because we are convinced that it is primarily through education that a real beginning can be made towards desired change. We refuse to reduce education to a technique, to a system that can be run by a heartless band of people who have skills only. For us education is a whole job, a *sadhana* that claims the loyalty of the whole man. It begins by changing oneself before one sets out to change others. It means making oneself worthy of knowledge, power, truth and beauty before we at all think of making these available to others, especially to children (Das 1981: 8).

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1. The flexible body of integral education is different from the flexible body and body culture promoted by late capitalism where body becomes a flexible and ready instruments for the valorization of capital (cf. Martin 1994).
2. This is an ideal set by Das and in some schools we find a much more dedicated striving towards this. Still, as a whole, much needs to be done for following alternative method of evaluation and assessment.
3. Some of the enthusiastic and committed activists of integral education stress this much more emphatically. In a recent article, Mr. Santosh Kumar Panda, an activist of integral education and currently teaching in the integral school in Dhenkanal, writes that integral schools should take many more steps in involving the parents in the decision-making process of the school and here managers of the school must be prepared for a greater sharing of love, power and sorrows. As we shall see, in many schools, teachers still regularly visit parents which create a new bond of intimacy between two important actors in the lives of children--teachers and parents. In my recent fieldwork, I accompanied Anjali Apa, a deep and inspiring proponent of integral education and currently Principal of Integral Education School in Gopinathapur, Cuttack when she went in the evening to meet with some of the students who were to sit for their high school examinations.
4. Michel Foucault writes about it beautifully: "What strikes me is the fact that in our society art is now only linked to objects, rather than to individual or life itself. But couldn't we ourselves, each one of us, make of our lives a work of art? Why should a lamp or a house become the object of art and now our own life?" (Foucault)
5. In the Pathachakra movement in Orissa, Prapatti and Babaji Ramakrishna Das or popularly known as Babaji Maharaj in Orissa who were staying in Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry have played an important role. To this the Oriya translation, more appropriately said, Oriya transcreation of the major works of Sri Aurobindo and Mother by Chitta Ranjan Das added a new momentum. Prpatti, Babaji Maharaj and Chitta Ranjan Das are three major sources of inspiration in the integral education movement in Orissa today. As we shall see, they have their differential nuances. Both Prapatti and Babaji

Maharaj have passed away and it is Chitta Ranjan Das who is now striving to energize this movement making it still more child-centered and a vehicle of self-development and social transformation.

6. Rabi Bhai's distinction between spiritual sensation and long-term spiritual commitment finds support in the recent work of Robert Wuthnow. Wuthnow (1998) writes:

7. An example of competition is the way integral schools are extending their classes from 7th standard into high school without making proper arrangement for infrastructure such as science laboratory. As many schools in an area open high school none of them gets an adequate number of students.

8. In his recent work, philosopher of critical realism Roy Bhaskar (2000) has argued that non-judgemental observation, engaged action and unconditional love are the pillars of self-realization. Chitta Bhai and members of *Suhrut Gosthi* in Orissa have been striving to embody this and with this to galvanize the integral education movement which at some places has fallen into beaten tracks of conventional morality and systemic roles of society.

9. Sabita Apa had left Markona integral school on the ground that one teacher of the school enjoyed unquestioned power because of her proximity to the management.

Traditionally Exploited

Despite many efforts since independence, almost 90% of India's labour is in the unorganised sector. Working in farms, industry and commerce, they are among the most exploited of India's people. For the most part, the provisions of the Contract Labour (Abolition) Act have remained on paper, even as efforts at unionisation have had little success. Little has changed for most of these workers, and after years (sometimes generations) of service they have little livelihood security. Neither do they get paid for days they are sick or injured. There is no compensation if they break their backs or injure themselves. The fact that they may not be able to report to work is a burden carried on worn shoulders everyday. The government maintains that weakening labour regulations will improve their condition. By ensuring more 'flexibility' in the labour market, they reason, firms will offer competitive remuneration packages linked to the viability of business. Yet, as movements like the Hamal Panchayat show, the improvement of worker conditions can only be obtained by a rights-based struggle for dignity and against exploitation and by strengthening the framework of the existing law.

Called Hamals in Maharashtra, manual load carriers are the backbone of commercial activity in every city. In Pune, there are over 14000 Hamals engaged in regular work. They are responsible for loading and unloading trucks of many commodities, ranging from cloth to construction hardware. They also move heavy goods from one part of the city to the other and deliver most goods first to and then from markets. This heavy manual labour is spread over twelve to sixteen hour days. All payments are based on the loads carried. As casual workers doing physical labour, most workers primarily come from the more disadvantaged class and caste communities. Some flee even more exploitation in rural areas. They frequently face historic prejudice and exploitation. Even among these groups women are even more exploited than men are. They do not get equal pay for equal work. Though this is hard, back breaking work, there is little, if any material security. On a daily basis Hamals have to find work. Even this work can barely sustain the basic needs of their families. "Our society does not value manual work. The work of the head is prejudiced against work of the hands", says Baba Adhav, one of the Panchayat's earliest founder members. Most of these workers were working in

conditions where neither their safety nor their security was considered important. Their desperate need for work was used as an instrument to destitute them further.

The Beginnings of Organisation

In the mid fifties, even as Maharashtrians began a movement for the linguistic division of Bombay Presidency, casual labourers began demanding their rights against what was a prevalent exploitation by traders and transporters. In Mumbai, P. D'Mello began struggling for the rights of dockworkers and porters. At the same time Alvares tried to organise loaders at railway stations. Early demands made by Hamal and Mathadi these workers were for fair pricing of their labour. In the three markets of Pune, Nana Peth, Ganesh Peth and Bhawani Peth, Hamals had begun meeting regularly to share their problems and work on ways to alleviate these.

The earliest activity of the nascent Hamal Panchayat was maintaining a news board on street corners of Bhawani Peth. While the union was informal and unrecognised, these boards served to formalise and consolidate the Hamals working under this umbrella. It also served to understand the working conditions Hamals shared in the different warehouses. Till this time there was little information about the extent of work and employment of Pune's Hamals. Their positions, even as virtually permanent workers in the shops and godowns of Bhawani Peth, were precarious. The Shop and Establishments Act of 1948 did not require for Hamals to be on the employment rolls of business establishments. This meant that neither could they be eligible for various benefits, nor they would they have any legal recourse should they have been treated unfairly.

In a few years, the membership of the Hamal Panchayat was growing into a large and restive. The members of the Panchayat were getting more and more active to redress the problems associated with their exploitation. By 1956, the Hamals had taken out several protests to the offices and meetings of several government representatives, including the then Chief Minister, YB Chavan and President V. Giri. They demanded to know why the government, in its capacity of representing the interests of the masses, was continuing to allow their systematic exploitation. Sacrificing their daily wages, Hamals instead chose to take to the streets to pursue their long-term goals. They initiated consistent and novel protests (such as picketing offices with their hands tied) that demanded that the government recognise and redress the causes of their exploitation. The first response of the government was to suggest that contract labour be admitted in this sector, which would permit Mathadi workers to be employed by contractors in the service industry. Though this may have improved their condition marginally, most Hamals were not satisfied with this suggestion. They merely saw it as a way of allowing contractors to exploit them instead of traders. The structures of power would still not give them ownership of their labour, nor would it allow for a more secure, transformed livelihood.

Hamals therefore stepped up their campaign and demanding instead legislation that would grant them their rights as independent and unionised professionals.

Their first recognition as a union came in 1956, when, after an eight-day strike, Hamals were collectively asked by the traders to come to the negotiating table to discuss a revision in the commercial rates of service. The negotiations themselves lasted several days, as the prices of different loads were each negotiated and agreed to. At the end of these however, according to Baba Adhav, the traders were not willing to fix these in writing, instead insisting that these serve as a reference point for future transactions. It was then that the Pune collector, Mr. AV Sheikh, stepped in to mediate the matter. After consulting with both parties, he issued a statement detailing the various rates that Hamals were to be paid for their services. This was no small victory. Previously, load rates would not only depend exclusively on the trader, but his unequal position of power meant that he decided what was to be paid, whether it was fair or not. By fixing rates on the loads carried, Hamals were able to collectively ensure that they were not taken advantage of in this way again.

Formalization in Legislation: Provisions of the Law

The struggle however was far from over. While Mathadi workers managed to secure standardised rates for their services, they still were far from the sort of livelihood security they needed. It would take legislation to incorporate various welfare measures that protect most of the organised workforce. By using a combination of protest mobilisations and working with elected officials sympathetic to their cause, the Hamal Panchayat, as part of a larger state-wide movement, managed to see the passing of *The Maharashtra Mathadi, Hamal and Other Manual Workers (Regulation of Employment and Welfare Act)* in 1969.

Through this landmark legislation, Hamals were, for the first time recognised as workers engaged in regular employment, and entitled to all the privileges and benefits of permanent workers. According to the Act,

‘It is expedient to regulate the employment of unprotected manual workers such as, Mathadi, Hamal, etc., engaged in certain employments, to make better provisions for their terms and conditions of employment, to provide for their welfare, and for health and safety measures where such employments require these measures; to make provision for ensuring an adequate supply to and full and proper utilisation of, such workers.... (*The Maharashtra Mathadi, Hamal and Other Manual Workers (Regulation of Employment and Welfare) Act 1969*).

This Act applies to registered unprotected workers employed in connection with loading, unloading, stacking, carrying, weighing and measuring goods in grocery markets, factories, mills, commodities markets, metal markets and

railway yards. Besides fixed rates for these activities the Act also specifies social welfare provisions to safeguard these workers.

The Act provided for the creation of a Board, constituted of an equal proportion of Employer and Employee representatives, and chaired by a government appointee. The board would also oversee the implementation of the different welfare programs, and ensure that the obligations of all parties were fulfilled. Unfortunately, much of the otherwise progressive act was completely undermined by a single paragraph at the beginning of the act, which left its implementation to the discretion of the State Government.

It shall come into force on such date as the State Government may, by notification in the Official Gazette, appoint and different dates may be appointed for different areas, and for different employments, and for different provisions of the Act.

Thus, even as the State Government framed the law recognizing the threat to the health and safety of Hamals, they also decided that the protection of these would not be guaranteed across the state, but rather, in places where it chooses.

What this meant, therefore, was that the implementation of the Act in different areas depended on the workers of the area to strongly demand it. In areas which where Hamals have not been able to strong enough to demand it, this Act continues to remain unimplemented to date. This is the case even now, in most of the state outside the urban centers. Even in strong labour centers such as Mumbai, Pune, Thane and Nasik, different parts of the Act were notified and implemented at different times over the last thirty years.

The Pune Mathadi Board - Negotiating a Space for Hamals

While the stronger and more vocal dockyard workers and Hamals of Mumbai were able to quickly benefit from this legislation, things were not as easy for those in Pune. When the government finally approved the notification of the Act for Pune's workers in 1972, traders went to court protesting the decision. For eight years, the case languished in the Courts. In 1980, however, the Supreme Court ruled in favour of the Hamals and ordered that the Pune notification was legal and long overdue. With this significant victory, Hamals and their employers proceeded to constitute a Mathadi Board to mediate and institute social and economic protections for these workers.

Currently, the Mathadi Board of Pune has ten members in addition to the Government Labour Officer who serves as its chairman and is appointed by the state government. Businesses and Hamals each select five members to sit on the board. A representative of the Hamal Panchayat is also among the five mathadi/ hamal representatives on the board. The Board jointly takes decisions relating to the different contractual obligations of the employers and

employees. All Hamals are required to register themselves with the Mathadi Board. Once Hamals are registered with the Mathadi board, however, it mediates all aspects of the relationship between traders and Hamals. The Board opens up the registration process depending on the demand and supply of Hamals in the market. If there is too little work, or if business is slow, registration is restricted. Every three years the rates of wages are revised and fixed for all commodities and hamal activities. These depend on the rate of inflation and loads carried.

In Pune, traders and shopkeepers pay Hamals through the Mathadi board. Shopkeepers and Hamals alike keep a monthly diary of services rendered. Once each month, the employers make a cumulative wage payment to the Mathadi board which in turn pays the Hamals their dues. This process ensures that all workers are paid according to their prescribed rates. In addition to this, the employer has to also pay a 30% tax to the board. This amount is used to administer various welfare programs. Through the Mathadi Board, Hamals are assured various employment benefits associated with organised labour. These include provisions for their provident fund and gratuity. Approximately 12% of the employer's contribution goes towards these benefits, realisable upon their retirement, and assures them a certain degree of financial security. With the existence of a provident fund account, Hamals have the financial surety to be eligible for financial market loans against their provident fund capital in times of significant need, such as the purchase of a home or a wedding in the family. Hamals also now receive a small allowance that makes allowance for paid leave and paid vacation. Group accident cover, ensures that workers are protected against injuries and illnesses sustained in the line of work. They also receive a 12% Diwali bonus for their annual festival expenses.

Though the Mathadi Board controls the administration of all welfare programs, Hamals maintain that it works smoothly and with accountability. According to Datta Pawar, a hamal for over forty years, the Mathadi Board does not harass workers because of strong vigilance and accountability of the Hamals concerned. Nor is it a heavy administration that needs large inputs to sustain it. The operating expenses of the Mathadi Board account for less than 2% of the total operating expenditure. For the services it renders and the security it assures registered Hamals of fairness, justice and livelihood security, this is a small price to pay. By the very nature of its composition, Pune's Hamals have finally been placed in an equal relationship with their employers.

Transforming the Community

The Mathadi board has enabled a degree of security and stability to the life of organised Hamals. But the democratisation of political power is deep rooted in the structure of the Panchayat. According to statistics of Mr. Bhosale, the Office Bearer of the Panchayat, approximately four thousand of the twelve thousand Hamals in Pune are active members of the Hamal Panchayat. Open

elections are held once every three years, where Hamals elect the ten-committee members to represent them in the Hamal Panchayat. These members are selected with particular attention that all the different markets have representatives in the Panchayat. Two positions in the Panchayat are reserved for women. In addition, Hamals also elect administrative officers such as the president, vice presidents, treasurers and secretaries.

These representatives meet every Wednesday to articulate concerns that arise in the different markets of Pune. Based on these discussions, collective decisions are taken to work out the different problems they face. Oftentimes, action is taken by approaching the Mathadi Board or the Government. But what distinguishes the Hamal Panchayat from other trade unions is the socio-political context and approach that characterise its work. Deriving its inspiration from the ideologies of Jyotibha Phule and Baba Ambedkar, Hamals have taken the responsibility of their own social and economic transformation upon themselves. In areas where the solutions cannot be derived from peoples' representatives in government, they frequently initiate their own social programs. Using their collective resources, they have initiated a number of projects, which epitomise the spirit of giving, sharing and building an actively transformed future.

In 1974, a small kitchen was opened to provide lunch facilities for the workers at the Hamal Panchayat office. The emphasis was to provide food that was fresh, healthy and affordable. Many Hamals, after exerting themselves physically all day had little access to food that was affordable. To reduce the pain of hunger and exertion many had taken to drinking to reduce their suffering. This also caused problems in the home. When money was spent on alcohol, families had to also go hungry. Yet not only Hamals but also poor people of the entire city needed this service. It was at this point that the concept of Kashtachi Bhakar took root. Here Hamals started a non-subsidised food kitchen that produced cheap food, cooked daily on a no-profit no-loss basis. Today, Kashtachi Bhakar is distributed daily through ten centres in the markets of Pune. Over 15000 rotis are now prepared everyday, along with vegetables, farsan and a sweet. Taking advantage of the large quantities of food required, Hamals negotiate purchases directly with vendors that bring produce into the city. As a result entire meals are extremely affordable, and range between Rs. 2 and Rs.10. Besides providing wholesome affordable food, Kashtachi Bhakar also provides gainful employment for over 130 women. In the central kitchen you will find them busy at work, cooking and dispatching food with an alarming alacrity. These women, who are also unionised and receive employment benefits, are from within the Hamal community, working to support their children in case their husbands are otherwise indisposed or deceased. They are also part of the managing committee in the Hamal Panchayat meetings.

The Hamal Panchayat has also built a community centre, which serves as a cultural centre for various activities. With a loan taken from the Mathadi Welfare Board, they proceeded to build a three-storied *Hamal Bhavan*. The building was constructed with mostly Hamal labour and consequently did not cost as much. The cultural centre is also a space for weddings and other social events. Panchayat members often rent this space at rates that are much below those charged by commercial establishments, directly reducing the large debts that such occasions often place on the family. Hamal Bhavan also now houses a school where approximately 200 children, primarily from the backward castes and classes study. Books and uniforms are provided free of cost by the Hamal Panchayat for those children whose parents cannot afford to buy these. Children between the ages of 10 and 16 can therefore learn in an atmosphere that is lively and stimulating.

Most recently, the Hamal Panchayat has commissioned the construction of Hamal Nagar. To fulfil the need for safe and sustainable housing, the Hamal Panchayat has organised a credit facility with a nationalised bank to assist Hamals with the purchase of these homes. All loans are scrutinised and guaranteed by the Hamal Panchayat and the Mathadi Board. With access to bank credit and affordable housing Hamals can now improve their quality of their lives. All applications are made directly to the Hamal Panchayat. After scrutinising the applications, the Panchayat makes a recommendation to the Bank to sanction a housing loan. This loan finances 75% of the housing cost. Typically, however the Hamal also has to raise the remaining 25% from the commercial credit market. Hamal Nagar is located adjacent to the new Market Yard and this permits Hamals to work not far from their homes. Market Yard is itself a rather new development, the result of a long-standing demand for better working conditions and an effort to decongest Pune. In the 1980s Pune's overburdened markets were relocated to Market Yard, on the outskirts of the city. The operations were supervised by the Market Committee, which ensured that the necessary infrastructure for a decongested trading centre was in place. Today, Panchayat representatives also sit on the committee to ensure that workplace safety and decisions are taken with the participation of the workers concerned.

A Growing Movement of the Exploited

But the Hamal Panchayat goes beyond just organising a previously unorganised workforce. Through networking and organising, the Panchayat is also making linkages with other unorganised labourers in an effort to organise them as well. It is an active part of the Phule Samta Pratishtan, which serves as an organising center for the different workers unions in Pune. With a focussed emphasis on uniting the most exploited workers in Pune, the Pratishtan has forced a social transformation of a significant proportion of the labour force in Pune. Now, Hamals share the successes of their organisation with a number of other workers of Pune's large service industry, including rickshaw and tempo drivers, rag pickers and waste recyclers, handicapped

people and farmers. These unions meet frequently, sharing the best strategies for breaking the shackles of the exploitation of their labour. Oftentimes, they coordinate their activities that tend towards achieving wider social objectives. One of these initiatives is an ongoing campaign to criminalise the exploitation of labour.

The group is also a strident defender of civil liberties and constantly are in touch with social and political developments in the state and national governments. In October of 2001, they took to the streets together to offer their solidarity and support to movements that were struggling against the Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance. Their information and knowledge is actively and consistently built up. For the purpose, many use the Phule Granthalaya, that contains books and documentation that helps develop and keep informed them about various social and political issues. At their offices in Market Yard ever morning, those who can attend a reading and discussion session do so, where they discuss their histories and futures.

Such examinations and studies lead to a questioning of different forms of prejudice in society and also in the Panchayat. The status of women Hamals is particularly low, and they are paid less than their male counterparts. Similarly, the lower castes and classes, even within the Hamals frequently were forced to service the less desirable markets and industries, such as those of the coal and the cement. Against these prejudices, the Hamal Panchayat has also registered strong movement that is internally and externally directed. It has ensured that the Mathadi Act has included provisions that guarantee women equal pay for equal work, and also that women are eligible for maternity benefits. It has simultaneously ensured that working conditions have been improved in the more hazardous sectors, reducing the danger and undesirability of this work.

The ethic of the Hamal Panchayat also extends to helping and working with rural groups struggling for justice. Through the Maharashtra Hamal Mahamandal, they try to organise mathadi workers in the smaller commercial centres all over the state of Maharashtra. In 2000, they also offered their premises to host village khadi industries exhibition during diwali. The community actively attempted to revive this industry at a time when it was in a state of decay. Says Binawle a long time member of the Panchayat, “nowadays our village industries are getting destroyed. With the bonus that we get in diwali, we thought we would do our part in encouraging these industries.” During this time, many Hamals and others advertised and sold this khadi to the public.

The Hamal Panchayat has had significant successes in organizing Hamals into a democratically functioning workforce that believes in transforming itself into a more empowered collective. Yet, at the same time, the Hamal Panchayat is very aware that its successes need to be extended to other Hamals and

Mathadi workers throughout the country. Even as in Maharashtra, the struggle continues to make the 1969 legislation mandatory and applicable in all markets of the state. Baba Adhav believes that a national law for Mathadi workers is urgently needed so that their exploitation in smaller cities is not permitted. At the same time, they are demanding that Hamals not be required to carry loads that exceed 50 kilos. Citing norms laid down by the maximum permissible load according to the International Labor Organization, Hamals are recommending these be adopted. Using different pressure points and different campaign strategies the Hamal Panchayat works with government at times and on its own at others, ensuring the transformation of a united workforce that is far more difficult to exploit. This transformation has brought the Hamals into a politicised citizenry that empowers them with the authority to improve their situation.

Conclusion

Yet, all is not well for the future of Hamals as the nature of business change in Pune. Over the years the amount of goods being traded in Pune has significantly decreased. Many Hamals believe that this is a consequence of increased mobility as vendors selling their goods directly to retailers in the smaller districts of the state. Further, this problem has been exacerbated by the change in the nature of packaging of most commodities. As package sizes become smaller for many goods traders seldom need to use Hamals, and instead use their shop assistants. These two factors result in a more aging hamal population. Few Hamals are registered these days. To make matters worse, the proposed changes in labour reform threaten to roll back the work of the Mathadi Board and the Mathadi Workers Act. Mathadi workers like Pawar believe that these changes while they come from the World Bank threaten the progress and the livelihood security the Hamals have struggle for over the last forty years. Once contract work is allowed in this sector, he believes, it will not be long before contractors begin to undercut organised Mathadi workers and exploit those whom they employ.

The organisation of Hamals into a collective was motivated by the urgent need to institute workforce protections and livelihood security into a profession and class that has been frequently exploited. The Mathadi Act, as a piece of legislation gave legal sanctity to their demands of justice and dignity. Yet the success of the Hamal Panchayat lies in enforcing the various protections granted by the legislation. It also lies in the ability of the Panchayat to respond to the own needs of its members. By addressing these using the resources and labour available to it, the Panchayat has been effective in improving the quality of life of its members. As one more seed of hope that is always growing and developing, we can look forward to the Hamal Panchayat fertilising and engaging with other traditionally exploited groups struggling for legitimacy and justice.

GOVERNANCE
Sashakt- The Challenge of Change
MAHARASHTRA

Neeta Patel¹

Introduction

To many, *Parsik Hill* is an eyesore. But for the thousands of families who are trying every bit to make it their home, it is perhaps their last straw of hope. Barring less than a hundred tribal families who belong to *Parsik Hill*, all are migrants who have been pushed out from their original land. So we find people from everywhere, from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, and, of course, from rural Maharashtra, jostle for a few square feet of land.

They are the marginalized. For, who else would try to build a home on the slopes of a hillock with no basic amenities like water, toilets, drains, solid waste management, roads and electricity. No schools. No health facilities. No government or NGO intervention. They have no choice but to bear it all.

And for all practical purpose, the community does not figure anywhere in government records. They are “encroachers”, with no legal status, and are to be evicted, today or tomorrow. Therefore, they have no right to subsidies, schemes or outreach services. In this background, one could well imagine the status of women and children. Poverty, minimal access to resources, illiteracy, poor living conditions and social restrictions contribute to the violative conditions with regard to women’s rights. They have little space and scope for participating in the decision-making processes for development, both within the family and in the community.

The condition of women, in turn, deprives children of basic nutrition, health and education. A large number of children are out-of-school and many are working. The girl child remains discriminated against and this is quite visible. While even issues like rights of the child and child protection have not figured in the community’s priority, it is difficult even to imagine the level of children’s participation in decision-making within the family and in the community.

The challenge then was to bring women and children into the focus of the community. Bhaskarnagar was one of the more difficult pockets in terms of

¹ With inputs from Seema K.

access, the language, the largely migrant north Indian population, and the status of women. They believed that any development, if at all, could only be because of external interventions and this gave the community a very passive receiving character. Also, there had been no intervention of any kind before.

The interactions and activities with children helped break the ice and served as an entry point. Initially, as the community organizers facilitated regular play sessions with children, the women watched from a distance. It didn't take long before they too joined to participate, to play, and children would grumble as their sessions began to be taken over by their mothers. The need was simple: a space for recreation, where they could run and jump and laugh; where they could give expression to their feelings and thoughts; a space where they could be themselves and call it their own. It was with these playful mothers that the process first began.

The space thus created saw the women express their dreams and aspirations, a wish to be respected by the family and the community, a need to be heard and understood, a desire to reach out and to be accepted. They wanted to learn to read and write. Not a smooth process though, placed in a disapproving community as they were. The classes went on nevertheless making a group structure possible. Learning to sign was an achievement, giving them the confidence to take up other demonstrations and dimensions of change. Earlier too, the women did come together for informal talks. The sessions attempted a structure and provided a direction to their thought process attempting a feeling of a collective. Acting as a barrier in this unlearning and learning process, was the culture of silence. The silence, however, would not last long as women were eager to listen, to share, to probe...

The coming together was an example for others to initiate similar processes in their areas. Different groups had different priorities. Potable drinking water was definitely a need. Toilets were a concern for others. Ration cards, schools, health facilities... the list was endless. The women themselves, however, figured nowhere in the list. The sessions would try and bring women into focus, to enable them understand their own life situation, to take up proactive roles for themselves, their families and the community. With the gradual formalization, the test for the facilitators, and for women themselves, lay in sustaining the group processes. Both the groups and the facilitators underwent trial and tribulations as groups that bound with enthusiasm earlier were seen to lose interest and disintegrate due to various reasons. Within groups there were women eager to take the process ahead while there were others who felt they were not prepared. There were women who felt insecure in speaking out in the open or venturing beyond their own *chawl*. Some also withdrew saying that failures only added to their frustration and stress. The groups that survived had dared to enter into a dialogue, tried to own the process and were willing to

act. The other groups waited on the sidelines, watching cautiously the process. They would eventually join.

The following three case studies have been selected to present an overview of ways in which groups struggle to understand and imbibe the concept of self-help.

Vishwas (meaning “trust” in Hindi)

Water for most part of the year remained a scarcity. Women lived with a constant preoccupation of getting water for the day and toiled up and down the hills umpteen times to fill their share. The situation worsened in the summers when the few hand pumps in the area dried up leaving the women with the only other alternative - to buy water from private tankers. This gave way to expression of agony, frustration and resulted in women taking up a struggle to bring water to their community.

Members of *Vishwas* group led the struggle and stirred the community to come together for water. They convinced the men folk from the otherwise defunct *chawl* committees to participate. In a first-ever general meeting in the community, they could mobilize a huge crowd. And for the first time they discussed issues related to basic amenities as a right. Water, of course, was a priority. In order to involve the larger community, *Vishwas*, together with other groups, carried out a signature campaign in different *chawls* of *Bhaskarnagar*. The women while explaining the process to others faced questions of credibility of the process. They had to win the trust of unwilling men for their signatures and deal with their doubts and fears. Representatives of SHGs then met the local Corporator and the Mayor demanding safe drinking water. As a result of this process, municipal water did reach some pockets in the community.

Even as some groups celebrated their success, others including *Vishwas* felt let down. It would take another struggle to bring water near their doorstep. It would take another process for them to believe in a struggle!

Hamar Gueya (meaning “our friends” in Bhojpuri)

In the bylanes of *Bhaskarnagar* an animated group of women are seen going around with paper, pen and stamp pads. They would stop at every house and explain the content of a memorandum to the person. “Sign only if you agree. Just remember that it is our need. Unless we make a demand for it, no one is going to give it to us.” Tired, yet glowing with a sense of achievement, the women hand over the remaining task to their men. The men do the rounds during the nights. Within a week the task is complete. Confidence flows through the group binding it all the more strongly.

But confidence didn’t come easily to *Hamar Gueya*, a SHG that shied away from formal meetings and large-scale activities. They led a protected existence that did not require them even to step out of their houses. Water, ration, clothes... the men arranged for everything. It was then a struggle for the

women to come together for their weekly meetings. “What’s the need?” the men would ask. The apprehension being that their women would be misguided by all the talks about contraceptives. Convincing the men, talking to other women, taking up responsibilities, voicing their concerns, putting up their board... the group had come a long way from their passive receiving character.

Now, they had come together for a signature campaign to demand a water connection to their part of the hill. The campaign required them to take up leadership roles and act as motivators for the rest of the community. Keeping their *ghoonghat* intact, the women kept working at their task. Eventually, the strength of their conviction and their efforts forced the men and the rest of the community to acknowledge them as a force to reckon with.

The initial interactions with the group had been on an individual level. Attempts were made to involve women in conducting a need assessment of their area. While the group talked about absence of basic necessities, lack of toilets was listed as the first priority. There was no water too. Coupled

with the bad roads and the forever threatening forest and railway officials, the women were an irate lot. Their attempts at maintaining hygiene were all in vain. With every rain, they would once again be smothered in the wastes of the hill. They loathed their existence on the hill and longed to go back to their homes, their villages, their land...

The coming together then was initially a cathartic process. Women would pour their hearts out. There was so much to say and ask. The foundation of the group lay in the strong sense of friendship that came to define their group... and hence the name *Hamar Gueya*.

The meetings were dominated by the presence of children. They were many and a cause for concern. The persistent coughs, colds, fevers, diarrhoea bouts said everything about their access to basic health services. No one in the group even knew that a health post existed. Health then came to the forefront in the meetings. The most frequently asked questions were related to reproductive health. After a point of time, the group wanted to know about the body, more than about children and reproduction. The need was to understand the body, to be able to respond to its needs, to free oneself from the many misconceptions that one lived with, all in the context of one’s body.

Sessions followed. And a wonderful process of learning through sharing began. The outcome was encouraging. Behavioural changes set examples, expectant women would be monitored through their diets and regular check ups at the health post, the children would be referred for vaccinations and persistent aches were now attended to. The group would learn to voice their feelings in

their families and let themselves be heard. The struggle was against the very passive attitude of taking things lying down.

Things were not smooth though. Women would get battered, violence being an integral part of their existence. At one point, the group would end up in tears. So many obstructions, so many hurdles, a life long of difficulties... would it be possible ever to get redemption from all this? Would living mean putting up with unhappiness all the time? Was there no solace, no escape, no way out? Anger and tears did not limit them. The violence and the frequency of the same were questioned. Strong in their analysis and assessment skills, the group knew what action had to be taken. It was very clearly communicated that no kind of violence with the women would be allowed to get away with. The group spread its arms around each other... The relationship was based on emotions. The support system existed and functioned in an atmosphere of love and belonging. The frequent quarrels that followed every meeting then did nothing to mar the spirit of the group, which would come together as one in times of need.

That would be how the group would learn to understand and tackle the diarrhoea menace by taking preventive and curative measures. The ORS depots that followed were all attempts at understanding the seriousness of the disease and the need for curbing it. Adding to their confidence were the visits to the health post to meet the Medical Officer and work on the demand for basic health facilities within the community. The group though still shied away from going out much and interacting with officials. The quarrels too, continued.

All attempts at tying down this group into a structure, met with failure. The group rejected the thrift-and-credit initiative that was introduced to help them come and function in a regular structure. Since the agenda did not belong to the group, the initiative failed. This fact was established in the presentations that the group made during the women's day celebrations. It was a demonstration in group strength, a communication of confidence and beliefs... evident in the quiet, yet firm rendition of the song, "*tod tod ke bandhano ko dekho behne aate hain*"

Bandhan (meaning "bonding, togetherness, " in Hindi)

The women from *Bandhan* group were late entrants in the struggle for water. And when the water connection reached their *chawl*, it was natural that the group was jubilant. The group's motivation ran high and soon various other issues found place in their agenda; be it sanitation, education, health, ration card... Through a process of repeated discussions within the group, it was decided to build community toilets in the area. Since land was scarce and *dadas* controlled the same, the women approached them for some space. The response was positive but the space being offered did not quite suit the group's need. A lack of confidence to assert and to negotiate has delayed the decision.

The group is convinced about the benefits of thrift-and-credit (T&C). And so the group tried to initiate the T&C process. Twice they tried but failed. The reasons were many: difficulty in making timely payments, withdrawal of some members from the group who had to leave for their village, and a feeling of insecurity about the money being contributed. The group is all set to make one more attempt. And this time they hope to be better prepared with rules and regulations in place.

Next, the group embarked on procuring ration cards. Women from the group met with representatives of *Rationing Kruti Samiti*, a network of organizations working on the issue, and discussed the possible course of action. They brought together other SHGs and drafted a letter to the Rationing Officer voicing their concern and demands. Recently, representatives from *Bandhan* and other groups from *Parsik Hill* participated in a *morcha* to Mantralaya that was organized by *Rationing Kruti Samiti*. For the first time in their lives, they went upto Azad Maidan, mingled with women from similar backgrounds and marched with them for a common cause.

A visit by the Education Officer of Thane Municipal Corporation (TMC) to the area triggered an active role of this group. The women, together with children, set about identifying out-of-school children in their community. Armed with the survey findings, they enthusiastically worked towards implementing the *Sandhi Shalas* under the *Mahatma Phule Shikshan Hami Yojana*. The group members were instrumental in finding a space for the *shala* and the required number of out-of-school children. The *shala* is in its fourth month now. The trained volunteer from the community continues to conduct the class even though she is yet to receive her honorarium from TMC. Perhaps, therein lies the strength of the *Bandhan*.

The Process Continues...

In the past eighteen months, *Sashakt's* struggle has been to reach out to the 'poorest-of-the-poor' and respecting their agenda. All through, the stress of the intervention has been on capacity building through meetings, activities, events and campaigns; use of low-cost, need-based and area-specific communication material; formation of groups; strengthening their network; and establishing linkages with government departments.

The community processes in *Bhaskarnagar* have witnessed formation of SHGs, many of whom have been active in voicing and taking responsibility of their own issues as also taking the planned action. While the facilitators have guided and supported these processes, the task in many other groups has not been easy. Women still find it difficult to venture out of their *basti*. Sustaining the active groups too has been a big challenge for the facilitators as the struggle for rights is a long drawn battle and tendency to expect fast results still persists. More challenging has been the task of facilitating the process of ownership of issues. Bringing along with a positive change in the passive receiving character of the community at large.

Motivation fluctuates within the group structure testing the perseverance of the group. With every rift, the group emerges stronger, better armed with conflict resolutions methods. Only the strongest of the groups survive the division in thoughts and opinions. And there are not many who do. Thrift-and-credit, which is seen to hold groups together has been in many cases the reason for the breaking down of the groups.

Amenities like toilets, electricity, education, ration card and health have still to be pursued in an effective and workable manner. Linkages with the concerned authorities need to be built and strengthened. The task of working towards change of government attitude to work closely with the community in their development is a continuous challenge as each issue is voiced and taken up. Inaction and delays in implementation of government commitment often act as a discouraging force.

The ultimate test for women and for the facilitators lay in sustaining the processes that would enable women to take on the leadership to define and decide and participate in community issues that affect their lives.

A strong desire to bring in change has been the driving force in these community processes and the restlessness at times, the disappointments at other times have seen the groups coming up again and again, expressing just that one force - a desire to change.

Amidst umpteen challenges, the community processes with women facilitated by the *Sashakt* team has helped transform a totally unreached urban community to the one which now is in recognition of itself and in recognition of government, moving towards empowerment and development through its SHGs.

GOVERNANCE
The Allapuzha Community Development Society
KERALA

Harini Ramani

Introduction

In an era of globalization where the market acquires supremacy perhaps often to the detriment of the poorest who lose control over their livelihood patterns, decentralization, it has been argued, could act as a countervailing force empowering people to acquire control over vital decisions influencing their lives. In the Indian context, direct local democracy has been mandated constitutionally by the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992. With the ultimate objective of initiating a process where people were to be given a say in how their communities would develop with their elected representatives at the local level being empowered to act in their common interest, these amendments provided for political, administrative, functional and financial devolution of powers from the state government to the local bodies.

In an attempt to institute and sustain a process of such democratic decentralization, the State Planning Board in Kerala, India, resolved to initiate a People's Planning Campaign (PPC) in 1996 to empower local governing bodies to draw up a five-year plan within their respective areas of responsibility. This Campaign takes place in five phases starting with the identification of people's needs and gaps in local development at the village assembly level. 'Development seminars' are then held, with representatives, officials and experts to discuss a 'panchayat development report' - a printed document that details village development issues and challenges, data, appraisals and sector surveys. From this broad statement, 'task forces' set about to 'projectise' development approaches to be adopted in each panchayat culminating in the formulation of a panchayat plan. A process of integrating village level plans is then carried out at the block and district levels. The campaign has not just decentralized functions of a government bureaucracy; it has decentralized planning while mobilizing the energy of hundreds of thousands of activists and volunteers to go beyond what government-funded projects can accomplish.

However even prior to 1996, Kerala has successfully experimented with democratic decentralization and participatory planning. This paper focuses on a particular experience of the Allapuzha district in Kerala wherein a participatory bottom-up planning approach developed primarily by the community with support from UNICEF, the State government and the local government, is utilized in the governance of urban poverty alleviation – the Allapuzha Community Development Society (CDS).

Locating the Poor

Currently India, in addition to a process of rising urbanization is experiencing an equally dramatic shift in the location of poverty with the urban poor now constituting around 40% of the poor in all of India. The state of urban poor is reflected in its magnitude and data reflecting poor health and education indicators; poor sanitation and housing. Further women in India constitute the largest section of the urban poor. Centrally sponsored schemes targeting the urban poor such as the Urban Basic Services (UBS) Scheme have been implemented since 1986. However, there was no clear strategy at the local body level to implement poverty alleviation programs of the Centre and the State so as to facilitate effective stakeholder and community participation in the implementation of the programs. Moreover (perhaps consequently), there were several intermediary resource leaks due to which benefits seldom reached the target beneficiaries. These key observations (true to poverty eradication schemes in India, in general) were revealed in a community based impact study of Allapuzha town, (one of the best performing UBS towns in India) conducted in 1992.

In an exercise that marked the beginning of the involvement of the community and the eventual formation of the CDS, the results of this survey were intensely discussed especially amongst the poor women who came together to express their own needs. It was mutually felt that poverty, defined by an income criterion alone did not work as income data was difficult to obtain and subject to manipulations. An alternative approach of identifying the poor by the community itself was required. Further, the women wanted a formal community structure with powers for planning, implementation, monitoring and raising resources. This structure was to be linked to the Municipality at the local level, so as to function as an out reach service of the Municipality, but without direct interference in their self-management procedures.

The result of this exercise was the development of a “poverty-index” with the assistance of UNICEF. The index was based on nine risk factors that the community itself could identify, thus providing little scope for

manipulation. The poverty index was to consist of these nine verifiable risk factors and families facing four or more of these risks were considered families below the poverty line:

1. Thatched / *Katcha* (temporary) house/ Sub standard house or hut
2. Having no latrine
3. Only one person in the family has employment
4. There is at least one uneducated person
5. There is at least one child of 0 – 5 years old
6. Non-availability of drinking water within a radius of 500ft
7. At least one person uses intoxicants
8. Family belonging to the Scheduled Caste or tribe
9. Has means only for less than two meals a day

Local Development Committees- Functional Development

The next step in the evolution of the CDS was the formulation of an organizational structure conducive to self-management by the women in particular. The CDS structure is a three-tier system. The basic unit is the Neighborhood group (NHG), consisting of 20-40 families and five elected resident community volunteers. The Area Development Society (ADS) at the ward level consists of a number of NHG's. At the town level the Community Development Society (CDS), is the apex body of which the ADS's of the town can be considered various branches. The NHG using the above described poverty index, identifies the poorest in the community. Next, the NHG prepares the micro plan or the NHG plan, based on the felt needs of the community. The ADS Governing Committee receives all the micro plans, integrates them and thus prepares the mini plan or the ADS plan. These mini-plans are given to the town CDS, which integrates the CDS town plan, culminating the bottom-up planning process.

The NHG's, the ADS's and CDS elect their office bearers. The NHG elects the NHG president and the NHG committee for a period of two years. Similarly the ADS elects its president and governing council and the CDS elects its president and governing board. The tenure of all the office bearers is two years and they can be elected only for two terms.

This organizational structure is linked to the Municipal system of the state. The municipal officials are ex-office member secretaries of the ADS and the CDS. However while the former's expertise is sought in the integration of plans, they do not have voting rights. This ensures that decision-making power rests only with the elected women office bearers at different levels.

In terms of financial autonomy, under section 284 of Kerala Municipalities Act, 1994, every Municipality is required to create a separate Urban Poverty Alleviation (UPA) fund account. By this law, 2% of the total revenue of the municipality is to be transferred to the UPA fund account. The Municipal Secretary transfers this entire fund to the CDS and all expenses are processed through the CDS system. Further, the CDS is empowered by the government to mobilize resources from different agencies and departments, in addition to the funds available from the Central and State governments towards poverty alleviation. Similarly the CDS is empowered to mobilize bulk loans from commercial banks for self-employment, a feature, which significantly enhances the quality of this program, as, will be explained shortly. Also the CDS has a mandate to draw up affordable and cost effective housing scheme for the poor and mobilize finances from agencies such as the Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUDCO). All this gives the CDS an opportunity to mobilize funding with minimum bureaucratic interference and a consequently with minimum loss of time.

CDS at Work- Allapuzha

The above-mentioned bottom-up participatory planning approach successfully mobilized and organized the poor women in the governance of poverty-alleviation. In 1993, the Allapuzha CDS consisted of 350 Neighborhood groups with 10304 women members, representing the 10304 poor families out of a total town population of about 35000 families. Each of the NGH's conducts a survey at an interval of two years using the poverty index. The reduction in the cumulative risk factors is thus measured and compared to base-line data. Families whose risks have been reduced are replaced by a new set of poor families. Thus the approach is impact-oriented. Effective coordination and integration is achieved since all urban poverty schemes are routed through the CDS system and are focused on the same target families as notified by the NHG.

A qualitative change in the programs possibilities was brought about with NABARD extending its assistance in the formation of a micro-credit system linked to the formal banking institutions. This provided access to credit to the poor with the intension of generating opportunities for self-employment. These loans were disbursed and recovered in-group meetings. This ensured transparency and a system of peer monitoring ensured that default was almost nil. Provision for self-employment opportunities (rather than a mere transfer of funds) bootstrapped the beneficiaries out of poverty since they could return the borrowed sums and still be above the poverty line. It is this feature that contributed significantly to the sustainability of this approach.

Further, the CDS system provided for the undertaking of public projects such as construction of say public toilets, roads etc. Unique to this approach, the NHG plan allowed the community to decide what the most leveraged project for its particular area would be. These projects served a dual purpose. Firstly they improved the quality of life in the community by providing a public good with a long life. Secondly by paying wages for those who worked on these projects, they managed to directly alleviate poverty. The key in all these cases was that the community itself decided the target beneficiaries and the most required projects. This in itself constituted an improvement over a situation where typically the government would fail to undertake projects because of bureaucratic obstacles, corruption or simple unawareness of the most needed development project or a combination of the above.

The Allapuzha CDS now has its own office premises given by the local body. The CDS training center is set up in this campus. The women of Allapuzha provide training for women coming from several districts in Kerala as well as other states. As a measure of the sustainability to this approach, it is to be noted that since the CDS as an institution is owned and managed by the community, there is a sense of accountability which in turn ensures that planning, implementing and monitoring of all programs under the CDS is done with efficiency.

A Model for Kerala State

Since 1993, the CDS program has begun covering a target population of two million in Kerala with 11050 NHG's, 1335 ADS's and 37065 women members and 55250 community volunteers. The approach is already being replicated in 58 towns and one entire district of Kerala and currently covers around 30% of the urban poor in the state. It has influenced the State Government to initiate a mass based poverty eradication program in association with NABARD under a ten-year period to eradicate poverty from the State.

Further, as an indicator to the success with which the CDS system has mobilized the lot of the urban poor and improved their quality of life in Allapuzha, the Central Government of India has adopted certain salient features of this approach for all urban areas in India through the national scheme called *Swarna Jayanti Shahari Rozgar Yojana*. While this approach has been replicated in other parts of Kerala, its replicability at an all-India level seems rather doubtful. This is perhaps primarily because while stakeholder participation is required for the success of any poverty alleviation program, it is informed participation that is more desirable here. Herein lies one fundamental factor associated with Kerala in particular, that ultimately generates successful

peoples participation, whether one considers the CDS system of Allapuzha or the People's Campaign, initiated later in 1996.

Kerala's long-term achievements in bringing a high material quality of life to its people even at low levels of economic development—the well-known "Kerala Model." Over much of the 20th century, Kerala's people organised to bring about near first world levels of literacy, life expectancy, birth rates and infant mortality, an effective public food distribution system, a land reform that undercut the exploitation of the privileged castes, and an agricultural labourers' act that codified wages, working conditions, and benefits (Franke and Chasin 1994; Jeffrey 1993; United Nations 1975). Universal education in particular was bought about by concerted public action in the form of social mobilization that began in the turn of the 20th century in Kerala. In terms of demographic indicators, the overall adult literacy rate, male adult literacy rate and female adult literacy rate for India is 51.2, 64 and 39 respectively. The same indicators for Kerala are 90, 93.6 and 86.3 respectively. Allapuzha performs even better than the state where the same figures for Allapuzha are 93.66, 96.42 and 91.14 respectively (UNDP, 1997). Such a population endowed with human capabilities and education in particular can be mobilized for further changes more easily than those who have seen fewer accomplishments. Further literacy positively influenced the quality of stakeholder participation and the decisions that followed. Thus at an all-India level, if one is to counter the effects that illiteracy has on the quality of participation, then greater emphasis on capacity building of the community is required.

In conclusion, given the magnitude of poverty in India, its eradication is an immense challenge. The Allapuzha CDS system is only a means by which decentralization as implied by the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments (1992) can be implemented in substance rather than in form, where it makes a positive difference to the lives of a majority of Indians.

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GOVERNANCE
Tawa Matsya Sangh (TMS)
MADHYA PRADESH

Meena Menon

Introduction

“We are not asking for their bungalows or helicopters, we only want to fish in this reservoir which they have built. They displaced us to build a dam, now at least let us use its waters for our livelihood.”

The words of Guliabai, who was displaced by the Tawa dam, hide a world of meaning. When you see a fisherman casting his net in the turbid waters of the Tawa reservoir, little do you realise how much has gone into that single action. What you don't see is the long years of struggle, as displaced people, as adivasis whose skills became redundant, as neo-literates in one sense, in fishing, and lastly, as a collective group trying to gain rights to fish resources in the Tawa reservoir. Guliabai's simple demand can make the difference between survival and starvation for many people here.

In a span of ten years, many Korkus and Gonds who had very little to do with fishing, have now become fairly adept at it. They use dragnets or hooks, build their own boats and recently, even acquired a ten-hp boat. They are part of the Tawa Matsya Sangh (TMS), a federation of cooperative fishing societies in Hoshangabad district of Madhya Pradesh which has been making profits for the last five years.

In the somewhat turbulent history of the Tawa reservoir, this is probably the first time, most of the people displaced by it, have utilised its resources well and even increased the size and quantity of the fish catch in its waters.

Forty-four villages were displaced by the dam on Tawa, a tributary of the Narmada River, the first major multipurpose project in the Narmada Basin Development Plan. A large portion of the reservoir falls in Kesla block of Hoshangabad district, an area which is notified under the Fifth schedule of the constitution. The average productive area of the reservoir is about 12,145 hectares. The Tawa dam submerged about 20,050 hectares of land, and affected 4145 families. Since 27 of the 44 villages

were forest villages, the adivasis had no legal title to land. Rehabilitation of sorts was only provided to the revenue villages.

Fag Ram, a director of the Tawa Matsya Sangh, said people from 81 villages were displaced by four projects in Hoshangabad- the Ordnance factory, the Proof range, Tawa dam and the Satpuda national park. "Farmers lost valuable agricultural land and now most of them engage in draw down cultivation. Fishing was not the traditional custom here but we decided that it was a way of earning a livelihood. We all learnt how to spread nets, use boats and slowly acquired some expertise in the art of fishing," he explained.

Kisan Adivasi Sanghatana

Kisan Adivasi Sanghatana (KAS) was set up in 1985 to work with the displaced people in this area. Led by the Sanghatana, the adivasis took part in a sustained struggle for fishing rights. They held boat rallies, machli (fish) satyagrahas, staged rasta rokos, faced lathi charges and some of their leaders had criminal cases filed against them. "We demanded proper rehabilitation of villages displaced by the four projects. We were inspired by the movement of people displaced by the Bargi dam (also in Madhya Pradesh), which was demanding fishing rights," said Sunil of KAS, who is also advisor to the Sangh. In 1994, the Madhya Pradesh government granted fishing rights to the Bargi fishermen's cooperatives and leased the reservoir to them for five years.

Two years later, on Nov 7, 1996, the state cabinet committee decided to lease the Tawa reservoir to the people displaced by the dam. Registered on October 3, 1996, Tawa Matsya Sangh signed the lease agreement with the MP State Fisheries Development Corporation on 24 December 1996, for five years. The only assistance it got from the government was seed money of Rs six lakh, half of which it had to repay in four installments.

The cabinet also approved other important decisions, for instance, it waived the outstanding dues for draw down cultivation. The membership of the cooperative societies would be restricted to the project-affected people and those living within a radius of three km from the periphery of the reservoir. TMS was in charge of overall management of fishing, and it also had the responsibility of stocking the reservoir with fish.

The adivasis were organised in a two- tier cooperative structure - a cluster of 38 primary fishermen's cooperative societies (33 adivasi and

five of traditional fishermen called dhimars) at the village level, integrated into a federation, which was initially called the Tawa Visthapith Adivasi Matsya Utpadan Avam Vipanam Sahakari Sangh Maryadit. Now 1242 fishermen are members from all primary cooperatives. The main activities of the Sangh are to weigh and transport fish to depots, sell fish to retailers and wholesale markets, pay the fishermen's societies, provide credit facilities and fishing requirements to societies, take up regulatory measures for conservation and welfare activities for fishermen, stock the reservoir and promote fish seed- rearing activities through member societies, apart from checking illegal fishing.

Fishermen and Women

At the fish collection depot at Kesla, the mornings are hectic. Fish comes in from various villages; it is weighed here and sent to retail centres at Shahpur and Sohagpur or to Bombay, Kolkata, Delhi, Bhopal and other cities. Guliabai, the only woman director of Tawa Matsya Sangh is not a fisherwoman. Women are not directly involved in fishing here. Yet, she closely monitors the Sangh's working. "I come here almost daily to check if the fish is fresh, and that it is not stolen. I also find out what problems we have on a day- to- day basis and then place it before the directors," she said.

Sevadin, is among the 50 odd fisherman from Junkar village. He lost five acres in the Tawa dam. "We get paid on a weekly basis(from TMS) and the payments are regular. I make Rs 400- 500 a week. Sometimes, if the catch is poor, then I earn only Rs 100 a week," he said.

"Now, because of the Sangh, the middlemen are absent, we are paid as much as Rs 15 a kg for big fish. Earlier, people used to fish and sell it anywhere- there was no organization and no cooperative. We were paid poorly, if at all we managed to get any fish. We, as members of the primary societies, sell fish to the Sangh and the Sangh does the marketing for us," he said.

Villagers from Daudi, recalling the old days, said the state government cooperative only paid them Rs 2 -3 per kg- even for that time, they were underpaid. Now the prices were competitive, said Barmaji Uike of Daudi primary society who earns anything between Rs 200 to even Rs 1000 a week in a good season.

He lost over 40 acres of land in the dam and now relies on draw down cultivation. "I use the money from fishing to pay for my agricultural expenses. Earlier there was farming and forest produce, now the forests are all protected or degraded. What will we do without fishing?" he asked.

“We can keep some of the catch for our personal consumption. If the lease is not with us, we will not be able to keep anything. We go late afternoon to place the nets and return around 4 am to collect the fish. The secretary of the village primary society weighs the catch at the banks and the fish is taken to the weighing centre,” he added.

Late afternoon, near Banglapura, 15 km from Kesla, a few fishermen are placing nets in the reservoir. It is a muggy evening and if the wind rises, the fish wont catch, fear the two men in the boat. The next morning, at the edge of the reservoir, the morning’s catch is being weighed and readied to be taken to the weighing centre at Banglapura.

Each fisherman knows how much he has caught on a daily basis and a catch coupon is with the secretary or chairperson of the village primary society. The payments are made at Kesla depot on a weekly basis.

Rameshwar Bhusare from Chanagadh village is having his catch weighed. He has caught five kg of fish and that means an average of Rs 500 a week, if he continues to net this much. “I have been out for two weeks, living from a boat and spending the night on the banks. Now I am going home,” he said. ‘I feel the Sangh is honest and every paise is accounted for.”

Balkrishna Baraskar and his group live in a tent nearby. They, too, are having their catch weighed. “We are getting less catch now- 4-6 kg a day sometimes. It used to be ten to 20 kg a day.” Fishing is being taught to young Haricharan who is 12. He has not been to school and his only source of livelihood in the future seems to be fishing.

At the fish-weighing centre at Banglapura, four-kg catla and piles of catfish lie on the floor. Hari Pal Bhallavi weighs them and transfers them to bright orange and blue crates. Fibreglass boxes with ice store fish for a minimum seven days. This stock is kept as emergency or to satisfy unexpected demand.

Mahipal Singh, now in charge of marketing and accounting at TMS, said the largest sales were in Kesla: “We give priority to local demand, the rest is sent to outside places.”

This year, production is much less. Fish catch from nine villages is sent here for weighing. That day’s catch weighed 320.8 kg, less than the average 500 kg per day. Mahipal, who has studied upto class 12, did not

know much about accounting when he joined, but now he is a bit of an expert.

The average earnings of a fisherman in 1999-2000 were Rs 93 a day and last year, Rs 90.93. This year it may be less. Smita, assistant manager, TMS, said, "Production was affected due to the unsettled atmosphere over the new lease conditions. This year, we have caught only 254 tonnes of fish till February, against a target of 400 tonnes for the whole year (2001-2002)."

Royalty

According to the lease conditions, the TMS has to pay a royalty of Rs 6 per kilo on 80 per cent of the total catch to the Madhya Pradesh (MP) Matsya Mahasangh limited (formerly the Madhya Pradesh State Fisheries Development Corporation), the apex body of fisheries cooperatives. Twenty per cent of the catch was exempted from royalty. Last year alone, royalty amounted to Rs 15.70 lakh and since the beginning of the lease, over Rs 77 lakh has been paid. After the lease was renewed last year, royalty is to be paid on 100 per cent of the fish catch, something which the TMS is strongly opposed to. This is only one of the many conditions that has upset the TMS.

Fag Ram said, "Why can't the government have a good word for our work. Instead, it increases the royalty and our financial burden. We are almost illiterate adivasis running the show and we have demonstrated that we can earn good profits. We need critical inputs from time to time but even that small help is not coming to us. Since lots of ice is needed for the Sangh, an ice factory was sanctioned by the central government food processing ministry three years ago, near Pathrota, Kesla. Now the capacity of the factory has been reduced from ten tonnes to five tonnes and it has been shifted from the original place to Pawarkheda which is further away."

Ice is a major expense and last year alone, TMS spent Rs 6.7 lakhs only on it. It is crucial to store fish especially in long distance transport.

Sabbulal Uike, chairperson of TMS, said, "The government could have done so many things for us. We need help with facilities and better infrastructure. We need a hatchery too. When we started, we did not know what a ledger was or a cashbook or a balance sheet. It has been a superhuman effort for us to learn everything."

“Royalty is a big burden for the TMS specially when the Mahasangh does not do anything for us. Royalty also means that TMS pays fishermen less. This almost supports poaching in a way as the poachers don’t have to pay royalty. However, TMS members are sincere and do not poach or catch fish using dynamite or electric nets,” said Sunil.

“We have to stock 30 lakh fingerlings every year but we don’t even have a hatchery. We need fish -rearing space. As a solution to this, small groups in villages rear fish in ponds near the reservoir to minimise transportation. The Sangh buys the fingerlings and releases them into the reservoir. This is done in ten ponds during the monsoon and it also creates employment within the community, “ he added.

In Chatua, 14 km from Kesla, a displaced village, Sukbati is among the group of six women which rears fingerlings in the monsoon. Most of the women survive by selling forest produce like tendu, mahua or wood. “This was a good idea to earn some money. The first year, (in 2000), we fed the fish for almost two months and sold it back to TMS. We earned Rs 1300 each, but last year, the rains were poor and we had no water. Even though we transferred the fingerlings to another pond run by men, we did not make any money,” she said.

In the first year, the women sold 10,00,000 fingerlings which did well. Last year, it was just 1,00,000. This year too, they plan to give it a go. Sukbati added, “We need good rains, otherwise the ponds don’t fill up, and the heat kills the fish.” Four of the women went for a ten-day training programme on fish- rearing conducted by the Central Institute of Fisheries Education(CIFE).

TMS Working and Performance

The Sangh is run by a Board of thirteen directors, which meets every month to discuss its functioning and day- to- day problems. There are two biannual general body meetings as well. TMS started with a share capital of Rs 31,000 which has increased to Rs 5.44 lakh as of March 31, 2001. For the fifth year running, the Sangh has made profits --from Rs 1.38 lakh the first year, to Rs 2.94 lakhs last year.

The TMS maintains that fishermen must also share its profits. Almost Rs 7 lakh was distributed last year as deferred wages or “bonus” to the fishermen, which is more than their earnings in a single year prior to the lease being granted to TMS. The deferred wages are paid during the lean

season between June and August when there is a unanimously agreed ban on fishing. Fishermen can be paid upto RS 2000 during this time.

According to the TMS annual report, in 2000-2001, production was 327 tonnes of fish which was less than the year before due to drought and delayed rains due to which the fish did not spawn in time. In 1996-1997, for three months after the lease was obtained, the Sangh caught 93 tonnes. In 1997-98, the catch was 246 tonnes of fish, and for 1999-2000, a record 393 tonnes. Before the lease was granted to TMS, the average catch for the preceding-five years' was 125 tonnes per year.

The TMS catch per hectare ranked second in all the reservoirs of the state. Last year, with advice from some Bengali fishermen, they started using the "phesi" net, which increased the amount of fish caught. There was an increase in size in catla fish, which now grows over five kg, and major carp, indicative of the healthy growth of fish in the reservoir. The cost of large catla is very high in markets outside the state. Earlier, under the exploitative contractors, young catla were caught and not allowed to grow. There is a steady increase in the average size of all the varieties of fish being caught.

Now, the number of fishermen are on the rise and the average income per person in 1999-2000 was Rs 12,493 per year, almost double the previous maximum earnings. In 2000-2001, the Sangh sold fish worth Rs 1.16 Crore as compared to Rs 1.25 Crore in 1999-2000. In 1999-2000, the Sangh earned Rs 31.88 per kg of fish. In 2000-2001, this increased to Rs 35.67 per kilo. The fish fetched a good price in all markets and for the first time, new markets in Bombay, Kanpur and Lucknow were tried out, with Lucknow turning out to be the most successful.

Last year, about 49.3 per cent of the fish was sold in local retail markets of Beitul, Hoshangabad and Narsingpur -- fresh fish was provided to local people at competitive prices. In 2000-2001, about 477 fishermen were engaged in catching fish and about 52,191 mandays of work were generated. Growing fish seedlings in farm ponds, work at the weighing centres or depots, making bamboo baskets and retail fish selling, also contributed to wage generation. Seventeen boats and 10.5 quintals of nets were supplied to fishermen through interest-free loans. TMS released 32,00,000 fish seedlings into the reservoir, to ensure a good catch in the future.

State Management

From 1975-76 till 1993-94, the development and management of the reservoir was under state control. During the initial phase, between 1975-1978, the state fisheries department managed it. Restricted fishing operations were allowed by fishermen from other areas, apart from Bangladeshi migrants, on a royalty basis, according to S N Chatterjee, former director, fisheries, Government of Madhya Pradesh. The then newly-formed state fisheries corporation took up the management of the Tawa reservoir from 1979-80. The Corporation also had to market the fish and fishermen were paid on the basis of the fish catch till about 1984-85 when the contract system was introduced. In 1994-95, in a bid to privatise the reservoir, it was leased to a contractor though rules were in place to protect the local people's fishing rights and minimum wages.

A paper by Ram Pratap Gupta, professor of economics, Rampura, said that when the MP Fisheries development corporation managed the Tawa reservoir (for 15 years), the production of fish was between 16.79 tonnes in 1984-85 and 165.31 tonnes in 1989-90. No reasons were given for this wide fluctuation in production levels or low productivity.

Bhurelal Majhi, a director of TMS and a traditional fisherman, said in 1973, four societies were formed after the Tawa dam was built. Traditional fishermen like him were asked to fish in the reservoir. Later, when the entire reservoir was leased to a contractor, outsiders from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar were brought in to fish, people were given very little wages and local fisherman were often beaten up. "That was a bad time for us," he recalled. "We were harassed if we were seen near the reservoir."

Conclusion

Independent reviews and the Sangh's own records show a remarkable state of affairs which could not have been possible without the collective participation of people and the initiative of the KAS.

In conclusion, Mr. Chatterjee said that the Tawa reservoir had passed through all the three forms of management-- state, fisheries department and contractor-- and it was clear that the results were best under the latest cooperative system of management. The collective system of management had raised the confidence of the Korkus and Gonds, upgraded their skills as fishermen and ability to run a society and work together in a democratic manner. The TMS has justified its existence and

met the expectations of the displaced people, he felt. Besides fishing, members are engaged in weighing and transporting fish, maintenance, packing, marketing, fish seed rearing, accounts and supervising the societies and depots. They are part of TMS and are considered fishermen. Some women also take part in activities at the depot and in fish rearing. There is a great sense of ownership of the project and the whole community takes part in decision- making.

A report by G Venugopal and V Annamalai on the “Survival of displaced adivasis in the context of democratic decentralization- a case study of Tawa Matsya Sangh,” said that a unique feature of Kisan Adivasi Sanghatana’s work is how they started with a rights based approach, reoriented themselves to the role as leaseholders and managed the resources efficiently, and took advantage of the space provided by the market in the interest of the poor.

The TMS has set new records in fish production, employment and income. It increased fish production by more than three times compared to the average of the last five years (before the lease). The productivity of the reservoir grew to two and a half times the national average and the total wages of fishermen grew seven-fold. Many of the displaced adivasis who poached fish, are now owners of the resource and getting a fair share for their labour. While the government did renew the lease for Tawa Matsya Sangh last December for another five years, the fishermen are unhappy with some of the clauses of renewal, especially the ones that seek to control the functioning of the Sangh. Apart from increasing the royalty, the government wants to have a say in appointing office-bearers and advisors to the Sangh. The KAS has brought about a great deal of political awareness in the area and people have allied themselves with the Samajwadi Jan Parishad, a political party-- a fact that has not endeared them to the chief minister. TMS director, Fag Ram, also contested the last assembly elections and though he lost, managed to win over 5000 votes.

Tulsiram Majhi from Tawanagar, a traditional fisherman, said, “When the State Fisheries Development Corporation was formed in 1979, we sold fish to the Corporation, whose contractor was erratic. The fish catch was under-reported. Now after TMS has the lease, the middlemen are finished-- we are doing the work and for the first time, we are paid well. But that has not gone down well with the contractor lobby. They are the people making trouble for us and they also have political backing.”

Efforts are on to undermine the Sangh's performance. Last year, the government set up a review committee to evaluate the Sangh's performance. The team comprised Khushiram, then principal secretary, fisheries department, R K Nigam, director, directorate of fisheries and Aruna Sharma, IAS, former managing director, MP Rajya Matsya Mahasangh. The team arrived during the TMS annual general body meeting on July 17, 2001, and tried to interview the members of the Sangh publicly on stage. Fishermen said they were humiliated and their views not taken into account. No office bearer of the Sangh was interviewed. The report of this review committee was not given to the Sangh or made public.

Fishermen and women pledged that they will not allow anyone to take away their right to fish in the Tawa reservoir in November, 2001, at a two--day meeting held to mark the completion of the five --year lease to TMS. The Sangh is an example of how with the right approach, local people can manage their own resources. It is also a good example of conserving biodiversity and the effort is economically and ecologically viable. It provides a sound alternative to the private or public sector- the people's sector.

Bargi

The forerunner of the Tawa Matsya Sangh in Bargi, again a cooperative of adivasis displaced by the Bargi dam, has been thwarted by a powerful political lobby. A court case was filed against the performance of the Bargi fishermen's cooperatives last year by an office bearer of the MP Matsya Mahasangh. The petition said the performance of the Bargi fishermen was poor and production was low- at 26 kg/hectare, less than the national average of 40 kg per ha. Welfare activities were not carried out for fishermen, it added. The government also raised a controversy over the payment of royalty .The Bargi fishermen's cooperative has paid Rs 1.24 crore as royalty over the lease period. Yet the Mahasangh charged them excess royalty and 24% interest on the delayed payment, according to Raj Kumar Sinha, convenor, Bargi Bandh Visthapith aur Prabhavit Sangh.

The Bargi cooperative had produced at least 400-450 tonnes of fish per year during the lease period and in 1999- 2000, when the lease was extended for a year, Rs 17 lakh was the net profit. The Mahasangh claimed in court that it would increase production to 1000 tonnes per annum. However, since last year when the Mahasangh took over, production has dropped to less than 200 tonnes per annum, Sinha said.

Since last year, the Mahasangh has appointed a contractor to sell and market the fish. However, payments to fishermen are due for months,

there is no proper marketing or efforts to sell fish for local consumption or welfare activities for fishermen, added Sinha, who felt this was a plot to bring back the contractors who had strong political connections.

State Commitment

The example of Tawa Matsya Sangh is promising but it also needs state support. The question is how much is the state willing to stake in the cause of democracy. Very little, going by what happened in Bargi. So the road ahead for TMS seems fraught with confrontation. While the TMS has set an example and Bargi before that of how resources can be effectively managed by local people, the government seems hell bent on interfering with their working and controlling what it fears is the political mileage these movements are gaining.

While the government has granted fishing rights to people and ostensibly wants to support such cooperative initiatives, some of its subsequent decisions (for instance the renewal clauses in the lease to TMS), fail to support its progressive face. This amounts to double standards. The people have already demonstrated their commitment to collective functioning. They have shown what is possible when there is actual decentralisation of power, which is what the Madhya Pradesh government has been bleating about all long. The people have made their choice- now it is upto the MP government to decide if it has the courage of conviction.

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