

0106. 6th Progress Report (Apr 1980)

Covers the next 9 months of our work in Bagepalli. We start with a reflection on our relationship with the village CSUs. We then go on to describe various land struggles. Cadre training is a new activity we have taken up along with expansion into new villages.

This report covers a vast span of events from August 1979 to April 1980. For many reasons, we were unable to bring it out earlier.

1. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ADATS AND CSUS

The past few months we are having a lot of discussion among ourselves and with some friends on our role as a Group and voluntary organisation. This led to more clarity on our relationship with the Coolies Sangha.

Legally the Coolies Sangha is only a branch of ADATS, its grassroots organization. But in reality it is much more. In fact, ADATS takes a secondary and temporary significance in our work in Bagepalli Taluk since ADATS is only the promoter of the mass organisation, the Coolies Sangha and temporarily also playing the role of the coordinator in place of the Bagepalli Coolies Sangha.

The Coolies Sangha is a mass organisation. It is a people sufficiently conscientised to be able to react constructively to their environment seizing every opportunity they can to further their goal of humanisation. For this, they have to be sufficiently clear about various forces acting in society, shaping their existence.

For us to expect each and every labourers in this Taluk to reach that level of consciousness and free himself from the fear and alienation that has engulfed him for centuries would be unrealistic. Therefore, the Coolies Sangha is a people, sufficiently conscientised to be united and to accept their cadre workers. Ultimately, it is a people who are able to throw up their own cadre workers, selected by them, who are both effective and in the correct ideological direction.

We do not believe that the peasantry are capable of doing all this just now, without any ideological input from outside. So we identify our role as promoters of the mass organisation. Our role as promoters would also require, for a limited time, coordination the activities of various Coolies Sangha Units till they are mature enough and strong enough to have their own Taluk level coordinating body, the Bagepalli Coolie Sangha.

Once the work of ADATS in this Taluk is more or less completed with the formation the Bagepalli Coolies Sangha, then ADATS would not have to continue in the same concentration. We would be able to initiate similar Coolies Sanghas in the surrounding taluks of the district. We would still have to continue maintaining a contact with the Bagepalli Coolies Sangha, but would not have the lead role that we do right now. Some of our Group members might opt to continue living in the villages of this Taluk for they would have got integrated into the Bagepalli Coolies Sangha. But ADATS will spread.

Therefore the maturity and strength of the Coolies Sangha and an assessment of our effectiveness can be made only through the clarity, commitment and effectiveness of the cadre. The few monthly cadre training session we have held (we had to stop them some time back for want of money), and the weekly sessions that one of our Community Worker is holding even now, have helped a great deal. A serious continuation of these sessions, along with the cadre getting practical experience in the taking up of issues, organising mass meetings and struggles is the only way to strengthen the clarity and effectiveness of the cadre.

In most of the villages we can claim to have selected the correct persons as the cadre. They are labourers who have not lost their contact with the masses, they are serious youth, and are fairly clear as to why we are here in Bagepalli Taluk. We are quite sure that with a few more years of training and guidance they will become even more effective. In due course they will be able to guide the activities of the mass organisation by themselves. An important character what we have noted in most of our VLWs is that they are able to draw more youth around them and function as groups in their villages, along with their Community Workers. This is a positive point since they avoid getting elitist and isolated

But our hopes for the Coolies Sangha, as for any mass organisation, are realistically restricted. We are convinced that the peasantry will play their historic role and recognise their responsibilities only when the state power is supportive and sympathetic. Therefore the Coolies Sangha will be vary much restricted if it does not ally itself with national events and movements that are capable of influencing the character of the state. For this the peasantry have to be intelligently organised and educated, for unorganised, alienated people will simply be swept by the tide of national events. There are enough instances of this happening in the world everywhere. The peasantry have benefited very little in the process. This last only underlines the validity of our role as promoters of a mass organisation.

2. ISSUES AND STRUGGLES

2.1. The Somnathpura Struggle

The Harijans of Somnathpura realised crop worth over Rs 18,000 from land forcible grabbed and cultivated under the protection of Act II of 79.

Though the Harijans had refused the offer of the Landlords that the lands be equally distributed between Landlords and Harijans till the authorities decide on their applications, the Landlords still entertained some hopes that this would be the case. As a tactical move, the Harijans did nothing to clarify their misunderstanding till the very end. They were able to harvest and sell off their crops due to well planned and united efforts.

Only one Landlord went to Court in a desperate bid to retain his land. But the Harijan was both, the previous owner of the land as well as his present Tenant. Therefore, the Landlord was unable to get a temporary injunction that he sought. In spite of the Court order against him, the Landlord still had plans to grab the crop, and arranged for protection with the help of persons brought in from another town. That night, Sathyamurthy conducted a lengthy meeting. The next day, nearly 100 Harijans went and harvested 35 bags of groundnut from 4½ acres of disputed land. The Landlords and his henchmen did not have the guts to interfere. The crop was immediately sold to a merchant who had been kept in readiness.

These past few months, they have been going to the Assistant Commissioner's office at Chickballapur in connection with applications (From No:1). We expect favourable decisions very soon. But in any case, the 42 Harijans of Somnathpura are clear that they are not going to give up their unjustly lost and now reclaimed lands.

There is a marked change in the Somnathpura Cluster of villages. The Coolies Sangha Units are active, they have regular meeting and do not permit differences among themselves to interfere with unity. This is very notable because it was just under 2 years back that these were the most alienated people in our entire area of operation.

Sathyamurthy's wife, Kusuma, a qualified Health Visitor, has trained 4 village *Dais* and they are conducting a health programme for the entire Cluster for the past 1 year with great success. Since they began, there have been no fatalities during childbirth. They have controlled a lot of communicable diseases like scabies, head lice etc. They avoid getting into the business

of doling out curative medicines. This health activity of Kusuma has helped Sathyamurthy in his organisational work.

2.2. Pathapalya

Things have not turn out too well for us in Pathapalya. The 'Bhoosami Sangha' succeeded in achieving it's ends, modifying their tactics. When they realised that we were too intelligent for them, they stopped launching cases against the people. They diverted the issue into a personal one between Khasim Peera and his house owner. Khasim Peera's house owner continued providing irritants and excuses to provoke our Community Worker into petty squabbles. This was magnified by the local Landlords who started openly supporting the house owner. That part of the episode ended with over 200 Landlords and their family members marching towards Khasim Peera's house in order to throw him, his family, and belongings out, then and there. However, they accidentally came across Khasim Peera on the way and a bitter confrontation ensued. It ended with their giving an ultimatum that the house and village be vacated in a week's time.

As soon as we heard about this incident, we immediately rushed to support Khasim Peera, and tackled the local Circle Inspector of Police who had already received a written complaint against our Community Workers from the Landlords, stating that the attack had taken place outside the Pathapalya Police Station under the eyes of the silently witnessing police. Though the Circle Inspector tried to cajole, and later threaten us to get rid of Khasim Peera, we stood firm and made it clear that we were gong to protest at higher levels.

As a result, an enquiry was conducted at Pathapalya. The Landlords were told to ensure that no bodily harm came to our staff in the village. But at this enquiry, the police and the Landlords were able to mobilise some men and many women to testify against Khasim Peera. Some of their complaints were so ridiculous that the Circle Inspector refused to even register them.

However, the police did insist that we vacate that house near the Harijanawada. All the Harijans got together, and one of them agreed to quickly complete his half completed Janata house for Khasim Peera to live in. That was perhaps the last united action in Pathapalya for a long time. Just at the time of shifting houses, Suryakumari delivered a baby boy, their second son.

The Landlords had managed to achieve exactly what they wanted. The emphasis of our work and stay in Pathapalya shifted overnight from a land issue to a personal one. We were preoccupied with ensuring the security of our workers than with the people. To add to our troubles, the newborn baby fell a victim to the dreaded brain fever, and died a month later.

Just at about this time, the Land Tribunals stopped functioning because the entire Government machinery was busy preparing for the forthcoming general elections. This came as a boon to the Landlords who immediately went out of their way to get even more Janata houses sanctioned in the Harijanawada, give bank loans to the Harijans, etc. They split the Harijanawada into 2 camps. More and more Harijans got disillusioned and fatalistically went over to the Landlords side, till Khasim Peera had the support of only a handful of families.

In his confusion and anxiety, Khasim Peera made many mistakes that consolidated this difference in the Harijanawada. This led to only more frustration which ended in their decision to leave Pathapalya and quit ADATS.

For the past one month, the Landlords who have achieved their objective to a large extent, have stopped maintaining their pampering relationship with the Harijans, returning the situation to status quo. Shivashankar Reddy, our Community Worker from Lagumaddepalli, has taken over Pathapalya. He has a relatively easy job in bringing all the Harijans together again.

This is partly because there is not such a strong bitterness when reflecting on the recent past, in Shivashankar heart and the Harijans also find it easier to start afresh with him. This same task would have relatively been much more difficult for Khasim Peera and Suryakumari and the Harijans since they were personally affected in the crisis. The point however, has only academic significance since in their bitterness they chose not to try at all, which is also quite understandable.

We have learnt a great deal through our experiences in Pathapalya and come closer together as a Group. We are fairly confident that we will now be able to regain our base in the Pathapalya Harijanawada, and that we were only temporarily out exude by the Landlords.

2.3. Muguchinnapalli Gomala Lands

23 Harijans families of Muguchinnapalli village had been aspiring for 40 acres of gomala (grazing) lands for the past 10 years. Though this land had been set aside for grazing cattle by the government many years back, it had long back stopped being used for this purpose, and the caste village had been trying to cultivate it illegally. So too had the Harijan families.

There had been many clashes and exchanges these past 10 years and the Harijans had always failed to establish their rights. This was a burning issue in their village and once they began to trust M.S. Nagaraja, their Community Workers, they had many Coolies Sangha meetings on the topic.

Finally, a representation of them, along with M.S. Nagaraja, went to the revenue office at Chickballapur to meet the Assistant Commissioner. He assured them that if the land was no more being used as a grazing ground, then the Harijans would surely get preference in getting it. This boosted their morale.

On their return, the Harijans all together went and sowed a little coriander on all 40 acres, only to establish their rights. They also planted eucalyptus trees on the border Bunds. There was a lot of opposition from the Landlords, but the Harijans stood firm and their mass action was a success. Though they did not get any crop from the land the last time, they are keen on properly cultivating at least a part of the land this coming season.

3. WEEKLY CADRE TRAINING AT YELLAMPALLI

M.S. Nagaraja, the Community Worker of Yellampalli Cluster is fortunate to have got a group of extremely good VLWs in his Cluster. They too attended the monthly cadre training sessions we had held at Bagepalli – the ones that had to stop for want of money.

In the Yellampalli Coolies Sangha Unit meeting 5 months back, they decided to resume training on their own, just for their Cluster. Ever since, they have regularly met for more than 20 Sundays and discussed theoretical issues with reference to their concrete experiences and activities.

After a few months, the Kondireddipalli Cluster and Lagumaddepalli Cluster VLWs and Community Workers also started attending the weekly Yellampalli sessions. The only problem they have encountered is that they are unable to get other people to attend as resource persons and share other peasant organisation experiences.

4. NEW CLUSTER AND GROUP MEMBERS

We have started working in Billur Cluster where Venugopal chose to live and work as Community Worker. He has started in more or less the same fashion as the others, except that he is emphasising more on children and women in these first months. An advantage that Venugopal had is that word of our activities and the Coolies Sangha have already spread. So

he did not have to give an elaborate introduction on intentions. There is every indication that he will be able to build a strong base quite soon.

B.N. Manjunath, a student from Bagepalli who has been associated with the Group from the very beginning, decided to discontinue his college education and has taken over as Community Worker in Lagumaddepalli (Shivashankar Reddy has taken over Pathapalya).

Bharathi wed Pradeep, and Sheila wed Ram. They are helping out in the children's programme. Vani wed M.S. Nagaraja. She is going to work with women and children in their Cluster of 4 villages.

5. ADATS / YIP STUDY PROGRAMME

At the request of Young India Project, Penukonda, we conducted a joint study-cum-orientation programme at Bagepalli/Penukonda. The methodology was participatory and helped many get clarity on what they were doing. This is the first step for YIP to seriously enter into the field of community education and organisation. After these sessions, some YIP Field Workers left their group.