

0505. Coolie Sangha Model of Development (1986)

The first of 3 papers, written by Ram Esteves in 1986, on the Coolie Sangha Model of Development which elaborates on the philosophical basis for the Development Worker's involvement when working with the poor, and the role of the bourgeois intelligentsia.

The paper then goes on to argue that we should work within the capitalist framework instead of merely spitting into the wind, comments on the relationship between the Coolie Sangha and the political party, and ends with the listing of a strategy for the first 3 years of our involvement, which we call Coolie Sangha Formation.

1. PHILOSOPHICAL BASIS FOR OUR INVOLVEMENT

1.1. Material versus Spiritual Development

The development of a people centrally implies the bettering of their material well being. All other facets of their spiritual existence are determined by this material status and so take a secondary position.

At the same time we find that it is deficiencies found in the spiritual existence of the poor people's lives that perpetuate their under-development and poverty. The culture of poverty manifested in tolerated indiscipline, fatalism, pursuance of short term goals, etc. operates to ensure the continuance of poverty and under-development.

A seeming dilemma is caused as to where a development effort should focus its thrust on the material realm of the poor people's lives or on the spiritual realm. Efforts are often made to materially develop the poor through economic inputs, but these fail. Equally sincere efforts made to raise the spiritual status of the poor from the existing subhuman levels also fail. Both fail because they fail to comprehend the dilemma and base their efforts on a total comprehension of the existence of the poor people in society.

1.2. The Concept of Class

This seeming dilemma or contradiction is de-riddled with the understanding that the economic betterment of a people can come about only when the position of that Class of people to the prevailing economy is changed to a better status. A Class that is predominately marginal to the economy can develop itself only if it enters into the mainstream of the economy. The alteration of the position of a class of poor people in an economy therefore becomes the primary concern of a development effort.

All our efforts are directed to this end and the cultural transformation of a Mass of poor people into a Class becomes the primary task of those of us in the countryside. Only then can this Coolie Class enter into struggle in order to alter its position within the economy. Efforts directed at this transformation of a Mass of people into a Class is a cultural action involving spiritual transformation for material gain.

1.3. Short Lived Gains

Poor people benefit from a system only to the extent that their Class is entitled to in that economy. Not more and not less. Attempts at artificially increasing this quantum or share through economic projects of voluntary agencies or even struggles of action groups fail to alleviate their poverty.

Similarly, the development of the poor people's spiritual status cannot be sustained without the corresponding material base required to support this humanisation. Even honesty, de-

gency, and the love for their children are luxuries that the poor can indulge in only when they can afford to.

But small short lived gains in the level of their human status and self respect, as well as in material terms as measured by patches of land or increases in wages are obtained by the coolies in the course of their struggles. Struggles that involve the rectification of their spiritual deficiencies in order to alter their material status. These fruit, though by no means to be seen as final results, sustain the struggles and permit them to continue.

They are fruit where those who attain recognise having travelled along paths that clearly show the end as being nearer; that fill the coolies with a hope and a fresh enthusiasm to travel further. They differ from village to village, and what is seen as the fruit of struggle in one village will often fail to entice the coolies in another. The coolies are not carried away by great examples.

1.4. A Diversified Approach

This forms the rationale for a grass rooted, situation based and diversified effort to be encompassed into the total, overall, large and single strategy for the development of the coolies. One that first seduces and then permits each and every coolie to overcome her or his spiritual inhibitions and join together with her or his fellow coolies in situation locales in order to enter into Class struggle. One that is based on and therefore encourages individual participation of the coolies.

Uniform calls and broad slogans alone will raise only certain aspirations in the lives of the individual coolies to varying extends. They alone are not sufficient, and have to be accompanied by ample room for the evolution of thousands of situation locale based slogans that all find recognition in the total call.

1.5. Participatory Democracy

This forms the rationale for participatory and democratic structures not only in the final vehicle of Coolie Class struggle, but also in the evolving of that vehicle.

This participation must be a true and sincere one that does not mimic bourgeois democracy, making a sham of the word. Because it is not worn to give an appearance of cleanliness to essentially foul acts and deeds. It is the most fundamental prerequisite of coolie development. Pretences at participation and a pseudo-democracy that only gives the blind sanctions of an ill formed and misinformed mass will create exercises without foundation. They will be unproductive and fail to evolve into the Mass Organisation of the Coolie Class.

This participation has to be forced to be participatory, for then alone will it entail the involvement of each and every coolie, irrespective of caste and sex, age and conventional leadership. This participation has to be forced to be participatory if it is to be prevented from becoming a bourgeois democratic force.

1.6. Centralised Democracy

This forms the rationale for a centralised democracy, or the need for democratic centralism in our work. A democracy dictated by a determination and a sense of purpose. A democracy dictated by an unshakeable conviction in participation and a firm determination in the face of severe odds and temptations to short cut the democratic purpose. A democracy dictated by an analysis and ultimately by a faith and an ideology. In a word, a democracy that is for itself, for its own sake, rather than to clothe actions and obtain halos of sanctions for dubious deeds.

This true form of democracy is the most difficult to usher into society. Simply because it does not cater to a felt need in the minds of either the poor who plainly see it as cumbersome and

tedious a circumvent procedure to follow in order to obtain some benefits and services from the voluntary agency or the rich who stand to loose from too much awareness and assertion of rights by the poor. We are trying to usher into society a true form of democracy that the coolies find no inner compulsion to participate in. We are trying to usher into society a true form of democracy because we believe that by enforcing long enough it will become a habit in the coolies. A habit that they would have, by then, become accustomed to and find hard to break.

1.7. Assumptions and Prorogation

The foregoing paragraph spells the extent to which the coolies are alienated, existing on a day to day materialistic basis with no room in their lives and no thought in their minds for the finer of “politics”; where they find no need to assert their rights as citizens in society; where they are prepared to accept and take just about anything that is dished out of them, provided they stand to gain pittances; where fatalism has overtaken basic human aspirations to be masters of one’s own destiny.

The foregoing paragraph also spells the role we assume to ourselves in deciding for and on behalf of the coolies not only that this true form of democracy is necessary, but also that we have a role in dictating its content and course.

Naturally, such assumptions and prorogation have their limitations and are fraught with dangers of not just abuse, but of faulty directives and leadership.

1.8. Checks and Controls

But we strongly believe, as a result of over 8 years of experience as well as a result of empirical study, that the worst that can come out of this danger is wasted effort. Because if the coolies, in their moments of lucidity when they shake off the effects of their severe state of alienation, do not see a sound rationale, honesty, and an even sounder chance of success in this whole process, they will either outright reject us or else humour us till our resources run out. In the very healthy situation of the absence of a state power apparatus, this wisdom of the poor people will remain the greatest point of checks and controls on the possible megalomaniac tendencies that can develop in us.

In our work will always remain the necessity to be answerable to the coolies and to carry the coolies with us if we want to be relevant. This, I consider as the most healthy aspect of voluntary agency involvement in societal transformation. This constant and instantaneous pulse is not provided to my fellow members of the bourgeois intelligentsia class in any other forum, and so there is the possibility of them drifting into irrelevancy before they become fully aware of it.

2. THE ROLE OF THE BOURGEOIS INTELLIGENTSIA

2.1. The Vanguard role.....

It is the job of us bourgeois intelligentsia, in our own self interest of wanting to live in more sensible, pleasant and rational environments, to assist the Coolie Class in their fending for themselves.

I therefore do not hold as valid the traditional definition of the vanguard role as knowing the last and the final answers, manipulation and steering along predetermined path. At the same time, I do see as vital the vanguard role of being constantly sensitive to the needs of the Coolie Class, offering theoretical clarifications, directions, and even leadership at times. I see traces of irresponsibility, laziness, cowardice, and a lack of seriousness in those from my Class who outright refute the vanguard role, but at the same time pretend to be on the side of the coolies; who hide behind pretensions of democratic processes. To be member of the

bourgeois intelligentsia to opt to be with the coolies, is not and cannot be a job that one performs, but an all embracing way of life. It cannot be part time or time bound. It cannot be one where one does not see a role for oneself; where one is detached and only serving a process.

2.2. ...and the Professional

That is the privilege of the professional; the one who renders efficient services in the pursuit of excellence; the one who is honest and sincere, but is not burnt by passion; the one who is self controlled and comfortable being occasionally detached. I respect the professional and recognise her role. I see that without her society would not function. Production and re-production of wealth in society, even growth, owes a great deal to the professional.

But not change. The professional has no role in transformation. She has to sit back a while and wait for the new realities to set in, re-adjust herself to the new equations of power and societal relations, before she can function once again. To give leadership to change is the prerogative of the bourgeois intelligentsia. I try to take this role very seriously.

2.3. Professional Welfare Delivery System

Most social workers and voluntary agencies in India today are beginning to render professional welfare to the marginalised population on behalf of the ruling bourgeois. They are being transmuted into unpaid workers of the bourgeois, doing a very good job. Because the bourgeois do not want the filth and squalor of the remnants of the preceding feudal order any more. Because they see these ramifications of the dying landlord order like caste, low wages, illiteracy, atrocities, and the Patron-Client relationship as impediments to bourgeois growth. And finally, because the unpaid workers work with a zeal and efficiency that cannot be matched by the paid workers

2.4. Social Infrastructure

Therefore the bourgeoisie is even talking about social workers and voluntary agencies building up social infrastructure in the villages. This attempt is to make welfare reach out to the remotest corners of the population. Not deep into the inaccessible jungles or high into the mountains, for that would mean only a physical infrastructure of roads and communications; but to the greatest of sceptic, dulled by poverty into a state of hopelessness, so that she too may begin to believe and harbour false hopes.

Rapid industrialisation of the cities using high technology, while creating and strengthening a new urban middle class, will leave millions of coolies and poor people in the villages untouched. It is the realisation of this fallacy that is prompting our present bourgeois leadership to lay such great emphasis on rural welfare and the roping in of social workers and voluntary agencies into the delivery system of this professional welfare.

This pretended concern is prompted more by shallow political considerations than even by a desire to lay the basis for sound capitalist development; by a realisation that this particular path of industrial development they are pursuing will never effectively touch the countryside. This has, all along, been the basis for welfare in a bourgeois economy and India is no exception.

2.5. Searching for a Role

Personally, I do not want to be a part of this degeneration of role into serving a master who I know to be cause of deprivation and dehumanisation. Though I will later argue that measured by material yardsticks alone, the bourgeois do a better job than the feudal lords, my intelligence tells me that even material development cannot be achieved by pursuing the lines taken by the present bourgeois leadership in India.

It is explicit to me that the present leadership of the Indian bourgeois is not playing its societal role of even developing a sound basis for capitalistic development in honesty. Rather, it is pursuing very selfish, very dangerous, short term and quick gain. I am left unconvinced by their rhetoric on self sufficiency, national strength, et al.

But dreams and visions of socialist revolution died for my generation in Europe in the '60s. For me and my compatriots, this realisation came in the '70s. I do not have fantasies of a socialist pattern of society being ushered in under the leadership of the proletariat in India. I am intelligent enough to realise that bourgeois democracy, as a system, is too well entrenched into the country. And as an ideology, it is too well infiltrated into the values of the poor though they stand only to loose from it.

At the same time, I have never considered myself to be a fanatical charisma for the cause of revolution. I am not bitterly disappointed into accepting defeat. I have all along prided myself, with a total lack of modesty, as being from the bourgeois intelligentsia, attempting to analyse and understand my country and the societal stage of her development.

2.6. The Role of the Bourgeois Intelligentsia

If revolution is out of the question for the immediate future, then we bourgeois intelligentsia have another role to play. This need not get a secondary or less important status just because it is an alternate one. For today, under the present historical circumstances, it is no more an alternate. It is the required, the necessary role for our being relevant.

This new role is going to be within the societal framework of capitalism, neither fostering it nor cleansing it of its pretended unintended effects. Both those are roles for the bourgeois themselves and I have no intention to serve them. My role is to expose capitalism. To douse the false enthusiasm that the bourgeois attempt to build up in the victims of their system, and to erase the sanctity that they try to create for their actions.

We development workers from the bourgeois intelligentsia, who are able to perceive through the maze of poverty, who fail to be deceived by pseudo measures pretending to alleviate poverty and by bourgeois attempts to maintain a certain equilibrium and ward of disgruntlement, who recognise in welfare an acceptance and apology for impotence, who are not riddled by the seeming contradiction between material and spiritual development, have a definite role to play.

The role of initiating, through cultural action, attempts at making the poor conscious of their positions as a Class. This role has become the manifesto of ADATS in Bagepalli.

3. WORKING WITHIN THE CAPITALIST FRAMEWORK

I am aware that it is not fashionable for anyone in the development field, even temporarily, within the societal framework of capitalism. I therefore think that it is necessary for me to elaborate in order to avoid endless debate and clarifications.

In a society where peasant struggle has not already transformed it from feudal to socialist patterns, the development of capitalism is inevitable as contemporary realities have shown in India. Bourgeois rule is here to stay in India for some time and cannot be wished away. It is therefore necessary for us to understand why, and place this phenomenon within the framework of societal development of India rather than to feel disappointed or start living in a dreamland of unreality.

3.1. Capitalism and Feudalism

It cannot be argued that as a mode of production, capitalism is worse than production through the clutches of landlords and feudal oppression. It cannot be argued that the dehumanism and

materialism that capitalism fosters is worse than the sense of security that a Patron-Client relationship falsely promises to the peasantry in feudal society. It cannot be argued that in preference to the development of capitalism, a society may stagnate at low levels of feudal production and at stark levels of deprivation. Apart from not being true, these arguments would also be futile.

I have worked long enough in the villages to be abhorred by feudalism. I have worked long enough in the villages to be tired by the baseless and meaningless cruel exhibitions of prestige that even a middle peasant with a Reddy or a Brahmin caste shows in order to “prove” his superiority over the coolies. I have worked long enough in the villages to be pained by the subhuman status that the coolies are being degenerated into by the gutless sadism of the landlord imitating middle peasant classes and castes.

I am trusted by the coolies and represent a hope in them to escape from this morass. They trust me to liberate them; to show them a way by which they can liberate themselves.

If capitalism can get the coolies out of landlord and middle peasant clutches, if capitalism can give them the dignity they subconsciously crave for, if capitalism can improve their conditions of living by even an iota, I opt to work for the ushering in of capitalism in the countryside as my minimum task and objective.

Because I am not one who propounds the theory that fostering material hardships and suffering on the people will result in revolution. I believe that any further deprivation in the living standards of the coolies will only result in their total marginalisation and death.

3.2. Capitalism's Pursuit of Minimum Levels of Human Emancipation and Decency

Capitalism unleashes productive forces that are hidden in feudal society. When doing so, as an essential prerequisite, it pretends to believe in the equality of all mankind. In this pretext, as has to be, there is a small element of truth. It is this truth that the bourgeois intelligentsia has to intelligently exploit and build on.

This does not imply that I believe in capitalism as an ultimate be-all and end-all. This does not imply that I believe that the only thing necessary in a capitalist society is to cleanse it and shroud it with bourgeois decency.

An attempt has been initiated to project capitalism as a system having all the answers; as capable of self criticism and self betterment towards perfection. Disparities and irrationalities are glossed over and overlooked by these social democrats by explaining them as the natural order of the universe. Everyday, in the media, I find a massive effort at shrouding going on. But all this fails to convince me that within the framework of capitalism is the seed of basic human decency. It fails to convince me that within the framework of capitalism is the seed of true human emancipation.

I am clever enough to realise that the pursuit of minimum levels of human decency and emancipation by the bourgeois is necessary for the development of capitalism. And it is this effort of the capitalists to usher in elements of minimum decency and of minimum human emancipation into society that the bourgeois intelligentsia must intelligently exploit and build on.

3.3. Mass Organisation to Pressurise

Yet, capitalism will not, even for its own sake, automatically elevate the position of the feudal coolies to that of dignified wage workers. The trend of capitalist development in India today shows that the bourgeois is prepared to pursue its development casting aside the bulk of our rural population peasants and coolies alike. It appears that their representatives, the ruling party, has been entrusted with paying lip service to rural development and formulating

schemes of charity. Welfare is, to me, an expression of this neglect since it does not envisage a role in the mainstream of production for the beneficiaries of welfare.

Pressures from the rural population in India are not sufficient to check bourgeois development and force them to pursue their societal role of taking the whole of Indian society and the entire Indian population along, even when serving their own selfish ends.

I believe that the present leadership of the bourgeois in India is not playing its role fairly. It is pursuing selfish and short term, quick gain. I have a cold dread that this will degenerate the position of the Indian rural population to a point of stagnation, both material as well as spiritual, from where it will take a tremendous effort and a very long time to get out.

To my mind, the rural population in India is not organised enough in the path of struggle to assert its right and play an effective role in checking the path of capitalist development pursued by the Indian bourgeois. To my mind, this lack of mass organisation in the rural population, this lack of awareness in an ill-formed society, is what permits the pursuance of this dangerous path by the present leadership of the Indian bourgeois. This is my rationale for mass organisation work with the coolies.

Mass organisation that will act as checks and controls on the development of capitalism in India. Not only to extract alms of welfare from it, but also to extract a just share and place whereby the position of the rural poor as a Class will get strengthened.

3.4. Capitalism, a transition phase

In this manner, I see the development of capitalism as a transition phase in the development of India. A transition phase which is not only necessary, but also inevitable.

Dreams and visions of an immediate socialist revolution by a peasant movement have, in this sense died for me. Dreams and visions of a socialist revolution by the urban proletariat in India, excluding the existence of the coolies in the villages have died for me a long time ago.

But at the same time, believe that the Class of coolies in the villages once they are strengthened and become a Class of rural proletariat can contribute tremendously to the process of rationalising society.

3.5. Transient role

I do not see any personal role for myself in this since I am essentially of the bourgeois. I only see a transient role for myself in preparing a Class from out of a Mass. It is for this reason that I have earlier said that I do not consider the vanguard role as one where the last answers and the final solutions are known or offered. It is this rationale that gives me meaning, hope, and an enthusiasm to continue.

I wait for the day when my class intellectualism can be complemented with the wisdom of an informed poor because I firmly believe that it is only this complete knowledge that can effectively analyse and understand society in order to change it. My role then, in a word, is to bring the poor to a level where they can participate.

4. THE COOLIE SANGHA AND THE POLITICAL PARTY

I would like to comment on a point that has confused many sincere development workers. These confusions, characterised by a "purer than thou" and a "holier than thou" sense of false superiority, often lead to dangerous path of adventure. I am talking about the temptation to confuse Mass Organisation with the Political Organisation.

4.1. The Root of the Confusion

Mass Organisation work with the twin objectives of solving the day to day problems of their members, while at the same time also raising their levels of awareness and consciousness. In order to achieve these objectives, and also as a result of having these objectives, making a critical analysis of society and the empowerment of people becomes a serious goal. This is definitely political. Because of this, the distinction between Mass Organisation and the Political Organisation becomes shrouded and development workers begin to overlap roles, objectives, functions and, ultimately, importance.

It is necessary to differentiate between Mass Organisations and the Political Organisation and to explicitly state that the capture of power can never be the objective of the Coolie Sangha. The empowerment of a Class of coolies does not logically continue to imply that they will, or are even remotely capable of converting their forums into political platforms.

4.2. The Difference in Character

A Mass Organisation can only give representation to any one single Class of exploited people, who would otherwise be marginalised, in the mainstream of a political process led by a Political Organisation. But the Political Organisation carries with it many such Classes of exploited peoples.

Different Mass Organisations work with different exploited Classes like the coolies, *Ryots*, factory workers, etc. Each Mass Organisation attempts to encompass all the aspirations and needs of the Class of people it works with, one such aspiration and need being their Class Aspiration and Class Need.

The Political Organisation, on the other hand, deals only with the Class positions and Class strengths of the different exploited Classes in society in order to initiate political processes in favour of all the exploited peoples in society, recognising that one exploited Class alone cannot influence the course of societal development.

The Coolie Sangha, a mass organisation, ensures that coolies are not abstracted into just a common Class denominator as a result of our anxiety to make them participate in societal transformation. There is ample room, as should be in any Mass Organisation, for their individual expression of specific concerns without the threat of converting their existence to that of a monolithic mass by giving the title of Class. At the same time, their real strength, which can be guaranteed only by their emergence as a Class in society, is also made possible.

This total embracing of the coolies existence is not possible in a Political Organisation which gives calls and slogans embracing all the diverse Class interests of all the different exploited Classes in society; which directs itself solely to the question of societal transformation. Without the work of the Political Organisation, the work of the Coolie Sangha will fail to get relevance. Implicit in the Coolie Sangha model is that a Political Party will give societal relevance, through leadership, to the struggle of the organised Coolie Class. But the model itself has no political ambitions, and directs itself only to the question of creating a Class from out of a Mass.

5. STRATEGY FOR COOLIE SANGHA FORMATION

As a result of our work of over 8 years with the coolies of Bagepalli, the foregoing philosophical basis for the Coolie Sangha model of development and the following broad strategic principles that derive from this philosophy have evolved. The implementation details of this strategy will vary according to the different organisational capabilities, specialisation and interests of different Voluntary Agencies.

- An accurate micro-analysis of the area has to be made, related to and based on a common critical analysis of the political economy of the country, in order to objectively assess the position of the coolies in the area. This micro-analysis has to be made through involvement with the poor and should take the form of an informal inquiry rather than that of a cold assessment of statistical data. Then alone will it have our intellectualism and the poor's native wisdom as components in it.
- To be able to make such an informal analysis, it is necessary to have an as exhaustive as possible microanalysis of the country in order to develop an overall frame of reference in which specific situations, observations, developments, opinions and reactions can be placed and understood. The microanalysis should, we believe, be a common one shared by all development workers who see a value and necessity in working for societal transformation and use the Coolie Sangha model of development.
- The promotional organisation – i.e. the Voluntary Agency – must initially follow a programme approach in the villages, using adult literacy or children's education or community health education as activities that ensure a daily and continuous contact between the development workers and all the coolies of a village over a prolonged period of time. When, instead, a project approach or a once-off support is used to gain contact with the coolies, misleadingly partial understandings will emerge and this can result in them, quite rightly taking an opportunistic attitude towards development workers and Voluntary Agencies.
- Adult Literacy, apart from its value as a component in a programme approach ensuring daily and continuous contact between the coolies and development workers, is also the foundation on which the Coolie Sangha is built up. In addition to vastly increasing the communication capacities of the coolies, adult literacy will also have the added and indispensable value of bringing the coolies to a position where their conceptual abilities to grasp the larger details of societal structures and processes are enhanced. The content of this adult literacy programme has to be societally relevant and informative, apart from the technique being capable of arousing and sustaining the interest level of adults over a prolonged period of time.
It is very difficult to visualise illiterates as comprising an informed society and therefore the adult literacy effort can be considered as the foundation on which Coolie Sangha formation rests. The Coolie Sangha model demands that there be a proximate relationship and a total understanding of the existence of the coolies in society, along with a transparency in the motives and objectives of the development workers, as a fundamental prerequisite for success. In our opinion this transparency, transcending the mythical figure, can be obtained only when dealing with literate and neoliterates.
- Coolie issues that demand united struggle in their solving have to be supported by the development workers as and when they come up, and no exercise or intellectual reasoning should be used to put off such issues,. Struggle has to remain the central point in the philosophy and programme of any relevant mass organisation, and these issues have a very great educational value in the dialectical process of participatory learning. It is only through reflection on issues that the validity of concepts are emphasised in the understanding of the masses, and intellectual lines are safeguarded from perversity and ultimate alienation. At the same time, the limitations of floating from issue to issue, and the danger of inculcating a culture of opportunism in the people should always be borne in mind. In the taking up of coolie identified issues, we should not degenerate into sheer activism.
- Cadre Training is the pivot around which all the other activities and programmes of the Coolie Sangha model rotate around to gain relevance. The sharing of perceptions, vi-

sions and the macro-analysis of the country, the derivation of the micro-analysis, etc. must be achieved through regular and systematic cadre training. While it may not be realistic to make each and every coolie conscious of her or his socio-economic and political environment, the training of a sincere and committed cadre from the coolie class with the objective of having at least a few ideologically clear persons from each and every village in order to build up an effective human infrastructure will give the Coolie Sangha a vital impetus. This human infrastructure of trained cadre must eventually become a serious intellectual force in the area, capable of joining and complementing the intellectualism of the development workers.

- A 2 Organisation policy, keeping the promotional organisation (voluntary agency) and the people's organisation (Coolie Sangha) as separate entities, with the clear objective of organisational withdrawal of the Voluntary Agency from an area once the Coolie Sangha is consolidated has to be followed. This organisational withdrawal should not be considered as a simple phase-out operation, interpreting the role of the development worker as time bound. When following an organisational withdrawal strategy, higher and deeper roles of involvement for the development worker are envisaged, in addition to horizontal expansion of the same work in adjoining areas.
- The twin principles of coolie participation and grass root planning have to be followed as guiding principles in the working relationship between the Voluntary Agency and the Coolie Sangha. This, evidently, cannot be done in the first stage of involvement in a new area but must become sacramental in the shortest time possible.
- Coolie participation is envisaged in the Coolie Sangha model not only in the final functioning of the mass organisation, but also in the evolving of its structures. The finer details of these structures like functional and operational details, delegation of authority, etc. (specially at the lower levels), have to be evoked through discussions between the development workers and the coolies. This is a very important strategic principle, and unless the coolies intuitively find recognition of their participation in the final structures of the mass organisation, they would feel alienated and estranged from the structural details, interpreting them as cumbersome bureaucratic procedures to meaningless comply with.
- There is need for definite, formal, and declared coolie controlled structures to be evolved in order to give a shape and discipline to the Coolie Sangha at all levels and at all times. This alone will ensure the continuity of the mass organisation and also guarantee that the united strength of the coolies is not diverted into opportunistic pursuance of short-term and immediate gains that may prove to be counter productive in the long run.
- These formal structures should be characterised by proper membership rolls, admission/suspension/cancellation procedures, meetings at various levels on fixed dates and with definite agendas, authority and quorum, recording of minutes, ratification of decisions by the next higher level in the Coolie Sangha structure, regular built in monitoring mechanisms, periodic review and self-evaluation mechanisms, etc. These structures must follow the established geopolitical boundaries of village, Cluster/Panchayat, taluk, etc., as much as possible.
- These structures should have room for diversification at the lower levels in order to give unrestricted scope for all the individual aspirations, hopes, dreams and dissension of each and every coolie to be expressed in her or his respective situation locale specific milieu.

At the same time the structures must have a centralised unity at the higher level in order

to guarantee a common thrust by all the coolies, and to make it possible for them to express their single and non-diversified Class interest as coolies.

- Economic projects pursuing definite non-economic objectives of strengthening the unity and organised strength of the coolies, demanding grassroots planning and co-operation in implementation, enhancing skills and management concepts through a process of “learning through doing”, etc. are necessary in order to consolidate the Coolie Sangha building process and to give the Coolie Sangha teeth to come to grips with contemporary realities in the villages. These economic projects can either be small or big depending on situational variations
- Skill and management training of the coolies in order to enhance their technical abilities is equally vital. When this is ignored, a lopsided development will take place, with the coolies increasing their political abilities without at the same time matching this strength with capabilities.
- The role of adult literacy or children’s schooling or community health education activities as programmes is time bound. These programmes will transmute into service projects at a later stage of Coolie Sangha development, when formal and definite coolie controlled structures are imbibed into the lives of the coolies as normal and natural practice. When coolie strength becomes a visible reality in an area, the programmes earlier initiated to begin the Coolie Sangha formation process will get converted into service projects. These projects can continue serving specific and useful needs of the coolies like adult education or children’s schooling or community health education, but the further development of the Coolie Sangha will not be dependent on these activities.
- The Coolie Sangha model must cover a geopolitical viable area if coolie strength and influence are to become a visible and viable reality.
- There are restrictions for individual Voluntary Agencies which makes it impossible for them to cover more than a certain area, and so networking of all the development workers and Voluntary Agencies all over the country, following this model of development seems to be the only practical solution. At the same time, it is imperative that Voluntary Agencies develop proper implementation technologies and managerial capacities in order to cover as large an area as they can, without losing their effectivity and intensity.

6. IMPACT IN BAGEPALLI

A friend from a donor agency, when visiting us, commented that most project holders cite pressure from the people as a reason for expansion. Perhaps these project holders are being honest when they say so – I do not know. But in our case, I do objectively believe that the coolies of Bagepalli have finally found an organised body and movement that represents their interests as a Class.

They have begun to link their hopes and aspirations to the BAGEPALLI COOLIE SANGHA to very obviously visible extent. This, I proudly say, and not as a project holder trying to sell expansion programme, is the most impressive and meaningful result of our 8 years work in this taluk.

I do not fool myself into thinking that it is only class aspirations that prompt the coolies’ expectations. The service aspect, the aid-giving aspect, the small economic projects aspect, all contribute to tempt them. But these do not counter or invalidate the class aspirations, as some cynics claim. Neither am I generalising this to all the project holders and their justifications. I am only speaking about ADATS and Bagepalli – what I know to be true, and feel as real.

In all sincerity, I very strongly feel that in Bagepalli we have been able to, perhaps stumble, on a strategy for mass organisation and giving a recognition to the coolies as a Class. And I

have an unshakeable faith that this mass of rural poor, once conscious of their identity as a Class in society, will fend for itself.