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The Role and Training



of Development Activists

the workshop Nov 26 to 30th, 1979.

The Centre for Development Research and Action (CDRA), Madras, and the FAO - Freedom from Hunger Campaign/Action for Development, New Delhi organised a five-day workshop on "The Content and Methodology of Training for Activists" at Whitefield, Bangalore from November 26 to 30, 1979.

The Purpose of Organising the Workshop

There were in all 13 persons, 8 men and 5 women. Five out of the thirteen were activists, engaged directly in helping various oppressed groups to create their own organisations for political, economic and social self-protection and the furtherance of their interest. The rest were involved with organising training programmes for such activists or for potential activists. Five persons were from North India, the rest from South India. There was a doctor, a law graduate, an agricultural scientist, while the others had a background in the social sciences. One of the participants had been a factory worker for six years with experience in trade union work.

Some of the participants knew each other while some were new to each other. So the group spent some time on informal introductions. This helped to break the ice and interaction and dialogue became easier.

Participants in the Workshop

The two people who had thought of and who actually organised the workshop explained that one general purpose behind it was that many people had been carrying out training programmes of different kinds, at different levels. Some of these programmes had been regular, others ad-hoc, some very systematic and formal, others very informal and quite unorganised. Some had written about their programmes, others had not, with the result that learning by exchange experiences had not occurred. The impact and follow-up of most training programmes, it seemed, had not been evaluated sufficiently.

The organisers felt the need to meet people involved with training programmes to:

- (a) learn about their work, insights and experiences and
- (b) to discuss with them the content and methodology of effective programmes for the training of activists.

One specific purpose was to help CDRA formulate concrete ideas on how and what kind of training programmes to organise for people who could function as activists in the rural and urban areas. The CDRA representative explained that they had been organising training programmes off and on on an ad-hoc basis but were not satisfied with them. They found it difficult to communicate effectively with the people they were trying to train.

In its work CDRA had decided to focus attention on training activists. This was mainly for two reasons. First, it had been approached by some groups of rural youth for training. Secondly, looking at the present scene in rural Tamil Nadu it was felt there was a real need for training rural youth as activists. It was CDRA's understanding that tensions, specially caste tensions, were increasing day by day. Encouragingly small groups of harijan youth were also emerging to deal with such problems. However owing to a lack of theoretical clarity and support, the potential activists were unable to carry the struggle forward. CDRA felt it should play a supportive role in such situations by organising training programmes and providing relevant reading materials.

The group tried to grapple with these specific and other general problems for which the workshop had been convened.

Long List of Issues and Longer Working Hours

The workshop got off the ground with a brain storming session to list all those issues which were thought to be important and relevant to the theme of the workshop. The list which emerged was quite formidable.

It became clear to the participants that if they stuck to the usual working hours they would not be able to achieve all that they wanted to in the time available. It was decided to work fairly long hours beginning at 8.30 a.m. in the morning the morning until 10 or 11 at night with a few breaks in between. Even then it was not easy, in fact not possible, to discuss all the issues in the detail that was thought necessary.

The workshop came to be considered as the beginning of a dialogue. After some time, and after putting some of things discussed into action more such sessions could be held for further reflection and achieving clarity about how best to carry out training programmes for activists.

Sharing the Outcome of the Workshop With a Wider Group of People

It was decided that the deliberations of the workshop should be recorded and presented in the form of a simply written report which could be made available to other groups involved with similar training programmes.

who is an activist ?

After considering a number of other words which are generally used for people working with the rural and urban poor it was decided to continue to use the word activist.

The Group Chose to Make its Own Definition:

An activist is a person, who identifies with the interests of the people, who is committed to working with the poor and oppressed to help them organise themselves to bring about a radical change in the present unjust social, economic and political structures and create a free and equal social order. An

Activist may be from within the poor and oppressed community or from a different social, economic and educational background. But she will be a person committed to work full time with the people and participate in their struggles. An activist is committed to the people and not to a project, party or organisation. This means that an activist does not use the people to fulfill the aims of an organisation.

In so far as an activist's loyalty is to the oppressed people, there is a difference here from workers of political parties and trade unions. The latter, the group felt, are more often than not, committed more to the interests of their parties and unions than to the interests of the people. Various examples were given to show that even left oriented political parties and trade unions often use people for their own ends and are very dogmatic in their approach. Party and trade union workers normally carry with them a closed framework of analysis, a ready-made programme - a finished product that is to be delivered to the people. Their message is usually not open-ended. There is no scope to change it.

Although activists are and can be both men and women henceforth the activist will be referred to as a woman. Words like she, her, herself will be used for the activist in order to avoid writing repeatedly she/he, herself/himself etc.

An activist, on the other hand, is a part of the people's struggle - like a wave in the sea which rises up when the waters (the people) and the objective conditions make it necessary and which merges into the water when there is no need. Activists allow other waves also to emerge. They are not the only waves which rise.

Are Development Workers Activists?

The group dealt with the question whether development workers who implement development projects can be called activists. The answer was that those development workers whose sole concern is to implement development projects without questioning the present structures which are responsible for the poverty of the masses cannot be called activists. Most development workers do not help to organise the people. At best they improve the economic status of the poor marginally and at worst their projects make the poor poorer.

An activist is different from a development worker in so far as the main objective of the activist is organisation of the oppressed people to bring about a radical change in the present system and not work for marginal improvements in the economic condition of people without questioning the overall structures of society.

The Role, Attitude and Perspective of Activists

The main role of activists is to help people form their own organisations to fight for their rights. They should always work with a group of people rather than with individuals so that collective action is taken. An activist should also help people take leadership and responsibility into their own hands so that an outside activist is able to withdraw soon and the community brings forth activists from within as the need arises.

It was felt that an activist, whether she is from within or outside the community, should not regard herself as the main force of a struggle or organisation. It was also stressed that the poor should not be organised on issues preconceived by the activist. The seeds of discontent are within the conditions of the people, in their daily lives. Problems like economic exploitation, caste discrimination, sexual harassment of their women, etc. They feel the need to do something. A activists can help in the formulation of the unarticulated distress of the people and assist them organise themselves. The issues around which the people decide to organise should be decided through an intensive dialogue between the activist and the people.

Two examples were given to show that the emergence of an organisation of the poor depends on the objective conditions of the poor and not merely on the ability of an activist to organise.

In Maharashtra the Employment Guarantee Scheme of the government had raised the expectations of the rural un- and under employed poor. Their hopes were, however, being increasingly belied because of the haphazard and faulty implementation of the scheme. The poor were becoming more and more frustrated. Similarly in rural Tamil Nadu, the situation was becoming tense due to the increasing oppression against Harijans. In response to these atrocities some groups of Harijans were emerging to protect themselves against attacks by high caste sections.

These seedbeds of frustration are being and can be used by activists to help in the emergence and growth of people's organisations.

Increasing Peoples Self Confidence

The poor distrust others and themselves, they have fear, they devalue themselves. They have no confidence about their power of thinking and action. They believe it is beyond them to change their own destiny. It's an attitude of fatalism with centuries of history behind it.

It is an important role of an activist to help them shed fear, regain confidence, believe in themselves, and trust fellow human beings. This can and should be achieved through struggle, struggle against outsiders who exploit them as well as struggle against their own fear, lack of confidence, individualism, illiteracy, etc. Confidence increases through affirmation, through group action. An activist should help in keeping the group action going so that people learn how to work together. An activist has to constantly ask "am I increasing their confidence, their faith in themselves, and their self-reliance or am I making them instruments of my own plans of action, imposing my own ideas on them?" There is a tendency to do the latter among activists who come from university backgrounds, who are well versed in speech and who use standardised terms. This makes people who do not understand such language feel small and inadequate. Instead of increasing their confidence there might be an altogether opposite effect.

Help in Analysis

Activists should help people analyse their situation and clarify issues in order to evolve action plans. The activists can and should make, what may be called, their most valuable contribution, that of raising questions and providing a wider perspective.

On the basis of the studies undertaken by activists and the experience and knowledge they might have of their struggles, they can help the people to broaden their understanding as well as to see their struggle in the context of the larger reality - the nation.

Two-way Relationship Between the People And the Activist

It is not always correct to believe that the poor and the oppressed do not know their problems or are not aware of their exploitation. If they do not talk about such things openly to outsiders it may be because they have good reasons not to trust them. The outsiders, especially if they are well to do, more often than not go out to exploit or make use of the oppressed people. Another reason why the people might not talk about their oppressed condition and the injustice they suffer may be because such a condition has existed for so long and it is so deeply entrenched in the system that they see no way out of it. They perhaps do not know that things can be different. The brainwashing they are continually subjected to about the rich being cleverer, hard working, and they being poorer because of their past bad deeds perhaps also plays a role in keeping the people quiet about their plight.

However, silence on the part of the people about their problems and exploitation may not always be because of their ignorance. Sometimes it might be a strategy on their part to prevent making their situation from becoming worse than it is.

Some participants gave examples to show that the poor and the oppressed often have a very good idea of how they are being exploited. They have their own thinking and perspective about their condition. They can in fact describe their own reality much better than outside academics. Often one finds that they present reality in a much more pointed way and in its various dimensions. The poor might also have a perspective of the way the total system works, and they also have or may have an idea of their own powerlessness to deal with it.

Also, they do not think in abstract terms; they usually think in concrete terms about their immediate prospects in the social system.

Activists, specially the ones from outside, do not have the same knowledge, experience and consciousness which the people have. The activists' knowledge of the micro situation is usually more limited, but they are likely to have more information and knowledge about the macro situation or how the whole system operates.

Therefore, it will be wrong for activists to think that they know everything better than the people and that all they have to do is to pass on the "truth" as they know it to the people. The interaction between the people and the activists is by no means a one way process in which the activists provide all the "wisdom" with the people having nothing to contribute from their side.

Activists have to learn from the people and the people from the activists. It has to be a two way communication, a relationship of give and take. Together the people and the activists must strive to extend the limits of their knowledge, perception and understanding of the social processes at work around them.

Mutual enrichment comes when both activists and the people together make proper connection between local reality in the concrete and the wider regional/national reality in a generalised abstract form; encompassing the part into a whole.

Equality, Not Easy to Achieve

It will not be easy for the activists to be regarded by the people as their equals. The people will invariably look up towards them for leadership. Traditionally, that is how leaders are looked upon. It is not easy for the people to break away from the influence of hierarchies and undemocratic methods of functioning in their own traditional institutions as well as modern institutions like schools, government offices, etc. Activists on their part are also usually victims of similar attitudes in reverse and tend to enjoy their superior role as guides or teachers.

Given the constraints, it will be a constant struggle to achieve equality in the group, to start ever widening ripples of new values, new methods of functioning, a new way of relating to each other. Such values will be new for the people as well as for the activists and they will have to join in a common pursuit to achieve them.

Should Activists have an Ideology?

At this stage another question was asked - should activists go to work with the people without an ideology? Can they merely inform people about the different ideologies or ideas of development and change, without putting particular values on any. Should activists be neutral? If they have an ideology should they not tell the people what it is?

The group felt that it was not reasonable to expect activists not to have any views on society. Their views might not always be in the form of a well defined ideology. But undefined though they may be, views will be there. The fact that activists want to work with the poor means they have some views as well as aspirations to do something. It is their idea of their own role which will determine their methods of work and attitudes towards people. If activists work with the poor as against the rich it shows that they have already made some choices vis-a-vis power relations in the social system.

It was felt necessary for activists to have a more or less clear understanding of why they want to work with the poor and what they want to do. However, the group thought that it was against rationality and scientific attitude to blindly accept any one prevalent ideology as perfect and fully satisfactory for all times and situations. Any particular historical and rational and scientific analysis (like that presented by Marx, for example) is in the last analysis and according to the very method, a human effort bound by time and place. Activists have a responsibility to examine the ideology they find satisfactory against the concrete experience of the historical situation in the present day society. This they owe to the people if they are not to make guinea pigs of them. Activists need to be as clearheaded, rational and scientific as possible.

With What Kind of Perspective Should the Activist Go to the People ?

The group rejected the proposition that an activist as defined above should go to the people with only an orthodox Marxist ideology. Even Marxist ideology has come to be interpreted in more than several ways in recent years. Having rejected this proposition it was felt that just anybody and everybody who worked at the grass-root level would also not be termed activist. Even while allowing for differences of ideology it was possible to specify some essential common elements of the ideology of activists.

To begin with, activists would uphold the values of freedom, equality and justice and clearly judge the present social system as unjust, oppressive and unequal. It will be their conviction that injustice, inequality and poverty can be removed only by a basic restructuring of the whole society.

Furthermore, an activist will understand that oppression, injustice, poverty are not a result of mere individual desires or quirks. How individuals behave and act is a result of a structured social, economic and political system. An activist will also recognise that the material conditions of living result in people relating to each other in a certain way and it is important to analyse and understand how in a particular society different sub-systems or structures are interconnected. For an activist restructuring of society can only come through the oppressed classes struggling against the existing system in a coordinated manner as a united force.

Hence, an activist will consider it her primary task to help people to become strong and united with revolutionary consciousness.

Activists should not be Rigid

Although activists should have a good understanding of the reality around them and a clear perspective on what needs to be done, they should not think that they have all the answers to all questions and have nothing further to learn. Activists should realise that the reality is always changing and hence one's understanding is never complete, that there is always a possibility of improving on one's understanding. They should be willing to modify/change their understanding and perspective according to the changing reality. Their ideas must always be open to verification and redefinition, if necessary. Changes should even be admitted in the tools of analysis for none of them can be held to be infallible or suitable for all times to come.

Openness vis-a-vis- the People

Just as activists would like the people to be open and willing to learn, they should also be open and willing to learn from the people and from the interaction which takes place between them and the people. If they start believing that theirs is the correct ideology, that they know the solutions to all problems and all that the people have to do is to learn from them, then there can be no scope for any genuine dialogue between the people and activists.

Activists should not believe that they have already achieved the right level of consciousness and their task is only to bring people to their own level of consciousness. Such a belief and attitude again leads to an unequal relationship - a situation of domination emerges. In such a situation genuine dialogue and learning cannot take place. Such efforts of activists to make the people believe what they believe in would amount to indoctrination.

The task of an activist is to help people reach their own conclusions and not necessarily always the conclusions of the activist. By working and struggling together the consciousness of the activists and the people should change and reach higher levels. An activist helps in setting in motion a process of thinking, reflection and action.

Similarly, while organising people it is neither desirable nor necessary for an activist to predetermine what direction the organisation should take. The direction should emerge out of the dialogue between the people and activist after a thorough analysis of the situation. The experiences and thinking of the people have to be taken into consideration. The organisation would become effective and militant only if the people believed in it, ran it themselves and decided its direction. An activist has to be an active and alert worker but not the leader all the time. Leadership should ideally be with the people.

Activists have to learn to be humble and patient in their work with the people. They have to wait for the people to become active, to take responsibility and act. The main objective of an activist is not to get "tasks done quickly" but to strengthen people's organisations so that they can get their own tasks done.

When activists go to work with the people they should not try to predetermine the results of their dialogue with them. It is the people who should decide what they want to learn. For activists it should be enough to facilitate free and open discussion and provide a scientific method of analysis.

Open Ended Dialogue

Because it has been said that activists should not impose their thinking and/or ideology on the people it does not mean that they should not tell the people what they believe in. Infact they should clearly and frankly tell the people what their own thinking is and why it is that, and then encourage the people to examine it critically in the light of their experience. Through an open and frank dialogue the people and the activists should arrive at a common understanding as a basis of common action.

An activist's theoretical framework can offer a tentative perspective to the people to understand the way social relations are organised, to analyse the structure of poverty, exploitation and dominance and to see the links of local struggles with struggles at the national level. The activists' role is different from that of a party worker in the sense that she should not try to implement the ready made and rigid policies and programmes of a particular party. An activist can be a conscious element with a perspective but not a worked out plan and programme of ideas and action.

But the problem is that a well defined perspective usually includes a particular approach to solutions of various problems. An activist is then likely to provide not only an interpretation of the reality, but also the solution. This is a tendency which activists have to be careful to keep in check.

The peoples' struggles have to be based on the peoples' own understanding with activists giving a helping hand only, not leading them. Through struggle both the people and activists raise their level of consciousness.

Activist Believes in Democratic Methods

An activist should also believe in and practice democratic methods of functioning. While helping the people to organise themselves an activist should help to develop participatory, democratic and open-ended structures within people's organisations and promote people's power through raising their consciousness and ability to exercise power.

Activists Work to Build the Peoples' Power Not Their own Power

The ideology and perspective of activists should be to build people's power and not their own power. Their task is to make people aware of a way of functioning, of an approach - which is democratic, which leads to open thinking and frank discussion. The process is important because only through such a process can the end result be achieved. A activists and the people should work in such a way that they become aware of the main elements of effective and democratic functioning and master them.

Scientific Method of Analysis

Activists should possess a scientific method of analysis and study. They should study and observe how society functions in reality, or more concretely, how a village is structured, what are the inter-relationships between different groups, what is the leadership pattern etc. It is only after studying the essence of the society or the community they are working with can they reach any conclusion about what needs to be done. Observation and study can help in the identification of forces which stop change and forces which lead to the kind of change which the activists and the people find desirable.

Activists must have faith in the people. They must believe in their ability to learn, to analyse, to act and to bring about radical changes. They must be able to convey this faith in the people to the people through their behaviour, speech and action. If activists have faith in people they will not try to decide for them and lead them all the time. The people will then be able to take initiative and responsibility to run their own organisations.

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Should Activists Get Involved in Projects For Economic Improvement ?

Most struggles of the poor are on concrete issues, which are more often than not economic - issues like higher wages, better conditions of work, implementation of government programmes like fair price shops, land reforms, and other such measures. People can be organised on these issues. But if people are part owners of land then should activist help them ?

This issue provoked a lot of discussion. In the beginning there were differences of opinion but gradually, through analysis of concrete cases a more or less common view-point emerged.

There was no difference of opinion in the group about activists helping workers to fight for higher wages, better conditions of work etc. This meant that there was no difference of opinion about activists working with landless labour, factory workers, quarry workers etc. It was felt that while fighting for higher wages the contradiction between owners of means of production and workers is retained and hence the class consciousness of the people can be retained and sharpened. It was the opinion of some that by fighting for higher wages people do not get necessarily integrated into the capitalist system. This was disputed by others who maintained that even while fighting for wages workers are or can become drawn into and entrenched in the capitalist system. Most of the time their demands are only for higher wages, better conditions of work and not about changing the ownership of the means of production. This theoretical discussion was however not carried on further.

The main discussion was focussed on the question whether activists should help

- marginal and small farmers to improve production;
- marginal and small farmers and landless labour to start projects like dairy development, poultry units, credit unions to improve their economic condition;
- quarry workers to get contracts for quarries and manage these quarries themselves;
- kilnworkers to own kilns jointly and run them themselves.

In other words the question was whether activists should also act as development workers, whether they should help organise and run economic development projects.

In the beginning some participants were of the opinion that activists should not get involved in these "development" projects. To back up their opinion they gave examples of a number of "development" projects which had not led to any substantial change in the condition of the poor. They opposed the involvement of activists in such projects because they felt.

1. they divert the attention of the poor from the real issue - which is struggle against the exploitative system. They give false hopes to the people. They make them believe it is possible to have a better life within the system.
2. these projects cannot muster enough resources to help all the poor in a community they end up dividing the poor further by helping a few.
3. once activists start helping the poor to get loans and other inputs the people start looking at them only as providers of economic benefits. It becomes very difficult to change this image and to establish a different kind of relationship with the people.
4. such projects also further increase individual enterprise. The poor spend all their time and energy to make their two ends meet through economic activities like poultry, dairy, cultivation on small pieces of land etc. When they become owners of these small units it becomes difficult to organise them, to develop their class consciousness and militancy. By encouraging such economic activities activists end up working within the system and by integrating the poor even more into it.

While agreeing that most development projects the past have been of the type described above, some participants urged that there is a need to reconsider the matter. In the past many (even most) organisations of the poor and the working class, like trade unions, peasant organisations have also been undemocratic and reactionary. When this fact does not act as a deterrent to reconsider the question of organising the poor, why should the negative experiences of development work in the past stop anybody from taking a fresh look at it?

This same question was put differently and more concretely this time.

If some activists are helping landless tribals to get their land back from the people who have taken it from them through money lending etc, what do the activists do when they succeed in wresting back their ownership? (concrete cases like this were cited from different parts of the country). Do the activists help the people now to cultivate the land they have won after waging long struggles or do they leave them and go elsewhere because they have now become owners (some) land and so cannot therefore be militant any more.

Similarly if some activists working with quarry workers decide with the workers that the best way to end their exploitation by contractors is to get contracts for the quarries for themselves, then what should activists do when the workers actually manage to get the contracts. As the workers would have become owners and no more only wage earners should the activists abandon them as no longer being capable of militancy?

Many participants felt that because the poor live in abject poverty their economic condition has to be improved in every possible way. They cannot be kept poor with the argument that it is poverty which makes people want to fight the system and become militant. In fact it can be argued that it is not the most poor who are the most militant.

If the argument is that wage earners retain their class consciousness and do not get integrated into the capitalist system only because they do not own the means of production, then what about the millions of self-employed people like middle peasants, cobblers, carpenters, hawkers, rickshaw pullers. Can they not be organised along with the landless labourers and factory workers? Are they to be considered as class enemies of the landless and the workers? The group agreed that this question needs to be further analysed for greater theoretical clarity.

After a lot of discussion it was agreed that activists might have to get involved in programmes for economic development like land improvement and cultivation, quarry and kiln management etc. Otherwise the people might not be able to manage their lands, quarries and kilns properly. And this could result in the people losing control of what they had won through protracted struggles.

It would be wrong, the group felt, if after the struggle for land ownership is won, the activists withdraw from the scene. If they have strong reservations about working with small and marginal farmers then they should see that they do not involve themselves with struggles for the ownership of land.

Once they are part of a group and a struggle they should do what the group decides (unless of course they have very serious differences of opinion). If after waging a struggle the group decides that it would like to till the land it has got, the activists can put forward their reservations, their fears about such activities. They can warn the people that such economic activities can lead to a diffusion of the class struggle and class consciousness, it can lead to a kind of "economism". The people can reflect on these views and decide what they want to do. This would make them cautious and self critical and help them to avoid certain pitfalls.

Development Projects Should be a Mean to Structural Change

The approach and method of work in these economic activities will, however, have to be radically different from the normal run of development projects. A work will have to be organised in a way which not only retains but strengthens the class consciousness of the people involved in it.

When involved in economic projects activists should aim to help the people to develop alternative ways of organising these activities. The structure of these programmes and organisations will have to reflect all the principles the activists and the people believe in and aspire for. Every feature the activists want to see in the new society they want to create, should be experimented with even in the smallest structures and programmes they organise.

Whatever economic activity the activists get involved in (whether it is cultivation of land or management of a poultry or dairy unit, a quarry or a kiln) they should consider it as an experiment in new methods, a new way of organising, a new approach to work. It is through these concrete experiments that the people and the activists will gain knowledge and experience of revolutionary methods of work. Such experiments are thus very essential as experiences in cooperative, democratic methods of functioning.

The participants felt that if land is to be cultivated, some collective form of operation should be adopted. It is collective action which can strengthen the collective consciousness of the people.

In order to make such experiments successful a lot of thinking and discussion will be necessary about how to organise the work, how to fix the wages of those who work on the land, how to divide profits, what kind of inputs to use, where to take loans from etc. While cultivating the land various issues can be taken up for analysis - like the functioning of the government bureaucracy, banks, the operations of the institution of market etc. As the peasants will surely have to confront all these issues, through collective action and reflection, they can further sharpen their class consciousness.

If this experience of getting the ownership of land, and managing it is successful it can provide a good example as well as courage to others. Secondly as this group of people will presumably be better off economically they will be less dependent on outside sources of funds to build their organisation. They can then be in a position even to help other groups engaged in similar struggles.

It was stated that nationalisation in the sense of state ownership can possibly be established overnight all over the country but socialisation in the sense of community control and utilisation of the means of production is something which cannot be established by a legal decree and enforced through state power. The ground for its spread in all spheres, all over the country, will have to be prepared through experimentation and practice. Even small experiments of collective ownership could provide tremendous inspiration; thereby demonstrating the alternatives to the existing patterns of ownership. This could, in turn, lead to or keep the struggle for the socialisation of the means of production going.

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It will however have to be ensured that these small efforts at collectivisation not only do not hamper but also carry the struggle forward. Therefore it is essential that activists also get involved with programmes for economic development. If such projects are left entirely to technical experts then there would never be able to support or encourage the emergence of people's organisations and/or struggles.

When activists participate in radical economic projects they are not like donors or intermediaries between the donors and the people. They are part of the group and their actions have to be not only responsible to the group, but carried out in partnership with the people.

The second half of the workshop was devoted to the subject of what should be the content and methodology of training programmes for activists. The discussion was both about the general principles of training and the specific training programmes being planned by CDRA. The discussion was not on abstract lines but based on the experiences of the participants with various training programmes.

The tentative programme of trainings to be carried out by CDRA was taken up in detail and suggestions were made that CDRA should make certain changes in its approach to training. The CDRA participants found the exercise useful to reflect on their past programmes and reformulate their future training plans.

training of activists.

The Old Concept and Practice of Training Unsuitable For Activists

Soon it became clear enough that the usual training programmes cannot be suitable to "train" the kind of activists the workshop had in mind.

Traditionally, training is considered to be the transfer of selected technical skills and knowledge by one set of people to another. The content, methodology and the setting of the training is all determined by the trainers. In such training programmes the trainees are merely passive recipients of whatever the trainers decide to give them. They are objects of training and not its subjects. They do not participate in organising their own learning. The onus of responsibility is on the trainers at whose instance alone the training proceeds. Such trainings are basically undemocratic, hierarchical and non participatory. The trainers provide the directives, determine the contents and the methods and watch for the response, the results of the experiment they have conducted.

After going through such a training the trainees could be expected to adopt the same attitudes in their own work. They would assume the role of trainers vis-a-vis the people and work in an authoritarian, undemocratic and anti-people way.

In fact the group seriously questioned whether the word training with its undemocratic connotations should be used at all. It was however settled that instead of discarding the term it should be redefined to express a qualitatively different view of the process.

The word training was used not in a narrow technical but in a broad sense. Training, it was felt, was a continuous on-going process. Yet, there could be periods of intensive learning, acquisition of skills and knowledge and reflection, which could be regarded as training.

Essential Features of Training of Activists

Activists should be trained through a process of group interaction. Such a process can facilitate the acquiring of attitudes, knowledge and the skills for activists to fulfill their role.

Training should create an atmosphere where the participants discover knowledge for themselves in a dialogical group situation where every one (both trainers and trainees) participate with a questioning and open mind.

In such a training programme, the distinction between trainers and trainees is minimised. The trainers are facilitators who create an atmosphere where all the participants (including the facilitator) can express themselves freely, ask questions and learn. The facilitator is also a participant in the common search for knowledge. Here every one discovers and analyses reality. The 'truth' is not handed over by one set of people (the trainers) to another (the trainees); instead a genuine dialogue between people is made possible.

Training should not only help in the search and acquisition of new skills and knowledge but also help the participants to acquire and strengthen values like justice, equality, honesty, truthfulness and solidarity amongst oppressed groups. It should also create or release energies in the participants to act with conviction and courage in their various struggles at different levels.

The way the training is organised should reflect the value which the training talks about in theory. For example, the training itself should be participatory, democratic and non-hierarchical - if these are the values it would like the participants to imbibe. The participants should be involved in decision-making about most, if not all, aspects of the training programme.

Training should help participants develop an analytical, and questioning mind and a scientific approach to understand the realities around them.

The discussions and analysis should be based on the reality as experienced by the participants in their life and work. They should begin with the known and then go on to the unknown rather than the other way around. In fact the issues to be discussed should be determined in consultation with the participants according to their needs and expectations. A good way of achieving this is to ask the participants to present case studies of their work experience. From these presentations it may be gauged what are their priorities for training.

It was thought very important to be able to establish a relationship of equality during training programmes. If the training is conducted in a camp situation everyone should eat and live together. Trainers or officials should not enjoy special privileges like better food, better accommodation etc. The opportunity of being together should be used to reduce disparities rather than to reinforce them.

The training camps for landless labour organised by the National Labour Institute (NLI) were cited as examples. In these camps government officials and NLI personnel sit with the people on the floor. No chairs are provided. They have to eat with the people and wash their own dishes like everyone else. The poor villagers are also encouraged to smoke (if they must) in the presence of upper caste and class people. Such seemingly simple and matter of fact rules make a lot of difference. The poor tend to lose their inhibitions and fear of the rich and government officials. They gain self-confidence. At least during the camp equality is shared and a dent made in inegalitarian behaviour and etiquette.

Discussions should not go on for so long that participants start getting bored. However, it was felt that boredom and disinterest would not be problems if the programme could respond to the participants' needs. But if people still get bored, then they should be encouraged to say so to enable the group to do something else.

Each training programme should be an exploration. Even if the objective of a programme is to provide technical skills, it can be done in a participatory way. Even in such programmes it should not be necessary to predetermine which skills are to be imparted and how. The group can first discuss the tasks the participants have to perform, and then decide which skills they require for fulfilling these tasks - and how they want to learn them. When done in this way the whole training programme can become an interesting and participatory exercise.

An on-going evaluation of the content, method of work and inter-relationships within the group should be in-built into the programme. Each participant can be asked to write down his/her thoughts on the programme and then present them to the group for discussion.

The number of participants in a training programme like this should not be more than 25. In a bigger group it becomes difficult to achieve intensive inter-action.

As to the selection of participants for a training programme (say of CDRA) it was felt that the best way is through personal contact. If there is an active group or organisation then it can be asked to nominate someone suitable. Otherwise one should meet potential candidates and get to know them personally. The people selected should have had some education, should have already started questioning the unjust social system, be willing to work for change and be ready to participate in struggles.

The location of the programme should be as close as possible to the realities in which the participants will be working. It is better to have residential programmes in which every one lives together and therefore can work for long hours as well as get to know each other well.

Participatory Exploration

One point in the workshop one of the participants Vasant Raishikar, who had been conducting informal training programmes, was asked to share his method of work. He explained that when he conducts a training programme although a theme for deliberation is chosen before hand, depending upon the group that is meeting, the detailed content and direction is not predetermined. It is left totally open ended. His narration was found very useful because it showed how many of the principles of training stipulated by the group earlier in the workshop were actually practiced by him. After listening to him the group was convinced that it is possible to create exciting learning situations without the trainers trying to impose their own views and concepts.

Vasant who is not formally attached to any organisation helps a number of grass-root groups to organise training camps. These camps can be attended both by educated, middle class activists and by peasants or factory workers. His methods are the same for both these groups.

He finds a group of 15 to 20 to be ideal for a camp and does not like to work with a large number of people where the participants have to break into smaller groups for a meaningful discussion.

Full Trust in the Participants.

When Vasant organises a training camp he does not know how it will proceed because he does not predetermine the content or the time table. He does not consider himself to be in-charge of all these matters. It is the group which is in command. He puts total trust in the people because he believes that if they have come for a training session it is because they are serious about it. According to Vasant this approach of his has so far not failed. He believes that if you put trust in people they start becoming responsible for their thought and action. When the people feel that they have the freedom to think, act and relate to each other, they take on a lot of responsibility.

In these camps the discussion begins with the real experiences of the participants.

The theme chosen relates in some way to the work they are doing or the life they are leading and the programme begins by each participant in turn telling the group about an aspect of the theme in terms of his experience and feelings. Some participants talk freely while others find it very difficult to speak more than a couple of sentences. But nobody is quickly passed over. With patience each one is encouraged to speak, and the group waits in anticipation. Only if the silent waiting of the group is seen to oppress a very shy participant is he or she passed over. In the course of this first round the participants begin to sense the difference, begin to learn to be attentive and respect other participants. In the course of these preliminary narrations common elements begin to stand out. The discussion usually begins by identifying these common elements and the group picking out one as the starting point.

In a training camp for peasants or factory workers when a starting point is decided upon, depending upon the nature of the point, again, the participants are invited to speak out their views or narrate their experiences. Sometimes it takes time for someone of them to lose shyness or fear and speak out. But, invariably, patience on the part of the facilitator pays rich dividends.

This establishes the bonafides of the facilitator that he/she really means what he/she said about participation. The narrations are not usually thorough, precisely to the point, or well expressed. But they are genuine expressions. When some one has broken the ice, others follow. Not all the participants, but one has enough to start with. In this way almost any issue can be tackled.

Acquiring a Questioning Attitude

The facilitator's role is to ask questions to carry the discussion and analysis forward, to draw people to talk and to think and to provide information which may not come out of the group. The facilitation has to be very patient because some participants might narrate things which the facilitator thinks are not relevant. The facilitator has to remember that these details might be relevant to the person who is narrating them and should not dismiss them out of hand. The people have to be encouraged to see the causes, inter-relationships, and the method of analysis. Through such case studies one can discuss almost any economic, political, philosophical issue. The best way of involving people in learning is to proceed from such concrete cases about which they know something and therefore can contribute to the discussion.

Time is an important element in such a process of learning. With enough time both the detail, the content and the process of analysis become clear and whatever is learnt is retained by the participants. New words and concepts are introduced only if that helps the analysis. The group does not start off by using words like mode of production, ownership of means of production, class conflict etc. According to Vasant, if at the end of a training session there is a hunger for knowledge, a realisation that we do not observe enough and do not observe scientifically and if there is a realisation that there is an inter-relationship between phenomena - then the training can be regarded as having made an impact. The participants must learn to ask more questions. It is only through questioning and reflection that they will be able to go further, observe more, question more and understand the realities better.

Participants have a right to learn what they want to know. It is not the facilitators who should always decide what the participants should know. As it is not desirable to impose anything on the learner/participants, it is important not to predetermine the content of a training programme.

An Example of Participatory Exploration

To explain how discussion unfolds itself, Vasant gave an example of a training camp. This camp was held in a small village, not very remote from a city and yet a village which was not visibly urbanised. Under the National Adult Education Programme three classes were being run in the village. Similar classes were being run in nearby villages also. The animators were young boys, some of whom were themselves labourers or small farmers. All of them had only a few years of schooling. Each day for 3 days about six animators plus a few village youth would gather at night after meals for an hour or two. The theme chosen was "The Village".

Discussion started with the question "What is a village?" It immediately became clear that they had lived all their lives in a village, but had never given a thought to this question, had never asked this question. So it was quite an effort to answer the question. (There was a blackboard and answers to the question were to be written by the participants on it). The answers started to come in slowly first, then a little faster.

"Houses"	I	
"Shops"	I	Comments were made on this and
"Temple"	I	that, Yes, a village has all these
"Land"	I	things. But, is that all? Let us
"People"	I	go further. Let us ask a few more
"Cattle"	I	questions.

A question or two was put. Do people live singly?

Are they like a crowd on the streets? Why do they live here?"

"No, not single, unrelated people, but families".

"They live here because it is their village; they have their homes here".

Another question was put in: "Is it enough for people to have houses to live in to make a village? Why did they set up homes here in such a difficult, remote place?" (The village was difficult to reach as it did not have even an approach road till about 3 years back and for 3 months during rains it used to be practically cut off. There is no electricity even today, though there is a bus service now. Drinking water was difficult to come by earlier).

"Why, because of the land, of course. To be near the lands".

"What is a land? What do you need land for?"

"The people work on land and live on its produce".

"So, can we once again try to answer our first question. What is a village?"

"Village is a place where families stay and make their living off the land".

At this stage of the discussion a diagram was drawn on the black-board, showing that people just don't set up a village anywhere but where they have a nearby source to make a living. It was asked if there is this only one source-land-by which people make a living? The answer first came "they can be getting jobs". This answer had a background. Many boys from the village went daily to a nearby city to serve in different places-factories, offices etc. The facilitators (there was one more person in addition to Vasant in the group who acted as one) wanted to focus attention on the relation of man with natural resources. So it was suggested that the group think of the time when there were no jobs in the city. Someone thought of cattle, sheep; some other thought of forest. Then all these were put on the board in a group.

Land	I		
Cattle	I		
Forest	I	NATURE	People
Sheep	I		
Water	I		

There attention was drawn to the word Nature under which all these things can be put. Now the group was asked again to look at the diagram drawn earlier. The diagram was somewhat like this:

"People depend on land for their living".

"Land gives them food".

"Is it that men and women sit in their houses and the land comes and puts food in their houses?"

"Of course not! people cultivate the lands".

"How do men/women cultivate?"

"By labouring".

"So, how can we now describe the relationship?" To aid their thinking the diagram was redrawn; like this:

People

LAND

and it was suggested that someone from the group name the link from what they had talked about earlier. It was not difficult for one of them to draw a line and write "labour" in between, so that it became,

People → labour → land

Generalising at this stage the facilitators put below this

Man → Work → Nature

The discussion so far was summarized for the group. All of us have to live. In order to live human beings have to labour on nature and produce different things. It is in the effort to produce a living for themselves that people come to live in a village.

To emphasize the link it was asked, "can anyone earn a living without working?" It was also asked further if nobody worked on nature would it be possible for human kind to exist? The answer was NO.

"But is the village - houses and lands - all ready-made so that people just have to come and occupy them?" was the starting question for the next stage of the discussion. The answer was self-evident, so it led to another question".

"How did their village come in to existence?"

It was a question the group could not answer in terms of documented history. So it was suggested that the group approach the question speculatively and try to imagine what might have happened.

It was not easy for the group to do this but with effort they were able to visualise a time when there were no houses, and land was under forest or grass.

"Do you think it was just one person or one family who came and established the village?"

They said, how could they tell, they did not know they were told, yes, nobody knew for sure. They were to imagine, what could have happened? You see, people must have come, broken new land, distributed the lands for cultivation, started growing crops, etc. Suppose there were a few families.

They must have been kin to each other, or known to each other. Most likely they came here from a nearby established village in search of lands, because their own village could have been overcrowded, or they had some trouble, or there was an adventurous spirit. Somebody must have taken a lead, shown some skill, courage and imagination. Then following the first few families others must have followed later. Some could have come through a marriage connection. Some as servants. Servants, labourers or artisans were probably brought by the ones who took the lead in setting up the village.

"One must not forget that it was only through hard labour that lands were made cultivable, that the village came to be a safe place to live.

"Now, think how could the lands have been distributed. What are the different possible ways?"

"Each family may have taken as much land as it brought under cultivation"

"Wouldn't they have naturally help each other while breaking new lands? Don't you even today help each other out in various tasks?"

"Yes, may be according to the need i.e. the number of persons in the family; or could be according to how much the family could bring under cultivation; or equal shares to all"

At this point the facilitator gave some information regarding the element of communal ownership in land rights as the British found in different parts in India, how rights were vested in the village community to certain extent and lands were periodically taken away and reassigned if the village elders thought it necessary. The information given was neither very detailed, precise or full. It was given to make the point that society was not always organised on the basis of alienable private property rights of individuals. In fact, life was far more communally organised, that even in the matter of land rights and distribution a village like theirs had a long history of and different stages of growth.

As it happened the group met in the Panchayat office, adjacent to which was the house of the inamdar, who used to hold the villages around as inam lands. Till, may be, fifteen - twenty years ago the inamdar had been a very big landlord and most families took lands from him for cultivation as tenants or share-croppers, or worked on his lands as labourers. The boys in the village remembered the days of feudal relationship with the inamdar family. It was obvious from the way they joked about the young boy from the family who had asked for tea at some recent mela in the village and was poo-hooed that the inamdar family had become just a relic of the past with no power in the village affairs.

They had been witnesses to a historical change of great significance but without understanding its importance.

The facilitator put a question to them did they think that the inamdar had at any stage laboured to bring the lands under cultivation. None could believe. They said they had heard it said that the inamdar family had got the villages around in inam from a nearby king in the old days

"Which means he was brought from outside and given these villages as a lord? What is an inam? Do you think the cultivators were at all consulted when this happened?"

The group only knew that as an inamdar the family had a right to a share of the produce from all the lands from around these villages. Besides they owned large tracts of land. The group was asked to visualise villages spotted all over a large area, and think of their relation with kingdoms of old. The brute fact of military conquest and domination, the mechanism of tribute paid to the raja, assignments of part or whole of the tribute by a raja to inamdars, and such inamdars gaining superior rights over land during the early British period - all this process was discussed and unfolded. Lastly, the transition they had witnessed as small children/young boys after independence was discussed.

Here the group members were encouraged to describe the changes in their own way. They recalled how tenants had stopped paying rents to the inamdar, how they had stopped giving a share of the produce. How then the inamdar family was come gradually to sell the lands. It became clear that there had been an element of bigger tenants grabbing forcibly and illegally and being able to get away with it because political power had come into the hands of these peasant castes at the local and state level. The inamdar family was reduced to helplessness. It was some of these old tenants who were the big landlords and rich men of the village now.

In this way a background was created for the discussion of the village at present and the analysis of its structure. It would not be right to say that all the participants in the group fully understood all the points covered during the discussion. There remained many ambiguities and many points would have to be gone into again with more information with the help of selected reading materials. The time available was too short to look at the village from more than one angle, that of rights in land. As he explained, this particular programme was an experiment and an exploration for Vasant too.

It is an urgent need that village youth begin to understand their village as a whole system made up of interrelated sub-systems and having a history. They need to be able to locate the forces of and directions of change, the dynamic situation.

This 3 day programme (all told about 5 hours) was undertaken to learn about the problems involved in handling this whole theme at the level of village youth without any academic training. It was a rich learning experience for Vasant also, as he stressed. What could be said to be the achievement?

The participants began to look at their own village historically and analytically. They began to reflect upon the village as a system and a structure. In response to the probing questions they began to think, to make connections, to understand some concepts. Through such a dialogue fundamental questions like relationship of man to nature, the origin and history of society, distribution of means of production, etc., were raised in a manner whereby they became live and highly relevant questions.

There were some limitations. Most of the questions were asked by the two facilitators and it was in answer to these that the group did its reflection. Ideally the questions also should have come increasingly from the participants. And they do start coming when the participants come for their second or third programme.

Learning came to the participants slowly, painfully and bit by bit. It came as they thought and made shy tentative answers and found that they could give answers which were meaningful, because they fitted in. As the discussion moved closer to their own times they had more to tell, both incidents and information, and they could check out suggestions from facilitators with their own knowledge. They became more confident.

It was clearly a situation wherein the facilitators knew more in some areas, and the participants were under the pressure of the "authority" of the facilitator, particularly Vasant. At the same time it was they who were doing the answering, who were discovering, taking the first steps in historical and structural analysis.

Then the discussion moved to the situation as at present. The theme was the division of the population into different economic classes and it was approached through the present distribution of land. From this point onwards the boys from the villages were in command. They were more informed and they were doing the analysis to a far more extent.

Following the usual divisions, and with the intention to focus attention on the landless element in the structure as against the big landlords, the facilitator suggested the group show on the board how many were big landlords, how many landless, etc., which would give them a rough picture of the economic classes in the village. There was a certain reason why the facilitator chose the theme of division into economic classes. The group of activists working on the NAEP programme in the village were "class analysis oriented" and it was understood that one of the objectives of the training programmes was to intensify the class consciousness of the animators. In a sense the question that the facilitators posed was a loaded one.

The participants said there were no big landlords in their village. Neither were there any landless families. The facilitator's first response was of disbelief. How could this be? So he took the answer to mean that the participants really did not follow his question and asked them not to be so offhand but search out the big landlords and the landless, who were bound to be there. Still, the participants firmly answered that there were no big landlords and neither were there any landless.

This was hard to accept, but there was nothing the facilitator could do about it! The facts in this village were not very convenient for intensifying class consciousness, but one had to proceed with facts as given by the participants who knew best amongst the people present there.

The facilitator was up against a problem. An analysis of economic division as reflected in land rights was the theme, and it had to be fruitfully completed with the group's participation. It would not be right to dismiss their village and go into national statistics. But then it posed a problem only if one wished to impose a certain line of analysis and conclusion on the group. The facilitator felt a sense of relief. Now whatever analysis was done it would really come out of the situation and the group's thinking.

The problem was of making meaningful divisions amongst the landholders and the criteria used had to be such as could be understood and found meaningful by the participants. Here the facilitator's previous experience came to his aid. If a landholder is sufficiently "big" in terms of the village, usually he does not labour in his field, has labourers on annual payment contract to work both as labourers and overseers of other labourers, and is someone who acts as a money lender to the poor landless or marginal landholders.

The extent of holding in acres is not always important. Most likely the participants had only the acreage yardstick in mind when they had answered there were no big landlords in the village. Only the inamdar had been the big landlord in their view and he of course was now just one like them. It was suggested to the group that they may consider applying a yardstick. Such as the following:

"Are there farmers who do not labour on their land, who get their land cultivated by the labour of others?"

"No. All farmers work on the land". Again, this was hard to accept. A further question was put.

"You mean to say there isn't a farmer in your village who does not do coolie labour on his land? Do all work with their hands like labourers?"

"Even if they don't work with their hands, they actively supervise". "No, they work also if it is urgent or if it comes to that". From the discussion it could be gathered that at one time in the recent past the big ones of today were not so big and also laboured on the land. The transition from being tenant, farmers to big rich farmers was a very recent one.

But the participants had begun to make distinctions. Now they went forward more speedily. There were 5-6 farmers who employed labourers on the basis of annual contract.

"Let us put their names on the board".

Their names were put. From this point more information about these easily came forward. They were also moneylenders. In fact they were addressed as "sahukars" (moneylenders) rather than "shetkari" (farmers). They managed the affairs of the village. Other common features of this group were discussed.

We had now identified the top section of the landholders and it was easier to formulate the criteria for the subsequent strata one by one, and roughly decide how many should be put in each of these categories.

In this way the group analysed the situation and came to divide the landholders into five strata.

Farmers who owned 10-15 acres of land, employed labourers on annual contract, had much surplus to sell in the market, lent money to others, grew cash crops etc.

Farmers who did not employ annual contract labourers, but had some surplus, grew cash crops.

Farmers who worked hard on their land and had enough to meet their needs. They had enough to eat and drink. (In marathi they could be described as Khaun plun sukhi)

Farmers who had land, but didn't grow enough to last through the year, and had to supplement by working on other's lands.

Farmers who were landholders for name-sake only and were practically labourers.

Now, which of these could be grouped together as having similar interests? In fact the participants did not perceive the situation along class lines but they did distinguish the top category on the one hand and the last two on the other. The top 5-6 farmers were markedly different not so much through their exploitation as through their power and authority in the village which the boys knew. But it also came out during discussions

that their authority was being successfully challenged by farmers from the second and third strata. The last two categories were the struggling poor.

The facilitators had known from the talk of the boys that many went out to jobs in the city nearby. So they suggested that the group could not know how much economic conditions were unequal unless one also took the earnings of those employed outside taken into consideration. Like land, jobs were a source of income. It was suggested that the NAEP animators should independently write down the details of the types of jobs, the number in each type of job and their division according to landholder strata. Then they should sit together and collate their notes and present the information on the last night.

There were about 100 persons who did other jobs, mostly in the city (leaving out 3/4 in the village itself). All the different jobs were classified and put on the board together with numbers of persons engaged. Then for each type of job the numbers were divided into landholder strata. The picture was revealing. The top 2 categories had disproportionately large numbers earning through jobs outside. The jobs in the city were at the clerical, teaching, technician, grade IV employees and casual labourers levels mostly, but added a good amount to the family income. At the other end, out of the 30 marginal landholder (strata V) families, who needed supplementary sources of income most, only five had outside jobs.

The job pattern in this village further strengthened the unequal landholding (and income from land) pattern.

This was a moment of revelation for all.

The urban working class having kin relations with the better off landholders was also of sociological and political importance. The facilitator here gave some information and analysis about the working class reactionary social (caste) attitudes from an article he had recently read. The article also showed up the kin relations of the working class with landed peasant castes in Maharashtra. There was then some discussion on the implication of this fact for radical revolution. Such a working class was unlikely to support the landless or marginal farmers in their demands for land/more wages.

The best part of the analysis came at this point from the participants. The question was put to them:

"Why is it you think that those most in need of outside jobs have the least jobs?" By this time they were thinking and participating actively. The answers came from them:

"Fear: The poor are not familiar with the city world and are afraid".

"Ignorance & fear: The poor do not know where to go for jobs and are afraid to approach city people".

"Cannot afford: The poor are so poor they cannot take out time to go looking for a job. They have no money to spend on travelling to the city and trying to find a job".

"No connections: Usually you get a job through somebody you know or are related to or are friends with.

"Lack of education: To go and look for a job requires some education nowadays. The children of the poor start working so early that they are too illiterate and are tied down to work in the village itself.

"Fear": They stick to the labouring they know than taking the risk to venture into the unknown even when they see other boys going out and earning more".

Poverty forcing to keep people poor-this vicious circle came home very forcefully as it came to be drawn on the board.

This whole exercise in dialogical exploration could be said to be only the beginning of a process which has to be taken further in many ways. The claim is not made that the whole economic and social structure of the village came to be understood. It also could not be claimed that a self-sustained process was firmly got going. But a modest claim could be made that the village youth learnt through participatory experience a method of analysis, a way of questioning, the value of looking for empirical data and its interpretation. They also had an introduction to seeing things in a historical perspective. They had done some very hard thinking for themselves.

When it all started the facilitator had a theme with him which he wanted the participants to consider. He also had in mind that they should come to see the relations amongst the people in the village as a system and a structure. But apart from deciding the theme (which also can be left to the participants) he left it to the participants what to make of it from their own contribution. The role of the facilitator was a very active one, as can be seen from the narration, and yet it was within the frame and flow of the answers given by the participants at each step. If he had thought of giving a lecture on the subject of "the village and its structure/system" it surely would have been quite differently organised. It would have been more comprehensive, more academic and it would have impressed the participants as very learned. But they would have as quickly passed over it or have come to repeat some of the formulations parrot like, but not been able to explain if challenged.

In this dialogue they brought out the building blocks to build up an analytical structure in the context of their own village out of their own observation. They would not be able to repeat almost any of this if they were set an examination. This was the advantage. In future they would be able to handle analysis on their own. Moreover they would not allow people to lecture them or be devalued by people posing as their superiors. They would be more confident of their powers of thinking and would speak out boldly.

The Facilitator also Learns

The facilitator also learned many things during the dialogue. He came to know about the perceptions of the village youth, the specificity of the socio-economic political situation, the variation within a general situation of poverty, inequality and oppression.

A usual premises such as that in each village there are a few big landlords and many landless families, or that the harijans are the most oppressed and the poorest, and which are mechanically taken for granted, may be very convenient for so-called radical propaganda but if the local situations are much different, then what? It was a challenge and in meeting it, the facilitator also learnt how to approach village realities more objectively and meaningfully, starting from redefining one's analytical categories. The fact that this small village was sending out around 100 persons for jobs outside forcefully brought home to him the dynamic changes villages are undergoing and which have to be incorporated in one's village analysis. If the facilitator had chosen to give a lecture he would have not learnt all these things. His analysis would have remained very impressive but divorced from the complex, dynamic reality.

Vasant's approach is based on the conviction that no human being, however learned and brilliant, can come to possess the whole and definitive truth for all times. Any one person's learning and understanding is partial and limited and it always remain open that in interaction with others he comes across something new which enriches, makes less partial his hold over truth. Out of this understanding comes naturally a respect for others, a willingness to explore together, an interaction. Then one does not resort to dialogical method as a subtle technique to bring others to accept one's pre-determined conclusions. One readily accepts the experiences of others, and builds on the basis of those experiences an understanding of truth, together with the others.

It is not claimed that participatory exploration automatically leads to action. Such exploration can be undertaken with only academic interest also. But when activists learn to use this method there is a significant advantage. In absence of following such participatory exploratory method the actions decided upon are usually based on orthodoxy and dogma, not taking into consideration the specificity of the local situation, the perceptions of local people, their immediate needs and problems, etc. When such a method is followed the actions are decided upon by the participants themselves out of their understanding of their situation so that unity of theory and action is achieved in a real sense leading to further reflection-action - reflection process.

Through this method a quest for knowledge is aroused. Knowledge comes to be seen as directly relevant to the understanding of their situation, problems, needs and solutions. The learners can then be helped to read what has already been written on the different issues. Reading will make more sense if they have already done some thinking on their own. According to Vasant, the written word should not be allowed to dominate. He feels, in the past we have paid so much attention to the written word that it actually came to dominate and to stifle new thinking.

In this method, there is no special burden on the facilitator who feels free and light because she is not taking on all the responsibility. Every one has to be alert all the time with all one knows because any topic might come up at any moment. So, a participatory process makes strong demands on the participants' creativity.

The participants experience this as a new way of learning. In the past they have not been participants in the learning process. As they come to see that each detail is important they begin to see the importance of observing carefully. They enjoy learning because they can also contribute to it. They start relating their experiences and interacting with other in the group. By analysing their own reality and by putting on a board the facts about their village, their vision gets broadened. This whole thing comes as a revelation to them.

Once a process of being involved in learning gets underway, it becomes relatively easier to relate to larger corresponding concepts.

The use of the local language, even of the local dialect of the people is very important. If you use another language and also force them to speak that language their confidence will be less. They will be handicapped because they will be speaking a language which they do not really understand.

The learners should not only understand and analyse their reality but also understand how to understand, how to analyse, what kind of questions to ask.

This method of understanding is important, through which they can understand other realities and inter-relationships.

The workshop participants found Vasant's presentation of his experience and views to be very useful. Some of the other participants had also been using a similar methodology in their own training programmes, but there were others who said they were not using participatory methods of learning. One of them said that he now realised that most training programmes he had attended were more manipulative than participatory. He admitted that most of his own talks were lectures with no discussion or interaction with the audience. Vasant's narration made him reflect on and question his own approach in the past.

Another participant shared his experiences as a worker of an organised trade union. He said he went to the people with a well formulated stand and a closed framework. Even from "participatory" discussions he wanted only one thing to come out and this was determined by the party line or trade union line. He was there to promote the people's struggle but this struggle was to go on the lines decided by the trade union leaders. There was no genuine freedom for the workers to take their own decisions. The hierarchies, he found, were very rigid in the organised trade unions.

Vasant's narration made it quite clear to the workshop participants that any issue can be tackled with the participation of the learner. Learning can and should be related to the realities and experiences of the participants. Only then is it real and meaningful learning. The local realities can then be gradually seen in the context of the nation, the universe. The interrelationships between the local power structure and the national and international power structure can be made clearer.

Similarly, other topics like the need for people's organisation, type of leadership necessary for it, necessary linkages between local organisations, regional and national organisations, the issues on which people can be organised etc. can all be discussed.

Vasant calls this method participatory exploration. One can also call it dialogical method. Vasant has been using this method for a long time. The group asked him whether he had been influenced by Paulo Freire. He said he had not read Freire till only a few months ago. He found a great deal of similarity between Freire's ideas and his own. Reading Freire made many things clearer for him.

CDRA Training

The outline of a training programme for rural youth drawn up by CDRA was presented for discussion. It was a nine-day training programme for potential activists. All the details of the nine-day programme had been worked out - the time-table, the contents and the sequence of contents had all been decided. Each hour in the programme had been planned. All the activities from "introduction" till "good bye" had been programmed in advance.

The group felt that planning a training programme before hand would not leave much scope for the participants to decide things for themselves. They would again become mere recipients of instructions. Once a programme is planned to such an extent it becomes difficult to make it open and flexible. It cannot take the felt needs and expectations of the participants into consideration.

In the CDRA programme were included topics like tools of analysis, and a number of simulation games. Time was also allotted for reading documents. The group discussed many of these issues.

Tools of Analysis

Some of the workshop participants said that any training of activists should provide tools of analysis to the learners. There was a lot of discussion about these tools of analysis.

One of the participants pointed out rather strongly that although every one talks about imparting 'tools of analysis', she has never understood what these tools actually are. She requested that these tools of analysis be made available so that she too may touch them, feel them and include them in her own training kit. Amid laughter and amusement the participants ventured forth into a discussion about what in fact these tools were. Very good use had been made of humour as a means of focussing attention on a very serious issue, one that has always been taken for granted. The effort once again became to go beyond the word to the essence of the concept. Although many of the participants had mentioned that mode of production was the most important tool of analysis, it was not clear as to how this tool was to be used in a concrete situation. Mode of production after all is an extreme abstraction unless its meaning is made clear.

The group felt that the term 'tools of analysis' itself was misleading. It mystifies rather than explains. It gives the impression that there are certain tools of analysis which are valid for all times and societies and are therefore infallible. Once you have acquired them you can correctly analyse every society and situation and determine the course of action. This, the group felt, may lead to activists becoming rigid. They might become victims of their own tools and jargon. Production relations, mode of production, dialectical materialism, surplus value etc. are some of the Marxist concepts which are used to analyse society. Some trainees try to hand over these concepts or tools of analysis to the village people. All this jargon is passed on to the village youth who learn the jargon without actually

knowing what it means. The way these tools are given does not lead to questioning. The learners are not made to discover these tools for themselves; instead they are simply handed over these tools (usually by an outsider).

At this point, one of the workshop participants explained how he had learnt and how he teaches these tools of analysis to rural youth. A lecture is given to the learners about society and how it is structured. They are told about the different classes in society, the different structures in society (like economic, political, social) and their inter-relationships. Information is given about modes of production, production relations etc.

The group was impressed by the participant's (himself a villager) knowledge about these concepts but felt that his presentation was not suitable for training activists. It was not suitable because it started from the abstract. The topic was called "tools of analysis". This itself would be entirely new for the learners to understand as it introduced too many concepts and words with which the learners would not be familiar. Such a presentation may create awe among listeners but it might not lead to their active participation. In fact instead of making the learners self-confident, such an approach could make them feel very small. Although the lectures might sound radical they would not be participatory. The learners would feel the burden of all the new concepts and would, most probably, not be able to apply these tools very confidently. In fact, even in the workshop there were people using many of these terms without being able to explain what they really meant. One could see that they had not understood these concepts well, although they kept insisting these were the only scientific tools to analyse society.

The group felt that there is nothing wrong about the different methods and concepts or tools used to analyse society. What is, however, often wrong is the unimaginative way in which these methods and concepts are used and taught to others. Instead of analysing society through the experiences of the village people themselves by using their own language, many activists/trainers draw their language and examples from the books they have read. Such examples and language are very remote from the perceptions of the village people and, therefore, they cannot lead to much learning and analysis.

It was agreed by the workshop participants that it is absolutely essential to simplify the language trainers and activists' use. It is essential to go beyond the jargon to the essence of what is being talked about.

The activists must learn how to observe the society they live in, to collect relevant information and to analyse it. To understand a community it is indeed important to understand the pattern of the ownership of the different means of production, as well as control over other sources of income available, the way production is organised and ways in which command over the labours of others enables owners to snatch a large share of the produce; the mechanism through which surplus is also purchased cheaply through loan operations, the division between classes based on the pattern of economic exploitation and political power and social domination. But this understanding must be reached through facts they observe and identify themselves through questioning and relating, not on the basis of readymade theories and formulations dished out by someone. In short they must construct their own theory in an effort to make sense of the concrete reality around them, in order to understand the way to change it in the desired direction.

Use of Simulation and Other Games in Training

In the outline of the proposed nine-day CDRA training programme, there were as many as 5 games. Some other workshop participants had also been making extensive use of games in their training programmes. Those who had been using games felt that simulation games were useful in making the atmosphere lively and in breaking the monotony of a training programme. Moreover, through such games many ideas could be conveyed and concepts explained. Also, situations could be described: it may be the structure of a village or the functioning of the economic system or the selfish nature of groups. Certain games like 'Star Power', 'X-Y game' were described.

Some workshop participants, however, expressed serious reservations about the use of such games. There was a lot of discussion which made the proponents of the use of these games think more critically about their usefulness. They said they had never examined the games critically. They had learnt them in some training programmes or seminars and had started using them in their own programmes.

It was pointed out that the origin of most of these games was the West and most had come to India from the US. Simulation games had been developed initially for business management training programmes. Most of these games were based on a certain presumption about the nature of man, the urges that moved men, the goals they have, which are consistent with the moral philosophy of free enterprise.

It was suggested that this surely was not a matter of accident. The use of these games presupposes that one accepts the premise of capitalist moral philosophy as to the unchangeable selfish nature of man. All games are devised to prove this and then work again from that basis to find out solutions. It was asked, are we challenging this very claim of the capitalist philosophy, or are we satisfied in working out "management solutions" within the framework of a "selfish" man?

Some of the participants said that in the games they found a definite element of manipulation, of wanting to control people's responses and direct them from outside. In many simulation games all the facts are not told to the players. Something is kept hidden by the trainers. That in itself gives the trainers certain power over the others making his/her position superior vis-a-vis the rest of the group. After the game is over the trainers analysis - sometimes even given his/her own judgement.

Some participants narrated how they had felt insecure, unsure and manipulated while playing such games. They were not sure what and how much was serious and what was the game part. One of them had found the judgement given by the trainer, after they had played a game, very unfair.

It was pointed out by a number of participants that normally the more educated and sophisticated trainees hesitate or refuse to play such games precisely because they feel manipulated and self-conscious.

The critics of games were of the opinion that such games have no place in participatory trainings. They give the illusion of being participatory because of the physical participation of the group members in them. But the group members are, in fact, only participating as much (or as little) as the pieces of a chess board participate in a chess game. The rules of the game are decided by the trainer who holds the deciding trump card.

Another criticism of these games was that they simplify reality. They present a simplistic picture of the phenomenon they are trying to explain. It is much better to study real experiences and discuss them rather than to create complicated games.

It was pointed out that games which are not manipulative, where all the cards are put on the table may be used. Observation games or memory games may be quite interesting and useful.

Since there were two opinions about the use of games it was suggested that CDRA should experiment in two groups - in one use games and in the other not use games. This would enable CDRA to see whether games are really helpful in creating an atmosphere which is conducive to learning and whether they help in gaining a better understanding of society.

Use of Reading Materials in Training Programmes

Reading materials can be of two kinds - 1. those which are written in such a manner that the reader is given an impression that what is written is the truth and there is nothing else to be read or explored or known. 2. those which introduce certain issues, present one or various points of view and which encourage the reader to explore further, read more and reflect for himself/herself and then make up his/her mind.

It is the second kind of reading material which is useful, and which should be provided to activists.

There is however a dearth of simply written, analytical reading material specially in local languages. Often instead of simply written good analysis what one gets is simplistic analysis which is not very helpful.

A concerted effort has to be made to prepare such reading material and to translate into local languages the material available in foreign languages. The material should be self-contained i.e. it should explain the different terms used and the background. Yet it should not be bulky.

Some of the themes on which reading material is required are:

- the village and its structure
- the larger economic system
- history of the last 200 years
- ideologies and theories of social change
- how to analyse society

The workshop participants were of the opinion that this is a big task and it cannot be done by individuals but through a widespread group effort.

Use of Film, Slides, Skits, Cartoons, Songs

These different media of communication are indeed more effective than the written word and can be used effectively for educational purposes. But often these media are used to communicate a prefabricated message - to create a predetermined reaction and response. The message can be about family planning or about radical people's organisation but the approach is the same. The effort is very seldom to stimulate thought and to make the audience question, analyse and reach its own conclusions. There is often a certain element of propaganda and manipulation in the use of these media. The producers have their own perspective which determines the presentation and the message. In this way they are manipulative and hence not educative in the real sense of the word. The songs and dramas used by radical groups also have the same element of propaganda in them.

The workshop participants felt that well produced film strips, slides, dramas, songs can and should be used to provide facts and information, to raise questions, to initiate dialogue. All these media can be used like any case study material which is not accepted as such, but is discussed and analysed. The advantage of these media is that it can present facts in a selective and effective manner and can keep the interest of the audience alive.

Conclusion

The workshop provided a good opportunity for people involved in the training of activists to share their experiences and views as well as to reflect on their own work. Useful discussions took place. The workshop provided suggestions and ideas for the future training programmes of CDRA and other organisations represented in the workshop. It was hoped that through this report more reflection and discussion on the role and training of activists would be initiated and the actual performance of activists and the quality of their training programmes would also improve.

It was also hoped that at least some of the workshop participants would collaborate with each other in their work and would put into practice the principles of training agreed upon during the workshop.

Reported by Kamla Bhasin Vasant Palshikar Lakshmi Rao
Designed and Illustrated by Sheba Caracchi

Collection Number: AK2117

DELMAS TREASON TRIAL 1985 - 1989

PUBLISHER:

Publisher: **Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand**

Location: **Johannesburg**

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