Acc. No.
Date
New Delhi.

43/PR/2

PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH AND ACTION IN INDIA

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Where does participatory research stand today in India ? To understand this, one needs to see where participatory action stands today, because a genuinely participatory approach to research has to be a response to action. Though this has not always been the case, in recent years most scholars who have got into participatory research have taken to it as a result of demands from the field. In order to understand this, in this paper we shall at first study the developments in the 1950s and 1960s that led to the formation of social activist groups and after that see in what way some scholars decided to support action in the field. We shall end it with some questions concerning the present, particularly some recent experiments.

Pattern of Development and Disillusionment

The first factor to be borne in mind is the birth of what are known as action groups in the late 1960s and in the early 1970s. This phenomenon itself is the result of the disillusionment of many middle class students with the present pattern of development that seems to result in the enrichment of a small minority at the cost of the powerless majority that is further marginalised. Like most newly independent Third World Countries, after its independence in 1947, India also took for granted that the Western sophisticated technology-based and capital-intensive economic

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growth model was the only one available to it. Some modifications to the captialist system were introduced according to another Western model i.e. the Soviet type of planning with its heavy industry infrastructure and State ownership of the means of production. But while planning the development of the country, the decision-makers and leaders of India assumed that the introduction of technology and the creation of a heavy industrial infrastructure would itself create jobs for all and would lead to social transformation (Fernandes 1985: 3).

However, by the mid-1960s the ill effects of this model of development were beginning to be felt. Mass education had been introduced after independence and the first post-independence generation was coming out of schools and colleges. Planned development had not created an adequate number of jobs and unemployment was staring this generation in its face. Food shortages and political crises too went hand in hand. This generation was also exposed to somewhat radical thinking in the University and many of them realised that merely making capital and technology available does not make it accessible to the masses. Rather, the introduction of sophisticated technology without changing the social structures which render a few powerful at the cost of the powerless majority, only intensify inequalities rather than reducing them (Gueriviere 1987: 70-71).

> Largely because of the elitist metropolitan model of development adopted by the Five Year Plans in India, with the concentration of investment and resources in the industrial or modern sector, there is a dual economy with dichotomous relationship between the urban and rural sectors, and, within the city, between the formal and informal urban sectors. This dual relationship may be conceptualised, as Wiebe does, in terms of a model of dominance and dependency (de Souza 1978: xvi-xvii).

Because of its ill effects, in the 1960s, the youth were)ass)g through a historical process of disillusionment with :he sophisticated technology and heavy industry-based approach)f the country's planned development, that was expected to solve :he socio-economic problems but in practice had led to unemploy-ient and greater impoverishment of the weaker sections. This challenge went beyond :he economic arena to the political field, particularly to the eftist parties. As K. Damodaran, a prominent founder-leader)f the Indian Communist Party said in 1974, the Party that)riginally stood for the revolution slowly adapted itself to .ectoral politics and began to lose its revolutionary fervour. order to win elections it had to adapt itself to the Indian cial reality where votes were got mainly through what are own as "vote banks." The subordinate sections are encouraged to actions which get them some benefits but their autonomous ganisation is rarely encouraged. They remain only sources of tes for political parties (Damodaran 1979).

A case in point is the Bhoomi Sena in the Thane District of Maharashtra. The Left Parties encouraged the tribals to grab land from the moneylenders and go to jail. But not much was done beyond it. Slowly the tribals were disillusioned with this approach for they viewed the land-grab movement only as a symbolic gesture and the electoral needs of the parties did not permit them to go beyond it.

That is when the tribal leaders realised that they could attain their rights only through a sustained struggle, not by a one-time land-grabbing action. As a result of this realisation, once out of jail, their leaders began a process of discussion about land alienation. This discussion led to a slow, collective awareness of the fact that most of the land had been illegally taken over by the moneylenders. The discussion, apart from being a tool of awareness building, led to a sense of oneness among the tribals and to confidence among the young leaders who had begun the process of discussion. A decision was taken on further action and ongoing reflection (Rahman 1981: 3-4;15-16).

Apart from the students who had not yet entered the parties, in many cases those who had already joined them and had taken the most radical stance and even violence, realised that though they took to violence and fought for the people, in reality leadership remained in their own hands. In some cases they had succeeded in eliminating the enemies of the people but not in building up local leadership. Slowly, a few of them gave up

violence and settled down among the people to organise them and get into a different type of movement with the people (Roy 1983: 72). Among these one can mention groups like the Institute for Motivating Self-Employment, West Bengal and many others in Andhra Pradesh and elsewhere. Many others were disillusioned with the Leftist parties because of the support they extended to the Indira Gandhi Government when she declared a State of Emergency (1975-1977), imposed a virtual dictatorship on the country and suspended human rights. Thus to some extent th)social activist groups thrive as a result of the failure of the parties of the Left (Joseph and Desrochers 1985: 40).

From Voluntary Action to Social Activism

Also, most voluntary agencies entered the field with the ideology of national development and passed through a history of their own. Most took the economic and GNP growth of planned development for granted and initiated projects with technological inputs with the hope of changing the economic condition of the r)ple. A large number of them had also taken to a relief orientation of satisfying the immediate needs of the people through institutionalised care of hospitals and schools. Slowly, however, those who were not merely implementing projects, but were also reflecting over their consequences, realised that families with a weak economic base were unable to get the benefits of the institutions like hospitals and schools, and relief alone could not solve their problems. In other words,

making institutions available was different from making them accessible to those who needed them the most. While agencies with good intentions could make institutions available, access to them depended on the power equation. By and large the weaker sections were excluded from them, though they were founded mostly for them. Their benefits reached mostly the more powerful classes. Hence, by the 1970s, many voluntary organisations realised that poverty could not be overcome by economic inputs alone, since it is the result of the oppressive social structures. They realised that they had to get into a new type of education, geared to making the weaker sections aware of their situation, and help them to become active agents of their own development and of changes in society (Fernandes 1981: 36). This type of development projects were often referred to as "mass action for development."

> From the notion of mass action for development it is but a short step logically to mass action against those who have so far been monopolising the fruits of development. Thus notions of organisation and mobilisation emerge to supplant the earlier view of village self-reliance through Khadi and village industries....In a class society, and under the tutelage of the counter ideology, individuals will begin to see the class antagonisms where mere mobilisation fails to develop the forces of production, and from that to an understanding of politics is another short logical step....Thus, through the agency of the counter ideology, conceptions develop from charity to development from development to organisation, from organisation, to politics and from politics to political education (Roy 1983: 61-62).

This disillusionment with economic development, political parties and the voluntary sector, has been the beginning of the social activist groups, many of which were founded by students in the 1960s and 1970s. Most of them belonged to the middle and upper classes, but opted out of the system and chose to go to the rural areas and get involved in the organisation of the otherwise marginalised sections.

Reflection and Non-Party Political Forces

Thus, one can see that the first feature of these activist groups is that initially it was an upper or middle class movement among the urban university students, who opted out of the system to go to the rural areas and to get involved in the organisation of the rural poor. They worked among the powerless classes that had been further marginalised by the present pattern of development and had been neglected both by the economic and the political forces. Politically they were powerless and were only "vote banks" of existing parties. Economically they owned no assets for themselves but were only tools in the hands of others as wage labourers, often bonded. Most of them were the assetless rural poor who formed more than 40 per cent of the population. The bottom 20 per cent among them owned less than 2 per cent of the country's assets while the elite 10 per cent owned more than 50 per cent of the assets (Govt. of India 1980: 8-10).

It is this group of the most marginalised that the upper class urban students got involved with. The development of

these communities as human groups was the first priority of these young persons who opted out of the system. They were convinced that outsiders cannot develop the marginalised. They have to develop themselves (Nyrere 1973: 60). This is what can be called participatory action. In this type of action, those who participate are not only the upper class persons who take decisions for the masses as it happens ordinarily. In these cases the decision-makers are the people who are affected by the events of everyday life and whose lives have to change as a result of these decisions. The upper class youth who get involved with their organisation are ideologically committed to assist them in their struggles and not become the decision-makers.

Secondly these are what have come to be known as the "Non-Party Political Forces" (NPPF) as against the traditional established parties including those of the Left that did not seem to respond to the aspirations of the poorest among the poor (Kothari 1984). While the Leftist parties organised the "working class", their leaders came mainly from the upper strata and their cadre from the urban industrial workers and from the rural peasants who were formerly tenants but acquired land after they struggled with the assistance of the Leftist parties under the slogan "land to the tiller." These new landowners often depend on the cheap labour of the landless in order to develop their newly acquired land which is their only asset. As such, in some areas this group even had a vested interest in the poverty of the landless. As such, the cadre of the Leftist parties are in contradiction with the most marginalised

sections, whose empowerment the social activist groups are attempting through the participation of those who have been excluded from all economic and political processes and have only been subordinate participants. Consequently, the social activists were attempting alternatives, through participatory action, both to the economic and political systems (Fernandes and Lobo 1986).

Thirdly, the activists realised the need for the people to become aware of their situation. In other words, the third feature of these activist groups was what can be properly called participatory research. They knew that real knowledge is with the people. However, this knowledge has been monopolised by a few and the producers are deprived of its ownership. The dominant section have thus used their monopoly of knowledge to deprive the marginalised classes of their rights and of their humanity. Literacy is the lowest among these classes and infant mortality the highest. Laws may be enacted legally freeing them from their bondage and indebtedness. But the local vested interests ensure that the knowledge of these legal provisions does not reach the oppressed (Fernandes 1982: 708-709). Instead, the powerful classes have got the powerless to believe that the present oppressive situation is their fate and have made rules for them to subordinate them further, After all,

> differences in the ability to make rules and apply them to other people are essentially power differentials (either legal or extra-legal). Those groups whose social position gives them weapons and power are best able to enforce their rules. Distinctions of age, sex, enthnicity and class are all related to differences in power, which accounts for differences in the degree to which groups so distinguished can make rules for others (Becker 1973: 17-18).

The role of the activists was to take them beyond this false consciousness and help them to become owners of what they produced, including knowledge. After all

> at all stages of their liberation, the oppressed must see themselves as men engaged in the ontological and historical vocation of becoming more fully human. Reflection and action become imperative when one does not erroneously attempt to create a dichotomy between the content of humanity and its historical forms. The insistence that the oppressed engage in reflection on their concrete situation is not a call to armchair revolution. On the contrary, ~~reflection~~ true reflection--leads to action. On the other hand, when the situation calls for action, that action will constitute an authentic praxis if its consequences become the object of critical reflection (Freire 1972: 41).

Thus, the activists had to get involved in a new form of education meant to empower the powerless. They had to attempt an alternative to the present system of education that is accessible to the powerful and excludes the weaker sections. This search for alternatives through the participation of the oppressed was genuine participatory research that led to action and decision-making by those who had till then only been passive doers.

Professionals, Education and Technical Approach

However, the whole phenomenon of the formation of social activist groups had a few shortcomings. First of all, in the 1960s, radicalisation had been almost totally in the South of the country which has a longer history of political struggles and

has higher literacy. Apart from the upper classes that were radicalised, another group that entered the field consisted of young persons belonging to the oppressed sections who had got access to formal education because of a series of historical circumstances. However, despite access to education, many of them were excluded from good jobs in the system. This disillusionment would motivate them to go back to their own class and get involved in organisation at the grass roots level. Another group that got radicalised and got involved in violence was mostly in Eastern India. Several of them would get disillusioned with violence and then settle down to form social activist groups. Briefly, social activist groups were formed in areas that had a higher literacy and a history of political action for social reform but did not have sufficiently effective Leftist parties. Action groups filled this vacuum (Sheth 1982: 50).

Radicalisation would reach the Northern belt only as a result of the imposition of the State of Emergency by Mrs. Indira Gandhi in 1975. This region being more feudal in social structure than the rest of India, has more repressive forces controlled by the dominant sections than elsewhere. As a result, both corruption and the violation of human rights was felt more in this region than elsewhere. Consequently, the struggle for "Total Revolution" and an end to corruption began mainly in this region, particularly in Bihar which is the most feudal among them, and in Gujarat in Western India which has a

Gandhian tradition of non-violence. After the Emergency was lifted in 1977, many of those who had struggled for an end to corruption and had felt the violation of human rights, would get radicalised and get involved in social activist groups.

Another major shortcoming of these groups is that while taking to an educational and organisational approach, they had given up as irrelevant, all economic support projects and technical inputs. This has resulted in many struggles through which the marginalised demanded their right to be human. However, most of those struggling for their rights were persons depending on their daily wages for survival. A struggle or a strike often deprived them of these wages and in the absence of any other economic support, they were left with the choice between starvation, total elimination and going back into the clutches of the moneylender. For sheer survival, the people were forced back into indebtedness and slavery. This led to a major crisis in many social activist groups. Some of them went back to purely economic projects. Some others began to search for new alternatives (Joseph and Desrochers 1985).

That is when the radicalisation of some professionals like medical doctors, engineers and others began a new phase. Being better placed in the system than the others--since most of them belong to the upper classes (Qadeer 1985: 205-207)--they began to get radicalised only in the 1970s. They realised that technology as it is used today, is accessible only to the already strong and further marginalises the powerless.

Thus began a new phase in social activist groups and in participatory research. The new groups and some of the older ones attempted to combine people's education with economic programmes, using the latter as tools for education and people's organisation. They went beyond the search for appropriate people's organisations to find a type of technology that could empower the powerless. The present sophisticated technology could not achieve this. New alternatives had to be found beginning with the traditional techniques of the people and updating them. This was genuine participatory research with the people (Fernandes 1987: 23-25).

The search for alternative techniques with the people began in the medical field and took the form of community health. Other areas were experimented with, such as agriculture, housing and law. One of the better known fields today is forestry. The traditional forest management systems are geared to industrial raw material needs and the revenue requirements of the State, and in the process destroy forests that are the life support system of the tribals and other forest dwellers. Also new afforestation programmes are geared to industrial needs and not to people's requirements. As against this, many social activist groups attempt new people-oriented community forestry schemes with the involvement of the people, using species useful to the local population and using the programme as a tool for rebuilding communities that have been weakened by deforestation (Fernandes, Menon and Viegas 1988: In the press).

A major achievement of these groups is that they have succeeded in politicising issues that were till now considered non-political. These concern areas like housing, women's rights and the environment that were till now relegated to the field of relief rather than be included in the political arena. This too required another form of participatory research viz. the people's perception of their deprival, their priorities in struggles which rarely coincided with those of the upper class activists and alternatives which the people could manage and did not make them dependent on the outsiders (Fernandes and Lobo 1986: 318-320).

Finally, experience made the activists and researchers aware of the need of participatory study in another area viz. the behavioural sciences. Studies have shown that the oppressed internalise many values which the exploiters impose on them. They thus develop a low self-image. As Paulo Freire (1972: 24-25) says, the oppressed suffer from the duality of an authentic existence and bondage i.e. the conflict of the "choice between being wholly themselves or being divided, between ejecting the oppressor within or not ejecting him, between human solidarity and alienation." Heredero (1977: 24-25) describes this duality as a low self-image of themselves and of their group which the oppressed have internalised because of centuries of imposition of the oppressor's values on them. Such imposition of values, their internalisation by the oppressed and the consequent low self-image are themselves important for the maintenance of the system of oppression (Kulke 1983: 40-41).

As mentioned above, many activists belong to the upper classes, while the persons they chose to work among are the most marginalised. They are used to dependence and to receiving orders. It is easy for these groups to transfer this dependence to the activists whom they view no more as oppressors but as benefactors. Despite their ideological commitment to participation and the empowerment of the marginalised, sometimes their class values of attaining quick results and taking decisions may overtake the activists and they may tend to throw overboard many ideals they stand for, particularly the organisation of the people and their total participation (Sethi 1983: 115-117). They may tend to take many decisions for the oppressed thus inhibiting the growth of people's organisations.

That necessitates another form of participatory research. We have seen above the search with the people, for forms of education, organisation and technology relevant to the people, and situated it within the context of their oppression and modes of empowerment. In the context of the low self-image of the oppressed groups, the activist has to join the people in their search for behavioural factors that keep them divided and factors that can bring them together. Similarly the activists have to listen to the oppressed to identify within themselves their class values that are seen in their behaviour. They also have to study attitudinal changes required both among the oppressed and the activists and identify methods of achieving them.

Macro-Situation and Support Institutions

Another major change during the last decade, has been the response of scholars in several institutions to the demands from the field, and in some cases of an entire institution. Many scholars have been attempting to support activists in the field by putting their knowledge at their disposal and by supporting them in their struggles. Among them one can mention scholars at some management institutes as, for example, the one of Ahmedabad, the National Labour Institute for a few years in the 1970s etc. In some cases, the scholars have come out of these and other institutions to found new support institutions. We can mention among them the People's Institute for Development and Training (PIDT), and the Society for Participatory Research in Asia (I)A), both of them based in New Delhi. The best known among the new institutions is the Centre for Science and Environment(CSE) which has effectively created a consciousness on the environment as people, not merely wildlife and trees which many traditional environmentalists have been trying to protect from the people (Agarwal 1985: 54). The two reports it has published (Agarwal, Chopra and Sharma 1982 and Agarwal and Narain 1985) have been instrumental in making a large number of activists aware of the deterioration of the environment and of possible solutions.

In other cases, existing institutions have evolved to become supportive of the people. One can mention among them the Indian S ial Institute (ISI) and the Voluntary Health Association of India (VHAI) which have been trying to bring together persons and institutions attempting alternatives in health and other fields.

Similarly, professional associations have been founded to search for technical alternatives accessible to the people. One can mention among them the Medico-Friends Circle, which brings together radicalised medical professionals, several lawyers' cooperatives and organisations of progressive young managers. The last of these has today become an institution called Pradan,

that puts professional managerial expertise at the disposal of activists.

This type of institutions have become necessary because of the situation of the social activist groups. First of all, an important characteristic of these groups is that they are involved in micro-action. Most activists fail to see the local situation within a macro-perspective. Besides, a large number of them are persons with a University education with which they are disillusioned. Hence they tend to take an anti-intellectual and at times even an anti-theory stance and get involved exclusively in action without any ongoing reflections. As a result, often their action remains not only geographically local but also ideologically localised (Fernandes 1985a: 51-53).

Obviously, a few who have been able to have an ongoing analysis of their situation and have been able to keep in touch with others realise that

> the structural change we envisage is change at the macro-level. Such macro-changes have never taken place voluntarily in society. They have been brought about by the consciousness of the oppressed masses through the class struggle. Such a process involves organisation of a base with a macro-perspective. As such, therefore, there cannot be a contradiction between the micro-level of praxis for various reasons (Nayak 1983: 67).

But such activists are few and far between. The majority keep to local action and a localised ideology.

However, the fact remains that the local exploitative situation is oftener than not, the result of macro-policies. Within this policy-making framework, knowledge is used as power by the decision-makers in two complementary ways. First of all, though the adverse effects of these decisions are felt mainly by the powerless, their voice is never heard and their situation is never taken into consideration in these decisions. The second way of using knowledge as power is to keep information concerning legislation and development away from the people to en w facilities are available to them, they are not accessible. Thus what are officially mentioned as poverty alleviation programmes, in practice reach only the better off sections and the poor are often further impoverished. Laws are made concerning the liberation of the poor from indebtedness, raising minimum wages, giving land to the tiller etc. But often this information does not reach those who should get the benefit.

Often official policies are made in favour of the poor. But many of them seem to be aimed more at publicity than implementation. In other words, they seem to be meant to overcome the upper class reaction to the inaction of the Government and not really to benefit the poor (Baxi 1986: 36-37).

Support institutions thus have to play a double role. The first is to make information about macro-policies and about other findings available to the groups working among the marginalised sections. This is to ensure that the lack of knowledge does not render the people further powerless. The support organisations,

being located in cities, have greater access to official documents and material that affect the people. The activist groups and the support organisations together can transfer this knowledge to the people. If this transfer of knowledge becomes a part of their process of empowerment, then the people can be helped to use these projects as a mode of building up their material assets and strengthening themselves or of mobilising their group against policies that have adverse effects on them. Moreover, while transferring knowledge to the groups in the field, support organisations help the activists to situate the local situation within the macro-context.

However, only local mobilisation and action cannot change the situation in favour of the powerless. While the people have to view their own micro-situation within a macro-perspective, if policies have to change, the voice of the powerless has to be heard by the decision-makers. Support organisations play this second role in different ways. Using the services of sympathetic journalists, they try to mobilise public opinion against the repression of the people or against the schemes and policies that marginalise them, or in favour of a new approach supportive of the people. In other cases, support institutions put activists in touch with technical support organisations such as those of medical, legal and managerial professionals and build up the forms of support. A third way is to translate people's knowledge got through participatory research into professional academic language which alone the decision-makers understand,

to ensure that the people's voice is heard in the decision-making process. Briefly, the role of support institutions is to get involved in the field to facilitate participation and ongoing reflection and make the voice of the people heard at the top.

As examples of making technical material available in simple language, one can mention the two reports on 'The State of India's Environment' referred to above and other publications of VHAI on health and related matters (e.g. Sarin 1984). Another type of support these institutions give to activists is in the form of legal education, to enable the people to become aware of their rights, and taking up public interest litigation. This happens particularly when repression begins against the activists and the people. The ruling political parties have championed the cause of the poor to get votes for themselves. However, their leaders are often the local exploiters and their prosperity depends on the poverty of the marginalised sections. When efforts are made to organise the poor, the locally powerful elements feel threatened and repression begins against the activists. The police and the Government are on the side of the oppressor (Volken 1985: 19). The political parties often consider the non-party groups reactionary (Karat 1984: 25). The support institutions therefore, come together to create support for them in the form of public opinion and public interest litigation in courts of law.

These institutions have also come together to create public opinion against anti-people measures to transfer knowledge to the activists and facilitate mobilization at the grass roots

level against such measures. Two such issues are the Draft Forest Bill, 1980 and the plan to build several major irrigation dams both of which would have further marginalised the tribals who are already impoverished and exploited. In 1980, the Government of India drafted a Forest Bill to replace the Indian Forest Act, 1927. While speaking of environmental protection, the main thrust of the Bill was the protection of forests from the tribals who have traditionally kept a balance between human and environmental needs. It is the industrialist who has destroyed forests for profit. But as the forest resources declined, the dominant sections who have a vested interest in using the forest as a raw material and not as a life support system, try to reserve whatever is available for themselves and deprive the traditional communities of these resources.

Once the plan to enact such an Act was brought to the notice of the support institutions in 1982, they circulated the material among as many groups as possible, helped them to mobilise people around it, reflect over their situation and begin to act. The people felt a threat to their very existence and opposed the move. They even demanded that a new Forest Policy that supports the people be brought into force. The proposed legislation was thus scuttled (Fernandes 1983: 1-4).

Similarly there have been movements around major dams, each of which displaces an average of 25,000 persons, most of them tribals. Over 200 of these dams are being planned in the country during the next decade. Several institutions have come

together on this question and are trying to support the groups in the field. This is one area in which one sees the need to go beyond action to genuine data based research with people's participation, in order to find alternatives to measures that destroy the environment and the people.

The Role of Macro-Research

What has been said so far, concerns mainly local and even localised understanding of the situation to support the mobilisation of the people, for struggles against the vested interests of a given area. But it is also obvious that most policies are made at the macro-level and while the people feel their impact, their voice is not heard in their formulation. If the system has to be changed in favour of the people, then it is essential for their voice to be heard in the formulation of the policies which have to come not as a result of the class interests of the dominant sections but as a consequence of the pressure felt from below.

That is where the role of macro-research comes in. Do traditional research methodologies have a role to play in the mobilisation of the people and in supporting them? Briefly, what does support to the people mean? Is it to be restricted only to facilitating awareness building concerning the situation in the local area and in situating it within the macro-context or does one have to go beyond it? One would think that if it is true that only local struggles cannot change the situation, then the macro-aspect has to come in also

in research. The local situation has to be viewed in its totality and one has to ensure that the voice of the people is heard by the decision-makers. While participatory research is essential for mobilisation, the only language the dominant decision-makers understand is that of traditional research which is removed from the people. And yet if the voice of the people has to be heard by the decision-makers, then it is important to translate it in the language which the decision-makers understand.

Some would obviously state that it is against the people to go through such a process. The present system is against the marginalised sections and no effort should be made to make the voice of the people heard by them for fear of being co-opted (Karat 1984: 25). There certainly is some reason in this. However, the present writer and many others would think that while it is essential that the change of the system itself has to be the real objective, such a change cannot come overnight and the people cannot be abandoned because of the objective set by the upper classes. As things stand, it is essential at least to prevent the dominant sections from continuing with policies that keep repressing the marginalised sections.

A case in point would be the Indian Forest Bill,1980 which was attempted to be imposed on the people. As mentioned above, mobilisation in the field and coming together of those supporting the people and public opinion created by them prevented such a Bill from being passed. Mobilisation that was carried on for over a year has ensured that no such Bill will be contem-

plated in the near future, However, those who support the people cannot stop at any such one time action but should think in terms of long-term solutions that go beyond this prevention.

And that is where the role of traditional research comes in. In the case of the Draft Forest Bill, for example, when activists, scholars, lawyers and other support groups held a national meeting at the Indian Social Institute in April 1982, they realised that while the present forest policy represented the existing unjust socio-economic structures, and as such not much more can be expected from the ruling class in the form of policies and implementation, another shortcoming had to be faced. The participants stated that all the data available at present only represented industrial and commercial interests. No study had been done till then looking at the forest from the point of view of the people. The participants, therefore, gave a mandate to the organising institutions to do several such studies. They stressed that these studies should use a participatory approach but should also be available in the form of professional reports.

Only five such studies have been completed. Two of them have taken a purely academic approach, one has remained at the level of a popular report while the remaining two attempted a combination of mobilisation in the field with a professional report. They had to combine participatory with the traditional methodologies and the effort, being pioneering, was only partially successful (Fernandes and Viegas 1985: 32-51). Some of the implecations will be discussed at a later stage.

Activist Groups, Participatory Evaluation and Training

While participatory research concerns the most marginalised sections, and conventional research or the combination of methodologies mentioned above is aimed at policy changes, a new trend has emerged in the form of participatory evaluation which concentrates mainly on the activist. The trend has been the result of recent developments that have affected these groups during the last one decade. They are mainly the activists' search for personal security, recent legislation that forces them to concentrate on their own group rather than on the people, and the fear of co-optation by the dominant sections, particularly the Government.

To begin with security, it should be situated in the fact that most activists opted out of the system when they were still University students. Many of them even lack a degree and are not able to get jobs within the system. At some stage they have to get married and think of their future. A few manage to combine their security and support to the people. But this is not the case with the majority who remain in the field and try to find security in the action group itself. This can become counterproductive since they may tend to make themselves indispensable and the people who are used to dependence may remain dependent on the activists. They thus keep a micro-perspective but do not let the people take over the leadership even at the local level (Volken 1985: 22-23).

Together with the question of security, often comes also the disillusionment with the purely educational and organisational approach most of them began with, excluding all economic support

programmes. When, after some struggles, the people fail, the activists get discouraged. One should also remember here the question of the low self-image of the oppressed, their tendency to depend on the oppressor and the upper class origin of many activists. In the context of their insecurity and failure of struggles, the tendency among many activists is to go back to their class values of centralised decision-making as a mode of overcoming the leadership crisis that sets in. Within the context of their search for security, many of them tend to go to the other extreme and initiate economic growth and technology oriented projects, though they may keep a component of education in them, but without much effectiveness. Thus the educational aspect may often be forgotten and the growth of the community, of the people may suffer. Concentration shifts from the people to the activist (Fernandes 1981: 54-57).

Thirdly, in the Government there is a sense of suspicion against all voluntary effort. Those involved in this type of work are often accused of being foreign agents and anti-national and ever stricter laws are made to control them in the name of national security. The voluntary organisations have to spend a good amount of their time attending to organisational, financial and administrative matters and a good amount of their energy is lost in administration rather than in people's education. In other words, importance has to be given to the task of protecting their organisation against attacks from the Government, at the cost of the process of education (Fernandes 1986: 5-8).

This happens specifically because often they struggle

against local vested interests who often have the Government officials under their control. When their domination is threatened, they can easily accuse the activists of being outsiders come to create breach of peace in the area, and the police would cooperate with the dominant sections on the pretext of maintaining law and order. Arrests of activists are not uncommon and legal proceedings against them are a well accepted way of harrassing them (Volken 1985: 19).

Together with that, the dominant sections know how to reward those who cooperate with them. Many activists who have done good pioneering work are often invited to the State or National Capital for frequent meetings and conferences. Besides, they are always offered the bait of funds for various projects. This can create in them an ambition to implement projects that can be a visible success, i.e. those that are not much different from the traditional economic projects, but do not really help the people to grow (Kothari 1986: 14-15).

It should be remembered that though the groups may have many activists and animators, in reality they depend on the charism of one or two persons. It is these persons who are frequently invited outside for meetings. Their frequent absence from the place, particularly when a great amount of money pours into the projects, can go against the very process of education which they had set in motion in their own area. While they try to inspire others elsewhere, their own work may suffer and what they implement may turn out to be only economic projects without

a serious educational input (Fernandes 1987a: 291-293). Briefly, the activists who were radicals and were working against the system may be co-opted by all these factors together.

That is where one speaks of participatory evaluation and the role of support organisations. While many may be co-opted by these factors of fear and rewards, many others go through an ideological crisis. They see themselves being co-opted but resist it without knowing how to do it. They feel the need of ongoing evaluation in order to attain ideological clarity or support. By participatory evaluation one speaks of ongoing reflection on one's own work in the context of the micro and macro-situation in the society around them and their option to struggle with the marginalised sections. It is this option that may suffer in case of co-optation and that is where the support organisations are developing a strategy and a methodology to help the activists to keep clarifying their goals for themselves, to rethink their ideology and rework their strategy.

By their very nature these evaluations have to be participatory. Most scholars who support the activists are persons who began as academic professionals and have got disillusioned with the external evaluation they have done. They have seen little or no use in them because the values and orientations mentioned in the report are rarely, if ever, internalised by persons who are evaluated. In participatory evaluation the outsider functions only as the facilitator, posing probing questions, giving relevant information and guiding the discussion. The reflection itself is

done by the activists and not by the outside facilitator (Tandon 1981: 26-30).

A major technique that is found necessary in this evaluation is that of behavioural sciences. Often personality conflicts are hidden behind apparent ideological differences. While at the rational level conflicting actions are attributed to differences in outlook and perspective, a perceptive behavioural scientist can identify conflicts for leadership, recognition and other benefits. Hence, reflection often begins with an effort to help the activists to face these conflicts and solve them within the context of their common commitment. In other words, the behavioural techniques that are used to help the oppressed to get over their low self-image are equally important while dealing with the activists.

Together with evaluation, also assistance in training attains importance. While training is given in techniques such as health care, forestry, law, an important component of these programmes is specifically people's participation in all these fields. It includes aspects such as methodology of training and popular theatre. In other words, an area where training attains importance is specifically transfer of knowledge which is the very basis of participatory research. It is based on the assumption that the main role of the trainer is the building up of the community of the oppressed and assistance in people's organisation. Hence greater stress is laid by many of them on the training of trainers than on that of the grass roots level animators. If the activists can be turned into trainers of others and not merely into persons who have received knowledge, then there is a

better possibility of knowledge remaining in the field. Then there is a greater possibility of creating resource persons in the field who can continue the process, than if the outside trainers were to train the grassroots animators themselves.

Similarly, awareness building through participatory research can be successful only if the outside facilitators first train the local animators in the methodology of using research as a mode of mobilisation as well as in methods of data collection. Similarly, when training is given in legal, health and other aspects, attention is paid to modes of using them primarily as modes of building up leadership among the oppressed and turning them into political issues. Popular theatre thus attains importance as a method of training the people. In that sense training becomes an essential ingredient of participatory research as well as of evaluation.

Some Questions on Participatory Research

After a decade of involvement in the field of participatory research, several questions still remain unanswered. The first concerns the role of the people, the activists and the external researchers. The activists being more educated than the ordinary people, the external researcher relates to them better than to the people. Both because of the commonality of class and the language difference from State to State, most communication with the people is through the social activists who are rarely from among the oppressed themselves. Hence, what certainty does the external facilitator have that the people's point of view is understood and that they do not take an upper and middle

class view of the oppressed? This concerns research as well as training. Those who are trained to be local animators for participatory research as well trainers of others are from among the social activists. How can the external research and evaluation facilitator and trainer ensure that this knowledge does not remain with the animator but reaches the grass roots level? There is always the danger that the training of activists will reinforce the dependence of the people on them, rather than making the people independent. There have been several such experiences.

The second concerns the timing of initiating research and of choosing the issue and the extent of people's involvement in it. If participatory research is to be a mode of mobilising the people, then should one wait till the people express the need to tackle the problem and only then support them in their search or can the activist or even the external researcher take some initiatives and in the process make the creation of awareness on this issue possible? This assumes that the need to tackle an issue is lying dormant in the people and that the activist and the external researcher can awaken it.

Both efforts have been made in India with different types of success. In the case of the forest studies, there were time constraints. It was important to make the voice of the people heard among the policy makers both in the form of local level mobilisation and a professional report. Moreover, this study was time-bound. The professional report had to be completed before the finalisation of the new forest policy, the time for which

had been fixed as mid-1984. Hence, the studies had to keep to certain deadlines and there was little possibility of waiting for the people to show their readiness. Out of three States in which a participatory-cum-conventional approach was attempted, mobilisation was fairly successful in one State where we had a fairly long contact with the activists, was limited in its success in the second State where we had a much shorter contact and was all but non-existent in the third State where we contacted the groups just before the study. If we had waited for the people to be ready, we would have realised that it would be difficult to use the forest issue as a rallying point for mobilisation in the third State and would not have taken up the study there. But waiting for this to happen would also have reduced the intensity of mobilisation in the remaining States where the study became a part of the process of bringing the people together around this issue. Hence one would hypothesise that the external scholars should take some initiatives and should try to find a balance between the micro-reality, people's readiness and the macro-situation. But the modalities have still to be understood fully.

Thirdly, the issue becomes much more relevant when one comes to the specific questions to be studied. Should they be left exclusively to the activists and to the people, or should the external researcher play a role more active than being a facilitator? To explain this through the example of the forest studies, each of the eight to ten groups involved in it in every State, added questions that were important in its own area of operation. A common schedule was worked out putting all these questions together. As a result,

the schedule became too long for ordinary villagers and the activists spent much more time than necessary on individual schedules and mobilisation suffered. Secondly, some very important questions were left out. For example, the social activist groups, being by and large male-dominated, all but ignored the role of women in the informal forest dweller economy (Fernandes and Viegas 1985: 68-69).

What role should the external scholars play in such a situation? Should they allow the activists to go ahead with their present understanding of the question and evolve at a later stage, or find a way of introducing these questions or of becoming more selective in the choice of issues from the very beginning? In the forest studies we decided to let the activists go ahead with their understanding and introduce some of these questions during the study, but with limited success. Hence, both the length of the questionnaire and the absence of a section on women's role remained major lacunae in the study and affected the mobilisation of the tribals, particularly women. We had to undo the damage by doing a follow study on the role of women in the informal forest dweller economy (Fernandes and Menon 1987).

The fourth question that remains unanswered is whether the gap between participatory and conventional research can be bridged. As mentioned above, if one also works for policy changes, one has to ensure mobilisation at the grass roots level and ensure that the voice of the oppressed is heard at the decision-making level. The latter is possible only with conventional methodology. Our experience in several studies has shown that the activists

have not succeeded in combining the two. In some cases, conventional research has preceded participatory research and the results have been used for mobilisation. In some other cases the two have remained parallel. We are also aware that the present experience is insufficient to come to any definite conclusion. We can mention only one case where the need of conventional research was felt during mobilisation and it followed as a result. But even in this case, it was difficult to use conventional methodology as a tool for mobilisation (Fernandes and Viegas 1985: 69). We are not clear at this stage whether it is because the two cannot go together or because the nature of our involvement and the training of the activists was inadequate. But it is clear to us that if macro-change has to result from micro-level mobilisation, these two methodologies have to be combined.

Fifthly, all our experiments have been in areas where social activist groups were available to mobilise the people. Does it mean that mobilisation is possible only when some groups exist in the field? Can the researchers go directly to the people, and if they do, how are they to initiate participatory research without any local ally. Very few researchers have experience in getting involved in the field without an intermediary. Till now we have only acted as support groups of local social activists. It is possible that one needs to experiment with alternatives to this and get researchers from support institutions to go beyond being scholar activists and become direct activists at the grass roots level. Or is it that they have a specific role to play and they should stick to it?

Sixthly, one has to go deeper into other dominant systems that have till today remained in the hands of the dominant sections. One can refer in particular to elements like history and theories such as dialectical materialism. Participatory research has been presented as bringing together knowledge available with the people and helping them to become its owners instead of letting outsiders appropriate it. In that case, what role does history play in it? Is it possible to situate this knowledge within the macro-perspective without the historical context that has given birth to the social situations? One can certainly get popular history out of the people. But is dominant historical interpretation to be ignored completely or is there a way of putting it at the disposal of the people to enable them to better understand their situation? be modified without letting the dominant sections co-opt popular movements as they have often done in the name of better participation? (Kidd and Kumar 1981: 21-28). Similarly, are creative theories like dialectical materialism to remain beyond the purview of the people, and is one to depend only on what can be developed at the local level even within a macro-perspective? What role is the outside researcher and the support organisation to play in making these systems accessible to the grass roots activists and the people themselves? Can these theories evolve from the people's knowledge without the researcher going beyond his role of eliciting responses from the people?

The discussion in participatory research has tended to limit itself to the micro-macro perspective and controversies have been mostly on the type of support--party or non-party--at the macro-level (Lourdusamy 1985: 37-42). One needs to go beyond these controversies and face some of the questions that can make participatory research more creative than it really is at present.

Conclusion

We have discussed in this paper the origin of social action and the challenge presented by the oppressive state of the marginalised sections of society. Many young persons have accepted this challenge and participatory research has been a mode of making their dream come true. External scholars and support institutions certainly had access to similar thinking in international organisations and in other countries. But their evolution has been mainly as a response to the challenges in the field and a result of their own radicalisation.

Because it was a response to an existential situation, the evolution of participatory research has been creative. Participatory evaluation and training have followed as a result of new demands. Efforts have been made to combine the new and the old but with limited success. But precisely because it is a response to a challenge in the field, many questions concerning participatory research and these experiments have remained unanswered. They cannot be answered within a purely theoretical framework but only by combining ongoing praxis with reflection in order to make the response more creative.

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