



Rajesh Tandon

AN APPRAISAL

Participatory Research, its practice, its networks and the programme of the International Council for Adult Education on Participatory Research has completed a decade. It is perhaps now time for an appraisal of this period, its history, origin and an attempt to outline some directions for its future.

Broadly speaking the last decade in the history of Participatory Research can be divided into three phases. In this note those phases of the history as well as some directions for the future are outlined for critical reflections.

PHASE I: INCEPTION (1977-80)

This phase is characterised by the period of three years 1977-80. This is the inception phase. The history of Participatory Research is rooted in the critique of the conventional social science methodology based on the principles of adult education. This critique was intensified through the practice of adult educators in countries of South and culminated in the Dar-es-Salaam Conference on Adult Education held in 1976 in Tanzania. A groups of people, similarly concerned and beginning to develop a critique of conventional social science research, sat together for a while to share their ideas. Participatory Research as a phrase was coined perhaps then. It was then decided to convene a meeting of a few interested people from different parts of the world in early 1977 in Canada to concretise some further ideas on Participatory Research. The AURORA meeting in Canada in 1977 marks the beginning of Participatory Research Network. Still groping with the new emerging ideas of alternative research

paradigm, the groups of people assembled there from Asia Africa, Latin America, North America and Europe essentially began to articulate more systematically and coherently their critique of social science research. It was in this meeting that the idea of informally linking up with similar other people in different regions was mooted. This marks the beginning of Networks. Though still in a stage of infancy, the idea essentially entailed identifying linking up and sharing information and experiences of the people who are developing similar critiques of social sciences methodology and beginning to articulate an alternative paradigm. The people who had attended that meeting were identified as initial coordinators of the regional networks. During the next year, in some parts of the world, these coordinators became active in linking up with similar other people in their region and initiating a communication and dialogue among them. In some parts of the world, these coordinators did not pursue it and alternative people were identified to pursue the networking process. The period 1978-79 was essentially used to sharpen, deepen and systematise our collective critique of conventional social sciences research and begin to articulate elements of what was then thought as characteristics of Participatory Research. The definition of Participatory Research even then had the alternative vision of society but it focused on separate elements of investigation, education and organisation. The political economy of research and questioning the basic objectives of research enterprise had only begun to be articulated during that period.

The regional coordinators met in October 1978 in Venezuela and then in the summer of 1979 in Sweden. It is in the second meeting that the idea of an International Forum of Participatory Research was mooted and planned. In April 1980, in Yugoslavia, such a forum got together more than 60 Participatory Researchers from different

parts of the world. They brought with them their experiences, their case studies and spread over a period of a week, this event marked a major step forward in the articulation of meaning of Participatory Research as well as strengthening regional networks. The case studies, the theoretical papers, the debate in Yugoslavia was an important milestone. It began to raise the issues of links between Participatory Research and people's struggles and organisations, the question of whose interest does research serve and the production and tools of production of knowledge and the appropriation of knowledge of the experts by ordinary people. This was also the first event where members of various regional networks came together to meet across regions and establish links and bonds of solidarity. Many of us who attended that forum felt rejuvenated, affirmed and supported.

#### PHASE II: CONSOLIDATION (1980-85)

After the Yugoslavia forum began the next phase of consolidation in the history of Participatory Research. Regional networks began to develop their own separate identity in all regions; regional workshops, training programmes, meetings, sub-regional events were organised; learning materials, case studies, theoretical papers and debates arising out of these regional experiences were published and disseminated. This was also the period which marked the integration of Participatory Research as one of the programmes of the ICAE. This was in marked contrast to the previous phase where it was just a project of the Council, somewhat removed from the mainline activities of the Council. As a programme of the Council, it began to inform various national and regional members of the Council and in several parts began to influence regional members. In Latin America, for example, it was the network of Participatory Research which gradually transformed itself into the Latin American Association for Adult Education, CEAAL. In Asia, the network began to work closely

with ASPBAE and similar situation exists in Caribbean. The Council published a series of books, collections of case studies, monographs and documents on Participatory Research which was widely distributed, disseminated and shared. A special issue of Convergence brought out the debates from the Yugoslavia forum to further inform practitioners educators.

This was also a period where in several regions, exciting, intensive and potentially very important initiatives in the practice of Participatory Research were undertaken. In Asia, The Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) emerged out of the Networking as an organisation committed to the practice of Participatory Research, primarily in India, as well as in the countries of Asia. Similar development took place with the Participatory Research Group in Toronto, which which acquired an independent identity and demonstrated its commitment to the practice of Participatory Research. The period also witnessed variations in the development of regional networks. While the Asian and Latin American networks continued to grow and strengthen themselves, there were difficulties with the African and the European networks. The European network finally started functioning as it got divided into several sub-regions: U.K., Northern Europe and Southern Europe. And since then, other sub-regional networks have functioned well, except Northern European Network. The African network, ever since the departure of the first coordinator, has been experiencing continuous difficulties and has, in fact, resulted in a decay of the network. The momentum that was generated in Africa during the first phase seems to have been lost during the second phase. The North American Network also went through a process of differentiation and expansion in both Canada and United States towards the latter part of this phase. The Caribbean network came into existence during this phase, went into a period of disorganisation during the

letter part of this phase, and has come up again.

The period also marked two important events in the history of the networks. The first one is the Paris Conference in 1982 of the International Council for Adult Education; there a special interest group on Participatory Research attracted more than 80 participants from about 50 countries. A second, more recent, World Assembly in Buenos Aires in 1985 saw Participatory Research as one of the fullfledged working groups and attracting more than 60 participants. As a programme, as well as activity of the International Council for Adult Education and its regional and national members, Participatory Research began to be recognised as legitimate and important, and the networks of the Participatory Research began to acquire some degree of credibility in different parts of the world.

The period also witnessed the rise of a variety of somewhat alternative meanings of Participatory Research. The programme of UNRISD on popular participation began to talk about Participatory Research. The ILO programme, began to talk about participatory action research and these alternative formulations began to, on the one hand, advance the concept and practice of Participatory Research, and on the other hand, fragment the emerging field. However, the growing interest in the practice of Participatory Research in different parts of the world and increasing documentation of those practices led to a situation that by the end of this phase Participatory Research was atleast a heard concept, if not fully understood one, in debates on adult education, development alternatives and peoples' empowerment. The period reached a stage of a clearer articulation of the meaning of Participatory Research. Participatory Research is no more presented as a critique of traditional social science research, it has a philosophy and a worldview of its own. It is beginning to articulate questions of political economy of research: who's interest does research serve? and it is transcending the petty

debate on the issues of techniques and methods. The practice of Participatory Research has demonstrated that the tools and techniques are not central issues. The issue is control over the process of production of knowledge, its storage and its use.

### PHASE III: DIFFUSION (1985 ONWARDS)

The third phase in the history of Participatory Research has just begun, about a year or so ago. This is the phase of diffusion. This is the phase where links between Participatory Research networks and peoples' movements have been more clearly articulated and established. This is the phase where Participatory Research no more stands on its own, in opposition to conventional social science research. This is the phase where Participatory Research sees itself as an ally of the struggles of local people, of the tribals, of the landless, the urban poor, the workers. It is seen as a contribution to the strengthening of the movements: peace movement, workers' movement, womens' movement, movement around indigenous technology and local and local control. Participatory Research has begun to be recognised as an alternative methodology of empowering the people, of generating knowledge from the point of view of the experience of people, contributing to the ideas of an alternative people controlled local development. As a result, the networks of Participatory Research are beginning to include people active in different movements and different problem areas. The debates are no more on the methodology and epistemology of Participatory Research; they are focused on the use of Participatory Research on problems of deforestation, land, occupational health and safety, womens' empowerment, etc.

Therefore, in a way the original identity of networks Participatory Research is beginning to get defused. This has perhaps happened most dramatically in Latin America, and it is beginning to happen in Asia as well. Issue-based coming together of Participatory Researchers is

becoming more important. Simultaneously, the ideas and principles, the philosophy and the worldview of Participatory Research has begun to find expression in a variety of related fields, like training, evaluation, documentation etc. Alternative methodologies of training, called Participatory Training methodology, and evaluation called Participatory Evaluation methodology, have begun to surface from practice, deriving their strength and meaning from the principles of Participatory Research.

This suggests that perhaps the future directions of the networks of Participatory Research as well as the programme of the Council on Participatory Research may be very different from what has been the history over the last decade. It appears that what is important is to find ways to articulate and disseminate the inherent philosophy and the world view, the principles of Participatory Research on a wider scale and to seek their integration in a variety of issues of development, peoples' organisations and struggles in different contexts. The future holds promise only if Participatory Research begins to link itself up with peoples' concerns and issues and not limit itself to a debate on methodology and epistemology.

However, this phase also perhaps needs a greater emphasis and influencing the academia as well as challenging the academia. The first phase in the history of Participatory Research was marked by a critique of the academia, of conventional social science research. In the second phase, we all got very busy in doing Participatory Research, in discovering its meaning through practice, in articulation. We almost lost contact with the academia, with the centres where the new people are being indoctrinated and trained. It appears that we need to go back to those centres now with much greater strength, much clearer vision, much more coherent and systematic arguments, definitions and examples and we need to begin the process of influencing the young, those who are today trained in these centres

of learning, research, training in different parts of the world. Perhaps, therefore, the new thrust of the programme on Participatory Research should also be to promote this process of influencing the academia with a view to convert the new people towards this cause. This is so because we have no more to justify the cause. We do not need to defend the cause any more because it is itself visible. The time has come to find ways through which the programme of the Council can promote this more directly, more centrally and more vigourously. One way perhaps could be to bring the agenda of Participatory Research in all training of adult educators. Another way could be to convene a series of regional, local, international influencing exercises so that the programme can serve its purpose more forcefully.

There is some need to intervene in some regional networks and sub-regional networks in order to revive them, reenergise them, catalyse them. But on the whole, regional networks have developed an identity and autonomy of their own and can function largely on their own. There is a need to maintain links and communication across regions, so there is perhaps a need for the international component of the Council's programme to continue. There is a need to use the Council's programme to demonstrate the spread of Participatory Research in different directions; for example, the forthcoming international meeting on Participatory Evaluation would be one such event which will highlight the use of principles of Participatory Research in the practice of Participatory Evaluation of development programmes. Similarly, the Council can promote the use of Participatory Research on other problems like problem of land, deforestation, workers education, organising the unorganised, etc. etc. It appears that the future demands a new way of organising the programmes of the Council as well as its inter-regional cooperation and coordination.

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