

This is the way it happened

We went to so many places and talked to the people about their problems, some of the discussions followed as below:

In Kachnera (Rajasthan, Tarun Bharat Sangh-NGO) we met with a group of 50 or so villagers during noontime, suddenly one elderly looking gentleman asked us, "I smoke and I want you to do something to get rid of this habit." I hesitated for few minutes and said promptly, I cannot do this but only you can leave if you want. But in order to continue the dialogue we will talk little more. Then I asked how many hand made cigarettes he smokes, he replied about worth four rupees a day. And further I asked how old he is. He replied, 52 years but he looked much older than me. I asked him if he could guess my age. He said 45. I told him that my age was 57 years and added, "do you know why I don't look that old? Because I do not smoke and drink tea." Further I asked how many children he had. He replied, two sons. Incidentally, I also have two sons. I asked, do your children go to school? He said yes. I asked How far is school? About 15 KM. He said. How they go to school? I inquired. He told me by cycle. Both have bicycles? My question was. No, he said only one has. I asked Do you love both your children equally? Yes, he said. To which I said if you love both then both could have cycles if you can leave the smoking for one year. In India a cycle can be bought in 1400 Rupees. Further more I added, if you could leave for few more years then you can be debt free. But choice is certainly yours and you can do it. Look at me I said if I can do it so can you.

In Chudadohar of Jharkhand (People Science Institute-NGO) we went to, villagers thought that we are coming from US so naturally will have lot of money to give. During one meeting when I inquired what they need, suddenly one asked for Rupees 500,000. Then I asked what for they need the money. They said they have constructed the Dam and stored water but can not use it as land is at higher level and they need to buy pump and pipe to take water up to higher grounds. We replied that we do not have so much money and that villagers are providing even the daily food for us since we are travelling. But let us see how we can find the solution together. We asked if every body drank tea and chew tobacco? Every body said yes. How much you spend daily on tobacco? Five rupees per day, for an average family. How many Families are there in this village? Answer was about three hundred. Suppose instead of five you take four pouches of tobacco, you can save one rupee per day. They said sure sir this is not a big deal. Then I said could you donate the saved money to your own village charity. Yes we can do that sir. Then I asked, could every body do that? Yes, yes we can all do that (Many voices came from the crowd). I calculated quickly in my mind that in six months this would become a handsome sum of 54,000 rupees. They were amazed to hear that big an amount so easily can be collected. We added further, note this donation of every household by name in your village ledger. Take that amount to bank and show them your record that you saved this much money in six months and you need more 446,000 rupees loan for five years period. Bank will be glad to loan you that amount. In rare case bank does not loan you the amount, then we will come with you to the bank and fight for your loan. And as incentive We will provide you a grant of rupees 10,000 after you have collected 54,000 rupees first. And we also drew their attention to the fact that they are able to collect Rupees 9,000 per month and are capable to hire 9 persons at rate of rupees 1,000 per month. When village will be employing these people, they will work for the village development unlike Government personnel who want to rule over the villagers instead of serving them. What these nine persons will do, was their next quick question? We replied, there are jobs like doing research about village resources, vegetation, earth quality, school - teacher, village writer to write applications to government dept. Getting information about government declared entitlements etc. etc. And best part is these people will not leave your village.

In Boalia of West Bengal (Nai Azadi Andolan-NGO), we were eating some local fruits, and one of the villager commented we sir cannot efforts to eat fruits like you can. We were quick to reply that you can drink tea five times a day, which is like spending RS 15 /person but could not buy a Papaya, which is RS. 8/ per KG, and 1.5-Kg papaya can be bought and eaten by full family. They were convinced that if our priorities are right money is not the big issue.

In Ganeshpura of Rajasthan (TBS), people said that there are no jobs for our boys. We were taken a back what should we say now. Again discussion led us to believe, there has to be some way out of this predicament. We asked, what do you have plenty in this village. Every body in unison said nothing. Think again, I said. We got the same answer as if nobody was trying to think. Finally we drew their attention to the scorching dry heat of the sun, and bounty of stones we noticed lying everywhere in the village. Quickly we took out some SUNMAID dry fruits packets out of our bag and showed them. We suggested, when fruits like Grapes and Apple are cheap why don't you dry and package them to sell for profit? Besides, people will eat them instead of harmful tobacco. Collect the stones lying around and give them some shape with a grinder and sell them. Go to the market to see what sells, make similar or new art effects. Then I asked, is there a school in this village? Yes there is a big school having about 600 students they replied. Where do they buy notebooks? I asked. They answered they get those from city and it costs them a lot of money. We suggested that they buy paper in bulk and make notebooks themselves, which can have a saving of 50 paise per notebook. Suppose each student needs 10 notebooks per year, 3000 rupees profit can be made easily by someone who takes the job. There was a water shortage in this village as for last three years rain failed. We were told lot of Berries bloom when there is a dry spell. We suggested why not dry berries and sell. You don't even have to go and buy them from the town. You can take school kids on field trip to collect the berries. Part of the profit from these berries can go to the school's general fund and rest can be distributed to the participating children's families. We further suggested, they should work for themselves rather than for some Seth in near by big town. We were amazed to see in one Gujrat village women folk in their spare time polishing diamonds and earning mere five rupees per piece and improving their own economic condition and family's wellbeing. This village was near Surat.

On our way in Ravali, Rajasthan (TBS) we saw, lot of women were collecting dry sticks and branches of trees for fuel to make food. It takes entire day for them to walk long distances to collect wood for a week. A brain wave came to us and we decided to talk about this in next village. Outcome was an idea we shared with them to eat some sprouted grains and lentils instead of prepared food. Suppose if we can eat one time prepared food and other time sprouted dals and black gram with added salt and some onions. Following it not only be healthy but also a substantial saving in fodder wood, they accepted. Incidentally, we are ourselves following this lifestyle for last five years; hence it was easy for us to say that way.

We were greeted very warmly with tea in Gadh Mora, of Rajasthan (TBS). To their disappointment, we told them we do not drink tea. We were touched by their innocence; we saw that after preparing tea, lot of wood logs was left to burn out. What a waste we thought and decided to talk about it. So as soon as we reached in the Nayadera village, we announced, we do not drink tea so please don't make it. They were amazed and this initiated dialogue. We told them, It has three drawbacks, one: it spoils our health as nutrient absorption power of body is reduced. Second, it is a big money-drained for them as consequently the user gets poorer and tea producer becomes richer and it is habit forming. Thirdly the sugar, which is very harmful. There are other healthy and less expensive alternatives to drinking tea, i.e. buttermilk (chhaachh).. We talked to some milk producers in same village that you think selling the milk is profitable business. Think again, you are not selling the milk but your water and greenery, which you do not have. The more you loose these; more dry your region will become, in years to come. Is it going to be a profitable proposition in long run for you and for your children and grand children to come?

In Amavara Rajasthan (TBS) we saw the teacher was going door to door to collect students for the class. An idea crept into our head why force children to study and sit in class all the time and people always complained about the cost of books and other supplies needed for school education. Our observation was that the old Mecauley - system presently used, is based on punishment where as in order to make it attractive it should be based on encouragement. We suggested, we should reward the students whenever he or she finishes one book. After a successful completion of a test they should be rewarded with some money and a certificate to acknowledge their feat. This will lead to more interest in studies. Old books can be collected from effluent students of city. Also to organize the exchange of trips from city schools to village schools and vice versa. To our pleasant surprise we learnt, such a system exists and operated by some dedicated persons from New Delhi, but on a very small scale.

In general seeing the condition of non-cooperation amongst people. We talked about Maha Manav VS Vivash manav. What we did: made a face with one stomach and a pair of hands and two legs and told villagers that this person, works with two hands and fills his stomach and when there is no work his feet will take him to different place where there is work. You must be thinking he is free and happy, but that is not the case, then we made another picture on a paper with one stomach two legs and many heads and double number of hands of as many heads. We called this as Maha Manav . This guy works with all the hands, feeds only one stomach and so many heads can think what work has be done. Science there is only two legs, which can only be used for standing or move together. We told them this stomach is your village and you can make it strong only when you together. You have so many hands to work with and so many heads to think together the solution any problem comes to village and no body feels alone.

We saw the condition of non-cooperation amongst villagers, also people are religious and god fearing, depending on god, and Government to solve their problems. We asked them who made the Idol of God in the temple. After a long pause Answer came, Artist made it. Then we asked who made you, your neighbor and me. Of course they said God is the one who made every body. OK we said. Now man makes the idol and God, right, makes us all? Right, they said. Then we asked whom you would love more, The idol that man made or the one that God made. There was an expression of sudden understanding in their eyes when they answered; we should love the one God made. Then we proceeded; you are all very intelligent people. We don't have to tell you much, I am sure tomorrow if your neighbor is sick and in need you will take care of that, instead of going to temple to worship the Idol made by man. That will be real worship of God.

Indian villagers are poor and there had never been any economic survey done by Government or private agency. Individually also people do not keep track of their income and expenses. As a result what they earn they spend and always feel that some things are beyond their reach. Unfortunately those some things happen to be the important things. We showed them in different places and meeting throughout our visit how to keep account simply and easily. We took a clean sheet of paper on left side we asked them to write all the money that comes in the family through various sources, on right side write all the money spend by the family members. If you can not write, ask your school going child to write down for you. At the end of the month total both right and left sides, write down the total of expense and income. If your income is more than your expenses you are doing fine. And if you invest the balance properly, you can buy things, which were beyond your reach before. But if your expenses are more than your income, then you should check from the list, which expense is unimportant and can be cut down in future. The trick of becoming rich is to spend less than what you earn, no matter who helps and give you money to cover your additional expenses, but you will never be rich.

In one of the village in Orissa we were asked to say few words, we asked the audience did any body seen The gold is giving eggs? Every body was perplexed and hesitantly said no. We told them you buy Gold because you want to make gold merchants rich and in process you become poorer. We suggested them to invest money in them selves, in order to make them self-richer. Earlier the gold used to increase in value but not any more because it is not any more standard for currency. Basic point we wanted to bring to them that self help schemes (SHS) especially for women as had been started in Bangla Desh. Where women save a pre fixed amount every week and with collected fund give to their members for starting their own business which can uplift their own economic condition. Further we gave him or her insight that nothing comes free someone is paying for it some how. When government does a job it cost you some how three time than you do it your self. Like more people will be involved will have their interest in it and in long run it will cost you more. We have seen the same job if it is done by NGO costs one third of what it would had cost if it was done by Sate Government. Four times more if it is done by Central Government

A very interesting fact came to our notice that where there is Women self help group were formed the women folk had come closer and trying them self to get rid of social taboos, and protect them self against the high handedness of men. For example some men was beating his wife every night after drinking, women belonged to the group of WSH, told her story to the group. The women of the group decided to talk the men, not to do this but he took this threat lightly. Women again tried but in vain. The third time they decided to beat the men good for some time to remember. So this is a good sign that in case of urgency these women are together not only for money matter but also for social causes and can change their conditions if need be.

In Badabalkani of Orissa we were asked, why many entitlements were denied to them by Government Village workers, and why their names were not listed in the list of Below Poverty Limit (BPL). Though their income is much less and some were included who earn lot of money. We asked them did you reported this to any body or wrote any letter to the authority. Answer was No. The main problem we thought is people do not know how Government works, whom to tell. We told them it is democracy you have power to write to any body directly and you will not get in trouble. They may get results what they want some times, if they approach higher authority and of course persistence always pays in long run.

In another village of Orissa we met a dynamic lady who was surpunch of some twenty-village panchayat. She told the audience that women should not consider their husbands as god and act as dummy in front of their husbands. They should feel, they are partners, she gave our example, and commented that all other times we see a man or women alone comes and talk to us but look at them they are real partners in life and work hand in hand.

Another village of Orissa we were asked what we can do with our time and were interested to get some money to buy a sewing machine. We directed this Question to NGOS and asked them to write a request and submit to them and if they can muster some funds they will get them, as the people working with you day in and day out really know your conditions.

Women can bring about the change required in the society to enable people to think clearly and take some very important steps towards eradicating poverty, wrong practices, improving children's health etc. We visited Badabalkani village camp organized by HOPE in Orissa, which is four kilometers dirt way from Sampur, which is three hours drive from Bhuvaneshver. From Sampur to Badabalkani, only walking and ride on back seat of a scooter could get us to the camp. There were close to 200 people from surrounding villages who walked long distances to attend this camp in hope to find some help in medical or other matters.

There we met a woman (Anjali) who remained a very concerned, sole head of her husband's extended family as her husband was away from home, posted far away in Bihar on police job. Things had become harder for her family, as her husband's brother who was dumb but physically capable, was supporting his family by farming on his small land. He died in cyclone leaving behind a young child and wife Sumitra. Anjali, herself a mother, accommodated the widow relative and child in her own small home. We were impressed with the eagerness of Anjali to help her husband's brother's family. The only problem was she did not know how, since Sumitra was grief stricken, still in shock, unable to think and take care of her child. Sumitra made great effort to bring Sumitra (crying) and child to the camp and pleaded with us to help them. We had a discussion in which she was very open in presenting and accepting different ideas discussed to help make the widow woman self-sufficient. We could clearly see the leadership qualities in Anjali when she said, "If I get a sewing machine, I could stitch clothes and earn some extra money to help her and the small child. Since she knew how to read and write, she was willing to teach her sister in law and other women too. She said she wished she could help them start some home based business like making papad or pickle. All she wanted was little moral support and may be some information on how she can get some financial help. We guided her a little in writing a letter to HOPE about the case and requirement, which if fulfilled could make a woman self-sufficient. We also wrote a letter on behalf of the widow to district authority and get counter signed by local surpunch of 27-village panchayat and gave copies of the same to HOPE, CYSD, and other authorities to follow up such cases.

Unfortunately Sumitra's name was not listed in the BPL (below poverty level) list by the village worker because she was not living separately on her own so she did not qualify for the ex-gratia payment, monthly subsidy given to the family of cyclone victims, these are government entitlements. We wished if a self-help group existed in her village like we had seen in Rajasthan and Gujrat villages, women folks could help each other in such circumstances. I definitely see this incident as a proof that a literate and informed woman has a great potential to make not only her family but also her surrounding better. I believe that it is due to the eternal truth about women that they have mother's instinct. Even HOPE thought Anjali would be an asset as an employee to the organization.

In Jharkhand, Daltonganj we met some small NGOs whom are working in the area with PSI to help Adivasi local villages. One young woman social worker named Ashrita made an impression on us. She was from a tribal family but had an opportunity to receive gandhian education then married in spite of tribal resistance, to a non tribal who himself was a worker for village development. We went with them to the villages like Bhaisasur where there is lot of poverty, lack of education, depression in people and absolutely no enthusiasm. Tribal are in general resistant to woman's education and they don't welcome city people and new ideas in their village and they don't have unity amongst themselves either. But we were told that with Ashrita's long association, it is becoming possible to talk to women and through them improve future of village children. There were no bathrooms for ladies but I learnt that now since girls education is becoming more common, some of them married in to city and visit the village, this is being felt as one of the necessities as they feel awkward going out in the open for daily routine. Ashrita was very well respected for her leadership qualities in her organization as well as favorite of villagers as they value her advice.

In Bikaner we went to Dhani Bhopalramji village with URMUL Setu Sansthan, where we saw an all girls school. There were about 70, very pleasant polite and friendly girls ages from 8 to 16 who missed the regular schooling from the age 4 on ward. We were very happy to learn that they were given residential crash course of six month, in reading, math, civic and social studies, etc. to bring them to the right level. They had missed schooling because of social stigma in their cast, of not sending girls to school. Seventy families and their surroundings would benefit as a result of this organization's farsightedness and generosity of people involved.

We met Women Self Help Group in Kharoch village of Gujrat, who had RS 147,000 collection, which gives loan to their members. We told them to use this money to establish businesses. We went to Tatam Dhar Village with Anand of PSI. There we met Jahnvi from ANANDI. This Organization had established three thousand WSHG. It has experience in training women to do work in village and prepare them for leadership role. With her we went to Bhavnagar and near by area and attended a mahila mandal's meeting, all of them were smart and open minded to suggestion and criticism. There were about 30 women in the meeting. Women had their own money which they lend only to their members and emergencies, we showed them the Multi purpose mechanical plough and solar energy pumps and with the ease can be used by men folk but convenient to women as well and these things are well within their reach. It can make their life more productive, and this money can be used as investment in their economic future. Such a large amount was not needed for family emergencies and can only fetch small amount of interest from bank.

We were very happy to meet a woman who was already doing diamond carving at home with the help of small loan, from the group to buy a power operated grinder. She was making only five rupees a piece, but was fetching about 1000 rupees per month. The whole work was done in her home using her leisure time. Man will come from Surat, take the finished diamond and supply raw diamond after paying her the labor.

We went to Nallipur, Orissa with Madhusudan of ABHIYAN where schedule cast women's self help groups were having a meeting. A bank manager and a block development officer spoke with the group about banking facilities and other developmental activities to give them information, that is a good sign. It was such a pleasure to see these women coming in large number and want to know the ways for progress. A woman who seemed to be their leader spoke to the audience with remarkable confidence and said that you (women) are in miserable condition because you think you are inferior to men. You consider them God and accept the wrong ways by which you are treated. Look at them (pointing to us) they are partners in life (jeevan-sathi), they work together and consider each other equal. We saw in women's eyes a shine of understanding. It was a ray of hope that they want

So far we had talked to people about their problems, but we shall talk about the problem NGOs have.

All the NGOs are working on the principal of raising the money and get it to the person needs it. The person receives the money and acknowledges it. That is end of the story. The problem does not solve here, neither for donors and nor for receivers. Beneficiaries never told to share the bounty of help received with the NGO or pass the experience to others and help others with extra income they generated, because of the help they receive. So that one good thing happened, could be converted into a wave of change. And need for more funds required by NGOs, will diminish as people start helping each other. So the point to ponder

is how to make the recipients part of continuous improvement process so that others can take the help of NGOS, as well the beneficiaries. We asked point blank to NGOS what is their Annual Budget, most of them said that it is in order of 10 millions or more. What percentage comes from the earlier clients, answer was nil. In some cases the previous clients had their income increase to ten times or more because of the help they receive from NGOS in term of money, advice or material and all in some extreme cases. The NGOS raise all their funds from foreign donors or from Government programs. If you can see this becomes a money order type of economics which has one engine, that is head of NGO and no body else. There is no built in mechanism, which can bring the money automatically. Some places NGOS are working in the same villages for twenty or more years and working on same problems as they started with and problems had increased rather than reduced. We suggested That let us share the profit of client from more 10% with NGO and keep them in fixed assets and from the interest on these assets help more family. The response was positive but we have to have this understanding from the beginning and better in writing. Another way if villagers themselves can manage the resources and such money can be pooled for other future use. What we had observed that NGOS are making these villagers dependent on them, where as they were depending on Government sources before. Our objective must always be to teach independence instead of leaning on one source or other. In this we had seen some shining examples of cooperative movement, especially URMUL in Rajasthan. This biggest dairy farming cooperative of Rajasthan and the members are benefited greatly with the efforts of this organization, in field of economics, education, water and health areas. The biggest trouble of present system is we (NGOS and Government) think they only help every body and people are not encouraged to help each other. Let me state one story, which I heard while I was at IIT Kharagpur back in 1965. That Japanese imported one Kaplan Turbine from Germany but never installed in any place and that was the back in early 19th century. Now they export the Turbines to produce Electricity to all over the world and we in India know how to design and produce the turbines but still imports the turbines for our plants. The main reason for this is we lack ways to impart acquired knowledge to others, as we fear for our own survival. Where as truth is far from this fact more you share your knowledge more you become expert and we should not fear for competition as long it is healthy and based on sound principles.

We talked to more and more NGOS that why they are afraid of sharing knowledge with others, but we were delighted that now they share knowledge as well but only on very limited scale and personal basis.

What we would like to share with you one more thing that people of rural area do not know the meaning of investing in them selves, pay yourself first. Why government should fixed min price of wheat rice and potato etc., no body wants to buy potato at any price, when in high season. Many farmers in rich places like Punjab and others places are committing suicide because of cost to cultivate is going sky high and they can not survive.

Many other questions are lurking on our mind why a District collector post is there when an elected official like Mayor of city exits. And believe me the former had more power than the later, who is elected by public. Is it real Democracy in India?

We use to tell every body in everyone who was listening to us in all those village to increase the scope of their prayers to include his neighbor's children well being instead of their own, and in the end please pray for my India's well being also. I may ask you the reader to do so as well.

In India water problem is very acute and with the help of legislators who are always stay in urban area, rural people are robbed of their water. Catchment area always lies in rural area and with out any way to compensate urban people steal the water of rural area.

There is one organization in Bharat "WWW.COMPLAINTBHARAT.ORG" which is recently started. We should complain about big size of mostly useless state governments, which some times cannot pay its own employees. What to talk about development. Each one rupee worth of development cost three to four rupee.

Recently when we were in India, we came across the article that middle class is more responsible for poor people not to progress because they always wants from government more and more, we kind of agree with this statement.

