

Dilemmas in Agriculture

- A Personal note¹

Gorrepati Narendranath

“A human environment cannot exist apart from nature, and so agriculture must be made the foundation for living. The return of all people to the country to farm and create villages of true men is the road to the creation of ideal towns, ideal societies and ideal states.”
(Masanobu Fukuoka – in – The Natural Way of Farming).

What inspired me to go back to my ancestral village in the eighties was the dream of **“One straw revolution”** of Masanobu Fukuoka, the need for alternatives to the present paradigms of modern science, development and polity raised by Rajni Kothari, Dhirubhai, Ashish Nandy, Vijay Pratap and other sensitive and eloquent social scientists of Lokayan, the urge to **do** something – crystallizing the ideas (into action) by Uma Shankari, my wife, and my father who was a government servant all his life, but a farmer at heart. He increasingly took the driver seat once we moved to the village!

A cocktail of social work, farming and research has not taken me very far in finding solutions to the problems (or challenges) in the agriculture sector. But it has certainly made me more aware of the complexity of the variables involved, their interconnections and contradictions. Before finding ‘solutions’, to recognize situations for what they are. I now feel more at sea than when I began – fourteen years ago(in1987) – having gone back to my ancestral village and ancestral property of 36 acres in Venkatramapuram of Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh, 65 kms. from the religious centre of modern Hindu India – Tirupati.

Some of these dilemmas are:

- Is natural/organic farming a viable proposition?
How does one meet the cash needs through organic farming?
How to make it less laborious? And yield more?
Or should we simply say “agriculture into economics won’t go?”
- Accepting the unsustainable nature of modern farming of chemicals and pesticides, how does one cope with the short term need to feed starving millions? But for the high yielding varieties of the green revolution, would it have been possible for our country to become reasonably self-sufficient in food and get out of the clutches of the food-politics of U.S.A.?
- Haven’t all societies in the past, feudal, capitalist or socialist based themselves on extraction of surplus value from agriculture and utilizing the same for development in other spheres especially industrial? How then are we thinking of a society in which agricultural surplus is minimal and terms of trade are in favor of agriculture and the countryside?
- Can we stop the genetically modified foods/seeds from swamping the market? Especially if they are going to be cheap and plentiful. at least to start with?
- Are we underestimating or ignoring human tendency to try and do with less effort to relax from any activity regarded as ‘work’? To consume ‘new’ things? Of wanting to bite the forbidden fruit? To innovate, to rebel?
- If foreign agricultural products (or any product for that matter) are going to be cheaper, what harm is there in allowing their imports? Will it not be good for the consumer and will it not propel the producer in our country to look for ways to make his produce cheaper? To improve yields and efficiency?
- Isn’t producing for personal gain a more efficient and rational way of organizing production and sale than co-operative/collectivized effort? Aren’t these the lessons from our own experience and that of USSR and China?

- How far is it practicable to combine the efforts of agricultural workers and farmers on their demands?
- Is it possible to organize farmers on a national-international level?
- Are land reforms a thing of the past? How far can parcelling of land go?
- ❖ How far are caste and untouchability impediments to agrarian mobilization?

In the following narrative I shall try to address some of these dilemmas and the challenges we have faced and continue to face in the course of the last fourteen years of our stay in our village here, recognizable by our weakening eyes, graying hair, and growing children. We have been trying our hand at organic farming and chemical-pesticide farming, trying to make our farming viable and not really succeeding; trying to organize the farmers on issues like increased power charges (7 times at one stroke), the WTO imports; assisting agricultural workers, especially dalits on the question of untouchability, land reforms, and access to tamarind trees; helping the bamboo workers to form a co-operative society; trying to kick up enthusiasm for local health traditions and ayurveda; we only seem to be running in circles, if at all.....

It is therefore necessary to do some introspection and reflection on what changes have occurred and are taking place, why are we doing what we are doing and why is there no adequate response or why are people responding the way they are. I have broadly divided the narrative in to three sections: The first part deals with our battles (long live Don Quixote) in organic and inorganic farming. The second part deals with the problems of the agricultural workers and dalits. In the third part an attempt is made to reflect on the issues at a more general level.

PART – I

“In a sense, farming was the simplest and also the grandest work allowed of man. There was nothing else for him to do and nothing else that he should have done.” (Masanobu Fukuoka, **The Natural way of Farming**).

That is easier said than done! Fukuoka is not talking (p.258) just about farming the way we normally understand it. Through that activity which we generally think of as farming he discusses a whole way of life and thinking that seems to go against the present way of doing things. The question that bothers me is .. this materialistic orientation (in the pejorative sense), obsession with productivity and profits, the consumerist culture... is this something special to the present era or to what extent is it all a part of human nature? For after all haven't saints and seers from Buddha and Mahavir downwards to Gandhi, Marx and Mao said something similar?

Coming to Indian agriculture, according to Rajini Palme Dutt: *“It was during the first three quarters of the 19th century that the main ravages of Indian industry took place, destroying formerly populous industrial centers, driving the population into villages and destroying equally the livelihood of millions of artisans in the villages.”* (Palme Dutt, R, **India Today**, PPH, Bombay 1947, p.225-226).

So that the proportion of the population dependent on agriculture rose from 61% in 1891 to 73% in 1921 (Central Banking Enquiry Committee – 1931) and has more or less remained at that level for the next fifty years (73.8% in 1971) but fallen slightly to 68% in 1991. In other words there is extreme pressure on land due partly to the de-industrialisation policy followed by the colonial rulers. This has been accentuated by the policies of our rulers ever since independence in trying to extract the surplus from agriculture and invest it in industrialization. The adverse terms of trade for agriculture sector and consequent poor performance of the industries have only worsened the situation. The share of agriculture in the GNP has been consistently falling from 60% in 1947 to 31% in 1991. A more telling

figure is that the per capita availability of food grains in 1905-06 was 549 gms/day which in 1986-'87 was only 470 gms/day rising slightly in 1993-'94 to 491 gms/day.

“The most alarming feature, as regards the future of our agriculture is, that capital formation in the farm sector, as a percentage of the total in the country, has now (1997-'98) sharply declined to less than 8% as compared to 18% in 1980-81. Capital is attracted towards those ventures, which yield high returns. Sharp decline in capital formation in the farm sector is a clear evidence of its poor profitability”. (see Annexure – I).

“.....the disparity ratio between per capita average income of agriculturists and non-agriculturists is now (in 1997-'98) 1:5.5. In 1950-'51 this ratio was only 1:2.2. Such fast growing disparity in incomes is neither conducive to faster growth in agriculture, nor even to maintenance of peace and tranquility in the country.” (Bhanu Pratap Singh: **“Indian agriculture on the decline”** reproduced in Souvenir of Andhra Pradesh Federation of Farmers Associations, Hyderabad, Feb 2001.)

“The green revolution was only a 10 years phenomenon, created under the impact of two factors, first, the introduction of high yielding variety seeds, and secondly the then prevailing terms of trade, which were favourable to agriculturists. If we compare the five yearly averages of food grains production (five yearly average will even out the vagaries of nature) in 1949-54 and 1964-'69 i.e. during the pre-green revolution period, we find that the growth rate of food grains production was 2.66% per annum. During the 10 years green revolution period, 1964-69 to 1974-'79, the growth rate was 3.34% per annum. During the 20 years of post green revolution period 1974-'79 to 1994-'99 the growth rate has been only 2.49% per annum... And during the last eight years 1990-'91 to 1998-'99, on annual production basis, growth in food grains production has lagged behind even the growth in population” (see Annexure-II).

“The share of agriculturists in the national income is now (1998-'99) no more than about one-fourth, while they still constitute nearly two-third of the population of the country. The share of industrial sector in the national income has also been declining in recent years. It is the service sector, which really produces no tangible goods, but which now corners more than 51% of the national income, and provides employment to no more than 17.2% of our total population. Simple calculation shows that the average per worker income in the service sector is now about eight times the average income of agriculturists.”

(see Annexure – III) (From: Bhanu Pratap Singh - **“Indian Agriculture on the Decline.”**)

“In spite of all these achievements (of increases in yield and production) scores of farmers are committing suicides in AP. In Chittoor district where I live, farmers are a weary, tired lot today. Whatever they may do they seem to be in losses. The feeling of frustration and resignation is all - pervasive; the sense of inferiority is profound. Farmers introduce themselves apologetically, much like the women who introduce themselves as “just housewives.” (Uma Shankari, **“Farming in Andhra Pradesh : A Ring side View”** paper presented at NAPM Workshop on 2-3-2001 at Hyderabad).

In this background I shall try to describe the farming practices in Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh and our battles amidst them.

Crops in Chittoor District: Traditional and modern:-

Around 70% of the lands in Chittoor district are dry lands and rainfed crops are grown on them. Only 30% is irrigated as against the Andhra Pradesh average (35%). Earlier a variety of dry crops – millets, ragi, bajra, jowar, etc. ground nut, red gram, cowpea, bean pea, horse gram, etc. used to be grown. But due to unremunerative prices for millets people have more or less ceased raising these crops and have instead concentrated on ground nut which is by far the most remunerative of the lot (of late in the last 2 years due to imports of cheap palm oil from Malaysia the prices of ground nut oil and coconut oil have also crashed.)

As a part of the Eastern ghats most of the district is studded with hills. Traditionally, several chains of small tanks have been built, especially during the reign of the Vijayanagara kings and these form the backbone of irrigated agriculture in the district in the absence of any major river or canal projects.

The farmers in our area (which is the middle part of the district) grow paddy for one season and follow it up with two years of sugarcane. This is the cycle. In the eastern taluks of our district the situation is somewhat different. There the soil is more sandy and there is more rainfall. Farmers opt for a cycle of paddy and groundnut (in rabi). In the western taluks, the climate is moderate, but there is water shortage although the soils are red and rich. They prefer to grow vegetables, especially tomato. While some do grow mulberry (for silk), the location of two metropolis close by, Bangalore and Chennai (175 kms and 150 kms respectively from Chittoor) has spurred the growing of vegetables like tomato, brinjal, beans, and potato apart from flowers and grapes in a few pockets. It has also meant rapid growth in allied activities such as poultry and dairying.

The district enjoys cover of both monsoons. It gets about 900 mms of annual average rainfall. The salubrious climate and easy drainage of water in most areas enables the farmers to raise a variety of crops from pan and banana to sugarcane, paddy, groundnut and flowers and vegetables as mentioned above.

Jaggery: The district is known for its jaggery. The jaggery comes in two categories, the white or golden yellow colored, mostly from Aragonda or western region is for consumption.. and fetches a better price. Farmers have increasingly taken to adding bleaching agents such as sodium thiosulphate, (Hydros) which is prohibited for human consumption. The colour lasts for a couple of months, by which time the jaggery changes several hands and is also probably consumed. The second variety is of darker even black colour due to the nature of the soil. Generally soils which are alkaline will give rise to paler jaggery, which though attractive to look at is not as sweet as the darker one. The latter fetches a slightly lower price than the yellow variety (by about Rs.100/- to Rs.200/- per quintal). It is mostly meant for brewing illicit liquor.

A number of private sugar factories have sprung up in the district, apart from the two major cooperative sugar factories sponsored by the government. As there is enough cane to supply the factories there is no restriction on production of jaggery, which often fetches a better price than the factory price for cane. Besides, the farmers do not have to run after the factory sugar cane inspector for the cutting order and then wait for the lorry to arrive at any odd hour and search for people to load it with cane. Farmers appear least bothered about their jaggery being used for brewing arrack.

Prices of jaggery and sugarcane (factories) have been more or less stagnant for the last five years while the cost of production, labour, fertilizer, and electricity etc. have been steadily going up.

Mango: Climatically the area is suited for mango. Once a mango garden is raised (in about 7 years) it requires little maintenance and fetches fairly good income – about Rs.10,000/- per acre. While the income from mango for the last three decades has been steadily rising, the costs have also started rising, especially for spraying pesticides and irrigating and of late, the returns are not as much as they used to be earlier (a decade ago). Although the price of mango is highly volatile from year to year depending on the production in the district and elsewhere, it tends to give a steady income in a lump sum annually to the farmer with least maintenance problems. Most farmers sell their mango crops to merchants for one or two years at a time and use the money for some urgent needs such as marriages, house construction or sinking bore wells or for medical bills etc. A number of juice making factories have sprung up in the district (around 25) which are seasonal in operation. Their fortunes also fluctuate with the mango market. (See Annexure IV)

Vegetables : The highly volatile vegetable market is very labour and capital intensive and farmers prefer to grow them in small plots of one or two acres generally. Vegetables and sugarcane crops are the mainstay of small and marginal farmers. As there aren't enough cold storage plants farmers are often put to heavy loss in vegetables, especially tomato, when the prices crash due to a glut in the market. The stakes are high for tomato with investments ranging from 25 to 40,000/- per acre with profits likely to go up to even one or two lakhs per acre (if tomato sells at Rs.10 or Rs.12/-) per kg in the whole sale market).

Groundnut : It is the main stay of the dry land farmers, and most marginal farmers double up as agricultural workers. Unfortunately, the crop is very much dependent upon the mercy of timely and frequent rains in the kharif. For every one season of good crops there will be two bad years of heavy loss and two years of bare sustenance. Of late, the cost of raising groundnut crop is also rising, pushing the farmers into greater debt. The brunt of the price crash due to import of cheap palm oil from Malaysia was born by these farmers. The yields are also very low --- depending on timely rains, from 5 to 15 bags an acre. But the economics in the flat sandy soils of the Eastern taluks of the district are very different where it is raised as an irrigated dry crop in the rabi season with heavy doses of chemical fertilizers, the yield going up to 30 to 40 bags per acre, if not more.

Choice of crop :

Price or profit is the basic motivating factor for the farmer to grow any crop. But he will make the choice of crop depending upon a variety of factors apart from the price, like cost and easy availability of labour in season, ability of the crop to withstand shortages of water supply and easy marketability, disease-proneness of the crop. It is the risk of rejection by the factory (apart from the intensity of labour) that dissuaded many farmers from taking to gerkin cultivation under contract farming for a company in Kolar, Karnataka, although it promised high returns of Rs.50,000/- per acre apart from supply of seed, pesticide, fertilizer and credit and buy-back of the produce at a fixed, predetermined price. It is for the same reasons that crops like sugarcane are preferred to the rest: sugarcane can withstand shortage of water for over a month i.e. even if one or two wettings are missed or even more it will still give some crop unlike say paddy or vegetables which will be wiped out. One gets nothing, besides it is least disease prone and jaggery making can be managed with family labour with one or two labourers, so that even at current low prices, (not counting family labour) one can earn up to Rs.20 to 30,000 per acre (gross income). If dairying can take care of the running costs of labour, etc. then one can end the season with a lump sum. This is the main attraction of sugarcane.

Two cheers for tenancy : We were surprised to hear that my grand father and my uncles would never give their land on lease /tenancy/share cropping. They always cultivated with the help of farm servants, family labour, and hired labour. But today the scene is completely different. Almost all the farmers under our tank (10 out of 12) with lesser extent under each are giving their lands for share cropping. The non-remunerativeness of most crops especially paddy, the problems of ensuring labour supply when needed in season, power supply, etc. have prompted many farmers to go in for tenancy farming even if they have small holdings of one or two acres. Often they give a part of their land, usually $1/3^{\text{rd}}$ acre to $2/3^{\text{rd}}$ acre to a tenant (by oral agreement) and cultivate the rest by hired labour using the tenant to water their lands and to organize other operations, such as, calling labour, making jaggery for the owner (his labour is costed) but assures the farmers of labour for making jaggery. By this method the farmer's income is halved and would imply a net income of Rs.10,000 to 16,000/- per acre for sugarcane/jaggery and 10 to 15 bags of paddy per crop per acre. This way the farmer really benefits in paddy cultivation. If he had to do it through hired labour he would end up with heavy losses. But farmers cultivate paddy so that they don't have to buy rice which can become quite an expensive proposition, and secondly, through raising paddy the

soil is enriched with organic nutrients making it ready for growing chemically fed sugarcane and vegetables for the next one or two years.

For almost similar reasons the agricultural worker opts for tenancy, since he has no land of his own (with water) and there are many like him. By raising paddy (and supplemented by the subsidized ration rice) he is able to meet his rice requirement without having to go to the open market. He does not hire labour, usually making do with a little exchange of labour with his neighbouring tenants. If he were to cost all this labour he would be worse off. He would be actually making a loss. But he too prefers tenancy as it assures him of rice and hay for his cow and bullocks and an assured sugarcane crop for two years. Usually, he would have borrowed money from the farmer (often without interest), the farmer in turn borrowing from the jaggery merchant (at an interest of 18 to 24%).

The missing cheer: Giving a part or the whole of one's land on tenancy does not solve the land owner- farmers' problems altogether. The tenant after the initial heavy schedule of preparing the land and planting paddy or sugarcane, has to only do watering most of the time. He prefers to do this at night and go for daily wage during the day which can fetch him anywhere between Rs.40 to Rs.60/- so, the farmer owner has to always keep a watch on whether his fields are being irrigated properly, whether deweeding and fertilizer application have been done on time and properly, and to ensure that timely and proper spraying is done especially for paddy and vegetables and crushing of cane for jaggery making started in time before the onset of power shortages in summer.

Labours' love lost: The other problem with labour is that they are forever demanding money in advance, promising to come for work. Having used up the money they then try to avoid the person from whom they have borrowed. It is often in such a situation that farmers/money lenders physically assault the agricultural workers. The workers on the other hand, unable to make both ends meet (some of them are into drink as well) tend to borrow from several land owners promising to come for work, so a lot of hide and seek goes on with the workers preferring to go to work for those who are likely to pay immediately. So the lesson is to try and pay immediately after the work is done and not to give advances/loans. But often this is a difficult choice because the workers prefer advances, and the farmer ends up giving a loan as well as paying afresh! Further, if the farmer himself puts in labour, the workers work better. If the farmer/owner stand around, they work a little less. If the farmer does not turn up at all, then they work even less – (20 to 30% less). Farmers lament that workers are no longer as hard working as they used to be. (That applies to the farmers also). They recall that in the good old days they would rise in the early hours around 2 to 3 a.m. and draw the water from the wells using bullocks and "Kapila" – a huge leather sack. In the "good old days" of course, the agricultural worker had little option but to work for the landlord or farmer, the children tending the cattle (now they go to school) and those who were truant (not turning up for work in time etc) were often beaten up. The farmers were also hard working (for they too had little choice of other avenues of earning money or survival). But now things have changed. With the advent of diesel motors and now electric motors, farmers and workers have got used to switching on the motors and since power comes with adequate voltage only at odd hours during the nights there is a tendency to flood irrigate using excess power and excess water (provided of course there is water in the wells). There are also apparently other avenues of work especially in urban areas although it is not easy to get.

The truancy of labour and their short supply when needed (in season), the alienation of both the worker and the owner from agriculture work, the worker / tenant because it is not his land and he would like to double as tenant (with least effort) and agriculture worker during the day, the farmer reluctant to put in the physical labour required and vexed with hired labour, unwilling to let go of the land,,farmers are forever trying to do with less labour and looking for such devices such as switching over from labour intensive crops like paddy and

vegetables to annuals like sugarcane and banana and from annuals to perennials like coconut and mango.

City lights and changing crops:

There is a growing trend, due to the strains and problems of agriculture, that those who are brighter (or even otherwise) will try to do something outside agriculture, either in allied businesses like selling fertilizers jaggery/ groundnut / mango business, or running a petty shop or money lending. An enterprising person may do all of these or a combination of these. The children of the better off are educated often outside the village, in English medium schools and efforts are constantly on to help them settle down in urban areas where it is felt one can earn easy money. People also prefer to marry off their daughters to urban dwellers... the market rate being high especially for Government employees (for their assured income and side incomes).

When once a son is settled in business in an urban area or gets a job, the dynamics of his farm change. The family has to shuttle between the urban area and the village. They would thus prefer to raise crops which require less supervision and monitoring such as mango, coconut and such horticulture crops. so sometimes they leave a small patch for growing rice for home consumption and convert the rest of the lands – the food growing area under tanks into mango and coconut gardens. This trend although very much visible in almost every village is some how not being assessed by the agricultural department. In a similar trend in Kerala, large tracts of paddy growing areas have been converted into rubber and coconut plantations.

Water is Life:

Agriculture makes one realize the critical importance of water. If there is timely rain as required periodically at different stages of growth and fruition of the crops, it makes all the difference – a single spell at times could be the difference between prosperity and desperation. The dry land farmer knows this better and more bitterly than anybody else. This is the reason why farmers, wherever they may be, are desperate to get an assured water supply for their lands. In upland areas, where there is little scope for river water through dams and canals, tanks supplemented by wells have been the backbone of irrigation i.e. assured water supply to crops. In Andhra Pradesh the traditional rulers over the centuries have constructed over 80,000 tanks some of them irrigating thousands of acres. In Chittoor district there are about 8,000 tanks today, mostly built during the rule of the Vijayanagara kings. Due to the hilly terrain most of them are chains of tanks with the surplus of one tank flowing into the one below and they are generally small in size irrigating between 30 to 100 acres. These tanks were often built and maintained by the ayacudars themselves, who were encouraged to do so by the rulers offering tax concessions for several years. It was also thought of as an act of merit deriving “punyam” for those constructing the tanks.

An elaborate system of rules of maintenance and sharing of water were evolved - a part of the land and / or produce was set apart separately for the maintenance of the tank, all the ayacudars at the beginning of the rainy season had to collectively clear the supply and feeder channels of weeds, etc. There was always a headman (“Pinapedda”) who was usually the one who owned most land under the tank. It was he who would give specific instructions for the actual activities to the Neergatti, who was invariably a Scheduled Caste person.

The Neerugatti, or water – irrigator was the critical person in the whole structure. It was he who irrigated all the fields, called the ryots for work, and repaired, especially at times of rains, when the bund gave way, etc. When the water is less in the tank, he would intimate the ayacudars. All the ayacudars assembled and decided what crops to grow, etc. It was the job of the Neergatti to see that the tank water was distributed equally between those who were tailenders and those who had lands just below the bund. The neerugatti family was maintained by all the ayacudars. He was entitled to a share of the produce and was also to be fed by the ayacudars when irrigating their fields. There were many tax concessions for the ayacudars and much of the tax collected from the tank irrigated lands often went back to the

village for maintenance of the temple, tank etc. The king / ruler was supposed to collect a sixth of the produce. but this was increased to one-fourth during medieval times and to almost half during British rule as they did not understand any of these rules and simply transposed the British system. They would also tax the land and not the crop. As the tanks were declared to be Government property, the Government took away a major share of the produce. The ayacutdars were left with little surplus or motivation to maintain the tanks. This led to gross neglect of tanks and fall in revenues. And lands were even left fallow at times. The British set up various committees and realized their mistakes. But they were not willing to part with their over all claim to the ownership of the tank and share in the produce as taxes, although they reduced them a little. They took up maintenance of the tanks and found it to be a costly affair. They abandoned the smaller tanks and concentrated only on the bigger ones (above 100 acres ayacut). So the decline of tanks began during the British rule although the tanks were the heart of the irrigation in these dry regions and people did try to maintain them as best as they could under the circumstances, as there was no other means of irrigation except wells, which often supplemented the tanks during the rabi season. As the maintenance of tanks declined, well irrigation increased.

Borewell technology and the electricity tangle:

The advent of freedom saw no perceptible change in the attitude of the authorities. The Government was still considered the owner of the tank system (and other common property resources) and therefore the onus was on the Government to repair and maintain or not. This was more so with the bigger tanks. The advent of diesel engines in the early sixties meant that more water could be pumped out with less physical effort. The problem was further accentuated with the introduction of electric irrigation pumpsets and supply of cheap subsidized electric power during the 70s and 80s. With the earlier bullock drawn moats, recharge of the wells kept pace with the water drawn out. But with the diesel and the cheaper electric motors the water table in the wells was depleted faster than their capacity to recharge. This necessitated deepening of wells and use of rigs to blast the rocks. But very soon the water table went beyond the reach of the rigs and the farmers were forced to go in for inwell bores. If one struck good water in the bore inside one's well, it only meant that the neighbour's well would go dry and he would have to bore deeper. This kind of one upmanship has meant that water table which was around 40 to 50 feet went down to 200 feet by the early 1980s. Soon in-well bores of 4 ½ inches gave way to 6 ½ inches - surface borewells now going up to 400 feet and beyond, necessitating use of more powerful motors 7.5 to 10 H.P. and pumpsets of 7 to 12 stages to suck the water from deep down - implying greater use of electric energy.

The current scenario is that all landholders below a tank who were earlier irrigating their fields with tank water (supplemented by wells towards the end of the season) now irrigate the same lands with deep bore wells pumping water from 200 feet and more below the surface. In this process many bore wells have gone dry and water has not been struck in new places. The lucky few also survive for an average period of five years. Those bore wells under tanks would get recharged when there is water in the tank. But those in the open are left to the mercy of the 'pathal Ganga'. Or so long as some one else does not strike a bore well in the same underground path.

On an average, a farmer would have spent Rs.1,00,000/- per well. (This is a modest estimate taking into consideration the cost of digging an open well, lining with stones, going in for electric motor, then deepening the well, blasting with rigs and sinking a bore well, installing a compressor or more powerful electric pumpset and then abandoning the whole thing and going in for a fresh surface borewell, which may or may not strike water. For the 20 lakh officially recognized services in the State for electric powered motor connections, the farmers would have spent on an average Rs.1 lakh per service - something like Rs.20,000 crores! Very little of it has come from the banks or other state agencies. As surveys among

the suicide committing cotton farmers revealed, most of the credit (80 to 90%) availed of by farmers came from private sources at heavy interest. But the farmer still prefers to go in for bore-wells at such huge expenditure and risk because it makes eminent sense to him.

If a farmer were to spend Rs.50,000/- sinking a bore well and fixing a motor and were to irrigate one acre of land with the water (the average per bore well is about 2 acres in this area) by planting sugarcane he would be able to more or less clear his loan within two or three years (by which time, if not in the next two or three years the bore well would have gone dry or flow depleted forcing him to go in for another bore well, much deeper this time.)

With the advent of bore well technology, the Pandora's box has been opened, with each-one-for-himself-and-the-devil-take-care-of-the-rest attitude. Sinking of bore wells is not confined to lands under the tanks but to dry lands which are being converted into mango gardens on a large scale (something akin to the orange gardens of Maharashtra).

Those who buy lands are mostly rich people, those who have made their money in agriculture related business (like mango merchants) fertilizer dealers, contractors (small and big), and professionals from the urban areas (with some rural roots) and those urbanites wanting to convert their black money to white as there is no tax on agriculture. Farmers generally compete for small patches of land contiguous to their plots and often quote very high prices (wet lands cost around Rs.1,50,000 to Rs.3,00,000/- per acre and dry lands, Rs.15,000/- to Rs.40,000/- per acre). The whole sale-purchase taking place in a cloak and dagger fashion often resulting in a lot of bad blood and ill feelings with morals and values taking the last seat.

The individual oriented bore-well technology has further aggravated the problem of neglect of tanks and gradually, those having lands adjacent to the tank bed have started encroaching on to them, often sinking bore wells right in the tank bed and occupying large parts of the tank bed. Almost every other year the revenue authorities announce "last warnings" and at times even destroy some standing sugarcane crop but the process continues. at times these encroachers even divert the water from entering the tanks. Being locally powerful, there aren't many who dare oppose them and incur their wrath.

To day, in most villages of Chittoor district there is no question of even drinking water if there is no electric supply. Thanks to the way the borewell technology has been used or allowed to be used today, the farmers in Chittoor district are completely dependent upon electric supply for their water needs. This is more or less the case in all the upland areas of the state as well as the country.

The farmers are finding the going difficult with the present prices of agriculture produce. Besides, with the floodgates of imports being opened under WTO conditionalities and the prices of various agricultural commodities crashing and subject to the whimsical nature of the international market, the situation is only likely to get worse. With over 10 million tones of sugar in stocks in godowns and another 50 million tones of paddy and wheat, with unremunerative prices for practically all agricultural products, the prospects are indeed bleak for farmers of our country. It is in this context that the farmers feel highly resistant to withdrawal of any subsidy – of power or of fertilizer. The state Government under Chandrababu Naidu is proclaiming that it would go ahead with reforms in the power sector meaning all subsidies would have to go. The farmers have been repeatedly pleading that the upland farms have invested over Rs. 20,000 crores in well irrigation in the last two decades and the government having failed to provide canal water should either collect water user charges at the same rate as for the canal water users - a nominal Rs.400/- per acre per annum, or give them the first right of use over the power produced by the damming of rivers viz. hydel power at the cost of generation which is not more than 20 paise per unit and the whole quantity of around 9000 MU would be adequate to take care of agricultural requirements in our state. The demand is that it is the moral duty of the state to supply water to the farmers of the upland areas especially since they have invested such huge amounts – and the state has

benefited from the increase in the value of produce. Records show that between 1982-'83 and 1996-'97 area irrigated under tanks has gone down by about 50%; under canals, surprisingly, by 15% but under well irrigation including bore wells the area went up by 40% covering 42% of the total irrigated area, (up from 20% in 1982-'83).

The problem needs a multipronged approach. One man in one village created wonders in Maharashtra (Anna Hazare in Ralengaon Siddhe) and one organization in deserted Rajasthan brought back a dead river to life reconstructing the tanks (Rajender Singh and the Tarun Bharat Sangh).

The Emperor's Clothes –

Watersheds/ Vana Samrakshana Samithi:

It is such success stories which give us hope that all is not lost. It appears to have inspired our dynamic Chief Minister to adopt the same for Andhra Pradesh with World Bank aid. Under the watershed management programme over 5000 watersheds were to be developed within a span of 4 years, each of them being allocated Rs.20 lakhs. We all know what happens when a lot of money is poured into a project. The smell of money (like blood) attracted the local sharks in the form of petty politicians of the ruling party who are local heavy weights who cornered several of them each (3 or 4). Forget water - milk and honey flowed in their homes within a brief span of about 3-4 years. Not to be outdone, some of the NGOs also jumped into the race and most of them now have a handful of watersheds each, some handed down after being messed up by the local bigwigs or the Government (so, now they have an excuse). Even those NGOs who were earlier involved in organizing the dalits especially on issues of land, have now veered round to water-shed development and Joint Forest Management (Vana Samrakshana Samithis).

The entire exercise has been reduced to a farce and the people are left with a fat bill in the form of a foreign loan! The basic idea of watershed was never properly explained and means of getting the people involved took a back seat, the projects were time bound and the money had to be finished. Those monitoring the show assessed that at least 10% of the water sheds were reasonably successful, in the sense that the actual works were completed and there was some involvement of the local people and one could see the water table in the area rising. These will be the show pieces for the evaluators, the lenders and the media to be taken around. Similar is the case with the JFM projects.

Though watersheds are an important component of the alternate exercise including revitalization of tanks (there was this strange argument by some Government officials that tank revitalization was not part of water shed management as the same was not mentioned in the programme! The issue was later clarified) several other steps also need to be taken.

The farmer's keenness to grow water intensive crops like sugarcane and paddy has to be traced to reasonable returns and assured income that they tend to provide. So we have to try and involve combinations of cropping patterns which require less water and give reasonably attractive returns, low or medium level of risk and effort. Turning to horticulture or growing of forest related medicinal plants like amla are a few options. The neglect of dry land crops such a ragi, bajra etc have had a telling affect both on the nutrition level of people in the area and tendency to convert to water intensive crops. If only the prices of these crops were higher, in the mean time, peoples' eating habits have also undergone a sea change. They no longer consume these dry crops (sajja, korra, jonna) having converted to subsidized ration rice with a little smattering of ragi powder thrown in, if at all. Eating rice is considered socially superior to eating ragi or jowar. We have been eating unpolished rice for the last 12 years but have not been able to persuade our neighbours and fellow farmers and workers to do so. Earlier they used to also eat only boiled rice, now that is used only for making *idlies*.

Usage of energy saving devices such as HDPE pipes for water suction, frictionless footvalves and more efficient pumpsets can help save up to 15% of energy consumed by irrigation

pumpsets (if not more). Metering of all services, and costing the power supplied will automatically lead to conserving energy used and help control theft being shown as agricultural consumption. Encouragement to drip irrigation and digging ponds in the fields to conserve water run-off during the rainy season are methods that could be promoted by demonstrations and imaginative incentives to farmers.

As stated earlier, the basic motivating factor for the farmer, like any one else, is relatively easy money. Any crop or practice will be adopted, even if it means some effort and some risk provided the returns are sufficiently attractive. (Tomato has become one such crop in the western taluks and generally sugarcane in wet areas at other places. Till recently silk production was also quickly adopted by the farmers. The import of superior quality Chinese silk at reasonable prices has been affecting silk production of late).

Planners will have to make their programmes attractive for the farmers – adequate to motivate them. A kisan credit card, is such a scheme wherein the farmer is not tied down to a particular activity for availing the loan. allowing him some freedom of expenditure. A recent success story has been the thrift scheme for women popularly known as DW CRA (Development of women and children in rural areas) under which groups of 10 to 15 women get together and save Rs.30/- a month (a rupee a day) and deposit the money every month for 6 months at the nearest bank in a joint account. After six months of such saving the bank (government) sanctions each of the members a loan of Rs.1,000/- each. The cycle is repeated a second time and then they are ready for a bigger loan of Rs.15 to 20,000/- for dairying etc. The scheme does not insist on the loan amount in the first two stages to be spent only on productive purposes and allows for consumption purposes as well. But after the first two rounds, the saving habit is ingrained and the women usually buy productive assets by the third round. The repayment rate has been as high as 90% unlike the earlier schemes (50 to 60%). There are now more than 3,50,000 such groups across the state with their savings in each village ranging from 25,000 to more than a lakh and the total amount in the state running to several hundreds of crores.

From the above discussion it is clear that even 10 acres of land without water, as happens in Anantapur and Mahboobnagar districts, dependent on rains, and usually growing groundnut or jowar dependent upon the highly unpredictable rainfall pattern (untimely rains are as bad as no rain) is not equivalent to one acre of wet land - land with an assured supply of water. An average income would be around Rs.10,000/- to Rs.20,000/- per acre for wet land and Rs.1000/- to 2,500/- for dry lands depending upon the crop and rain.

From our own calculations if we cost rent for land, interest on bore well sunk, risk factor, management expenses and farmers' own labour, etc, costing all these would imply a net loss (in 1999-2000) for irrigated paddy of Rs.9,725/-; for irrigated sugarcane Rs.13,475/-; and Rs.125 for irrigated groundnut. But the farmer calculates only what he actually spends by way of cash and that way there is an apparent profit. Excluding rent on land, cost of sinking a well and management charges the farmer gets a "profit" of Rs.7,625 in sugarcane, Rs.4,575 in paddy, Rs.8,775 in groundnut (see Annexure IV)

For the various schemes of water and power conservation (to make farming less dependent on external forces and more sustainable) of the NGOs or the Government or of political parties, how does one get the local people to co-operate? In all the schemes about watershed management or VSS or tank restoration this key element is being left unanswered. The same

goes for the power crisis being faced by the farmers, with the Gov't threatening to forcibly collect the dues and withdraw subsidies and raise the power charges several times more in the coming few years, the farmers are complacently waiting for the blow to strike even after the situation and the Government's intention has been explained to them loud and clear by the Finance Minister, Yashwant Sinha in his budget speech and the near unanimous resolutions passed at the Chief Minister's Conference on 3-3-2001 chaired by the Prime Minister. Although farmers are frustrated and angry at the crash in prices and are partly aware of the real culprit - the WTO conditionalities and India's unpreparedness, there is a kind of despondency - perhaps a result of repeated desertion by the leaders of the farmers' movements into electoral politics.

This then is the challenge, how to mobilize the farmers to fight for their rights and to work together for their survival?

Our farm:

Our 36 acre farm is the joint property of three brothers. Two brothers reside in Hyderabad. For managing the show I was to take 36,000/- a year. We have 26 acres of mango garden which cannot run on a loss. In a lean year, when crop is low and / or price is low we barely manage without loss; otherwise we can make on average of one to one and half lakh rupees from our 100 year old mango garden (May my grand father rest in peace!) We have in addition 550 coconut trees, mostly planted by my father (who was then in Government service) in far away Hyderabad, 580 kms) whose yield was somewhat low, about 20 to 30,000 nuts per year and facing a water problem of sorts. We also have two patches of wet land totalling about 5 acres with assured water supply in one plot of 2 ½ acres and somewhat short in the other. We also have about ¾ acre of dry land.

How not to make money in farming:

After 8 years, I find my bank balance of 7 lakhs has completely disappeared. I am left with loans of Rs.2 lakhs (some of it from the 4 lakh Swadeshi fund we had created). Incidentally, people also owe me around that much. But there is not a scrap of paper to prove that. Someday, some of them may return the loans. For the outsider, simple arithmetic would show that forgetting the rest of the property, if I were to share the surplus from the mango garden with my brothers, I should be giving them at least Rs.30,000/- per year. But even that I was barely managing to do every alternate year! Where is all the money going? Admittedly, I am a bad manager alright. But still, I have been honestly trying, although not giving full time, but atleast between the two of us (me and my wife) somebody is there most of the time and on those rare occasions (twice or thrice an year) when both of us are out, our friends, Nagesh and his wife Aparna manage the show (more about them later). The only asset we have acquired after my coming to power (at the farm) is the possession of a power tiller at a cost of Rs.1,25,000/- (ably advised by friend Narayana now warming his heels in Timbuktoo, Anantapur district, Andhra Pradesh). The only saving grace about the tiller is that our own farm hands are able to handle it and we don't have to depend on other vehicles for ploughing and small transport and of late even spraying. (We still need the bullocks on hire for furrowing and the big tractor for transporting more than a ton).

How did we manage to make so much loss? Year after year? Through our wrong assessments (mostly mine) we often undersold our mango crop (to middle men). Vexed with them we have been trying to harvest ourselves the following year which makes you feel you were better off selling the crop!

Under the wise suggestion of Nagesh (borrowed from Uzamma) we decided to stop growing sugarcane and instead grow rice. On ethical grounds we opted out of sugarcane and went in for rice, which included apart from the high yielding variety of the Government, some traditional varieties of other nearby regions (Tamilnadu and Telangana). Again for ethical/ideological reasons, we refused to give our land for tenancy farming and tried to cultivate using hired labour. At one place we had given a small plot of 1/3 acre to a worker for his own use and another plot on share cropping. It was his job to call labour for the various activities and at another site we gave the worker a salary of Rs.600/- per month plus a plot of land in share cropping.

We ended up paying enormous amounts for labour for two acres. We had heavily invested in organic and leaf manure and groundnut cake which are labour-intensive operations and we ended up spending some Rs.16,000/-. Our paddy crop was an average yielder meaning as much as anybody else. Most of the farmers are also easy going. They do not select their seed carefully. They do not nurse the nursery (treat the seed etc.). They often plant late but try to make up with application of urea and / or NPK. While the crop of paddy we produced was almost equal to what most of the other farmers were producing (20 to 22 bags per acre, only very few produced 30 to 40), our costs were twice or thrice of others. I was particularly peeved by the way the dalit workers would bring in their bullocks (sometimes country cows doubling as bullocks) and would do light ploughing so that the bullocks don't tire. In the end despite their collecting their full wage, the plot would have hardly been ploughed needing another round. Now a days, no farmer has bullocks all of them having switched over to cows and hiring tractors for their small ploughing needs and even bullocks for furrowing etc. So only some agricultural workers have bullocks, which are over worked in season. One pair, I remember collapsed in my field. This is what prompted me to go in for the power tiller for which unlike the other farmers we paid the full amount as we were not eligible for the 35,000/- subsidy. (We were perhaps the only non-subsidy clients for the machine). The tiller had its own set of problems and expenses but atleast the whole thing was under our control and we could plough the way we wanted although it increased our dependence on outside forces (mechanic, diesel etc.). Ultimately, the rice we grew was rather expensive and very exhausting as we had to take care of so many vagaries like truant labour, diseases, timely application of various organic inputs (searching for them), timely weeding, proper harvesting and drying and finally storing. We could avoid all this if only we had given our land on tenancy. Besides, if we hired labour we would have to cook the afternoon meal for them (whew!) and also hear complaints about how badly the meal was cooked. No wonder most small farmers, including those owning one or two acres of wet land, give their land on tenancy. We hardly sold any of the paddy we produced. Most of it was consumed by us and our workers hired for various works. After three years of such expensive experiments we decided enough is enough, and opted for share cropping like the others! There is indeed so much relief, especially for people like us who are not used to physical work.

The broken chain or how not to do organic farming:

It is in this context that one must assess the whole question of usage of chemical fertilizers, and pesticides as well as high yielding varieties. Farmers are aware that traditional seeds are less prone to diseases and they taste better but the yields are low. Farmers know that farm yard manure is better and so is green leaf manure for paddy. But where is the farm yard manure in that quantity? (See Annexure VII)The forests have gone, the cattle wealth has disappeared. Earlier the SC boys would graze the village farmers' cows for a pittance in the forests, the cows were there mainly for dung and breeding bullocks. Now the SC boys go to school and to maintain a farm servant is very expensive (More than Rs.1,000/- per month). The economy has turned from bullocks to cows with the advent of milk marketing and hybrid

cows. With the one or two cows they maintain, the farmers make a combination of FYM, leaf manure for paddy and follow it up with chemical fertilizer application – three tractorloads of farm yard manure and about 150 bundles of green leaf lopped from trees meant for the purpose are put in the fields at the time of ploughing followed by three bags of urea. Some apply NPK (17x17x17) as well. They follow up the paddy crop with sugarcane planting for which no or not much FYM is applied but use 3 bags of 17X17X17 per acre in our area. They get an average yield of about 35 to 40 tonnes of cane per acre.

The question that bothers me is why are farmers not taking to composting, vermicompost, etc. which are supposed to fill the void of lack of enough dung and also enrich the FYM? That question I better ask myself. Even after 14 years stay in the village and 8 years of directly being involved in farming I myself have not got down to it. For me the reasons are: to make compost one needs to have mud and leaf transported to the spot where the cattle are and where the dung is being heaped. This requires additional expense. I have no tractor which means I have to hire tractor and labour for the purpose. Now of course I have the tiller but where do I get the mud from?. Since most wastelands have been occupied, one has to go to the tank bed. One might as well put the tank mud and the leaf manure and the dung directly on the soil and they would get composted right there with lesser expense/trouble - so the argument goes. It is not easy to find labour when needed, besides this is additional work for the person who is tending the cattle, but perhaps all these are excuses not very convincing. I am still unable to understand why I can't kick myself to get the vermicomposting going. That requires construction of a couple of sheds with pits to prevent rats and birds from entering.. Am I too busy/ lazy in other activities? I have no excuse to offer especially since these are worth trying and could have a demonstrative effect. Every year I plan and it goes by.

In our experiments with organic farming to use the word loosely, to construe all that goes without the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, we tried several varieties of traditional paddy seeds, as also high yielding seeds with heavy doses of organic manure,(6 tractors of FYM per acre, +200 bundles of leaf manure + 3 bags of groundnut cake/other oil cakes at time of deweeding for paddy), but somewhere something is always going wrong. For one thing there aren't too many tillers of paddy coming up, the same seeds with a little bit of urea at the time of deweeding seem to multiply the tillers. That seems to me at the moment the missing link in paddy cultivation - how to make the high yielding varieties respond to organic manure - perhaps vermicompost could do the trick. In the meantime, the cost of growing paddy organically is becoming prohibitive unless we produce enough surplus to sell.

After burning our fingers with self-cultivation of paddy, we, like other farmers around opted for share cropping initially with the condition that they practice organic farming and since they cannot put the additional farm yard manure we put the same at our cost, We also added three bags of groundnut cake +castor+pongamia cake per acre...but so far this too has failed. We felt it was being unfair to the share croppers, making them share the losses of our experiments, so this year we let go, and allowed the share croppers (each one on 1/3 rd acre) to grow with chemical fertilizers except for the small 1/3 rd patch that we were continuing with "self-cultivation".

We were controlling various pest attacks with neem oil spray, azardichtin spray, Besharam decoction spray till last year. The last crop was paddy BPT 5204 variety harvested locally called Jeelakara masoora- which we had grown earlier organically. It caught a disease and that was it. Try as we might, we simply could not control the disease. It is of some consolation that those who practiced chemical farming also got poor yields! (about 20 bags an acre was our yield while they got about 22 to 25 bags). This is usually what consoles the farmers- that his neighbors are worse off than him!

Pesticides – the vicious cycle:

Talking about pesticides, we must discuss the mango in particular. Our area has been climatically suited for raising mango gardens and my grandfather with much forethought had converted several paddy growing areas to mango gardens around 100 years ago and he even did mango business making use of the railway line exporting to Bombay. Those days no pesticide was used. Nor was watering done. But now, since the last 40 years pesticides have entered the scene...starting with DDT, then briefly endrine, which has seen the pests become accustomed to them. Then the farmers switched over to endosulfan which lasted for nearly a decade and half; soon the pests, mainly hoppers and thrips, became resistant to that also. This was replaced by monocrotophos and sevin/carboryl which lasted for about 5 years to 10 years. Now for the last 5 to 10 years, synthetic pyrethroids are ruling the roost. They can affect the hormones of the plants and have deleterious side effects like shriveled leaf, etc. but the farmers have little option. Pyrethroids were so cheap and one spray would do whereas the earlier procedure of using endosulphan for one dose and then following up with monocrotophos etc were not only costly but cumbersome. The evidence is clear that a pesticide lasts for a few years effectively by one spray and over a few years one has to take recourse to two sprays and then after a few years even that becomes ineffective when one is forced to go in for a new, more powerful pesticide and so the sequence goes on till now we are almost at a dead end. The scientists say synthetic pyrethroids so far are the last word in pesticides, they have nothing more powerful and we are using that now twice instead of a single dose earlier. Suddenly the scientists have made a quick about turn and since last season have started saying actually there does not appear to be the kind of adverse effects of synthetic pyrethroids as was expected and one can use them in correct dose. Some of them talk about integrated pest management (IPM) - you make a cocktail of neem extract and chemical pesticide or reserve the chemical pesticide of lethal dose as a last resort. By this method the farmer ultimately ends up with a fat bill! It always makes me wonder how scientists talk of heavy doses of fertilizers and pesticides in repeated doses totally unmindful of the economics!

As an organic farmer, or at least as someone desiring to do organic farming, I was in a dilemma, for the last eight years, since I was in charge of the farm should I stop using the chemical pesticides? We were not sure of the success of the organic methods of pest control, so that would mean putting at stake our main source of income. So we decided consciously not to go in for organic pesticides for the main garden of 23 acres but try the exercise in a separate 2 ½ acre plot. For the last seven years we tried almost everything that our organic friends suggested, we found neem seed kernel grinding and spraying rather cumbersome on a large scale and switched over to neem extract, Azardictin-spraying for over 4 years (earlier we tried neem-oil, neem cake extract, Besharam decoction etc,including diluted cow urine. We spent a lot of money and effort in the main garden trying to avoid synthetic pyrethroids spraying the equally bad endosulfan, monocrotophos and one year the horrible smelling acephate. All this because we had experienced the bitter results of pyrethroids, when we leased out our crop to some businessmen from Karnataka, they had sprayed fenvelerate, a powerful synthetic pyrethroid, along with a growth promoter which we came to know later, and the next year and the year after the trees looked so weak and shriveled.

So we can very well see that we are following a wrong path. The history of pesticide usage on mango clearly has drawn us to this repeated warning from Nature that you can't beat / defeat the "pest" with more and more powerful pesticide after each round. In the end like "Bhasmasura" we may end up being consumed by the pesticide ourselves. As it is, the mangoes produced by our pesticide sprayed garden are having pesticide residues and are not fit for export to the west - those great masters who taught us to use these pesticides in the first

place! These lessons of ineffectiveness of pesticides was brought home very powerfully by the suicides of the cotton farmers in the Telengana area of Andhra Pradesh. Yes, of course spurious pesticides, spurious seeds are a part of the problem but growing pest resistance to pesticides, conducive climatic conditions also have their powerful say in pest control (or non-control).

In our experience we found in one year, in small patches where we have mangoes within the coconut garden (2 ½ acre plot) we sprayed nothing and in another patch of 2 ½ acres we sprayed organic pesticides several times (3 – 4 sprays per season) and in the main garden we sprayed only chemical pesticides (excluding synthetic pyrethroids) and in all three, the result was the same! Meaning the yield was very low that year. There is a tendency in mango to give a bumper crop followed by a lean crop year after year. But this is not always true and several climatic factors have their say. Ultimately we have realized this.

“Science never does any more than mimic a virtual image of Nature that exists only in the human mind, so what it grasps is only an incomplete and inferior imitation of the real thing. I can assert here without the least doubt that anything created by man with scientific knowledge will always be inferior to nature. When one realizes just how wondrous a thing nature is one can only bow to it in humble acknowledgement. The moment we become humble before nature and renounce the self, the self shall become assimilated into nature and nature shall allow it to live. Even a small ego becomes capable of summoning great strength. It is enough merely to know this road and walk it each day.” (Fukuoka, M., **The Road Back to Nature - Regaining the Paradise Lost**, P.224.

Dairying : Milking who?:

Dairying is an important link in our farming (unlike Fukuoka's). And we tried our hand at dairying. We employed one person to look after the cows at a measly Rs.600/- per month (which he would make up through the hearty meals three times a day at our house). We raised grass and bought groundnut cake every month along with rice bran. We often ran out of rice straw which sometimes we had to buy at great cost. Initially, we were thinking of raising some local breeds - the famous Punganur breed, which is now not traceable thanks to the extensive cross breeding. We settled for cross-bred cows with a greater percentage of the local/natural blood. We raised grass and the first couple of years we did not make any loss as we were using some of the milk for our home consumption and selling the rest. But gradually the price of oil cake began to rise. Initially it was the same price as the milk (7 years ago) but now milk sells at Rs.6.50 a litre while groundnut cake costs nearly twice as much at Rs.11/- or so and a farmer has to feed at least a kg of cake to the cow every day twice a day...so most farmers don't go by the rules...they feed their cows on the grass that they gather from the fields and what they grow, during the 4 months since January they feed them on sugarcane leaf and in lean months on groundnut leaf and horse gram leaf and so on... keeping buying cake and rice bran to the minimum given only to lactating cows. And then we started making losses. For the last three years we were spending Rs.10,000/- per year extra! This was unsustainable. So we retired our cow man (who anyway had to be retired as we had given him the job of looking after the cows as a stop gap arrangement) with a ten thousand rupees fixed deposit. As for our cows we decided the better thing would be to lease it out to another worker who offered to do so, staying in our garden, and taking 2/3rd of the payment from sale of milk and giving us 1/3rd. The 2/3rd including the cake and bran etc, We pay for any sickness and we also give straw from our paddy crop and whatever crop residues we get. He in turn will have to give us all of the farmyard manure produced. This has been on for the last six months - let us see how far this will sustain.

In the meantime, what is saddening is the way the Government has killed the milk co-operative movement initially promoted by it. When the cooperative movement was at its peak, milk sales were high and did a lot for improving the farmers' lot (despite whatever Claude Alvares might say, milk was never an essential item in the diet of people in this region. It was used for children, and for butter-milk). It took care of all the minor routine expenses. Elections to the cooperatives right from the village to the district level were a big political affair and even the fellow who was secretary of the cooperative at the village used to make a lot of money, taking a little extra milk officially for testing and asking people to pour over the brim of the litre measured, etc. The milk for testing would never be tested. The society dairy was soon reeking of corruption and they were unable to pay bills to farmers for milk supplied to them for over a year! After much agitation the bills were paid but the cycle repeated. At this juncture the Government allowed private dairies to operate, with our Chief Minister (in opposition then) taking a lead by starting a big dairy (Heritage Foods). The private dairies have formed a cartel and they do not raise the price of milk, despite their being several buyers (so much for the multi buyer model of the World Bank). Now one cannot see big dairies of milk producers, anywhere in our area because they are simply not economical. Selling milk as middlemen is! So farmers manage their cows by grazing them and feeding as little cake and bran as possible. This implies a decrease in milk yield but then the costs work out. Often the milk is also diluted.

As far as diseases were concerned people treated their cattle with traditional remedies. It was only when these failed that they resorted to the Government veterinary care which, just like allopathic treatment, is prohibitively expensive. Of course, there were outbreaks of dangerous diseases like anthrax and there are foot and mouth disease advertisements at every veterinary hospital. But nobody panics the way they are reacting in Britain and the West. Of course you cannot feed crushed bones and skull to vegetarian cows and expect nothing to happen.

Alternate energy – the crying need:

Along with our cattle we had also maintained a gobar gas plant which was giving enough gas for one meal with dung from three cows - not very efficient. It was a concrete dome type model, a Chinese model, we are told, which gave way after ten years. It developed cracks in the dome and we could not restore it much as we tried. So now we have cooking gas from the nearby town, so much for bio-gas. But the new janatha model introduced by the Government is smaller and more efficient. A small family is able to manage its cooking over it with two cows--- feeding four people. Two families in the village are having this. The others do not have either enough space or motivation although almost all families have at least one cow each.

The question that bothers me is why are gobar gas plants not picking up? Why are people in villages also wanting to have gas cylinders? Now an elaborate system has developed in every village around ours by which empty cylinders are transported to the nearest gas agent and replacement delivered for a fee (Rs.20/- per cylinder). The state Government has a scheme by which gas connections are given to women in the DWCRA groups. These often ended up at the houses of better –off farmers as gas costs money.

Of health and wealth:

The question of health and treatment of the sick also needs to be mentioned here. In our eagerness to promote cheap and local health traditions we also wanted to promote ayurveda. But as our core fund had diminished to a mere four lakhs even before we started, the amount we were willing to pay, Rs.2000/- per month to an ayurvedic doctor was not attractive enough to any doctor - even a fresh graduate! There are three RMPs at the central village close to our village. The nearest MBBS doctor is 10 kms away. An allopathic doctor-friend

of ours started weekly visits. He would not want to give medicines and injections unnecessarily. Initially people did not respond to him. Slowly his friendly ways and his willingness to explain and listen, made him acceptable, and many patients go to him regularly nowadays. We were also handing out medicines - allopathic, homeopathic and ayurvedic as desired by the patient (the choice was mostly left to him/her), but patients nearly always preferred allopathic medicines because of their capacity to give immediate relief. This is what the RMPs told us too. That whatever medicine we administer it must give immediate relief. The rest of the real treatment can follow. We tried to give a refresher course to the RMPs through our doctor friend, but after the first two classes they decided it was not worth the effort. The agricultural workers, especially, feel they cannot afford to lose a day's labour/wages so they go in for quick relief treatment, if things get complicated they go to the nearby town or even Tirupati. Our doctor-friend for personal reasons, stopped coming but continues to give medical advice over the phone and sees the patients we send to him free of cost. It is indeed a great relief to have a doctor whom you can trust not to give unnecessary medicines, nor to recommend unnecessary examinations, to talk sympathetically and in a friendly manner to patients, not to fleece patients where doctors thrive on disease and ignorance. It must be remembered that getting checked up by the doctor is only half the story. When they go to town, however sick they may be, a movie is a must, as well as well as buying odd things. So the sickness comes in handy.

Unpolished is Uncouth:

While agricultural worker households still are uncontaminated by and large by tea and coffee, for most farmer households these have become compulsory, and by their standards a fortune is spent on these beverages every month. People also insist on having only polished rice. Our efforts to induce them to eat unpolished rice have been in vain. In fact at times, especially when there are guests, we are forced to prepare meals with polished rice. Some times workers protest and refuse to eat our unpolished rice, so that we have had to cook separately for them.

One is also reminded of the village bus. People are willing to stand for hours rather than walk up a kilometre to the next stop.

Giving up isn't every thing:

Before summing up the dilemmas in agriculture, I must mention Nagesh and Aparna, the US returned computer engineers, who want to lead a Gandhian life of self – sufficiency based on agriculture, who are living nearby. They have purchased their own plot, to have a “free hand”, turning down our offer of taking some of our land on lease. Ever since they bought the plot three years ago they have done anything but farming - running from the revenue officials to the court to the police to the village bigwigs. They were twice cheated out of the deals they almost clinched (I was partly to blame for one at least). And the final deal was with a person who had exchanged a piece of land with his neighbour cum relative promising him the land but sold it to Nagesh. So the battle dragged on for months and years, till the neighbour sold his share to a third party who continues the battle! So much for buying land and farming. Yet they have courageously stuck on. They are perhaps the only couple to live in a dalitwada with this kind of purpose in mind. They are of course finding the going tough. Most people are not honest, irrespective of caste and class in the village. Most of the time people speak half-truths allowing themselves some space for maneuver lest they change their minds later on. But in a crisis people do gather together. They find the life of this couple very odd and unexplainable. In the first place nobody had invited them to stay in the dalitwada! Now that they have adopted a baby girl from an orphanage, they find them even more queer, that Aparna did not want to go through the pains of labour and so she bought a child!

Farmers a tired lot:

Finally it must be remembered that the farmers are a tired lot to day. Most of them are single – nuclear family households, the joint families are an exception nowadays. Since farming is a collective effort, the whole nuclear family is then put to tremendous strain, both physical and psychological. They are heavily burdened with debts and yet there is hope - may be the next crop will see us through. In any case there is little alternative to growing wet crops. So in great desperation when a well or a bore well runs dry, the farmer feels his lifeline has been snapped and he will move heaven and earth to sink another bore well. He will certainly not wait for a service to be given before installing a motor if water is struck. The Power board employees are very understanding and are willing to oblige for a fee of course!

PART-II**The world of the agricultural workers:**

“ A person of courage to day is a person of peace. The courage we need is to refuse authority and to accept only personally responsible decisions. Like war, growth at any cost is an outmoded and discredited concept. It is our lives which are being laid to waste. What is worse, it is our children’s world, which is being destroyed. It is therefore our only possible decision to withhold all support for destructive systems and to cease to invest our lives in our own annihilation.” (Bill Mollison in **Perma Culture**, 199-).

The agriculture worker lives in his own world... a world shared by the farmer, more than anybody else, but still it is a world of his own. Unlike the farmer, the agriculture worker is more of a day-to-day living mind. There is little conception of saving or acquiring property (some of them do so, though rarely). When there is money, they tend to spend lavishly but are capable of missing a meal or two and surviving on precious little. Although they are living in the midst of agriculture they have to buy almost everything that they need or want - from rice, to oil, vegetables, soaps, clothes, sandals, medicines and now a days even electricity for the single bulb they use. Some have prospered, thanks to reservations, education, jobs in railways, working in the towns. But these are the odd balls.

Past and present

Compared to 40-50 years ago there have been tremendous changes in certain aspects and precious little in other ways. It is difficult to generalize, not even on a local scale. One has to continuously qualify the class of the agriculture worker with his caste, the region etc. But still there is something that sets the agriculture worker apart from the farmer. In our area almost all the workers have some piece of land, ½ an acre, mostly dry land on which they sow groundnut and sometimes even horse gram. The more enterprising even try out tomato during the rainy season. Almost all the families of the SCs in our village are doubling as tenants for somebody or the other. While the older male works as the tenant, his wife would go for work as a daily wage earner, the son would be a part of a youth gang who do work on “contract” earning a fast buck (and blowing it up partly). Girls, especially do a lot of domestic chores and are ready for agriculture work at the tender age of 10 to 12. Most of them are married off by the time they are 14-16, some just after reaching puberty. People are afraid of illegal sex before marriage. What is surprising is that marriage seems a sort of license. Extra marital affairs, flings are very common, not taken too seriously! This is the case even among the farmers, although the frequency is higher among the workers and goes by the caste of the people involved as well.

Four-five decades ago, my grand father and later uncle had around 10 farm servants working throughout the year. One to look after the hundred odd sheep, one for the 20-40 buffaloes, one for the 40-60 cows, four pairs of bullocks, looked after by at least two persons, one or two in the kitchen. There was hardly any tenancy. All agriculture work would be done with farm servants and hired labour. Unless a severe drought struck (once in 15-20 years) there was always work and always food. No one needed to go hungry. The food consisted of ragi

and rice balls with some pickle or hot curry to gulp it down with some buttermilk at times, especially in summer. There was also jowar and other millets which were more cumbersome to cook. Even smaller farmers had paid servants working on yearly basis. The children would start as cattle rearers and graduate finally to ploughing with bullocks and preparing the paddy fields – the toughest jobs. The forest was plenty and lot of things could be obtained “free” - fire wood, bamboo and wood for the housing. The forest had always been taken for granted.

70 to 80% of the agriculture workers in our area are from the scheduled castes (mostly Malas). The Wadders are a community specializing in stone and earth work (these are sub groups within them) who also work as hired labour, but generally take work on a contract basis. There was tremendous demand for them for digging wells. But now with the advent of bore wells they have been confined to public works such as roads and buildings and large scale farm works. They charge a higher rate than the SC workers. They are famous for taking advances before starting a work and demanding more and more. By the time the work is completed (they would have contracted elsewhere) they would have already extracted 25 to 50% more. More than any other community they are into heavy drinking and lax in sexual behaviour. Of late, they are under severe strain with the advent of poclains for road works.

For the SC workers, their clothing has improved. So also their toiletry. They dress more fully clothed. The women, especially have shifted to polyester – its cheaper and longer lasting. The men still do wear some cottons but the younger lot are also increasingly into polyester. The younger generation especially insists on buying expensive soaps for bathing.

There is electricity in every house. In a hamlet of 80 odd houses of SCs there are 5 TV sets, about 10 fans, and an equal number of tape recorders/radios. Most of them have only one bulb per house. Pucca houses are coming up with Government assistance (15,000/- or 50% of the cost). There is also a water tank being built. Some families have shifted to Tirupati, working as ward boys in hospitals, restaurants and some in masonry work. One girl managed to become a Government doctor, two have joined the police and one managed to become a librarian in the university and even installed a telephone for his parents in the village.

Now a days (for the past 20 odd years) almost all the SC boys and girls go to school. But what a school! Although the teachers are reasonably well paid (Rs.4000 to Rs.10,000/- per month) they are mostly very reluctant to teach with any sense of responsibility. Most of the children learn things by heart and write, but can hardly read numbers or recognize letters. There is no way any of these children can ever become even attenders, let alone doctors and engineers. The fate of the non-SC schools in the villages is no better.

Earlier, 40-50 years ago, the workers were paid by the measure, there was hardly any cash payment- five “padis” of paddy, ie. 2 1/2 kg) per day for men and same for women. The young boys tending the cattle were hardly paid anything - 5 to 6 rupees per year. The older farm servants worked for a pittance of Rs.50/- to 60/- on year and fed thrice a day. Now the wages for women are Rs.30/- per day plus a meal for the afternoon. Still way below the official Rs.50/-. But the wage has jumped from around Rs.20/- to Rs.30/- plus a meal in the last four years. For men it has changed from Rs.35/- to Rs.50 without food and Rs.5/- to Rs.10/- less with food. And for tough work like fencing, cutting trees etc. Rs. 60-70 per day is the going rate. The closer one is to the town, the costlier is the labour and more difficult to get. The work hours vary from region to region, even within a distance of a few kilometers. In some places they come for work early in the morning and close by the afternoon. In others, like in our place, they usually work from around 9-9.30 a.m. to 4.30 to 5 p.m. with an hour's break in the afternoon. Given the low price of paddy and the subsidized rice scheme for the poor, wages have indeed risen although not fully sufficient to allow a family to live decently. There is a tremendous difference in wage rate and employment between dry and wet regions., the drier parts of western Chittoor district and neighbouring Anantapur dt. WE

should note the seasonal migration of labour to wet regions. Despite the absence of a union, once a wage rate increases, it is rare for it to go down - a sense of camaraderie prevails.

There are agricultural workers from other castes as well. Especially from our neighbouring village of Reddys and Balijas, a large number of whom used to go for daily wage. But today, things have changed tremendously in this caste village. Most of the boys have studied reasonably up to intermediate and some even up to post-graduation. Six boys are in the army and allied services (after paying heavy bribes for recruitment). A few are railway employees and two are teachers. On the whole there is hardly a thatched hut anymore in the village. Almost every other house has a TV (they are mostly small and marginal farmers). Now very few of them go to work as workers. Interestingly, most small and marginal farmers including those having some wet lands are in possession of ration cards for subsidized rice although everybody speaks as if it is only the SCs who are enjoying this privilege and not turning up for work.

The haves and the have-nots

If one were to make a class analysis, to compare the situation prevailing about 40 years ago, (in the 1960s) there were a few big landlords. My uncle (and father combined) controlled around 90 acres. The Reddy landlord in the neighbouring village controlled some 400+ acres. A third Reddy landlord in a village, lets say C, controlled something like 200 acres. A Reddy in village 'D' further down controlled about 1000 acres. A couple of kms down the line a shaukar, Komati Setty family also controlled over a 1000 acres. They used to lend money even to the then Palegar Zamindar and acquired substantial land through money lending and over-due interest payments. The Palegar-zamindar of the area declined soon after the abolition of the zamindar estates in the 1950s itself, thanks to their bad habits of wine, and women and little education. The Reddy from village C used to work as a sort of accountant to the Palegar and acquired a lot of wasteland and other lands misusing his position. But his sons got into drink and squandered the entire (or almost entire) property within one generation. Many of the members of this family have shifted out of the village, one of them even to the US. The shaukars, thanks to the ceiling act and the growing political weight of the Reddys after independence, also disposed off most of their-lands and many of their family members have migrated to urban areas.

The 1000 acre owning Reddy family is well established and prospered through handloom business in the earlier days and acquired a lot of land in the area. They have large tracts of coconut and mango gardens. The younger generation (after the initial founder) started a confectionery factory (Nutrine) in Chittoor and has done very well, apart from a small ground nut oil crushing unit. Thanks to the ceiling act they too divided their land into apparently several bits. They have surrendered over 100 acres of dry lands to the Government on paper which was redistributed to the poor. The title deeds continue to be with these landlords although the local poor know that they are the technical owners. But no one dares to question. Our neighbour, the Landlord B still controls about 100 acres. After distributing his 400+ acres (much of it acquired through liquor business in the British period) in the names of his 6 children and himself, shifting categories of land to accommodate the maximum, he ultimately surrendered some 5 (!) acres to the Government which was distributed among some SCs who happen to be his farm servants. The lands continue to be in his possession and enjoyment (surrounded by lands of the Reddy landlord). If any enquiry is done officially, the title holders will reply that they are the owners and enjoying the land! This particular family has enjoyed some political clout, having been aggressive. But the son of the landlord has since shifted to Bangalore and another to Chennai much earlier. They have businesses in Chennai and even Singapore and Bangalore. They have also set up a juice factory based on mango pulp right at the village. One grandson of the landlord has returned from the city and has taken charge and seems to be doing reasonably well. With the rise of Telugu Desam and especially the present Chief Minister, this family's political clout has

dwindled. They still continue on a small scale, holding “durbars” and settling disputes between villagers belonging to some 15 villages around. Thanks to the traditional rivalry between the Kammas and Reddys (both sudra peasant castes) the Kammas of the surrounding villages resent the suzerainty of the Reddy landlord. The Reddys of our neighboring village resent the weight of my uncle and proclaim loyalty to the Reddy landlord of the neighboring village! In our family, while my grandfather built up the assets through his aggressive buying and converting into mango gardens and doing mango business (initiating it in the area), my uncle lacked the initiative and hardly added another 20 acres. My father was in Government service at Hyderabad and the property was divided between the two, with a little extra going to my uncle. Except for one, the children of my uncle have not been very enterprising and they have more or less managed to keep their share of property of around 12 acres each. The one son (who managed to study up to M.Phil in Economics) runs a mango business in the neighbouring market in season and is doing fairly well for himself, but has not done well enough to acquire more land. For our family I (mis) manage the show for my two brothers as well of about 36 acres for Rs.36,000 annually and a 1/3rd share in the returns. Of my two brothers one retired from the army as a Lt. Colonel and another is a lawyer. Both are settled in Hyderabad.

The new rich:

A kamma family from our neighbouring village closely related to us, is typical of the rise of the new class of landlord- political leader. During my grandfather’s time, they had about half the size of our property (around 50 acres). The eldest among them was hard working, tight fisted and enterprising. He used to run a small tin shed cinema theatre, locally partnered a rice mill and a tractor along with my uncle and kept buying a lot of dry land cheaply and converting it into mango gardens. Even after dividing with his brothers he has managed to hold on to 100 acres for his four sons, mostly in mango gardens. His eldest son is active in Telugu Desam and aspiring to be an M.L.A. in the near future; he has landed several contracts for road works, made a neat profit of around Rs.10 lakhs in just one such contract two years ago and has not looked back. The joint family now owns a poelain and three tractors. Most of the political leaders in the area are typically contractors cum wine shop dealers cum owners of big mango gardens (100 to 200 acres sometimes more). The bigger ones have businesses in cities a well. They have together succeeded in making elections a very very expensive affair with drinks, and cash flowing freely. An M.L.A. election could cost the candidate anywhere between 30 lakh to 2 crores+ !

Most of the farmers in our area have very small holdings. A farmer having 100 guntas (7 acres) of wet land is considered rich, and by village standards, he is indeed rich. However due to the depressing agriculture scenario, almost everybody is trying to get out! Everyone wants their children to study and get a good job in the city or do some business.

Elections have however been a positive turning point in class and caste relations. Earlier, the local landlord’s word was law. With the advent of Mrs. Gandhi there has been a dramatic change especially with regard to the SCs. Distribution of Government lands to the SCs, special laws to protect them, and her efforts at an alliance of castes against the landed castes – the “kulak base”, her constant refrain of Garibi Hatao and saving the SCs, housing schemes etc. and abusing her by the landed classes, endeared her to dalits (SCs). So much so, that she soon became an “amma” for them. At many places fierce struggles took place to allow the dalits to cast their vote freely for the Congress party. The landed gentry of Reddys and Kammas (mostly in this area) fiercely opposed them (the latter supporting the Janatha party). With the rise of the Telugu Desam of NTR (Kammas backed by BCs) followed by Chandra Babu Naidu, the Congress has resumed its role as a Reddy party (much more emphatically than ever.) But the question that we may ask is where are the dalits and other poor BCs predominantly agricultural workers – politically, socially and economically?

One is reminded of Victor Hugo's comment about 'the ruling class willing to do everything for the poor/down-trodden except get off their back', that aptly sums up the situation.

Castes and Untouchability – between Gandhi and Ambedkar

'The 'untouchable' to me, is compared to us, really a Harijan—a man of God and we are 'Durjan' (men of evil). For whilst the 'untouchable' has toiled and moiled and dirtied his hands so that we may live in comfort and cleanliness, we have delighted in suppressing him. We are solely responsible for all the shortcomings and faults that we lay at the door of these 'untouchables'. It is still open to us to be Harijan ourselves, but we can only do so by heartily repenting our sins against them.' (Mahatma Gandhi – Young India, 6-8-1931).

"You must abolish your slavery yourselves. Do not depend for its abolition upon God or a superman. Your salvation lies in political power and not in making pilgrimages and observance of fasts." (B.R. Ambedkar).

Despite our background in sociology the first shock in the village was the practice of untouchability. I knew that SCs (scheduled castes) were not allowed inside the houses of other caste people. But being part of a household in which you could not take your SC friends /acquaintances inside, gave me a queasy feeling to say the least. It prompted me to build a separate house for my family as quickly as possible. (It was also required for reasons of other conveniences as well). But the extent of the practice was really appalling only when I started living in the village. At the tea shops in the central village, SCs are allotted separate glasses which would be hanging by a wire loop or kept aside at a corner visible for all those who should know. An SC wanting tea/coffee has to take the glass and hold it while the tea shop owner would pour the tea from a height. The SC gentleman after drinking the tea has to hold the glass again for the owner to pour some water so that the SC customer can wash the glass and keep it back in its pristine position. This in the nineteen eighties!

SCs are not allowed into the eating places. They have to stand or sit outside or on special benches inside specially allotted for them. They would not be served in plates but in leaves which after they finish eating they would have to pick up and throw outside. There are stone slabs outside or in the center of each village or raised platforms under a tree on which people squat and chit chat, read newspapers etc. or settle disputes. But SCs dare not sit on them... especially at bus stops in the village. These are unwritten rules. If there are temples in the caste village with closed walls, SCs cannot enter them. There are still a few villages where the SCs cannot pass through the caste Hindu streets wearing footwear. If a SC person is riding a cycle and another caste person happens to be walking along the road, in which ever direction, he must get down from the bicycle and wait for the other caste person to walk across, after wishing him and taking his approval to cross him, he may ride again, as a mark of respect. If the cycle rider rings his bell to warn of his coming he is considered haughty. If another caste person, even of a younger age passes through the street of an SC hamlet, all the SCs, irrespective of age, have to stand up, as a mark of respect. (The SC women also do the same for SC men). The village barber or washerman does not serve them as they are below his status and besides the other caste people will no longer use his services. This has resulted in the SCs appointing one of their own caste persons as their washerman and behave towards him and his family exactly as the caste Hindus do to their washerman! They consider the washer family slightly lower and do not intermarry or eat with them. But in most villages these days all the SC boys know to cut their hair and each family usually washes its own clothes, meaning the womenfolk do the job. The younger boys often patronize the washerman at the central village who will iron their clothes, if necessary. But in quite a few villages this is still not possible. The owners of tea shops, barber shops etc. also do not object if the customer is "reasonably dressed" like the students wearing shirt and trousers. There is of course no question of any SC daring to enter the house of another caste Hindu in most villages in our district, and I am sure the situation is not very different in most other parts of the country as well. In quite a few villages SCs have never voted at all or only voted

according to the wishes of the local bigwigs as they are dependent on them for their daily survival. Passage to most SC villages are only through the caste village which can be barred for erring members. Even the houses where the SC live and the burial grounds are often technically owned by people of other castes – it helps to keep them on tender hooks.

Much of the tension between SCs and OCs has occurred on such issues – at eating places, tea shops, sitting on benches, not showing due respect by getting up, demanding their right to vote or inter caste marriage often involving physical assault and abuse. Most of those who lead such struggles are those who are going to colleges or having some land, jobs (mostly Government, railways, military) or some independent source of income. At times factions between the other castes or even within a caste help in assertion of their rights by SCs. Of late, a lot of tension has been generated in struggles to recover land assigned in the name of SCs or tamarind trees which ought to be assigned to the poor.

Despite their intense rivalries when a situation of SC versus OC develops, the upper caste members close ranks. There are several voluntary organizations like the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha which had just come into existence, working among dalits (SCs) in Chittoor district and all of them, including us, rallied together and campaigned against the practice of untouchability. The campaigns reached a peak during the Ambedkar Centenary celebrations in 1991, and we documented systematically the widespread variety of practices of untouchability with the help of co-operative district officials. We managed to control, if not put an end to such practices as separate tea glasses in tea shops and hotels in the main centre villages where we were working. But even till today most of the other practices continue. Where the SCs have been well organized under some sangam or the other (mostly sponsored by NGOs) they have been able to exercise their vote somewhat freely and also stand up to the other caste people. Such clashes now a days result in filing of cases under SC, ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act under which no bail can be granted to the accused, who in turn has to prove his/her innocence. Moreover, the complainant when the case is registered will be paid some money by the Department of Social Welfare, and more if the case is actually proved. So the OCs do not as readily beat or abuse the SCs as they used to earlier. But to counter this act the OCs also have a weapon. A case of attempt to rape is foisted on the SC, which is also equally powerful, as the accused has to prove his innocence and no bail is granted when the case is registered. Of course it all depends upon how strongly or how well the rival parties are organized. A lot of hard bargaining goes on and usually some settlement is reached (an apology and/or some monetary consideration).

Change and adaptation :

We were quite surprised at how quickly people adapt to the change. Even in villages where untouchability is severely practised, a Government official who happens to be a SC is treated with respect, especially if he is a police officer! Not so much the SC school teacher, so power begets respect! The very same people who bitterly opposed or were hesitant to changing the practices of untouchability, one finds freely chatting with SCs.

In our house our cook is a dalit from the local hamlet. What is surprising is how people (other caste persons) fairly quickly (within two to three years) adjusted to the new situation. They now not only eat in our house, food cooked by her but she also visits some of their houses. But most other SCs do not try and are not invited into the houses of OCs. But there are signs of growing leniency and adjustment though it would need several powerful social, political and economics campaigns before untouchability disappears altogether.

The caste system and the politics of numbers

Dalits constitute 18% of the population in the district (according to a voter survey conducted by the Telugu Desam Party). 60 to 70% of the dalit households are primarily agricultural workers. The rest are partly marginal farmers doing odd jobs in towns like masonry work or in hotels or factories or Government jobs(mostly teachers). The upper castes in our area are either Reddys (12%) or Naidus (6.4%) who mainly own the best cultivable lands in the area.

Both of them belong to the sudra varna in the caste hierarchy. The Reddys were the traditionally dominant feudal community whose monopoly was shaken by the rise of the Telugu Desam with which the Kamma Naidus identify themselves. They are closely followed by the Balija community who although constituting 9.2% of the population but are not a dominant economic force, and have been struggling across the state for a BC status and adequate political representation. The other sizable community is that of Muslims (7.6%) who tend to concentrate in the small towns of the district. They are generally poor and live by doing petty business. Some of them have prospered in fruit business and other such enterprises. They are present throughout the district and are generally perceived by other communities as just one more caste --- somewhat like the BCs and interestingly, their behaviour towards the SCs is more or less the same as that of other castes. In our campaigns against untouchability we often had to fight with Muslim tea stall owners for maintaining separate tea glasses for SCs.

Thanks to the politicization and democratization through elections, bus transport, hotels, school and colleges, cinemas, things are moving, albeit slowly towards a more egalitarian inter caste relations. But it is clear from past experience with untouchability and apartheid that these practices do not simply wither away with development. Remember the practice of "bussing" in Southern USA where blacks had to sit in the rear seats of a bus; a practice in vogue till the early sixties, till Martin Luther King led the campaign, as well as our own experiences in putting an end to the practices of untouchability.

But one thing has become clear to us, through our stay in the village that while untouchability can be put an end to, caste will not go away. Caste is a reality of Indian society. It is the predominant social identity in villages. It gives a sense of security – with relatives, kith and kin, in times of need, for employment, sickness, death marriage etc. reinforced each time the community gathers for such occasions and functions. People may adjust to inter-caste marriages (except in case of marriages with SCs and Muslims), with the caste identity of the male predominating. It is now clear to me why caste has survived for over five thousand years and why it still continues to do so. Within the over all hierarchy each community has freedom of action to practice its beliefs and customs and depending upon its control over resources and numbers, comes to terms with the other communities regarding social status etc. Caste will not go. It cannot be wished away. It is an identity - a positive identity. The negative connotation comes with the SCs in their interaction with the other castes – trying to hide their caste for fear of distancing and insult. But now with the resurgence of the Madiga (leather worker) community proudly announcing their caste honorific with their names, things have started moving. Unfortunately for the dalit movement it is no longer the ominous threat it appeared to be with the rise of the Dalit Mahasabha and organization of NGOs at the grass roots in dalitwad. A resurgence that appeared possible once again with the rise of Kanshi Ram in U.P. is now a lost dream. The mobilization of Madigas as a separate community wronged at the hands of Malas who are supposed to have cornered most of the benefits in the name of reservations (partly true) and the competing calls of the political parties have badly splintered the dalits into several groups and the community lies dissipated feeling betrayed by its leadership.

The practice of untouchability sustaining down the years into the 21st century, is basically due to its function of reinforcement of relations of dominance and dependence. Unless these relationships are shaken to make people of different castes who are mutually dependent, interact on a more equitable footing and make them reasonably independent of each other in economic terms, untouchability will not go. Economic reforms are a necessary condition of dalit liberation but are not sufficient. By themselves economic reforms cannot change the relationships of the traditional caste culture. They have to go hand in hand with social reforms campaigns for removal of untouchability – both by dalit assertion campaigns a la Ambekdar and by caste Hindus campaigning among the farmers of other castes – a la Gandhi.

Both are complementary. Both are needed; however much the Ambedkarites might revile Gandhi and vice versa. In fact Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism (and not Islam or Christianity) heralds the possible confluence of these two streams of struggle towards a new flowering, submerging untouchability in the annals of history.

Today there are no major social campaigns against untouchability at the village level nor is there any movement of significance demanding redistribution of economic resources, especially land, to dalits. The National campaign for Dalit Human Rights has been fairly successful in making the voice of dalits heard at the U.N. and the National level equating untouchability with apartheid. While its efforts at the international and national level are commendable it is sad to see the campaign at the local level against untouchability is hardly noticeable. It is a welcome sign that the CPM of late has woken up (better late than never) to the evil practice of untouchability and has been launching campaigns against such practices for the last three years in the name of Kula Vivakshata Vyatireka Porata Committee i.e. struggle committee against caste discrimination. It may be noticed that the committee of the CPM is campaigning not for abolition of caste but only against caste discrimination, that is, they seem to have realized that the fight against caste and against caste discrimination are two different things.

From the point of view of other castes, Sharad Joshi, a noted farmers' leader, made an interesting observation. He says that when the farmer's economic status is improving he will not bother much about the practices of untouchability and caste hierarchy. It is only when the position of farmers is not improving or on the contrary is declining, while certain sections/families of dalits are improving, through jobs, lands etc. with the consequent claims to equality by the latter that the other caste people tend to be very particular about maintaining their status. For, after all, it is only the social status (by birth) that is still left with them, having been deprived of any economic improvement and getting deeper and deeper into debt. And all the anger and frustration of their situation gets concentrated into focusing on the maintenance of practices of untouchability and caste discrimination. This situation is particularly noticeable in the case of many backward communities who are only a little above the SCs in caste hierarchy such as the wadders (stone cutters), Yadavs, Ekira Dora, Balijas etc, as also among the poor or middle farmer Kammas and Reddys. A similar situation prevails between the Vanniar and the SCs in Tamil Nadu. We thus have a funny situation with the big land owners, and rich urbanites professing caste liberalism and against the practice or at least willing to stop practicing untouchability, while the peasant insists on maintenance of untouchability and associated practices which would in turn reinforce his status and dominance in all spheres.

Interestingly, the removal of untouchability, although an important demand, is not at the top of the agenda of any of the dalit political parties. They are more interested in forming caste alliances with other backward castes to oust the upper and middle castes from power – Bahujan samaj theory. Capturing political power through the ballot with their numbers, seems to be their strategy and once in power they expect social and economic justice to flow. They do not spell out any specific economic agenda for dalit liberation unlike the communists who emphasize the economic liberation of dalits as primary.

Land reforms for dalits

Around 75% of the dalits in the rural areas are agricultural workers. To any one observing their situation, it is quite clear that a little land with water supply will make a tremendous difference to these dalit families, in terms of survival, standard of living and most importantly as a launching pad for improving their status and economic position. The freedom that even ½ an acre of wet land can bestow on a family, the dignity it enjoins is to be seen to be believed. Despite all the theories about land fragmentation and their unproductive nature and therefore need for land consolidation (although there is a lot of truth in this contention) it makes a lot of economic, social and political sense to ensure that each landless poor SC

family across the country is in control of at least $\frac{1}{2}$ an acre of wet land. As P.S. Appu pointed out distribution of ten cents of wet land to each dalit family in Kerala and land distribution accompanied by other inputs had tremendous difference in the lives of dalits in some areas of Bihar. Similar has been the experience in Andhra Pradesh wherever dalits have gained control over some wet land.

The question is, is there enough of such wet land to go around? Let us make a simple calculation. For the 1 crore dalits meaning 20 lakh families, 14 lakhs would be living in villages (70%). Of them 75% are dependent on agriculture as workers i.e. around 10.5 lakh families. Which means the Government would have to acquire around 6 lakh acre of wet land for redistribution to dalit families across the state. Out of some 1 crore acres of wet land in the state is it too much to ask for just 6%? By extending the scheme to other agricultural worker families of other castes as well at a later stage, the Government in power can easily do away with the subsidized rice scheme on which it is spending around Rs.1200 crores per annum. This would thus make good economic and political sense as well for any party or coalition in power. It is only the imagination and will that is lacking.

Talking of political will, land reforms would have made a sea change in the lives of the down trodden and paved the way for making our country into a vibrant political and economic power. While Communist China has redistributed 42% of its agricultural land soon after liberation, in Capitalist Japan 32% , South Korea 33% and Taiwan 38% of land has been redistributed while in India hardly 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ % has been redistributed! Land reforms is today a forgotten agenda, with even the left political parties only paying a lip service while it is more or less missing from the election manifestoes of other parties, who are now talking in terms of lifting the ceiling laws. The moot question is, is there enough land available for redistribution?

In surveys conducted in Chittoor district by the NIRD and the district administration separately, it has been found that around 40% of the land assigned in the name of the poor is in ineligible hands amounting to nearly 2 lakh acres. Similarly, out of the nearly 10,000 acres of ceiling surplus lands, most of it continues to be in the hands of the erstwhile landlords or sold to some others at throw away prices. Another 5000 acres involved in some 89 cases is doing several rounds of the courts and tribunals on some frivolous ground or the other for the last 25 years and no body seems greatly perturbed! About 8,000 acres of temple and math lands are under encroachment by various local bigwigs across the district. Some of the temples don't even exist any more. The lands are supposed to be leased out in public auction. thousands of acres are gobbled up by racketeers under sec.11A of the Estates abolishment Act claiming falsely that they were cultivators and in possession of those lands way back in 1948. And there are several compliant revenue officials to prove that and accept such claims well into the 1980s! Similar is the fate of Bhoodan lands and tribal lands alienated to non-tribals. Then there are deforested forest lands, which can be handed over to the local poor for rejuvenation of the forests and enjoyment of the produce by the local poor through Vana Samrakshana Samiths. Over 5 lakh acres of such land exist in the district and nearly a crore across the state, opening up a tremendous potential for employment generation and ecological sustenance. But unfortunately as things stand, most of the afforestation schemes have only served to line the pockets of the forest department officials and some local touts. So there is land; "Enough for every man's need but not for each one's greed", as Gandhiji would put it!

Realizing the importance of land reforms as revealed by the few surveys carried out and our own experience in the field, most of the NGOs working for Dalit empowerment in Chittoor district, as well as the mass organizations of the left parties, especially CPI and the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha decided to work together five years ago (1996). A movement for implementation of land reforms was formed with the sole purpose of getting the various land reforms laws implemented, to assist the poor to take possession of the lands that ought to be

in their possession even according to the existing legislation. This was a single point agenda and anyone, group/individual could be part of this effort irrespective of their other activities...the only rule was that political parties could not participate directly but only through their mass organisations, as otherwise the whole exercise could get easily branded as a front of some party or the other and the struggle as a show to build up strength for the party. I was made the convenor of this movement and in the last five years we did succeed in getting about 5000 acres of land into the possession of the poor. This was possible as a local organization of the poor existed in the form of a union and with the confidence that a district level association of unions was backing up the effort. We were helped a great deal by some progressive Collectors, Joint Collectors and Asst. Collector (IAS Officials) who shared a lot of information on land issues with us. We had periodical reviews on the demands and issues we had put forth to them in our public rallies. The serious involvement of the top officials in the district did help the local revenue officials from the Mandal Revenue Officer to the village Accounts Officer to squirm a little in their seats. When the senior officer beckons they are at their colonial best serving their senior masters full of 'yes Sir' and 'no Sir'. Definite deadlines are fixed and sometimes even reviewed. But very little moves! There is always some good excuse. Of late they are full of campaigns and programmes ordered from Hyderabad by the Honourable Chief Minister, like Janma Bhoomi, Neer-Meeru (water and you), clean and green, micro level planning etc. By the time they finish running around under one programme the Chief Minister is ready with an another programme with immediate collection of data and reviews...the break neck speed for a machinery not used to moving around...has resulted in gross fudging of figures and routine administration turning to a stand still. The revenue officials are so busy they simply don't seem to have the time to attend to our land issues. In the meantime the top revenue officials are frequently transferred and one has to begin all over again. The lower level revenue officials know this game. The most powerful official in the revenue department is not the District Collector but the village Accounts Officer. He is the main mischief maker. He is a powerful man. He can produce any record, change any record. And the courts are their always ready to oblige with a 'stay' which can then drag on for years endlessly from one court to another and generations will pass - no law will be implemented, no justice will be done. For those poor who take the law seriously, to get the land reform laws implemented would mean spending lakhs of rupees (not just thousands) and running behind those fleecing lawyers and lethargic courts. This is no way to get justice. We had submitted a list of issues involving some 20,000 acres to the Government. While some issues in which there was no strong adversary were solved by the administration, most of the rest remain unresolved. A strong and vibrant people's movement is the only answer. But those who should be organizing it seem to want to run away from the responsibility. It is much easier to work on issues which do not involve conflicting class interests, especially for funded NGOs this is a major problem. The thin cadre of the political parties have to double or triple as spokespersons for so many of their front organizations that they have little time to spare for such activities and are unable to do much especially in terms of follow up action. The non-parliamentary left, meaning various ML groups are non-existent in our area. But even if they enter, as it happened in the past in the eastern taluks, the main issues are side tracked by their murder politics into law and order problems inviting severe repression against even the smallest of activities. So where does one go from here?

"To be or not to be, that is the question.

Whether it is nobler in the mind to suffer

The stings and sorrows of outrageous future

Or to take arms against a sea of troubles

.....

Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;

And thus the native hew of revolution

Is sicklied over with the pale cast of thought
 And enterprises of great pith and movement
 With this regard, their currents turn away
 And lose the name of action.” (Shakespeare in **Hamlet**)

Dying culture- The Artisans:

Weavers are supposed to be the second largest category of workers after agriculture workers. In our area they are concentrated in the eastern taluks—near Puttur, Srikalahasti, Nagari and Narayanavanam. Their basic problem is of getting quality yarn at reasonable rates and a remunerative price for their produce. Although many commissions and expert committees have recommended these measures in the past and several legislations made for production of hank yarn and supply to the weavers, and several products reserved exclusively for the handloom sector, these are honoured more in the breach and a situation has come where the power looms have almost completely taken over and even pass off their products as handloom; Very few of power loom owners are weavers

Of late in keeping with the growing trend the Sathyam Committee even recommended removal of all reservations/restrictions or master weavers. In favor of handlooms there are also many bogus societies, which are gobbling up the subsidies being provided by the State Government without a meter of cloth being produced. (All the cloth produced is in the form of bills and vouchers). With the working classes having switched over to polyester for their daily ware cotton weavers have been put to great distress. The silk weavers however are able to manage somehow (they prefer imported Chinese silk yarn). Many weavers in our area have given up their traditional occupation and in some areas have even started committing suicides - so much for planning and liberalization. The linkage between cotton growing farmers, (now drowned in a highly volatile market of debts, pesticides and chemical fertilizers and gambling with bore wells and the market) – carders, ginners, spinners, weavers, merchants has been broken long ago with the advent of British. And surprisingly even after so much of Gandhian campaigning, no machines have been devised, which can reestablish these linkages to supply quality yarn to the weavers directly from the farmers. (The PPST team of Kannan and Ramakrishna and others in Chennai is making some serious efforts in this direction). The weavers have not been able to organize themselves effectively even at district level as Gandhiji realized their success also depends upon consumer consciousness. A via media has to be found between a humanistic-patriotic fervor to save/sustain the handloom weaver and cater to the changing consumer tastes vis-à-vis other products –polyester etc.,

The potters' days have been numbered long ago with the advent of aluminum and steel and of late plastic. They will not disappear altogether as there will always be demand for a few mud pots for drinking, storing, for ceremonies and in any case most of them double as farmers or do other things as well. There is a potters' hamlet near our village and they are managing to survive, Thanks to the creative thrust of an artist residing at Rishi valley school near Madanapalle, quite a significant number of potters in Madanapalle division have taken to producing beautiful artifacts like decorative vases etc. to cater to the urban market and are doing fairly well.

The bamboo workers are finding it hard these days. Most of them in our area survive on producing mango baskets for local merchants and flowers, and grape baskets for the Bangalore market. Of late, cardboard boxes are taking over. While a bamboo basket costs Rs.6.50, and can carry around 7 kgs, a Rs.10/- cardboard box can carry 10 kgs of mangoes, involving less labour for packing. The weavers informed me that the demand for mango baskets has come down drastically within the last two years from one lakh baskets a year to around 30,000. Earlier they (with some assistance from us had formed a co-operative society with great difficulty. Difficulty because it was a very expensive affair. I did not believe

them when they said it costs around Rs.15,000/- to Rs.20,000/- to form a co-operative. When we actually got into the effort I realized they were right. There is so much corruption in the Government and one has to make so many trips to many places including a couple of visits to Hyderabad and everyone demands a cut. While 50% of the expenses involved is accounted for the share value etc., the rest is required for meeting these expenses. Without the cooperative they would be harassed once a month at least by the forest officials seizing their produce saying it was being produced from bamboo cut without a permit (either from the forests or the local farmers both need a permit). The forests officials used to fleece them regularly. After the formation of the Co-operative they have a license now and get bamboo from far away Giddalur – nearly 300 kms. Even that bamboo is getting to be scarce and the forest officials adjust to maamools –less expensive. The bamboo workers still get some bamboo supplied by tribals from the near by degraded forests as well as local farmers. Within the bamboo workers are a handful of the more intelligent and artful who dominate the scene. It is they, like the master weavers, who mobilize the capital for purchasing bamboo and supply to the rest of the workers and also market the produce and take all the cream – or what ever little surplus that comes. It was they who moved with us to get the co-operative society formed. The rest of the workers barely sustain themselves with all the family labour thrown in and the men are mostly into drinking. This seems to be the case everywhere: the intelligent, enterprising, strong always tend to exploit/dominate the rest and the rest are willing to subjugate themselves - why?

It is the black smiths, the carpenters and construction workers especially the masons (supervisors) and other skilled among them who are doing reasonably well, locating themselves in the bigger villages thanks to the Government programmes of housing as well as people's preference for cement –pukka buildings. Despite all the talk of alternative, cheaper materials (20 to 30% less), when it comes to building one's own place, people feel it is an investment of a life time, why take the risk? The blacksmiths are always in demand both for house work and for farm implements. Of late one must add the electric motor mechanics for repairs to the electric motors of various kinds are also in great demand In fact most farmers are themselves half electricians and half mechanics.

The various service castes like barbers and washer men also tend to migrate to the towns or nearby main (central) Villages where they set up shop unlike the old times when they used to visit house to house and were fed and given a share of produce. Now everything is monetised, and more centralised. The equation is also reversed. Instead of the servicemen/women visiting the customers at their residence, the customer visits the serviceman, although an old barber or washerman of the earlier generation still do the rounds, though they are highly irregular.

Part-3

Between Global and Local:

Yaksha: “What is the Greatest Wonder?”

Yudhishtara: “Day after day and hour after hour, people die and corpses are carried along, yet the on lookers never realize that they are also to die one day, but think they will live for ever. This is the greatest wonder in the world”.

(From Mahabharatha)

“The white too shall pass, perhaps sooner than all other tribes. Contaminate your bed and you will one night suffocate in your own waste” (Chief Seattle : We are part of the Earth).

Nature and Human Nature:

Perhaps, it is human nature to try to relax – as much as possible. To work less and rest more – if possible. We continuously develop/improvise technologies towards that end. It is probable also at the back of the drive to acquire – to become rich – resulting in exactly the opposite activity - work-! So that some day, I or my progeny, may rest and be happier.... So is the drive to look for short cuts – to get rich quickly, to cheat, oppress and exploit, concentration of power in one's hands – however, seems to have a drive of its own. Power is enjoyed for what it is. The stronger, physical or mental, enjoy the power of riding over the weak and meek. So is it in Nature, among the billions and billions of experiments in living going on simultaneously at various levels, only the fittest survive. Amongst the monkeys (closest to us) it is the strongest male who corners most of the females and bosses around.

As human beings, we are more conscious than other beings and capable of greater compassion – of giving and loving as much as of oppression, violence, anger and cruelty.

In Nature there is always a “balance”. The attempts to grow high yielding, short duration varieties of crops have their costs –they need heavy doses of chemical fertilisers for quick absorption and pesticides (organic/inorganic) to help overcome their greater susceptibility to pest, fungal and viral attacks. Every credit has to have a debit somewhere. Some one's gain is somebody's loss! The “harmony” in Nature is in the eye of the beholder! The harmony can be at various ‘levels’. Violence and rule of the powerful over the weak is as much part of nature as are peaceful co-existence of a variety of plants, animals and insects and birds, the seasons, the sun and the moon,.. and remember, the earthquakes, the cyclones and bursting volcanoes (certainly, they are not man induced) are all part of Nature's ‘harmony’.

Insignificance of being:

Reality is much, much more complex than we realise or can fathom. But that does not, of course, stop me from trying. And in the end it is so much simpler to ask: “who am I?” and “what do I want?” sages down the ages, across the Globe have pondered over this question and in each and every society (from tribal to big urban civilizations) they have attempted to answer this question. At one level, they more or less seem to be saying the same thing – being is a search for happiness/fulfillment. The more you give, the more you fulfil, ‘love thy neighbour as thyself’. And as there are always moments of happiness and sadness in life – do your ‘duty’ (?) disinterestedly –as both happiness and sadness, pleasure and pain, are temporary, they come and go – be in it and yet outside it...Farmers know this best. Every year, year after year, every season, every crop the farmer faces this, one missed rain can make all the difference, between a bountiful crop and almost nothing. All his effort of the entire season is gone in a whisker of a missed rain or a cyclone....

Farming makes you realise –your insignificance before Nature, and before the collective, we need people to do farming. The less number of people one employs, the greater is the dependence on machines and outside technologies. But this also depends a lot on the kind of crops one grows. And both in terms of technology and the crops one grow, the tendency is to try and depend less on others – to minimise labour. But this is increasing our dependence on non-renewable energies like diesel and electric power harvested from coal and gas (or worse nuclear).

Cockroaches or Apples:-

The West has succeeded in reducing the number of people directly involved in agriculture. Hardly 3 to 10% of the population in these societies produce enough and more for the rest, not only in their own country but even for others – forcing them to sell or dump in the sea or give away as charity or force others to buy or not give them the food if they

don't 'behave' and where the government gives them enough money not to produce when the market is weak... turning the entire world into a market making other societies grow other crops while we grow food for them... They have made 'new' technological breakthroughs, in evolving genetically modified foods which have it in their genes to fight certain pests and diseases. Now, genes from cockroaches can go into apples, from humans to animals to plants and vice versa. So that ultimately we don't know really how much of an apple or a cockroach or human being one is consuming!

The road the modern west has shown I fear, is suicidal. But I am not sure of the other path(s), caught as we are in the market web.. everybody wants and needs money and almost all farming – all activity is broadly tuned to that. I am really at a loss. How to get out of it? I is easy to say: 'limit your wants'. But it seems so difficult although it 'costs' nothing! Where does suppression of one's feelings and desires end.. and where does the joy of release from wants begin?

Need and Greed:-

There is so much of food and so much of everything we need produced in the world, enough for everybody and more and yet people are made to or allowed to starve and die, suffer in diseases without care, children going blind for want of adequate food. The divide between the first and third worlds, the North and the South, the sharp divide between the rich and the poor in each country, the concentration of wealth and all that goes with it, the filth and poverty of the rest the rapid pollution of the earth, its water, air and disappearing forests, rapidly exhausting all non-renewable resources and dumping plastic, not easily degradable stuff, all over. Can't we do something about it? How can we keep quiet? And for how long?

Heads you lose, Tails I win:-

It seems such a rational thing to do: to reorganise control over our resources, to redistribute and co-ordinate our activities so that every one of us has plenty to eat, to shelter and entertainment and be happy. So much sharing and beyond is possible at so little cost, and yet there is fear. There is so much concentration of wealth, arms and ammunition. And the capitalist engine is devouring the world with redoubled energy after the collapse of the dream of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Now, with no holds barred, no frontiers of states to block them, in the name of free trade and globalisation, under the garb of the W.T.O., the World Bank, the I.M.F and such wisecracks, whose wise prescriptions somehow seem to suit the multinational corporations of the West the best!

The developed countries and their masters, the multinational corporations are closing in for the kill. Not satisfied (they cannot be satisfied) with their 20% (declining) population controlling 80% of the World's resources, they now want to control whatever is left in the name of liberalization, globalization and privatization. It is in this wider context of Pax Americana that we have to try and understand the twists and turns of various contradictions in our society. Our planners and politicians of all major political parties, irrespective of their hues, sometimes pretending to be original, are merely singing the song of LGP, at times tuned a little different.

The corporatization of agriculture, the unequal and one sided conditional ties of WTO (why can't our labour be allowed to go anywhere in the world?), the World Bank loans, the golden hand shakes, the Government determined to sell even profit making public sector undertakings are all part of the same scenario.

Golbal and Local:-

I don't know if we can change all this. Whether it is worth fighting against. May be this is how human societies have always been down the ages and that is how they will be – technologies may differ, the world may have become smaller, but people's behaviour is the same... That is why the Mahabharata continues to enjoy so much popularity, the story told and retold...

But this much is clear to me: the present situation disturbs me a lot and trying to change things, my even small efforts, gives me peace and joy. When I tend to sit back and relax too much, I feel restless and uncomfortable. I shall therefore continue my experiments in organic farming, campaign for equitable distribution of resources (i.e organising farmers, agricultural workers for lands etc), and be part of campaigns for justice.

People are suffering. There are so many burning issues all round. The class-caste divide, the urban-rural, agriculture versus industry, tradition modern, western vs Indian, ecology-versus development, collective versus individual, consumerism versus limiting wants, the list can go on... the farmers know they are being exploited and yet they can't get themselves to put up a united fight for a better price for their produce, can't co-ordinate and regulate production. The dalits are more divided than ever and do precious little to get rid of the scourge of untouchability blatantly practiced in the villages and covertly in the towns and cities. We are unable to get the agricultural workers to fight militantly for land reforms..

There are no dilemmas in understanding who is squeezing who? And at whose cost? The dilemmas relate to us. To us and our elites surrendering so rapidly and trying to be more loyal than the king. And why? Why are people like us, who feel its all wrong – individuals, groups, organizations, why are we unable to put our act together? Are we to remain mere shouting brigades while the LPG caravan (Liberalisation, Privatisation, Globalisation) moves on, why are people not responding or responding momentarily as fire fighters and sectorally?

Leaders as Lambs:-

The fault is not of the suffering people, but ours, those who could help them, stand by them, lead them, we are unable to inspire confidence in them, partly because we failed in the past at great cost. But a major portion of our failure to inspire faith in the suffering people, in themselves, through us, is partly due to our own inhibitions.

In my opinion, the more we internalise our beliefs and externalise our practices – so that there is a harmony between what we believe, what we speak and what we do – greater will be the energy generated from within. That energy – call it spiritual, whatever, will then have the force to energise others. That is the force that Gandhiji acquired through his constant 'tapasya' with truth and non-violence.: his experiments with himself- of trying to practice what he believed (rightly or wrongly). The energy it generated, electrified people, around, energised them into action for Truth and Justice. Forget Gandhiji, this is true of any leader of some repute, doggedly pursuing his/her ideals – Ambedkar, the sufi saints, the leaders of the Bhakti movement, Lohia, lenin, Trostsky, Mao, the so many Marxist leaders who have given up so much, even the not so good guys like Hitler, Mussolini, Churchill. People on the other hand, crave for "saviours".. that crystalising force which will energise them.- to swell up in confidence and stand up for justice. That makes me sometimes wonder, they seem to be looking for the sacrificial "bakra"- (lamb) who is well fed, respected and on the D day is bathed, decorated with flowers and vermilion and other marks and taken round the temple in a procession, with drums and music and what not, people shouting slogans praising the god (or Goddess), showering flowers, garlands on the sacred lamb only to be butchered at the altar of the deity.. for the good of all. There will be lot of praise for the "leader" (read bakra) and after he/she has done his/her bit fighting for justice etc. the leader may enter the folklore and perhaps even history books. These leaders, the messiahs and reformers are the "bakras" –

the sacrificial lambs of societies, they give their all and even if they don't give, people demand – praise them and take over, each and every second of their time if possible.. such is their need! The more you give, the more they want! But that's what compassion is all about!...(?) only to the extent that you give.. is the door open...

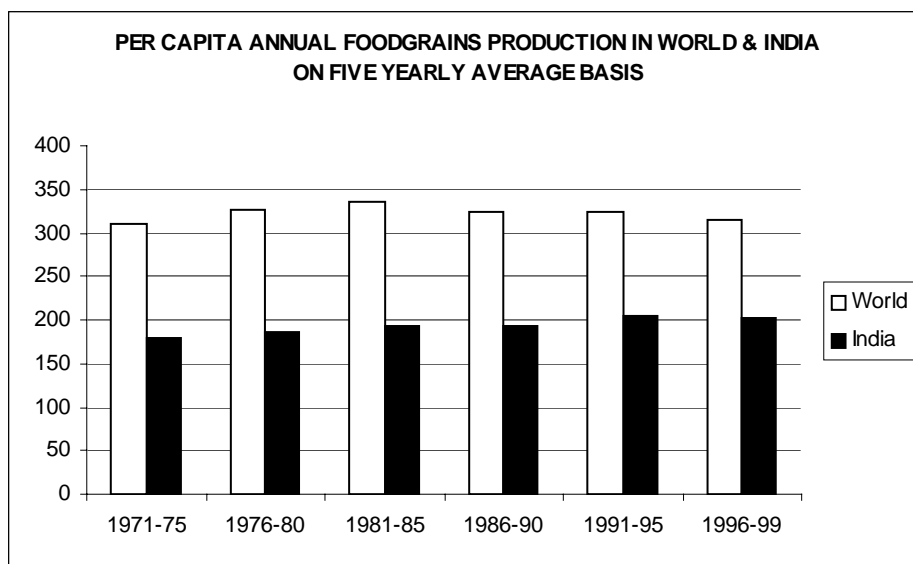
Its time (high time) that people like Medha Patkar, Bojja Tarakam, B.D.Sharma, Vandana Shiva, Madhu Kishwar, Aruna Roy, Thomas Kocheri, SP Shukla, Kishan Patnaik... there are so many dedicated souls, giving up so much achieving so much, despite their failings and weaknesses. It is time to sink our egos and get on with the work, to go beyond our territories, to energise people, to instil confidence in themselves and strive for an alternative future(s).. to speak a new language of politics – to sanitize it the way Gandhi, J.P. did.. be in it, yet out side it (Long live the 'Bakras'!)

Truth Shall Prevail:-

Our rulers will not see the suicides of farmers because they don't want to. They will not hear the cries of children dying of brain fever nor feel the pain of unemployment and growing debts because they don't want to. They want the freedom, to allow our foreign masters, for a pittance, to peacefully plunder and exploit. The army and police and the courts will stand guard.

“The fault is not in our stars but ourselves that we are such underlings”. No matter how much they may tempt through their advertisements of film stars and crickets, I refuse to drink their Coca Cola or Pepsi. Therein lies our strength. Like the miniscule malarial parasite we can bring these mighty multinational corporations down to their knees, to a state of sweat and shivering, if only we let our little big egos deflate, break the barriers of ideologies, distancing from power and pelf, help build movements of agitation and construction, thinking globally and acting locally, we can definitely drive these paper tigers away, towards a new (old) ethos of compassionate living. No matter what they may say or do, “Sathyam Eva Jayate” – Truth shall prevail, however bitter it may be. (But whose truth is the question).

Annexure -2



From the above chart, it is evident, that per capita availability of foodgrains in India, during the last 25 years, has always been less than 64% of the average availability of food grains in the world as a whole. This is why, Indians as a nation, are amongst the most undernourished in the world.

Annexure-3

In the above chart, it can be seen that the share of agriculture in the total national income has been continually declining. It would not have been deplorable, if the percentage of agriculturists in the total population of the country had also declined in the same portion. But that has not happened. The share of agriculturists in the national income is now no more than about one-fourth, while they still constitute nearly two-third of the population of the country. The share of industrial sector in the national income has also been declining in recent years. It is the service sector, which really produces no tangible goods, but which now corners more than 51% of the national income, and provides employment to no more than 17.2% of our total population. Simple calculation shows, that the average per worker income in the service sector is now about eight times the average income of an agriculturist.

Allowing agricultural imports of whatever is cheaper in international markets, and disallowing the export of those, which can benefit our farmers, is wholly unjustified.

While the industrial sector has been almost completely decontrolled, the farm sector remains, as shackled, as it was in the past. This is confirmed by the following extracts from the "Report on Currency and Finance 1998-99" by the Reserve Bank of India.

"The economic reform measures since 1991-92 have not made any dent in the domestic markets in the agricultural commodities. Some of the restrictions placed from time to time on the free movement of agricultural commodities are spelt out below".

"The occasional physical bottling up of marketable surplus of wheat in Punjab, Haryana and Western U.P, to facilitate the procurement operations of the food.

Annexure-4

After initial problems about quality and standardization, most of them have settled down to the dictates of the suppliers of metal containers and bigger players in the market such as Parry & Co and Vadilal, etc., who often take the factories on lease. They purchase the juice produced in 3 litre containers and repack for the retail market. The stakes keep growing as one moves up the ladder of exchange.

Annexure-5

Electric power mainly to agriculture comes to a whopping Rs.36,000 crores per annum according to the Union Finance Minister in his budget speech of 2001. (But this is some what exaggerated since consumption by agriculture is not metered, a lot of theft of power is shown as agricultural consumption). According to the State Government and the electricity Authorities the farmers are paying an average rate of 35 paise per unit to day for the power consumed by them while the cost works out to Rs.2.95 paise a unit i.e almost 8 times what is being paid. Now under the World Bank dispensation (the days of free lunches are over) user-must-pay dictum, at one stroke the Government raised the rate of Rs.50 per horse power per annum charged during NTR's regime for 13 years by 7 times in 1995. It was again raised by 60% in 2000. The farmers of Chittoor District have since 1995 stopped paying their electricity bills. On 3rd March, 2001 in a Chief Ministers' conference presided over by the Prime Minister it was made plain that power subsidies to the farming sector will have to go. It was decided almost unanimously that meters should be fixed for all services immediately and that price per unit of power consumption would be immediately raised to 50 paise and to 50% of the cost to serve within the next three years and full recovery of the cost within the next six to seven years which implies a further raise of 50% immediately followed by a further raise by 7 times within the next three years and an ever further 3 times within the next six or seven years. That means a 5 H.P motor running for about 6 hours per day for 200 hours would consume around 4,800 units or say 5000 units and a farmer would have to pay something like Rs.20,000/- if all subsidy is removed within the next six years.

Annexure-6**Per Acre Cost of Cultivation in Chittoor District for Three Major Crops****Expenditure in Rs (1999-2000)**

Item	Sugarcane	Paddy	Groundnut
Seed *1	3200	1000	900
Ploughing *2	1200	1800	900
Growth & Transplantation *3	1000	1200	-
Deweeding *4	2400	1200	2400
Fertilizers *5	2000	3000	2500
Pesticides *6	400	400	400
Harvesting (making jaggery) *7	10500	1500	1200
Transport *8	300	300	300
Well sinking *9	7500	7500	7500
Motor repair & Maintenance *10	500	500	500
Electricity Charges: *11			
At Old rates	125	125	125
At New Rates	(1000)	(1000)	(1000)
Management *12	3600	1800	900
Rent on land *13	10000	5000	500
Total	42725	25325	18125

Income in Rs.

Item	Sugarcane	Paddy	Groundnut
Jaggery	29250	1200	18000
Straw		3600	
Total	29250	15600	18000

Income – expenditure for sugarcane = -Rs. 13,474

Income – expenditure for paddy = -Rs. 9,725

Income – Expenditure for groundnut = -Rs.125

Annexure-6**Foot notes:**

*1. Seed for sugarcane calculated at Rs.800 per ton for 4 tons; for paddy at Rs.8 to 10 per kg for 60 kgs + Rs 400 for nursery preparation = Rs.1000; for groundnut at Rs.20 per kg for 45 kgs = Rs.900.

*2. Tractor charges at Rs.200 per hour for six hours for sugarcane =Rs., 1200; for 9 hours for paddy =Rs.1800; for 4 hours for groundnut = Rs,800 +Rs.100 for seeding bullocks=Rs.900.

*3. Growth and transplantation: for sugarcane 20 man days at Rs.50 per man days = Rs.1000; for paddy 30 woman days at Rs.40 per woman day=Rs.1200;

*4. Deseeding: for sugarcane at Rs.40 for 30 woman days twice in the season = Rs.2400; for paddy 15 womandays at Rs.40, twice= Rs.1200; for groundnut 30 woman days X Rs.40 X2 times=Rs.2400.

*5. Fertilizers: for sugarcane at Rs.500 for 4 bags = Rs.2000; for paddy 3 bags- Rs.500 X 3.= Rs.1500 + organic manure of 3 tractor loads at Rs.500 per load = Rs.1500; (Organic manure is not put for sugarcane because it is usually grown after paddy and the manure which is already there in paddy field is considered sufficient); for groundnut 3 bags at Rs.500=Rs.1500 + 2 tractor loads of organic manure at Rs.500 per load – Rs.1000;

*6. Pesticides: negligible for all the crops- applied only if necessary at Rs.400/- per crop.

*7. Harvesting: Sugarcane at Rs.200 per qtl for 45 qtls + Rs.1500 for making jaggery; paddy 30 man days at Rs.50 = Rs,1500; groundnut at Rs.40 for 30 women days = 1200;

*8. Transport: negligible at Rs.300 for all the 3 crops.

*9. Well Sinking: a new bore well assumed to last 5 years costs Rs.1 lakh; after 5 years another bore has to be sunk, at Rs.50,000 but the same pumpset can be used again, therefore Rs.1,50,000 for 10 years; for one year Rs.15,000; each well assumed to service 2 acres, therefore Rs.7500 per acre.

*10. Motor Repairs: Rs.1000 per year per pumpset. Each motor assumed to service 2 acres, therefore Rs.500/-.

*11. Electricity Charges for 5 Hp pumpset at the old rate of Rs.50 p.hp servicing 2 acres = Rs.125 at the new rate of Rs.400 p.hp.= Rs.2000 servicing 2 acres = Rs.1000.

Annexure-7

For an Acre of land we would require atleast 6 tractor loads of farm yard manure for one season 10 tones, i.e at the rate of 20 kgs of dung per cow per day one would have to maintain three cows, for obtaining 20 tones (12 tractor loads per year) and for 200 bundles of leaf manure per acre would require leaf from 20 trees of moderate height pruned every alternate year that would mean 40 trees. All this is highly labour intensive and in any case the new high yielding and high breed varieties of seeds cannot absorb these nutrients from these manures at the rapid pace of growth that they are tuned to. They need chemical fertilizers, and it is so much easier to apply, less labour and readily available. One bag of 17X*17X17 cost around Rs.450 while a tractor load of farm yard manure including loading, unloading etc., costs more than Rs.600/-.