

A journey through time...

*A Report on the National Summer Workshop on Dalit and Tribal Issues
1st to 5th May 2002, Koraput, Orissa*

Report by West Bengal Unit

Introduction:

It was a great privilege for the West Bengal SCM team to attend the National Summer Work Camp that was held at Koraput Orissa. The West Bengal team consisted of two participants and Program Secretary. The two participants were Subhadip Mukherjee of 2nd year doing Bachelors in Arts and Shyamal Kujur of class twelve studying Science. Sandeep Pramanik is the Program Secretary from this region.

As most of the exams in West Bengal are held during this period so we were a bit short of participants. Initially five members were supposed to go but we could only send three. The team left West Bengal for Koraput on 30th of April by Samleshwari Express. The Journey was bit tedious, as we had to travel for twenty-five hours during peak summer. None of us had ever visited Koraput before so we did not know what to expect from there. We reached Koraput at 10.15 pm on 1st of June. We reached the venue by Autorichshaw, which took fifteen minutes. The local language being Oriya was not very difficult for us to understand, as it was somewhat similar to Bengali. There was a sense of excitement in the air while we traveled through different turn on the road.



(While going to Koraput 1st May 2002, 3.30 p.m.)

By the time we had reached the venue it was nearly 10.45 pm. At the Venue the members of the host team joyfully greeted us. The program had already started from 1st May morning so we had missed a bit. It was an excellent hospitality for the host team that at so late in the night they had kept our dinner. After having our dinner we were briefed about our staying arrangements. Our Program Secretary, Sandeep Pramanik was accommodated with other Program Secretary's from other region at the Guest House which was next to the venue. The two of us were accommodated at a hotel named 'Atithi Bhavan', which was a mere two minutes walk from the venue. Being tired after the long journey we quickly retreated our respective rooms. Before going we could see some of our old friends who had reached earlier. It was nice to see them. We were told that the next day is appointed for the exposure and we had to get ready by 6.00 am in the morning as the bus would leave at 7.00 am.

Our room at the hotel was a double bed room. We were really happy when we came to know that only the two of us were allotted in the room. It was a big spacious room. With excellent arrangements.

2nd May 2002

As per schedule we had reached the Venue at 6.00 am. The host committee had prearranged the bus so we did not have any difficulty. The bus started at 8 .00 am. It was delayed a bit by the number of work that had to be done before leaving the venue and the fact that we had to have our breakfast before leaving. The food arrangements were taken with us so that it can be prepared somewhere during the field visit. The journey nearly took three hours. It was nearly 80 km from the venue. We did not feel the tiredness of the journey as we were constantly cheered and entertained by the host committee. There were people on board the bus with musical instruments like guitars and other rhythm instruments. We sang all the way, this took away some of the tiredness that we were feeling after such long journey the previous day.

After a long twists and turns in the mountainous road the bus finally reached a market place where we met the local Tribal Population know as the Gonda tribe. It was really exciting to meet these people. Initially it was a bit scary for us

as previously we were warned about the consequences if we did not respect their culture and traditions properly. It was surprising for us to see people here in India going around with Bows and Arrows. The women wore different colorful beads around their chest and thick silver rings around their necks. It was as if we were thrown back in time to an age we could never imagine.



(Gonda Tribe men & women at the exposure)

The tribal men and women had come to the market place to buy salt. Just for a handful of salt they had to walk for hours. That what makes us feel so bad. What we never think of as a precious substance is the most valuable for them. In economics we are taught of demand and supply. There we are taught that salt is a substance that can never affect the price of the market as it is the most easily found substance. Yet for the same salt the tribals had to pay the price of walking for a day to the market to get it. That is what so ironic to the ideology that the people of the world believe in.

We talked to different tribal people; they shared their different experiences. It was surprising for us to know that the boy's family has to pay a dowry to the girl's family for getting married. It was not such a big sum of money, as they don't have much with them. They shared with us the rituals with which they get married. They were celebrating a festival during the time we visited them. We were at the last days of their celebrations. They even invited us to their place.

We had our lunch at a hilltop. The lunch was prepared there. While the lunch was being prepared all the students had enough time to know each other. They played games together and talked about their experiences.

After the lunch we were heading towards the location of a Dam. It was constructed 40 years ago. During that time some of the tribal population was displaced. We saw the dam. Some of us went down to see the way it was working. In the meanwhile a big thunderstorm had come. Due to that some of us were stuck down below for a long time.



(The Dam on the river)

From there we headed toward a village where these displaced tribal population were residing. They were displaced during the construction of the dam 40 years ago. We visited their house and came to know many facts about them. We also happen to visit the house of the head priest who happily told us about the different problems faced by them and the rituals performed by them. As it was getting late we had to leave the village early. We would have liked to stay in that area for more time to know more about them. After reaching the venue we had a quick dinner and retired to our respective rooms.

3rd May 2002

The day started with lot of work to be done by our unit members, as today was our day for the morning worship. We did our very best to prepare something before the breakfast at 8.00 am. The worship started at 8.30 am and was conducted by three regions including us.

From 9.00 am we had our Bible Study conducted by Rev. Kadirvelu. It was a very nice session that was conducted by him. Every one appreciated his work. He took very little time to make us understand different aspects from the Bible. It was followed by question answer sessions. Many students asked different questions to him, he answered them all satisfyingly.

After that session it was time for us to share our experience regarding the exposure that we had yesterday. All the different unit members participated in appreciating different stands taken by the tribals to retain their identity.

Mr. Subhash Mahapatro took the next session. His topic was "Understanding the Indigenous People of India: the scenario then and now". After his session many students asked him questions to clarify the doubts that they had in their mind. After this session we went for lunch.

After a quick lunch it was time for a video documentary on "Gujarat Carnage". The documentary was followed by some talks on that issue by Mr. Akshay Sail. He is a member of the INSAF team who had visited the Gujarat region in India after the Godhra incident. He shed some light on the real facts of the issue. He told how human right was violated in every aspect. And also how woman were raped by the mobs. It was like a big eye opener for most of us. All were really horrified after knowing the real facts about the incident.

The sessions were followed by some video documentaries. Sanjana and Vijay brought these from Bangalore. They are from an organization called 'Pedestrian Pictures'. There was a documentary called "The Bee, the Bear, the Kurba" which was followed by another documentary on Kashipur issue. After this Sanjana and Vijay gave us some more information's on these issues. It was followed by question answer sessions. After this we went to dinner and was back to our rooms for charging up for the next days sessions.

4th May 2002

The day started as usual with lot of work to be done. Though it was not our day for morning worship but we had volunteered our self to help the other region do a skit. We did our very best to make it a success. The worship started at 8.30 am after breakfast.



(The Drama done by the students [L to R] Subhadip, Aerbin, Neil, Cinderella and Namita)

Rev. O. Gorda conducted the first session. He did the bible study for the day. As usual he told us the different incidents from the Bible relating it to the present context.

After this session we watched a documentary on "Narmada bachao andolan" again conducted by Vijay and Sanjana. It was a great experience for us to witness the struggle by the people of the valley who are fighting for their rights. After this we had many questions in our minds, which were happily answered by the two.

This was followed by Panel presentation and discussion on struggles of the Tribal & the alternative roles of student. The members of Jharkhand, West Bengal, Mid India, Kerela and other regions presented it. Students and members from these regions told the audience about their feelings and there personal experiences. The group from Jharkhand-

Bihar region told about the facts that were discussed during their Zonal workshop that was held in the beginning of April this year. From our region Shyamal Kujur and Subhadip Mukherjee mainly dealt with Globalization and the alternative role of students. We shared some of our own experiences in our daily lives.



(Cultural program being performed by West Bengal and Jharkhand-Bihar region)

The cultural program that was conducted by students and members of the different regions followed this. Most of the students performed their traditional dances and songs. It was real nice to see the different cultures of India coming together to become one. Our region performed a Drama and a Traditional Sadri song. As we were short of students the Jharkhand-Bihar region gladly helped us in our cultural activities. This went on till 12.00 in the night. After this it was time for our bed. Back to our charging positions.

5th May 2002

This being a Sunday had different plans installed for us. Instead of morning worship we had plans to go visit a local church. Before going to the church we watched a documentary “Nako Dupont Nako”. It was on the subject where the villagers of a village in Goa protested the construction of a factory, which was supposed to manufacture Nylon 66. It is an environment non-friendly substance. It showed how the villagers stood together to stop the factory from being constructed.

After this we headed towards the church. It was a twenty-minute walk from the venue. When we reached the church it had already started. There was a baptism ceremony going on. It was nice for us to witness the church service in Oriya (the local language). We had to leave the Church half the way as we had many more sessions to do. After returning back it was back to our meeting room.



(DRDA Center Koraput [L to R] Sandeep, Shyamal & Subhadip)

Mr. Subhash Mahapatro conducted the first session of the day. He discussed on “ Networking and Advocacy for tribal rights: Solidarity with the People’s Movements” which was followed by question and answers. He had asked one incident to be pointed out by the students, which showed an example of violation of human rights. It was great honor for us when Rebecca Sangetha from Bangalore a theology student of United Theological College gave an example, which was quoted out from our College SCM magazine known as INFO MAG (March 2002 issue). It had an issue where a woman’s right is violated.

The next session was taken by Mr. P.C. Jena our SCM Chairperson. He dealt with the subject of Globalization and its effect on the Tribals and the Dalits. He carefully explained the effects of globalization on them and how we can prevent them. He gave us different alternatives by which we can fight Globalization. The session became very

interesting and students requested the timekeeper for some more time for discussing this issue. They got the time that they needed, they were really happy with this.

After this we had went for lunch. This being the last day was the only time for us when we could exchange each other contact numbers so that we could remain in touch much after the workshop. The air was full of sentiments as already some members were starting to leave.

After lunch there was an important session taken by our SCM General Secretary Ms. Elizabeth Joy. She dealt on the subject " The Apathy of Tribal & Dalit Women in our country". This session became very exciting when different opinions started coming up regarding the status of women in India. This debate was carefully taken care by our General Secretary.

This was followed by a break in which all the regions came together to prepare the group report with action plan. Our region was with two other regions. They were Orissa, and Jharkhand-Bihar. Students from this entire region sat together and we discussed the issues.

At 5.00 pm the last session started. Here the Group Report and Action plan was presented. Subhadip Mukherjee presented our group report from West Bengal region and Rashmi Shabnam Tirkey from Jharkhand-Bihar region.



(The Action Plans being presented by Rashmi & Subhadip)

Action Plans:

Unit Level: -

- 1) Work camps like these to encourage students to work in these fields.
- 2) Taking out magazines and newsletters.
- 3) To promote more interaction between units members by means of one-day interaction camps, seminars etc.
- 4) Video films and documentaries, which are to be supported by National office. We must be provided with Video Tapes or Video Cd's.
- 5) Encouraging students to read bible. As we think bible has the answer to any problems that we face.

Regional Level: -

- 1) Publishing of articles in local newspaper, like *Janhul* in Jharkhand and other newspapers in other regions.
- 2) Work camps at regional levels. With topics like women, displacements reservations, deforestation's etc.
- 3) Web site development, as we already know that our unit in West Bengal has its own web site, so we would like it to promote the problems on Tribals and Dalits on an international basis.
- 4) Encouraging church leaders to come and interact with students & youths.

National Level: -

- 1) "Aikyatha" being the magazine of SCM to be used for promoting issues on Dalits and Tribals. Special sections should be made in the magazine for articles from our regions.
- 2) More National Programs like these in future, this helps students from different walk of life to meet each other and know more about each other.
- 3) Promoting inter country participation. Like this time we had a participant from Sri Lanka. Manoharan proved to be quite informative regarding the struggle that is taking place in his country.

The last moments of the program had arrived. After a great appreciation from different people including our General Secretary who appreciated our great effort that we had put to present the Action Plan so wonderfully. The time was for the closing worship; Rev. Ranjit from Andhra Pradesh conducted it. Like Jesus with his disciples, we broke the bread and took it reminding us of him, the work that he had given his disciples to do. In the same way we had a mission in our hand. The bread was like an oath that we took together promising to end the oppression. It ended with all participants shaking hands with each other and saying good-bye.



(The Team)

Our train was on 6th May morning 4.15 am. So our team decided not to sleep but to spend the last moments talking about the things that they could not do in all these days. We spend the last few hours at Koraput singing, talking, joking etc. we left for the station at 3.45 am and boarded the train. As we were tired with no sleep we spent the whole day sleeping in the train with constant dreams about the wonderful time that we had together.

7th May 2002

We reach Kolkata at 6.00 am. We were back to the same city that we had left. Nothing had changed in the last five days. Or I guess we were very optimistic regarding changes that we expected. A miracle in five days? We were back in the concrete jungle. Where human rights are violated every second. No one to say a word, no one to protest. It was as if we had

a journey through time all these days meeting all those strange people. Koraput we will be back some day.....the journey continues.....



(Back to Kolkata)

Some Facts about our team:

Sandeep Pramanik: He is the Program Secretary for West Bengal Region. He has been associated with SCM for the last six years. He had training at NCCI and other places. He has attended many programs with SCM. Sandeep can be contacted at email sandeepscm@yahoo.co.in .



Shyamal Kujur: He is a student of class twelve with Science. He is studying at St. Paul's College. He stays at a hostel with other students from this college. His actual home town is in North Bengal that is Siliguri, which is near the Indo-Nepal border. He is a tribal student, so he helped us lot by sharing his problems from his perspective being a tribal himself. He has attended other regional programs at SCM. It was his first experience at National level.



Subhadip Mukherjee: He is a student of third year, doing his Bachelors in Arts. He is studying at St. Paul's College. He is a local resident. He stays at proper Kolkata. He had experiences of being a volunteer with many NGO, which mainly worked on issues of Women, Children, Tribal etc. He is with SCM for more than two years. He has attended many regional camps, attended the Zonal camp at Ranchi (April 2002). This is his first experience with National SCM. Together with some other students of SCM in his unit he helped to conduct many camps. He can be contacted at:



34/C Bondel Road, Ballygaunge