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Memories of Prof. Ranjit Gupta

VIJAY MAHAJAN

I had heard of Prof. Ranjit Gupta as a close associate of Prof. Ravi Matthai even before I joined the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, IIM(A) in 1979. Several of my batch mates from IIT Delhi preceded me to IIM(A). Knowing of my interest in rural development, some of them told me about these two professors, who had started the Jawaja project in rural Rajasthan. Soon after joining IIM(A), I went to meet them. Ravi was travelling, so I met Ranjit first. He asked why I was interested in rural development. I could give no clear answer except to express some vague sense of unease about the gross inequality and poverty in India and my urge to do something about it. Thereafter, I would see him about once a month. In one of those meetings, Ranjit suggested we organize a seminar on alternative approaches to rural development. The seminar was a good exposure to the views of a range of people, from the Leftist economist, Biplab Dasgupta, to the Gandhian, Prem Bhai.

Ranjit encouraged me to do a summer job in Jawaja. By the time I went to Jawaja in the summer of 1980, the Jawaja Weavers' Association (JWA) and the Jawaja Leatherworkers' Association (JLA) were already up and running. I was asked to live in Beawar town and work with these two associations and help in their activities. I spent an initial week doing that and realized that the associations did not have much work to offer me except to look for orders, which required trips to Delhi and Bombay. So, with Ranjit's concurrence, I shifted to Kabra village, which was where the school master Radhe Shyam Sharma ran non-formal education (NFE) centres in six neighbouring villages. Radhey Shyamji got me a room in the school to live in, and fixed me up with a poor couple for meals as a 'paying guest'. I rented a bicycle on a weekly basis.

Radhe Shyamji and I would cycle morning and evening to nearby villages where NFE centres were running and he would use the meetings to educate villagers about practical things such as how to deepen wells, how to increase crop yield and how to graft local ber bushes with the improved CAZRI variety. After a while, Radhe Shyamji asked me to go by myself to these NFE centres and hold meetings, along with local volunteers. Three weeks later, he asked me to start a centre in a new village, Kalra Khera. When I came back, I submitted a summer project report to Ranjit in which the highlight was the 10 or 12 visits I had to make to Kalra Khera over a month before I could persuade the villagers to start a NFE centre there.

Reading the detailed account of that work, Ranjit was really happy.

In my second year at IIM(A), I became closer to Ranjit and Ravi and would drop by for chats regularly. They encouraged us to organize another seminar on the lines of the previous year, and we were able to invite people such as Dr Anil Sadgopal from Kishore Bharati, Hoshangabad; Bunker Roy from the then SWRC, Tilonia; and Vivek Monteiro, a trade union activist from Mumbai, for a brilliant two days of formal and informal interactions between students and faculty. In those days, IIM(A) had many faculty members deeply interested in rural development and some of them had worked on the Jawaja project. I was able to do many elective courses with some of them. Because of this supportive 'eco-system', it is not surprising that in the ten batches between 1977 and 1986, over 30 IIM(A) students joined rural development or related work.

By the end of my second year, I had made up my mind to work in rural development but was confused about how to do so. I had many chats with Ranjit and Ravi about this. Eventually, I opted to join Prof. NCB Nath, who used to run an organization called FAIR, working on improving government rural development programmes and agencies. Though there was intensive field work in the assignments, the eventual output used to be a cyclostyled, spiral-bound report. After a few months, I wrote to Ranjit that I did not find the work very satisfying.

Ranjit put me in touch with Deep Joshi, then a program officer in the Ford Foundation's New Delhi office. I shared my Jawaja experience and Deep his Sukhomajri experience. In our own ways, we both had come to the same conclusion — that unless

competent, committed and caring young people worked closely with poor communities, development was not going to happen. Deep later introduced me to a Gandhian NGO, ASSEFA; its leader, Loganathanji, was working with Bhoodan farmers. In July 1982, I joined an ASSEFA project in Bihar and informed Ranjit about what I was doing. He was very happy and supportive. He had worked with Jayaprakash Narayan and AVARD and, therefore, knew the context in which I was working. I also told him about the seed of the idea that Deep and I had converged on. He encouraged me to write a concept note on it. That note, written a year after I went to Bihar, first used the acronym PRADAN, which stood for 'Professional Assistance for Development Action'.

I continued working with ASSEFA and slowly expanded the work with poor communities on the border of MP and Rajasthan. From there, I used to visit Ahmedabad once in a while. Ranjit was a bachelor. He would ask me to stay at his home when I was in Ahmedabad and we would talk till late in the night over dinner. Ravi Matthai passed away in 1984 when he was barely in his mid-fifties. Ranjit was bereft but accepted it stoically. He continued to encourage me. With the support of Loganathanji and Mr Mathew of ASSEFA, I established Pradan in 1983; we were funded by the Ford Foundation in 1984, with the help of Deep. By that time, in addition to ASSEFA, we were working with MYRADA, Seva Mandir, Anand Niketan Ashram and so on. My batch mates from IIM(A) — Ved Mitra Arya and Pramod Kulkarni — joined me in Pradan. Ranjit kept pointing a steady stream of people to work with us. Some such as Vasimalai, Prabhakar Rao, Guru Charan Naik, Biswajit Sen, Raja Menon and Madhavi Puri worked in Pradan. Others such as Nachiket Mor did summer jobs with us.

One of the people Ranjit introduced me to around 1985 was Sanjay Dasgupta, then a young IAS officer of Karnataka cadre. Ranjit Gupta had five brothers. Sanjay was the son of Prof. Anirudha Gupta, one of his brothers, who taught at the School of International Studies, JNU, and Dr. Khadija Ansari Gupta, who taught Sociology at Miranda House, Delhi University. Sanjay had set up India's first computerized monitoring system for the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), the main rural development programme in those days when he was DC of Karwar district. He wanted to make this idea go national. Around the same time, Mr Inderjit Khanna, a Rajasthan IAS officer, became Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India. Ranjit introduced us to Mr Khanna and he encouraged us to develop software not just for monitoring but for the planning of IRDP at the block level. We agreed to do so and that is how a Pradan project was established in Kishangarh Bas block of Alwar district. We persuaded Subodh Gupta, an IIT Kharagpur computer science graduate, to leave his job in ORG and join us, and together we made IRDPLAN, the planning and monitoring software for IRDP. This was installed in every District Rural Development Agency of the country by 1988.

Ranjit used to teach a course called Rural Environment and Social Change (RESC) to the IIM(A) students pursuing a specialization package in agriculture. In 1986, Ranjit decided to take a year-long sabbatical and asked me to teach the course in the year he was to be away. Deep had just left Ford Foundation and joined Pradan, so I could say yes. Ranjit asked me to draw up a fresh course outline with details of topics, cases and readings. When I sent it to him, Ranjit did not change a single line in the outline and

persuaded the Institute faculty to let me teach the course as I had proposed. I had packed the RESC course with many non-traditional materials such as guest lectures by NGO leaders, live cases and films. I began the course with a screening of Gautam Ghosh's Paar, a film about a poor Musahar family of Bihar, similar to many of those I had been working with. Another high point was when Joe Madiath from Gram Vikas, Orissa, came to campus to conduct the case 'Siro Mallick Gets a Loan', an expose of the corruption in IRDP. He brought Siro Mallick with him! Many from the IIM(A) batches of 1986-87 remember that event even today.

In the meanwhile, Ranjit had joined the Board of Pradan. He introduced us to Prava Rai, who then joined Pradan as head of our development communication effort and started editing the now-famous Pradan journal, NewsReach. I took a year's leave in August 1988 to go to the US for a mid-career fellowship at the Princeton University. In 1989, after Aloysius Fernandez's term was over, Ranjit became the Chairman of Pradan's Board. He facilitated Pradan in revisiting its mission. After a year-long exercise, the mission statement that emerged was 'Building people to build people'. On the other side of the globe, I was getting increasingly convinced of the need to promote livelihoods on a large scale by accessing mainstream capital and by impacting government policies and programmes. When I came back in 1989, I talked to Deep and Ranjit about these ideas.

Towards the end of 1990, I sought Deep and Ranjit's approval to move on from Pradan, to work as a special assistant to Mr Lakshmi Chand Jain, then Member, Planning Commission. I was hoping to work with Lakshmi and also join politics. However, this

never worked out and within six months, I was back on the road. Instead of rejoining Pradan, I decided to set up a bank for the rural poor. I began consulting with SEWA Bank in Ahmedabad in 1993. I would stay with Ranjit occasionally and he would always encourage me to think big. I explained to him my plans to set up a bank for the poor, and he looked at me and said, "Don't think of anything less than 1,000 crores. You can do it."

The next few years were extremely busy for me in terms of doing all the preparatory work for setting up BASIX and I did not meet Ranjit much. In the meanwhile, Ranjit also retired from IIM(A). I next met him at the Academy outside Madurai set up by the DHAN Foundation, which was an NGO, spun off from Pradan by Vasimalai. Ranjit was very happy there for a while but later moved on. He moved in to the Chorao Island in Goa, where his brother and sister-in-law had decided to settle down after retiring from JNU. In spite of his frail health, Ranjit continued to travel from there to various places, including to the Bhartiya Agro

Industries Foundation (BAIF) in Pune, where Girish Sohani from a batch senior to us in IIM(A), was working as Executive Vice-President, and doing some remarkable things.

Later, when the whole family moved to Bangalore to be in a more central place and closer to Sanjay, Ranjit settled down on the top floor of Sanjay's home. I visited Ranjit there a few times — the last being the time of the tragic and untimely death of Sanjay. After that my contact with Ranjit was only over the phone once in a while. He had not lost his zest to do things in spite of his age, ill health and the loss of Sanjay. On the phone, after enquiring about BASIX and asking me whether I had reached Rs 1,000 crores yet or not, he would always tell me about what he was planning to do next.

What a life... how many of us he touched and left inspired. I can only cite Auden:

*"Let us honour if we can
The vertical man
Though we value none
But the horizontal one."*

Remembering Prof. Ranjit Gupta

ASHOKE CHATTERJEE

Prof. Ranjit Gupta and I met through the late Ravi J. Matthai, soon after my arrival in Ahmedabad in 1975 as Director at the National Institute of Design (NID). NID was going through a period of great turmoil. The young and pioneering institution and the profession it was committed to establish in India was under great threat. Prof. Matthai had provided an anchor to the educators and students at NID, helping them through a difficult period. It was also a time during which he and Ranjit Gupta were engaged in the concept of 'The Rural University' and the path-breaking effort to relate contemporary management knowledge and skills to the gut issues of Indian poverty. Soon, they invited me to join them. NID joined this effort, in which educators and students were encouraged by Ravi and Ranjit to test new design capacities outside corporate and government sectors — in the challenging environment of Jawaja block in Rajasthan. The choice of this incredibly difficult region as the 'classroom' for The Rural University experiment seemed foolhardy to many. Yet, over the years, the wisdom of the choice began to emerge. If management as well as design, technology and other streams of knowledge could make a difference here, there was demonstrated relevance and opportunity through the emerging streams of professional education in India. With relevance and opportunity came major new responsibilities. Educators and young professionals now had career choices before them that could not be denied. The challenge of serving those at the margins of society, demonstrated at Jawaja and by many others over these years, remains an important and urgent national issue. Just as Ravi and Ranjit were inspired to move to Jawaja, Jawaja itself became a catalyst and inspiration for many. Over 30 years later, the Yash Pal Committee on Higher Education echoes many of the ideas and aspirations articulated at Jawaja.

When Ravi was taken away from us far too early, Ranjit stepped in to sustain an IIM(A) presence at NID and among the Jawaja artisans. He helped them create the Artisans Alliance of Jawaja (AAJ) and its component Leather and Weaver groups. Today, the *raigars* and *bunkars* of Jawaja are testimony to the vision and commitment that Ravi and Ranjit represented. From the outer margins of a feudal, oppressive society, they are today respected members who can enter spaces once forbidden to them, take water from the village wells and share a cup of tea and even a meal with those to whom they were once untouchables. They have achieved a small measure of the economic and social self-reliance that was the object of The Rural University. In this drought-prone and degraded environment, they no longer needed to migrate or be forced to work on relief sites or pawn their possessions. They eat twice a day, not once in two days as it was when Ranjit and

Ravi first met them. Yet, their lives remain difficult and the systems that should support them are most often remote and difficult to access. While their struggles are far from over, the memories of Ranjit and Ravi continue to be a major source of strength and hope.

Jawaja was part of the development experience that Ranjit carried with him to his later work at Bharatiya Agro Industries Development Research Foundation (BAIF) in Pune and elsewhere, as well as to the Dhan Academy in Madurai. We had occasion

to work together at both locations, as well as at Communication for Development & Learning (CDL) in Bangalore. CDL is an experiment in the best Ranjit Gupta tradition – a small effort toward the huge challenge of bringing communications know-how to the service of development activists. In many ways, inspired by Ranjit, CDL is one of the candles he helped light, which continue to illumine some of our areas of darkness. This is how I remember Ranjit – a spirit always ready to light the way for me and for so many others.

With fond memories

BISWAJIT SEN

Ranjit was, for many of us from IIM(A), during the late seventies and early eighties, our mentor and the reason we chose to work in rural development. Whereas we, of that generation, were academically inclined to work in villages, it was Ranjit, along with Prof. Ravi Matthai, who gave us our first real exposure to working in the villages through the Jawaja project initiated by IIM(A). Ranjit was not only committed to working for the poor throughout his life but also had the unique personality to pass on that commitment to a large number of young people, who were his students.

Ranjit spent his childhood and formal education years in Lucknow, in a large family of brothers and sisters. He finished his post graduation in Economics from Lucknow University but, over the years, expanded his knowledge domain to encompass many disciplines related to development. He was associated with the Bhoodan and JP movement and supported the several Gandhian-based NGOs working in the country, through his work in Association of Voluntary Agencies for Rural Development (AVARD).

He joined IIM(A) in the mid 1970s and held the State Bank of India Chair Professorship for Rural Development till his retirement. He was best known for his course on Rural Environment and Social Change, which introduced us to many of the ideas that we still apply in our work. He also started the Centre for Rural Entrepreneurship there, to seek out and train exceptional young individuals, who would become social entrepreneurs.

His deep-seated compassion and positive motivation to all of us to continue in our chosen work for the next two decades will always be with us. He continues to be our role model, in his commitment to the poor — an inspiration to his students and his colleagues.

Mukto Purush Ranjit

ACHINTYA GHOSH

Bis (Biswajit Sen, currently in World Bank) used to call him Ranjit. So did Vijay and Ved. Vasi (Vasimalai) always addressed him as 'Sir'. All four of them were his students. I was tempted to call him Ranjit but could never do so. Deep was older to all of us and called him Ranjit. Deep was not his student and, therefore, it was all right for Deep to do so. Ranjit, on the other hand, jokingly called him Daari *Baba Deep* at times.

Ranjit was a professor at IIM, Ahmedabad. I used to adore him. I maintained a distance because I thought that 'he was too big for a small fry like me'.

But distances melted away one evening in Meghdoot Hotel in Itarsi where we spent some time together. He had come to visit the Kesla project. On another occasion, one evening at the IIC in Delhi when some of us were around him and he was in a good mood, he said, "Achintya "I am a *Mukto Purush*." He was a free bird. He used to enjoy whatever he did. Everyone knew that in his younger days, he had volunteered to do development work in the villages of Uttar Pradesh when there was no support available for the work. He used to travel long distances to villages by cycle. Can we imagine doing this? For Board meetings, he would come to Delhi a day early and stay at the IIC. He would go back one day after the meeting. He loved the company of the 'young development-wallahs'. In many conversations, he would often ask, "Is there a shared excitement among you guys about what you do?"

After his retirement from IIM(A) in 1994, he agreed to help the Pradan RRC (Resource and Research Centre). The then EC (Executive Committee) of Pradan (he fondly called the EC as the Pradan think-tank) met at Raichur in Karnataka to deliberate on development issues. Pramod Kulkarni was in Raichur, running his NGO, Prerana. Sanjay Das Gupta was the then District Collector (DC) of Raichur. Sanjay was earlier in the Pradan General Body and later became Pradan's Board Member. Sanjay was Ranjit's nephew who was staying with Sanjay in Raichur. Sanjay hosted a dinner for all of us.

Ranjit soon moved from Bangalore to Chorao island of Goa. Pradan's RRC used to be located in Goa, with Mustafa as the anchor. Some of us met Ranjit in Goa. He had been to the Pradan offices in Alwar, Rajasthan; Kesla, Madhya Pradesh; Lohardaga, Jharkhand; and Madurai. I accompanied him during his visit to most of these locations.

During Vasi's tenure as ED of Pradan in 1996, the EC members had differences on certain key issues. We were six of us: Vasi, Ved, Vinod, Dinabandhu, Deep and me. Tensions rose high and there was no dialogue among us. It was March 1996. Vasi consulted and sought Ranjit's help. Ranjit was earlier the Chairperson of Pradan. He had completed his term but continued as a Board member. Ranjit came to Delhi from Goa. He took the initiative and arranged an informal meeting with the six of us.

We met at a guest house in Surajkund. Ranjit had a special way of facilitation in the meeting. He would be humorous to create a friendly atmosphere so that we talk freely. He called Vasi '*Annachi*'. We were so loved by him that he wanted us not to disintegrate. This was followed by a meeting at Kodaikanal which was again facilitated by him. Even the Pradan board had met in Goa on his request to deliberate on this. In all these events, he would build the bridge between the differences for dialogue. He contributed greatly by often being unconventional and egoless.

Ranjit had attended the Pradan Retreat in Tawa near Kesla in 1987. Pradanites had

deliberated in small groups about the attributes of a development professional. Tapas Dutta (joined UNICEF later) and Teji Bhogal were assigned to consolidate these attributes. They made a consolidated list from the presentations of all the sub-groups. The list had over 70 attributes. Some of us were disheartened to see the long *dhobi* list. Tapas murmured that he would pack up his bags and leave in the evening for his earlier job at Unnayan in Kolkata because he thought that he did not possess most of the attributes. Sankar (Professor Sankar Dutta, Director of The Livelihood School) was sure that he possessed over 60 attributes. My thoughts were similar to Tapas's but I was thinking how to continue my work in development so that I would continue implementing lift irrigation schemes in the ASSEFA projects in Bihar.

Ranjit witnessed all this. We all were keen to hear his verdict in the evening. He stressed, "There needs to be not more than five key attributes for development professionals. None will dare to be a development-wallah if you guys look for such a *dhobi* list of attributes. *Sab bhag jayenge...*" I was relieved and happy to hear Ranjit's words.

People's Forestry in Jawaja: An Experiment in Educational Innovation

RANJIT GUPTA

An experiment in educational innovation was initiated as one of the activities of The Rural University by Prof. Ravi J. Matthai of the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, IIM(A). The experiment, supported by the Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi, was started in August 1975 in a backward block called Jawaja in Ajmer district, Rajasthan. The experiment was started on the invitation of and in consultation with the Education Department, Government of Rajasthan. The department responded favourably to the idea of experimenting with the integration of education and rural development and agreed to collaborate in its implementation. The experimenters decided to locate the experiment in Jawaja panchayat samiti, comprising Jawaja block and Beawar town.

Besides Ravi Matthai and this author, the experimenters included a few faculty members and students of IIM(A) and the National Institute of Design (NID), Ahmedabad. One of the basic aims of the experiment was that the interveners would work towards making themselves *dispensable* by developing the self-management capability of the target groups. By 1980, the outside Group had declined from a peak of 12 to only four faculty members: two from IIM(A) and two from NID. Ravi Matthai passed away in 1984. Since then the size of the Group has remained three: the author and two NID faculty members, Ms. Nilam Iyer (Leather Designer) and Ms. Krishna Patel (Textile Designer).

THE RURAL UNIVERSITY: AIMS AND ASSUMPTIONS

Matthai, who conceived the idea and initiated The Rural University, elaborated upon the aims and assumptions as follows.

The Rural University is not an organization in the structured sense. It is an idea. It has no campus, no teachers and no taught. It has no formal curriculum, no organizational hierarchy, no office bearers. It has neither an overall blueprint nor a budget.

The Rural University is concerned with the people, the 'disadvantaged' in particular. It is based on the assumption that the development of rural India will occur through the development of people. People must learn to help themselves and to help others. *Self-reliance* and mutuality are basic to the idea of The Rural University.

The experiment focuses on the integration of rural development and education with learning as the basis of development. It assumes that people will learn in the course of doing things and, therefore, development activities would be the vehicle of learning. The activities themselves should not be of primary importance. The focus should be *people*. "The process of learning would be related to the villagers' attitude towards and capability of viewing opportunities and being able to manage his/her own affairs. Learning would also relate to individuals being able to work in groups, evolving their own types of organisations. It would involve understanding the need for mutuality and cohesiveness, developing norms of group functioning, and many other aspects relating to the process of group dynamics" (Matthai, 1979). It is in this sense that "the experiment was regarded as focusing on people and their learning and not so much on the movement of physical inputs and outputs" (Matthai, 1979).

APPROACH

Certain thoughts on learning and education influenced the Group's approach to development. Thus, the Group felt that rural development should not be a massive system of doles from the 'haves' to the 'have-nots'. Instead, it assumed that the sustained development of rural India would be feasible only if it were based on people learning to be self-reliant and, thus, generating their own resources and opportunities. In doing so, the approach stressed the following aspects of learning:

- ♦ Learning occurs all the time, everywhere with everybody, whatsoever he or she does. However, this learning can be extremely narrow if there is very little variation either in what the individual does or in the environment within which he lives and works. It is equally

likely that his responses may become conditioned reflexes if within this narrow confine, his environment remains relatively stable. Something must happen to get him off his 'learning plateau'. Either he does something or someone else does something to enhance his capability of learning or his substantive learning itself. *It is this element of the deliberate that distinguishes education from learning.*

- ♦ Learning can, therefore, be individual, particular or inadvertent. Or it can be individual, particular and deliberate. Learning can be in terms of generalized principles abstracted from the experiences of mankind. Or it can involve joint learning through the experience of others in which the commonality of experience provides a basis for learning; for example, a group of craftsmen working together and learning from each others' mistakes or learning from the joint performance of a common function. *The aim of education for development is then to make learning deliberate, help enhance the capabilities of learning and help people learn how to learn.*
- ♦ The start of such a process to develop educational awareness and capabilities could be centered upon gainful or new economic activities — activities which attract the immediate attention and direct interest of the villagers.

ASSUMPTIONS

The identification and selection of the activities followed from a number of assumptions, the important among these being the following:

- ♦ All activities, as far as possible, should be based on local physical resources.
- ♦ The ideas should be generated by the villagers themselves, with the experimenters acting as catalysts.

- ♦ The activities should be decentralized as far as possible so as to involve as many villagers as possible.
- ♦ The capital intensity in each activity should be as low as possible so that the main constraints on production in the area will be the number of trained people.
- ♦ The activities should aim at adding value to the basic local resources and it should be possible for the villagers to retain the added value — if not wholly, a major part of it.
- ♦ The villagers must learn to become self-reliant and manage these activities themselves. This will involve, among others, the villagers learning to work in groups and reducing their dependence on the 'delivery system' as well as making more effective demands on the 'delivery system' for the resources that government policies intended for them.

AREA PROFILE

The Jawaja block, covering approximately 200 villages and a population of about 1,00,000 (at the time the experiment was launched), is situated in the midst of a drought prone region. Drought is a recurring feature. It occurs at least once in two-three years and often successively for two-three years. The available arable land (24,844 hectares) is about two-fifths of the block's total area (58,441 hectares). The rest is rocky, hilly scrub land. The undulating hilly terrain, bereft of green cover, is severely eroded. Widespread quarrying by miners trading in marble stones, mica and precious stones such as agate has aggravated the problem further.

Small and marginal farmers constitute the bulk of the population. Most of them have holdings of less than 0.5 ha. There is a sizeable livestock population (mainly sheep, goat and camel) of doubtful quality. A majority of the poor households are multi-occupational. Many are artisans such as weavers, potters, stone cutters and leather workers.

Drought being a recurring feature, agriculture is uncertain. The minimum temperature in winter months goes down to as low as 1°C and the maximum temperature in summer

months can be as high as 46°C. The variation in the annual precipitation ranges from 150 mm to 1000 mm, the average annual rainfall being only 500 mm. The average evaporation, being usually more than the annual rainfall, has made the soil arid. The practice of open grazing of a total livestock population exceeding 1,00,000 in the panchayat samiti has had disastrous effect on the natural vegetation. Environmental degradation and its relationship with poverty are strikingly visible. Women and children, who share the tasks of gathering fuel wood and fodder and of grazing of animals, are the worst sufferers. The diminishing, degraded forests and overgrazed hills have made their tasks extremely difficult.

The block is named after its village headquarters, Jawaja. The village is located in the middle of the block on National Highway 8 that links Delhi with Bombay. Beawar, the nearest town in the periphery of the block, is the last train stop before Ajmer on the Ahmedabad–Delhi metre gauge line. The town is about 70 km south of Ajmer and just under 500 km north of Ahmedabad. It is a trading centre with a large wool market amongst other commodities.

EVOLUTION OF PEOPLE'S FORESTRY: AN OVERVIEW

The experiment started in 1975 with two groups of villagers — the weavers and the leather workers. The efforts to involve the school system in tree plantation began almost simultaneously.

SCHOOL PLANTATION PROGRAMME

After some initial exploration and experimentation, a modest programme to plant and raise a few species in school compounds was introduced in 1978 not so much with a view to promote forestry but to create a learning space in the school with teachers and children soiling their hands to plant and raise a few locally suitable species, and, hopefully, in the process developing a sense of love for nature. To promote their participation, an incentive scheme was introduced. They were told that prizes (such as *durries*, or carpets, woven by the weavers group) would be awarded to the school ranking first, second and third, in accordance with certain criteria mentioned in the later part.

A group of about 100 schools from different parts of the block participated in this experiment. The seedlings (mostly agave) to be planted were obtained from the forest department and supplied free of cost to the participating schools. To assess the results and award the prizes, a committee was constituted. Initially, the experiment progressed erratically, not because of lack of enthusiasm on the part of school students or the school system but due to indifferent involvement of the local unit of the forest department.

NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

About the time the tree plantation in the school compounds began, 15 non-formal

education centres in as many villages were also started. Village school teachers and villagers, both men and women, with varying levels of formal education, from middle pass to graduate, were inducted to run the centres. The two local school teachers deputed to the project by the education department of the state worked as field coordinators.

The centres exist even now; their role and intensity of work vary, depending on the seasonality of agricultural production and the severity of drought. Like The Rural University, the centres too have no formal curriculum, no building, no organisation in the structured sense, no defined studentship, no blueprint. They act as informal forums for villagers, both adults and children, to meet and spend a few hours to discuss and share their problems or the problems of the village, their understanding of what is happening or not happening in the village and elsewhere, and share information of interest to the participants. Boys and girls, particularly the latter, who are not literate but interested in learning, participate more regularly. Adults are less regular but they do meet whenever the need arises or, alternatively, when they have little else to do. Yet, these are the centres that, in a sense, acted as catalysts and accelerated the movement towards people's forestry.

PASTURE DEVELOPMENT

The idea, that the villagers themselves must take the initiative to plant and protect trees, caught on by 1982. Villagers of two non-formal education centre villages resolved to protect the plants in the village commons open to grazing by demarcating them into four parts with no grazing for three years in three parts. After three years, another part would be closed and the cycle maintained

through three-yearly rotation. Anyone violating the decision would be punished, which they did when some of the villagers in a village violated it. The visible outcome following the enforcement of this decision – healthy plants where none used to exist earlier – encouraged three more non-formal education centre villages to adopt the same practice. Hordes of school children also began collecting seeds from school compounds, public grazing land and private land, and planted them where they could.

DECENTRALISED NURSERIES

In 1984, the Society for Promotion of Wastelands Development (SPWD), New Delhi, stepped in and supported the project in promoting decentralized nurseries (one each in the non-formal education centre villages) owned by small cultivating households. The nurseries averaging about one-tenth of an acre were manned mostly by women and children and, once the saplings were ready, they were given free to the villagers for plantation. The arrangements made to promote the activity worked out well, so much so that in the next two years, it grew to include 57 nurseries in as many villages in four districts.

PROCESS LEADING TO THE MINI-MOVEMENT OF PEOPLE'S FORESTRY

SCHOOL PLANTATION EXPERIMENT

As the plantation experiment at the Narbadkhera school showed encouraging results, the Group introduced a school-based programme to popularize the plantation of agave cactus. Discussions and meetings, both formal and informal, were held with the headmasters and school teachers of virtually all the schools in the block except the primary schools, which were excluded in view of the age group of the students. The discussions

helped not only in chalking out a programme of action but more importantly in defining and underscoring its objectives:

- ♦ To get the teachers and students to know how to grow plants and to know the utility of such plants
- ♦ To use the school field as a demonstration plot for the villagers
- ♦ To get the teachers and students to make the villagers understand the concept behind this plantation so that they can take it up on their own

With these in mind, seeds were distributed in June-July 1978 to about 100 middle schools. Cyclostyled copies of technical notes and protection measures for the plants were distributed by the forest department (*Jawaja Letters*, October 10, 1978). To encourage school teachers to take the initiative in this work, an incentive scheme was introduced. They were told that prizes, based on the following performance criteria, would be awarded to the best three schools participating in the plantation programme.

- ♦ Number of plants accepted (100 plants were offered to each school)
- ♦ Number of plants that survived
- ♦ Protection measures taken
- ♦ Efforts made to convey the concepts to the villagers
- ♦ Effect of the efforts

To evaluate the performance and award the prizes, a committee comprising the Additional District Education Officer (ADEO), Beawar, the Forest Ranger (Beawar), the BDO (Jawaja Panchayat Samiti) and a member of the IIM(A)-NID Group was constituted. The first evaluation was conducted towards the end of 1979, about 18 months after the seedlings were planted by the schools. In terms of survival rate, the achievements varied from 10 to 90 per cent. In the 100 schools taken

together, the survival rate was about 30 per cent, which the committee felt was 'fairly good' because it was the first attempt of its kind in the region. Prizes were awarded to four schools. The ADEO, who had taken keen interest in the experiment chalked out a plantation programme for the following year (1980) and approached the Group to help him get the required stock of seedlings from the forest nurseries. Because the Group could provide only a small part of the required stock and some of the schools lacked adequate supply of water (one of the factors that contributed to their poor performance), only about one-third of the schools that participated in 1978-79 could participate in 1980. But those schools that did carried on the plantation work with greater enthusiasm. To augment the stock of seeds, the school from the non-formal education centres also collected seeds from public and private lands. As in the previous year, the performance of the participating schools was evaluated by the committee constituted for this purpose and prizes were awarded to three schools.

ACCEPTANCE OF THE CONCEPT BY THE VILLAGERS

In 1981, the villagers belonging to some of the non-formal education centre villages approached the ADEO and the centre *sanchalak* to help them plant fruit bearing trees such as lemon, mango and guava. The demand for the saplings of these species was substantial. However, the DFO (Ajmer) expressed his inability to supply the saplings *gratis*. After some negotiations, the villagers agreed to buy them at Re 0.50 each. The DFO agreed to supply the saplings at this price provided he was so authorized by his seniors. But due to the bureaucratic work culture, the ADEO was hesitant. Eventually, the impasse was cleared, with a member of

the IIM(A)-NID Group writing to the Chief Conservator of Forests, Jaipur, who in turn instructed the DFO "to supply 1,500 plants of lemon, mango, guava and *la'amia* (calabash) trees free of cost to the representative of the Jawaja project." He added, "The cost of labour and transportation will be borne by the project."

The plants, supplied by the DFO, were distributed to about 100 villagers in eight of the non-formal education centre villages. The number planted by each of them varied from 1 to 30. But the survival rate was poor. In general, the fewer the seedlings planted, the higher was the survival rate.

The plantation programme took a new turn the following year. The villagers attending the non-formal education centres decided that they should aim at minimizing their dependence on the forest department by collecting seeds of *babul* (*Acacia nilotica*), *dhak* (*Butea monosperma*), *Prosopis juliflora*, etc., from public and private lands during April-May. The seeds so collected could be raised in nurseries and planted during the rainy season. Young girls and school kids participated in seed collection and also took the lead when the time was opportune to sow the seeds and tend to the plants. The ADEO prepared a brief but simple handout in Hindi. It highlighted the importance of forests, the factors to be kept in view in choosing species, the methods or practices to be followed to plant and nurse them, and the after-care measures required to promote their growth. The handout was distributed to all the schools and the non-formal education centres and, thereby, reached the villagers.

The centre *sanchalaks* and the two field coordinators met the ADEO in his office every

fortnight to review, plan and coordinate the activity. At one such meeting in July 1982, they expressed their opinion that the plants procured from forest nurseries at Re 0.50 each should be given to only those villagers who could and would water the plants in the event monsoon failed. They also thought that instead of awarding prizes to the participating schools, five persons, that is, school teachers and children, from each participating village should awarded prizes.

This gave a new dimension to the project. The focus vis-à-vis performance award shifted from the school as a system to individual villagers, whether adults or children. The performance criteria remained unchanged but the coverage expanded. Instead of three or four schools receiving the awards, as many as 35 individuals (21 boys, 9 girls and 5 *sanchalaks*) qualified to receive the prizes. Barring the top three, who received prizes (*durries*) worth Rs 500, others were given letters of appreciation. The performance evaluation committee now included three headmasters of three local higher secondary schools.

MOVEMENT FROM PLANTATION TO SOCIAL FORESTRY

Next year, the activity expanded to include not only the non-formal education centre villages but another 20 adjoining villages. Many villagers from these villages were of the firm opinion that the plants should be planted in all idle lands, irrespective of whether they were private or panchayat or public land. From mere plantations in school compounds by school students, the activity acquired the overtones of social forestry. At the same time, the villagers emphasized that the involvement of school teachers, students, and *sanchalaks* was needed to spread and strengthen the activity.

While endorsing this view, the field coordinators and *sanchalaks* thought that efforts should be also made to get the Special Schemes Organization (SSO) of the Rajasthan government involved in the programme. They requested the IIM(A)-NID Group to contact SSO and enlist its participation. The SSO readily agreed, and in consultation with the Group and others in the field, evolved a programme for village pasture development, in which the forest department and other government development agencies in the area were asked to participate. In a circular addressed to these departments/agencies the SSO listed, the following were the chief features of the proposed programme (translated from Hindi):

- ♦ The villagers will divide the village pasture land into four parts.
- ♦ In one part, *dhak* will be planned. These are fast growing plants the leaves of which are eaten with relish by buffaloes, particularly in winter months when fodder is otherwise scarce. Once the trees become mature, these could be auctioned to the villagers.
- ♦ In the second part, seeds of *Prosopis juliflora* will be sown. The species will provide fuel wood to the villagers and also help prevent unauthorized cutting of trees in nearby areas.
- ♦ In the third part, shrubs and grass for sheep and goat to graze will be grown.
- ♦ In the fourth part, fodder seeds will be sown to meet the fodder requirement of the village.
- ♦ The villagers will also plant trees and grow fodder in their own lands.

The participation of the forest department and the government development agencies, however, remained lukewarm. The seedlings and technical services they were expected to

provide did not come forth readily or adequately. Despite repeated reminders, the supplies and services flowed erratically, often not on time. In usual circumstances, this would have perhaps hastened the collapse of not only the activity but also the spirit underlying it.

That this did not happen was partly because of the efforts made in the past to involve the village school children and their parents in tree plantation and the enthusiasm it triggered in the process. Partly, it was also because of the sustained efforts the field coordinators and *sanchalaks* made to ensure that the tempo was not lost.

One very encouraging outcome of all this was a collective decision of one of the non-formal education centre villages, Naikala. The villagers decided that not a single green tree in and around the village would be damaged or felled. Anyone found guilty would be fined and punished. It was not a mere resolution. On a couple of occasions, they did impose severe fines to punish the guilty. The same village took the lead to implement the pasture fuel wood development programme, on the lines indicated in the SSO circular. To do this, the villagers decided that no grazing or tree cutting would be allowed for three years in those parts of the village pasture land, where new seeds or seedlings were planted.

INTER-VILLAGE DISPUTE

The enforcement of the decision led to inter-village dispute, which the Naikala villagers resolved in a novel way. Naikala is situated in the uphill. Downhill there is a bigger, more populous village, Kabra. The pasture lands of the two villages adjoining one another are located in the uphill, close to the Naikala settlement. Till now the pasture-fuel wood resources in the two adjoining lands were

similar. The enforcement of the Naikala decision, 'No grazing, no tree cutting for three years', however, changed the scenario.

Within a few months following the monsoons, the Naikala pasture looked greener and healthier than the Kabra pasture. The result was that the Kabra women started collecting fodder and fuel wood from the Naikala village common. The Naikala village youth (boys) guarding the village common objected to this and, one day, politely but firmly turned them out. The Kabra women returned empty-handed and narrated the incident to the men-folk who were enraged. Next day, the Kabra men and boys met in large number in a village gathering and resolved to teach a lesson to the Naikala villagers. They marched in a procession along with their animal herd, uprooted the hedges planted by Naikala villagers to protect the village common, and let loose the animals to graze.

The Naikala youth wondered if they should prevent the Kabra villagers and aggravate the confrontation or accept defeat and let the Kabra villagers graze and collect fuel wood from their land. Opinions were divided. Usually, the village elders favoured non-confrontation whereas the youth favoured confrontation. Some felt that the law and order enforcing authority should be requested to intervene; others opposed it.

As the stalemate continued, and the Kabra girls went about freely collecting fuel wood. The Naikala boys then took a unique step. About a week after the Kabra men had thrown them out, the boys sat in a group and waited for the Kabra girls. When they arrived, the Naikala boys told them that they could collect as much fuel wood as they wished on one condition. For every head load of fuel

wood, the girl carrying it would have to kiss a boy of her choice. The girls blushed and ran away. This was one thing the ladies were not willing to reveal to the men-folk. Instead they started collecting fuel wood from other areas. However, in a few days, through word of mouth, the story spread. Instead of getting angry, the Kabra men were amused. They laughed and enjoyed the raw but ingenious humour the Naikala boys had sprung on the girls to shoo them away.

The elders of the two villages met to sort out the problem amicably. Radhey Shyam, one of the coordinators residing in Kabra, was invited to participate in the meeting. He advised the Kabra villagers to follow the Naikala example and like them try to develop their pasture land. The Kabra villagers accepted the suggestion and introduced it the following monsoon.

CHILDREN AS CATALYSTS

Several things started happening. If social, economic and environmental factors influenced the attitude and participation of adults, the children who led the movement were attracted to it mainly because of the emotional satisfaction and joy it offered to them. In a village, far away from Kabra and Naikala, Sukhram, a school kid of about 10 years, collected seeds of whatever species he could lay his hands on and planted them in a plot of wasteland adjoining his house. Barring the time he spent in the school or on household errands, he spent most of his time digging pits, sowing seeds or seedlings, putting up makeshift fences, watering the plants and fostering their growth. Some failed to strike root, some germinated but died, but quite a few survived and grew. Soon the results of his labour became glaringly visible. In the midst of a vast stretch of barren land, was his small plot with 40 young plants of

different species. His peers made fun of him and in the process his name spread. That is how the author and other members of the Group came to know of his efforts and went to his village to see him and his plants. Instead of looking amused or joining the fun, which the villagers and children who had assembled there apparently expected, the Group praised him, spent some time with him and took care to see each of his plants. In the eyes of his peers and village elders, Sukhram's image suddenly shot up. The children particularly were impressed and apparently felt that what he did was not nonsense to outsiders but a praiseworthy effort.

The news spread. The Society for Promotion of Wastelands Development (SPWD) invited Sukhram to a public function in Delhi and awarded him a certificate of appreciation. He returned to the village a hero. Many boys started emulating his achievements. Some were envious too. Early one morning, when Sukhram went to his little plot, he was dismayed to find that someone had uprooted all his plants.

He wept but did not lose faith. He started planting again with greater vigour and vigilance. Impressed with the way the project generated the involvement and participation of the villagers in afforestation, the SPWD also expressed interest in sponsoring a wasteland development programme in Jawaja. A team of SPWD officials visited the area and held discussions with the field coordinators and others. The visiting team included Arvind Khare, an IIM(A) graduate who participated in The Rural University experiment for two years as one of the first members of the Interviewing Group. Khare also met the author and Ravi Matthai, the initiator of the experiment, to share ideas and formulate the broad framework of the collaborative programme.

MATTHAI FOREST

On their own initiative, the schoolchildren of 4 to 5 adjoining villagers built a 15-acre forest in the midst of a totally barren hilly region and named it the Matthai van (Matthai Forest), in memory of Ravi Matthai, the initiator of the experiment. Whenever the author happens to pass through this tract, the children rush to stop the vehicle and take him out to see their creation. Each of them has planted a number of plants of different species and takes immense care to ensure their healthy growth. They have dug the hard rocky soil, put up makeshift fences, which no expert would perhaps recommend but which nonetheless seem to serve the purpose. To irrigate the plants, they bring buckets of water often from a distance of 1 to 2 km. They also take great pride in their creation and feel hurt if a visitor they like and respect does not see each of their plants. On a hot summer day, this could be quite tiring because it involves two hours of walking.

WOMEN AS LEADERS AND EDUCATORS

What has been described in the preceding paragraphs is not an isolated case nor is it confined to children alone. In a school building in a remote village, which members of the IIM(A)-NID Group visited one Sunday afternoon without prior intimation, the members were surprised to find 30 village women, mostly Harijan, sitting in a classroom with one of them drawing sketches on the blackboard to illustrate the plantation work they proposed to carry out with the onset of monsoon in the next one or two weeks. On further enquiry, the Group found they had been having such meetings every alternate Sunday for the past two months. They belonged to different villages in different districts and carried out various tasks (nursery raising, seed collection, management of seed banks, etc.). The purpose of their fortnightly

meetings was to organize and coordinate their activities, exchange information and ideas and learn more about afforestation techniques and practices.

TOWARDS A MULTI-PURPOSE PROJECT

Encouraged by these outcomes and the spread of the project from 18 villages in Jawaja panchayat samiti to over 200 villages in four districts, SPWD is now planning to execute an ambitious, medium, multi-purpose project (watershed management, tank irrigation and wasteland development), covering several hundred acres of land. From the point of view of the aims and approach of The Rural University, however, the proposed project represents a reversal of the process initiated by the experiment.

ANALYSIS AND GENERALIZATIONS FROM THE EXPERIMENT

In our view, it is the process of learning that contributed to the transformation of the school plantation work into a movement for people's forestry. That this took time suggests in itself the first lesson, namely, generating such a process is time-consuming. Like the villagers, the interveners must have *patience* and *resilience*: patience for crude results and resilience to learn from mistakes. This does not mean that the interveners have to be thoughtless, without a vision or a sense of purpose. Vision, purpose and ability to initiate action that is *contextually relevant* are extremely important. But in an open system, in which a large number of individuals and groups are actors performing multiple roles in a framework and in which the *cognitive, emotional, behavioural* and *achievement* elements are inextricably mixed (such as a social system), it is neither easy to predict the outcome of interventions nor wise to lose heart if the desired outcome does not manifest within a prescribed time.

At the very outset, the experimenters recognized that development connotes change and that there are at least four aspects of change, critical to its realization:

- ♦ The *environment* in which change is attempted
- ♦ The timing of the change
- ♦ The structure of the change
- ♦ The *process* of the change

They took a good deal of care to study the first. The 'area profile' given above represents only a fraction of this study (Matthai, 1979). As regards the timing of the change, they realized that there is no pre-determined or established way of figuring this out. It has to be sensed, so to say, by keeping one's antenna alert, occasionally on hindsight, and seldom through theoretical exercises.

The structure of change defining also the content of change, though important, is perhaps the easiest of the four to visualize. It is what many interveners, planners and social scientists refer to as the 'plan' or 'project', and take great delight and care to prepare it. In contrast, while recognizing that all the four aspects are important, the experimenters substituted 'activity' in place of 'plan'. They felt that the structure of change should be left loose and flexible so that it evolves along with the process of change.

As for the process of change — the process of developing awareness and capabilities — centered upon new activities. The activities, in a sense, constituted the structural elements.

The activity initiation tasks were identified as follows (*Jawaja Letters*, March 17, 1976):

- ♦ Determine the feasibility of the activity, including local, physical and human resources required to start it.

- ♦ Identify the people who are interested in participating in the activity. (There can be a wide divergence between the expressed interest and actual participation. Usually, villagers do not respond meaningfully to problems that are strange to the context of their experience unless these are put to them in a manner readily understandable to them. The problems have to be explained and related, using familiar context, language and symbols.) Locating people is a vital but difficult step. It calls for intensive discussion with individual villagers, whenever and wherever it is convenient to them.
- ♦ Work out the financing, marketing and organization of the activity, keeping in view the aims and assumptions of the experiment.
- ♦ Work out ways of enhancing the participants' learning so that they can handle the activity by themselves.
- ♦ Establish links with the formal education system and other external but relevant groups and agencies.
- ♦ Work out the arrangements required to implement and coordinate the activity with emphasis on making it increasingly self-sustaining. Ensure continuous follow-up at all levels.

The pursuit of these steps helped the Group to select a number of activities, including plantation in school compounds and non-formal education. The schools and the non-formal education centres were also seen as the *conjugate foci* of the process to integrate education with development.

The process of learning initiated was not derived from any prescribed theory of learning. It was built on certain assumptions, or hypotheses. Important among these are:

- ♦ Development of rural India will occur through the development of people.
- ♦ People must learn to help themselves and to help others. Self-reliance and mutuality are basic to this idea.
- ♦ The process of learning should be related to a villager's attitudes to and capability of viewing opportunities and being able to manage his own affairs.
- ♦ Learning occurs all the time, everywhere with everybody, whatsoever he or she does. However, this learning can be extremely narrow and may keep him confined to his 'learning plateau' unless he does something or someone else does something to enhance his capability of learning or his substantive learning itself. This element of the deliberate distinguishes education from learning.
- ♦ Learning would also involve individuals being able to work in groups, understanding the need for mutuality and cohesiveness, develop norms of group functioning, evolve their own type of organizations and many other aspects relating to the process of group dynamics.

The learning process involves "at one and the same time a cognitive element (increased awareness), an emotional element (changed attitudes), and a behavioural element (changed interpersonal competence)." (Schein, Edgar H. and Bennis, Warren G., 1966, *Personal and Organizational Change through Group Methods*, New York: John Wiley and sons, 1965 p. 272). Whether these three levels of change occur sequentially or simultaneously, one is not sure. But, "Learning to pay attention to... involves a fundamental attitude change towards the learning process itself. The first attitude change step is therefore, the single most

important component in the total learning experience." (Ibid., p. 273). In relation to tree plantation, learning about its value, its growth process and organic relations with the environment, its visible and invisible contributions happens at the two centres of learning: formal schools and non formal education centres. The relative contributions of the three elements of the learning process varied in the two centres. In schools or with children, the emotional element contributed the most. In non-formal education centres, or with adults, the cognitive element dominated. The link established between the schools and the centres through tree plantation perhaps fostered all the elements, simultaneously or sequentially in a cycle, and accentuated and spread the process of learning.

Besides this linkage and efforts to involve school teachers, students and villagers, particularly women, several other interventions and linkages accelerated the process.

- ♦ Periodic interactions between the Group and the participants (school teachers, students, villagers, ADEO, field coordinators and *sanchalaks*) and among the various groups of participants. The experiment suggests that one of the critical requirements of initiating and sustaining a process, such as the learning process earlier described, is periodic or frequent face-to-face interactions between and amongst the actors/participants. The formal schools and the non-formal education centres facilitated such interactions.
- ♦ Whereas schools are a closed system, in the sense that recruitment of members (teachers and students) is restricted and controlled through a variety of methods and practices, the experiment promoted

the non-formal education centres as catch-all forums. They are open to every villager, male or female, adult or child, with no formal curriculum, no fee, no organizational hierarchy or a blueprint. The experiment assumed that whereas the number of villagers, adults or children, attending a centre would vary from time to time, it would extend and deepen their areas of concern and enable them to relate their needs and interests with the larger region of which their village is a part. Also, as their sense of mutuality and cohesiveness grew, they would participate in new activities or start them on their own as well as make demands on the official delivery system to supply the inputs and services intended for them. That this did happen is borne out by the evolution and spread of people's forestry. There are some other examples too though the rate or quality of change in these cases was not as exemplary as in people's forestry.

- ♦ Award of prizes as added incentive to participating schools and subsequently to villagers participating in plantation helped in improving their motivation and performance.
- ♦ Institutional collaboration, particularly with the education department of the state government and the SPWD. The ADEO's involvement in the activity and the role he played in the formative stage contributed substantially to sustain and accelerate the process. The technical back-up by the forest department, within the constraints in which it works, also contributed a good deal.
- ♦ Further acceleration followed from SPWD's support to start and spread

village-based nurseries manned by ordinary villagers; the incentive or reward the programme offered enabling each grower to earn Rs 2,000 to Rs 2,500 for 2 to 3 months labour on a small patch of land; the simplicity of the technology; the initial training to nursery growers and villagers at large; and the free availability of saplings from the nurseries to villagers interested in plantation.

- ♦ 'Extensibility' (another concept integral to the experiment), that is, the learner, having learnt, taking the initiative to impart the learning to others. In this case, the nursery growers, children, men and women of the initial group of 18 villages, where nurseries were first started, performed this role as and when the villagers of other villages joined the programme.
- ♦ Identification and induction of the *right* individuals as field coordinators and *workers*, and the *role* they played to foster the process. Their enthusiastic involvement and capability to perform multiple roles were proportionate to and, in more than one sense, an outcome of the experimenters' emphasis on making themselves increasingly dispensable.
- ♦ Topping this is the emotional and widespread involvement of women and children in the activity. The experiment highlights that their participation in this sort of activity is crucial.

From the point of view of area development, the SPWD's proposal to build a multipurpose, 'irrigation-watershed-wasteland development' project will no doubt be a boon, a handsome gift to the people. From the point of The Rural University, however, it will be a contradiction. Both in principle and

substance, the proposed project represents essentially a system of doles from the haves to the have-nots. Since inception, the experiment has avoided this because it saps people's vitality, their motivation to learn to be self-reliant. Economic and environmental improvements may accrue from the proposed project as they do from similar projects whether executed by government or nongovernmental agencies. But instead of improving people's confidence in themselves and their motivation and capability to help themselves and help others, such projects usually make them more dependent on outside agencies or interveners. At least this was the premise on which the experiment was started, and hence the assumption that "sustained development of rural India would be feasible only if it is based on people learning to be self-reliant and generate their own resources and opportunities."

A hypothesis that may not be irrelevant to advance is that the reversal of the process, which over time has given rise to what we have called "mini-movement towards people's forestry", may begin in case the proposed SPWD project is executed where the activity centre is located — at the field headquarters comprising field coordinators and other project staff. The very notion that the project is on the anvil has thus prompted one of the coordinators to find ways by which he could acquire a Jeep to move and supervise the project, a legitimate view considering the requirement of the work and his urge to upgrade his social status. But the attitudinal change is significant, in the sense that it could lead to other demands, equally legitimate. If the demands or needs are not met, he and others may feel constrained and dissatisfied. If met, it could lead to organizational hierarchies and rigidity, and in the process distance them from the villagers.

The process once started is likely to spread laterally as well as upward and downward. It is in this sense that the on-going process and the aims underlying it may get distorted.

Significantly, the villagers who have endorsed the project, technologically more complex than nursery raising or tree plantation, and have volunteered to participate in it are the ones who took to tree plantation recently. They neither witnessed the gradual unfolding of the learning process initiated by the experiment nor participated in it as closely or adequately in terms of time like the Jawaja villagers. This difference in learning and the learning cycle earlier referred to could be one reason why the Jawaja villagers did not agree to own or join the proposed SPWD project even though it was offered to them first.

If this reasoning is valid, it partly answers the first question: the extent to which the process has taken roots. It seems to have spread fairly well and acquired a character of its own in most villages in Jawaja, where it has been nursed and sustained for years. These are the villages that saw how the school children took to forestry via the school compound plantation, how the non-formal education centres functioned, how the link between the two was established and how the villagers themselves joined the movement.

But the movement even in these villages has not yet attained a level that makes it self-sustaining and self-propelling. It will take time to reach this stage provided the type of support extended by SPWD vis-à-vis nursery raising and seed banks continues and the villagers are encouraged to learn to generate and manage resources from seed banks and trees planted by them. Even though, in the past three years, the villagers have planted over one million trees and shrubs and have

taken measures to develop their pasture/ grazing lands, there are vast patches of barren land still left to be greened. The greening of these at Re 0.25 per plant is not a costly affair. The process to complete this task can be accelerated manifold; the rate of acceleration will depend on the rate at which decentralized village nurseries are established. Likewise, more seed banks could be established and the village women managing them could be inspired to become the new agents of change, involving no other support except for the purchase of seeds at a cost as low as Rs 8-10 per kg. Even the institutional demand for such seeds is substantial; perhaps, more than what is readily available from the market. The market price also happens to be significantly higher than the price charged by the women-managed Jawaja seed banks.

In the context in which the experiment has been conceived and keeping in view the results so far achieved, these are more important issues than a project to transmit doles. There are other questions which we have not touched, for instance, how would the villagers share the benefits accruing from tree plantation in common or public lands? Who would get what, when and how? These are important questions. But the problems are not insurmountable. Thus, to

some extent, the villagers themselves have seen to it that equitable or just sharing of benefits is facilitated. This they have done by selecting those species that are commonly consumed in the village as fodder and fuel wood. The marketable value of these plants being low and since these are traditionally consumed for subsistence, according to individual household needs, they do not visualize that benefit-sharing would be a problem or that it would be less equitable when benefits start flowing. In fact, they have let the 'disadvantaged' draw relatively greater share of the benefits, which have started accruing from the juliflora hedges planted three years ago along the village roads and the village boundary. Whether the practice will continue and become a tradition or change in course of time will depend on whether the process will increase the stock of plants of their choice. If it does, benefit-sharing vis-à-vis the Jawaja people's plantation may become not only more equitable but significantly better for the disadvantaged, that is, the poor.

Excerpts from Gupta, Ranjit, 1990-91, 'People's Forestry in Jawaja: An Experiment in Educational Innovation', in Studies on Social Forestry in India, Bangkok (Thailand): RAPA Publication, pp. 209-228.



About Prof. Ranjit Gupta

Born in 1934, Prof. Ranjit Gupta is one of the most distinguished and eminent social development thinkers that India has produced. He did his Masters in Arts, with a specialization in Economics, from Lucknow University in 1954. He joined as a Research Scholar in the same university and rose to the Research Director's position. He was an academician par excellence and scholar in many domains, having made a lasting imprint on the minds of people; he gradually became an activist in the development sector. He worked with Jayaprakash Narayan in the Association for Voluntary Agencies in Rural Development (AVARD). He was a revered faculty member at the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, IIM(A), along with Prof. Ravi Matthai. He conceived and ran The Rural University project in Jawaja, South Rajasthan, which inspired dozens of IIM(A) graduates to work in rural development.

He was the Founder Secretary and Research Director of Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST), New Delhi. Later, in the mid-70s, he worked as Consultant, Ford Foundation, New Delhi. He was also the Chairman of Centre for Management (CMA), IIM(A), and was instrumental in establishing the Prof. Ravi J. Matthai Centre for Educational Innovation there. He was the Honorary Adviser and Founder of the TATA DHAN Academy in Madurai, which has evolved as a centre of excellence in development education.

He served as a member of many task forces/working groups appointed by the Government of India and Planning Commission in the 1970s such as Whole Village Development, National Commission on Agriculture, Command Area Development and Drought Prone Areas Development.

He had rich and varied experience in institution building. He was a member of the Governing Body of the Indian Institute of Forest Management, Bhopal (1982-94) and IGNOU, New Delhi (1986-87 and 1988-89); Chairman of the Governing Body, Pradan, New Delhi (1988-95), and member of the Board of Trustees, Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST), New Delhi (1994-2000). He was the President of Sampark, Bangalore (1996-2002) and Trustee, Center for Development and Learning CDL, Bangalore.

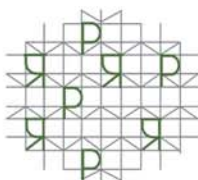
He authored, co-authored and edited several books, monographs and research papers. He had keen interest in development management/education and a soft corner for NGOs in the development sector. He believed in working with a focus on the disadvantaged groups, by enabling development professionals to build people. He passed away in October 2008. He leaves behind a worthy legacy through his rich work and his contributions to the sector.



Pradan is a voluntary organistaion registered under the Societies' Registration Act in Delhi. We work in selected villages in 7 states through small teams based in the field. The focus of our work is to promote and strengthen livelihoods for the rural poor. It involves organising them, enhancing their capabilities, introducing ways to improve their incomes and linking them to banks, markets and other economic services. Pradan comprises professionally trained people motivated to use their knowledge and skills to remove poverty by working directly with the poor. Engrossed in action, we often feel the need to reach out to each other in Pradan as well as those in the wider development fraternity. NewsReach is one of the ways we seek to address this need. It is a forum for sharing our thoughts and a platform to build solidarity and unity of purpose. NewsReach was supported in the past by Sir Dorabji Tata Trust and Ford Foundation.

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