# The struggle for life and light:
## Agragamme and the management functions for human liberation

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## ABSTRACT

Agragamee is the name of a development organization in Orissa which works among the tribals and other deprived castes and classes. Its main area of activity has been the Kashipur Block of the District of Rayagara, which is one of the most backward blocks of India. Now, Agragamee's work covers 556 villages in 9 blocks of eight districts of Orissa. Agragamee has all along emphasised upon empowerment of tribals and other deprived groups and has believed in creating capacity and political awareness in them so that they can fight for themselves. Agragamee has conceived of its role as a partner in this struggle. This article discusses the vision and activities of Agragamee with a specific focus on its discourse on management of social transformation.

Agragamee began in the dream of a young man who was looking for integral development for the tribals of the country. This man is Achyut Das, who after his post-graduation in Mathematics from Utkal University, Bhubaneshwar, had spent some time at SWRC, Tilonia. Before arriving in Kashipur, Das had already learnt from anthropological reports that Kashipur was one of the most backward tribal pockets of the country. Das came to Kashipur in April 1980 and toured the entire Kashipur block which consisted of 482 villages and hamlets. Traveling in this area was itself an arduous task since most of the villages were inaccessible by either road or public transport system and the tribals had enormous fear of the outsiders. During his tour Das saw the abject poverty and misery of the tribals. During our conversation, Das told me that initially the tribals were avoiding him because they took him for one of those officials either from the forest department or the revenue department who periodically came to take away the best that they had: rice, milk, yogurt, etc.

In fact, for centuries, tribals have been exploited by the moneylenders known as *sahukars* and in the recent past by the officials of the State. They controlled the economy and the destiny of the tribals. Over the years, the best land of the tribals has gone to the non-tribals. After independence the political leadership has also been in hands of the exploiters. This was made clear to Das and members of his team by the base line survey that they had carried out of the locality in 1981. Das tells us about this in the interview I had with him:

> The base line survey of 1981 was very clear that we need a political change. Out of the 17 sarpanches 13 were non- tribals. The leadership was in the hands of the non- tribals. The same concentration was also in the economic field: the sahukars were the sarpanches, they were the leaders, they were the contractors. Our response was: these fellows are controlling the entire system. Why not organize people so that they fight on their own?

The base line survey of 1981 provides us a picture of the area which Das and his co-walkers had chosen to work. Out of the total population, 71.3% were the tribals and 18.15% were of scheduled castes origin. On the educational side, the survey indicated that there were very few school buildings and the teachers seldom are in the village. About the picture of employment and production, the report reads:

> The employment pattern here is very irregular. Majority here don't know what is productive employment and, as such, there is hardly any permanent source of employment which was used to be the forest. Well, the forest here has been depleted and degraded beyond imagination. The agriculture is not at all profitable as the quality and shape of land is very poor. The large labour force with more than 50% remains unemployed half of the year. The opportunities in industry and mining are practically absent. The surplus labour has decreased the wage rate and a daily labourer gets as low Rs.3/- whereas the minimum wage declared by the State Government is Rs.6/- There are various kinds of bondage as it offers some security to the working force. The vast labour force is totally unorganised (SWRC, Kashipur 1983: 22).

The report provides us the following glimpse of land alienation and consequent misery among the tribals: It is a fact that due to money lending tribals have mortgaged or sold their land to *sahukars*. Now, despite land reform the best and irrigated land is owned by the *sakuhars*. The land alienation continues because of age old socio-economic compulsions. The tribals are to have much spending on alcohol and other ceremonies such as festivals and marriage. The easiest thing that they can do is to mortgage or sell the land to the moneylender though such transactions are illegal. Our observations show that the tribal has got deep attachment to his land for he has no other alternative but to have a crop once in every two years (ibid: 5)

About agriculture and the cropping pattern, we learn the following about Kashipur from SWRC's baseline survey of 1981:

> The agriculture is primitive and traditional without any application of modern technology. The crop grown are almost rainfed without much of irrigation available. There is strong inclination to grow millets such as maize and ragi though rice is also being grown. There are also pulse crops as well as oilseedsxxx [Kashipur grows] lakhs of rupees worth of oil seeds. Since there is no processing industry excepting a small private oil-mill everything is taken outside and in the process the *sahukars* and tradesmen make a lot of profit. The tribals are never aware of the support price determined by the government. Due to difficulty in transport and storage the producers sell their stuffs without any bargain. One example is that during

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I think mobilization of masses of people has or had, inside, of itself, organization. That is, it is impossible to start mobilizing without organizing. The very process of mobilizing demands organizing by those who are beginning to be mobilized. Secondly, I think that both mobilizing and organizing have in their nature education as something indispensable—that is, education as development of sensibility, of the notion of risk, of confronting some tensions that you have to have in the process xxx In the process of mobilizing, of organizing, you need from time to time stop a little bit with the leaders in the groups in order to think about the space you already walked xxx. A good process of mobilizing and organizing results in learning from the very process and goes beyond.

Paulo Friere in
*Myles Horton and Paulo Friere (1990), We Make the Road By Walking:*
*Conversations on Education and Social Change, p.117*

The more privileged groups, who clamour for further expansion of higher education, are politically much more powerful and better organized in pressing for what they want..To counter this resilient stratification, what is needed is more activism in the political organization of the disadvantaged sections of Indian society

Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen (1995)
*India: Economic Development and Social Opportunity, p.95*

Our management function is not only the management function of providing inputs, giving logistic support, and carrying out socio-economic survey, etc. The managerial function of this process-oriented approach is basically to manage the forces: One is the management of people's organisations and the other is the management of the countervailing forces. The major management challenge is to see that all these forces which are interacting live in harmony and the work continues. You have to take along with you those who are responsible for the success and failure of your organisation. I do not want to put a manager in every village. Let people go through the entire process of management, go through conflict. What we can provide is a network. Management skills have to be developed with the resources within the villages and that resource is very much there.

Achyut Das,
the Director of Agragamee,
*in conversation with the author*

## Introduction

Agragamee means pioneer, somebody who takes the first step forward. Agragamee is the name of a development organisation in Orissa which started its work among the tribals of Kashipur block of Orissa, one of the most backward blocks of India. Agragamee started as a branch of the noted development organisation in the country, the Social Work and Research Center of Tilonia, Rajasthan. In 1987, SWRC, Orissa established its own identity as Agragamee by registering itself as a separate society. Currently Agragamee's work covers 556 villages in 9 blocks of eight districts of Orissa. The present essay describes the vision and activities of Agragamee with a spefific focus on its discourse on management of social transformation.

the season ragi and maize are procured and taken out of Kashipur and same thing is brought during the lean period and sold in double the price (ibid).

It is in this space that Agragamee began its work. Its main objective has been to create a condition so that the tribals who have led a poverty-stricken and exploited life for centuries are able to provide food for themselves and assert their rights. Thus food and voice has been the animating vision of Agragamee. (Menon and Schenk-Sandbergen 1991).

When Agragamee began its work nearly fifteen years ago in its earlier incarnation as SWRC-Orissa, it did not start by offering any big promise to the people of the locality. The workers of Agragamee spent time with the villagers, talked to them, and through this provoked them to think about the condition of their living. In the evening, they used to run the night schools where both the young and the adult of the village joined. This was an occasion for them to discuss with the tribals the problems they face. Through the night school, the workers of Agragamee were able to establish intimate contact with the villagers.

At first, adults in some tribal villages were not enthusiastic about learning alphabets. They said, "We do not want to learn the alphabets. What use has it got for us? Give us something useful." Then the workers of Agragamee asked whether they would be interested to build a check dam in their river. The hesitant tribals immediately agreed. But for this they had to mobilize resource and organize cooperative labour in order to supplement Agragamee's contribution. (Agragamee always stresses that nothing should be given to people for free). But while building the check dam the tribals initially were not able to properly add the actual proportion of cement, and rubbles to the mixture. So, they were interested in learning the alphabets.

## Different Programmes and Activities of Agragamee

Education has been at the cornerstone of Agragamee's work; Agragamee firmly believes that education is the key to awakening the exploited masses for social change and a better quality of life. But by education Agragamee does not simply mean teaching alphabets but creating awareness about the structures of exploitation in which people live at present. Agragamee emphasizes political education and creation of alternative leadership among the tribals.

Non-formal education and innovative education are the two programmes Agragamee carries out in the field of education for which it receives support from both the Central and State governments. The Govt. of India also supports the work of a district resource center in Agragamee which works as a nodal agency for the training of non-formal school teachers in the four new districts which previously constituted the district of Koraput: Koraput, Raygara, Gunupur and Nabarangapur. Recently an all-Orissa resource center for appropriate educational initiatives in the tribal areas has also come up in Agragamee with support from a donor agency called ACTION AID. It is known as *Sikha Sandhana*.

For the opening of schools in the villages Agragamee has all along emphasized the following:

a)  The village should construct the school buildings;

b)  It would only provide a teacher and two lanterns. The slates etc. would be given by the villagers;

c)  The teachers are selected from the locality and preferably from the village itself; and

d)  The school should be open to everybody so as to make mass-literacy visible.

Agragamee has used these schools as an open forum not only for literacy or awareness building but also for village level planning. In fact, most of the programmes of Agragamee are undertaken through these non-formal schools.

Agragamee has, from its inception, also worked in the field of irrigation, food security, agricultural development and land development among the tribals. *Kutumba Panthi* or the village grain bank is probably the first thought-out scheme of Agragamee to enable tribals to break the cycle of poverty, starvation, debt and bondage.[1] Under the Agragamee grain bank scheme people contribute rice, millet, and other agricultural produce during the harvest season. Agragamee provides a matching contribution to this collection. During the lean season, the needy people of the village borrow rice

or millet from this collection at a rate of interest fixed by the village committee, which is a people's organisation in the village created with the initiative of Agragamee. Grain banks work as revolving funds which have the potential to grow every year, thereby ensuring food security to the village.

This programme of Agragamee is now being replicated on a much wider scale with the collaborative effort of the Panchayat, Raj Department of Govt. of Orissa, UNICEF, and development organisations like Agragamee. Agragamee's programme of *Kutumba Panthi* has given rise to the Orissa Household Food Security Project which works in four blocks of Orissa namely Kashipur and Dasmantpur blocks of old Koraput district and Lanjiguda (of Kalahandi) and Tureikela (of Bolangir district). In Kashipur block, Agragamee is the executing development organisation for this programme and it now works in 207 villages (Agragamee 1994). As part of the work for this project, there are animators who work with villagers, teaching them how to manage their grain banks, hygiene, sanitation needs, and provide emergency medical information such as the use of ORS during diarrhea.

Irrigation, land development, and enhancing agricultural productivity has been yet another important area of Agragamee's work with the tribals of Kashipur and Orissa. Agragamee builds cross bunds, check dams, etc. with the active participation of the people. These help tribals to cultivate their fields lying in the highland areas. Agragamee also works on land development for the tribals. Agragamee's report of 1982-83 describes one such effort for us:

> The village Rastuguda in Mandibisi Gram Panchayat is our contact village. In course of the meetings and contacts, it was found that the lands of the villagers were not bunded or cleared. Consequently, it was not possible to preserve water on the lands, which usually affected the yield of the crop. There is a water channel on the higher level. It was found that bunding and terracing could irrigate the land easily. A number of meetings and discussions was held to convince them its usefulness. Then a target group consisting of five poorest tribal farmers in the village was selected for assistance. Their lands were surveyed and a comprehensive plan was chalked out. These five farmers worked as a group to develop each other's land. They were paid Rs.800/- on daily wage basis by us. Ten acres of land of these people were developed in the process. As far as 160 man days were created besides bringing a sense of awakening among the villagers as a whole. The programme was participated and supervised by our members. The land development subsequently led to a number of village activities such as (a) formation of village fund, (b) adoption of vegetable crops, and (c) exposure to market and other village level development. Now the village has applied to the B.D.O. for the construction of a check dam. They have also stopped money lending in the village.

Along with land development, Agragamee also stresses crop- planning. Its crop planning program involves initiating the tribals in multiple-cropping practices, adopting high yielding varieties (H.Y.V.), switching over to new crops and utilizing fertilizers and chemicals. In fact, Agragamee has enabled the tribals to grow vegetables. It has established a vegetable growers marketing co-operative society to help them get a better price for their produce.

Agragamee believes that "training and meetings for the target group are important in the entire process of planned intervention" (SWRC 1982-83). Agragamee regularly conducts training and demonstration programmes for the farmers of the locality. With the establishment of Agragamee's Agro Service Center at Mallijharan, such educational programme has become much more integral and systematic part of Agragamee's activities. The center has been established with support from an international donor agency named German Agro Action.

Micro watershed project is another project of Agragamee for multi-dimensional development of land and its equitable distribution among people. In high land areas, it develops what is called *dangar land*, which belongs to the revenue department of the State. Agragamee currently works on two watersheds it has built in Tadapei and Bundel. After the watershed is fully developed, land entitlement would be given to the needy and landless tribals through the village committees. Through the work of watershed, Agragamee seeks to advance the following policy changes for tribal development:

1. The Government has to accept the fact that each tribal village can be visualised as a micro-watershed;
2. Each micro-watershed is to be defined from specific agro-climatic conditions;
3. All the resources meant for development of tribals should be mobilised for the watershed;

4.  Land entitlement should be ensured;

5.  Training of the tribal beneficiaries in watershed development and agroforestry has to be taken up; and

6.  Market network is to be established so that agricultural produce gets remunerative price (Das : 17)

People's mobilisation for fighting for issues of rights and livelihoods has been one of the consistent activities of Agragamee. From the beginning, it has taken up issues like bonded labour and payment of minimum wage to the labourers. During the initial years, it organised labourers to demand minimum wage from the contractors. It brought a case to the notice of the administration when workers in three villages— Regnasil, Tarli and Angar—were not given their due minimum wage by a contractor and after nearly a year of fight they finally got their due. It also worked with people of a village called Gotiguda where mining labourers were getting only Rs.3/- per day; they got Rs.5/- per day after Agragamee's intervention. When the State of Orissa under the chief ministership of Biju Patnaik declared Rs.25/- as minimum wage Agragamee mobilised people to demand for the same. In one case, because of Agragamee's intervention, a government department had to reimburse lakhs of rupees to the labourers who were underpaid even after this declaration of minimum wage.

But now instead of demanding for minimum wage from either government departments or the private contractors people have begun to take up contract for development work themselves. · Village committees established with the joint initiative of people and Agragamee have been successfully bidding for contract for work in their areas. Funds received for this stay in a joint account book in the name of two persons nominated by the village committee.

In the same way, they also manage the public distribution system (PDS). Earlier the dealership for fair price shop was in the hands of the money-lenders. Now in a majority of villages in Kashipur the dealership for fair price shops is in the hands of the village committees. General body members of a cluster of villages select a person of competence and license is given to this person by the civil supplies authority to run the PDS in a locality. This public distribution center is managed by a committee formed in a general meeting of the members of the households of the center, a committee in which every participating village has inevitably its representation. "The committee sits every month and discusses the inflow and outflow of stock, pricing, accounts, profit and loss, etc. The price is fixed by the committee taking into consideration the expenditure incurred on different heads. The committee is accountable before the General Body. To manage the public distribution center efficiently, Agragamee conducts periodical training programme for the committee members, on preparation of records, managing accounts and on other managerial skills" (Agragamee 1994: 37-38).

Agragamee's annual report of 1993-94 also tells us how the members of one such center at Sunger are planning to register a formal society called Anchalik Lokashakti, Sunger to look into the developmental activities of the area. Over a period of six years they have generated a capital of Rs.36,000/-. Agragamee feels that their self-managed systems are "an attempt to eliminate the middlemen / traders in the process of supply of essential commodities" (ibid: 38).

Ghasi Majhi of the village Haliasahi of Mandibishi Grampanchayat is one such dealer. People of the surrounding villages have nominated him to be the dealer of their fair price shop. Until recently he was working as a bonded labourer in the house of the village "king". But he has been released and rehabilitated as a result of the efforts of Agragamee. In fact, the entire village of Haliasahi until recently consisted of bonded labourers and all of them have been released and rehabilitated. When they pressed their masters for their release they were threatened with eviction from their house sites. But they were successful in staying this move (see below). Now the village of Haliasahi has purchased a plot of land in the name of the whole village. Ghasi also has purchased some land for himself.

Arjun Behera, the Agragamee worker who has worked with people like Ghasi in this locality for years told me that initially Ghasi was afraid of the workers of Agragamee. He could not believe that he would wrest freedom one day. Besides, he was a drunkard. But now though he has not totally left drinking (partly because of the fact that he has been chosen as *gauntia* (headman) by people of eight to ten villages where it is customary for him to accept offer of drink in ceremonious occasions) his drinking has certainly come down a lot because of his children who threatened him that if he drank heavily they would report it to "Arjun Angya" (Arjun Sir). On our way back from Haliasahi in that rainy night Behera told me near a flowing stream that he wants to change the name of this village from *Haliasahi* to *Jagabalia Sahi*.[2]

Women's mobilisation now constitutes yet another important activity of Agragamee. Initially, Agragamee had not paid enough attention to women's development programmes. But with the joining of Vidhya Das, a sympathetic analyst of women's problems and a passionate activist, Agragamee speeded up its work in this front. (It must be noted here that Vidhya Das is Achyut Das's wife and she was working at SWRC, Tilonia before joining Agragamee). Agragamee has taken up various activities for the development of tribal women. It provides leadership training to them and helps in the establishment of *Mahila Mandals*. One such *Mahila Mandal* is *Mandibishi Mahila Mandal* in Mandibishi panchayat of Kashipur block. Mandibishi Mahila Mandal was activated by the assurance of the Biju Patnaik Government in Orissa that it would grant licenses to registered women's societies / groups for collection and marketing of minor forest produce (MFP). It organised the women of the locality and collected broomsticks from them. Instead of selling it to the contractors of the Orissa Tribal Development Corporation (OTDC) they had plans to process the broomsticks into brooms and sell these themselves. The women of many villages of Mandibishi had stored their broomstick stock in the community storage room of Haliasahi. They were waiting for the formal license for purchase and processing of minor forest produces. But one evening, the officials of the OTDC along with representatives of forest department and police descended on their village. They forcibly took away the 173 quintals of broomsticks that they had painstakingly collected for months, abusing verbally and physically the leaders of the Mahila Mandal. But this has not dampened the valiant spirit of women. They filed court cases against the concerned officials for manhandling them and forcibly taking away their stock. As a result they have now received their licenses and have succeeded in getting their seized materials back.

During my visit to Mandibishi, I met Lakalma, Gunjulima, and other women of the locality. They told me about their determination to fight for their rights and dream of a new life by processing their produces locally and selling these (see, Giri 1995). In this regard, Vidhya Das also told me during our interview that Agragamee wants local products to be processed locally so that there is a value addition. Agragamee is now taking up tumeric processing and market it through the women's groups. Agragamee has also similar plans for the processing of *Alasi,* an oil seed grown in the locality.

Agragamee has also helped in the formation of credit societies among women. About this Vidhya Das says: "We have regular meetings of the contributing members. They say that if we can pay money lenders so much let us fix a slightly higher rate of interest for ourselves so that our money can grow faster. After all, everybody does not have the advantage of borrowing. Those who get the advantage should, at least, pay a reasonable amount of interest. This is a logic developed by women themselves." Vidhya Das also told me that in small ways women have been supported by Agragamee for collective vegetable production. Women work on a piece of land they leased for this purpose. For this, Agragamee supplies seeds free of charge in the first year and in the second year this supply is provided through an interest-free loan. In some of the villages, collective vegetable production has given income to women so that they use it as a credit fund. Now Agragamee is also encouraging women to have their credit network at the panchayat level.

Agragamee has also supported tribal women in the locality in their fight against alcoholism. The tribal women like Sumoni Jhodia, Andhari Majhi, and Sabal Majhi have led the campaign for banning liquor and it is because of their struggle that the then Chief Minister of Orissa, Biju Patnaik, had ordered total prohibition in the State. Women leaders such as Sumoni Jhodia have also brought survival issues to the forefront in the planning for agricultural development in the locality. A few years ago when the Government was planning to start coffee plantation in the high lands, Sumoni reasoned with the district collector not to do this so since the local people urgently need food crops, not coffee. She also argued that the tribals could not control the coffee plantation system and eventually they would become labourers in a huge profit-making machine. The Government finally agreed to the women's demands and started alternative programmes of agro forestry in Kashipur.

Agragamee's recent work on women's development has provided new momentum to its striving for a life of dignity for the tribals. It has to be noted that this emphasis has been the product of a lot of soul-searching. As Vidhya Das further tells us:

> We found that the leadership which we were trying to initiate was not coming about because the counter-organization to the process which we were initiating was very strong. The male leaders we were identifying were being easily captured by other elements within the social milieu of Kashipur. Animators were doing good work in the limited environment of their village but when they had to work on larger development issues they were not able to take up the challenge. So, Agragamee had a lot of questioning within itself as to why this is so and why is it that the issue-based activism that we had taken up is not catching roots in these areas. Then we thought that for a community which has always been on the margins of survival

the easiest option has always been tempting. Physically people here are so weak! But among the women it is different. Women have always found strength in their group, in doing things collectively. So, whenever you ask them to take up some responsibility they do it in a collective way. Of course, it takes a lot of time to convince them but once the conviction is there the strength of the conviction is so tremendous that they cannot be easily let aside. So, I argue that whatever issues we take up let these be taken up under the women's leadership.

Vidhya Das illustrates her confidence with examples. She tells us that three years ago, "it was mainly the men's committee which was taking up village level work." "But in a majority of cases corruption came in. But now women's committees are taking up the village level work and the problem of corruption is vanishing." For her, "it is because women are very careful with their money. They just will not tolerate someone pointing fingers at them because the group feeling is very strong. Unlike men, when women go to the office of Block Development Office they don't go alone. So they cannot be easily tempted to corrupt practices."

Training and capacity-building is yet another important dimension of Agragamee's exercise in social intervention. For Agragamee, development process has to emphasize "development of human resources" and it must aim at developing "the potential and managerial skill of the people by imparting training on various trades" (Agragamee 1994: 22). It provides training to village committee members on the following: the policies and provisions of the government schemes and their implementation through village committee; Panchayat Raj system; political education, social analysis, management of village funds (Kutumba Panthi, Management of Public Distribution System); forest protection and forest laws; common property resources and their utilisation; soil and water management and bio-farming. Agragamee also provides regular training to its animators. It must be noted here that the animators are the paid staff of Agragamee who play a key role in the implementation of its various projects. Very often an animator has to look after two to three villages. Agragamee also carries out training programmes for youth club and Mahila Mandal members.

## Some Critical Turns in the History of Agragamee

Agragamee had a modest beginning in May 1981 with support from SWRC, Tilonia. Agragamee had its first external support from HIVOS, a Dutch donor agency, which was provided for a year. After it the organisation was faced with severe financial problems as it took sometime to submit a follow-up proposal. Though an interim proposal was approved by the Bread for the World of Germany the actual support reached it around the December end of 1982. The group was in severe financial crisis— none of the staff members took salaries for 4 months and one of its friends supported the group by mortgaging his wife's gold.

Another critical moment came when the group established its independent identity as Agragamee, separate from that of SWRC, Tilonia in 1987. In keeping with the Government of India regulations under the Foreign Currency Regulation Act (FCRA), the foreign currency number of SWRC, Orissa, which allows for receipt of foreign funds was canceled. This led to serious financial difficulty for the organisation. Knowing the need of his co-workers and because of his inability to provide regular salary to them Achyut Das advised them to explore possibilities for jobs in better endowed organisations. He also offered them help in finding well-paying jobs. But none left the group. Finally the group decided that all of them would take some Rs.500/- per month till their financial situation improves. When Agragamee got its own foreign currency number, it paid back all these arrears. Difficult moments like this has tested the sincerity and determination of the members of the Agragamee team and have gone a long way in creating solidarity.

Another turning point in Agragamee's history is the arrival of the IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development)- assisted Orissa Tribal Development Project in Kashipur in April 1988. Agragamee was requested by the Govt. of Orissa to be involved with this project and was entrusted with the task of human resources development for this project. But when Agragamee supported people's demand that development work should be given to the village committees, not to the private contractors, there was attack on Agragamee by the vested interests. It complicated Agragamee's operations in the villages, finally forcing Agragamee to withdraw from this project.

The encounter with IFAD was a critical turn in the history of Agragamee not because it had to return the already sanctioned grant to IFAD but because of its perception that IFAD continues to systematically destroy the ethos of developmental action as mutual responsibility that Agragamee had cultivated over the years. Basic to Agragamee's

intervention is the fact that nothing should be given free. When Agragamee takes up any action for people's development—whether it is the construction of a check dam or a school building—it insists that people should contribute to these activities. For Agragamee, this helps in creating awareness and solidarity among people. But in the IFAD sponsored activities, huge funds are dumped for building roads and bridges without any clause for participation. This creates a different mind-set within people which is difficult to change.

It is said that when adversity comes it does not come alone; it comes with all its friends. Now Agragamee's problems have been aggravated because of the start of mining operations in Kashipur. In 1994, this work was to begin near Sunger. But people of the locality immediately started resistance to the proposed mining operations. In such a critical juncture, Agragamee feels that it has a moral responsibility to be on the side of the people. People of the locality apprehend that if mining takes place they will be evicted from their own homeland. It will also worsen their economic prospect since after the loss of land and homestead the only job that is in store for is that of unskilled labourers. They know only too well the fate of oustees of other similar projects. In fact, Rengali is not very far from their locality where the oustees from the Indravati hydro- electric project are still struggling for basic needs even after twenty years of their eviction. Agragamee runs an educational and rehabilitation programme for these oustees as well.

## The Management Functions for Human Liberation

We are coming to the management issues in the functioning and management of Agragamee as a development organisation belatedly. The IRMA-sponsored collaborative study on management of development organisations has identified the following management-related questions to be asked in the context of our case in hand: mission, goal, and objective of the organisation; organisation development (OD) efforts within the organisation; design, function, and performance of the organisation; and the logic of its management of task environment which consists of such important categories of actors as the resource providers (the government, donor agencies, and the volunteers), the target group, and the commensals (other development organisations) (IRMA 1994). I present below aspects of Agragamee's discourse and practice in the above fields of management.

## Understanding Agragamee's Vision:
## A Critique of the Goal-Directed
## Approach in the Modern Management Discourse

Agragamee stressest that it does not have a clear-cut goal but has a vision. This vision is to enable the tribals to realize their potential as human beings, to awaken the humanity within them so that they can live with dignity. The tribals have been oppressed for centuries and despite the post-independence rhetorics of the government about their all-round development their basic rights to a life of dignity have been systematically denied. Agragamee's vision is to enable the tribals to fight for their life and rights. However, it does not want to be the eternal spokesperson for their causes but seeks to create capability within the tribals so that Agragamee becomes redundant soon. Achyut Das as well as many of his colleagues urge that in understanding Agragamee its vision needs to be understood. Of course, embodiment of this vision in the life of the actors as well as the community where activism is at work requires formulation of short-term as well as long-term goals. It requires formulation of projects with clear-cut goals which have a time-bound mandate as well. The different projects described above have been driven by specific goals. But Agragamee stresses that an organisation should not be characterized by its goal but by its animating vision. The actors of Agragamee state that implementation of several income-generating activities can be goal of an organisation; it cannot be its vision. Its vision has to be human liberation— liberation of human beings from existing structures of exploitation and realization of their freedom. As Anil Pradhan, one of the animating workers of Agragamee, says its goal is not to teach tribals how to make pickles but to enable them to realize their freedom.

Because of the sheer deprivation of people, Agragamee instinctively feels that its goal is to provide the needy people something. For Agragamee, when one sees malnourished children and anemic adults one cannot articulate one's goal excepting in terms of welfare. As Achyut Das says, "It has to be a service- oriented organisation because of subsistent needs. But at the same time, because of the particular development orientation that Agragamee has chosen for itself it is not ready only to be a service organisation. This dilemma has been right from the beginning."

Along with this and parallel to the distinction between goal and vision is its distinction between project-oriented approach and issue-oriented approach. As Achyut Das says: "I don't say that Agragamee has an overall goal because when we began we self- consciously tried not to have a project-oriented approach. Our immediate goal was to make people understand the process of money lending and mobilize people to fight against it."

For Das, "there can be another dimension to this. Once you state a goal you also mobilize your resources accordingly. Then our entire work becomes mechanical." In case of Agragamee, Das says, "our planning has been creative and issue-based. We add creative variation to whatever programmes we execute, for instance, insisting on the participation of people in the programme that we execute on behalf of the government." For Agragamee, understanding the management of a development organisation like it has to have a process-oriented approach, realizing that the managerial dimension of a process-oriented approach is basically the management of different forces — forces of change as well as the countervailing forces which resist changes.

In maintaining the distinction between vision and goal, Agragamee seeks to celebrate the open-endedness of its goal. When Agragamee came to Kashipur in the vision and practice of only a few young men fourteen years ago it had no clear-cut goal before itself. It had only a lot of enthusiasm. It did not promise tribals a heavenly world overnight either. As it worked with the tribals they jointly identified areas of action which they can undertake. In fact, it is the tribals, i.e., the target group who have continuously shown the organisation new ways in its wanderings and explorations.

Professor Chitta Ranjan Das (from now onwards C.R.Das), the President of Agragamee and an engaging experimenter of alternative education and alternative relationships, takes this distinction between vision and goal into new heights. In his discussion with the workers of Agragamee during its last annual meeting in September 1995, C.R. Das emphatically stated that a goal which is not capable of change along with the change of time and the march of one's life is not worth calling a goal. C.R. Das also asked them probing questions about their self- definition and identity. For Das if to be an Agragamee worker means to be a pioneer then where are they pioneers, and in which society are they so? In his words:

Are we pioneers in the society we have come from? But we didn't stay in that society. Instead we have come to these highlands to solve problems here. Then are we pioneers in this society? We are not and we cannot be because we do not come from this society. We ourselves are not tribals. If we were all born here then we would have related to problems here as our problems.

We have to be clear about what we are and our commitments. The society of which we are pioneers— Agragamees—is yet to be; it is a society which exists no where but is going to be, a society whose hour has come. We are Agragamee in the dream of another society and in seeking to realize this. It It is a society where man recognises another human being as human being. There is no model of this society; it is a society that might be and might not be. Do not think that you have come here to emancipate the tribals. No matter how many watershed we build, how many grain banks we help to form we will not be able to totally eliminate their poverty but we can certainly help them realize themselves as human beings and let this be done through education. Let education be at the root of all our strivings.

C.R. Das and Achyut Das seek to dissolve the familiar dichotomy between self-interest and altruism that usually characterize the formulation of goal and formation of identity in case of voluntary organisations. A voluntary organisation is not there only to save the world and emancipate all the downtrodden from the shackles of oppression. In fact, the creativity of a voluntary organisation lies in the creativity of its workers whom C.R. Das, building upon Gandhi, calls Rachanatmaka Karmi. Therefore, the goal of an organisation which reflects its broader vision of human liberation must be dear to its members. It must translate itself to self-enriching goals and practices on the part of the actors.

It is for this reason that the vision of a development organisation cannot be discussed without at the same time understanding the life-goal and aspiration of its members. The IRMA collaborative framework on the study of management of development organisations puts the goals of an organisation in one box and the volunteers in another box of resource providers. The IRMA model of management inquiry into this question has looked at volunteers only as resource providers and paid employees of an organisation who subsidize its costs of operation. But in order to understand the functioning of development organisations which are animated by a vision of human liberation, we have to understand the self-formation of the employees of an organisation who look at their work differently, different from the hegemonic logic of what Roberto

M Unger (1987) calls work and exchange. We have to understand the ways employees of an organisation identify themselves.

It is undoubtedly true that the employees of Agragamee get paid. But they get paid only Rs.1200/- per month and the maximum salary paid to an Agragamee staff is Rs.1500/. This is also the salary of the director.[3] The employees of Agragamee say that they have come here not just for earning money. They continue to work with Agragamee despite consistent bites of malaria and difficulty in work environment because they have tremendous joy in seeing joy in the face of fellow human beings such as Ghasi Majhi.

An activist is what comes closest to the self-identification of the workers of Agragamee. They do not look at themselves as mere development workers but primarily as activists. For the workers of Agragamee, it is essential that the activism of a development organisation must be physically demonstrated in the life-style of its members. The target groups of all most all development organisations live in conditions of extreme physical deprivation and the life-style of the managers and employees of these organisations must reflect this. In this regard, Achyut Das tells us, "We could gain the trust of the tribals because we could physically demonstrate our activism. When we came here we did not have any vehicle. We used to walk miles—15-20 miles, at the least—to reach villages. After such long walks we also did not accept food in their households. We cooked our own food." In fact, during the last annual meeting Das told his co-workers: "If Agragamee has anything to be proud of then it is its activism. Let all our pride be evaluated in the yard stick of our activism."

## Organisational Design and the Case of Agragamee

From Agragamee's discourse on goal and vision for human liberation when we come to the question of organisational design we confront the question — whether the tasks and responsibilities of the development organisation are allocated in accordance with the requirements of its goal-objective strategy and whether the design of Agragamee has any relation to its stated goal and strategy (IRMA 1994). Regarding the first question, Agragamee has a mixed approach. It believes that specific allocation of tasks and responsibilities will create specialised compartments within the organisation and would obstruct the spontaneous flow of thoughts and creative sharing of responsibility. So, for the major part of its existence Agragamee has emphasized collective responsibility and flexibility towards change of positions and tasks. But as Agragamee has grown, it has also felt the need for specific allocation of tasks and responsibilities. For instance, in the last general body meeting specific task has been allotted to different workers who will head different programmes and activities. But some workers resisted this move by arguing that such specific allocation might create inflexible orthodoxies within the organisation and do away with the spirit of spontaneous creativity and collective responsibility.

How is the design of Agragamee related to its goal and strategy? Agragamee's organisational design, it states, reflects its wider vision. Its organizational structure gives an image of anti-hierarchical stance within the organisation. The reality and its perception is, of course, different about which we will discuss at great length when we come to discuss the internal management within Agragamee and its evaluations — self as well as external. Agragamee's salary structure does not permit large differentiation: it having only two slabs—Rs.1200/- and Rs.1500/-. This salary structure helps in making all the workers feel that all of them are partners in struggles. It supposedly sends a message that there is no boss and no subordinate in this struggle.

Another aspect of Agragamee's organisational design which reflects its vision of human liberation is its emphasis upon decentralisation. For Agragamee, the struggle for life and light must necessarily be a decentralised process. It believes that concentration of power not only in the hands of the State but also in the hands of organisations which work at the grass roots is inimical to the people's quest for freedom. Decentralisation has become another fashionable label in the whole semantics of contemporary liberation. But the current discourse of decentralisation merely points to the need for devolution of power from the center, it does not have any programme for restructuring the center and creating centers of autonomous self-organisation at multiple levels of society (see, Giri 1994a; Unger 1987). In this context, Agragamee stresses decentralization as a process of creation of autonomy and self-organisation at different levels of society. Agragamee thinks that in the development dynamics that has been unleashed in our country for the last fifty years it is the organisations which have become more powerful at the expense of the people. Agragamee identifies its goal as to the reverse this trend so that ultimately people become powerful.

Agragamee strives to embody the principle of decentralisation in its organisational design and functioning. Agragamee has different field centers within Kashipur and has different projects in other districts of Orissa. These centers and projects are encouraged to be autonomous. In fact, Agragamee self consciously tries to turn its field projects into independent organisations.

The question of centralization and decentralisation in the study of a development organisation is also related to the inheritance and a growth of the second line of leadership. How is this question taken up in Agragamee? The director of Agragamee says that he now genuinely wants to hand over the leadership of the organisation to the local tribals. After having established an adequate infrastructure for development work and having created a mobilizational basis for developmental action, Das wants to withdraw. But at present he is not confident that indigenous leadership is sufficiently well developed to take up this task. Das is also interested in developing a second line of leadership within the group. He says that he does not want to be the master of their group for ever.

Such an attitude of the top man in the organisation and his capacity for withdrawal has been a source of encouragement to the young workers. They come to Agragamee for learning and after a while they form their own independent organisation with active support from the director. Sudhanshu Dalal is one such young activist of Agragamee who has just started an organisation at Phulbani named BARD. But Dalal says that others in the organisation were jealous of him.

Regarding the question of inheritance now there is a clear indication that after Achyut Das his wife Vidhya is not going to take up his place. On both the question of inheritance and second line leadership, the following statement of Achyut Das provides us a lot of insights: Unlike the Gandhians we don't want to build an ashram and be its prisoner. I must be in a position to give a deadline that by this and this day we must quit and that day is not very far. May be I will be here but not within this structure. This structure has some limitations which I have realized. It is not going to initiate radical social transformations in a time-bound way. The system is not going to be totally identified by the people. They can't be owned by people. If people don't come up you can't sustain it by leadership from outside. That way I see the danger of my continuation where leadership will be always from outside.

Along with the issue of centralisation, professionalism also poses an important question. One important research question in this area is, "whether the development organisations need and want professionally trained manpower? Whether the design of these organisations is adequate to accommodate professional inputs?" (IRMA 1994: 24). Agragamee needs and wants professionally trained manpower especially as it is expanding its activities and as it takes up activities like watershed management which requires more technical collaboration. But hiring professionals implies payment of higher salary to them than paid to the workers which is dangerous in the long run, destroying its organisational structure which is based on equal salary. To combine this challenge of simultaneously meeting the need of professional input and maintaining an organisational design based upon equality and dignity Agragamee has devised some creative strategies. It has been instrumental in the formation of groups such as Orissa Professional Development Consultants (OPDC), Rayagara and Sikhya Sandhana, Bhubaneshwar. Those who work in these organisations have professional training on educational and technical matters and they offer their services to Agragamee. They get their salaries from these organisations but carry the spirit of Agragamee. In other cases, Agragamee hires the services of professionals and pays them out of specific project grants. One such instance is the deployment of the services of professionals of a Delhi-based consultancy agency named TARU for studying the environmental impact of mining in the locality. For this Agragamee has managed a special grant from the donor agency HIVOS.

## Functioning of the Organisation

Planning for manpower is an important question in the research on management of development organisation. How does Agragamee plan for its manpower? How does it inculcate its values in the new entrants of the organisation? Does it make any effort to maintain the moral of the team?

Usually Agragamee does not advertise for its position and those who join Agragamee do so having heard about it from some of its friends. Sometimes friends of Agragamee within the academy and in the other fields recommend their students and other acquaintances to Agragamee. Thus recommenders play an important role in Agragamee's recruitment

process. Professor Jatin Nayak of Sambalpur University is one such. He recommends his students to Agragamee. One of his students currently heads Agragamee's educational unit.

Regarding the process of acculturation into Agragamee, it works in many ways. Of course the first process of acculturation is the work itself. To work in remote areas of Kashipur where many of these villages are inaccessible by road requires a great deal of determination and courage. The first six months become a period of testing for the newcomers. Those who cannot withstand such difficult work environment leave Agragamee. The new entrants also work under the apprenticeship of the old timers in the first six months.

Agragamee does maintain sustained effort to maintain the moral of the team by engaging its workers in regular self- evaluations (More about this when we discuss the whole evaluative process at work in Agragamee). In this regard, C.R. Das plays the role of a perennial gadfly. He continuously challenges Agragamee workers to rise upto the heights of growth awaiting upon them individually as well as collectively. For instance, Das challenges them:

Let whatever activities we are carrying out continue! But let us also take up programmes which open their eyes. Is it the work of our night school to teach a,b,c? Do our schools have the same goals as Ashram schools? Do we give them anything after they learn the alphabets. We are dealing with the tribals and tribals are there all over the world. Why can't we write books on the tribal problems and tribal folk-cultures and send it every month to the students of our school? It would be all the more better if we write these in the language of tribals instead of only in our language, i.e. Oriya.

Another issue with regard to the functioning of organisations is the question regarding their choice of activities. How activities are chosen within Agragamee? When it began, Agragamee had not gone with any predetermined set of activities. Open-ended interaction with people was its only activity. Its intimate relationship with people led them to share their problems with Agragamee which it has striven to solve as a partner. In one case, the people of a village were not interested in starting a night school. They wanted Agragamee to help build a check dam. But as discussed above through the building of a check dam they learnt the significance of learning alphabets and numbers. But when Agragamee has grown bigger one does not know to what extent people have influenced the choice of programmes adopted by Agragamee. Consider, for instance, Agragamee's withdrawal from IFAD and its adoption and implementation of Orissa Household Food Security Project. Thus in order to answer the question, "whether there is any 'actual' (not just stated), involvement of the target group in the selection of activities," it requires detailed investigation which has not been possible in my present research engagements.

A related issue here is the question of a wide range of activities that a development organisation takes upon itself. In this regard, scholars of such organisations tell us that most often such activities are taken up not to fulfill the mission of the organisation but to fulfill its need for legitimacy and social approval. How does Agragamee fare vis-a-vis such problems? Agragamee has taken up multiple activities. But more than its multiplicity of activities what strikes one is its enormous spatial spread, now working in eight districts of Orissa. Some workers of Agragamee feel that it has failed to systematically pursue follow-up programmes. But whether this lack of follow up is actually there or not and whether this is due to Agragamee's spatial spread and multiplicity of activities remains to be investigated in further research.

While establishing one's legitimacy is a motive in case of many development organisations spreading themselves into a wide- range of activities, Agragamee is concerned with the question of credibility. Agragamee seeks to be a credible champion of the tribal cause in Orissa for which it feels a strong need for a much wider basis. It is perhaps for this reason that Agragamee works in eight districts of Orissa.

## Management of the Internal Environment

Discussion with the leaders of Agragamee on this issue begins with their reaction to two issues that many external evaluations have pointed out: one that its proportion of women workers in the staff is not adequate and the other is that crucial decisions in this organisation are carried out by a core team. For instance, during our conversation with Vidhya Das on this issue, she began with the following statements:

a) whether the internal structure is democratic or undemocratic is irrelevant so far as it fulfills a mission;

b) It is of less importance to look at Agragamee's structure per se rather than its work and relevance

Similar was also the reaction of Achyut Das. Regarding the lack of 50% of female staff in the organisation, Das says that because of its work in remote, inaccessible, and malaria-prone area, it is not easy for Agragamee to get single women. But he feels that now the situation is changing because more and more women are willing to join it because of the unemployment problem for educated women in Orissa. It, however, encourages husbands and wives to work together. At the same time, Das tells us that since the continuity of single women after their marriage is always a question, the organisation is hesitant to invest in them. Agragamee feels that it is always a right thing to invest in the local tribal women who are eventually going to be the leaders. He urges us to understand that even if Agragamee does not have many women workers "still women's issues have been taken very strongly in Agragamee."

Regarding the process of decision-making within the organisation Das says that major policy decisions are taken in the general body meeting with the involvement of all the workers while the administrative decisions on which it is not possible to consult everybody are taken by a small group. The broad policy frameworks like the salary structure, the kind of activities to be taken up, etc., are decided by everybody. But issues like firing and hiring of a person are decided by a small group. Once the policy framework is decided it is rigorously followed and all the administrative decisions are as per the policy decision. To my question how the administrative decision-making is perceived by the staff, Achyut Das said that it could be either autocratic or democratic.

At the same time, Achyut Das shares with us some of his dilemmas in managing the internal environment of Agragamee. First, people work for a salary which is meager. Given the kind of problems workers with lower middle-class socio-economic backgrounds have, this appears to be unfair, though one is not convinced of their capacities to manage things in the best possible manner. The lack of professionalism among the workers makes it difficult to manage the entire process. The intellectual gap between actors at different levels—for instance, between the field staff and the tribals and that between the staff and the core Agragamee team—constitutes yet another challenge for effective management. For Das, this lack of professionalism makes it difficult to decentralize the whole operation. Thus despite decentralisation, there is still dependency on the core group for decision-making and management.

Achyut Das makes it clear that this dilemma is a direct product of the contradiction that exists in Agragamee's structure and sentiment, i.e., the existence of a mixture of radicalism and professionalism. In his words:

> We are neither a radical group nor a professional social service group. If we were a radical social action group, we would not have been able to build this infrastructure. At the same time, we don't want to build huge infrastructure because we believe it will corrupt us. But we can not dispense with the need for professionalism in our management and functioning either.

Another aspect of Agragamee's internal environment that strikes immediately an observer is the issue of health management. The campus of Agragamee at Kashipur suffers from lack of systematic attention to hygiene and cleanliness. One sees a lot of dirt around. It seems Agragamee does not have any systematic and efficient mechanism for garbage collection, sweeping and waste disposal in its campus. A related issue is the consciousness regarding these on the part of Agragamee workers. For instance, Agragamee has issued notice to all its workers that they should use mosquito-net everyday without fail to protect themselves from malaria. But some field staff seem not to be very serious about this.

## The Question of Performance

Agragamee's perspective on the measurement of performance of a development organisation is in line with the prevalent view that there are considerable difficulties "in measurement of total output of the non-profit development organisations." Agragamee pleads for carrying out a social cost-benefit analysis of its activities and impacts, for instance, finding out how much money-lending has been reduced by the introduction of grain banks? In Achyut Das's words:

> Suppose you have constructed a water harvesting structure then what is its social relevance? Now women's groups in our locality have become very active but we have not spent huge amounts of money for this. How do we carry out the social cost-benefit analysis of our education programme? One way to do this is to find out how many people we have taught. The other way is to find out the social cost: what is the enhancement in social relevance of a person now that he has become literate and can resist a particular process which is wrong?

The question of performance of an organisation is intimately tied to the question of its evaluation. Evaluation of its activity is a regular feature of Agragamee. There is both internal as well as external evaluation conducted on Agragamee.

## Internal Evaluation

Agragamee had carried out its first self-evaluation in 1984 (see appendix for the criteria for self-evaluation it had used). The recent internal evaluation of Agragamee and its affiliated organisations was conducted during October 1994 to February 1995. Agragamee had engaged the services of three outsiders — one management consultant, one social activist, and one academician - - who are familiar with its strivings in this evaluation process. Terms of reference (TOR) for this evaluative exercise was prepared in a three days workshop of staff members, animators, facilitators of the evaluation and others. This evaluation found the following on the following aspects of Agragamee:

### (a) On its aims and objectives

i) The evaluation felt that while a substantial number of people in the target population are well aware of the aims and objectives of Agragamee, some others think of the "organisation as a substitute of the Govt. and a contractor to undertake development work" (Agragamee 1995: 3);

ii) "The programmes / activities undertaken by Agragamee have not only propagated its aims and objectives rather it has created space to develop the awareness level of people and has made them more articulate than before" (ibid);

iii) "The explanation and expression capacity of the staff is not so spectacular as it is generally understood. Besides a few others have no such clear idea/ understanding regarding the objectives of the organisation and activities undertaken by it" (ibid)

### (b) On financial transparency

"The evaluators found that financial statement presented at the General Body Meeting only shows the total financial transaction, i.e., how much money came and how much was spent. Many staff members have discontent regarding the organisations secrecy on financial matters." "The Project staff even do not know about the money come and spent at the project level," some complaining of "mismanagement of money by the project head" (ibid).

### (c) On Decision Making

(i) "According to the opinions of the staff the decisions at project, sub-project, field center level are taken independently but in some cases they have to depend upon the head office at Kashipur because of which the progress of most is adversely affected" (ibid);

(ii) "At the village level the decisions are generally made by the village organisations like Village Committee, Youth Club, Mahila Mandal, School Committee, Watershed Committee, Forest Protection Committee, etc. But sometimes it is found that the villagers need the help, guidance and advice of the project field center staff."

(iii) "Though the evaluation found that the decisions regarding the management of Grain Bank, determination of the interest rate of the loan taken out of this bank, waiving away the interest of the loanee if not able to repay, management of PDS center, management of right scheme etc. are taken by the people independently some aspects of watershed development have been imposed on people" (ibid: 6);

(iv) ".. decision making process within the organisation is more dominating than democratic" (ibid: 7).

### (d) On Decentralization of Power

Despite the scope for power decentralization within the Agragamee structure, "interferences are always there in the activities of the sub-projects from the Kashipur office" (ibid: 9). Project leaders face many problems because of this.

### (e) On Administration

i)   Quarterly staff meetings and project director's meetings are organised in which administrative issues are discussed and the staff give their opinions "freely and frankly" (ibid: 9);

ii)  Six to seven persons who constitute what is not clearly defined as a core team "have a larger say in the major decisions and administrative matters" (ibid);

iii) "Transfer of personnel in the organisation is minimal and is generally carried out only when a new project or field center is opened" (ibid);

iv)  Disciplinary actions are taken on the grounds like misutilisation of organisation asset, disorderly conducts etc leading sometimes to dismissal of the persons concerned. But "there is no written procedure or regulations and these are carried out at the discretion of the director and at times in consultation with the so-called core group members" (ibid); and

v)   "Insofar as administration is concerned there is high degree of transparency and sharing of information at inter and intra project level".

## On Training and Human Resource Management

i)   The evaluation found that "women leadership in the organisation is only confined to the women development programmes instead of the organisation as a whole" (ibid: 10);

ii)  "Almost half of the staff members of the organisation say that inadequate / no opportunity given to them in form of training to improve their skill/personality. Few members feel that only a handful of favoured staff members are spent for various trainings" (ibid).

## On Difference Between Male and Female Staff

The evaluation found that generally work involving less responsibility is assigned to women staff. But women volunteers workers seek higher responsibility.

## On Job Commitment

No staff member is required to sign any bond or agreement during appointment. Some staff members have transit attachment to the organisation. "In recent years most of the staff members who have joined the organisation have considered this as a stop-gap arrangement and have left as soon as they secure higher paying job. However, in general the staff who have worked for more than a year or more have developed strong commitment to the organisation and the causes" (ibid: 12).

## On Relationship with the Director / Leader of the Team

The evaluation states that "very few people interact freely with the director and the staff located at Kashipur are more free in their interaction than the staff staying at other projects. Opportunity for individual growth as per capability is decided by the Director" (ibid: 14). The internal evaluation report also states: "The credibility of the Director is very high in the organisation and he is a source of inspiration and encouragement for the staff. A particular management style can't be attributed to the Director as it ranges from authoritarian to democratic" (ibid: 15).

## The Practice of Critical Self-Reflection

The above critical remarks about Agragamee's over-all performance was carried out by Agragamee itself. This shows that Agragamee is aware of the need for creating critical reflective space within itself. In fact, the first self-evaluation was carried out in 1984 and it was a conscious choice. Achyut Das also lays bare the internal contradictions within the

structure of Agragamee. As mentioned above, Das feels that the existing structure has its limitation In totally being on the side of the people. This has become clear to all concerned during the ongoing anti-mine struggle in the locality (see, above). He feels that the existing structure has some legal binding for which the organisation Is not able to provide total support to people. Now it Is constrained to support them from the behind only. Despite this, two of its workers have been implicated in police cases. Das says that Agragamee has to make up its mind what it wants to be. If it wants to be on the side of the people during their crises then it has to be prepared for risks.

Agragamee's president Chitta Ranjan Das also works as a source of perennial criticism for Agragamee. He says that the workers of Agragamee must be prepared for self-criticism both as an Individual activity and one that Is carried out in a communitarian setting. For him, the real test of Agragamee comes when people are ready for confrontation with the existing systems. What Agragamee will do when people begin to confront the structures of the old society? On whose side the workers of Agragamee will be? For C.R. Das, this decision cannot be an organisational decision since this has to be personally arrived at by everybody. This makes urgent the task of adequate preparation on the part of each worker as an individual. C.R. Das also told me that a dialogical forum within the organisation has been created after a few years of experimenting to respond to the lack of free flowing and spontaneous interaction between the workers and the leadership. On his suggestion, everybody started sitting together and discussing each others' problems as well as that of the organisation. This helped to create a dialogical and reflective space within the organisation which also helped to democratize the structures and functioning within it. Das also feels that given Agragamee's central emphasis on education, Its workers are not creative enough in writing and publications.

While discussing the strength and weakness of his organisation Achyut Das, however, stresses that the organisation has never felt shy to own up Its mistakes. Transparency in the organisation and lack of vested Interest in the leadership to perpetuate itself have helped Agragamee to grow, Das remarks.


## External Evaluation

The funding agencies of Agragamee — private and public — carry out periodically evaluation of Agragamee's work. The Dutch donor agency HIVOS has been one of the consistent supporters of the activities of Agragamee. HIVOS has carried out external evaluations of Agragamee, the first being In 1982. The last evaluative study by HIVOS entitled "Agragamee: Food and Voice" was carried out in 1991 (Menon and Schenk-Sandbergen 1991). It states: "...there are, no doubt, very effective activities In Agragamee, such as the training of an animator who reaches many villages, the grain banks and the non-formal education and Innovative schools. However, the Impact team has the impression that there are also shortcomings at different levels In the effectiveness of the organisation" (Menon and Schenk-Sandbergen 1991). The evaluation raises the following questions about Agragamee:

a) It can be asked If the expansion to so many districts has been effective. More Intensive work In a smaller area might have been more fruitful;

b) It can be asked If besides the collective approach a household and/or more Individual approach would not have increased the effectiveness of certain activities, as e.g., access to all kinds of government loan programmes and Individual loans from the village funds;

c) It can also be asked if the policy not to recruit technical professional skilled personnel from outside has turned out to be the right policy In view of the not successful Implementation of Income and employment generating projects;

d) It can be asked If It was effective not to take an electricity connection at the headquarters when it was possible (too luxurious). The capacity of the solar light Is limited; and

e) It may be asked If the policy not to implement social service programmes such as nutrition programme for children in the NFE schools and preventive health programmes are justified in the context of malnutrition and bad health in particular of women In the project villages (Menon and Schenk-Sandbergen 1991: 26).

Agragamee felt that the methodology of this evaluation was not participatory and the Impact study team was bound to its term of reference without trying to understand the process of Intervention with which Agragamee has been associated. Regarding Its suggestion for attending to Individual needs Agragamee states that "a tribal as an individual may get a variety of benefits but without a community ownership cannot enjoy this benefit." It "can never believe that

individual beneficiaries oriented schemes are the solutions to the tribal problems" (Agragamee 1991: 5). Regarding the impact study team's suggestion for taking up welfare programmes in health and nutrition, Agragamee's rejoinder states:

> Agragamee does realise that the tribals are malnourished, the drinking water is not safe and houses are unlivable. But Agragamee's objectives are not as the same objective of a charitable organisation. The Impact Study Team should have no illusions that Agragamee would run creches and other welfare programmes. Agragamee stands for empowerment and it shall remain the same as long as it exists.

HIVOS is to shortly carry out another evaluation and in its term of references it states that HIVOS maintains an organisational rather than a project approach in its evaluational exercise. "This implies that the evaluation takes account of all activities of the organisation involved, irrespective of the sources of funds." The evaluation also wants to assess the development of second line leadership within the organisation. But Agragamee wanted to add some new points to the HIVOS terms of reference. It has particularly stressed that organizational analysis should include an analysis of the structure of the organization: "a) strength and weaknesses within the structure, b) the limits of the existing structure and its expansion, and c) new approaches in the structure." It also suggested that methodology for evaluation should be totally participatory.

## Management of Donor Agencies

Donor agencies are an important part of the task environment of the development organisations. How does Agragamee manage its relationship with the donor agencies? What is Agragamee's experience in this field? What is Agragamee's perception of what it calls the changing trajectory of the field of funding for the NGOs?

Agragamee states that its management of donor agencies is based on its strength. This strength lies in its credibility, its deep foundation in the love and trust of the people with it works, and its capacity to work in extremely difficult circumstances. In the words of Achyut Das:

> When negotiations with donor agencies take place we are strong enough to ask to our funding agencies about their credentials, sources of funding and the organisations they support, etc. We will not like to establish partnership with a funding agency which supports an organisation working for the landlords in the name of agricultural development. Giving money is your business because you are getting it for us and for us spending it means having certain degree of transparency. You examine us, you visit us any number of times you want but when you are giving money you are giving it for a joint enterprise. Managing all these international agencies has been a straight forward affair because they know that Agragamee has a reputation of saying "no" to any funding agency.

He further tells us:

> The conflict is centering around a particular kind of politics: either we are saying no or they are saying no. In the voluntary sector now there is a lot of groupism and politicking. Take for instance our experience with Bread for the World. It is a Christian donor agency but it has a clause that it can also support other non-religious groups. When we began they supported us in a small way. But at the same time they were expecting us to be affiliated to some of their partners so that we are in control of them. Something like a big brother out there to control you, to look after you! But we did not do that. After some time, they said that they are not going to support us. We are not part of a racket but part of a process on the ground. If you are not going to support us then someone else will do so. All the Christian funding agencies will definitely avoid us because we take a stance that if you are going to evaluate us then we will certainly evaluate you. They are not ready because they are not ready to face embarrassing questions.

Das feels that usually donor agencies have an autocratic style of functioning. "If they want to hang you they can do that" and for this they use evaluation as an instrument. But Das insists that terms and references for evaluation should be mutually agreed upon. Having formulated the project, it should be a party to the formulation of terms and references. He also suggests a panel of names for the selection of evaluators.

In this regard, Das tells us about his confrontation with Food and Agriculture Organization, Rome regarding the evaluation of its supported project in Kashipur. He was invited to prepare a proposal for evaluation. The FAO headquarters told him that it would have an external evaluator but he insisted that the evaluation team should also have an evaluator from the locality as suggested by Agragamee and should be paid the same amount of honorarium that is given to other evaluators. FAO did not agree to its condition for equal honorarium and Agragamee withdrew from the evaluation.

C.R. Das also presents a similar perception about the evaluators from international agencies. For him, "Many a time, the evaluation is done superfluously for which one has to submit an answer. It would not have been necessary if those who come as evaluators were able to see things rightly."

Regarding the HIVOS evaluation, Achyut Das told me in the interview I had with him:

> One area of our conflict is why 50% of our staff are not women. They also say that only three or four persons are taking decisions in Agragamee. We say that these relationships are part of a historical process. Whatever we are doing is not because of any self-interest but for a cause. If you are committed to that cause then support us. We don't say that you don't evaluate us but you understand that Agragamee is fighting for a cause. You take side with that cause; money is secondary.

Regarding Agragamee's interaction with HIVOS, Agragamee's director says that the donor agency has been extremely considerate. But he has all along shared his critical comments on it with its concerned authorities. Das says that he was not in favour of HIVOS opening its regional office in Bangalore. He says: "I gave them the theory from nuclear physics that two particles of nuclear nature attract at a distance and repel when they are squeezed together. In my correspondence, I have criticised everyone of their policies. They are looking after Orissa but there is not a single Oriya in their Bangalore office."

Management of communication with donor agencies is a challenging task for a development organisation. Development organisations usually follow a supplicant role in their interaction with these funding agencies. For instance, an organisation which I had studied earlier asks the permission of its partner international organisation in the United States even on such matters as providing refreshment to the beneficiaries when they attend its meetings (see, Giri 1994b). But this is not so with Agragamee. For instance, looking at the correspondence between HIVOS and Agragamee one is struck by the straight-forwardness and boldness of the development organisation. It states clearly what its position is and does not present its critical remarks in sugar coated form. Achyut Das also addresses his addressees in donor agencies in first person while he gets addressed as "Mr. Das". Das tells us about this:

> Sometimes my language is quite strong but now I have been trying to watch my language. Now I reply in a professional, objective manner. The personal element is no longer there. When we began with HIVOS, sometimes these letters were personal. But this is no longer the case. And German Agro Action would not entertain anything personal. You have to look at it from the other side. The kind of persons who are now coming in donor agencies are not interested in you as a person; their only concern is project and report.

Das agreed with me that in terms of writing a letter there is also a managerial problem in terms of structuring sentences. Earlier Das was typing all his official correspondence himself. But now he gets these done through his secretaries and shows these to his other colleagues so that these are to the point and most specific.

During our conversation Achyut Das also told me about the emerging preferences for funding in the voluntary sector. For him, all the international donor agencies now show a particular tendency to support big projects. As he understands this logic: "The bigger the project, better for the interest of those who work in it. If the project is not big enough then they cannot justify the higher salary structure for their staff, the rent of their building, etc. There are very few international donor agencies who go in for small voluntary organisations these days." He also states that for the funding agencies the concept of their funding is changing very fast. "Funding agencies now do not support projects purely for welfare; they support projects for empowerment. The traditional welfare concept now has become diluted. If I want to give mid-day meal or run school that kind of money is now difficult to get."

## Management of Other Voluntary Organisations

How does Agragamee manage its relationship with other voluntary organisations? Agragamee states that it has a cordial relationship with other organisations whom it does not look at as mere adversaries and competitors. It believes in playing a creative and conscientious role in building a NGO movement in Orissa. It is now part of two NGO networks: the All India network of SAMPADA and the All Orissa network of SAMHATI.

Agragamee has helped in the emergence of many development organisations in Orissa who now work in different parts of the state as its sister organisations. All these organisations were earlier working as field projects of Agragamee. But after years of training and apprenticeship the concerned project directors have been encouraged to start independent organisations. These work as sister organisations and carry the spirit of Agragamee's struggle. Insofar as policy for their internal management is concerned, they devise their own.

Why does Agragamee encourage its field projects to declare independence from itself? Apart from its noble goal of decentralisation, there are strategic reasons as well. If all these projects were under Agragamee's direct and formal leadership then it would not have been easy to secure funding for all its projects. Others could have easily pointed finger at it receiving so much grant as one single organisation. It would have also led to the leadership's burden of supervision of the entire operation from its headquarters at Kashipur. Achyut Das further helps us understand this:

> Since challenges are there, Agragamee cannot be there everywhere. So, independent organisations would have to come up. Now networking is the catchword; unless and until you are working as part of a larger unit nobody is going to take note of you. The basic idea is that you need to have some co-ordination in the changing socio-political situation. Things are changing very fast. Now because of new economic policies the tribal areas are going to be opened up for multinational operations and mining. But where will the tribals go? To the city centers to work as cheap labourers and prostitutes? Your vote banks are no longer the tribals, they are the Mandalities—backward classes, minorities, etc. After 10 years or so, you never know whether the tribal issue is going to remain an issue at all. Our challenge now is to keep it remain an issue because we know that if the Government does not give special emphasis for the protection of tribal population it would face the same fate as it did in the U.S. or Australia. To give them an understanding of the changes that is taking place it is important to work in a larger area and to network with organisations who are working on similar goals.

There is an institutionally established network among Agragamee's sister organisations. Achyut Das says that he and his co-workers do not have any major conflict with the sister organisations because they are "very conscious" about the quality of their relationship. He tells us: "We take up projects together. If there are conflicts it is resolved in a democratic manner. I would expect that they work like Agragamee. But as long as some basic vision is there we are able to work."

Regarding networking among the NGOs Das also says that many of these initiatives are coming out of the donor agency initiatives. But the donor-driven networks among the NGOs are not able to maintain their independent critical stance.

Regarding the competition for resource in the voluntary sector, Agragamee says that it does not have to compete with other organisations. Agragamee works in the interior pockets of Orissa where it requires tremendous resolution on the part of individuals and organisations to work. Even when international donor agencies or the government want development organisation to take up project in Kashipur there is no taker for such offer. In the words of Das: "In a physical sense we don't have any competition at all." Moreover, the donor agencies with which Agragamee has been in partnership does not encourage competition. He says that if HIVOS supports an organisation than it will not support another organisation working in the same area.

There have been changes in the voluntary sector as well which provides challenges to the vision and practice of Agragamee. Agragamee feels that many voluntary organisations now look at themselves as development contractors. There is also now an increasing tendency on their part to base themselves in the cities. As Vidhya Das says, voluntary organisations now don't have any need to state that they are working for the poorest of the poor. A new mercantilism and professionalism has set in the voluntary sector where the target group have the least priority in its scheme of things.

## Agragamee and the Management of Government

Agragamee stresses that the relationship between the government and a development organisation has to be a dialectical one: it cannot be either totally supportive or totally dismissive. In the name of radicalism total silence should not be maintained vis-a-vis government simply because the government is a very important player in the field of development. Agragamee thinks that despite bureaucratic constraints it is easier to work on the government money compared to that of international donor agencies because "after all, it is our money." Agragamee's director further tells us:

> Collaboration and conflict will always be there vis-a-vis the government. You can't take a cut and dried position that you are pro-government or anti-government. We must collaborate with the government because it has a mandate for rural development and removal of poverty. When we take government work, we go one step ahead. If the government gives Rs.30,000/- for constructing a water harvesting structure we say that let people contribute another Rs.10,000/- so that it will be a quality work. We always look into how the Government scheme can be improvised through people's participation. That way, collaboration with the government becomes tripartite: we are collaborating with the government, people are also collaborating with the government. Incorporating this aspect of people's participation, we present government schemes as new proposal to be sanctioned by the concerned authorities.

But there is a limit to collaborating with the government. Agragamee now realizes that collaboration with the government is a difficult process. The development process has become so much politicized that in the process of implementation of governmental programmes, a sincere development organisation has to inevitably face many vested interests. Agragamee learnt this lesson quite well by its association with the IFAD-assisted government project. This project had a lot of money. So, all the parties starting from the top to bottom want to have their share. Agragamee's insistence that development work should be done through the village committees was not to anybody's liking in this case. So, all these forces started campaigning against Agragamee. After its withdrawal from this project, Agragamee had to lose a very important means of establishing contact with the people and providing them service. When Agragamee felt that all the vested interests were out to destroy it, it is at this time that it agreed to accept the offer by UNICEF to implement the project on food security. Through this programme Agragamee was able to recapture its ground vis-a-vis establishing vibrant links with people and work in an wider area.

Agragamee also stresses that a development organisation should not be totally dependent upon the government: "There must be some balancing. You get some money from the government, some from outside, and generate some resources on your own so that you are not putting all your eggs in one basket."

For Agragamee, management of government means much more than managing one's interaction with government as a resource provider. It also means managing people's interaction with government as a structure of exploitation and as a guarantor of rights. Traditionally, the tribals were mortally afraid of the government officials. Officials from the forest department and revenue department were considered the makers or breakers of their destiny. We get a vivid picture of this in the novel of the Gyanapitha-award winning novelist Gopinath Mohanty's *Paraja*. Mohanty (1946) describes how the life of an entire family has been tragically destroyed because Sukra Jani, the head of the family, has not responded to the offer of a revenue official for sending his daughter to his camp for a night. In this place of fear, Agragamee has instilled courage and fearlessness in the minds and hearts of the people. Now they are not only able to fight for their rights but also to take on the Government for its failure to keep up its promises.

Two clear instances of people taking on the Government are the fighting for collection of minor forest produces and the continued agitation against the ensuing bauxite mining operations in Kashipur. Both these confrontations could have taken a violent turn but for Agragamee's intervention. Agragamee has managed to keep people's responses non-violent despite strong provocations from the Government. In fact, non-violence is an important aspect of Agragamee's management of people's response to governmental encroachment of their rights and extraction of their resources. As Vidhya Das tells us about Agragamee's experience vis-a-vis the anti-mining struggle: "If people are non-violent and continue to put pressure on the Government they can sustain the movement for a long time. In the mining case if we had not given support then the agitation could have easily turned violent and the suppression of people could have been tremendous."

Agragamee's experiment teaches us important lessons about the management of people's mobilisation where governmental structure and policy is the target of people's ire. On the mining issue, Agragamee had advised concerned authorities of the Government to distribute relevant information about the mining operations and the consequent displacements. On the fight over forest produces, the workers of Agragamee had maintained maximum restraint otherwise it could have easily taken a violent turn leading to probable loss of life on both the sides.

## Management of Conflict

Agragamee has to walk a tight rope in its work with the deprived sections of the community. It works with both the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes. Though the living standard of a large number of scheduled caste population is no better than the tribals, some of them have been used by the local landlords to establish their authority over the poorest section. The scheduled castes who are called *damas* in the area and are feared by the tribals for acting as informers to both the money lenders as well as the government officials. Tribals also fear the *damas* for stealing their crops as well. In this context, management of relations between the Harijans and the tribals becomes a challenging one for Agragamee. Though it says that it is committed to the upliftment of both the Harijans and the tribals, it takes a pro-tribal stance in the management of conflicts between the Harijans and tribals. Given the fact that the tribals constitute as far as 90% of the total population in some of the areas it works, Agragamee has a crucial need for winning their trust. Overture towards the Harijans sometimes makes winning this trust difficult for Agragamee. At the same time, Agragamee consciously strives to integrate the Harijans and the tribals so that issues are fought in a larger terrain and both the deprived sections are able to fight against the upper-caste non-tribals who actually control the whole thing. As Agragamee's director tells us: "We see that more number of Harijans are on the staff; if there is a training programme we see that more number of Harijans are taken in it." At the same time, Agragamee has instilled courage within the tribals to resist extortion of their wealth and resources by the *Damas*, the Harijans. Agragamee looks upon this as part of its duty to empower the most deprived.

Management of conflict has not been an easy one for Agragamee. As usual, it has asked for blood and tears and the workers of Agragamee have not hesitated to pay these as well. In April 1984, Achyut Das was mortally attacked by a group of non- tribals while constructing a check dam on a perennial stream. He and his co-workers were constructing this dam for the benefit of the recently released bonded labourers. He tells us about this: The management of such a conflict becomes complex; negotiation was succeeding but it finally failed because of the countervailing forces. We had told them that only 1/3rd of the water will be diverted for the bonded labourers and 2/3rd of the water will go down to their fields. But they still came and attacked us. They wanted to murder me on the spot.

In its strategy of management of conflict, Agragamee has tried to build on the pro-poor policies of the Government for mobilizing support. Das here gives us the example of management of conflict over the homestead land in Hallasahi. The people of the village who were bonded labourers had been there for three generations. But their land was bought and sold by three persons without their knowledge. When Agragamee came to know of it, the new landlord was trying to evict them. Agragamee brought this to the notice of the Additional District Magistrate in charge of development. The Magistrate was furious about how such a thing has been possible, ordered actions against officials who had approved such transactions, and finally decided the case in favour of the tribals. In this case Agragamee had tried to manage conflict by involving the administration.

## Management of Market

Agragamee has also considered it important to teach people how to manage their interaction with market. Agragamee believes that the tribals should have a fair knowledge of the market. Agragamee conducts meetings in the villages regarding support prices declared by the Government. It also distributes weighing machines among people so that they are not cheated by the vendors and the shopkeepers. It also strives to create weekly markets in places where there existed none. One such is the weekly market in Mandibishi. Previously there was no market in the locality and the villagers had to walk about 15 kms to Kashipur for selling their products and to purchase necessary things.

Agragamee realizes that market management has been the weakest skill among the tribals. Entrepreneurial skill is something that they must obtain. The market for which tribals depend for cash and consumer goods is controlled by

the outsiders. Das tells us that this market is neither a buyer's market nor a seller's market. Tribals require cash for their clothes and for drinks, etc, and they go to either the money lenders or the traders for procurement of cash. Both these agents of market purchase the produces of the tribals at a throw-away price as distress sales.

*Alasi* is an oil seed that tribals of Kashipur grow in abundance. (It is such an important part of the life of the local tribal that C.R. Das says that *Alasi* is not a mere oil seed; it is also an institution through which one can get a picture of the life of the tribals). Tribals also sell their oil seeds to outsider merchants. Agragamee has calculated that every year nearly five crore worth of *Alasi* is marketed out. Because of money lending, 50% of it goes out as distress sale. 25% of it is spent on liquor and 25% spent on purchase of consumer goods during the festival time. For Das, "So, this area is absolutely finished. We argue that if this five crore worth of money remains inside Kashipur, then you do not depend upon anybody for your developments."

Agragamee has mobilized people to demand for local processing of their produces so that there is a value addition. It has the same strategy vis-a-vis local produces like the tamarind and the broomstick. The previous Government of Orissa had agreed to people's demand for installing oil-seed processing unit in each panchayat. In this regard, Achyut Das urges us to understand that its initiatives like the Kashipur Vegetable Growers' Association were formations to give the tribals a better deal in the market. Initially it was able to fight with the vested interests to provide them a better price. But this co- operative could not function because of changes in co-operative law which allowed outside vested interests to come in.[4]

For Agragamee, managing the market means introducing more players into the scene. "The question is whether you are able to give that kind of skill so that people are able to manage their resources and the market. The long-term goal is to enable people to control their market: once they do it, it will solve 90% of their problems."

Agragamee is now working on formation of small micro- enterprises in the tribal areas. It also stresses that it is important to federate these micro-enterprises so that they can benefit from having things in common — for instance, having a common manager or a common transport. For Das, even all the grain banks should have their common stock in one place so that even if one grain bank is not successful it can borrow from the buffer stock lying at the panchayat level. Similarly, he believes that all the Mahila Mandals can be part of a federal structure of a larger organisation. This would help them control, for instance, the entire broomstick market.

## And Now the Target Group

Agragamee is dependent upon its target group for its very existence. Agragamee believes that it cannot work in the area if the target group does not approve of it. In fact it is the target group which has provided strength and succour to the organisation during its hours of crises. One such crisis which threatened the very existence of the organisation was the allegation made by the then local M.L.A. on the floor of the Assembly of Orissa sometimes in 1992 that the workers of Agragamee were molesting tribal women. An inquiry commission was constituted by the State Government to look into this. But the women of the locality came forward in thousands and told the authorities that this was a conspiracy hatched by the vested interests to malign Agragamee. In fact, the women in a village did identity a girl who had been paid by the conspirators to give evidence before the commission supporting their allegation.

The target group is, no doubt, differentiated along lines of caste and gender. While in case of caste, Agragamee stresses on differential empowerment similar is not the case in case of gender. Agragamee consciously works towards the empowerment of tribals vis-a-vis the extortion of the Harijans. But in case of gender exploitation and gender inequality, Vidhya Das herself makes it clear that Agragamee tries to consciously underplay gender difference so that the process of developmental change is not hindered. She also helps us understand Agragamee's point of view:

> Equality does not mean just doing the same thing. The moment you insist that women should do the work that men do you further undervalue the work that women do. Thus you should fight for up-valuing the work that women do. You also upvalue the voice of women so that whenever women say something they are heard. We are not highlighting men-women contradiction. We don't say that women's issues are women's issues alone, these are community issues., survival issues.

This is also the point of view of C.R. Das. For him, the primary identity of a tribal woman is one that bears the marks of victimage and exploitation. In his intervention on this subject during the last general body meeting (in September

1995), he told that the it is general societal exploitation which simultaneously affects both men and women which is a greater cause for deprivation than gender discrimination per se. For him, a tribal male is beating his wife because he is the victim of the whole system of exploitation. So, neither C.R. Das nor Vidhya Das feel the need for targeting patriarchy as an autonomous structure of exploitation and extraction of resources and feel the need for waging a struggle for its simultaneous demolition and destruction.

## Management of Development Organizations and Transformation of Societies: The Lessons From Agragamee

Agragamee believes that a development organisation should contribute to transformation of societies and its managerial functions must embody this transformative thrust. Social transformation is not possible without exemplary physical demonstration of activism on the part of the leaders. This activism is not merely geared towards ameliorating the lot of the poor marginalized, and the deprived sections of society but involves the crucial tasks of self-growth and self-transformation.

Agragamee believes that building self-managed groups and institutions is the fundamental transformational challenge before individuals and institutions today. Its exercises in social transformation are geared to this. In fact, self organization and auto-creativity are important parts of the emancipatory discourse today (on the latter, see Hegedus 1990). Agragamee's management philosophy and practice seems to be inspired by these epochal concerns. As one commentator tells us: "Effectively what is at stake in self-creative society is neither autonomy nor self-realization, but nothing other than self-determination; that is, the capacity of people to control their own destiny and choose their own future at any level and in every aspect of their personal and collective life" (Hegedus 1990: 276).

There is always the difficult side of practice when we encounter any quest for human liberation. There is a dialectic of vision and practice which any investigation into quest for freedom and dignity must explore. In this essay I have provided more of the vision of this experiment and how this influences its practice. There are occasional hints that we get from leaders themselves that their practice is full of some gaps which call for radical thinking and transformative action. This calls for an ethnography of practice to supplement the story that has been provided here. This ethnography or critical-analytical description of practice of a development organisation would not only help us see the lack of fit between vision and practice but, also the dialectic between the two—the moments of and process of transformation in which vision and practice mutually transform each other. Such a description also must provide the story from multiple perspectives and points of view. It is a limitation of the current exercise that the narrative that I have provided is mainly from the point of view of the leaders. How do the target group look at it? Here I would just like to recall the sad eye of one old man in a village who told me that there is no stock in this village grain bank. Through his sad look he wanted to convey a message that Agragamee should do something about it. I thought about it and wondered whether Agragamee's current practice of matching contribution can give rise to an arrangement like 1: 2 i.e., to the amount collected by the villagers Agragamee provides not *only* a matching contribution but its double. I shared this idea with the director and he thought that if the practice of matching contribution does not work then double contribution will not work either.

The Agragamee experiment has created ripples in a body of backwater which still today challenges all the optimism that human imagination can have. The condition in which tribals and other backward castes live today in places like Kashipur is simply unimaginable. Agragamee has shown that it is possible to change conditions of our life even in cases of abject poverty and indescribable exploitation if there is a will to struggle and will to love. Creation of self-managed groups, institutions, and frameworks of co-ordination has been the key to Agragamee's continued struggle for a better society and this has certainly a wider significance today not only for the management of development organisations but also for the contemporary transformation of societies.

## Notes

1. During the rainy season, not having anything to eat, tribals usually go to the money lenders for borrowing money. The money lenders give them money but only on the surety of the land or the crop of the next season. Thus when they harvest their crop, it finds its way to the house of the money- lenders. Thus the tribals are condemned to a life of perpetual starvation, debt, and bondage.

2. Haliasahi means the village of the bonded labourers. Jagaballa refers to the famous deities of Orissa, Lord Jagannath and his brother Balavadra.

3. Now there is a move within Agragamee to fix a new pay scale for its workers but this is not to be decided by either the director or the core group of adivsors but by a mutually evaluative index developed by the whole group.

4. The story of this experiment is complex. Agragamee considers this as a failure because some of the leaders whom it had developed to manage this co-operative probably failed it. Agragamee also says that it fell prey to the conspiracy of monopolies like OII Orissa which wanted to destroy the cooperative in order to have monopolistic control over the   cheap market of the tribals.

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# Appendix

## CRITERIA FOR INDIVIDUAL SELF-EVALUATION

### PART-I

Given below are 13 criteria (as worked out by the group) on the basis of which evaluation of the individuals and the group would be done, by the group. Points on the basis of which numbers for each criteria are to be given are also explained along with each criteria. Participants are requested to mark upto five (5) for each criteria according to their judgment based on the points given along with each criteria. A higher number means a higher reward for the person you have marked. Please leave a blank if your are not sure of your judgement on any of the criteria. If you feel you don't know the persons, please don't evaluate that member of the group. Marks are to be given in the table attached as part II.

## 1. HONESTY

i. suspect a person of dishonesty to you and to the project because of your own personal experiences with that person.

ii. suspect a person of dishonesty because of rumors about that person.

iii. the person appears honest to you, but found to be dishonest to the project,

iv. the person is honest in his purpose, but contrary to the project.

v. the general workings and aims and objectives of the project.

## 2. INITIATIVE

i. the person has no initiative and always has to be told before he undertakes any work.

ii. the person takes initiative after being given the out lines of the programme or activity.

iii. the person takes initiatives to plan and implement programmes with other members of the group.

iv. the person takes initiative to plan with the members of the community for a programme or activity.

v. the person has the initiative to make necessary changes in programmes in consultation with the community, the group and the tribal animators.

## 3. ATTITUDE TO WORK

i. has no attitude to work whatsoever.

ii. has the attitude to question after the activity/programme without asking questions.

iii. has an unquestioning attitude to work, takes part in any activity/programme without asking questions.

iv.    questions any activity/programme only after asking why it is implemented.

v.    takes up an activity/programme only after being fully aware of the pros and cons of the activity and after having questioned its validity and relevance.

## 4. ATTITUDE TOWARDS PEOPLE

i.    has a feeling of superiority or inferiority towards his fellow workers.

ii.    is indifferent in this matter.

iii.    makes conscious effort towards equality amongst all the members of the staff.

iv.    has put people's interest before self-interest.

v.    has the attitude to incorporate people's idea into community action.

## 5. LEADERSHIP

i.    is a follower

ii.    is a participant, i.e. the one who does not need any leader.

iii.    is a leader in actual planning.

iv.    is a leader in project implementation.

v.    is a leader in creating other leaders in the community.

## 6. PERSPECTIVES/THINKING CAPACITY

i.    has perspective for the work in which he is involved.

ii.    has a perspective for the whole programme of which his work is a part of and is able to relate his work to the larger programme.

iii.    has a perspective about the whole project in general and is able to relate his work to the larger programmes, and to the project objectives as a whole.

iv.    has a perspective about development and change affecting our target group.

v.    has no perspective whatsoever.

## 7. ABILITY TO LIVE AND WORK IN A GROUP

i.    carries out his work in isolation and does not share his experiences and ideas with anyone.

ii.    shares his work, ideas and experiences with only a selected group of people.

iii.    makes an effort to share his experiences, work and ideas with all the members of the group, involves everybody in his work.

iv.    shares himself with the target community in all walks of life.

v.    consults the group and abide by its decision before taking any step.

## 8. COMMITMENT TO WORK

i.    has very little commitment to any work, loses interest half-way through an activity and is ready to hand over his responsibilities to someone else or let the work stop.

ii.    loses interest in an activity undertaken half-way through its implementation but carries out the activity all the same unwillingly

iii.    carries out any activity undertaken with full interest and involvement until its completion.

iv.    is totally committed to the causes of the deprived classes.

v.    readily takes side with the oppressed in a conflict.

## 9. COMMUNITY CONTACT

i.    the person has very little relationship with the members of the target group and is not interested in furthering it either.

ii.    the person has much interest in the target group as his particular activity requires.

iii.    the person has genuine concern for the problems and situations of the target group not necessarily limited to his immediate activity.

iv.    goes to village himself to build up contact with the target community.

v.    waits for the village to come to him.

## 10. ABILITY TO TAKE UP RESPONSIBILITIES

i.    can take up responsibilities for his work independently.

ii.    feels responsible for the entire activity or the project of which his work is a part.

iii.    the person feels responsible for the project in general and is capable of making decisions in matters outside his specific area of work whenever necessary.

iv.    has already shown some irresponsibility in some areas of programme.

v.    has the ability to identify his responsibilities without being told.

## 11. ATTITUDE TO THE PROJECT

i.    looks upon the project as a stepping stone to furthering his career.

ii.    looks upon the project as providing a job.

iii.    looks upon the project as means of working with the deprived classes and thus furthering national development.

iv.    is aware of the project objectives and tries to work in accordance with them

v.    is indifferent to the project objectives.

## 12. CAPACITY FOR EXPRESSIONS

i.    the person is not very communicative and his work output is not much.

ii.    the person is full of theories and ideas and seems to be exceedingly well-informed on the development process but does not have any significant work output.

iii.    the person has not much ability to express himself and communicate in a group situation but is expressive and active in the field.

iv.    the person has a good ability to communicate and express himself and is very active in the field.

v.    the person doesn't believe the importance of expression.

## 13. INTELLECTUAL HONESTY

i.    there is much difference between one's ideas/theories and his actions. For example, the person talks about poor and poverty eradication, but doesn't averse the exploitation of poor for his own ends.

ii.    has no clarity about the process of development and poverty eradication, but carries out activities in the field.

iii.    can objectively look at his own short-comings and failures and make conscious efforts to change.

iv.    has high respects for others' suggestions. ideas and experiences.

v.    has a very high opinion of his own caliber.