Chapter Seven

COMMUNITIZING EDUCATION – A FEW CASES

Abstract

This chapter has five sections. The first four of them present four different cases in communitizing education, while the fifth one presents the findings of a PRA exercise conducted in one of the cases.

The first case – the Pauta Experiment – is derived from a secondary source while the other three are accounts of communitizing education led by the researcher himself. In the presentation of these cases the details of the process have been highlighted because they are important from the point of view of strategies and values to be adopted in the communitizing process.

In a summary form the four cases can be presented as follows:

(1) Pauta, a village in Bihar, was adopted by St. Gabriel Institute, 18 kilometres away. The Principal and two of his colleagues led the interaction supported by other colleagues and students occasionally. Through a time bound intervention strategy (5 years) the empowerment of the community became a reality.

(2) HMT colony is a re-settlement colony 4 kilometres away from Rajagiri College of Social Sciences, Kalamassery, in Kerala. The TOC co-ordinator (attached to the college) took the initiative. The whole college supported. Within a short period, intensive interaction was planned and implemented, producing very rich experience for the NSS Programme Officers who came to Rajagiri for training.

(3) Kottayam Literacy Campaign was a pioneering venture in which the interaction between the university and colleges on one
side and the people of Kottayam municipal town on the other created history. A detailed account of the planning, implementation and evaluation stages is given.

(4) The Nalpathimala Experiment is an ongoing experiment which is being used as a social laboratory for the training and motivation of NSS volunteers and Programme Officers from 1991. Since it is in itself a highly replicable model for other universities, a fair amount of details are given in the narration. The chapter also presents the strengths and weaknesses of Nalpathimala experiment analyzed through a PRA exercise.

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2.7.1 The Pauta Experiment

2.7.1.7 The Community

Hazaribagh in Bihar is known for its backwardness. Most of the people are farmers with small plots of land uneconomically scattered all over, which they cultivate once a year during the monsoons. This is far from being sufficient to take them through the year. Irrigation facilities are not available. About 15-20% have regular employment in the coal mines. Harijans who have very little land or none at all, depend mostly on the jungle for their survival. They steal firewood from the forest for which they are often caught and punished.
2.7.1.2 The Institution

St. Gabriel's Institute\(^2\), Hazaribagh, is in the town about 18 kilometres away from Pauta. As Principal of the Institute, C. M. Joseph had the opportunity to come into contact with the above population, though like any other educational institution, St. Gabriel also had its usual aloofness. Joseph felt uneasy about the fact that the above described community had no school, no basic medical care or market in their village or even nearby. For every little requirement of theirs, the villagers had to walk to the town about 15-20 kms. away. No Government official and no politician ever set foot there. Joseph decided to do something here though he had no previous experience in community organization. He took leave from the Institute and two of his former students joined him.

2.7.1.3 The Interaction

In a cluster of seven villages in the vicinity of Hazaribagh, Pauta is the largest, with a population of 2000. Joseph and his two colleagues decided to go and live in Pauta. They started with a few casual visits and had interactions with the people. Soon they discovered that the problems were very complex and the causes of backwardness very deep.

Since Joseph and his friends came from the background of the formal school, they decided to start with formal education. There was a "single-teacher Government school" in the village. It had no buildings, so it existed only on paper and the 'single-teacher' rarely turned up to teach. And no student turned up at the non-existent school to learn. Joseph asked the people if they would send their children to learn if he and his friends were to teach. Reluctance and excuses were the initial responses. Some obviously doubted whether Joseph was coming to convert them to Christianity. The
upper castes feared that education of the lower classes would bring them 'trouble'.

At this stage Joseph decided it is better to revive the govt. school itself. The team went from house to house and persuaded the children to come to school. On 16th May 1974, with 100 children the school started under a few mahua trees. They were divided into three classes. Since all were beginners the divisions into classes was done on the basis of the heights of the children.

In order to identify themselves with the people, Joseph and his friends decided to live among them, cook their food, wash and bathe at the village well. They managed to rent a small room in the mud house of a poor muslim. Then they had their first disappointment: in the first night itself all their belongings were stolen. But this did not dampen their determination.

About the entry point Joseph and his friends had no confusions. They were basically educationists and they had nothing but education to impart. There was real need for primary education in the village. But the Government had done nothing to convert this real need to a felt need because an 'un-aware' community was what the absentee teacher wanted to perpetuate.

2.7.1.4 Positive Responses

The school caught on. Children liked the activities. If some children stayed away, the team visited their homes and persuaded them to start again. Timetable was flexible and the working hours shorter, so that children could attend to their other duties.

Once things started moving at Pauta, the govt. officials who had neglected the people till then slowly woke up to the situation. The absentee teacher started coming and joined the team. The people were noticing the
change in their children and started appreciating the efforts of the team. They came forward to clear the jungle for a playground.

Teachers and students from St. Gabriel Institute found time to visit Pauta. They also visited families, took classes, and attended meetings. But because of the distance they could come only during holidays.

The classes continued under the trees for 3 ½ years. Then 40 families came forward and donated 8 acres just at the outskirts of the village. It was made clear to the people that the team would only be helpful in getting some funds. They had to do everything else. The land, the buildings and everything else would belong to the people themselves. This had its desired effect. They took full responsibility for their school building, playground, etc. Today the school has a large playground, a beautiful 7-room building and about 400 students.

2.7.1.5 Beyond the School

Along with school the team had attended to another important problem: health and hygiene. They were not qualified in any way in this line. Yet they got a few common medicines and started distributing them sitting under a mango tree. The people began to flock to the ‘dispensary’. A few extraordinary cures made things worse for them. Realizing the great need one member of the team went to Patna for a one-year paramedical course. This medical service expanded later to 25 villages serving 10,000 patients annually. Once a week the women attended a class on health care, hygiene, nutrition etc.

Unscrupulous moneylenders were there in the village as anywhere else. To solve this they decided to start a small savings bank of their own. The elders took time to be convinced of its utility, but the children responded better and faster. Then came the youth club. Later these youth
groups were entrusted with the responsibility of organizing adult education centres in their respective villages. Balwadis, students co-operative store, scouting and guiding, etc. were started.

2.7.1.6 Putting People First: “Not me, but Thou”.

In the area where five years ago hardly ten children went to school, nearly 800 persons in the age group of 3 to 40 years now came to receive education in one form or another.

One special feature of the whole project was that the local people themselves were the real owners of all that was built up. The team owned nothing, not even their residence. They continued to live in the mud-walled rented hut. In order to prepare the people to shoulder this responsibility a managing committee consisting of elected representatives was set up in every village. To remove the possibility of more powerful sections of the community controlling the committee, its members were elected on the basis of proportional representation. So even Harijans and Adivasis came to have a place in it.

What Joseph and his colleagues practiced at Pauta was “putting people first”, and putting themselves behind. Unknowingly they were living the NSS motto of “not me but thou”.

2.7.1.7 The Withdrawal

When the team entered Pauta, they had told them that they would be there for about 5 years only, and that afterwards they themselves (people) must take care of everything. During these five years Joseph and his team had mobilized resources from Indian and foreign sources to develop the school campus, a co-op store and a network of health centres. At the end of
the 5-year period the team reminded the people that it was time for them to go. There were protests. But the team explained to them that for their real development, the withdrawal of the external team was necessary.

On 15<sup>th</sup> January 1980, the keys were handed over and the team moved out into another village five kilometres away. From this distance the team continued to extend its support and guidance to the Pauta community.

2.7.2 The HMT Colony Experiment

2.7.2.1 The Institution

The Rajagiri College of Social Science is a premier institution imparting social work education in Kerala since 1995. It is located at Kalamassery, about 15 km away from Cochin. From the very beginning of the functioning of National Service Scheme in Kerala (i.e. 1970), this College is its accredited state-level Training and Orientation Centre (TOC). The students doing MSW here used to be sent to various industrial/health institutions and communities in the vicinity of Kalamassery for fieldwork. For a long time the College has been planning to “adopt”, for integrated development work, one of the communities with which it had contact. This idea came up for active consideration in July 1983, and the students going to various communities were contacted to find out their opinion. After considering several factors such as proximity to the College, and socio-economic conditions, it was tentatively decided that HMT colony might be a good choice. The present researcher, who was co-ordinator of the TOC during 1983-84, volunteered to facilitate the adoption process.
2.7.2.2 The Entry

It was on 26th July 1984 that the co-ordinator visited HMT colony for the first time. He went there representing Rajagiri College, accompanied by a senior MSW student who had been going there during the previous year for fieldwork. The local people knew this student and therefore they came forward to meet her, and had interactions with her. She then introduced the co-ordinator as a new faculty member of the college. This visit helped the college to find out certain preliminary data about the colony, such as the distance from the college to the colony, the travel facilities available, the general appearance of the colony, common facilities available in the colony and a brief history of the community. The co-ordinator could also sense the people's attitude to the college based on their previous contacts.

Back in college the team informally shared their impressions with the principal and the staff members. Students who were going to other places for fieldwork, as well as their supervisors, were consulted. It was almost decided that HMT colony would be a suitable community for partnership.

The principal at this stage convened a staff meeting to discuss the question of village adoption. He attached a lot of importance to this programme and said that the college should have done this long back. In the brief discussion that followed, the members of the staff promised their whole-hearted co-operation in this venture. Some wanted to know what specifically would be their role in this task. The principal announced that the TOC co-ordinator would have the overall responsibility of the community organization work in HMT colony and that the others (staff and students) should back him up.

The co-ordinator's next visit also took place soon. This time his objective was to discover local leadership and to find out their opinion about closer collaboration between the college and the community. He met a few
people here and there, and had conversation with them about the general socio-economic conditions in the colony and also about the possibility of collaboration with the college. They welcomed the idea. One of the local leaders whom he met happened to be the vice-president of the PTA of the local school. He gave seven names from the two communities (i.e. muslims and harijans), in the colony. As per the co-ordinator’s suggestion he agreed to come with these persons to the college on the following day. They would explain to the college authorities about the situation in the colony.

2.7.2.3 Interface with NSS Programme Officers

At this time an orientation course for NSS programme officers was going on in the TOC which is part of the college. The TOC co-ordinator wanted the programme officers to benefit from the interaction between Rajagiri College and HMT colony. So he briefed the programme officers about what was happening in HMT colony and told them about the proposed visit of the eight local leaders. Three of these leaders were confident enough to speak to the whole group of programme officers presenting problems, promising co-operation to seek solutions to these problems and welcoming them (the programme officers) to the colony.

In the group discussions some had asked the local leaders about the total number of families in the colony. They gave different numbers varying from 200 to 310. Using this opportunity (uncertainty regarding the number), the co-ordinator pointed out how a survey can be useful in a context like that. The local leaders agreed with the idea and we could elicit from them some of the questions to be included in the questionnaire.
2.7.2.4 The Survey

The proposed visit of the forty programme officers to the colony fitted in very well with the idea of the survey. It was decided that on 31st July (Sunday) the programme officers along with the local leaders would conduct a socio-economic survey of the colony. As part of the orientation course the programme officers were to study survey techniques on 30th July. The group (programme officers and local leaders together) prepared the interview schedule. With 310 copies of interview schedule the programme officers reached the colony around 8 a.m. on 31st July. About 18 local persons were waiting for them. They divided themselves into six groups and went into different parts of the colony. It was noted at this stage that two local volunteers were talking apparently discontentedly about what was going on. The co-ordinator called them apart and enquired what led gone wrong. They complained that the local panchayat member had not even been told about this programme. The co-ordinator went with them to the panchayat member's house, and the member graciously came along with them and joined in the survey.

By about 1 p.m. the survey was over. While the programme officers returned to College for lunch, the co-ordinator stayed back in the colony along with one of the programme officers and had a discussion with the local volunteers and the panchayat member. They together counted the completed survey forms and found that they were only 159. That was the total number of families. In the discussion that followed, it was decided that on 2nd August a public meeting should take place. It was estimated that they needed about Rs. 40 for the mike-system. The co-ordinator initiated a small on-the-spot fund collection by placing Rs. 5/- on the table and instantly they were able to collect Rs. 22/- from the group for the mike-expenses.
The public meeting took place on 2nd August. It was slightly drizzling when the meeting started at 5.30 in the evening. Some of the programme officers attended this meeting. A small crowd of about 150 local people had gathered in and around the small school building. The principal and the BDO were the chief guests. The welcome speech was made by one of the local leaders who had come to the college. One of the programme officers presented a consolidated report of the survey. The principal in his speech congratulated the people on the good reports he had heard about them from the students who go there for fieldwork. He expressed his willingness to join hands with the people in their development-efforts. But he warned them against divisions on the basis of politics and religion. He promised his full co-operation. The BDO assured the people that the government schemes would be made known to them and made available to them as per the terms and conditions of the schemes. He hoped that with the college's co-operation things would go smoothly for the people. Then there were three local people to speak. They all spoke words of welcome, thanks and hope. When it was the coordinator’s turn to speak, he started by expressing solidarity with them. He told them that, as a teacher and as a parent, he was sorry for the 70% of the children in the colony who, going by the prevailing trend in the state, were all destined to drop-out from the schools before they finished their school-years, or fail in the S.S.L.C. examination. “Let us do something for these children now. It is now or never”. He then told them about the next step. It was to divide the colony into four wards and then to hold meetings of the people in each of these wards (neighbourhoods) separately, and to select two representatives from each of these wards.
2.7.2.5 Meetings of Neighbourhood Groups (NGs)

The neighbourhood meetings and selection of representatives were over by the following week-end. The HMT Colony Development Committee consisted of these representatives from the four NGs. Then the committee was enlarged by co-opting a few members such as the panchayat member, the teacher-in-charge of the local school, president and vice-president of the parent-teacher-association and the president of mahila samajam.

The committee at its first meeting discussed the felt needs of the colony. It was a brainstorming session. Among the many needs pointed out, the need for a dispensary was the top-most. Surprisingly, one of the committee-members suggested that instead of taking up too many activities and doing them in half-baked style, it would be better to concentrate on one thing at a time and to do it well. All wanted the dispensary. The co-ordinator asked them what would be their contribution towards the dispensary. There was silence for some time. Helplessness was expressed. Discussion took place. What emerged finally was this: “we will provide a room for the dispensary”. Rajagiri College, they said, should provide whatever else is required, i.e. doctor, equipments, etc. Medicine they would pay for. The meeting was also an occasion for the discussion on the challenges of rural leadership.

While the committee members were looking for a room (either on rent or free of rent) in the colony, the college was looking for a doctor or a nurse to work in the colony. It was a hard task. Finally a qualified (B.Sc. Nursing) social worker was identified, who volunteered to work in the colony.
2.7.2.6 Development Seminar

In September 1983 a one-day seminar was organized in the college for the members of HMT Colony Development Committee. It was entitled ‘HMT Colony – Problems and Possibilities’. The District Collector inaugurated. Principal presided. A class on rural development and rural leadership, discussion on programme priorities, presentation on various govt. schemes – these were the contents of the seminar. The eighteen members, who attended it, felt proud and enthusiastic.

2.7.2.7 Development Action

The rest of the story may be given in a nutshell. Through people’s participation and with the collaboration of the staff and students of Rajagiri College, the following programmes were implemented.

(a) Rural sports-meet on 20th November 1983. It was a full day’s programme. Almost the whole colony was present towards the end of the sports-meet when the ‘tug-or-war’ started. The day brought to light a few service-minded youngsters also. The Rajagiri students were the judges and the chief jury of appeal was the teacher of physical education in Rajagiri High School, Kalamassery.

(b) Housing scheme. Around this time the government had started implementing a new housing scheme in collaboration with voluntary agencies. We contacted the B.D.O. immediately. Application forms were distributed in the colony through the committee-members after discussing the terms and conditions of the scheme. Seventeen beneficiaries were sponsored. These seventeen houses were completed in about four months. The inauguration of these houses
was done on 28th February 1984 by the Hon’ble Minister for Housing, Govt. of Kerala.

(c) *Tuition programme.* Thrice a week a team of five students from the college used to go to this colony for their fieldwork, which now consisted mostly of tuition classes for the twelve S.S.L.C. students of the colony. They also did home-visits. The programme helped the students to understand the heartthrobs of the colony. During the month of March the classes were held in the college itself so that our students who are preparing for their own examination could avoid wastage of time in travelling to colony and back.

(d) *N.S.S. work camp in the colony.* From 26th December 1983 to 4th January 1984 the NSS unit of a neighbouring college (S.H. college, Thevara) conducted their annual camp in the colony. The decision to hold the camp was taken in the committee meeting. Local people, mostly youngsters, worked with the campers and participated in the organizing of the camp. The project was the leveling of the school ground. On 4th January 1984 the ground was inaugurated with a football match played between the S.H. College team and the local team. Ever since that, the local boys spend their evening playing football.

(e) The nurse started her work in the colony as a health oriented development worker on 26th December 1984. She did not want to run a dispensary. She chose to be herself a ‘mobile dispensary’ going from house to house, educating, conscientizing and healing where necessary. In the evenings after the football game the boys used to get together to have a discussion under her guidance. She provoked them with questions and made them think.
2.7.2.8 Problems

This account presents mostly the rosy side of the picture. Problems had been there, naturally. Had there been no problems, this exercise would have been an unchallenging one. There was apathy on the part of a section of the people during the early months. They used to be onlookers most of the time. Then the co-ordinator came to know that their party leadership had asked them to do like that. The reason was that all the eight persons invited to the college for the discussion belonged to the opposite party. Only then did he know that the PTA vice-president had played politics. Fortunately, because of the non-political nature of the intervention, there was no conflict. Lack of co-operation on the part of some of the committee members, attribution of political motivation etc. have been felt occasionally. But on the whole this has been, and continues to be, a rewarding experience.

2.7.3 The Kottayam Literary Campaign

2.7.3.1 Kottayam Declared as the First Fully Literate Town in India

On 25th June 1989, the Town Hall of Kottayam, in central Kerala, witnessed an extraordinary announcement. The announcement, which was made by the Honourable Minister of State for Education, Govt. of India, declared Kottayam as the first fully literate town in India. The meeting was presided over by the Chief Minister of Kerala State. Two central ministers and three state ministers other than vice chancellor and district collector, municipal chairman and a large number of dignitaries were present on the occasion. It was a public meeting, which was attended by hundreds of neo-literates, hundreds of literacy workers and over a thousand NSS volunteers, in addition to the public of Kottayam.
The Kottayam declaration became the first in a series of literacy events in the country. In February 1990 Ernakulam was declared to be the first fully literate District in India. The following year Kerala State was declared the first fully literate state in the country. And now, over 400 districts all over the country have been declared literate.

2.7.3.2 A Campaign Organized by NSS

During the second half of 1980s the NSS slogan was “Youth for Mass Literacy”. This made universities all over the country to focus attention on literacy as a thrust area. The present researcher, as the then Programme Co-ordinator of NSS in Mahatma Gandhi University prepared the project for Kottayam Literacy Campaign and implemented it with the co-operation of the NSS units, particularly of Kottayam colleges.

As per 1981 census the literacy level of Kerala State was 69.17 percent. Kottayam District had 81 per cent literacy and the district headquarters (Kottayam Municipal Town) had the highest literacy level in the country, namely, 86%. We discovered that until 1981 the Indian census did not exclude children below 5 years from being counted as illiterates. When children of this age group were exempted we found that the literacy level of Kottayam town was already 95 per cent or above.

This was a thrilling discovery. The NSS volunteers of the four Colleges in Kottayam town conducted a literacy survey to find out the exact details. The survey of the 12,000 households (January 1988) revealed that in the age group 6 to 60 there were only 2209 illiterates. If these persons could be made literate, the small town of Kottayam would become 100% literate.
2.7.3.3 The Strategy

Before NSS plunged itself into the campaign we took stock of what had happened in the country so far in the area of eradication of illiteracy. The Rural Functional Literacy Programme (RFLP), National Adult Education Programme (NAEP) and Mass Programme for Functional Literacy (MFPL) were all milestones in our country’s efforts in this line. None of these made the desired impact, and finally came the National Literacy Mission (NLM) in 1988 which seems to be delivering goods. What was obviously missing in the earlier efforts was the mission component, not only in the label, but also in what went on under the label. So one aspect of our strategy was to strengthen the mission component and to seek the support of NLM.

It was understood that the earlier attempts did not try to make literacy a people’s movement. To remedy this NSS wanted to ensure the highest degree of participation at all levels. At the same time NSS knew its weakness. NSS volunteers are students who cannot be expected to be available on regular basis for a long time to work on any project. But they are young, enthusiastic and capable of total commitment, if a vision and a challenge are convincingly placed before them. It was also understood that where the highest degree of participation is needed, the campaign approach succeeds best.

With this homework done, an advisory committee was formed at the university-level exclusively for the Kottayam Literacy Campaign. The Vice Chancellor headed this committee. The other members included chairman of the municipality, secretary of the State Resource Centre, principals and senior Programme Officers of the four town colleges mentioned above. The Vice Chancellor, leaving aside all formalities and protocols, visited the Municipal Chairman in his office to seek collaboration. The Chairman was
inspired by the idea and came over to the university several times. The Programme Co-ordinator NSS, spoke to the Municipal Council to convince them of what they could achieve through a joint action.

2.7.3.4 People’s Education and Literacy

Gradually the idea of Kottayam Literacy Campaign took shape as a special project of the NSS of Mahatma Gandhi University designed to be implemented in collaboration with Kottayam Municipality. The full name of the campaign was framed as People’s Education and Literacy Campaign Kottayam. The people’s education was intended to benefit the entire population of Kottayam while the literacy component was for the illiterates only.

An emblem was designed for the campaign. It was a combination of the NLM symbol and the NSS symbol. The NLM symbol is placed at the centre of the NSS wheel. The spokes of NSS wheel (symbolizing NSS volunteers) take the mission to the periphery suggesting the dissemination of literacy and knowledge from the campus to the community. “100%” is written inside the wheel. A literacy flag has been designed on navy-blue cloth with the emblem drawn in white colour on it.

The core team in the leadership of the campaign consisted of Senior Programme Officers of the four colleges in Kottayam Town with the Programme Co-ordinator as General Convener and the University Public Relations Officer as the publicity convener.

The NSS approached the Ministry of Human Resource Development for two helps. One was for a financial support of Rs.1,67,000/- towards expenses on training programmes, publicity materials, survey & re-survey, monitoring and evaluation, certification, newspaper for neo-literates, etc. The amount was sanctioned, and without this the campaign could not have
been implemented in the way it was done. The other request was for 32 National Service Volunteers (NSVs) to be assigned to the 32 municipal wards in the town. This was also approved. It was for the first time that such a large number of NSVs was assigned to a university. The municipality gave to NSS a room in the municipal office, right in the heart of the town.

2.7.3.5 The Objectives

Originally the campaign was intended to be implemented over a period of two years. The first year was to be devoted for literacy exclusively, and the second year was to be devoted for follow-up work and people's education programmes. The year 1989 was for bringing everybody into the fold of literacy and 1990 was for the follow-up work as well as for the people's education campaign.

Two objectives were identified for the campaign: (1) To make the 2209 illiterates of Kottayam literate as per NLM standards, (2) To initiate a series of sixteen educational campaigns in such a way as to enhance the quality of life in Kottayam.

2.7.3.6 The District Collector's Help Solicited

At this stage the University approached the District Collector to convene a meeting of the heads of educational institutions, editors of newspapers and heads of voluntary organizations to support the campaign. The Collector liked the idea and called the meeting as per our request. The response was tremendous. To quote the Collector's own words, "It was probably the best attended conference which the collectorate's conference hall had ever seen, with people having to stand on the corridor" for want of
space inside. Even the representatives of the leading trade unions of the
town had come to attend this meeting.

2.7.3.7 The Idea of ‘100 Days’ Comes in

It was the Vice Chancellor who initiated the discussion in the above
meeting. The idea was accepted by all, though there were some reservations
expressed by a few persons. The proprietor of DC Books, leading publisher,
made some significant contributions. He said: “If the number of illiterates is
only 2209 and if the support is as big as is evident here, we should aim at
completing the campaign in 100 days”. Thus was coined the slogan
“Hundred percent literacy in hundred days”. It was decided that all the
illiterates should be initiated into the world of letters in 100 days and that
the minimum required skills of reading, writing and comprehension should
be imparted to them during this intensive phase of the campaign. The
hundred days was to start on the 4th March 1989 and to end on 12th June
1989, but the campaign was to be continued for a whole year.

2.7.3.8 The Campaign Brigade

For the implementation of the campaign in the 32 wards of the
municipality advisory committees were formed in each ward. The
chairperson of the ward-level committee was invariably the councilor of the
ward. A number of squads were also formed consisting of volunteers drawn
from different categories and age groups.

The NSS volunteers were selected from the units in the four local
colleges. The idea of utilizing the services of students who had just
appeared for the SSLC examination occurred to us because the most
intensive phase of the campaign coincided with their summer holidays. The
effort was to draw every possible human resource into this campaign. The members of the campaign brigade were the promoters of the campaign in the concerned ward. One of their tasks was to identify instructors to teach in the campaign. Over 700 persons volunteered to do the actual teaching.

The support given by local newspapers in this process was remarkable. In most of the Kerala homes it is with a cup of black coffee and the morning’s newspaper that the day starts. Even the head-load worker will have the folded newspaper tucked under his arm when he goes to work. In such a cultural setup, the newspapers had a major role to play in making literacy the emotion of Kottayam town.

2.7.3.9 Training

For the training component of the campaign three agencies, namely the State Resource Centre (SRC), the Department of Adult Education (Kerala University), and the Shramic Vidyapith, Trivandrum collaborated. The NSVs had their formal training at Information Development and Resource Agency (IDARA), Madurai, and were given further specific training for the campaign. The NSVs had a pivotal role to play in the campaign and hence their motivation and competence were key factors. The NSVs met every Tuesday to review the progress of the campaign.

2.7.3.10 Formal Inauguration

The 100 days campaign, which was in fact a campaign within a one-year-campaign was formally inaugurated by Honourable Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs. In his inaugural speech he stated how thrilled he was when during his flight from Delhi he read in some Bombay edition
newspapers about his own district headquarters, i.e. Kottayam, marching towards 100 percent literacy.

In fact it was not a mere ‘marching’. It was a ‘run’. To suggest this idea of urgency, it was with a mass run that the campaign was inaugurated. At 9 a.m. on 4th March 1989 the Vice Chancellor helped an illiterate handicapped person in wheel chair to hoist the literacy flag in front of the Gandhi Statue in the central junction at Kottayam. From there started what was called the ‘great literacy run’ in which the Vice Chancellor, the Collector, the DSP the Municipal Councilors, Principals, Programme Officers, NSS Volunteers and thousands of local people participated.

2.7.3.11 Mass Awareness Programme

Awareness-generation was one of the most important areas of the campaign. A wide variety of strategies and methodologies were adopted for this purpose. The first and foremost strategy was personal contact for which there was no substitute. The NSS Volunteers and members of the other squads went from house to house a number of times. Khadija, a 55-year-old lady in one of the wards was an illiterate woman. The only other member of her family was her son who was unfortunately a mental patient. He was in fact in chains. The situation was really pathetic. It was impossible for the volunteers to talk to Khadija about literacy. Even then they kept on visiting the house. One day the lady said, “My dear children, you know my situation. But I shall also try to learn, because it is 100 per cent literacy that you want. I don’t want you to fail because of my non-co-operation”.

Personal contact was not always as easy as in Khadija’s case. Johny, one of the stoutest of head-load workers in Malayala Manorama, was illiterate. He had the body-build of a wrestler with frightening books and bristle-like hair. The volunteers of BCM College (which is a women’s
college) were afraid to approach him. Their Programme Officer had to interfere. In fact she had to meet Johny’s employer and use his influence to win this man to learn. But later the learner was very co-operative. He offered to go to the College to take his lessons.

2.7.3.12 The Media

The media played a very decisive role in the campaign. In fact the newspapers (Kottayam-based ones as well as those from outside) were competing with each other in giving news coverage. Most of them brought out full-page supplements on the Kottayam Campaign and wrote editorials in connection with the successful conclusion of the campaign. The AIR and Doordarshan also gave good coverage.

From the point of view of awareness creation through media, the most effective attempt was the one made through the ‘literacy count down’, which started on the 90th day. One day it was about the involvement of girl volunteers and female instructors. On another day it was about the distribution of spectacles for the elderly learners who could not afford to buy them. And so on.

2.7.3.13 Folk Art Forms

Apart from the print media and the electronic media, there were a number of folk art forms that were utilized. The literacy choir and the literacy street theatre and literacy dance troupe were some of them. One of the experiences related to this is from ward 26 of the municipality where after witnessing a “stick dance” (Saksharatha Kolkali) two illiterate youths who had earlier decided not to join the campaign changed their minds, and volunteered to learn. The song of the dance said the “whole world has
progressed, we are left behind and left in the dark, etc”. It had a tribal tune, which very well matched the message and created the desired impact.

2.7.3.14 Creativity in Awareness Generation

The organizers of the campaign were constantly engaged in the search for new methods of awareness creation. They made full use of the creative potentials of the people in each ward. A screen printer from ward 17 came up with the idea of a ‘literacy vehicle jatha’. The promoters of the campaign in this ward hired an auto rickshaw and decorated it and went all over the town with literacy songs and announcements stating that the whole town is marching towards total literacy and that nobody should be left behind.

Ward 2 came up with another novel idea. After nightfall a small team with a drum and clarinet went round with literacy songs in the manner of the Christmas carol. Yet another ward organized a Saksharatha Deepamala (literacy chain of lamps). Hundreds of people, including learners and instructors and promoters, gathered with candles, and symbolically shared light from one candle to the other.

2.7.3.15 The Instruction

The method of teaching adopted in the campaign was generally the “each one teach one” method. In some places such as the slums, housing colonies where people live close to each other and where the number of learners is high, the centre-based teaching style was also adopted. The textbooks used in the campaign were those prepared by the State Resource Centre. Their literacy kit, which contained a notebook and a pencil in addition to the literacy and numeracy primers, was distributed.
Indulekha, a seventeen-year old slum-girl who had not passed her SSLC examination was the person who taught the largest number of persons. Being in the slums she was close to the illiterates and she was instructor for 21 of the illiterates in her neighbourhood. Indulekha's name was recommended for national youth award. She was the youngest youth-awardee of 1990.

2.7.3.16 The Linguistic Minorities

One of the difficulties encountered in the campaign was how to handle the small group of Tamil speaking illiterates who were there in certain areas of Kottayam town. This was solved with the prompt help extended by the NSS volunteers of a college in Tamil Nadu. Programme Officers from this college came to Kottayam with a team of NSS volunteers who stayed with the people and taught Tamil with the help of literacy kits made available by SRC Madras.

The Tamil speaking population of Kottayam was found to be a highly mobile population and this naturally caused difficulties in a campaign, which was intended to cover all the people. Nevertheless the interaction with this group of people was very gratifying because they were extremely co-operative. They knew that we had arranged a team of post-graduate students of serious commitment to teach them their language, even though they were away from their native place.

2.7.3.17 Monitoring and Evaluation

Different tools were used for monitoring the learning process. One has a re-survey conducted with the help of a letter from the District Collector addressed to all heads of families in Kottayam Town. It
mentioned about the ambitious literacy campaign and appealed to them to make a declaration regarding the members of the family vis-a-vis their status in literacy. Against each name option was given to state: “literate”/“illiterate”/“has started learning”. The volunteers visited every home mid way through the campaign to get this performa filled as truthfully as possible. Through this re-survey about 300 new learners were discovered.

There was also the factor of societal pressure, which the illiterates could not wish away. Literacy had become almost the dominant emotion of the town and the fortress of illiteracy was falling brick by brick. The momentum was irresistible. Also, towards the end of the campaign a variety of strategies were used to ‘lure’ the reluctant illiterates into the fold of literacy.

The evaluation of the learning level of the neo-literates was done by a team of Programme Officers. The tool used was a set of five graded question papers. The first three were expected to be successfully answered by the learners during the 100 days campaign and the other two in the course of the year.

The neo-literates and the instructors were given certificates signed jointly by the Vice Chancellor, District Collector and the NSS Programme Co-ordinator.

After the completion of the campaign on 12th June 89, there was a period of 13 days before the declaration of the total literacy. These days were used for intensive teaching of those illiterates who started learning late during the campaign. These were also days for ward-level celebrations before the town-level celebrations of 25th June.

2.7.3.18 People’s Education Campaigns

As mentioned earlier the Kottayam Campaign was a two-in-one Programme, namely for literacy and for people’s education. The people’s
education component was designed to be implemented through a series of eight campaigns in the manner in which such campaigns were implemented in Singapore. The campaign initiated in Kottayam through NSS were the following: Read more books campaign, Green the city campaign, Consumer education campaign, Keep Kottayam clean campaign, Campaign against smoking, Campaign against alcoholism, Battle against cancer in Kottayam (BACK), and Legal literacy campaign.

One comment often heard in Kottayam town during the campaign was this: "now only we know that there is such a thing called NSS existing in colleges". The campaign took NSS to the people, and people into NSS.

2.7.4 The Nalpathimala Experiment

2.7.4.1 The Community

Nalpathimala is a small village, which consists of wards VII, VIII and XI of Athirampuzha panchayat in Kottayam District in Kerala. It is an ordinary village except for the fact that the headquarters of Mahatma Gandhi University happens to be situated nearby. A harijan colony and two re-settlement colonies form part of the village. The socio-economic status of the village is below average, as was revealed in a survey.

2.7.4.2 NSS Enters the Community

In 1990, a year after the Kottayam Literacy Campaign, as NSS Programme Co-ordinator, the researcher wrote a note to the Vice-Chancellor proposing the following idea:

Ours is a University named after the Father of the Nation, and we have now chosen to operate from rural headquarters.
Under these circumstances we have an obligation to get down to the people in our neighbourhood, in order to help them on the path to development. The National Service Scheme can take up this responsibility.... For this purpose we need to establish a Grama Vikas Kendra which will serve as a community centre for the people. It is proposed that two acres of land from the newly acquired premises of our University, be earmarked for this purpose and entrusted with NSS.

The Vice Chancellor responded positively. He issued the following order:

This is a beautiful idea. It must be implemented immediately. The Grama Vikas Kendra must give a *chetna*-dimension to the *chinthna* pre-occupations of our University.

Two and a half acres of land in the south-east corner of the university campus was promptly measured and allotted for the Grama Vikas Kendra (GVK). This piece of land lies very close to the village known as Nalpathimala.

GVK soon became the venue for a series of inter-collegiate work camps. The local people co-operated wholeheartedly. A temporary fencing was made for the land allotted, and a temporary shed thatched with palm leaves was made for holding meetings. The Khadi and Village Industries Board helped us to organize training in bee keeping for the local villages here. The NSS volunteers along with the local youth leveled some portion of the land in order to make a playground. Later small low-cost buildings were put up here partly utilizing laterites and doorframes from the old houses, which were being removed from the newly acquired campus. In all the camps held here the emphasis was on interaction with the people, and the involvement of people in the decision making process.
2.7.4.3 Major National Integration Camp and the Home Stay Idea

In January 1991 a programme which played a crucial role in really waking up the village was organized. It was a Major National Integration Camp sanctioned by the Ministry of Human Resources Development, Govt. of India. About 500 volunteers from ten states participated. The girl volunteers (about 300) were accommodated in a women's college nearby. But there was no school or college in Nalpathimala, which could be used for the accommodation of boys. Early in the planning stage of the camp the matter had been discussed with an informal group of local people, who said they would take the boys as guests in their homes. Pro Vice Chancellor as Chairman of the Organizing Committee of the Camp, expressed the fear that senior students from urban institutions like JNU may not be happy with the poor facilities in our village homes. Most of the homes did not have sanitary latrines. A lady syndicate member suggested that mats, if necessary, must be provided to the poor families who have volunteered to host the campers. A set of latrines were to be constructed in the GVK premises for the use of the campers who were willing to be guests of the harijan families which did not possess latrines. Two hundred mats were procured and kept at the GVK. It was informed that the host families could avail them in case they wanted. Even with all the precautions some of the programme officers in the organizing team expressed the fear that the National Integration Camp may lead to national disintegration if the boys did not feel at home in the village. However we decided to go ahead.

As a strategy it was decided to take into confidence the team-leaders who bring the volunteer teams from different Universities and put the home stay idea across to them. It was the conviction of the organizers that real integration will start only when the volunteers get an opportunity to know the hospitality and the goodness of the poor people. The organizers also
decided to stay with different families in the village during the camp days. The total number of families who offered hospitality was seventy-four. Two hundred male volunteers and eighteen programme officers in groups of three availed this hospitality. In every group there was one member who could speak the local language (Malayalam).

When the camp started on the evening of 10\textsuperscript{th} January 1991, the present researcher, as Camp Director, called all the volunteers and their Programme Officers into the large pandal which was specially put up for the camp. After congratulating the campers for having been selected to attend this major NI Camp, the Camp Director made the following observation.

You are the cream of creams in NSS. This I say because in a college with 2000-3000 student-strength only about 200 or 300 will join NSS. They are the cream of that college because of their of social commitment. To a major NI camp like the present one only the best among such volunteers (often best campers at college/University level) will be selected and sent. That is why you are cream of creams. Kindly accept my hearty congratulations. I also congratulate you for choosing to participate in a National Integration Camp. The focus of this camp, as its name indicates, is integration with our fellow countrymen whose language is different from ours, whose religion is different and whose socio-economic standards are different. You are now seated in a Pandal which has been put up for you by the people of this village who do not speak your language, possibly do not belong to your religion and caste. Some of them are from middle class families, while some are from the poor harijan colony here. This camp has not arranged any hostel or school building for your accommodation. The people here have agreed to give you
accommodation in their own homes. I want fifty of you, boys, to opt to stay in harijan huts for the next 10 days. I am looking for the cream of cream of creams. I, for one, and several of your Programme Officers have decided to be with the harijans. Please put up your hands if you are really willing.

About one hundred hands went up, and among them where the research-scholar-volunteers from JNU about whose choices we had apprehensions. All the apprehensions of the organizers dissolved in the enthusiasm and idealism of the volunteers, and there was a prolonged applause. The spirit of integration had already entered the camp.

The camp, which concluded on 19th January 1991, was a great event. It shook up the whole village. The ‘Dances of India’, particularly those presented by teams from the Punjab, Manipur, Maharashtra and Gujarat attracted large crowds, not only from Nalpathimala, but also from the nearby villages. The talks and discussions on different aspects of national integration prepared them intellectually for a great experience. The deep interaction with the villages, which was facilitated by the male volunteers staying with the people in their own homes, motivated them beyond the expectations of all concerned.

The organizers of the camp, however, had a special agenda too. It was to use this camp as an occasion to create a suitable environment in the village for initiating thoughts and actions aimed at the integrated development of the people here. During the cultural programmes in the evenings, some time used to be set apart for sharing of such thoughts with the people. The medium of communication in the camp was naturally English, but when it came to sharing of thoughts for the village, the medium was Malayalam.
One evening there was a special guest. That was a seasoned community development worker who was successfully implementing a model village-adoption programme about 70 kms. away under the auspices of an organisation by name Save A Family Plan (SAFP). In a short but highly impressive speech he spoke about what is happening in his village, and said that if the people of Nalpathimala are willing, they can even aim at greater achievements. He also invited interested persons to visit his village and the office of SAFP, known as ‘Aiswaryagram’.

When the Camp was over many people wept. The campers wept, and so did the mothers, from the host families, who came to see them off. Obviously it was a camp that had succeeded in building bonds of love. Even today several of the families treat as a treasure the letters received by them from their guest-volunteers. Also, even after eight years, some volunteers continue to write to their friends in the village.

At the end of the camp there was the usual evaluation in which the campers, the Programme Officers and the local organizers participated. It was felt that the most successful aspects were the interaction of the volunteers with the community, dances of India and the folk songs of India. The manual work and the lectures did not have the same impact as the other three. The emotional and the aesthetic had priority over the physical and the intellectual. The main reason for the extraordinary success of the camp was pointed out to be the home-stay programme.

2.7.4.4 Turning Point: An Exposure Programme

The University felt obliged to the 74 host families who collaborated with the NSS to make the camp a novel and an unforgettable experience for the campers. It was decided that as a token of University’s gratitude to them the University bus would be made available on a second Saturday for a
study tour for the heads of these families. Sixty-four persons participated. The trip was to Aiswaryagram from where one of the inspiring speakers had come. The date and time of the visit had been arranged in such a way that the people could be exposed to the dynamics of community organization in Aiswaryagram. In the main hall of the training centre at Aiswaryagram, the Sadyaya Sangham Committee of the village was having a meeting. The people from Nalpathimala sat round them in a "fish-bowl session" and observed the proceedings. The committee was heard discussing the functioning of their small savings programme and dairy co-operative. When the committee meeting was over we had opportunity to interact with the members.

Later we met in a private session in the green house of Aiswaryagram. As facilitator this researcher asked them this question: "What do you think? Is it possible for Nalpathimala to aim at some similar programme?" The immediate response was from a High School Teacher in our group who said: "Why not?" And it caught fire. There was optimism all around. It was decided that we should form a people's organization at Nalpathimala to work for all-round development. We borrowed the byelaw of Aiswaryagram. The very following day a core group met at the GranmaVikas Kendra to frame a bye-law.

2.7.4.5 The Seeds of Change

To cut a long story short, a society was formed at Nalpathimala. It was proposed that the Vice-Chancellor be invited to be its chairman. He accepted it. The Programme Co-ordinator, NSS, was to be the ex-officio Vice Chairman. A senior local man, a harijan who had some experience as Secretary of a co-operative society was later nominated by the Vice-Chancellor as the second of the two Vice-Chairmen. The name of the
society was accepted as “Grama Vikas Swasraya Sangham”. Elaborate
discussion had taken place regarding how party-politics could be kept away
from the affairs of the Sangham. The Sangham was registered under
Charitable Societies Act.

On 31\textsuperscript{st} March 1991 the formal inauguration of Grama Vikas
Swasraya 'Sangham took place. That was an Easter Sunday. The
Committee-member who pleaded for having the inaugural function on that
day was a devout Hindu. He said, “This is a programme, which has to cause
the resurrection of our village. Therefore Easter Sunday is most suitable”.
The Vice Chancellor inaugurated the Sangham at a meeting presided over
by the President of the Kottayam District Council.

The first committee was formed by nomination. There were twenty-
three members in it. We practiced participatory programme planning with
them. A memorable observation that came from one of the committee
members was this. “At present the people do not have any trust in us. In
order to win their trust we have to make the first programme really
successful”.

2.7.4.6 Summer School

The first programme that the committee chose to implement was a
six-week long summer school for the local children. It was done during
April-May 1990. Fortunately a high school teacher volunteered to work in
Nalpathimala for a year. She was made the headmistress of the summer
school.

The teachers were the educated unemployed youth of the locality.
They did the work voluntarily after undergoing a one-day orientation on
teaching. A small fee of Rs.5 per student was collected in order to meet the
expenditure on blackboard, chalk, prizes etc. One hundred and twenty children participated. The major activities in the summer school were

(a) Teaching of the basics of Malayalam, English, Hindi and Mathematics.
(b) Study of plants in the locality
(c) Promotion of reading habit
(d) Cultural programmes, public speaking, quiz etc.
(e) Short study trips

The whole programme was done in an improvised style. Classes were held under palm trees and in camp-tents. Two hundred books were borrowed from a nearby school and these were sub-lent to the students. The students were asked to prepare book-reports in a format, which was printed and distributed among them. One of the students read and prepared report on 42 small books in the course of the six weeks. She won a special prize for this and so did several others. The Vice Chancellor gave away certificates to the entire teacher volunteers.

Over the years the summer institute has become very popular with the students. Parents also welcome it. The Head Masters of the two high schools in the neighbourhood of Nalpathimala have testified that students who attended the summer programme at Grama Vikas Kendra had a tendency to perform better in the classes.

2.7.4.7 Small Savings

The next important activity launched by the Sangham was a Small Savings Programme. The village was divided into twelve sub-areas in September 1990 for convenience in collecting the small savings. These sub-areas are called Ayalkkoottams or neighbourhood groups. In each neighbourhood group there is a local volunteer who works as the savings
collector. The book keeping is done very systematically in the Grama Vikas Kendra where the Savings Office is managed by a committed social worker from a collaborating voluntary organization.

2.7.4.8 Neighbourhood Groups

Subsequently the people of the neighbourhood groups were motivated for other developmental activities. Each group chose a name for itself. They are Chaitanya, Aiswarya, Athulya, Darshini, Nitya, Soubhagya, Dhanya, Sahrudaya, Lotus, Karunya, Safalya and Akshara. They meet once a month in one of the houses in their area for discussions on issues/action-plans, which are related to the development of the area.

Two National Service Volunteers work as promoters of these Ayalkkoottams, but the leadership is vested with the people themselves. In each Ayalkkoottam there is a committee responsible for decision-making. The small savings collector is an important member in this committee.

Most of the ayalkkoottams have by now implemented some development-oriented action such as road-construction, digging of well, housing, financial help for medical treatment, construction of community centre, extension of electrical line, sale of umbrellas under installment scheme, cooking classes, health classes etc. The detailed report of these activities has been printed and published in book-form in Malayalam.

2.7.4.9 Fact Finding

Early in 1992 the need for more specific data about the socio-economic status of the village was experienced. The matter was discussed in a meeting of the committee and it was decided that a socio-economic survey must be conducted. A model survey-form was brought and the committee
discussed it and modified it to suit the Nalpathimala situation. A selected group of NSS Programme Officers, NSVs and local people conducted the survey.

Along with the survey, a need assessment also attempted. It was a surprise to note that sanitary latrine was the first priority with about 50 percent of the families. Inadequate utilization of governmental schemes, water scarcity, alcoholism, smoking habit, housing problem – all these were revealed as priority areas for intervention.

2.7.4.10 Help from SAFP

The report of the survey mentioned above was read and discussed in the committee and it was felt that the Sangham should do something about the problems identified. Naturally the committee thought of SAFP because ever since the major National Integration Camp of 1990 the village had a cordial relationship with SAFP. The very formation of the Grama Vikas Swasraya Sangham was a result of the inspiration received from SAFP. The committee decided to request them for assistance in latrine-construction. SAFP encouraged the Sangham to submit a systematic project.

It took almost a year for the project to be sanctioned. There was great happiness in the village when the letter of approval came. An assistance of more than five lakhs for housing, sanitary latrines, and self-employment programmes was received. The selection of beneficiaries was done by the ayalkkoottam-level committees. Forty-eight houses and 250 latrines and 145 small self employment programmes were sponsored in the village. A lot of collective thinking and action took place in order to make the best use of the project.
2.7.4.11 A Failure Story

The Nalpathimala experiment is not a string of success stories. In October 1992 a grocery shop was started in the village. It was with a lot of preparation, thinking and planning that the committee went into this venture. But it had to pull down the shutters before completing a full year. This failure was analyzed at several meetings of the Sangham as well as at ayalkkoottam-level. The fact was that the committee had not sufficiently studied the forces at work in the village. A large number of the people are ‘bonded customers’ who owe hundreds of rupees to the main shopkeepers of the village. These customers could not patronize a new shop, however noble the shop was, without clearing their old debts. The Sangham learned more lessons from the grocery shop than from any of the workshops organized at Nalpathimala.

2.7.4.12 Home Stay Programme

Nalpathimala is now a regular learning place for the NSS volunteers of Mahatma Gandhi University. When they come to GVK to attend camps and seminars the local families provide accommodation. They welcome the volunteers to the Ayalkkoottam meetings. The volunteers experience the goodness of the ordinary people and learn lessons, which no textbook can teach them. The University tries to inspire the college-level NSS units to start ‘village adoption’ programmes drawing inspiration and lessons from the campus-community interaction that takes place at Nalpathimala.

A number of voluntary agencies have sent their grass-root level workers to Nalpathimala to experience the model of community organisation followed here. Not everything at Nalpathimala is glorious; the people who come to learn from Nalpathimala often share valuable lessons
from their own work. In (1993) two French girls came to see this village and to stay here for a fortnight. But gradually they developed a special affection for the village and particularly its children. So they extended their stay for nearly three months during which time, among other things, they organized a three-day ‘creativity camp’ for the children. Before leaving they sponsored a Children’s Park for the village.

2.7.4.13 SAARC Camp at Nalpathimala

Among the camps organized at Nalpathimala, the SAARC Camp of November 93 deserves special mention. Three foreign delegates (from Srilanka, Nepal and Bhutan) were among the 150 delegates who participated in this camp. The main objective of the camp was communal harmony and international understanding. All the delegates including the foreigners were accommodated in the simple houses of the local people.

The grand finale of the camp coincided with the annual village get-together, which is called grama-mela. On the eve of that day all the ayalkkoottams had their meetings. One specialty of grama-mela that year was that ten principals were invited to participate in each of the ayalkkoottam meetings. Principals came and three of them stayed back overnight in three of the houses in the respective ayalkkoottam and had longer interactions with the people.

The grama-mela is a major event every year. One aspect of the celebration is the preparation of “community payasam” (sweet dish) which is served for over 2500 persons who generally participate in the meeting that day. The rice and coconut and other ingredients needed for the payasam are collected from the people and the payasam is cooked by a big team of local men and women.
2.7.4.14 Toddy Shop Closed

A anti-alcoholism campaign in the village finally led to the closure of a toddy-shop, which was functioning right in the heart of the village. On 31st March 1994 a dharna had to be staged in front of the toddy shop. Around 5 p.m. on that day the excise sub-inspector and his team came to the dharna pandal and assured that the toddy shop would be closed from the next day. And they have closed it.

2.7.4.15 Some Observations

One outstanding aspect of the experiment at Nalpathimala is the good-will that has been discovered and promoted through it. The ayalkkoottams function as a result of the sincere and dedicated work of a number of volunteers. Voluntarism of various degrees is evident at various levels in this village. The work done by the small savings collectors (who are also the animators in the ayalkkoottams) is mostly voluntary in nature. The committees at various levels also spend a lot of time for the village.

In fact from the beginning of Grama Vikas activities we had the help of voluntary full-timers from outside. Their spirit of sacrifice often proved to be contagious. That is why in spite of the pitfalls and problems the movement still continues. At present there is a voluntary agency by name OMMI (Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate) which has entered into permanent collaboration with the University in the Nalpathimala experiment. Even when the University system with its holidays, study leave, examinations etc. makes it difficult for teachers and students to be present in the village, the Grama Vikas Kendra is kept alive by this collaborating agency.
The Nalpathimala Experiment continues; it is an on-going programme. It is, after nine years, in a halfway position between a 'social movement' and an 'institutionalized programme'. How to maintain the 'the movement dimension' and avoid stagnation is a constant challenge. It is experienced that every innovative idea and every response to a genuine need of the community automatically brings in the movement dimension with massive participation, while the university, along with the permanent partner (collaborating voluntary agency) provides the institutional dimension. These are some of the elements on which NSS theorists and functionaries ought to develop a model for communalizing education.

2.7.5 PRA on Strengths And Weaknesses of the Nalpathimala Experiment

An assessment using PRA techniques was conducted in January 2000 to ascertain the strengths and weaknesses of the Nalpathimala Experiment. The participants consisted of 86 key informants from the village. They were conveners of neighbourhood groups, small savings collectors, presidents and secretaries of Self Help Groups, teachers in the Remedial Education Programme and leaders of HRD Project which is initiated by the voluntary agency collaborating in Nalpathimala Experiment.

2.7.5.1 Methodology: Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA)

The facilitator, after a brief introduction, initiated a brainstorming to identify first the major strengths/achievements of the programme going on at Nalpathimala. The groups were free to speak out whatever they felt was good about the Nalpathimala experiment. Twenty-three opinions came. These were noted on the blackboard. Then a discussion in the plenum took
place in order to consolidate the points and to priorities them. From this exercise emerged six points which by consensus were the major strengths/achievements of the Nalpathimala Experiment. These were:

1) A new image for the village
2) Co-operation and social harmony
3) Training Programmes and self employment
4) Conscientization & knowledge for life
5) Improved facilities for living
6) Women's development

These titles were instantly written in large letters on six placards and displayed at six spots in the large room where the group had assembled. Then the facilitator asked the participants to get up, pile up all the chairs in the centre and to move around to have a close look at the six placards and to decide which item he/she considered to be the most important strength/achievement. They took five minutes to do this. Then they were asked to stand under the placard, which reflected their priority. The number of participants whose stood under different placards was as follows:

| (1) A new image for the village | - | 11 |
| (2) Co-operation & Harmony | - | 6 |
| (3) Training Programmes & self employment | - | 13 |
| (4) Conscientization, knowledge for life children’s education | - | 13 |
| (5) Improved facilities for living | - | 14 |
| (6) Women’s Development | - | 27 |

**2.7.5.2 The Strengths**

In the next step the facilitator asked them 'why have you chosen to stand under your placard? They had their own reasons for standing there. The reasons were pooled and presented as follows.
(a) New Image for the Village

- National Integration Camps (NSS) brought students from all over India to Nalpathimala, giving a boost to the village's self image.
- SAARC Camp brought even foreigners here.
- Home Stay programme in NSS Camps made volunteers stay even in poor huts.
- NSS volunteers celebrated Onam with the people of Nalpathimala cooking food together in different homes.

In the general discussion the following points were supplemented:

- Socio-economic development programmes
- Neighbourhood groups, grama mela etc.
- Vocational training, self employment
- Housing, latrine construction etc. added new dimensions to this image.

(b) Co-operation and Social Harmony

- There is equality in the dealings at Grama Vikas Kendra; there is no distinction of caste and creed. This leads to harmony in the village. Love and mutual understanding are promoted.

In the general discussion the following points were added:

- Neighbourhood meetings take place in different homes
- Small savings collectors visit all homes every week

(c) Training and Promotion of Self Employment

- Hundreds of our people could learn new skills
- This has led to economic development
- Greater acceptance in family and in society
This has led to greater self-confidence for many.

(d) **Conscientization, Knowledge for Life and Children’s Education**

- There is greater awareness among our people (particularly the poor).
- Govt. Welfare Schemes, home science classes, training programmes etc.
- Remedial education and vacation classes have given motivation to our children.
- Children have become more self confident.

Additional points from general discussion:
- Study trips have widened the mental horizons of the children.
- Many knowledgeable people have come to Nalpathimala to enrich us.

(e) **Improved Facilities for Living**

- Houses for those who were in huts
- Latrines for hundreds of families
- Financial help for self-employment

(f) **Women’s Development**

- The personality development of women has great influence on the whole family, and thus on society at large.
- Conscientization of women has resulted in women’s awakening.
- This has led to better leadership among them; formation of about 30 SHGs.
- SHGs have caused greater economic stability for women.
- Women of Nalpathimala have learnt to take initiative.
2.7.5.3 Weaknesses

In the second part of this exercise the whole group re-gathered for a second brainstorming exercise, this time on the weaknesses of the Nalpathimala experiment. About sixteen points were written on the blackboard which were later summed up into the following six areas:

1) Failures in some of the activities undertaken by the Grama Vikas Swasraya Sangham
2) Lack of involvement on the part of the men-folk in the village
3) Lack of sufficient co-operation from the University.
4) Self-employment has not made any substantial change on the economic front.
5) Beneficiaries of earlier projects stay away from the educational-cultural programmes.
6) Sustainability factor not sufficiently emphasized.

As in the first part of the exercise these were written on placards and displayed, and the participants took positions under them in various numbers as indicated here.

I -24, II- 20, III - 2, IV-15, V - 18, VII - 7

Facilitator, this time, changed the pattern and asked each group to suggest ways and means to remedy the situation. Following are the suggestions that emerged.

(a) Failures in the Past

1) Absence of an efficient full-timer at Grama Vikas Kendra to manage its ventures.
2) Director Board should shoulder responsibilities in addition to participating in the decision making.
3) People’s participation should increase; more contacts are needed for this purpose.

4) Failures are stepping stones to success, they can’t always be avoided. However in future we should take care not to jump into activities that can fail.

(b) Men Folk not Sufficiently Involved

1) Arrange meetings of neighbourhood groups at time and date suitable for men also.
2) GVK staff should make deliberate attempt to contact men and to involve them.
3) Women should learn not to attribute wrong motives to the men who come for the meetings and programmes.

(c) Lack of Co-operation from the University

1) NSS co-ordinator and Adult Education Director should convince the higher authorities in the University to give GVK its due importance.
2) One of the NSS units (in a neighbouring college) could be asked to have regular contact with Nalpathimala.

(d) Self Employment

1) Training programmes have not yielded substantial economic benefit.
2) Training is not enough; GVK/HRD project should take care of post-training requirements. GVK/HRD project should initiate ventures for providing employment to the trained hands.

3) GVK/HRD project should mobilize capital investment and self employment.

(e) Poor Co-operation from Earlier Beneficiaries

1) Such individuals/families must be individually contacted and bought into the mainstream once again.

2) In future it must be made conditional that prospective beneficiaries have to agree to co-operate to keep GVK alive.

(f) Sustainability Factor not Sufficiently Emphasized

1) In future GVK’s development programmes should take care to protect the soil through water-conservation, promotion of vermicompost, etc.

2) Conduct campaign against excessive use of plastic,

3) Design programmes for top-soil conservation,

4) Promote bee-keeping, and cattle rearing wherever possible.

2.7.6 Conclusion

The Group was pleasantly surprised to see the critical consciousness exercised by it. The HRD project personnel felt rewarded seeing the extent to which the participants (most of them grass-root level leaders) had grown in their awareness and self-confidence.
While concluding the four cases given in this chapter it may be noted that Pauta Experiment (case I) is one in which NSS is not a stakeholder. The inclusion of this case is intended to serve the following purposes:

1. The student-involvement in Pauta experiment is visibly low. This is due to the absence of NSS in St. Gabriel’s Institute. The Principal came out to live with the poor. This is an exceptional behaviour which cannot be expected elsewhere. In the existing setup in India NSS is the best organ that can facilitate the communitizing of education.

2. Pauta however demonstrates that Campus-community interaction can take a wide variety of forms depending on variables such as motivation of persons concerned, nature of subjects being taught, nature of academic institution concerned, resourcefulness (including the influence to mobilize domestic and foreign resources) of the lead persons, etc.

3. Also, from the point of view of lessons in development action (such as planning for sustainability of the intervention, availing of Govt’s schemes etc.) Pauta has more valuable contributions to make in a study on the processes of communitizing education.

For these reasons the Pauta case which is a non-NSS case is included for the learning in contrast that it facilitates.
Notes and References

1 Adapted from Joseph C.M, “Formal Education as Entry Point to People’s Organization: The Pauta Experiment” People’s Participation in Development: Approaches to Non-formal Education, Walter Fernandez, ed, (Delhi:ISI, 1980)

2 C.M Joseph was Principal of St. Gabriel’s Institute, Hazaribagh.

3 Adapted from Steps in Village Adoption: Practical Guidelines with a Case Study, by the present researcher (Kalamassery: Rajagiri, 1984)

4 Kottayam Literacy Campaign is Documented in the monograph 100% Literacy in 100 Days by the present researcher (Kottayam: M.G. University, 1989), and How We Did it by K.J Alphons (Kottayam: Indulekha Foundation, 1989)

5 This Case has been documented in the form of a book in Malayalam entitled Nalpathimalayile Pareekshanam (The Nalpathimala Experiment) by the present researcher, and published by the University with a preface from the Vice Chancellor.