

# Annual Review 2009

## FOURTH WORLD ACTION

*Within the Third World, there exists two worlds; that of the affluent and the rich, and that of the poor.*

*We use the term 'Fourth World' to describe the world of the poor.*



## Our life – before and now

The economic climate in India has been transforming with tremendous speed, particularly in the last ten years. India is fast becoming one of the so-called leading nations in the world. India is booming!

How does this economic boom influence the life of the people in India? Do villagers and slum-dwellers enjoy the same benefits that a small section of the population in cities do? It is no surprise that industrialists and many political leaders justify economic growth and the spread of industries and mines as progress whether the poor benefit from it or not. But an unemployed youth or a factory worker who has been made redundant will feel differently. Then the 'experts' will express their theories of globalisation and the implications of government policies. But what do the people, the poor members of society, think of this 'new' India?

Last month when I was in Fatepur, a fairly remote village in the state of Jharkhand in India, I took the opportunity to ask this question to

some villagers I know well. I asked them if they could compare life in the village now to that of thirty or so years ago. Obviously this report is not an analysis of the current socio-economic situation in rural India or a debate on agriculture versus industry. Here I will simply narrate the conversation I had with a few villagers in one of the poorer states in India.

I talked to Bagloo, Thuta, Somra and Bodo. Bagloo is a Hindu, the rest are Santhals i.e. tribal (or 'indigenous' people - a word many prefer to use instead!). In villages there is little difference between a Hindu, a Muslim or a 'tribal'. Their common identity is in being a villager. Villagers - Hindus,



*Bodo with his daughter*



*Bagloo at work to earn some cash*

Muslims, tribal people alike, have all lived in harmony for generations.

Bagloo used to work as a health worker at the Ekta Niketan clinic. In many ways Bagloo is another 'ordinary' villager. Most villagers are content with whatever little they have and do not complain or demand more if there is a roof over their head and some food in the house. In fact Bagloo inherited quite a bit of land but he still has to look for work to earn some cash. Bodo on the other hand has not got much land, nor has he means to cultivate it. His only choice therefore is to work as a daily labourer all year round. He has to look for manual work on someone else's land or in nearby towns. Bodo has five small children, all girls. I will not be surprised if I find his wife pregnant again the next time I am in the village. To have

at least one son in the family is the norm and villagers have their reasons for this. Bodo represents one of those who will continue to struggle to feed his family. Bodo is 34.

Coming back to Bagloo, I always thought he was somehow different from the rest of the villagers. Indeed he is another 'timid' villager who never expects or demands anything more than basic 'survival', but his dream goes beyond the village he lives in. Bagloo is keen to know what is going on in his country and in the world. Every time I meet him, he comes up with all sorts of questions regarding the climate in Iceland or life on the moon and so on. I remember once he asked me if I could get him a compass. I did, and he was very pleased with it. I still wonder what use he has with it. Bagloo is a philosopher; he wants to know the secret of life! He is in his late 50s.

Thuta joined our conversation. I thought he was never keen to think of anything beyond feeding his family, a routine 'poor' villager so to speak. I must say I was wrong in this judgement; I learnt that he

has saved some money to send his younger son to college. Bishu, his eldest son, did not have this opportunity to go to school; he will become another Bodo. Thuta is in his 40s.

Lastly, it was Somra who joined us. He was mentioned in our previous newsletter. Somra continues to work as a health worker at Ekta Niketan. He is about 65.

One evening when I was putting my various pieces of information together for this report, a man



came to see me. Even though it was dark I recognised that it was Pan. Before I narrate my conversation with B a g l o o ,

Thuta and Bodo, I would like to write a line about Pan to include him in the story of 'new' India through the villagers' eyes. I know Pan very well. He was not around when I visited Fatepur last year. I asked how he has been. A villager seldom says that things are not

good; a usual reply would be 'very well' or 'no problem' or something of that kind even though they have no food in the house or if someone was ill! Pan's reply was not quite the same, so I tried to find out what was wrong. Here is Pan's story.

Last month Pan and eight others from Fatepur went to look for work; they ended up in a mining town called Raniganj about 100 miles away. Villagers often flock around construction sites, brick kilns or on new highway sites - a common picture in 'booming' India. For villagers the belief is that there is plenty of work in towns and cities!

Pan did find some work. Unfortunately however he was involved in a road accident in this new, unfamiliar place. While he was buying vegetables at a roadside market a car hit him from behind. He had broken ribs and cuts and bruises; his fellow villagers took him to a nearby hospital. Now he is back in the village with plaster around his rib cage and waiting for his wounds to heal. He will not be able to work for another two months, and he has to pay for his

medicines. He told me that he was fortunate to be alive. Pan has two daughters, a few years ago his wife died from illness. Pan is in his early 40s.

Pan did not stay long. I returned to my work.

Well Bagloo, how would you describe the changes in the village in last 30 years or so?

Indeed there are many changes. When I was young, say 40-50 years ago, there were no schools in the area. Our nearest school was at Burai about 7 miles from my village. Only a few of us in this whole area went to school. We used to walk through the forest; there were many trees. The forest has disappeared now. People from different villages used to come with their letters because there was no one else who could read for them. Those days Jugal and I were the only two in this whole area who could read and write!

Secondly our food has changed. These days we hardly see local grains that were so common when I was young. Even the rice we eat is different; now we eat high-breed varieties, they do not taste the



same. Thuta adds, these days we are less dependent on landlords and moneylenders. 30 years ago it was common to go to landlords and borrow paddy, then we had to return double the amount after harvest. Bagloo commented, the practice of money lending is not over though; these days the banks exploit us.

How is a bank seen as an exploiter? Bagloo replies, it is easier to borrow money from banks but people cannot pay back, so the interest adds up and in the end it becomes double the amount they borrowed initially. Seems a simple explanation to put a moneylender and a bank in the same category but there is truth in it.

We talked about price rises of essentials like rice. Bagloo recalled that rice was less than a rupee for a kilo whereas it has now

increased to 15 rupees. After rice comes mahua as another essential. Mahua, a local tree, was very common, but not anymore. Now there are only a few trees in the whole area, but in the mind of villagers mahua is still considered as an essential. Apart from making alcohol, villagers used to eat mahua flowers in different forms, used them as animal feed, made oil from its seeds, and doors, roofs and other furniture from its timber. Now mahua is mainly used for local alcohol; the price of mahua flowers has increased 30 folds in Bagloo's lifetime.

How about work opportunities in the village? The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, NREGA is in place. Bagloo and others are conversant about it. Bagloo explains, under the scheme all villagers are entitled to have a 'labour card' and thereby are secured to work for 100 days a year, and the rate is very good. He continues, before villagers were dependent on landlords, to work on their fields for a little money or some grain in return; there were fewer opportunities. In the early 80s the government introduced different schemes for unskilled



*Bodo received half the NREGA wage*

manual work like building roads or making dams. The daily wage did increase but officials and contractors took the money forcing the villagers to work at much lower rates. According to Bagloo things are now better and NREGA guarantees a full wage. Thuta and Bodo do not quite agree though. According to them corruption continues; villagers often get half their entitled wage. Indeed there are more government schemes these days but villagers continue to travel to far away towns and cities in search of work leaving their families behind. According to Bagloo, about 25-30% of villagers are regularly away as far as states like Gujarat, Rajasthan, MP, and

indeed Delhi.

Are things better now? Yes, they say. There is rice to eat because villagers grow hybrid varieties; people have some money to buy clothes, there are more schools, roads, even electricity in the area. Bagloo explains, the changes are very slow but things are now better than before. Is anything worse than before? They tried hard to respond. Somra replies, nothing has really changed; the poor remain poor. I rephrase my question asking them to identify three things that have changed for the worse. They struggle to find clear-cut answers to my question. After a pause Bagloo breaks the silence; he talks about road accidents as one of the negative things and starts giving an account of people who have been either killed or injured in the recent past. Well that may be true but the individuals involved are also sometimes to blame for the accidents, the others comment. After another pause Thuta says that these days they see new forms of illnesses that were not common before; Somra and Bagloo agree. They talk about the contamination of their food and water from harmful fertilisers.

It is time to end our conversation. I realise that it is hard for the villagers to talk about negative things that they have very little power to improve. The 'new' India has not necessarily brought new hope to village life, but this will go unsaid by the villagers and unnoticed by the politicians and industrialists.

As I write this report, I read India's war against terror. The government has launched 'Operation Green Hunt' deploying paramilitary forces in the fight against left-wing groups (Maoists) who have taken arms to oppose the measures that they believe are not in the interests of villagers. In many places in India villagers are caught in the crossfire, between supporters of economic growth that is to say industries, mines and other 'development' activities on the one hand and the critics of these measures on the other.

*(Written by Manan Ganguli)*

## 2009 Accounts

The major event of the year is the death of Janet Ganguli who founded the charity; she passed away on May 7th 2009. Fourth World Action continues, as does the work at Ekta Niketan in rural India.

We believe that our efforts, however small they may be, have been quite effective. The Ekta Niketan clinic, the treatment of tuberculosis in particular, continues to be popular in the area.

During the year we have helped the campaign to release Dr Binayak Sen who had been wrongfully imprisoned (in India) for his opposition to injustice to villagers he was working with. (*See Fourth World News, November 2009*).

Total expenditure for this year, like the previous year, remains under £3000. We expect to expand our initiatives including the work at Ekta Niketan in 2010. Our income has significantly increased during the year, thanks to generous donations from our supporters and also fundraising initiatives by those who ran the Edinburgh marathon.

The total income excluding the balance from the previous year is about £11,500.

### *Income*

Donations	£ 6,131.00
Bank Standing order	£ 320.00
Fundraising events	£ 5,000.00
Bank Interests & other	£ 12.00
Balance from 2008	£ 13336.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>£ 24,799.00</b>

### *Expenditure*

Project Ekta Niketan	£ 1857.00
Campaign	£ 986.00
Administration & publicity	£ 61.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>£ 2,904.00</b>

This annual report and other information can be found at [www.smallsimple.co.uk](http://www.smallsimple.co.uk).

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