



ANNUAL REPORT 1998-1999

The activities of Sanchal Foundation in the year 1998-1999 have focused on issues which are its main objectives: research and development activities concerning vulnerable groups of the population. The following activities have got the main attention:

1. Karuna Vihar project: Assistance for development of modern education and support methodologies for the disabled children in particular the mentally disabled.
2. Scientific assessment of the present status of survivors in Bhopal after the 1984 Union Carbide disaster through the assistance of a national commission.
3. Research and study for a rational understanding of minimum wages in India.
4. Research on Adivasi/Indigenous people's concerns
5. Profiles of some social movements and their history
6. Discussions and meetings with similar organizations as an outreach activity.

Descriptions of the above activities are given below:

1. *Karuna Vihar project.*

Sanchal Foundation had initiated this project in assisting in the training and up gradation of teachers, procurement of aids and appliances and in use of the latest techniques in the education and training of mentally and physically disabled children. The training modules have been implemented and 25 children are being assisted. Their mental handicaps range from mild to severe. The professionals include three special educators, speech therapist, and 5 teachers. Assistance was given to conduct awareness campaigns regarding mental disability in more than one dozen schools, civic groups and colleges. A special home management programme has also been developed.

2. *Scientific assessment of the present status of survivors in Bhopal after the 1984 Union Carbide disaster through the assistance of a national commission*

There have been several studies and research on different aspects of the world's worst industrial disaster of the Union Carbide in Bhopal which so far has killed more than 4 thousand people and caused multisystemic injuries to over 50,000 people. There are some reports that the condition of the survivors seem to be worst than what it was in 1994. The survivors organisations and the supporters have been demanding since 1989 for constituting a national commission (medical) which would go into the different aspects of the disaster. However, in order to assess the situation an objective and scientific assessment is necessary and this should be available to the public. Sanchal Foundation has been assisting professionals to outline the most effective methods of intervention 15 specific areas of work and investigation. This included documentation and analysis of the legal aspect of the Bhopal gas tragedy, organizing of published materials, and collation of materials, classification of legal documents under relevant heads, liaison with lawyers, researchers, government departments, ministries and survivors organisations with a view to collation of secondary data that is available.

3. *Research and study for a rational understanding of minimum wages in India.*

Historically the process of fixing minimum wages began with ILO in 1928. India signed ILO convention in 1928 and subsequently very many commissions and mechanisms were evolved to study the condition of the labour and fixing up minimum wages. India enacted a minimum wage act 1948 for certain employment. Concept of minimum wages was defined in the fair wages committee report 1948 as that wage should not only provide to be bare survival of the worker but also to ensure his/her efficiency by providing for health and education. The definition changed from one Indian Labour Commission to another.

There is a wide variation in the calculation of minimum wages even with this definition. In Maharashtra for example, there are 77 schedules of industry. Of these, the Government has decided minimum wages for 61 schedules. Of these, for 45 schedules, there is some linkage with cost of living. The industry often takes the plea of insufficient capacity to pay. In this connection the Supreme Court has decided that capacity to pay should not be a contention for payment of minimum wages. Where wages are lower than the minimum wages are paid, workers are in a situation of forced labour. In India over 80% of workers are in a situation of forced labour.

In 1994, a calculation done on the basis of the 15th ILC definition indicated the need based minimum wages for Bombay as Rs.2340 per month. Most employment would pay wages much lower than that. Sanchal Foundation has assisted in organising discussions on the various issues relating to minimum wages. Discussion about the sharpening of strategies for campaign to consolidate ideas and understanding with regard to minimum wage and plan for a national campaign was also discussed. Some of the basic issues which came up during the discussion on minimum wages were as follows:

How minimum wages would have to be considered scientifically and how minimum wages would have to be related to the issue of poverty? The difference and the distinction in minimum wages, fare wage, living wage and statutory were also discussed and then came up with the idea of strengthening the rationale of need based minimum wage but improving on the ideas of minimum wage as evolved during the 15th Labour Conference in 1957. The consultation also recognised that there is no uniform minimum wage either sectoral, nationally or otherwise and that a number of items have been left out of the purview of minimum wage. Boothlingam Committee did talk about National minimum wage to state level minimum wage but nothing came out of it. In 1991, Supreme Court added old age, education, health etc., to the norms for calculating minimum wage.

The idea of minimum wage is basically to improve the quality of life hence Social welfare is an important and integral aspect of it. NCL had rejected poverty level minimum wage but resolved to talk about need based minimum wage is a quantifiable minimum wage. Actual calculation of need based minimum wage to be based on quantification of Adequate and Balance Diet i.e; scientific minimum in terms of food, social realities, family size, rural indebtedness apart from those areas which have been accepted already. On the request of NCL, Sanchal Foundation assisted the Hazards Centre in conducting the study.

Methodology: The fundamental issue to look at from the point of view of unorganised workers on the issue of minimum wages is the existing norms or principles which define who the worker is. The present definition of labour is applicable to only the organised sector where to example, 200 man days of work is a basic premise for defining a worker and family labour is not recognised at all. Hence, the first step towards arriving at a need based minimum wage is to research in to existing definition of a worker and redefine the worker from the point of view of unorganised workers. The second issue would be to examine the present patterns of wages structure as defined and practiced in the whole unorganised sector. This would mean going through both secondary data and collecting of primary data from a cross section of this sector. The third most important aspect is to critically study the present composition and functioning of regulatory body or bodies and come out with an alternate regulatory mechanism. The report is being discussed and would be finalised after systematic reviews.

4. *Research on Adivasi/Indigenous people's concerns*

Sanchal Foundation has been assisting in a programme of documentation, research and study on Adivasi concerns. Students and experienced scientists have been assisted with the documentation work. One person was also appointed as coordinator of the research work. Her responsibility was to work with the organisations which have information available and initiatives to provide them with whatever help that is needed. She was given the responsibility of travelling and meeting with groups and organisations of Adivasi communities to coordinate some work on common concerns. The areas of work that have been identified are as follows:

1. Compilation of status report on Adivasi/indigenous people from 5 identified regions in India.

2. Biodiversity and intellectual and property rights on indigenous people.
 3. Status of women in Adivasi/indigenous society
1. Planning meetings with regard to compilation of the status report has taken place. Due to lack of resources further work is not in progress. However, people from these regions have accepted to collect as much data as possible from their own regions.
 2. With regard to Biodiversity and intellectual property rights several workshops were conducted and one professional also participated in an international meeting.
 3. The core group which has been identified to work with status of women in Adivasi/Indigenous Peoples' communities have met 2/3 times to discuss and identify areas of work and other programmes to be evolved. One of the areas that have been identified in the process of meetings was to initiate writing/recording of history of women in the regions from the Adivasi communities. To begin with North East of India was identified for the work.

A full fledged documentation is being carried out especially in areas where very little or no work has been done so far.

5. *Profiles of some social movements and their history*

The post colonial India has been witness to various social movements. They include workers and peasants; human rights, civil liberties and democratic rights movements; environmental and ecological movements; movements for secularism, women's movements, peace movements etc. These movements could not be described merely as protest movements but as positive, creative and constructive responses to the objective conditions of life searching for alternatives that would fulfil their aspirations and hopes. There are nearly 50 such movements in this country but we have chosen a few.

One of the first social movement that we chose to work on was National Fish Workers Forum.

1. National Fish Workers Forum.

Though six months of work has gone in to the work it has not been completed due to discontinuation of the study by the researcher. Hopefully, the study would continue in the near future. Quite a lot of secondary data has already been collected and traditional fish workers organisations in the coastal regions have been met with and interviewed. More work would have to be done after the resumption of the researcher.

4 2. Adivasi Mukhti Sangathan (AMS)

Adivasi Mukhti Sangathan which is a social movement was found in 1992 in Shendwa region. AMS emerged in this context to provide political, administrative

power and economic self sufficiency to the tribals. This process also symbolizes erosion of traditional models of centres of power and control. It is a unique social movement for study as it is an attempt to engage in democratising the polity at the grass root level and making the democracy vibrant.

6. *Discussions and meetings with similar organizations as an outreach activity.*

Kolar Gold mines has a history of 2000 years of mining including the period of Tipu Sultan till after its nationalisation in 1950. In 1972 the Bharat Gold Mines Limited was formed. Some of the deepest mines in the world are in KGF. It has also produced so far more than 800 Metric tones of Gold and had at one time 32 thousand workers. But now BGML has a strength of only 4000 and it has also been declared as a sick unit. The threat of the closure of the mines is looming large over the citizens of this small town. The whole economy of this town seem to run on the mining activity and now the future seems to be dark and the town is turning to be a ghost town. It is in this context discussions were held with workers, prominent citizens, representatives of other social organisations and professionals. The objective is to assist protect present workers, and do a scientific assessment of the status of the mines and to initiate studies, debates and discussions on alternate, viable economic programmes in KGF keeping in mind the vast infrastructure and resources available in KGF. Sanchal Foundation in collaboration with The Hazards Centre took up the responsibility of initiating research on the mines and if possible to come out with a technical assessment. The Project appointed a researcher and some local people towards collection of data. After nearly a year's work the first phase of the study is complete.