

SPEECH GIVEN TO FARM FORESTRY FAMILIES WHO RECEIVED CARBON REVENUE

Friday & Saturday, 14 & 15 February 2020

The Coolie Sangha of yesterday was a unity forged in order to overcome poverty and tackle feudal oppression. You have achieved your objectives. Those functions of the Coolie Sangha are no longer relevant.

In today's world, we need the Coolie Sangha in a state of permanent cooperation and mutuality. It should be a Unity that continually stands for justice, protection and support for each other.

This Unity is the basis for Social Capital needed by individual poor to aggregate their efforts and draw upon the community in order to succeed in new age business ventures that ADATS will identify and facilitate.

Ram Esteves

THE ECONOMY

- Whatever anyone says, there is a visible economic development that all of us can see.
 - It can be seen in people's movement, vehicles, mobiles, types of food, clothes, everything.
 - Even 25 years back, most of you had not travelled beyond your Gram Panchayats or gone further than the weekly markets.

I remember your asking ADATS for one bicycle for each village so that you could go to town in a late-night emergency.
 - Most children go to school in or close to their villages.

42 years back there were no schools in the villages and even the few schools did not have enough teachers.
 - When menfolk migrated in search of work, you gave half a bag of broken rice and a bag of Ragi to elders who stayed behind to look after young children.

This is a thing of the past. Today, with just ₹ 200 a month, a family gets enough ration to eat.
 - Young people won't believe you when you say that one out of five families lived in *Varpaku* (thatch lean-to's against someone's sturdy wall).

Today, these are used only to tie cattle.
 - Torn saris and no blouses are no longer seen; everyone has enough to oil and comb their hair into beautiful plaits and even wear a flower or two.
- Oppression has also reduced.
 - Feudal oppression has gone.
 - Untouchability has disappeared in the public space, even if some upper caste people practice it in their homes and harbour it in their minds.
- Ration shops, NREGA, LPG subsidy, free education and many government programmes have given you an income and purchasing power.
- Government expenditure on many activities has given contractors money.

Many youths from your families are themselves contractors or work with contractors.

- A few people run small and big businesses that make small profits.
- Government employees get salaries. The number of teachers, bus drivers, office workers has grown so much in the past 25-30 years.
- Nobody keeps their money hidden under their beds and mattresses.
- Traders make profits when you and the contractors and government employees and everyone else spend your money.

COOLIE SANGHA

- The Coolie Sangha was built at a time when the situation was very bad.
- Today, many believe that the Coolie Sangha is no longer necessary.
 - You feel that you are materially better off; there is money in your purses and a mobile in your handbag/pocket.
 - You feel that you do not need security or protection.
(with the exception of women who still face violence and discrimination even in your own homes)
- I agree that there is a lot of truth in this.
The kind of Coolie Sangha which we built 42 years back is no longer necessary.
- Let me then share with you the kind of Coolie Sangha I visualised 49 years back, when I first started working amongst you.
 - I dreamt of a gathering that would support one another.
 - I dreamt of a unity that would recognise injustice and oppose it.
 - I dreamt of a getting together that would serve people in need.
- I did not want a Coolie Sangha that is built only when the situation is bad. For me, the Coolie Sangha was an expression of cooperation, love and mutual support.
- Today, when I see student and women protests in the cities, I see this kind of a getting together.
 - They are not protesting only because they are afraid of what will happen to them.
 - They are rebelling against what they see as injustice.
 - Up until now, Law only said what we *should not do* and what we *should do*.
Now there is a law that seems to ask, "Who are you? Prove it!".
"ఎవరు ర నీవు?" and "कौन रे तू?" is an insult in our language and culture.
- But these protests are temporary gatherings; the Coolie Sangha should be a permanent and continuous getting together.
- All of you know that I am not shy to go to the streets. But continuous protest is not my dream; it is tiring and drains us of energy.
- 9 years back, I myself had asked you to get all your citizenship papers, land titles and property documents. It is there in our Strategic Plan and LogFrame.
- When we were doing DLDP works, many people said that you should show your land documents before undertaking soil and water conservation works. I said "No!" because I do not believe in *forcing* anything.

- For me, if you knew that it was your land, and ten people around you said it was your land, then it was your land.
- This type of Coolie Sangha which I described just now, based on love and service, is possible only through discussion and learning.
- That is be the role of Field Staff; to give you honest information and help you discuss and understand issues.
- You did this when the NREGA first started. Other people came to listen to your discussions and understand the concept of Right to Work. Field Staff gave you good information.

AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY

- Even though things have improved, real income from growing crops and agricultural wages has come down to zero.
- No one in the village is making products any more.
 - There are no more craftspeople making shoes or bullock carts or pots or crushing oilseeds.
 - The only old occupations we see are barbers and washer folk; and even they will disappear when their children take up other jobs.
- There are less and less farm labourers working under *Ryots*.
- Land owners produce nothing
 - Rains fail or are not on time because weather is unpredictable and the climate has changed.
 - Wet lands under tanks have become saline.
 - Every year, we see lesser and lesser truckloads of Ragi, Groundnut, Dhal and other products leaving the village after harvest.
- We see an increase only in the production of fruit and vegetables.
A lucky few who still have fertile lands, water for irrigation, and connectivity to cities make good profits and pay decent wages.

CAPITALISM

- In this new economy, there will be less and less jobs.
Factories that used to employ lakhs of workers now provide only a few thousand jobs.
- Jobless growth is happening because of computers and machines.
- Let us not blame this government or the other for this situation.
It is the type of capitalism that our country and the whole world has chosen to follow.
- Schooling and education is not the solution.
 - Even my Jimmy, who goes to a so-called “convent school”, will not have the skills to get these few jobs.
 - Forget the vast majority of children going to government schools!
- If and when subsidies and government expenditures stop, you will be in a worse situation than you were 42 years back.

- The only option for you is doing business.
- That is why, for the past few years, I have been asking you to develop a business mindset. Before spending any money on any activity, you must make a calculation or at least guess if it will make a profit or loss.
- The question is, what business can you do?

- I do not prescribe the normal “livelihood” solutions that all NGOs talk about.
 - How many women can make *Idlis* and sell at the crossroads and bus stops?
 - How many Petty Shops and Tailors can there be in a village?
 - Who wants Embroidered Cloth and Knitted Bags nowadays?
 - How many Cycle Repair & Puncture shops?
 - How many *Papad*, Pickle and *Agarbathi* factories?
- We are not *against* these. It is just that these are not the types of projects that ADATS needs to do. It is not our job.

- My search has always been for businesses that thousands and even lakhs of women can individually and together undertake, using their personal capacity combined with a collective strength; what we call Social Capital.
- This Social Capital is what I described as my dream.

Coolie Sangha needs to be in a *state of permanent cooperation and mutuality*. It should be a unity that always stands for justice and offers support and protection to each other.

CLIMATE CHANGE

- For the past 25 years we have spoken about Climate Change and have always kept you informed.
- All of you know that there is poison in the air that is killing thousands of people every day.
- The ones who are suffering are not capable of doing anything about it.
 - Partly because they live in huge cities where they have no control over their surroundings.
 - Also, because they refuse to change their lifestyle.

They want to continue living their lives in the exact same way as they always have, in spite of knowing that this is what is killing them.
(it is a little bit like us foolish cigarette smokers who will cough to our death rather than stop smoking).
- Believe me that you are *the only ones* who can do something positive.
 - Through Biogas units and Solar panels, you *avoid* adding to the poison in the air.
 - Through planting Trees, you *absorb* the poison that is already in the air.
- Those who teach and preach to you about Climate Change do absolutely nothing.
 - Till the end of 2010, when they caught a train to go for a big meeting, they did not even know what Climate Change was.

It took another 7 years for them to wake up and think of taking concrete action.
 - You, on the other hand, started understanding the science of greenhouse gases 15 years earlier, in the mid 1990's.

You actually made a plan in 1998 and, with your own resources, started planting trees to absorb Greenhouse Gases.

- Avoiding poisons and absorbing/reducing poisons is a health-cure for crores of people.
 - It must be seen exactly like services provided by Doctors and Nurses.
 - And just like them, you should get paid for it.
- For 25 years, I have been fighting for this. At first, nobody listened. But today, when suffering has increased and dangers stare them in the face, they are willing to pay for this service.
- I see Climate Change as an opportunity for thousands of you to get into businesses and build a guaranteed income for the day that government subsidies and government spending stops.

CARBON REVENUE

- In the past 2 years, Velcan Biogas women reduced 85,175 tonnes and sold 52,165 tonnes for ₹ 3,09,17,364
- They received ₹ 3,03,28,719 crore as carbon revenue. These are business incomes that they got from providing an environmental service to society at large.
 - At first 2,906 End User women received ₹ 94,90,146 as carbon revenue.
 - This month, 3,128 End User women whose Biogas units are still working received another ₹ 2,08,38,573
- In the next few months we will sell another 33,010 tonnes and receive another ₹ 1.9 crore. This will take their total receipts to ₹ 4,99,17,364 crore
- This is *in addition to* the ₹ 6.1 crores they received to build the Biogas units during your ERPA.
So the actual benefit is more than ₹ 11 crore!
- You who have planted trees with your own money have sequestered 26,345 tonnes and received ₹ 1,77,36,462
 - 2 years back, 509 families got ₹ 16,26,611
 - Today and tomorrow, 479 families will get ₹ 1,61,09,851

| Carbon Revenue | Families |
|----------------|----------|
| > 2 lakh | 1 |
| 1 - 2 lakh | 12 |
| 50 k - 1 lakh | 37 |
| 40 k - 50 k | 22 |
| 30 k to 40 k | 39 |
| 20 k - 30 k | 78 |
| 10 k - 20 k | 127 |
| 1 k - 10 k | 153 |
| < 1 k | 10 |

- After 2 more months, in April 2020, we will verify another 12,000 tonnes and you will get another ₹ 84 lakh taking the total carbon revenue to ₹ 2.6 core.

- I am so proud that, starting with the “Bagepalli Tamarind Project” in 1998, you set an example for the whole world:
 - But when compared to how much has to be done, how much poison has to be reduced from the atmosphere, the quantity is very little. It is just a drop in the ocean.
 - Quite honestly, I no longer believe that these “Mitigation” projects will make any difference in reducing Greenhouse Gases.
Humans have already crossed the tipping point through greed, stupidity and pretended ignorance.
 - Now it is time for corporates and policy makers to finally realise that the situation is very dangerous for all Human beings. They have to take hard decisions and act in a big way.