Social Movements and Educational Change
A Case Study of the Adivasi Munnetra Sangam

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Political change can be a catalyst for the transformation of an educational system through the positioning of grass-roots social movements as an alternative to bureaucratic state mechanisms and non-governmental organisations in designing and implementing education reform. The case study of the Adivasi Munnetra Sangam, a social movement in Gudalur in Tamil Nadu, is used to illustrate how fundamental shifts in control of power within the system can result in greater inclusion of oppressed groups.

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The debates on making Indian education more inclusive and egalitarian tend to revolve around two kinds of paradigms: (i) Improving curricula, textbooks, and teaching methods and bringing them in line with educational goals, which may range from creating skills and human capital at one end of the spectrum to self-discovery and good citizenship at the other (Krishnamurthi 1953; NCERT 2005). (ii) Enhancing organisational and systemic processes, which may range from improving teacher training colleges to privatisation of schools to strengthening the roles of leaders (Bruns et al 2011; Bush 2011).

These two paradigms are popular with the state as well as with the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that are increasingly active in this sector. They are also interconnected, though relatively few organisations work on all of these agendas simultaneously. In contrast with these approaches, a voluble but smaller group of voices has emphasised the role of politics as an independent force for improving education in India and elsewhere (Saxena 1998; Bowles and Gintis 2011; Anyon 2005; Apple 2007). It is argued that the primary factor required for educational change is political will and not technical abilities and resources. Social movements offer a path towards creating that political will. It is through social movements, which aim to shift the balance of power within the political system, that the normative orientations of key actors will change. Only then can strategic institutions generate the will required to pull attention and effort away from competing demands and put them into improving the education system instead.

The political perspective would say that the disadvantages faced by Adivasis and other marginalised groups in education are because of the systemic domination of certain interest groups over them. So long as educational personnel, processes, curricula, and pedagogy continue to be controlled by groups that maintain oppressive relations with the rest of society, there is little hope for change. Sometimes, critics of this approach balk at the conspiracy theories and social determinism which appear to underwrite it (Feinberg and Soltis 1998). However, if one replaces the suspicions of conspiracy and allegations of vindictiveness in this theoretical perspective with the concept of indifference on the part of the elites, the consequences of a structure of impersonal domination upon education remain much the same. The result would still be bad or non-existent schools for the marginalised.

The above-mentioned proponents of this power-centric approach would say that a shift in the orientations and the character of the key decision-makers would lead to better schools, more relevant curricula and so on. The educational establishment has entrenched interests within it for whom the improvement of Adivasi education is not a priority and who may even look down upon them as second-class citizens. The consolidation of power in the hands of the elites in developing countries is so daunting that even influential international bureaucracies like the World Bank and UNICEF avoid directly targeting these interests and try to manoeuvre through supposedly apolitical spaces. While international bureaucracies and large NGOs are themselves part of a politics or balance of power, they find explicit tugs of war and confrontations difficult to negotiate, preferring instead to use bureaucratic decisions and backroom lobbying. There is also the feeling amongst them that activism and confrontationist talk is self-defeating; that it does not achieve anything and only alienates the very people one is seeking to change.

It is well known in comparative education that political processes have a significant role to play in the expansion and improvement of education systems. The examples of communist countries like Cuba and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) show how strong diktats from centralised command systems led to dramatic growth in access to education and an improvement in its average quality (Gasperini 2000; Carnoy et al 2007; Zajda 1980). For all the problems that resulted from the United States (US) embargo and the collapse of the Soviet Union, Cuba still managed to have the highest levels of achievement scores in South America (UNESCO 2008). There is similar evidence from Western Europe that shows the key role that politics plays in improving schooling for the lower classes. For instance, in the second half of the 20th century, the growth of comprehensive schooling and the decline of streaming in the United Kingdom (UK) was driven by changes in the ideologies of the rulers, a culture of greater egalitarianism, and new social and political alliances which expanded the bases of power (Lawton 2004; Aldrich 2002). Combined with a change in the economic structure, it was this shift which led to the opening of new universities and increased social mobility. However, recent decades and further policy shifts may have seen a reversal of that trend (Themelis 2008).

It is not unusual that the way power is configured in a social and education system may lead to results that go against that particular society's own avowed goals of spreading education to everyone. Every organisation—be it a state education bureaucracy, an NGO, or a revolutionary party—runs the risk of potentially ignoring its larger goals. Organisations are, after all, driven by balances of power and it is common to see those in control trying to hold on to their positions of privilege, to the detriment of their original objectives. It may even be that the very purpose of the organisation is to maintain the domination of a class or group. The resulting imperviousness of bureaucracies and other powerful institutions to ground realities has been the context within which social movements have played a constructive role in education as well as other sectors. The

significance of social movements, specifically, is that their energies come from outside the establishment (Habermas 1996). They do not primarily operate through the state's machinery or through the command and control systems of NGOs. This, in principle, permits them to act outside the formal structures of power, which are often controlled by the dominant actors in a society. Over the years, social movements have proven to be an important tool for challenging and transforming the establishment. By operating outside the concentrated forms of control used by mainstream institutions, they give the voices that typically get lost in bureaucracy a chance to speak and be heard. This is also why established institutions usually find social movements awkward to work with. The eventual institutionalisation of many social movements does not weaken this pattern since these institutions may now have embedded in them new sources of legitimacy and membership. Within their institutional structure may lie a new configuration of social relations.

In a country where educational change seems to be happening at a snail's pace; where one repeatedly meets students who have had only a fraud perpetrated on them in the name of schooling and college, it is reasonable to wonder whether there are indeed vested interests that are disinclined to promote the expansion of education for the poor and marginalised. It is this question that leads one to examine social movements as a source of transformation for the education sector. This article is about the Adivasi Munnetra Sangam (AMS), a social movement for Adivasi empowerment which emerged in the Nilgiri hills of Tamil Nadu, and the impact it has had on local education. It is hoped that an analysis of its work will offer insights into what one can expect social movements to achieve in the South Asian context and also what they cannot be expected to achieve.

Social Movements for Education

The study of social movements has been an active area in sociology as well as in politics. They may be defined as dense informal networks engaged in a conflict with some other entity, united by a collective sense of identity (Della Porta and Diani 2006). In sociology, a considerable body of theoretical work has developed around social movements, which largely aims at explaining their rise, success, and decline. Theories which explore social conflict, social organisations and networks, political opportunities and mediation, identity, culture, and framing have provided rich insights into many social movements across the world (Della Porta and Diani 2006; Opp 2009).

Social movements aimed specifically at transforming education have been an area of special interest for scholars in the US and Canada, particularly for those inspired by critical pedagogy. Paulo Freire's work gave education the political orientation of overthrowing social oppression and critical pedagogy builds on his work (1996). It talks a language of fundamental reconstruction; not of the self alone, but of society as a whole. Freire's approach, of empowering the oppressed by learning about the conditions of their oppression, has inspired many. The oppressed are acknowledged as having the capacity to take the initiative in building new knowledge, thus escaping

from the traps laid by knowledge systems created by the powerful. Michael Apple, Stanley Aronowitz, and Henry Giroux, to name just a few, have written extensively about social movements or community-based organisations working to defend and strengthen public schools (Apple 1999, 2007, 2008; Apple and Beane 2009; Aronowitz 2008; Aronowitz and Giroux 1987; Giroux 2001, 2005). For them, the significance of such movements lies in their potential to counter the influence of neoconservative, neo-liberal, and religious fundamentalist forces in education. In recent years, how-to manuals have emerged with instructions for mobilising communities (Kahn 2010; Warren and Mapp 2011).

A clear inference from these studies of social movements is that their advantages and limitations have to be understood only with reference to the local context. There is no single formula from which a movement can spring. Nor can its impact be deductively predicted from extrapolating the learnings from one situation to another. The political opportunity structure, local cultures, institutions, and contradictions impact what a movement can be expected to achieve. Studies of social movements in other regions, therefore, may provide great inspiration and many ideas, but they do not translate easily into the South Asian context.

Amongst developing countries, it is in South American countries like Brazil, with its vibrant tradition of struggles for local democracy, that one finds studies on social movements for the improvement of education. Left-leaning parties and activist groups in São Paulo and elsewhere have contributed substantially to transforming education for the poor (O'Cadiz et al 1998; Gandin and Apple 2002). However, in South Asia, studies about social movements involved in improving formal education are scarce. Studies have been done on the Kerala Sasthra Sahithya Parishad and some literacy campaigns (Parayil 1992; Saldanha 1995), but these are about informal education, which is a very different institutional space.

Perhaps, the foremost amongst well-known South Asian social movements with an educational dimension was the Indian freedom struggle. However, its Nai Talim rapidly lost ground after independence as the middle-class education bureaucracy became the main voice for the cultivation of schools. In the post-independence era, the Narmada Bachao Andolan set up Jeevanshalas as a parallel to the dysfunctional government schools in regions which had been earmarked for sacrifice in the name of development. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and its Saraswati Shishu Mandirs have been gradually building momentum, though studies have focused mostly on the ideological character of their views on education rather than on the overall transformation they have or have not wrought.

Sadhna Saxena is one of the rare few who has tried to systematically examine how an organisation sought to build a social movement and how it allied that effort with work in education (1998). The organisation she studied was Kishore Bharati in Madhya Pradesh, which sought to organise the rural poor while also trying to get government schools to teach science with an activity-based approach and the underlying message of empowerment. The former aspect of their work

drew opposition from local landlords, district government authorities, the police, and assorted goons and criminals. The kind of violence that India seems to witness against critical educational work is very different from the scenario in the US, where decades of efforts—including through the Civil Rights Movement—have succeeded in creating a space for critical pedagogy. The struggles that Saxena detailed eventually gave way to the more moderate issues involved in working in government schools in alliance with the state. The grass-roots efforts in education took on a life of their own in the form of an independent organisation called Eklavya, while Kishore Bharati closed down. Eklavya focused entirely on working with the government education bureaucracy in a spirit of collegiality and partnership. From Saxena's article, it appears that the social movement faced many important obstacles, including a political environment hostile to any mobilisation and a disconnect between middle-class activists and the local community, with the activists soon losing direction and momentum.

The Adivasi movement studied here presents a more optimistic picture. It was analysed with the hope that it might yield more insights into the advantages which can realistically be expected from social movements in education. Among the questions that this article will explore through this case study are:
(i) Can social movements change the balance of power in education systems? (ii) Can they transform the daily functioning of educational institutions? (iii) Do they really have primacy over curricular, pedagogic, and organisational changes?

The three authors of this article took a collaborative approach to understanding these questions. One of the authors, Amman Madan, is an academic with a long history of connections with various educational organisations. The other two, Rama Sastry and B Ramdas, are activists from the Adivasi movement with four decades of experience in alternative education and people's movements. They have also played a foundational and significant role in the AMS school discussed in this article. The movement and its associated institutions were studied through a combination of institutional ethnography and auto-ethnography. Long discussions were held with activists and members of associated institutions, inviting them to reflect upon their experiences and the lessons they held. The daily functioning of the school run by the movement was studied in some detail. Its curricular and pedagogic aspects were examined to try and answer key research questions. A conscious effort was made to step away from the detached standpoint of studying social change. While truth, objectivity, and reality remained key considerations for the study, there was also a commitment towards building knowledge that would participate in the movement's work and enable further change. This was in consonance with a critical realist approach towards knowledge (Dean et al 2006).

Origins of the Movement

ACCORD (Action for Community Organisation, Rehabilitation, and Development) is an organisation which began work in 1985 in the Gudalur block in Tamil Nadu's Nilgiris district,

which abuts the state's border with Kerala and Karnataka. ACCORD built a cadre of Adivasi youth who in turn formed a community-based organisation, the AMS. The AMS has led protests for the recovery of Adivasi land which had been taken over by outsiders. Over the years it has established itself as an important and effective voice for the protection of Adivasis. This mass base is significant since it has led to a different trajectory in its educational work compared to NGOs that work directly with the state and government schools. Their educational work was studied through extensive interviews of teachers and activists, classroom observations, and by drawing upon various documents generated by ACCORD and the AMS.

Gudalur block lies in a valley of the Nilgiri hills and features a mixture of forest, plantations, and homesteads. It is home to five Adivasi communities—the Paniyas, the Bettukurumbas, the Mullukurumbas, the Kattunayakas, and the Irulas. In total, the Adivasis number around 20,000 people and constitute about 10% of the population of Gudalur and its adjoining territory. The Paniyas, who constitute around 40% of the tribal population and are the single largest tribe, were mostly bonded for a few centuries to a migrant landowning group from Karnataka called the Chettis. The Mullukurumbas have small landholdings, which they supplemented by hunting. The rest have primarily been hunter–gatherers.

Gudalur has been growing tea and coffee since the mid-19th century. British planters started the process of clearing the forests and this compelled the Adivasis who lived in them to constantly stay on the move. There was no protest at the time as the forests in which they dwelled stretched into Kerala on one side and Karnataka on the other. In the 1960s, the forests came to be occupied by migrants from Kerala who became small landowners. The 1970s saw another wave of migrants: Tamils from Sri Lanka. Both these migrant groups were, unlike earlier occupants, quite aggressive in seeking control of land. This compelled the Adivasis to move again, withdrawing deeper into the forests even as the boundaries of the forest itself shrank. In 1969, the passing of the Gudalur Janmam Estates (Abolition and Conversion into Ryotwari) Act, to acquire land from a raja in Kerala, resulted in almost the entire area of Gudalur coming under litigation that remains unresolved to this day. This in turn meant that unoccupied land, including forests, was up for grabs and the Adivasi habitat came under further pressure. Then came the Forest (Conservation) Act of 1980, which eventually led to the declaration of the forests as wildlife sanctuaries and the prohibition of human entry into them. Overnight, Adivasis had become trespassers and encroachers in their own homes. They were denied access to livelihood, water, fish, firewood, medicinal herbs, housing materials, and above all, their gods. Some Adivasis did get land titles in their names when the British were around, but not knowing what to do with them, they had kept the documents in safekeeping with the landlords under whom they worked. When the clamour for land grew, it became difficult to recover those land titles too.

It was this context that triggered ACCORD's work. The Adivasis were on the brink of starvation and there was endemic hopelessness and despair. Activists speak of visiting villages where individuals just sat slumped over, not knowing what to do next. ACCORD's work was initiated in 1985 by Stan and Mari Thekaekara, and K T Subramani, an Adivasi youth leader. They aimed to build a cadre of youth who could recover the lost land. These youths set up groups called *sangams* in each of the hamlets, which were later federated into an organisation called the AMS.

The AMS was able to bring all the different Adivasi communities together under one umbrella. Adivasi culture and their festivals were important for cementing this partnership. The AMS activists would often visit a hamlet, and over two or three days of interactions, they would develop a dance-theatre performance on the injustices of their existence. This had a dramatic effect on the local community and helped to mobilise them. Adivasi festivals were a time for dance and the effervescence of togetherness. They easily lent themselves to becoming sites where the conditions of the Adivasis could be discussed, leading to further consolidation of their political force. Thus, the Adivasi identity and the revival of their culture became as important as a land issue as sites for political action. In 1988, the AMS called for its first major demonstration in the town of Gudalur. Several thousand men, women, and children came together. This shocked not only the local people but the Adivasis as well, as they themselves had no idea that so many of them existed.

Decentralised Organisation

The efforts of the AMS within the community led to the redemption of over 1,500 acres of land from landowners, estates, and the forest department, which left every Adivasi family with some amount of land. This was the most pressing need since they had been cut off from all their other sources of livelihood. Subsequently, work on agriculture, health, education and housing cooperatives was also initiated. All these were built on the substratum of the highly decentralised organisation of the AMS. The Adivasi activists had a decisive voice in what was needed and how these needs were to be met. There was a conscious decision not to centralise power and thus, avoid the fate of most NGOs. This meant keeping alive a culture of grass-roots democracy and never becoming just service delivery personnel for the government. This also implied continued and deliberate efforts to enhance the decision-making powers of the Adivasis, as well as their culture, their unity, and their values. This was in marked contrast with many NGOs' trajectory of consolidating power within a narrow bureaucratic structure and building firm client relations with their beneficiaries, which eventually debilitates the local community and its sense of agency.

The emphasis on the community and its culture as a political strategy came at least partly from the previous experiences of some of the non-Adivasi activists. They had been exposed to community-based mobilisation while at college in Chennai and Bangalore in the 1970s, which required them to work as equals in and amongst the rural and urban poor. When they came to Gudalur, they had several years of experience in bonding with local communities, identifying their concerns in a participative manner, and building community-based

organisations through which they could negotiate with state functionaries and create networks with allies.

Early Interventions in Education

Given the importance of Adivasi identity, culture, and language to the AMS methods of mobilisation, it was inevitable that education drew its attention. Two challenges presented themselves immediately. The first revolved around the question of how best to straddle two worlds: that of the Adivasis and that of the region's dominant cultures. The elders insisted that if the children went to school, they would lose their language and culture and end up with low self-esteem. Yet, they knew that without modern education they could not survive in the world. The second challenge involved deciding on a kind of education that would safeguard the Adivasis from being dumped at the bottom of the social and economic heap again. They wanted an education that could set them up as independent self-respecting community members.

In 1999, a survey conducted by ACCORD showed that only 27% literacy existed among the Adivasi community and that the rate among women was as low as 17%. There were only 737 Adivasi children whose names were enrolled in the school registers, which represented only 25% of the children of school-going age. There were 14 *ashram shalas* or government-run residential schools for tribal children in the block, but the state of affairs there was pathetic. Non-Adivasi teachers and staff showed little empathy or concern for the Adivasi children.

An investigation into the reasons behind children not going to school or dropping out showed that language was a huge issue as each of the four tribes spoke a language different from Tamil, which was the medium of instruction in most local schools. This created a serious mental block that prevented any kind of learning. Language was viewed as the vehicle that would carry Adivasi culture forward. So, the fear that the next generation would not speak their language and, therefore, not respect their culture was reason enough for the community to either not send their children, or to actively encourage dropping out. One of the first programmes the movement took up was to work with the Central Institute of Indian Languages to develop a script for each of the tribal languages. Along with community elders, they have used this script to bring out a primer, a book of stories and songs, and so on.

Given the fact that the community's own systems of transmitting knowledge had collapsed with the destruction of their homesteads and the environment, the school was rapidly becoming the only space for their education. The question that arose was: What kind of education would they get?

The support of sympathisers within the state led to an early initiative which demonstrated the political strength of the AMS. Adivasi volunteers were selected and placed inside the government's ashram shalas to try and get them to function properly. As an activist said, they had thought that since the principals of these ashram shalas only showed up rarely, it would be possible to take over and get the schools to improve. However, it did not work out like that. There was a sharp reaction from the staff of the government-run schools against the Adivasi volunteers, who were high school graduates. As the volunteers began to expose malpractices, the resistance to them began to stiffen even further. In one incident, volunteers caught a truck with food meant for an ashram shala that had been diverted to a local shop. The complicit staff members became determined opponents of the AMS. While it had been possible to get support from higher levels of the education bureaucracy, getting the lower levels of the same system to cooperate was proving to be a much more difficult proposition.

The AMS volunteers found themselves in a fix. They felt unequipped to teach the children by themselves. They were also stonewalled by the government staff and blocked from instituting any reform. After a while, they withdrew to participate in a two-year intensive course on teaching and education run by ACCORD. They then moved to focus on an alternative school that had been taken over by the AMS. The penetration of the AMS volunteers into the power structure of the school was a remarkable feat, which was helped by the support the movement had garnered within the government bureaucracy. However, the local structure of the school blocked them from being able to achieve all that they wanted. This is an indicator of some general limitations of the social movement's approach to interventions, which we shall return to later.

The Vidyodaya Experiment

The alternative school taken over by the AMS was Vidyodaya, which had been started by two of the authors of this article, Sastry and Ramdas, for the children of the staff of ACCORD. They were aware of current literature on progressive education and had experience in running a similar school in Puducherry. In 1995, a *mahasabha* meeting of Adivasi leaders asked for Vidyodaya to be handed over to the AMS. This, the activists felt, would be a space where they could model the kind of education they wanted.

The takeover of the school led to the entry of a number of Adivasi youths who began to learn to teach and to manage educational spaces. A teacher training curriculum was set up which introduced them to the history of Adivasis in India. It also established that they were unjustly relegated to the bottom of the social and economic ladder through no fault of theirs. It discussed ways to get them out of the cycle. The history of the land rights movement, the geography of their villages, their food, and living practices were introduced into the school curriculum for children. The elders from the community came into the classroom to talk of their experiences, rituals, customs, values, and the way forward. They taught their origin stories, songs, and dances. These became part of the daily routine of the school, breaking some of the barriers between home and school.

Today, it is the Adivasis who run the school and they have been able to further develop curricula which integrate their lives into the school context. Not just in terms of content, but also in terms of values. Among other things, in keeping with the ethos of the Adivasi community, there is a very non-hierarchical system of functioning in the school. For instance, there is no principal's office, and in the room in which visitors meet schoolteachers and administrators, there is no desk across

which they must talk. The symbolism of bureaucratic power is avoided to create a more egalitarian space that the parents of Adivasi children feel comfortable entering.

The political stance of the AMS, which emphasises the centrality of Adivasi culture, underwrites and encourages pedagogic innovations that support that culture. The respect and compassion of the teachers, para-teachers, and activists for Adivasi students has given rise to several remarkable practices in Vidyodaya that go a long way towards helping Adivasi children make the best of their school life. For example, when children join in the first grade, they are not compelled to speak in the state's official language. As the teachers say, Tamil is a language foreign to them at that point of time. Nor are the new entrants compelled to sit in class. The teachers call the youngest children of the school "wanderers" as they are not used to sitting and focusing on an instructor for long periods of time. They are, therefore, allowed to move from place to place. The school's design deliberately has no doors separating classrooms, enabling children to move freely from one space to another. It is only after about six months that teachers begin to get them to start sitting to learn for increasingly longer periods. This approach of the teachers is very effective in getting the children to integrate painlessly with the school environment. It can be contrasted with the bewilderment and constant irritation that teachers in conventional schools feel towards children from marginalised social groups who arrive in grade one, but seem to find it difficult to pay attention or even sit quietly in one place.

Beyond the School

Along with the school, the AMS has set up an extensive network that helps children get into and then stay in school. A common problem was that the Adivasis found it very difficult to get a child to school at the right time. Mothers often had to leave for work in the plantations by 7:30 or 8 am. Therefore, getting children ready, organising their meals, and then ensuring they reached school by 10 am was a difficult task. The AMS organised elder members of the local community who took up the responsibility of escorting the children from their homes to school and then bringing them back in the afternoon. The AMS now ensures that every Adivasi child goes to school and so over 3,000 children are now in various panchayat, tribal welfare, and private schools. They continue to train what are called para-teachers at Vidyodaya through an intensive residential two-year course. These para-teachers teach in the government schools or in ashram shalas or in the study centres of the AMS. The AMS activists in the government schools no longer seek to seize control of them, but instead try to work as partners with the local government teachers.

One of the AMS's important programmes is conducting regular camps for Adivasi children during holidays and weekends. These camps are used to motivate children, discuss their problems in school and at home, and to bring about an assertion of Adivasi culture so that their self-esteem is not lost in the schools that they attend. A recent sign of the state's increasing trust in the AMS is a request from the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) asking the AMS to run a residential school for tribal children.

The processes involved in ACCORD's educational activities reaffirm local democracy and participation, thereby avoiding the passiveness that arises from the handing over of agency to the bureaucratic machinery of an NGO or the state. Empowerment and mobilisation is deliberately cultivated and protected. Each cluster of villages decides what they want for the year and this agenda is sent to the various educational, livelihood, and other bodies under ACCORD. For instance, if they want an anganwadi, or a study centre, or a teacher, or a scholarship for a student, this is put up at the cluster-level meeting and after it is approved, it is sent to the relevant AMS body to implement. The institution does not have veto power. All the school staff and para-staff are selected by the AMS leaders and sent to Vidyodaya for training. The AMS leaders also have a say in the admission of students to the school. The cultivation of a substantive democracy through the continued participation of the people is a keystone of the AMS work.

Advantages and Limitations of Social Movements

The AMS and its work present an opportunity to reflect upon the advantages and limitations of the social movement approach over the more familiar approach of working directly on curricula, pedagogy, school organisation, and teacher education through state institutions or NGOs. There are obvious difficulties in generalising on the basis of just one case study. And yet, the benefit of a case study is the insights it may offer for generalisation-building and subsequent testing. The AMS study does seem to support the notion that a substantial change in the nature of political control over educational institutions is very important for making them more egalitarian. This political change must include relevant shifts in the normative orientations and cultural beliefs of the elites who control the education system. It may or may not actually be a change of classes or groups, or in the composition of the elite, but at the very least, their ideas and culture must change for significant improvements to be made in a static education system. Social movements offer a way of achieving such a political change.

In consummation of the ideology that it is committed to, perhaps the greatest achievement of the AMS has been its affirmation of Adivasi identity and dignity. In their educational work, they have propagated a narrative of oppression rather than backwardness. This emphasises the belief that the Adivasis have been unfairly treated and that they have the capacity to equal all others. This is something which a movement could achieve much more easily than, say, a teacher education institution, because of its reach within the community. Origin myths and stories, respect for the community's dress, ornaments, and food practices, all became sites where the movement could act, debate, and reinterpret. The drama and emotional energy of these cultural elements is sometimes conveyed through demonstrations and meetings and much more frequently produced and reproduced through myriad daily interactions. The effect they have on the ideas of selfhood and the self-esteem of Adivasi teachers and students is considerable. This is much

more difficult to achieve through the bureaucratised processes of teacher education and conventional schooling since they involve impersonal and formal structures that allow for fewer spaces to enact and participate in powerful cultural narratives.

The cultural message of the movement carries through with ease to all of its institutions, particularly its model school, Vidyodaya. Adivasi dignity is in the air and affects many aspects of the school's functioning. Clear messages from the school authorities convey a tone of support for Adivasi identity and strengthen its legitimacy. This represents a sharp contrast from the way most other public institutions in the region operate. Vidyodaya clearly illustrates the effects of political control on school functioning. Many of the pedagogic practices of the school bear the mark of the values and beliefs of the movement.

However, this case study of the AMS also offers lessons on the limits of what social movements can achieve. Pedagogic knowledge and expertise that came from outside the movement played a key role in implementing the pedagogic innovations created in the school. Perhaps social movements cannot be the answer to everything. The cultivation of educational knowledge and practices may need to be done through various institutional processes that do not necessarily follow the logic of movements. Organisational structures that give primacy to knowledge cultivation and the building of professional teacher and researcher identities rather than to activism and political mobilisation may yet have a constructive role to play in educational change.

Another limitation observed in this case study was the degree of control the movement was able to achieve over the educational institutions of the region. The impact of the movement on the local education bureaucracy was far less than what could be seen in the institutions directly under its control. The initial attempt to take charge of the government tribal residential schools had to be abandoned in the face of resistance from government teachers and staff members. ACCORD volunteers presently work alongside teachers in local government schools in a much more collegial manner. Vidyodaya runs as a model school but there is not much that it can achieve by itself. Considering the numbers and distances involved, a large number of Adivasi children must necessarily go to government schools and the burgeoning low-fee private schools. But the movement has not been able to assert high levels of control over them, and without that, there are sharp limits on what can be achieved. The AMS has responded by working intensively outside the schools, but that cannot transform the school system. The SSA asking the AMS to run a tribal residential school does show an increasing trust between the state education bureaucracy and the Sangam. But the transformation of the state bureaucracy is still a distant goal.

Two further inferences—regarding the place of social movements in creating more egalitarian educational systems—may be drawn from the difficulties faced by the AMS in transforming the local school system. First, the inability to transform all the schools in its region may not be a limitation of the social movement approach itself, but that of the specific conditions within which this particular movement has emerged. It represents the voice of a small number of people within the block and they in turn are just a tiny drop inside a large state. The political muscle it is able to command is quite limited outside its immediate neighbourhood. Its resources are rather sparse; even getting an adequate number of graduate tribal teachers is a challenge. The demographic constraints merge with the cultural politics of the larger world to make it quite difficult to gather the large number of people that are required to work at the scale needed to touch each and every school in the region. Decision-makers at the district, state, and national levels control many aspects of schooling. Influencing them is way beyond the resources of this small group.

That social movements can, at least in principle, still tackle these obstacles is shown by American efforts at impacting schools through community mobilisation (Reneé et al 2010; Shirley 2010). They involved intensive networking and interconnecting of different local movements, which then become regional and national forces. These were then able to collectively exert pressure at the top of education bureaucracies.

Second, it may be suggested from the AMS experience that very different efforts to improve school organisation and administrative systems, which emerge from the logic of bureaucracy and organisations still continue to be important. While political movements may be able to lean upon them now, the initial resistance of schoolteachers reaffirms that bureaucratic organisations are remarkably resilient and resistant to external pressure. Transformation from within must also go hand in hand. This may mean all the usual processes of organisational reform: getting better people, building a culture that puts organisational goals before other things, having sufficient resources, acquiring the required technical knowledge, having effective feedback loops, and so on. Social movements may not be able to replace education bureaucracies. Hence, efforts to improve the latter from within their own logic must still be made.

Lessons from Building Democratic Movements

From the evidence offered by the case study, building social movements emerges as an important component required to change educational systems—particularly for tilting their activities in favour of the weak. We believe that ACCORD's work offers several lessons for those who may want to build movements that seek to empower the powerless. Foremost among these is that any intervention has to be clear as to whose interests are of primary importance. If it is the community's interest, then the intervention must be conducted in accordance with their ideas and decisions. In the present case, most community members will not have heard the names ACCORD or Vidyodaya. The school is commonly referred to as the AMS school and the activities are seen as AMS activities. People's participation should not be to carry brick and mortar but to imagine, design, and plan.

Second, it is important that people who have been historically marginalised realise that they are where they are because of others and not because of themselves. The sense of failure and oppression that has been internalised has to be brought to the fore. For this to happen, one must use what Freire calls "the material that life offers" and make it into their learning materials.

Third, one must recognise that people in such situations have never been in decision-making positions and therefore have to learn to do so—often by making mistakes. This space must be available to them. They have to learn to be unafraid of making mistakes. Fear is a very real factor to them since they have been physically and psychologically assaulted for the least mistake in order to keep them in line.

Finally, the AMS' experience of working with Adivasis has shown that even the least educated people are capable of handling institutions and difficult challenges. If the necessary inputs are available to them, highly motivated individuals can self-learn anything. Motivating them and getting them to believe that they are not marginal, and that they are subjects creating and recreating history is the most important facet of the work.

At the level of educational systems as a whole, the present case study supports the idea that shifts in the composition—or at least in the cultures—of those holding the reins of power, are important to ensure that substantial educational change takes place in the direction of greater equality. Trying to improve participation in educational systems without that runs the risk of becoming a mere token gesture towards education reform. If political cultures change to permit greater voice to weaker sections, then it seems reasonable to expect that the new equation of power would insist on at least some self-expression. However, the AMS and Vidyodaya experience also points to the importance of cultivating technical expertise along with political strength. Pedagogic knowledge and the ability to formulate new curricula are key to changing the education system and these may be developed at sites outside the social movements. While social movements can give them momentum, the cultivation of teachers requires more effective teacher education institutions.

Social movements that work towards greater democratisation have the capacity to change the overall climate within which institutions function. Without such a change, the cultural milieu and goals of institutions may continue to remain under the influence of entrenched dominant groups. And yet, it would appear that institution-building continues to be important, whether it is the strengthening of teacher education institutes, or enhancing the functioning of school bureaucracies, or improving teaching and research in the higher education system. For those who want to work towards egalitarian education systems, it is worth asking whether democratic social movements are necessary for educational change that empowers the oppressed. At the same time, it also seems plausible that, while necessary, they may not be all that is required to ensure that such change takes place.

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