

A Field Worker's Diary - Part 32

One distinct part of the 'Incredible India' tourism development program run by the Tourism department is the development of Rural Tourism Centres.

As Pochampalli in Telangana (which is known for its Ikkat Weaving) was also included in the list of places to be developed as rural tourist centres, I and some elders from Pochampalli went to a village in West Bengal called Ballavpur Danga which is a rural tourism centre.

As that village had already been developed into a thriving rural tourist centre, we were sent by our higher-ups to observe and understand the best practices being implemented there and to follow them in Pochampalli.

I had already written about this Rural Tourist centre earlier. To reach Ballavpur Danga, we had to first travel 3 hours on the train from Kolkata to Bholpur (the place where Rabindranath Tagore's Shantiniketan is located). From there, we had to go by road to reach our destination.



It was a beautiful village that was nestled in the midst of the tall and yellow-green trees of Sonajhuri forest. The

name 'Sonajhuri' means golden rain. The forest here is filled with a type of tree that has yellow flowers that fall like rain in the winter. It is said that Rabindranath Tagore had named this forest 'Sonajhuri' after he was enraptured by the sight of the golden rain.

One day, after we had finished learning about the measures taken to develop the village into a tourist centre, we had gone sightseeing to Shantiniketan and other nearby places.

Our journey along the banks of the Kopai River, found most often in Rabindranath's literature, was an unforgettable experience, as was visiting the nearby Amar Kutir.

Looking at the peaceful, silent and slow-flowing Kopai river was as delightful as watching the people of Amar Kutir going about their chores in a small and leisurely way without any hurry.

Amar Kutir is a handicrafts cooperative society founded in 1927 by Sushen Mukherjee,



who had been an active participant in the independence movement. At that time, like Sushen many youngsters had left their families to run a movement against the British. Sushen had built this Amar Kutir on one occasion when those youth had needed a shelter to shield themselves from the eyes of the British authorities.

They not only took shelter here but also made and sold handicraft products for getting the necessary funding for fulfilling their daily needs. Apart from giving them training on manufacturing these products, Sushen used to go door to door to sell these items and used that money for funding.

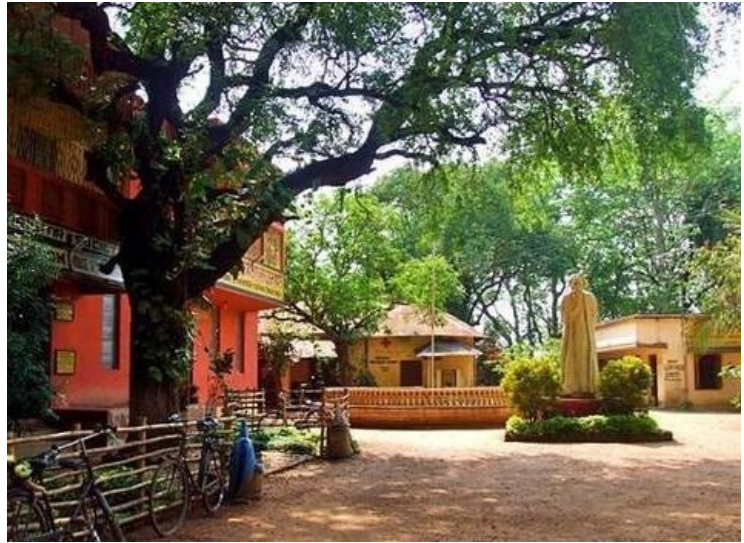
I felt astonished to see a cooperative society built on the principles of cooperation such as manufacturing of products together and using the income from them for fulfilling all of their daily needs, still standing strong on the same principles.

At a time when many cooperative societies which were started with great ambitions and fanfare have closed down just sometime after opening due to political and social reasons, I felt pleasantly surprised to see a cooperative society that has been working non-stop since seven decades.

In my experience, one other such cooperative I came across was the Mulkanoor Dairy near Warangal. Coming to another such example, we all know the story of another

successful cooperative Amul (Anand Milk Union Limited). When I started thinking about the reasons why even though there are thousands of cooperative societies, there are only a few that can be counted to be successful; I immediately thought of the people behind the iconic cooperatives.

I feel that it was the passion and professionalism of individuals like Sushen Mukherjee behind Amar Kutir, Cooperative Development



Foundation (Sahavikas) behind Mulkanoor, and Dr. Kurien, Tribhuvandas Patel, Dalaya behind AMUL, that led to the sustainable functioning of these cooperative societies.

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