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Submission of 'good practices'

- **2011-20 – decisive decade against caste based discrimination**

For some time now I have been engaged in writing a manuscript, which I call *Power to the People*¹, with the purpose to discuss and evaluate the outcome of the ten years of struggle against caste based discrimination since the 2001 Durban conference against racism. It involves an attempt to look into the structure and effectiveness of both the (imagined) Dalit movement in India and the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) as a transnational advocacy network/coalition. To limit the scope of the paper I have focused on one country, India, which means I may have failed to fully observe movement developments in other caste affected countries.

As point of reference we can take the John Hailey & Rosemary Viswanath review from January 2007, *Assessing the Perception; a Mapping Exercise of Strategic, Operational & Institutional Issues Concerning the Future of the International Dalit Solidarity Network*. The review was exclusively concentrated on IDSN as if the abolition of caste based discrimination would arise from international advocacy only and not from within India and other caste stricken countries. It appears we all at the time thought that lobbying UN, EU and national governments claiming their support to put political pressure and shame on India (applying the Boomerang pattern) would be *the* effective vehicle. Now, ten years after Durban we must conclude that the final goal, that of making the Indian government to take decisive measures to cope with caste based discrimination, has not been accomplished.

Drawing on my evaluation attempt I argue that the battle for Dalit rights is not to be won in Geneva or in Brussels. It has to be won by the people themselves in the formation of a social mass movement that brings together not only the diversified Dalit communities and organizations but also by way of Dalits joining hands with other movements of the marginalized working classes, adivasis, etc., providing they too commit for addressing caste as a particular issue.

¹ **Bobby Seal, who together with Huey Newton in Oakland, USA, in October 1966 founded the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, said in an interview in 1996:**

"They came down on us because we had a grass-root, real people's revolution, complete with the programs, complete with the unity, complete with the working coalitions, we were crossing racial lines. That synergetic statement of "All power to all the people," "Down with the racist pig power structure" -- we were not talking about the average white person: we were talking about the corporate money rich and the racist jive politicians and the lackeys, as we used to call them, for the government who perpetuates all this exploitation and racism." And in his homepage <http://www.bobbyseale.com/> he says: "All Power to All the People! Righteous down home people's power is what I advocated in the sixties, and what I say today."

Further, I believe that an international consultation bringing together representatives from Dalit Platforms, solidarity networks, international institutions like the UN and EU, and research organizations should have as its main theme to enter into a critical analysis of what has and what has not been achieved during the past ten years in order to show the way towards which activities and actions would be the most effective to apply for the decade just started. The questions to analyze are 'why caste-based discrimination has not become a matter of urgency for people all over the world', and 'what new effective strategies and practical actions are needed to bring about change'.

In the invitation to the consultation participants are asked to bring with them good practice examples from their work in different settings, which they believe have produced a ground-breaking impact or a 'turning point'. Certainly there are many activities carried out by the various Dalit civil society organizations to learn from; e.g. to raise Dalit consciousness, support individuals and communities in their day-to-day socio-economic struggles, including land acquisitions, and in their attempts to vindicate constitutional and legal rights. Yet, these efforts in themselves will not break the prevalent social order. Effective 'good practices' are to be elaborated in a process that takes into consideration the complex intersectional social structure of caste, class, religion, culture, gender, and linguistic and geographical divide.

- **Achievements – 'why caste-based discrimination has not become a matter of urgency for people all over the world'**

The IDSN Review Report 2007 affirmed, at the time of the review, that IDSN as a transnational advocacy network during the seven years of its existence had demonstrated a significant impact on the work and thinking of the United Nations, the European Union and national governments in Europe. The continuous and well prepared lobbying during the subsequent years up to 2011 in Geneva, Brussels and in European capitals has in a substantial way further increased the knowledge of caste based discrimination among politicians and officials at these international institutions and national governments. The various tactics and tools (Keck and Sikkink 1998) IDSN has applied – information politics, symbolic politics, leverage politics, and accountability politics – has certainly served this purpose. It has led to a number of important discussions and decisions moving the issue of caste based discrimination into the sphere of human rights and international law; a crucial achievement attained when the Human Rights Council in March 2009 decided to publish the final report including the draft Principles and Guidelines (UNP&G) as an official UN document ([A/HRC/11/CRP.3](#)). In summary, the advocacy work under the guidance of the Secretariat has been carried out with utmost professionalism; completely according to the book and this work must be sustained in the decade to come in order not to let the world forget.

A successful advocacy for change of any particular state's behaviour is equally dependent on two parts, the professional capability of advocacy network actors and the target actor being vulnerable to material or moral leverage. Advocacy is carried out at different levels. Keck and Sikkink (1998) identify five types of stages of network influence. They are: 1) issue creation and agenda setting, (2) influence on discursive positions of states and international organizations; (3) influence on institutional procedures, which may affect policies in the future; (4) influence on policy change in 'target actors', which may be states, international organizations, and (5) influence on state behaviour" (here India). The stages make up a

steady progression at which a network can be successful at any stage, the ultimate success being achieved, when the target state changes its behaviour.

IDSN has been successful on the first three stages of advocacy and partly on stage four, in that it has generated attention to caste based discrimination in different international fora, which in turn has led to various decisions, activities and statements. Yet, the final stage that of inducing the Indian government to move from passiveness to applying decisive measures to counteract and in the end eradicate caste-based discrimination still remains to be attained. And, caste-based discrimination has not become a matter of urgency for people all over the world! Why so?

I think we can point at two major reasons. First, compared to the case of apartheid in South Africa the international community has taken the position to uphold the principal of national sovereignty regarding India's shortcomings in implementing its constitutional rights for the Dalits and other minorities. Leaning on the difference in legitimacy the outer world makes itself blind of the fact that the *de facto* segregation and discrimination of Dalits is equivalent to that of apartheid; the apartheid system in South Africa being legally sanctioned and the clear constitutional abolition of discrimination based on caste in India (Smita Narula 2008).

The second reason, the change of the geopolitical environment in which these campaigns occur, also become obvious when comparing the anti-apartheid and anti-caste discrimination campaigns. The geopolitical setting has quite obviously changed from the first campaign in the decades of the mid-twentieth century to the shift of the millennium, when the campaign against caste based discrimination became internationally visible.

There is a tendency in the IDSN reporting or in concept papers to report only the positive words spoken and decisions taken. These occur frequently and shall of course be told about. However, there is no coverage and discussion of changes in the contemporary socio-economic-political setting and how these may restrict or negatively influence the outcome of the advocacy work, however professional that is performed. Therefore it may be worth to, at some length, bring it up here – known to all but not sufficiently considered.

India is today regarded as a regional power with aspirations to become a global power. It is since 1998 a nuclear armed nation and in March 2006 President Bush announced cooperation between the US and India on civilian nuclear programs. India has also a well established trade exchange with Western and Asian countries. These countries see India as a trading partner with enormous potential. A comparison with China is at hands. Trade between the two countries has increased and their diplomatic relations are well developed. When the Chinese Prime Minister, Wen Jiabao, visited India in 2006 he hailed the cooperation between the two nations as the driving force of a new 'Asian Century' and the Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, spoke of the potential for India and China to rearrange the world order by working together.

We can also, as an example, take President Barack Obama's choice of words at his visit to India in November 2010. His speeches did involve references to individual rights and equity but did at large not go beyond rhetoric.

His speech before a joint session of the Indian Parliament did include reference to the Dalits. He said: "We believe that no matter who you are or where you come from, every person can fulfill their God-given potential, just as a Dalit like Dr. Ambedkar could lift himself up and pen the words of the constitution that protects the rights of all Indians. We believe that no matter where you live--whether a village in Punjab or the bylanes of Chandni Chowk – an old section of Kolkata or a new high-rise in Bangalore – every person deserves the same chance to live in security and dignity, to get an education, to find work, and to give their children a better future. And we believe that when countries and cultures put aside old habits and attitudes that keep people apart, when we recognize our common humanity, then we can begin to fulfill the aspirations we share."

This is all very well but President Obama refrained from reminding the Parliament about Ambedkar's words at the time of the debate at the Indian Constitutional Assembly on 17th December 1946: "There is no nation of Indians in the real sense of the word; it is yet to be created ... how can people divided into thousands of castes be a nation". Neither did he refer to the resolution on caste and untouchability in India passed by the US House of Representatives on July 23, 2007.

Rather, it was other sections of Obama's speech that, as the Hindustan Times reporter writes, was "music to Indian's ears". In his address he said: "The just and sustainable international order that America seeks includes a United Nations that is efficient, effective, credible and legitimate. That is why I can say today – In the years ahead, I look forward to a reformed UN Security Council that includes India as permanent member". He also said the United States would lift controls on high-end technology exports to India with the effect that India can look forward to more lethal missiles, superior rockets and sturdier satellites. The President added that the US looked forward to working with India to ensure that the Security Council is "effective", hinting that the kind of "effective cooperation" he would like to see was actions against Myanmar and Iran.

Dalit activists have reason to be disappointed in the absence of more concrete actions by the political leaders of the world; the United States and the European Union and its member states. The European Union is an institution captured by its own complex structure, which obstructs its ability to arrive at joint and unanimous decisive standpoints. The hierarchical power structure of the EU positions the Parliament at the bottom level. Neither the Commission nor the Council or the member states' governments have been eager to confront the Indian government more than by rhetoric or in participating in some non-binding events. The eagerness of the EU, with a few individual exceptions, to confront India on the Dalit issue, I think, can be described as one of moderate enthusiasm. EU is most of all a market based organization for free mobility of capital, trade and people and with a flexible interest in human rights. Revealing is the recent comment by Herman von Rumpoy, the EU President, at which he expressed his concern over the shift of economic and politic power to China and India with Europe falling behind. And, in these very days, desperately to solve Europe's economic-political crisis, Europe turns to China for help.

From this perspective, is it to be expected that Europe would risk its neck by pushing the Dalit cause in a significant way? There might be a growing low-level political interest in Dalits' rights, yet, for India to listen, Presidents and Prime Ministers around the world will have to stand up combating caste based discrimination as courageous as Mr. Sicilianos (the India Country Rapporteur at CERD's 7th session on February 23, 2007), Ms. Navi Pillay of the OHCHR, and by all means, Mr. Peter van Dalen and Congressman Trent Franks.

The problem is that without a clear political stance from US and EU leaders the very active support from the different United Nations institutions will have minor substantial effect outside the UN building, bearing in mind the political construct of the Human Rights Council and the UN lacking any means, but shame, of bringing pressure to bear on the Indian government. And the Indian government does not tend towards shaming. Solving a social problem by social reforms may prove to be relevant in a society, where democracy and rule of law prevail. This presupposes there is a government with a conscience. As Stokely Carmichael said at the time of the Black Power struggle in the United States in the 1970s: “the civil rights movement is pleading to the White men’s conscience for the equal rights for the Blacks, but for this to come true the government must have a conscience”! And, so far we have not discovered the Indian government being in possession of a conscience. So what to do when the government has no conscience?

Considering this, as I see it, we cannot continue to lean on the Boomerang effect. We have to realize that this weapon by now has not hit the target. Instead it has, the way boomerangs usually do, swung around and if we do not watch out we may end up working in endless circles. So, what good practices could be applied in order to move forward? Below I will propose six ‘good practices’, which I believe are important and should be considered before the new decade. They are based on a model for structure, effectiveness and coordination.

- **A model for structure, effectiveness and coordination**

The model concerns both the domestic Dalit movements and organizations and the International Dalit Solidarity Network and how they should, in all directions, coordinate and cooperate. It is based on the strategy used by the Narmada Valley Dam (Sanjeev Khagram 2002) and the Anti-apartheid (Håkan Thörn 2006) campaigns and involves:

- Intensified awareness building and education; transformation of consciousness; cultural affinity, human rights and resistance;
- Creating an unified national Dalit mass movement including leadership; in particular women leadership;
- Mass mobilization at grassroots level including leadership; in particular women leadership;
- Coordinated mass demonstrations at state and national levels;
- IDSN advocacy at international level; DSN coordinated actions;
- Continuous links between grassroots, national and international levels.

However as we know, when discussing strategies to combat caste based discrimination one has to go beyond the kind of political strategies involved in racial apartheid or the Narmada Dam campaigns. The caste system is of a more complex nature compared to these two questions. It rests on a cultural and religious paradigm and constitutes a systemic worldview involving many complex issues. The Dalit identity is formed by their socio-cultural dependency status in relation to the dominant castes and so they are crushed under both the social and cultural hegemony of those castes and classes occupying positions of power and authority. Hence, in order to mobilize the people to break the system, it requires a double strategy; a political strategy and a religious/cultural strategy involving both a social-class and a cultural-caste struggle.

- ‘Good Practices’

Good practice 1 – mass mobilization

The Concept Note to the Kathmandu Consultation asserts that the consultation will provide a forum for presentation of new and review of some existing good practices for civil society advocacy strategies. It particularly refers to key findings from the International Conference “Decade of Dalit Rights in 2011-20: Decisive Decade against Discrimination”, held on 24 and 25 June 2011, in Geneva, and ongoing national and international work.

I refer to the Declaration of the Geneva conference (page 4), where as the main strategy is stated: “The building up of the Global Movement of the DWD affected Communities cutting across different regions, nations and cultures of the world with a view to ‘tear down barriers of caste’ for the enjoyment of all rights and freedoms is the direction we want to move forward in a single-minded manner in the coming decade (2011-20). Within the purview of the general goal of the enjoyment of all rights and freedoms fall the specific objectives of the elimination of DWD practices, full realization of economic, social and cultural rights, full and equal access to justice and the full participation of DWD communities in civil and political affairs guaranteed by proportional representation in political structures and decision-making processes.” Further (page 5), at local and national levels the strategies proposed are directed towards strengthening the capacity of DWD movements and solidarity platforms e.g. for mass mobilization, building alliances horizontally and vertically, including alliances with other caste-affected groups, with other issue-based networks and on inter-sectionality.

I also refer to the IDSN Council meeting in March 2010, ‘The Way Forward’. One main point of the Council’s discussion concerned the need for a strong pressure from inside India. India, it is said, will not change unless its basic foundations are challenged. Like the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, people in India have to mobilize to bring about a social revolution. There is a need for a mass mobilization similar to that of the American Civil Rights Movement. The discussion also touched the question of dual strategies with the argument that everything cannot be achieved through the IDSN advocacy to end caste discrimination. Moreover, the Dalits should look for support from other groups.

However, the meaning of the concept ‘masses’ or ‘mass movement’ has not been closely defined nor the idea of Dalits looking for support from other groups or in which way a stronger pressure from inside India should be organized. These are urgent issues for immediate consideration at this moment of the beginning of the 2011-20 *Decade of Dalit Rights*.

The character of the Dalit movement of today can be described as vast and diverse. It is made up of Dalit organizations in the thousands all over India; some with a few members and a small budget working locally, others with a comparatively well established and financed organization addressing issues also regionally and nationally. Hence, there is no single unified Dalit movement with a unified agenda. All the different groups have their own leaders and their own agendas highlighting different issues around different ideologies related to Dalits. What unites them is their common quest for equality, self-dignity and eradication of untouchability and the eradication of caste based discrimination. Yet, no person or group has the authority to speak for, or to activate, the whole movement.

The question discussed by researchers is whether a movement gains or becomes weaker from this kind of organizational structure. Hardtmann (2009) brings into discussion that some social movement researchers have found organizational fission and lack of cohesion to be essential for the continuity of movements. The flexible organizational structure, being constantly changing, with thousands of small groups and a multitude of leaders, they argue, would make movements difficult to suppress. Opponents may feel they are facing “on the one hand, a spontaneous explosion at the grassroots level; and on the other, a many-headed hydra” (Gerlach and Hine 1970). From her own findings, however, Hardtmann asserts that Dalit activists do not usually find split or tensions or even heterogeneity more generally to be a favourable state of affairs. They rather deplore them and regard them as weakening the movement. Also Ashok Swain (2010) in *Struggle against the State; Social Networks and Protests Mobilization in India* asserts that protest movements succeed when in a segmented society different groups manage to join together.

The first move is to agree on a definition of a social movement. This is important as the definition guides what kind of actions are to be taken in order to attain the objectives of the movement. Khagram et al (2002) put forward the following definition of a social movement, which I suggest should be the model for a Dalit Social Movement.

Social movements are sets of actors with common purposes and solidarities that have the capacity to generate coordinated and sustained social mobilization to publicly influence social change. Khagram et al stress mobilization and/or disruption as a defining characteristic of movements; they have the capacity to engage in joint and sustained mobilization. They refer to social movement theorists, who argue that movement’s effectiveness in bringing about social change is linked to its ability to disrupt or threaten a social order.

Transnational social movements are sets of actors with common purposes and solidarities linked across country boundaries. They have the capacity to generate coordinated and sustained social mobilization in more than one country to publicly influence social change. In contrast to transnational networks and coalitions, transnational social movements mobilize their (transnational) constituencies for collective actions, often through the use of protest or disruptive actions. One can imagine the Dalit Platforms in the five South Asian countries as having the potential to constitute a transnational social movement.

National social movements as well as transnational social movements would be expected to have a higher level of national or transnational collective identity.

Let’s take the need for an extended social mass movement a step further. National parties are dominated by high caste leaders and they have failed to understand the sentiments of Dalits and Adivasis not only in their earlier position as totally suppressed but also their new feeling of resistance. With the present policy towards the poor – be it Dalits, Adivasis, Muslims, or women as a special category – people are losing the faith they might earlier have had in democracy and democratic solutions. Along with growing Dalit activism and skepticism towards Dalit politicians being allied with non-Dalit parties, Dalit organizations of different types have been formed within civil society at grassroots level. There are those who like the Dalit NGOs work within the democratic system but also groups like the Naxalite Movement, which make use of militant methods. At present, Naxalites have a presence in almost half of India's 28 states, while they have turned into a political force to be reckoned with in some of the poorer, adivasis concentrated, forest and

natural resource rich states like Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Jharkhand and West Bengal (Rajat Kujur 2008). The Naxalite Movement – since September 2004 united under one banner; Communist Party of India (Maoist) – has proved its ability to set up and coordinate a resistance movement. An extended and united social mass movement in the form of a civil rights movement would have the option to make up an alternative – not with regards to aims but as to methods – in the struggle for the transformation of the society.

To ascertain a joint Dalit Social Movement is of course an immense challenge considering the existence of caste divisions also within the broader Dalit community and in addition to this people are divided by language and distance and lack of means to communicate. This is where the question of leadership becomes crucial.

Good Practice 2 – leadership

So, how do start; in the Indian context, step by step, making the entire nation a freedom square. Someone or a few must be the initiators. And, in the process of building a mass movement, there are many leaders on all levels of society; one of those is Ms Rangamma , whom I met last year – and there are many women like her among the next to 80 million Dalit women.



Mrs. Rangamma; one of the Dalit Panchayat leaders;
Kurihalli Village, Tumkur, Karnataka

There are two kinds of leadership (Gramsci), both necessary for a vibrant social movement. In the Indian context they are the educated, the intellectuals, and people on the field like Ms Rangamma and other women and men like her; illiterate, caught in the intersection of caste, class, gender and hierarchy, but with a life experience and a growing awareness of their own strength and quality, able to resist, seeing that resistance will pay off. There are around 600 000 villages in India; at thousands of places dalits are struggling for land rights and against all kinds of discrimination and against a system where impunity

prevails, not the rule of law – just imagine when all those people come together, united in simultaneous actions. How to accomplish this? Wouldn't this be a relevant discussion at a national consultation? And at which Ms Rangamma would be one of the delegates? People's participation in their own self-emancipation is essential to make possible a social transformation and therefore "there is the necessity to build concrete institutions that will be able to expand the capacities available to members of the working class (or any suppressed community; my comment) for democratic participation (Peter D. Thomas 2010 on Gramsci)." Leaders and leadership will in this way be regarded as part of the community. Participation will also serve the purpose of the transformation of consciousness; that is to cast away the culture and morality of the privileged groups. This process, the transformation of consciousness can also be expressed in the words by Gil Scott-Heron:

"Revolution is a cleaning product. Revolution takes place in your mind. This is when you become a revolutionary; when you start to question things. When you change your mind, that's the first change that is necessary, because when you change your mind, revolution will not be televised. The change is what takes place inside people. That's what they need to make before they make a move; before you see the result on television, the burning cars, the burning ... someone has to change the mind about how things are going and how to change that. That's the revolution that takes place and that's what I am talking about – what you never see"

Good Practice 3 – Dalit Panchayat

Under the initiative by M. C. Raj (Dalitocracy 2007), Rural Education for Development Society (REDS) in Tumkur District of Karnataka, Dalit panchayats were formed in 2006 as an instrument of internal governance. This new initiative gives the marginalized community an opportunity to participate in both internal and external governance in the village. The main aim is to build the capacity of Dalits to participate in the instruments and mechanisms of local, regional and national governance. It also has the avowed purpose of strengthening the internal governance mechanisms of the Dalit community. It rests on the political theory that power is captured through participation. This, activists say, is necessary because in traditional village panchayats Dalits are not allowed to voice their concerns and opinions. They are forced to accept punishments meted out to them. The Dalit panchayat philosophy is that like all other communities, Dalits should have the right to govern themselves as a community with their liberatory norms and get integrated into national politics as an empowered people, not as an enslaved people. By April 14, 2008 REDS announced that it had formed 1,017 dalit panchayats in Tumkur district.

Each Dalit panchayat has 10 members elected from the community, with an equal number of men and women representatives. The tasks the panchayats are expected to perform are e.g. addressing all issues of internal and family conflict and development, thus setting a halt to dominant caste village panchayat resolving such problems. Likewise, if dominant caste people have any problems with Dalits they are expected to come to the Dalit Panchayat and resolve such issues.

In the last two-and-a-half years that the dalit panchayats have been working it is reported that there has been a significant drop in the number of cases of discrimination in the region. Dalit panchayat leaders have been diligently recording all the goings-on, and the records show a drop of nearly 70% in such cases. Another significant achievement has been in land reclamation. Rangaiah, who is in charge of the land struggle, says: "There are policies sanctioning land rights to dalits. But the upper castes have taken

advantage of their illiteracy and managed to usurp all the land. We are now in the process of tracing all those documents and educating dalits on their rights.” So far, 6,107 acres of land belonging to dalits in 133 villages have been found to be in the wrong hands. Through meticulous documenting and rigorous campaigning the movement has managed to reclaim 4,829.36 acres of land. Success in Tumkur district, it is affirmed, is giving the Dalit community a glimpse of what the future might hold. Land for all dalit families, the right to livelihood, right to education, the right to govern themselves, and the right to dignity are their priorities (*Padmalatha Ravi, InfoChange News & Features, October 2008*).

The Dalit Panchayat Movement has grown to the level of establishing its own Dalit parliament in Tumkur District. In order to establish the Parliament an election was organized with the German electoral system as a model. The Dalit people participating in the Dalit Panchayats and in the elections have gained internal strength and confidence in the mechanisms of governance. This is achieved in that the constitutive structures of the Dalit Parliament are laid out with details of the process for conducting the elections, counting the votes, how the Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the parliament should be elected, etc. The establishment of the Dalit Panchayat Parliament, it is asserted, is a symbolic manifestation of the aspiration of the Dalit communities to become democratic elites on their own rights within the structures of governance in India.

Good Practice 4 – Connecting people

A mass movement consisting of many organizations and spread over a vast area like Dalit organizations in India has a need for expeditious communication in order to mobilize for coordinated actions. The tool for this, obviously, is the information and communication technologies (ICT). Dahlgren (2004) has pointed out that the new ICTs are playing a significant role in the extra-parliamentarian context enabling forms of participation that would not have been possible without them. The new technologies lower the costs and obstacles of organizing citizen-based groups for collective action significantly, thus making political action easier, faster and more universal. Internet will not replace traditional local protest means such as demonstrations and petitions, but as Aelst and Walgrave (2004) write: “... the Internet provided the glue to bind the opposition that had begun simultaneously in a variety of developed countries”.

It would of course be an immense task to provide more or less every village in India with a computer and train people in using the technique. It will be both time-consuming and costly. What could be considered in this context is to look into the possibility of redistribution of resources now available within the whole set of organizations; nationally and internationally. And, donor organization in Europe may look into the option to widen their scope of support and include means of communication. Can anyone see an alternative way to bind people together into a social movement for simultaneous actions?

Good Practice 5 – cross-nation interaction

Under challenge ahead in the Concept Paper 24-25 June 2011, *Decade of Dalit Rights UN* (page 10/15) there is a proposal for building a larger network involving other countries of the world, such as Latin America, South East Asia and the Far East, where minority communities of people are discriminated and exploited in similar ways to the Dalits. This proposal is not mentioned in the Declaration of the Geneva conference. Yet, such a move would offer an opportunity to monitor and tackle the broader range of human rights; i.e. viewing the interdependence of civil and political rights with economic, social and

cultural rights. This collaboration should have a different character to that of the World Social Forum. WSF is a meeting place for the exchange of ideas and experiences. The Alternative International Movement should have the objective to evolve strategies for planned and coordinated actions at different places of the world.

Good Practice 6 – cultural events as a an information tool

A question, which concerns IDSN and DSNs more directly, is the choice of activities for advocacy work in raising awareness among the official world as well as among people in general. Here I wish to point at the value of cultural events.

In the beginning of the 1960s solidarity for the people in Vietnam was weak. What sparked it off was a series of cultural events. Arts exhibitions, singing, music and theatre groups played an important role in the development of an energetic anti-war movement. People in general became interested, curious, wanted to know and understand. Not that everyone shared the same values and ideology but it initiated a never-ending discussion. Hence the question stayed on the public scene heavily debated.

See before you the Dalit artist, Savi Sawarkar, drawing a picture of a Dalit Devadasi woman exposing her vulnerability in the hands of the Brahmin priest while he at the same time delivers a speech in the spirit of Ambedkar; imagine a street theatre performance in a remote village at which women are made conscious of their strength to resist a patriarchal society; hear the Sakthi cultural group intensively beating their drums turning this instrument into one of vigorous resistance; listen to the reading by Dalit authors and poets like Omprukesh Valmiki, Urmila Parwar or Arjun Dangle telling about humiliation and abuses but also about anger, courage and resistance!

Cultural performances of different kinds displaying the features of caste and the means by which it is confronted may very well have the same effect as at the time of the Vietnam activism in making people, both the official world and people in general, aware of the problem. The question on how to use culture as a means of activism and how to connect cultural practitioners in South Asia and Europe, I mean should be brought into discussion within the context of a broader advocacy context.