

Leisure Activities and Social Life in an Industrial Township

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The aim of present paper is to highlight the conditions which are conducive to human living. Bhilai as an industrial estate came into existence with the establishment of Bhilai Steel Plant (BSP) that is product of India-Soviet technoeconomic collaboration and an agreement signed on 2nd February , 1955 between the Government of India and the Government of U.S.S.R. Government of India in its deliberate policy conceived public sector as an article of faith and an instrument of change for raising the living standard of the people in India (BSP 1986: 11-15).

Bhilai is located in Durg district of Madhya Pradesh (India). Bhilai had a rural and tribal setting within the area of Chhatisgarh known for its peculiar culture. The zone before the establishment of Bhilai Steel Plant had uniformity maintained through structural continuity of linguistic and cultural homogeneity among the groups. Madhya Pradesh, a state of India, has one of the largest population of Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes. Physically this state divides India into two parts i.e. South and North India, and is surrounded by six states which have cultural influence on periphery districts of the Madhya Pradesh.

Economic Roles of Bhilai Steel Plant

Public enterprises in India before a decade was considered to provide employment opportunities to workforce awaiting their chances. Bhilai Steel plant has generated highest opportunities among SAIL plants. There were more than sixty four thousands employees besides casual labours employed in the plant (1985-86). They constitute a little less than one-third among total employees in SAIL. According to the employment policy of SAIL, jobs reservation to weaker sections of society have been provided, especially to SC/ST, women and orthopaedically disabled persons who are less than one-third of the total employees of the plant. They shared approximately sixteen per cent amount in the total Rs. 186-17 crores paid in 1985-86, in form of. salaries, wages, and fringe benefits to employees of Bhilai. Economic contribution of Bhilai in terms of earning to SAIL, as well as to local, state and Central Government is noteworthy .In 1985-86, it has contributed approximately Rs. 464 crores to SAIL and Rs.230.58 crores to the coffers of local authority, State and Central Government in forms of income tax, sale tax, professional tax, entry tax, electricities, duties and in other forms of taxes and contributions.

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Activities and Social Life in Bhilai Town

Employees of Bhilai plant belong to different ethnic / castes, linguistic, and religious groups who are from different states of India. They are residing in housing complex provided by BSP or other agencies constitute the Bhilai Town. Data on social solidarity from secondary sources and through observations highlight that there are social activities and Voluntary agencies which are promoting extra - curricular activities, community development programmes in Bhilai Town.

Extra-curricular activities provide chances for interaction among people to involve in activities transcend people's loyalties from their primordial ties to nation-state. Sports and Recreation Council (1966) is responsible for such activities in Bhilai town. Six clubs are affiliated to this council and perform activities like music, fine arts, literature, drama and yoga. Council organizes various cultural activities at the local national and international levels. In such activities role played by sponsored clubs are noteworthy. Council runs e level Ispat clubs fully equipped with facilities for indoor and outdoor games, T.V. and a public address system, Management of Bhilai through council extends assistance to twenty five registered organizations and twenty two sports clubs. Apart from these, Bhilai Club and Steel club, branches of international organizations like Rotary Club, Lions Club and Jaycees are there. These clubs promote welfare activities and international understanding among people. For example, some artists of Bhilai have mastered classical Western and Eastern instruments. They have represented at national and international platforms. Artists from countryside through these clubs and organizations have visited England, France, Russia and other countries. Mention may be made of 'Panthi' dance and 'Pandavani' which have attracted national and international audiences towards the richness of folk culture of the region. Council also organizes sports activities and its local participants have represented at national and international games especially in common wealth competition, World championship in Sweden, Asia youth Rally in Japan and other national games like Chess, Hockey, Cricket, Basketball, weight-lifting and Kabaddi. These games and cultural programmes have aroused pride of national consciousness among people of Bhilai Town.

The Department of Community Development of BSP sponsors the community development programmes in the field of education, health and other welfare activities. These facilities are extended not only to the needy people of town but also to peripheral villages around the town. Facilities like approach roads, drinking water, medical camps, construction of schools and wells, installation of pumps, smokeless choolahs, repair of tanks and others i.e. sports and recreational activities are provided to villages located in radius of 8 to 16 Km. from Bhilai. Thousands of BSP workers, along with other people are residing in these villages. Communication with these localities are maintained through the establishment of centres for adult education and vocational trainings. These centres inculcate skills by training the people to generate income through making the hand globes and caning of chairs. Cultural activities are promoted through work oriented literacy and celebration of literacy day and national festivals. Folk dances, arts and music of local communities are given exposure through organization of *Chhatisgarh Lok Kala Mahotsav*. Cohesiveness among people belonging to different religious, linguistic and castes/ethnic groups are promoted through participation in cultural activities which provide chances for intermingling to people of younger and older generations in the area.

Collective consciousness and social solidarity among people are promoted through voluntary organizations, recognized and partially supported by B.S.P. For example, *The Bhilai Wholesale Consumer Cooperative Store Ltd.* formed in 1963 to provide goods for consumers at reasonable price. It operates twenty seven cooperative societies in Bhilai with an annual turnover of more than Rs. 5 Crores per annum. These societies distribute food grains, clothes and coke to BSP employees. *The Chhatisgarh Sah. Shak Samiti* (1976) provides economic help by giving loan on a nominal charge of one percent interest and other goods in kind to the members of the Samiti. *Super Bazar* (1967) provides goods on credit and recover money directly from salary of the employee. It provides T.V., Radio, cycles, refrigerator, electrical appliances on loan, apart from the daily consumer items. The *Steel Employees Welfare Association* (1973) shares the financial burden of the retired members as well as family of deceased person, thus extend financial security to its members. *Bhilai Mahila Samaj* (1957) is taking care of women in Bhilai. It has units like *Udyog Kendra* for tailoring, soap units for preparing soap bars, hand gloves units for knitting handgloves and others as knit and embroidery and Masala units whose products are supplied in concern departments of BSP. Needy women trained in these in jobs through the centre are getting financial support ranging from Rs. 300 to 400 per month.

Apart from above mentioned agencies, *Indo-Soviet Forum* (1962) and *Jan Kalyan Samiti* (1985) are also working in Bhilai Town. *Jan Kalyan Samiti* has ten centres in Bhilai. These centres are active in upliftment of common people by propogating education and civic sense. It also organizes sports and cultural activities to promote tolerance among different sections of people in town and peripheral villages. *Indo-Soviet Forum* organizes programmes relates to music, dance and cultural activities. It provides chances for interaction between members of both the countries. *Indo-Soviet Cultural Society* promotes cultural interaction between India and Russia through occassional visits of delegates in both the countries. Russian delegates visit India and perform ballet, music and folk dance at *Bhilai Centre*. Impact of such activities witnessed the emergence of *Metallurgical Music Makers* at Bhilai. This music group has succeeded in making striking adjustment and harmony in the performance of vocal, national and international platforms. BSP has encouraged local talents by giving them employment in the plant. 'Pandavani', a folk music and 'Panthi' a folk dance are well popularized, by active support and patronage of BSP. Performers of these music and dances are local people who have visited overseas for representing India on cultural forums (Srinivasan, 1988: 4-24).

National Integration

Bhilai Steel Plant has attracted workforce belonging to different ethnic, linguistic and religious groups. Migrant employees have come from various regions and states and brought diverse culture with them. Their immediate settled place known as Chhatisgarh itself is an amalgamation of Aryan, Nishad and Dravidian cultures protected by rulers of Gond Kingdoms. Members belonging to aboriginal groups are classified into Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes categories for administrative and political purposes. BSP through its trade union (s) at least in plant has divisions known as managers and workers. Participative management an emerging concept brings the total employees into one unit that is BSP. BSP got involved and played a part in the reconstruction of society and helped in building of a modern India. One of Bhilai trade union is known as Dominant Group and is affiliated to the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC). It mobilises societal resources in the interest of workers. INTUC

of Bhilai Steel Plant is an officially recognized body by the Madhya Pradesh Industrial Act (1960). Some of BSP union leaders are M.L.A's and M.P's. Such conditions have created conducive work culture and living environment in Bhilai Steel Plant. Officers' Association of Bhilai is affiliated to Steel Executives Federation of India (SAIL Steel Union) which looks after the social and economic interests and welfare of executives and safeguards officers and their family interests by providing financial aid in the form of loan, retirement benefits and cash in case of accident or death. Thus, interests of both the workers and the managers are equally safeguarded through institutionalized provisions. This has resulted in interaction between these two units as equal partners in the Plant. Skill development of personnel belonging to executive and non-executive division of employees are equally promoted through professional organizations like Institute of Engineers (India) or Indian Institute of Metals, Computer Society of India, National Institute of Personnel Management or Indian Institute of Material Management and Institute of Cost Accounts. These institutes are in operation in Bhilai town. They provide opportunities to people belonging to different sections of society who are willing to have upward mobility (Sahai and Mishra, 1990:327-331).

Cohesiveness among groups is maintained through participative culture observed in the plant by allowing workers' representatives to participate in management and decision-making. Outside the plant, schools provide opportunity of intermingling to younger generation. While occasional social gathering in clubs and societies provide chance for interaction among older generation. For intergroup communication Hindi is recognized as an efficient medium. Sometime English is used to bring conformity among people belonging to different ethnic and linguistic groups. Both languages are used for promoting tolerance, mutual understanding and communication among diverse groups. Cultural proximity is brought through music, dance, drama and arts exhibited and performed on a common platform. North India and South Classical music and dances in form of Bharat Natyam, Kathakali, Kathak, Odissi and Manipuri are enthusiastically enjoyed by people of Bhilai Town as well as of the region. Folk dances and music of aboriginals are appreciated by members of different communities. Exposure of these at international platform have attracted

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