



Brief Account of SCI in Asia (1934 – 1976)

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The first phase of SCI development in Asia was initiated by European long-term volunteers, including Pierre Ceresole, the founder of SCI, for Bihar earthquake victims rehabilitation work (1934) and later Muslim and Hindu refugees rehabilitation work after the partition both in Pakistan as well as in India.

The second phase started in the 1950's under the representative of SCI, Mrs. Ethelwyn Best, joined by European and Japanese long-term volunteers as well as Indian and Pakistani short-term volunteers. During this period 5-6 weeks workcamps were organized throughout India and Pakistan, preparing to form Indian as well as Pakistani National Committees, The dignity of manual labour and mutual appreciation of Orient and Occident were the backbone spirit of this period's SCI Activities. The historical landmark event took place in 1956 when the Indian National Committee, composed of all Indians took over the entire responsibility of SCI programme in India from Mrs. Best.

In 1958 Devindra Das Chopra and Valli Seshan (then Chali) were appointed as the Asian Secretary and the Assistant Asian Secretary respectively to see that the SCI activity spreads beyond Indian subcontinent. Subsequently SCI work spread to Sri Lanka, Japan, Malaysia, Thailand, Nepal and South Korea, in addition to India and Pakistan, then Bangla Desh, when East and West Pakistan were separated. Along with the geographical spread of SCI activities in Asia, another significant development, initiated by the AS and later given the support from branches and groups was to establish long-term projects in order to meet the enormous challenge of community development needs. This required much more substantial commitment in terms of time, finance, and skills than the traditions short-term workcamps. Cheriannagar project in Madras, Hatibari Lepracy colony project in Orissa, Kasauli Tibetan Nursery project, and later Nangloi project in Delhi, Bihar project, Moudoubi Cyclone Victims Rehabilitation Project in Banla Desh, Rapti Agricultural project in Nepal, Paharia Agricultural Rehabilitation Project in Sri Lanka, and Kimpu Pioneering Farm Project in Japan, became main stay of respective Asian branches and groups through the 1960's and short-term workcamps were often organized in and around these long-term projects.

Towards the mid-seventies another significant change in trend was introduced by the Asian Regional Committee. Although our long-term projects contributed to improve lives of people in poverty and insecurity to a degree, another challenge was the

conscientization of the people as regards to their rights and responsibility and getting themselves organized to obtain social justice. This required a much more delicate manner of working in the context of tradition-ridden societies. Foreign long-term volunteers, who naturally lacked the real understanding of traditional society and its culture, became less effective for this type of work. The Animation Programme, which trained the educated local youth as animators and placed them in usual villages in order to stimulate and support the most oppressed sector of the society to get what they were entitled to, became the mainstay of SCI work in Asia for the next ten years. The short-term workcamp programme declined somewhat during this period.

One thing must not be forgotten to mention in relation to the SCI work in Asia, This was the damage done by the one-way flood of governmental volunteers from the first world. After President Kennedy launched the American Peace Corps Programme in the early 1960s, many other industrialized countries followed suit. Although we do not say that nothing good was achieved by these governmental volunteers, nevertheless, this invited strict government control over all volunteer programs including indigenous volunteer groups like SCI branches and groups in Asia. And this control remains even now long after all governmental volunteer programmes were banned from certain Asian countries, such as India. These governmental volunteers' high standard of life-style in the local context tarnished the image of volunteers in local peoples' eyes, and, at the same time gave the local government a wrong idea of the concept of volunteerism and its usefulness.

Our British Branch wanted to send a large number of volunteers to Asia by taking advantage of the British Volunteer Program. We, SCI in Asia, said 'no' in order to maintain our image, truly volunteers even in the local context and international instead of bi-lateral contact. Internationally the compromise was struck that IVS had a free hand in Africa and was restricted in Asia. Even today the IVS runs a large overseas programme in Africa. However, learning from the lessons in Asia, we must be careful about what negative impact it may have on indigenous volunteer groups in Africa.

This is the very brief review of SCI development in Asia from 1934 to 1976.