

Fifty and going strong

DEVELOPMENT Inspired by Gandhian ideals, Surendra Koulagi, former secretary of Jayaprakash Narayan, started the Janapada Seva Trust way back in 1960 at Melkote. Today, the Trust has been working in the fields of education, village industries and agriculture, and is celebrating its golden jubilee in a simple manner, writes **Ashok Uchangi**

Mention Melkote and the connotations are immediate, that of the famed temple, the town's centre for Sanskrit learning and its weaving community. But, it is not often that one associates Melkote with this Gandhian who is doing great service to the community.

For, Sarvodaya leader Surendra Koulagi goes about his work in a quiet, unassuming manner. Inspired by Gandhian ideals, Koulagi started the Janapada Seva Trust way back in 1960. Today, the Trust has been working in the fields of education, village industries and agriculture, and is celebrating its golden jubilee in a simple manner.

It was exactly fifty years ago that Koulagi, who was Jayaprakash Narayan's secretary for five years (1954-1959) and a close associate of Acharya Vinoba Bhave, settled in Melkote and started working for the cause of the socio-economically marginalised communities in and around Melkote.

Karuna Gruha

In 1963, he started Karuna Gruha, a residential school for the physically challenged children of rural Karnataka. It happened to be the only residential school for the physically challenged students of the state, for many years. The vision and objective of Karuna Gruha is to give individual attention to the overall development of every socially disadvantaged child who finds shelter here.

The children here are provided with appropriate

medical attention and have been successfully rehabilitated. In its 47th year, Karuna Gruha has helped many physically challenged children become independent. They are now working in various capacities in many professional fields.

The Janapada Seva Trust has also been conducting many activities and programmes for the development of the community in general. Among their many activities is the Sri Krishna Shishuvihara, a nursery school started by the Trust in 1960. The nursery has a good collection of toys and learning aids, all at the disposal of the children here to explore and learn from. The Nursery strives to bring all round development among children by way of songs, plays, stories etc.

Hosa Jeevana Daari

The Janapada Seva Trust is working among the villagers and trying to involve the community in rural development and natural resource management at its *Hosa Jeevana Daari* centre which is seven kms away from Melkote.

Khadi Gramodyoga

A training and production centre for *khadi* functions out of the *Hosa Jeevana Daari* (literally meaning path to a new life) centre since 1980. The centre has been recognised by the



GANDHIAN IDEALS Surendra Koulagi, Gandhian and Satyagraha leader with the children at Janapada Seva Trust in Melkote. A *Khadi* outlet (below).
PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR



“IT WAS FIFTY YEARS AGO THAT KOULAGI, WHO WAS JAYAPRAKASH NARAYAN'S SECRETARY FOR FIVE YEARS AND A CLOSE ASSOCIATE OF ACHARYA VINOBA BHAVE, SETTLED IN MELKOTE

Khadi and Village Industries Commission.

Women from nearby villages are trained and provided employment. The centre produces attractive woven shoulder bags, *kurtas*, *razais* and many more products which are in great demand. At present, as many as 20 women from the region are working at the centre. The Trust also runs a Khadi shop in Melkote.

The Janapada Seva Trust also conducts many short term programmes for farmers including workshops on socio-political and economic issues.

A creativity workshop entitled *Dodda Marada Neralinalli* is being organised by the Trust for rural children from the last 10 years in the month of May every year. Singing, playing, dancing, clay work, painting, theatre activity and trekking are some of the activities at the workshop. Well-known theatre personalities and artistes guide children at the workshop. Children belonging to the lower income group in the age group of 8 to 15 can participate in the 20-day workshop.

The Janapada Seva Trust depends completely on public support rather than government help.