

Bonding over Food – Community Meal for Unity



Human society these days is marred by conflict and negativities. People have little tolerance and respect for each other, often leading to clashes of opinions. A general sense of mistrust, unhappiness and selfishness pervade our social fabric.

With the intent to foster peace and harmony especially among marginalised and deprived communities, Indian Social Institute has initiated the Shanti Sadbhavana Manch. It seeks to address issues of peaceful coexistence and respect for human values, transcending social barriers of caste and class. Towards this end, the initiative has established 'Peace Clubs', both in school and in community in 7 Indian states. Through a series of trainings, meetings, festival celebrations, and dialogues for conflict resolution, the Manch aims at strengthening awareness and promotion and realisation of constitutional and human rights.

As the famous expression goes, "A Family that eats together, stays together". It opens the doors for communication, offers a key to happiness and builds stronger relationships. Such was the attempt to restore communal harmony in Raikia village, Odisha. After communal violence shook the entire state in 2008, even to this day, communities continue to be hostile towards each other. A general air of mistrust and aversion envelops the village, with Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes living in the same village for decades, ended all interaction. People who stood by each other through thick and thin, now stopped even visiting each other's homes. Peace trainers working in the area did extensive visits and meetings, forming multiple peace groups consisting of members from both the communities. Efforts were made to encourage dialogues and conflict resolution with a humanistic approach, giving voice to each member present. Winds of change are gradually sweeping the village and apparent tensions are giving way to collaboration and mutual respect.

A community meal was organised in February 2021 to add impetus to the intervention. Dry rice and pulses were collected from each household which were later cooked together too, sending out a clear message of harmony and equality. A community meal brought them together with all villagers sharing the same space after years of self-imposed isolation. Both the communities have begun to take slow but steady steps towards healing themselves and live as a cohesive and happy group. These positive changes have further motivated the peace trainers to organise similar activities in the area and other villages as well.