

Kamakshi and the King



NANDANA REDDY

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FOREWORD

Children's right to participation is a new concept to both adults and children. It is difficult to understand and apply in practice. However it is important that we do so as this right is the foundation for children to realise all their other rights. We therefore need to find ways to understand exactly what it means.

Children's right to participation also has implications on the nature of relationship between children and adults. It implies a partnership that is continuously negotiated and ever expanding.

This is one of several stories that have been designed to help understand these questions better and equip both adults and children to prepare for a meaningful partnership.

Kamakshi and the King

Once upon a time, a long time ago, there was a King called Damodar. He ruled over the large Kingdom of Basrur. He was a very good and just king. He ruled over his subjects with kindness and affection. Everyone loved him.

His only drawback was that he, like most adults, had forgotten what it was like to be a child. He had forgotten how to fly kites, how to climb trees, what it was like to be scared of exams, what it felt like to play in the rain and the pleasure of eating ripe mangoes stolen from other's orchards.



Because of this he was not able to plan for children. His ministers advised him to form a committee of experts to suggest plans and policies for children. So King Damodar

called the best teacher, the best parents, the best games instructor, the best children's doctor and the best storyteller to form the committee.

The committee worked for days and nights, for weeks and weeks, month after month collecting information, reading big fat books, discussing among themselves and writing hundreds of pages. Finally after a year they came up with their policy and plan for all the children of Basrur. This was presented to the King.

The King was so impressed that he decided to call all his subjects to a public meeting and announce his new policy and the main points of the programme.

So he called his minister for Public Announcements and asked him to arrange the public meeting. Drummers were dispatched to the far corners of Basrur and everyone was invited to attend this historic meeting.

So all the people of the land began to make arrangements to attend this meeting. As everyone was going they had to take all their children too as they could not be left alone at home.

This was one of the grandest meetings ever. Everyone came, as everyone was very concerned about children.

The concerned Minister and Children's Welfare read out the document and explained all the main points of the programme. After he finished there was absolute silence. No one said anything and people were looking upset. The policy sounded good on paper but the plan had lots of problems with it. But no one wanted to tell the kind King this. After all so much work had gone into it.

Meanwhile the children who were there began to talk among themselves. "The King wants to give us more schools, but he is not going to do anything about the way teachers teach us." "He says that we must all go to school, but we cannot understand anything that is being taught there". "It is very kind of him to say we should not work, but who will fetch the fuel and water and look after our little brothers and sisters?" "The policy says that we should all grow up into useful and active citizens, but no one is helping us to do so."

Still no one said anything. A little girl called Kamakshi could not bear this any longer. She knew that the King was kind and understanding. She wanted to help him to do make a good policy. She also wanted to help all children. So she decided to speak up. She made her way



to the front of the gathering and in as strong a voice as she could muster she said : "Please your majesty can I speak?" King Damodar looked down at this little girl and wondered how she could possibly make any sense of all this grown up business. Anyway he let her speak as he had a rule that all his subjects had a right to express their opinions and after all, this little girl was also one of his subjects.

Kamakshi began slowly. She explained that the programme had problems with it. That though it was done with good intentions it could cause harm to children. She said that the way to overcome this would be to have some children on the committee, as "we know our situation best".

King Damodar thought this was an excellent idea. He thanked Kamakshi and said that he would do just that.

The next day he told his ministers to pick four of the brightest children in the land. A girl and a boy each from the rural and urban areas. There was a big search and these children were found.

The committee sat again and rewrote the policy and plan with the inputs from the children. However, though



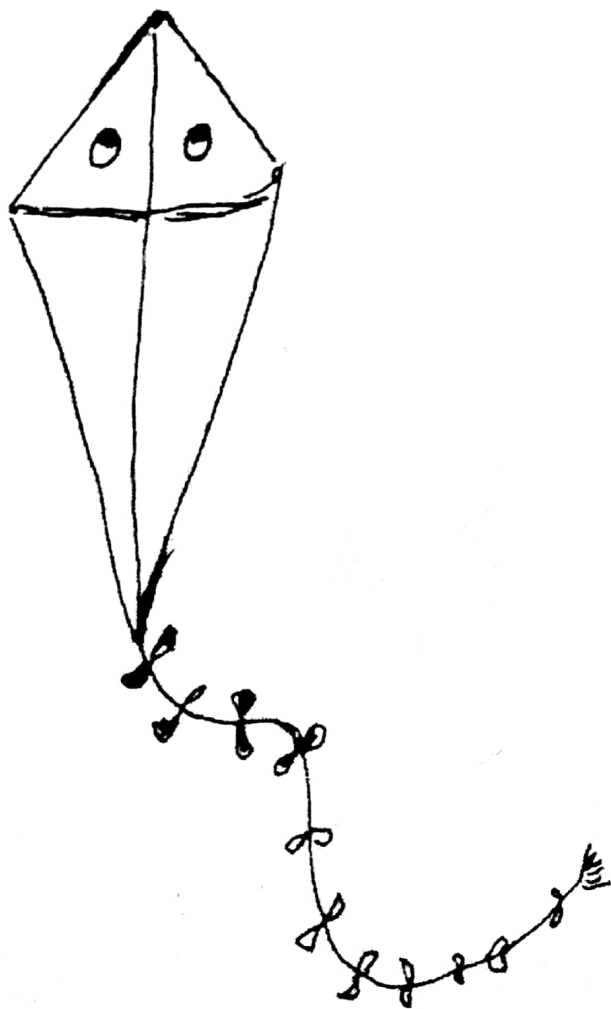
the children were very intelligent and nice, they only knew about themselves and the things they wanted done. They could not speak about all the other children in the land, as they did not know about the problems they faced. So even this policy, though it was a little better than the first, was not good enough.

Kamakshi thought she knew why. It was because:

1. The children of Basrur had not come together to discuss their problems and the possible solutions.
2. The children who had been invited to join the committee were not chosen by all the children of Basrur.
3. The representatives had not collected the views of all the children and agreed with them how to present them.

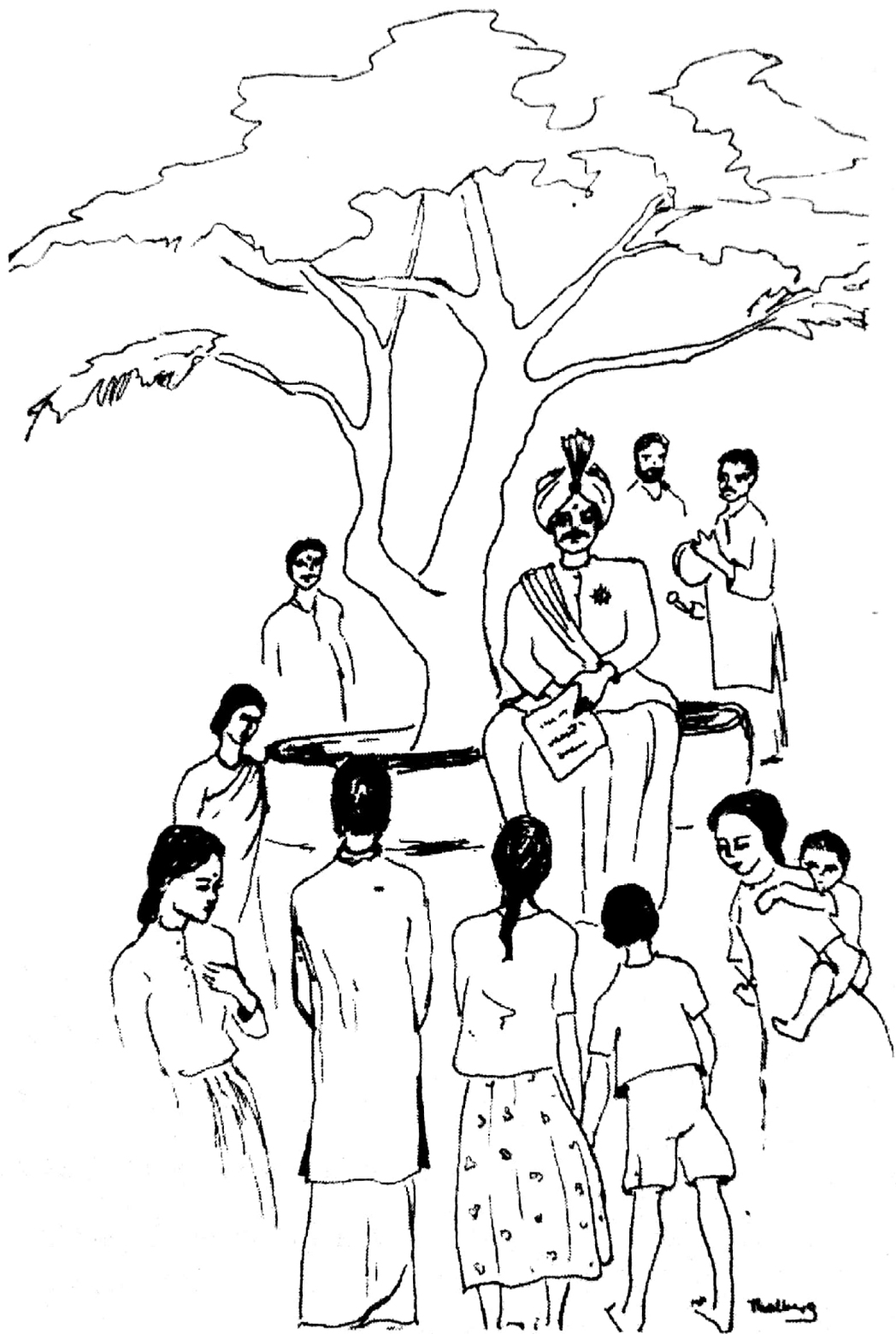
Kamakshi realised that all this had not happened because they, the children of Basrur, were not organised. She decided to get all the children together. Children with common problems formed smaller groups. They all discussed and listed the things they wanted done and then pooled all this information together.

In a big meeting of children, they elected four representatives to represent them on the committee and present their collective views. These children were elected based on a criteria set by the larger group. This was how well the child could make a presentation, how strong the child was so that stronger views would not easily influence her / him. Whether the child was able and willing to consult and report to the group at every stage, that the child



understood that s/he had to only present the views of the group and not his/ her personal views. That s/he was accountable to the group and had to abide by the group's decisions.

Kamakshi was one of the four children elected. They went to the King and told him what they had done and why. He



listened and then he was very thoughtful. He realised that he had made a big mistake. Though he loved children and cared for them he had not respected them.

A new committee was formed along with true representatives of children. They worked hard at the policy and plan and finished it in one month. They also decided that every six months there should be a review and that the representatives of children would be a part of the review committee.

The King called another public gathering. This time he issued a special invitation to all the children. One adult and one child member of the committee presented the policy and plan jointly. It was a very good beginning. Everybody could see that children's concerns had been truly understood and addressed. There was great applause and King Damodar was very pleased.

He called Kamakshi aside and thanked her for educating him. He said that this had taught him a big lesson that he should always respect the right of his subjects to organise themselves; to represent themselves and that

it was no different for children. Kamakshi blushed at this complement. She was also used to kings praising her.

Kamakshi wanted to ask the king to do one more thing for the children. She wanted him to take a day off each year and spend it with them, flying kites, eating mangoes and climbing trees. Now it was King Damodar's turn to blush. He was so glad that Kamakshi had asked him this. He had missed being a child ever since he was six and was longing to do all these fun things again. He happily agreed.

So ever since then there was a permanent children's council elected by all the children of the land. Also the first day of the harvest season was called Children's Day. On that day the King, his Ministers and all the adults did things that children love to do. The Kingdom of Basrur became even more prosperous and happy. All the children were thankful to Kamakshi and King. Damodar learnt how to be a child again.



About CWC

The Concerned for Working Children (CWC) is a secular, democratic national private development agency working in partnership with children and their families for the realisation of their rights through their participation and to address the issue of child labour. The organisation is operating in the State of Karnataka in India. However, because of our training, consultancy and advocacy activities our work expands globally and we are a well recognised and reputed agency in the arena of children's rights and protagonism, and rural and urban development.

CWC has shown that the harmful aspects of child work can be eradicated and that working children themselves can play a major role in the process. The foundation of CWC's work is the development of child protagonism; i.e. the empowerment of working children so that they may be their own first line of defence and participate in an informed manner in all decisions concerning themselves.

CWC works with local governments, communities and working children themselves to implement viable, comprehensive, sustainable and appropriate solutions in partnership with all the major actors so that children do not have to work.

CWC originally began its work in the city of Bangalore in 1975 with working children, most of who had migrated to the city from the rural areas of Karnataka. CWC, however, recognised that it was not sufficient to work with children who had already migrated and that it was also important to try and do some thing to address the reasons why these children left their villages. Consequently from 1989, CWC began to work in Udupi District in the South Canara Region of Karnataka State, one of the major feeder blocks of child labour to the vegetarian restaurants all over India.

Based on our extensive experience of working with marginalised children and their communities, we have facilitated the formation of Bhima Sangha, a union of working children, Namma Sabha, an association of young crafts persons, artisans and entrepreneurs and women's and men's self help groups. Currently we work in five districts of Karnataka, namely Bangalore City, and the rural districts of Udupi, Davangere, Bellary and Uttara (North) Kannada.

For further details go through our websit <http://www.workingchild.org>



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