



Participatory Training for Women

CONTENTS

Preface	
Introduction	
Genesis of The Workshop	
Case Studies	
Changing Structures, Changing Lives	
SPARC, Maharashtra	5
Taking Control of Our Health	
SEWA/CHETNA, Gujarat	21
Training Programme for Building Women's Cadre	
RISE, Andhra Pradesh	31
Training Rural Women	
MYRADA, Karnataka	41
Opening Doors	
ASTHA, Rajasthan	59
Training Field Level Women Activists	
PRAYAS, Rajasthan	
Training of Trainers	
JAGORI/ACTION INDIA, New Delhi	
Analysis of Case Studies	
Towards an Alternative Vision	

Community Health Cell
Library and Documentation Unit
367, "Srinivasa Nilaya"
Jakkasandra 1st Main,
1st Block, Koramangala,
BANGALORE-560 034.
Phone : 5531518



PREFACE

With the growing emphasis on the concept of women's empowerment over the past few years, the area of training of women has taken on even greater importance and relevance. There are a number of training programmes for women which are being carried out by both governmental and non-governmental agencies all over the country.

In this context, a workshop was convened in December 1987 to facilitate a process of in-depth analysis of the various models of training for women and thereby help promote women's organisation and participation in the development process. This compendium of case studies is a result of the process of analysis which started in the workshop.

We are grateful to all those who participated in the workshop, as well as those who have contributed their case studies for this compendium, and shared with us their experiences in the area of women's training. We are particularly grateful to Mona Daswani of SPARC and Mirai Chatterjee of SEWA who, as members of the Editorial Collective, assisted in the analysis of these case studies.

DECEMBER 1989



Introduction

The concept of empowering women has been the subject of much discussion and debate in various forums. Several models of empowerment have emerged and have been implemented at the grassroots level. Several critiques of the empowerment concept have also relocated the debate in recent years, by moving away from the target group empowerment orientation to critically looking at the key issues of participation and control that women can have in processes that affect their lives.

Historically, women have been part of a strict male-dominated patriarchal system which has not allowed them to realize their potentials and individualities. They have constantly been relegated to the background and their

role has essentially revolved around domestic production processes and child-rearing and caring services, and conferred upon them a secondary status. They have been seen as supplementing men's work and wages, if at all. Thus women have not been able to meaningfully participate in events outside their homes. As a result of this conditioning, their own self-esteem and self-concept have become extremely low. They see themselves as worthless, unable to do anything on their own, ignorant, foolish and generally inferior to men. Fears of this type, conditioning, socialization and being constantly subject to the oppressive social structures, have resulted in women feeling that compared to men, they have little to offer to society in pedagogical terms.

The nature of participation of women has also been defined in male-oriented terms. The strength and capabilities which women possess have not been recognized and accepted as valid. Also, the world view of training for women has been influenced by the concept that women are to fit within a framework of existing learning norms, thus further peripheralizing the involvement of women.

With the growing recognition and sensitization to gender equality and equity in society in the last decade, all the traditional value-systems today are being questioned and challenged, including the basic assumptions that are constantly made regarding women's abilities to learn.



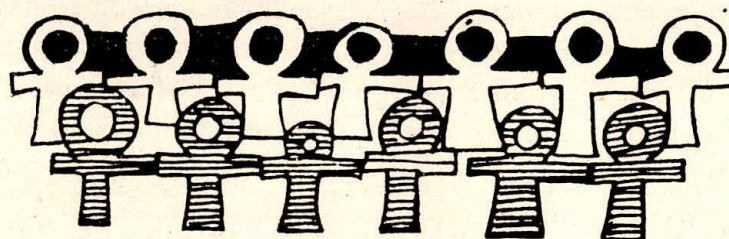
Training women is even more important in view of the fact that more and more development programmes today are being focused on women as the "target group". There is a growing realization that true development is not possible without the equal participation of women.

Women's training, therefore, not only aims to validate and translate the individual strength and tenacity of women into collective strength but also to search for an alternative framework within which change can take place, if we need to move beyond the rhetoric.

The type of training women undergo, therefore, in

order to empower them, has to lift the oppressive structures and burdens off the backs of women and enable them to see themselves as they really are - strong, capable, responsible individuals who have as much a right to their lives as anyone else.

To achieve this, we, as trainers, are struggling towards an alternative world view of women, so the task is dual - while on the one hand we are exploding myths, on the other hand we are also developing concepts to replace those myths. **This is the challenge.**





But our experiences on the ground and of ourselves, showed a very different canvas. Women's learning styles as well as perceptions, are very different from those of men. It is this reality that we would like to focus upon and highlight in our search for a gender sensitive framework of Participatory Training. Such a search has been a result of cumulative rich and diverse experiences of several women activists and trainers -- who have been themselves undergoing a process of questioning the existing value-systems, and redefining their own contexts as women in the present society.

The initial analysis that emerges from these experiences cannot but be situated within the larger framework of women's status, position and roles in society.

A group of 18 women trainers from 14 organizations from different parts of the country met at a three-day workshop in Delhi in December 1987 to explore the various dimensions involved in training poor illiterate and semi-literate women at the grassroots level. The format of the workshop was based on case-study presentations. Several common issues were explored and reflected upon, myths exploded, concepts refined through a collective process of retrospective and introspective analysis, which we are sharing with you in this presentation. We have also shared these analyses, with some more women's groups who also contributed their

Genesis Of The Workshop

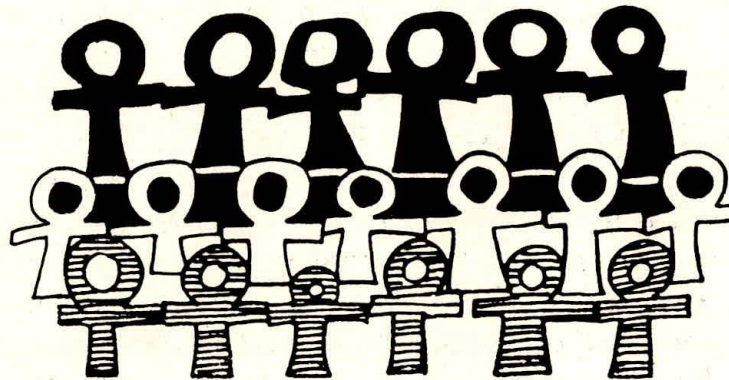
As women trainers in the field, many of us are constantly seeking and innovating on training methodologies and strategies which would be sensitive to women's realities and issues, such that women would be empowered in the collective learning process. The present framework of the philosophy and methodology of Participatory Training has not specifically addressed itself to women's learning needs, their unique styles and processes of learning. Women have been generally subsumed under the broad category of 'learners'. Such an assumption stresses that the formal and informal learning processes of women are akin to that of men learners.



case studies for wider dissemination.

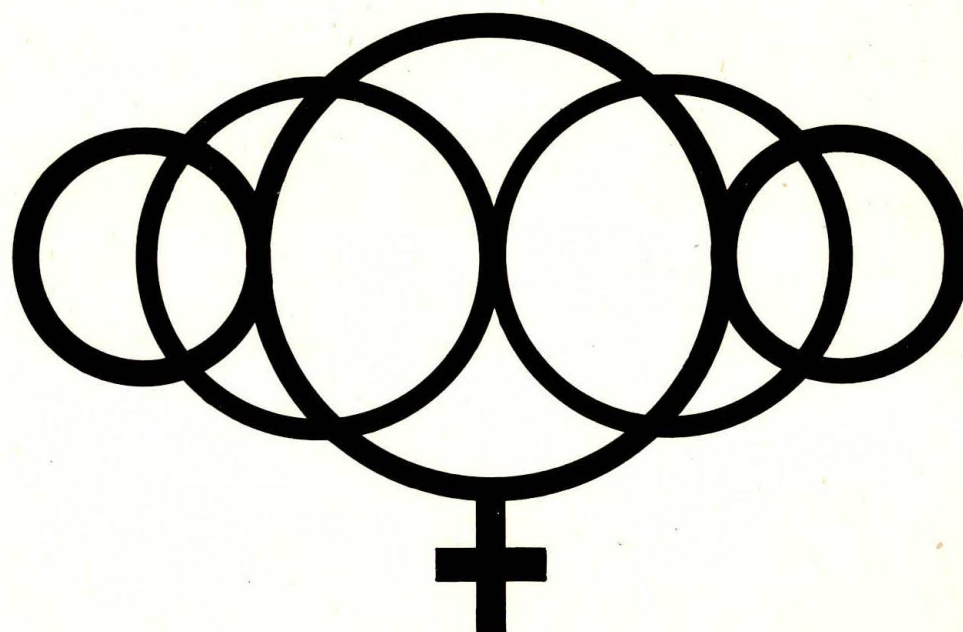
We are sure that as the practice in the field moves ahead, there would be many more issues in training women that would need to be highlighted, reflected upon and refined. We hope this process of learning would continue.

Finally, as women trainers, we cannot undermine our own learning from these experiences and from poor women themselves. We must acknowledge that working with poor women can be a humbling process and the power of these experiences can change our lives and our perspectives too, if we realize it.





CASE STUDIES





CHANGING STRUCTURES CHANGING LIVES

A Participatory Training Programme for
Women Pavement Dwellers



- SPARC Team



on a piece of the pavement, either along a main road or in smaller lanes, close to their place of work. We refer to a single group of pavement families as one cluster. A cluster may be as small as 25 households or as large as 200 households, depending on the nature and length of a particular street. In the early part of our work, we asked the people to identify their own cluster; often these had been given distinct names by them.

Behind the dismal facade of plastic and bamboo live the families, often from the same community. They have no access to civic amenities and therefore have to develop innovative strategies to meet their own requirements. Pedestrian toilets are used by them, water is obtained either from railway stations, families where the women are employed as domestic help, or even fire hydrants. All the activities such as cooking, washing and child rearing are carried out in a structure of approximately 6 by 8 feet. It is ironic that pavement dwellers contribute to the city through their labour but use virtually none of its resources. They are completely isolated from the mainstream and are often not aware of what facilities may be available to them.

They are invisible to the city authorities except as eye sores who are encroaching on public property. There is no acknowledgment of their contribution, instead they are constantly hounded by the local authorities. Pavement

Background

SPARC is an organisation which is concerned about the problems of the urban poor. We initiated our work in 1985 with pavement dwellers in the city of Bombay. In our analysis, they are one of the most disadvantaged sections of those rural migrants who come to the city for economic reasons. The informal sector offers them myriad options and work is invariably found. However with escalating land values and a crunch for space, these migrants are unable to acquire even a room in an established slum. Hence, they establish their own shelter



dweller's lives are fraught with insecurity due to frequent demolitions of their homes. It is quite clear that this strategy of periodic demolitions rarely achieves the Municipal Corporation's objective of the clearing of a street. However, it serves a more detrimental purpose, namely that of terrorizing the poor, so that they are continuously reminded that the city has no place for them. After a demolition, people may stay away for a few hours, or even a few days, then they invariably return and re-establish themselves. They have learned to cope with these demolitions as yet another urban reality. The very material they use for construction of their homes is relatively cheap and replaceable. Other than loss of belongings and occasional violence, the demolitions do little physical damage. Yet they have the tremendous psychological effect of increasing the sense of powerlessness of the poor.

We at SPARC believe that it is possible to bring about a change in the existing situation provided that :

1. People who are isolated, passive and fragmented become active participants in the process of social change.
2. Individuals through sharing common experiences establish bonds between themselves.
3. Those who have so far allowed destiny to determine their survival, assume control over their lives.

4. A position of powerlessness can be changed into one of power.
5. People can gain access to new and relevant information and knowledge.

We also believe that women bear the major burden of poverty without having access to any powers of decision making either in the family or the community. However, once women are involved in a process of change, they display tremendous potentials as leaders. This leadership can be collective and one which reflects the concerns of the entire community. Hence the focus of our work is to work with poor women, and involve them in collectively seeking alternatives to their present situation.

The Judgement—A Watershed

Until July 1985, there was no definite policy related to pavement dwellers. Their existence was tacitly sanctioned, even though its precarious nature was constantly reaffirmed. However, the situation changed when the Supreme Court passed a Judgement on the Pavement Dweller Case on 11 July, 1985.

This was a case which had been under deliberation for the past four years. The petitioners argued that since the Constitution guarantees every citizen the fundamental right to life no one may be deprived of this right except



by law. The right to life includes the right to livelihood and since pavement dwellers livelihood was linked to their place of residence, they should be permitted to stay there. Although the court granted that all citizens have a right to livelihood, it still conceded that pavements were public property, and another group of citizens, namely the pedestrians could not be endangered by having to walk on the road, because the pavements were occupied. Hence the right to life of pedestrians had also to be considered. It was stated that pavement dwelling is illegal, and it was within the jurisdiction of the Municipal Authorities to demolish structures without notice, or alternative accommodation.

This threw a completely different light on the situation. In the past, some pavement dwellers with access to resources had been able to appeal to the courts for a stay order in the event of a localised demolition. However, the Judgement closed all doors to legal redress. This affected groups all over the city of Bombay, and the women with whom SPARC works also participated in demonstrations and protests organised by various voluntary and political groups. It soon became clear to them that they could not return to their villages, and therefore would have to seek alternatives within the urban context. However, women who had not needed to think beyond the following day now found themselves having to plan for their future.

They were completely ill-equipped to do so, and therefore would have to undergo a process whereby they could learn certain skills and acquire some knowledge. This was not limited to merely moving from one form of shelter to another, but an opportunity to bring about a complete change in their lives. Shelter was only the issue which catalyzed women and their communities to get organised to take control of their future in the city. In order to do this, they were ready to participate in a training process.

Formulation Of The Training

It became clear to us at SPARC that the training would essentially provide an opportunity for women to reflect on their situation and acquire certain skills. The focus of the training was to develop an alternative vision of community organisation, based on a rejection of the present existing one. Since this could not be done in a vacuum, the issue of shelter would be taken up, as being the one which affected the entire community deeply, including the poorest members. In order to initiate the struggle for shelter, we evolved a strategy based on the following assumptions:

- (1) that the poor have a right to shelter;
- (2) that collective action can help them gain access to this right;
- (3) that the government system can be pressurised



in order to accept that the poor have this right.

In the present situation, it was clear that shelter was a crisis for the poor in the urban context. Their immediate need was to seek an alternative. This crisis situation was used to evolve a training programme with the following objectives:

To facilitate a process whereby

- (1) Women participate as active and equal members of the community.
- (2) Individual concerns are shared and become collective goals.
- (3) Alternative information, based on their own reality is developed by the poor.
- (4) Existing information is analysed.
- (5) Women's collectives form an alternative leadership.
- (6) Women are empowered.

Making A Public Commitment: Pre-training

The first step was a series of mass meetings where both men and women attended and spoke about the impending demolitions. It was clear that not a single person was even considering the aspect of returning to their village. It was also certain that their lives on the pavement were shortlived. Hence it was imperative that the community seek alternatives for themselves.

We at SPARC were emphatic in explaining that shelter was very much a women's issue—it was they who made the pavement dwelling a home, and it was they who were most affected by any demolitions since the men were almost always away at work. After a series of such meetings, a common consensus was reached that the women would indeed be active participants. This was the prelude to the training programme.

- (a) It brought about a general acceptance in the community for placing women in the vanguard of the training.
- (b) This position was publicly ratified.
- (c) Their key role put women in a position of responsibility from which there was no turning back.
- (d) Any fears, anxieties, and doubts were also shared, so that they did not act as deterrents.

Phase I

1. Group Discussions

Once a decision to move from the present dwelling was taken, a series of group discussions followed, including tracing their migration to the city, the history and development of the pavement cluster, why families are compelled to stay in the city, how people survive and the kinds of problems faced by them. This was initially a discussion among women from the same cluster, where



most of the families were from a similar rural area. This process varied among clusters, and was complete only when women had been through the range of topics. Often, similar discussions were held between members of different clusters. For the first time a collective reflection on the situation of the poor by poor women had occurred which achieved the following :

- (a) that concerns are common;
- (b) they derived strength from one another;
- (c) time and space for women to share with one another was created.

This had a tremendous impact on strengthening the groups which were formed, and sustained them for future activities.

2. Site Visits

According to the city authorities, there is no vacant land available in Bombay. This myth had to be destroyed and the best way we felt was through site visits to vacant lands. How did we locate these lands?

- (i) Women themselves had heard about marshy stretches of land through other slum and pavement families who lived in other areas.
- (ii) Through the city's development plans many of these vacant lands were identified.
- (iii) Speaking to professionals in the department of urban development was a useful source.

Hence, this was an important step in obtaining information contrary to what women had been told all these years.

What the women learnt from these site visits was :

- (a) That vacant land does exist in the city, although it has not been made available to the poor. Physically viewing a stretch of land has an impact far greater than hearsay. This was also a lesson in how to obtain information about an issue.
- (b) For many women this was the first time they had left home alone. Travelling by train, visiting far off places was a discovery, an exposure.
- (c) Women from different pavement clusters interacted with each other, in a new environment, where they had a common goal. This strengthened the basis for networking.

3. Formation Of Area Committee

Until now, the training had been open to all the women in the community out of their own free choice. This was a conscious decision taken by SPARC since we did not want to select trainees. Rather we felt that those who participated in a rigorous process should do so out of their own free will and with the sanction of the community. The community, especially the men, should be well aware of what the women were saying



and doing, in order to avoid misconceptions or develop hostility. However, once site visits were carried out, it became clear that certain concrete tasks had to be completed. Not everyone in the community would have the time or the capacity to participate. Hence a natural selection of leaders occurred. One woman for every 15 houses was chosen to assume responsibility for concrete tasks. These were known as the Area Committees. They also had to conduct regular meetings with the 15 houses, so that everyone in the community at large would be kept informed.

What the women in the Area Committees learnt was:

- (a) to function together as a team
- (b) effective leadership qualities, since they received direct feed-back from the community;
- (c) how to involve others and facilitate collective decision making;
- (d) having to conduct meetings themselves was preparing them to assume trainer roles in the future.

4. Enumeration Of Their Own Homes

This was planned as a simple exercise, wherein each cluster would determine the exact number of families living there. This was based on the following rationale :

- (i) The poor had until now never quantified information about themselves. Any census in

which they were included was done by outsiders, sometimes the government, often voluntary agencies. Hence it was important for them to generate an alternative statistical base.

- (ii) SPARC had learnt through past experiences that enumeration is a powerful tool in mobilizing the urban poor. Hence, it was planned that women would undertake this exercise themselves.

In retrospect, we see this as the water-shed of the training. The impact of the enumeration was tremendous - the number of physical structures did not total up to the number of families; the latter are greater in number by about 40 percent. This is because people rent out space, nuclear families expand, single member families occupy a stretch of street, homes are used for a range of occupations, etc. All these issues had to be resolved before women could arrive at a common consensus about the exact number of families in their cluster. This enumeration was repeated until the results satisfied the majority of the community.

Often, this was a frustrating exercise, both for the community, and for us at SPARC, since it was difficult to arrive at an exact number. However, we saw this as a very important group-building exercise, one which strengthened the training process, therefore it was continued. Of all the individual steps, this took up the



maximum time. For the women :

- (a) this was a concrete exercise which they did collectively, thus strengthening the team's ability to perform tasks;
- (b) they developed a tremendous insight into the community dynamics;
- (c) their own sense of confidence increased since the community saw them in a position of doing something concrete and vital;
- (d) they developed bonds between one and another, which set the basis for them to assume the role of alternative leadership in the community.

5. Settlement And House Design

In the established schemes for the urban poor, it is architects who develop low-cost housing designs. More often than not, these are based on a middle-class world view and are not relevant to the needs of the poor. Hence, they are often rejected by those upon whom the plans are thrust. Since the training process involved an opportunity for women to plan for their future in the city, an important component was settlement and house design. It must be emphasized that this component comprised not more than 10 percent of the entire training. However, it was important, since it gave women an opportunity to let their imaginations run free, to dream and visualize what sort of homes they wanted for themselves. At the same time they had to come down

to the reality of their means and resources, and community needs.

Professionals, such as architects and city planners, were ready to work with the women as resource persons. The first step was for women to shut their eyes and analyse how they had utilized the space in their existing homes. Then simple measurements were explained; for example, a 5 yard sari is 15 feet, a *mangalsutra* is 20 inches and so on. Women then created house models out of cardboard. The architects spoke about the importance of light and ventilation. The settlement design was one which evolved out of a series of discussions among the women. They articulated their needs, such as wanting common toilets, shared by 4 families and the architect would suggest a design based on units of four. All plans which emerged arose out of basic community needs, and it was highlighted

- (a) that dreaming and fantasy stimulate creativity and were perfectly valid;
- (b) realistically analysing the communities needs and resources was possible;
- (c) it is a myth that illiterate women are unable to learn sophisticated architectural concepts.

Phase II

1. Critique Of Public Housing

Although there is no policy related to the pavement



dwellers specifically, the Government and other voluntary agencies have schemes for housing the economically weaker sections. We felt it was important for women to analyse these schemes for two reasons:

- (a) Since these are government schemes for public housing, specifically for the urban poor, the women should know about them.
- (b) These plans can be compared with their own ideas about settlement and house design.

This was achieved in several ways : city planners met the women as resource persons and made slide presentations; government offices were visited, pamphlets and other materials were obtained, which were translated by SPARC personnel; model schemes both in Bombay and in other cities were visited by core group of women.

This had the following learning impact :

- (a) women felt a sense of confidence that they could critique the housing schemes from their own perspective;
- (b) they developed a sense of pride in their own designs, which were based on people's needs, unlike the others which they saw;
- (c) acquiring and processing information was no longer an unfamiliar exercise; this reaffirmed the earlier training.

2. Hardware Of Housing

We refer to three major components as hardware land, material and finance. Each of these is distinct, yet interrelated.

- (i) Acquisition of land is a difficult proposition and negotiations with the government have been initiated.
- (ii) Women have been visiting various places where building material is prefabricated, and determining which of these is appropriate for themselves.
- (iii) Finance has been tackled in two ways: by saving small amounts of money each month in a local bank and inquiring about loan facilities for housing from established credit sources. The savings are handled by local women from each cluster, and accounts are held in individual names.

The learning potential in this is tremendous :

- (a) It reaffirms the reality that there is no policy or scheme available for pavement dwellers, hence the women will have to be prepared for a long struggle.
- (b) Most established institutions like banks are not willing to even grant entry to pavement dwellers, until they find out about the



investment these women have made. Thus, a sense of confidence in themselves and the training was affirmed.

- (c) Banking procedures were learnt.
- (d) A sense of discipline was inculcated: planning for the future involved a different rigor from merely planning for the following day.



The Time Frame

The training was divided into two phases :

The initial phase and the second phase. The initial phase took exactly one year, and the second phase took six months. Thus the entire process of training was completed in 18 months for approximately 500 women from 7 different clusters. Details are given below :

NAME OF CLUSTER	DATE OF JOINING TRAINING	NUMBER OF FAMILIES	NUMBER OF LEADERS
1. Apna Jhopadpatti	15th March '86	97	7
2. Nagpada	9th April '86	153	10
3. Water Street	9th August '86	91	8
4. Tank Pakhadi	9th August '86	37	3
5. Shanti Nagar	29th Sept. '86	55	7
6. Dockyard Road	25th Sept. '86	22	5
7 Jhula Maidan	3rd Nov '86	40	7
Total Number		495	47

The training environment was a simulation of women's own reality. The most important facet was to create an unpressured atmosphere, where women could learn at their own pace. The first group of women who participated in the training were the most



adventurous. Information about the training spread among other clusters; as and when women were convinced about the training, they came to us and expressed a readiness to participate. Those who joined later benefited by the learning processes of the earlier participants. Each group had its own characteristics, which were used to the advantage of the training.

For example, Apna Jhopadpatti, Water Street and Tank Pakhadi are located very close to one and another and helped each other through the various steps. Nagpada is a heterogeneous, scattered group, who had to continuously be reassured and although they joined in April, at one stage they were found lagging behind. Shanti Nagar is an extremely homogenous group, most of them are ex-prostitutes who have left the trade and were very eager to change their situation. Although they joined later, they worked hard at each of the steps and were able to keep abreast of the other groups.

However, mechanically going through the stage of land visits, enumeration, formation of committees was not enough. The training was a process of attitudinal changes and depending on the group, a gestation period was essential. For example, Jhula Maidan, on seeing the other, wanted to race through the steps. However, the women had not yet acquired the basic values such as collective functioning, sharing and mutual trust through

this acceleration and they soon found themselves in the midst of disagreement and discord.

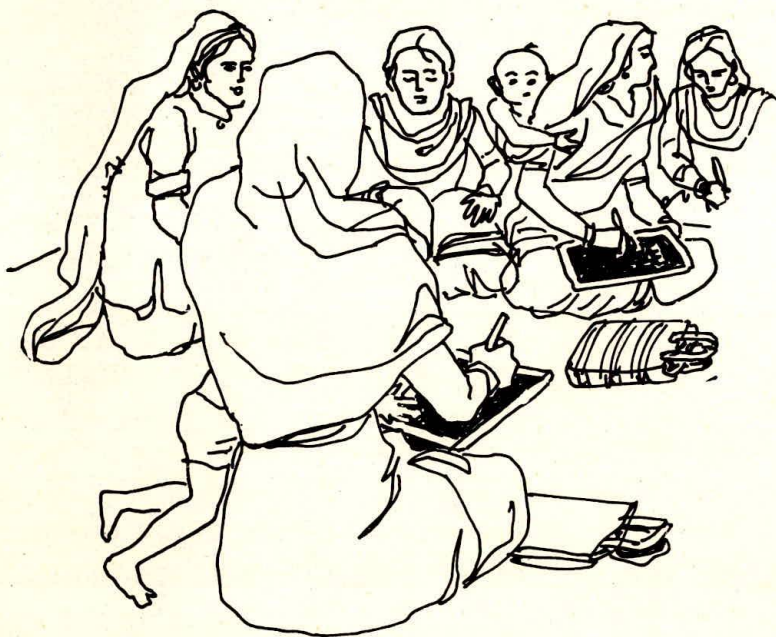
This had a significant learning impact, both for the women, and us at SPARC. An important aspect of the training process was that of group-building, of understanding community dynamics, resolving conflicts and re-constituting the groups. Hence, no matter how tedious certain steps may have seemed (for example, the enumeration referred to earlier) this played an important role in the group-building. Jhula Maidan had initially wanted to go through the steps very fast rather than invest time and energy in each. However, it proved of essence to the training to allow each step to progress at its own pace. They were helped through this by the other women who understood what the training entailed.

Each group would meet in the office once a week, each meeting had a specific learning agenda, which followed from the discussion of the previous week. Approximately once a month, resource persons were invited to speak to the entire group, giving specialized inputs. Field visits were planned according to each group's convenience. Often clusters worked out convenient times and went together. Later on women from different clusters would meet once a week and conduct their own meetings in order to periodically review the training.



The Outcome

A natural reaction to a description of this training is: What happened? Did the women get house? The answer is No. The objective of the training has never been to build houses, and the women have been well aware of this. Even those, who at the start of the process thought that they might get a house, found at the end of it that the kind of learning which they had undergone was quite different. To use a colloquial translation, the Bihari women said, *Dimag khul gaya hai* (our minds have opened). One of the outcomes was



that the women were able to create their own points of reference. No longer were they a fragmented isolated group. They had concretely analysed why they are in the city; they were aware that there was no returning to the village. It was clear that until they attained a certain level of organisation and demanded for their own rights, they would not gain access to any of the city's resources. This was important, since it demonstrated that an alternative vision of community organisation was central to the training - shelter was the critical issue that had been used to trigger this.

In the urban context, the crisis is around the issue of shelter. This affects the poorest among the urban poor, and hence is a powerful issue. Once women are centrally involved in the process of shelter planning, long term changes which affect the entire community are feasible. Their self-confidence and ability to deal with their situation is tremendously advanced, due to a quantum leap in their own perceptions. For example, when a demolition occurred in one of the clusters (Apna Jhopadpatti) the six groups mobilized one another and arrived at the demolition site in a show of solidarity and strength. This time the Municipal Squads found themselves face to face with a dignified group of women, who instead of being terrorized, displayed a sense of calm and said, We will dismantle our own homes, and did so while singing songs in order to keep up their



own morale. There was sadness in the air, yet there was a sense of strength and power. This will go down in history as one demolition in which goods were not lost and no physical violence ensued.

Until now, only the women's involvement in the training process has been described but the training had important repercussions for two other groups : the government, and for us at SPARC. When the women presented themselves and their concerns to the government, this was found to be a new experience for the bureaucrats. Until now, they had only their own preconceived notions about pavement dwellers. Suddenly they were faced with a group of articulate women, who knew what they wanted, and how to go about attaining their rights. The women were so well informed about the housing schemes and shelter-related issues, that officials have been astonished. They know more than us, has been the reaction of some of the more progressive officials! This became more evident when officials came out of their offices to meet the women in their own environment - the women were very comfortable and therefore clear in voicing their needs. The officials soon realized that they could not dismiss the women by trying to offer them resettlement in one of their model projects, which was too distant and underdeveloped to be viable. Thus, the negotiations were initiated based on women's needs. Although bureaucratic procedures are long and

tedious, the women are confident that they have the ability to sustain the negotiations.

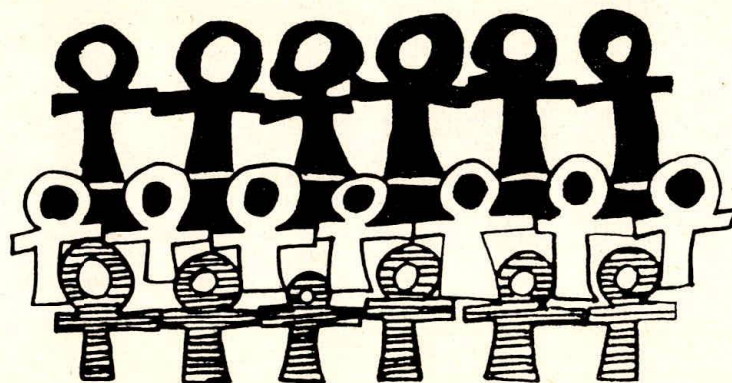
Finally, for us at SPARC, the training has been an empowering process. When we started, we were full of anxiety, since the issue of shelter was new to us. In retrospect, we realize that this was to our relative advantage, since we had no preconceived notions. As we came across new information, we shared this with the women and tested the validity of the hypothesis. Hence, we were able to critique the various aspects related to shelter from the point of view of the poor, particularly women. All those who participated in the training feel very empowered. As trainers we now have to move into a more supportive role, as women undertake more and more of the direct organizational work.

Perhaps the most important outcome of the training was the women forming their own organisation called Mahila Milan. This arose out of a direct need to sustain the various activities which are both related to shelter and to take up other issues. Mahila Milan has a membership which is open to all poor women living in the city. It is structured only in their own specific concerns. It functions independently of SPARC, meets on a regular basis and takes it's own decisions. One of the important functions performed by Mahila Milan is aligning with other people's organizations and ensuring women's participation. We believe that autonomous



people's organizations, like Mahila Milans can play a key role in the struggle of the poor. Establishing links between such organizations and creating a federation is essential for building a national movement of the urban poor. Mahila Milan has another important role to perform, namely that of sharing the training process which they

have undergone with other groups. This is not only a very effective way to reaching out to other sections of the urban poor, but it also strengthens women's own capabilities when they move from the role of trainees to the role of trainers. Hence, this training has wider implications in the context of a national movement.





TAKING CONTROL OF OUR HEALTH :

Some Experiences of
Community Health Workers Training



- Mirai Chatterjee, SEWA
- Pallavi Naik and CHETNA team



In our search for putting some order to these, a few key issues emerged:

1. We strongly believed that we had a right to know about our bodies and our health.
2. We also believed that all women could be involved in the process of sharing and supplementing their existing knowledge about their bodies. Literacy was no barrier.
3. Our concept of health was holistic, including our mental and emotional well-being.
4. We were committed to primary health care for all and especially the poorest and weakest in the community. Health training was to be an important element of our primary health care work.
5. We valued both modern and traditional concepts of health and disease, and hoped to use the safest and cheapest elements of both.
6. We hoped that our health work would lead to a greater consciousness of our status in a patriarchal society, leading us to further action

At the time when these ideas were crystallizing in our minds, we were a small group. These were the SEWA Health Team of three, twelve women from Shankarbhuban, a poor neighborhood where SEWA members live and some friends from CHETNA. Organizers from SEWA had become close to some of the

How We Began

When we first discussed the prospect of health training for women, we were excited. We spend long hours dreaming and discussing the various possibilities for organizing and empowerment that such training offered. Greater knowledge and control of our bodies could lead to collective action for greater control over our lives. It was this possibility that excited and prompted us to explore what none of us had been involved in before - health training with poor, non-literate women.

And yet we were faced with several questions. What would our health trainings be like ? What would these include ? Who would be involved ? And how would we do it ?



Shankarbhuvaan women over a period of several months. Some of the women had been long-standing members of SEWA. Others were curious about the organization, and still others had little faith in collective action. "We were born in this mess, raised and married in it and will die in it", they argued. "This Shankarbhuvaan will always be this way".

Yet it was the women themselves who suggested that we work on the issues of health, water supply and sanitation. They explained that they and their children were always sick, and to top it all, water supply was a big problem.

They also suggested that health trainings be organized because, "We know nothing about our bodies and health". (a view that they would revise later !). Some women were not confident about participating in such training - "How can we learn these things ? We are completely illiterate". Others, though nervous, were excited about learning and being involved in a new, different kind of activity.

At the same time, many men in the community were curious and amused about the kind of exchange of ideas and discussions that we had been having with women. They said that our hopes for the future were little more than tall talk. After all, what can women do? Who cares what they think, need and feel ? And

besides, so many like us, had come and gone, and life at Shankarbhuvaan remained unchanged.

Others were apprehensive about our intentions. We were giving their daughters, sisters, mothers and wives wrong ideas, stirring them up for nothing, they said. Some even thought that we had actually come to recruit women for sterilization operations ! Still men felt that it was impossible for completely illiterate women to learn and teach anything. "What do they know?" they jeered. "How can they learn ? They have no brain."

Finally some said that if their women-folk worked with us, people would laugh or spread rumors. It would be a disgrace for the whole family. As Arjanbhai, father of two of our future health workers explained, "My two divorced daughters have brought enough shame to the family. I don't want them wandering here and there".

Despite the ridicule, apprehensions and some opposition that we faced from our families and the community, we were determined to go ahead with our ideas and plans. The SEWA Health Team and CHETNA decided to work together for all the health training. CHETNA had, for several years, been working in the field of community health education, and we shared a common perspective on this. At the same time, we were united in our commitment to poor women and in our belief that they have a right to know and can



learn about their bodies and their health, regardless of levels of literacy. The Shankarbhuwan women, the SEWA Health Team and CHETNA friends thus began to conceptualize and plan the health training together. However, our CHETNA friends were to be the main trainers, till such time as others were ready to assume this role. They would, therefore, be chiefly responsible for preparation of subject matter and learning materials, organising these and sharing whatever they had collected.

Together with SEWA and CHETNA organizers, some women from Shankarbhuwan were to participate in the training. The next question was : Who would be involved? The issue was settled in one of our meetings at Shankarbhuwan. Nine women initially wanted to participate in this training. They had to withdraw because of marriage and moving away, and other family commitments. Finally six women decided that they would be the first health workers of Shankarbhuwan.

They suggested that the trainings be once a month for three or four days duration. They could not spare more time, as apart from household work, they were all daily wage workers, involved in various trades of the informal sector. They re-sewed old cement bags for transporting onions and potatoes, scrubbed and re-painted old tins, peeled garlic and sold vegetables, old clothes and scrap metal. Their earnings were between eight and ten rupees a day. SEWA decided to pay Rs. 10/- per

day in lieu of wages for the days that they would be involved in training. The women also felt that these trainings should be held either at SEWA or CHETNA offices, as there were too many distractions at Shankarbhuwan. Finally, as a support to our training, we decided to have a "clinic" twice a week, providing basic curative care to Shankarbhuwan's residents for a nominal fee. The "*dawakhana*" was also a practical means to train women in diagnosing, and providing curative care and health education.

The Measles Epidemic And After

The topic for our first training was decided by the outbreak of a measles epidemic in Shankarbhuwan. At least four children died before we could act. Our intervention was difficult because of a whole host of beliefs and rituals that we did not even understand at that time. We felt helpless and somewhat confused about what we could do. We arranged for measles vaccine from the local municipal dispensary, and government health workers immunized the children. Meanwhile, we closely observed and suggested treatment for children who developed complications as a result of measles. We also fixed the dates of our first health training with women. Although a sad event in Shankarbhuwan had prompted our training programmes, we were enthusiastic about starting.



All of us had a lot to learn about measles and health beliefs in general. Our training began with a discussion of how measles is viewed in a traditional community like Shankarbhuvaan, and what is done to cure it. We learned about its diagnosis by a "*bhuva*" (local-healer), of how the 'Mata' (Mother Goddess associated with the disease) had to be appeased and child's death had to be accepted because the 'Mata' ordained that it be so. Then, others of us shared our modern knowledge about measles, its transmission and how and why it is a killer of children in poor communities.

From our measles training, several points emerged which we incorporated in our subsequent sessions. First, starting with what we all know and experience every day sparks off greater interest and involvement of all participants. So we discussed how Ramiben's son got measles, how it was diagnosed and reasons why the little boy eventually died. Our training methods and materials from this point onwards incorporated our own experiences, down to the charts and drawings which portrayed life at Shankarbhuvaan.

In addition, we found that we particularly enjoyed those trainings where we all could participate and contribute throughout. We tried to ensure, therefore, that there was a role for all the participants in our training sessions. Sometimes we divided into small groups and

created role-plays and "stories, piecing together flip charts in which the CHETNA artist captured life at Shankarbhuvaan. Other times we made up rhymes and "*garbas*" to help us remember immunization doses, how malaria spreads, the use of chloroquine and other issues. We also tried to learn in pairs - one of us would ask the other about something we had just learned, and then the roles could be reversed to check whether both had understood and absorbed the material.

Further, rather than viewing a disease in isolation, we always discussed its socio-economic implications. Why is it that poor children do not survive a measles attack, whereas others do? How is malnutrition related to our status as women? How does insufficient and intermittent water supply affect our health? We felt that not only were such issues close to our hearts but also that we must begin to confront and analyse these, if our work was eventually to have some impact on our health and our lives.

Another thing we learned quickly was that our trainings rarely proceeded as planned. Often some of us were tired because we had been up all night with a sick relative, or were unwell ourselves or had been dancing at a wedding till the wee hours. Consequently, we sometimes found it hard to concentrate or just felt very sleepy. On the spot changes in our training became a common practice, based on everyone's mood, energy



level and requests.

By experimenting, we found topics, methods and materials that were particularly appropriate, and some that were useless. Even the pace of discussions and presentations had to be altered frequently because of our moods, knowledge and absorption levels. Sometimes we felt that reviewing materials presented was essential as some could not take notes and we could not always rely on memory. On such occasions, a few women who could read and write felt restless and bored.

There were also times when we felt that the subject matter to be presented was conceptually difficult to grasp, but were surprised at the ease with which this actually occurred. One such example was a session on what the heart and lungs look like and how they work. As most of the women had seen these organs in sheep and goats, understanding the human anatomy was no problem at all! Further, knowing about lung and heart structure, made understanding their functioning quite simple.

Similarly, when we learned about diarrheal diseases, we only briefly touched on bacteria, viruses and unicellular organisms (protozoa). But all present were interested to learn about these and their role in spreading infection. An impromptu microbiology session was then arranged, and thus, women who had never been to school began

discussing viruses and protozoa. They learned the English terms but had difficulty remembering amoebas, giardia and so on. So amoebas became "the protozoa with holes" and giardia "the protozoa with a tail", and similarly for different types of bacteria.





There were also times when women had a lot of difficulty understanding some sessions which we thought would be quite simple. Our training on food groups, and the different use of these by the body was one such example. Perhaps they were less interested in this issue than we anticipated.

Some of the training sessions that evoked the most interest were those on our reproductive system. Women who had eight or ten children were amazed to learn how their bodies actually worked. We had long discussions on our gynaecological problems. Our various deliveries and their complications, and even on our sexuality.

While we felt that our sexuality and oppression as women in this aspect of our lives had to be addressed, we did not quite know how to initiate discussion on this, or how we would feel raising this in a group setting. One of the older women in our group settled the issue by launching into an account of her personal experiences. Some giggled nervously but it paved the way for serious and important discussion. The younger, unmarried women were shy but also most intrigued. And we all felt a new closeness and warmth at the end of it. Among the methods we explored during our training were field visits to assess the prevalence of a particular disease, visits to hospitals and local dispensaries and use of facilities and equipment of various institutions. At the Community Science Centre (CSC) in Ahmedabad, for

example, we peered into microscopes and saw how protozoa, bacteria, adult mosquitoes and larvae actually looked.

We also used life-size models of the human body at the CSC for our anatomy sessions. We were able to detach various vital organs from their positions on the model, examine their size and structure and see their location relative to other organs. This "learning by seeing and doing" was very important.

In addition to this, Our "*dawakhana*" began to be and still is an important training ground. The SEWA Health Team's doctor initially examined, diagnosed and treated all patients, while we observed and learnt from her. Slowly, we began to examine people, take case histories and even diagnose and treat some of the problems with which we were familiar. Thus our "practical training" greatly augmented our class-room training.

Apart from models, field visits and the "*dawakhana*" we used charts, slides and even video programmes that we made ourselves at SEWA. Often we or our families featured in the audio-visual presentations speaking on our own experiences and understanding. We liked these a lot.

Regular evaluation of what we were learning was also considered important from the very first training on measles. We tried to ensure that our understanding of



a particular health problem was sound and solid. Although we did not want to have formal tests, we did try to prepare and review before hand. After all, we wanted to be competent health workers.

But our evaluation sessions were not just restricted to testing our knowledge of diseases. We also discussed the trainings themselves, how we felt about them, what worked and what did not. We also tried to plan how we should proceed what our priorities were, and where we were in terms of our ideas, beliefs and goals.

Where We Are Now

We began our health trainings a year and a half ago. Since then, our health family has grown considerably. Seven women from three villages of Sanand taluk, Ahmedabad district, and twelve women from six villages of Anand taluk, Kheda district are now village health workers. There are also seven of us now on the SEWA Health Team and some new CHETNA friends. That brings us to thirty-five in all. In both areas, the health training and "*dawakhana*" follow the Shankarbhuvan pattern, with a few modifications. Almost all the Sanand health workers are illiterate and also were initially less confident than their urban and more worldly-wise sisters from Shankarbhuvan. Some of our discussions, training materials and methods had to be altered to suit the village setting.

We have one dispensary for the three villages where our work started. It also serves as a means of practical training for the health workers.

In Kheda, our health work was a response to the repeated requests of tobacco workers who are SEWA members. Here too, we found women more withdrawn and less confident as compared to their city counterparts. We soon learned why. When they participated in health trainings, the tobacco growers, in whose fields they work tried to isolate them as potential trouble-makers. In fact, the health workers were very courageous to be participating in the training. They risked their daily wages for this and so sometimes during the training were anxious.

In the six villages of Kheda, we have two dispensaries—one each for three villages. Here too the health workers have begun to examine, diagnose and treat village people.

The Shankarbhuvan group of health workers have almost completed their initial training. It has been at times a gradual process and other times faster than we all anticipated. The women now run their "*dawakhana*" every day, by their own choice. They examine people and take histories, diagnose and treat some primary problems if they know how. At the same time, they are open about saying that they are unsure about a



diagnosis, and so would prefer to refer the person for further care. They have devised a system whereby one literate and one illiterate woman work as a team. One asks questions and the other notes the responses. They also have regular health education meetings in their community, to share what they have learned. Not surprisingly, they are now increasingly involved in other community issues such as savings for women, loans and so on. They plan to work on the issue of proper water supply next year.

Perhaps the most exciting development of the health training is that some of the women of Shankarbhuvaan have become trainers ! They have been conducting some of the sessions for the newer health workers at Sanand and Kheda. In addition, they are called upon to discuss the health aspects of women's lives during SEWA's unionizing efforts. They share what they have learned, their fears, hopes and vision for a just and healthy future.

Finally, some local voluntary organizations are seeking their help in training health workers in different parts of Ahmedabad. Women's groups are also inviting them to share their ideas.

Recently when on a study tour as part of health

training, we all decided to march silently with women from Rajasthan and other parts of India, in protest against the "Sati" that occurred not far from Jaipur. As Radhaben from Shankarbhuvaan put it : "If we cannot speak out for justice and truth, what good are we as health workers?" Kunvarba of Kodariya village in Sanand added, "If women are going to be killed like this, how can we sit still? Our presence in Jaipur is very much a part of our work and our training".

And so our work and ideas have changed and grown. Some of us who never believed we could learn something new and could change our outlook have done so. Others of us have derived a lot of strength, confidence and inspiration from our training, our health work and from each other. We now see ourselves not just as health workers providing a needed service, but also as community healers' in a broader sense. Our vision for the future is still evolving, but we will be not only free of disease but also of the chronic exploitation and poverty we face.

We continue to face opposition at home and in the community. All those trainings have made you too bold, we are told. But we feel we have made a beginning and have a long way to go together.





TRAINING PROGRAMME FOR BUILDING WOMEN'S CADRE



D. Susheela, RISE



our work. Few key women consulted us and invited us to assist them in the formation of women's association in their villages. But our strategy was clear: we would not go to the villages to organize women. We felt that a trained and experienced cadre of women's association should go into the neighbouring villages and help them in organising the women as well as strengthen networking among the various associations in several villages. Particularly in Gasikapalli, and Sathu, women had been interacting with Kothapeta, Pakampalli and Bendana Kuppam Women's Associations.

Background

RISE is a small action group working with others groups which are involved with tribals, landless-labourers, untouchables, small farmers and women in remote areas of Andhra Pradesh.

Besides their ongoing field work, they have been involved in holding training programmes and workshops in an effort to build the capacities of several field activists in the region. They have also been involved in documentation and preparation of learning materials.

Context

In the beginning our field team was working with 14 villages in Andhra Pradesh, which were selected for

During the International Women's Day celebration, Sathu and Gasikapalli women were very keen and strongly motivated to form an organisation to promote women's status in the existing socio-political economic situation, particularly highlighting violence and atrocities on women. The women's cadre was involved in these issues and mobilized the women on these. On another occasion at a peace march, the women's cadre was questioned so much by government officials that it strengthened their enthusiasm to acquire knowledge, skills and awareness to organise their own women's association. At the same time as this, women were being ill-treated and disappointed by their own men as well who would not allow them to speak with others or allow them any exposure to the outside world.



Objectives Of The Training

- To identify and analyse the various social problems of women;
- To plan for collective action to increase women's status;
- To increase women's participation in terms of utilising Government resources.
- To promote their knowledge about mother and child health care.

Trainees

As we mentioned earlier, this course was meant for cadre building, therefore we selected only cadres of women's associations. In each women's association each member is responsible for one unit consisting of four to five families. General criteria for identifying cadre is as follows:

- having an orientation and motivation towards social services;
- time and capability for transferring knowledge and skills;
- acceptance of her leadership in the community;
- possessing basic skills like problem-solving and organising skills in the field.

All the women are agricultural labourers and belong to the Harijan Community; one woman was from the Reddy Community who is a stone cutter in the Sathu village. They were illiterate women and after forming the women's association, they had started simple literacy classes.

Trainers

Two women trainers from RISE conducted the programme. Both have been involved in organizing grass-roots training programmes for women.

Learning Needs

Learning needs had been assessed during the pre-course period through informal dialogue with the cadre and in the Sangam meetings. Meanwhile, at the beginning of the course the participants discussed their learning needs in small groups in which a broad frame-work of the training was already provided.

After having intensive discussions in the small groups they presented their expectations of the training programme. Those needs were classified into three areas like concepts, skills and personality.

Programme Introduction

Day 1

The participants formed dyads to get to know each other. They had to choose a partner from different villages.



This provided them opportunity to talk and open up.

Group Building Exercises

In an effort to build up the learning environment and interaction in the group, we did two exercises "sip-sap" and "advocator".

Present Status of Women

We initiated dialogue with participants about women's status in the family and community. After that we divided participants into small groups to identify women's problem in the family and community in terms of various systems. In this session the focus was on culture, values, decision-making and health. We used charts made by 'CROSS' which related to the social and economical situation of women.

Sangam Strategy

Sangam is a strategy for organizing women in order to struggle for justice. At the same time this is a major tool for collective experiential learning. This situation has the potential to organize the masses and encounter the exploited and existing the value system.

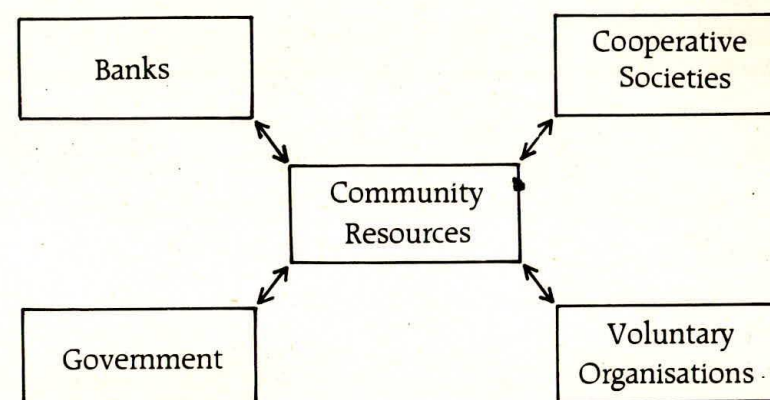
Problem Solving

We spent some more time on problem solving methods by understanding and analyzing various issues facing women. During this time we also discussed utilisation of local available resources for conflict

resolution. A Sangam meeting was demonstrated by Gasikapalli Sangam members. It was organised in a systematic manner, and at the end we had a reflection session on this demonstration. Particularly we focused on the meeting agenda preparation, facilitation styles, decision-making methods and minutes writing, which were discussed in detail.

Day 2

Training Resources



By and large we can find various resources for development, but these resources are in the hands of a minority. To capture these resource there is a great need for people's organisation to form pressure groups. Besides the lack of information people are not aware of those



resources. So knowledge is a power. Few key persons from the Pakampalli women's association shared their experiences regarding the formation and preparation of work plans and implementation of the economic programmes. They gave much emphasis on struggling with men, for revitalizing poor men's association and pressuring local government to give housing pattas.

Participants visited Dunkumakulappali women's association and had closer interaction with them. Here the major discussion was on the issue of atrocities on women. The women struggled with husbands, and yet minimized the ill-treatment meted out by men. They also had discussions with widows and neglected women about the rationale for them to acquire new skills like mat weaving, tailoring, scented sticks making and *Beedi* making which would help them to be self-reliant.

Health

The role of women's association in mother and child care, and particularly the need for immunization and ante-natal care was discussed. Food habits, hygienic condition and nutritive value of foods etc., were also discussed. During these discussion a number of superstitions and beliefs related to health problems were also highlighted and explained.

Re-Entry Plan

At the end of the training programme participants

were enthusiastic to go and share their experiences with the other members in the women's associations. And a few cadres felt the need to systematize their programmes, particularly on health and social issues. A few other participants decided to give support to neglected women by pressuring husbands and protesting on ill-treatment.

Monitoring And Evaluation

We used various methods to monitor the course. These were as follows:

- Informal dialogue
- Reflections (programme end and day end)

Since it was only two days, we did an oral evaluation at end of the programme. Major areas for evaluation were :

- Accomplishment of training needs.
- Training methods.
- Major highlights
- Accommodation and food.

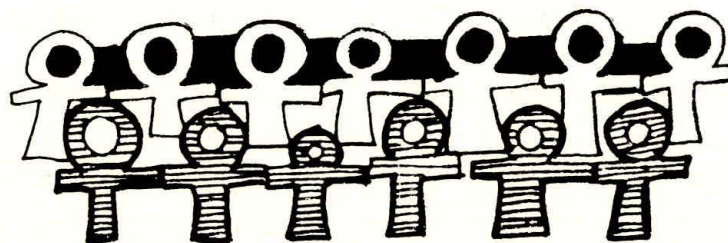
Training Impact

During last year's *Panchayat* elections Gasikapalli women's association members convinced Venkatamma to contest for ward membership against the outcast women.



All the sangam people made a big noise during the elections. Even though the outcast people also voted in favour of Venkatamma, but with a few votes of majority, an outcast woman won. But still Gasikapalli women's association had played a role in shaking the existing power structure. At the same time this women's association convinced Sankaramma's husband to make amends to her. Now Sankaramma is reconciled with her husband and family. Thirdly, this is the first time that the women visited the mandal office to submit their requisition for protected water programmes and put

pressure on them. Finally they succeeded in getting drinking water for handpumps. During that time they provided food and other facilities to the drilling unit team. Previously they used to collect rice and pulses from the Harijan community and give to outcast people for cooking and offering to guests. But this time they offered food and other facilities without any inferiority complex, and that team received them with pleasure. Meanwhile in Sathu village they are organizing poor men's association by motivating them constantly.





Appendix

TRAINING PROCESS

Day 1

Time	Content	Method	Time	Content	Method
11.45 to 12.10	Introduction	Pairs	4.30 to 4.45	Committees formation	
12.10 to 1.30	Group building games		4.45 to 5.00	Break	
	- Sip - Sap		5.00 to 6.30	Sangam Strategy to overcome problems faced by women	Lecture
	- Advocator	Exercises			
1.30 to 2.00	Training aims and needs assessment		6.30 to 8.00	Problem solving strategies	Lecture and Dialogue
2.00 to 2.30	Lunch		8.00 to 8.30	Dinner	
2.30 to 3.00	Present status of women	Dialogue and Chart Presentation	8.30 to 8.45	Organising Sangam meetings	Demonstration
3.00 to 4.00	Identification of Women's problems	Group Discussion	8.45 to 9.30	Cultural Programmes	
4.00 to 4.30	Analysis of the existing problems	Plenary session			



Day 2

Time	Content	Method	Time	Content	Method
6.30 to 8.45	Review session	Dialogue	12.30 to 1.00	Lunch	
8.45 to 9.30	Input session of Govt. Schemes and departments	(Lecture)	1.00 to 1.30	Preventive care for mother and child	Lecture and Charts
9.30 to 11.00	Sharing of activities and experiences of Pakampalli Women's Association	Lecture and Dialogue	1.30 to 3.00	Existing health problems among women and preventive steps	Lecture Role Play
11.00 to 12.00	Field visit Dunkumana Palli		3.00 to 4.00	Re entry plan and evaluation	Individual work



TRAINING RURAL WOMEN



Ranjani Krishnamurthy, MYRADA



MISSION STATEMENT OF MYRADA

"To foster a process of ongoing change in favour of the rural poor in a way in which this process can be sustained by them through:

- assisting the rural poor in building local level institutions with appropriate and innovative management systems
- influencing public policies in favour of the poor."

Introduction

MYRADA's focus is on organising and building appropriate local institutions of the poor; institutions which are trying to evolve and implement appropriate systems for managing their resources viz. credit, land, livestock, water, social infrastructure and human resources. As credit is an important and immediate need of the poor, and at the same time it is a means for getting out of the clutches of exploitative money-lenders, most of the institutions start off by evolving appropriate systems for managing credit but slowly move over to managing other resources. Irrespective of the resource which is being managed, these institutions are trying to:

- (a) Bring to the surface and re-introduce traditional

values which were operational in the past; values which fostered effective management of the resource. Mutual support, honesty, self-reliance, self-restraint, care for family welfare, concern for the village are a few examples of such values.

- (b) Use these traditional values to bring about appropriate changes in the behaviour pattern of its members. Promoting thrift, personal and village hygiene, punctuality and discouraging smoking and alcoholism are a few examples of such changes.
- (c) Nurture new, but egalitarian values, like equality based on gender, caste, religion etc.

MYRADA feels that to be effective these institutions have **to be socially viable**. The members need to be able to work together as a group; they should be able to function in a way where the collective efforts of its members towards the goal of the institutions are more than the sum of the individual efforts of its members. Further, the members of the group while mobilising at least **part** of their resources from themselves, must plan, manage and monitor **all** programmes and resources of the institution. Lastly, it is felt that the members should share the rights and responsibilities in a manner which promotes equal development of the resources, values, skills and capabilities of each and every



member.

To be socially functional it is perceived by MYRADA that these institutions need to be:

- (a) **Small** in size: an ideal of 15-20 members and a maximum of 30 members. A group larger than 30 members finds it difficult to function.
- (b) **Homogeneous** in composition, i.e., they should comprise people with common interests.
- (c) **Fully Participative** where decisions are not delegated to representatives but where all the members come together to arrive at every decision.
- (d) **Voluntary** where rules and regulations of the group are evolved, observed and changed by the members themselves. This encourages the emergence of values, rules and regulations which are **appropriate** to the activities of the group, which help to establish better living systems for its members and enables members to cope with the continuously changing demands of the environment.
- (e) **Non-political** where decisions are taken by the members on the merits and demerits of the issues and not due to the influence of outside politics.

Whenever necessary, the groups get together to meet

common needs. Thus if drinking water is a problem in a village, all the groups in that village get together to evolve strategies for solving the problem.

Why A Group Approach ?

Through our experiences of the last 20 years, MYRADA has realised that providing inputs to an individual family is not sufficient to raise the family economically above the poverty line and to keep it there. We have also realised that by working with individual families it is not possible to bring about the social development of the poor. The social values of the people are largely shaped by the values of the people with whom they live and interact. Hence it is not possible to re-introduce appropriate traditional values and use them to bring about appropriate changes in the behaviour of the people in an individual approach. We have realised that the group approach effectively meets the shortcomings of the individual approach.

Over the last 4 years the 17 Projects of MYRADA, spread over the States of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, have organised over 800 such groups: all involved in managing credit and some in addition manage watersheds, livestock, wastelands, rural enterprises and service centers. Around 300 of these are exclusively women's groups. Fifty have both men and women members and the rest are men's groups. The membership



in all the groups is restricted to people who are poor.

Why Have We Organised ?

MYRADA feels that most of the poor women not only lack access to adequate options to choose from, but unlike the poor men, **women do not even have the opportunity to exercise their choice within the available options.** Thus we believe that among the poor, women are the poorest. MYRADA perceives that their low status, is the result of their low self-image and self-confidence and also due to the attitudes and values of men towards women which the women themselves have internalized, much to their disadvantage. We believe that organising poor women into groups will not only expand the options available to them for their development but, more importantly, it will provide them with opportunities to develop the confidence and skills required to exercise their choices and simultaneously bring about a change in the attitude of men towards women.

Further, MYRADA feels that poor women have an important role to play in the development of their family and village. Firstly, they are involved in running the house, collecting fuel, fetching water, working and bringing up children. Secondly the poor women play an important role economically. They manage livestock and earn income for the family through agricultural labour. If their family

has land they are involved in the production process too. Lastly and most importantly, many of their values and attitudes are an asset for any development effort. Their concern for their strong sense of what is right and wrong, their low need to compete with each other, their interest to know new things and a strong pride in their achievements are a few examples of such values and attitudes. Thus, we feel that organising appropriate women's groups will not only facilitate their development but also the development of their family and village.

This study is an attempt to document the experiences of Holalkere Project of MYRADA in designing and implementing training programmes for members of women's groups. Holalkere Taluk forms part of Chitradurga District of Kamataka. MYRADA has been working in 45 villages of three hoblis of this taluk since 1981. Till around May, 1986 the Project was working with individual poor families trying to influence the delivery systems of the government commercial banks and co-operatives so that they are more responsive to the needs of the poor. The project organised around 500 women into a cooperative in 1984. However, this cooperative, like other cooperatives, was not really a people's institution. It was large, non-homogeneous, not participative and political. The rules and regulations of the cooperative were framed by the government, and not by the members. The cooperative therefore did not provide opportunities for



the poor people to expand their options and exercise their choices, did not provide the poor people with opportunities to develop their skills, capabilities, knowledge and awareness. The experience lead to a change in the approach of the project: a shift towards organising and building up socially functional groups, groups which are small, homogeneous, fully participative, voluntary and non-political.

This shift in thinking started taking place in 1986. Since then the project has helped around 1300 poor people, including around 750 women, to organise themselves into 63 groups with the features described earlier. Of these 63 groups, 33 are exclusively women's groups, 24 are men's groups and nine have both men and women members. The Project, for managerial purposes, has been divided into three clusters of around 15 villages each. This study restricts itself too the experiences of the project staff, especially Ms. Lata Mala, the person incharge of one of the three clusters, in providing opportunities to members of 16 women's groups to increase their skills, knowledge and awareness so that they are able to foster their group's development.

The 16 groups are in different stages of development. Members of four groups, all around one and a half to two years old, have developed a good understanding of their duties and responsibilities and the role of the group and MYRADA. To a large extent they can manage

the activities of their group without the support of MYRADA. Their activities extend beyond economic issues into social problems, most of the members participate effectively in team meetings and have evolved and observed appropriate rules and regulations, they have reflected on and resolved structural issues effectively; all the four groups are small and homogeneous, they have developed strategies for coping with conflicts arising within the group and also with men who interfere with the groups.

On the other hand four other groups, all less than six months old, are still in the initial stages of development. Some of the members of these groups are yet to get over their experiences with the co-operatives, they do not have a clear understanding of what the group can do for them; what is their role and MYRADA's role in the development of the group. The members are yet to resolve issues like membership, group size, decision-making processes. Thus the groups are relatively larger. Decisions in these groups are taken by a few members and not by all the members, rules and regulations are yet to be evolved. Effective mechanisms have not been evolved to cope with conflicts. Men interfere and dominate the meetings; the members of these groups are yet to learn how to cope with such problems.

The other eight groups are between these two extremes.



The Project staff feel that each group starts off from the initial stages of its development described above and, given the right environment, gradually develops as a socially functional group. In the process some groups may undergo a lot of structural changes. The time required for such a transition varies from group to group; depending on the composition of the members, relationship between members, non-members' attitudes towards members, the role of MYRADA staff etc. However, opportunities provided by the Project staff to members individually and as a group to enhance their awareness, knowledge and skills have facilitated such translations. Sometimes the Project staff even had to spend their time and effort with the women members' husbands, fathers and sons and the village leaders. The issues and themes for reflection, the area in which members required opportunities to enhance their skills and knowledge varied with the stage of development of the group.

What learning opportunities were, and continue to be, provided to the members of a group to facilitate their own and the group's development? What were the important values, attitudes and principles underlying the Project staff's efforts to facilitate learning of the members of the group ?

The learning opportunities provided by the Project staff and, more importantly, by the group itself to its members can be divided into four categories.

- (a) Meetings of the group
- (b) Meetings with members and their families individually.
- (c) Non-formal education in the NFE centers
- (d) Formal training programmes

Before elaborating on each it may be appropriate to share the values, attitudes and convictions which formed the basis of the staff's efforts to facilitate learning which ultimately led to group development :-

- (a) Respect of the staff for the members' experiences in coping with life and the awareness, knowledge and skills developed through the same.
- (b) Belief that the best way to promote learning of the members is to encourage them to start from what they are aware of, what they know and what they can do and develop upon these through systematic reflection on the same and by seeking and analysing new information.
- (c) A strong conviction that if the members are to develop the knowledge, attitudes and skills required to work effectively as a member of a group, it is imperative that learning should take place through collective and systematic reflection and action on their knowledge, skills and awareness and on the new information available to them.



Group Meetings

Normally members of a group come together every week to discuss issues which are of concern to them and to save whatever money they can with the group. The issues which come up in these meetings and the participative processes adopted for seeking and analysing information and making decisions provides opportunities to the members of the women's groups to enhance their knowledge, awareness and skills in areas which are relevant to the development of their group. Appropriate changes in the negative attitudes and values of the women are fostered through these informal meetings; positive attitudes and values of women are nurtured. However, **this process of learning takes a lot of time; depending on the size, composition and dynamics between group members.**

Issues For Discussions

The issues for discussion in a meeting emerge from the members of the group themselves. MYRADA staff, if they attend the meetings, do not interfere in this process. This approach is adopted as our staff have realised that the members participate and learn in the meetings when issues for discussions emerge from themselves. However, the staff of MYRADA encourage the members to record and implement the decisions taken in the meetings.

Venue And Schedule

These meetings are held in the village itself in a place where it is convenient for all the members to meet and talk without being unduly disturbed. Availability of space for sitting in a circle, which the staff perceive as essential for participation, is another consideration while choosing the venue of these meetings. As the women are busy in the mornings with the house-hold work and in the afternoons with earning a wage, the meetings are normally held around 7.30 p.m. - 8.00 p.m. after they have finished cooking for the night and at times even eaten their dinner. The meeting normally last for 1-2 hours; beyond that the members with children and those who have not given their family their dinner start getting restless. Some of the male relatives of the women members start coming to the meetings to call them home when it gets around 9.30 - 10.00 p.m. The women





participate and learn faster when men are not around, including the male staff of the Project, till they get used to them. These realizations have helped the Project staff to modify their approach and strategy for working with women.

Individual Meetings

In every women's group there are a few members who do not participate effectively in the decision-making process in the initial stages of its development. These women normally have a very low opinion of themselves or have major personal problems with which they are pre-occupied most of the time. Though efforts are made in the group meetings to draw them out, these sometimes do not yield much result. To provide opportunities to such weaker members to develop confidence in themselves and cope with their peers from the group, the Project staff visit them individually in their family setting or at any other suitable place. During these visits the staff and peers try to assist these members to understand the reason for their low opinion about themselves and personalise the problems. This helps them to slowly develop confidence in themselves and learn to cope with problems which arise in their lives. However, in case of major personal problems, for example, an alcoholic husband, the staff and peers spend a lot of time counselling not only the member but others who are directly concerned with her problem.

The project staff feel that the extent to which these efforts yield results depends on many factors. Importantly the problem of the woman, her interest to develop herself, their own and her peers' capabilities. The time required for such efforts therefore varies from case to case.

Non-formal Education (NFE)

The weaker members are in addition, given special attention by the animators of the non-formal education centers, which are run by the groups with the support of MYRADA. These centers are run with the objective of providing opportunities to :

- (a) The members to develop their ability to recognise, by heart and write numbers and do simple and relevant mathematical calculations; and later on to read and write in the local language.
- (b) Weaker members to enhance their knowledge, skills and capabilities and thereby develop their confidence in themselves. The NFE centers also provide a forum for the weaker members to share their personal problems with others and jointly seek solutions.

At present the stress of the NFE centers continues to be on numeracy. The animators of these centers start off from traditional systems of counting and calculating, which the members are familiar with, and use them



as the basis to develop the numeracy skills of women. Further the centers restrict their sessions to areas which are of interest and relevance to the members. For example, the sessions on numeracy are limited to helping the members to recognise, memorize and write numbers and do simple mathematical calculations. The members who have picked up these skills feel that it has helped them to improve their ability to cope with transactions of the group and develop a better understanding of the books of accounts of the group.

The groups evaluate the NFE centers every month: the number of sessions held, attendance, improvement in numeracy and literacy skills, and recommend to MYRADA whether to pay the salary of the animator or not. Recognising that around 60 percentage of the centers are not functioning effectively, the Project now plans to organise a workshop on how to make NFE centers interesting and useful. Some of the Project staff, animators of strong and weak centers, and members participating in the sessions at their centers will be the participants in the workshop

Formal Training Programmes

As explained earlier regular meetings of the group provide the group members with opportunities to build upon their existing knowledge, skills and awareness. However, the Project staff felt that the informal learning

environment provided by the regular group meetings had a few limitations. These are listed below :

- (a) The regular village meetings do not provide adequate opportunities to its members to share, reflect and learn from the experiences of members of other groups. It was felt that such interactions would be extremely useful for members of weaker groups.
- (b) As the poor women play the dual role of earning income for the family and running the house, they find it difficult to attend meetings of more than two hours regularly. However, reflection and discussions on some issues and themes demand more time from the members, which is not possible during regular meetings.
- (c) Learning is fostered in group meetings through the process of making decisions on issues which emerge. However, at times, the members tend to bring in their personal biases in the process of decision-making. This may hamper the learning process.

It was felt that these shortcomings could be met effectively through formal training programmes if designed and implemented properly.



Objectives And Content

The first series of training programmes in the form of workshops was organised by the staff of H.D. Pura cluster in December, 1987 with the objective of providing opportunities to the members of groups in the cluster to develop a better understanding of :

- (a) The role of groups, MYRADA and themselves in the development process.
- (b) The structural features which are necessary for a group to be socially functional.
- (c) The activities of groups involved in managing credit and systems which are appropriate for management of credit.

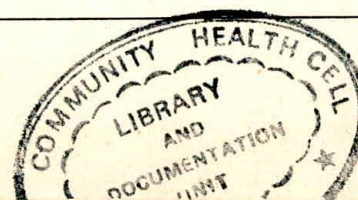
To meet these objectives 9 one-day workshops were organised in December, 1987, in a centrally located village. Each workshop was attended by members of 2-3 groups. The workshop normally commenced at 10.00 a.m. and got over around 6.30 p.m. with breaks in between for lunch, tea and coffee. Over the period of around seven hours the following questions were raised in each workshop (with a few variations between workshops):

- (a) What is the need for groups ? What role can groups play in their development ?
- (b) What are the goals of MYRADA? What is the role of MYRADA in the development of groups?

- (c) What should be the structural features of groups if they are to be socially functional? Specifically, what is the appropriate group size, composition and decision-making styles ?
- (d) What should be the activities of a group managing credit? What rules and regulations facilitate effective management of these operations?
- (e) How can credit management groups work towards evolving appropriate systems for managing other resources ?

Selection Of Objectives And Themes

The staff had informal discussions with members of the group in the areas in which they felt inadequate. This was followed by a discussion among the cluster staff members on the immediate training needs of the members. The outcome of discussions with the members and the staff's perceptions on the areas on which the members required to reflect immediately formed the basis of discussions in the staff meeting. The objectives and themes for reflection emerged out of the above process. However, before starting each workshop a group discussion was initiated to finalize and clarify the objectives of the training programme and to list out the themes for reflection. The discussion was initiated by raising the following questions:



JM-100

05613

289



- Why are we here?
- What shall we do today?
- What is the role of MYRADA staff in the training programme?

Methods Adopted

The members were encouraged to share and analyse their collective perceptions and experiences through group discussions. Thus the stress was on experiential learning. To promote effective participation in these discussions, the facilitator

- asked provocative questions usually through telling stories or sharing real experiences. Sometimes the facilitator deliberately provoked the members to speak by saying the wrong things;
- tried to be humorous whenever possible;
- used simple language;
- whenever the issue was not understood or the analysis was inadequate, the facilitator clarified with the help of day-to-day examples from their personal lives;
- tried to draw out the non-participative members in the workshop by addressing questions to them, asking them to summarize the discussions, etc.;

- tried not to answer questions which were addressed to them by members (especially members of weaker groups) but rather asked other members (especially members of stronger groups) to respond;
- encouraged the members to summarize different view points **on a theme** so that a consensus could be reached;
- encouraged the members to periodically summarize the discussions **till then**.

It was felt that the above methodology, though fruitful could be improved upon by encouraging discussions in **small groups, role plays, simulations, games etc.** However, such a process requires a lot of time. It was felt by the members of groups and staff that the training programme should ideally be for two days, and preferably not for more than three days at a stretch. The members of the groups felt that it was not possible for them to leave their household work and come for more than 2-3 days. Further, they shared that they could not afford to miss their wages for more than three days at a stretch. It was therefore felt by the staff that the duration of future workshops on the same theme may be extended by one more day and the training methodology could be modified as suggested earlier.



Size And Composition

As mentioned earlier members of 2-3 groups participated in each workshop. Though on an average there were around twenty members in each group, a few members could not attend the training programme because of personal problems including problems arising out of their husband's negative attitude towards the programme. The Project staff and other members of the group spent time with the members of the family of such women before the training programme commenced, to explain to them about the purpose of the training programme and put them generally at ease. However, such efforts were not always successful.

On an average, between 40 and 45 members participated in each workshop. The participants in three workshops were only members of women's groups; while the other six workshops consisted of members of both men and women's groups. Each workshop consisted of members of groups at different stages of development.

Reflecting on the size and composition of participants in the workshop, the staff felt that :

- (a) The number of participants in each workshop was too large; a group size of around 25 persons would have given better opportunities to the participants to share, reflect and learn from each others experience.

- (b) The process of getting members from groups at different stages of development helped the members of weaker groups to learn from the experience of members of groups which were working effectively. It was felt that this system therefore needs to continue.

However, the opinion of the staff on whether women learn better in a group consisting of only women was divided. The women staff when asked this question said a definite Yes. They felt that women share and open up more if all the participants are women. They also added that women **learn differently** from men. On the other hand, the male staff felt that the composition did not matter and in fact felt that a mixed group of men and women helped the women to learn to assert themselves in the presence of men and gain confidence. Though the male staff agreed that women learn different from men they felt that an effective trainer irrespective of gender could cope with different learning styles.

Different Learning Styles

Reflecting on their experiences the staff felt that women learn by thinking and **feeling** their way through the discussions. The emotional dimension of their learning, unlike men, takes a high priority. Women like to go deeper into issues and take more responsibility for

Appendix

Areas in which opportunities are provided to the members to learn and develop through village meetings, and the role of MYRADA staff in facilitating such processes are given below:

Areas in which regular meetings with group provide opportunities to the members to learn & develop	Role of MYRADA in the learning process
<p>Skill Development</p> <p>The regular meetings provide opportunities to the members to enhance their ability to :-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Express their views clearly - Cope with rebellious & dominating members and make the non-participative members talk - Work together as a group - Cope with dominating men (including their own husbands) in the village who interfere during group meetings - Identify the real problem and cause of the problem in a given situation - Make decisions collectively and implement and monitor the same - To manage finance - To evolve and observe appropriate rules and regulations 	<p>To foster such participatory processes MYRADA staff try to :-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Make sure that all the members understand the issue which is being discussed. (b) Make the non-participants express their opinion. Further the staff encourage the groups to nominate non-participants to chair meetings. (c) Encourage the members to share and reflect on their experience, knowledge and skill with regard to the issue which is being discussed. (d) Encourage the members to listen to each other and seek clarifications.
<p>Knowledge Building</p> <p>The group meetings provide opportunities to the members to enhance their knowledge on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - subject matter areas: agriculture, animal husbandry, sericulture, bee keeping, health - government programmes and the procedure for availing of the same. 	<p>Same as above. However, MYRADA staff in addition share their own knowledge on the subject being discussed and encourage the members to reflect on and analyse the same.</p>

Development of appropriate attitudes/values

The group meetings provide opportunities to members

- to develop confidence in themselves and thereby develop an identity of their own. This in turn fosters a change in the attitude of the men towards women to develop a healthy attitude towards women and to others from lower castes
- to strengthen traditional values
- values like concern for the family and each other, the village, a sense of what is right and wrong, mutual trust, etc.

MYRADA staff not only tries to provide opportunities for women to take responsibilities and prove that they can do the job but also make these proofs the subject of future group meetings to reinforce their confidence and positive self-concept.

Development Of Positive Behavioural Patterns

Group meetings reinforce behaviour pattern such as punctuality, attentiveness, accountability and an instinctive concern for fellow members during times of distress. The members build up a system of exerting pressure in order to discourage what they consider to be inappropriate behaviour and encourage what they consider to be appropriate behaviour.

In ways similar to what has been described above.



OPENING DOORS

Training As A Medium In The Process Of Social Change
A Case Study Of A Women's Awareness Camp



- Anita Mathur and Ginny Shrivastava , ASTHA



Context

Today many governmental and non-governmental organizations are striving to bring about social change which is only possible when people at large join in this process of change, and begin to seriously think about the socio-political, economical and cultural conditions prevailing in the society. Economic or social change cannot take place without empowering the people. It is in this context that we believe training plays an important role.

When we talk about the involvement of women in the process of social change, then the role of training becomes even more important, as has been our experience. In the present context, whenever there is any talk about the development of rural women, the common man

thinks that the discussion must be related to food, childcare etc. Until only these things are discussed, people do not get alarmed but the moment discussions are shifted on to issues like environment, awareness among women, knowledge of different laws, analysis of the society, development of organising skills among women their role in the process of social change etc. In a training programme, it is generally asked why should women be told these things. Training programmes for women in the midst of such kind of thinking becomes a challenge in itself.

ASTHA is a voluntary organisation working in Southern Rajasthan. It believes in people's awareness, cooperation and collectivisation of efforts. It organized a training programme in a *Panchayat Samiti* where the majority (86 percent) of the people belong to Scheduled Tribes in an effort to develop the organising skills and awareness among the women of that block.

Field Background

There are three hundred and one villages in Kotra Block of District Udaipur. Eightysix percent of the population is tribal (*Bhils* and *Garasias*) Some of the key problems of this area are destruction of forests, family feuds and high illiteracy among women (98.62 percent).

Women of this area are unable to join the



mainstream of development due to several historical and social reasons. As far as programmes are concerned only child development programmes for the development of women and children are being conducted and even in these programmes, the participation of the community and women is very marginal. The so-called customs which are supposed to provide social independence to them are in fact marginalizing these tribal women. Their role in the Panchayat is almost negligible. These women are strong but due to lack of proper direction, and lack of opportunities to participate actively, they have not been able to take any initiatives. In a situation like this, efforts are being made to generate awareness among them, make them aware of their resources and to develop organising skills among them through training programmes.

Principles In Designing The Training

- * As the women participants were mostly illiterate, it was thought that they can understand better by doing things themselves instead of listening or observing. So demonstrations, exercises and role play methods were used during the programme.
- * Apart from gaining an understanding of the general situation, a knowledge of resources and

an awareness of their own role, they also acquired knowledge of some methods through which they could react to problems of immediate concern in the field, gain people's confidence, and thereby, build their self-confidence. Thus 'vaccination of children' and 'making of ORT' programmes were conducted with the help of local nurses so that by doing new activities in their villages they can come to the forefront and gain self-confidence. Due to women's dual responsibilities, it is difficult for them to come out of their houses everyday to attend programmes regularly. So residential programmes were conducted in order to enable them to get a few days interval from their routine concerns. The residential training thus generated self-confidence among them and they became very close to each other during the programme.

- * The women participants were coming out of their homes for the first time to have a new kind of experience. As they had no experience of sitting and listening to anything for a long period of time, the main points were repeated two to three times to facilitate the process of learning and the sessions were arranged accordingly.



- * We understand and learn more easily from people similar to us. Keeping this in view, other rural women of the area who were involved in the process of development were invited for the discussion with these women, as resource persons.

Participants' Involvement In Designing The Programme Outline

It was not easy to break the myth that an educated outsider knows everything and illiterate women don't know anything.

1. Women from five *Gram Panchayats* were taking part in the training programme. Women who had been attending the meetings regularly and had potential to develop organising skills, were chosen for the training programme.
2. A discussion was held with these women in order to know their knowledge about the development programmes, resources available in the area, their experiences and also to know what information they wanted to learn about and considered important.
3. Women were also involved in deciding the period of the training programme. Although the organizers had previous experiences of training

programmes but the discussions in the new context was considered necessary as the field was new.





Pre-preparation

After the selection of the women belonging to five *Gram Panchayats of Panchayat Samiti*. Kotra, a general discussion was held with them. These were those *panchayats* where ASTHA had been doing intensive work, so that follow-up could be done after the training programme was over.

Keeping in view the socio-cultural background of the area, men were also taken into confidence so that confusion was not created and they may not to prevent women from attending the programme. Both written and oral information were sent to probable participants.

Due to the vast field area, it was not easy to choose a trouble-free convenient venue. Therefore transportation for women was arranged for their convenience to travel from their homes to the training site and back.

Two to four men from each panchayat were also invited to the training programme so that they could discuss the training with other men in the villages and cooperate in the process of women's development. Generally, people allow women to go out of their homes if the men of their own villages are accompanying them. And especially as ASTHA was new to the area, and most of its activists are men, this strategy proved to be of great help.

During the training programme it was made clear to the community that two to three organisers would stay with participants. Subsequently, this was communicated to the people in the respective areas. Thus people did not hesitate to send their women to the training programme.

At The Organisers' Level

Two months prior to the training, a discussion was held in the field with women so that they could mentally prepare themselves for the training programme. The necessary learning environment, reading materials and stationery etc. were provided during the training programme. People from governmental and non-governmental organisations were invited to provide inputs in the training programme. Keeping in view that children would also come with the women, toys, different instruments, medicine and other necessities were also arranged. An appropriate venue, food, residential and transportation facilities were also arranged for the training programme. All the necessary information was sent to CSWB (Central Social Welfare Board), which was the funding source for this training programme.

Objectives, Subject Matter, Process And Period

Keeping in mind the needs expressed by women,



the objectives of the training programme were formulated to develop organising skills and create awareness among them. The subject matter and the design of the training programme was made accordingly. At least 8 days were required for this but it was not possible for them to leave their families, fields and their work for such a long time. Therefore, it was decided to conduct the training in two phases:

- * First phase — five days.
- * Second phase — three days (after one month with the same participants).

Central Theme Of The Training Programme

Both the phases of the training programme highlighted various aspects of awareness-raising, knowledge-building and skill-building

In the first phase, the emphasis was on building knowledge and awareness among women. Therefore the women were involved in the whole process of analysis of society in understanding of women's problems, imparting of information related to governmental planning. Not only did the women get an understanding of the above things, but also they got an opportunity to discuss them. It was also kept in mind that the capacity to impart the information to other women in the area should also be created among the participants. To develop communication skills, problem solving skills,

and planning skills, role play and exercise methods were applied.

The second phase was organised after one month. During this period, each women's group had done some work, and so, during that phase, emphasis was on solving the problems which came up while doing this work. Development of organizing skills was another objective.

It is very essential to create inbuilt capacities i.e. keeping records during meetings; writing applications, letters, making proposals, etc. in women's organizations. If these capacities are taken care of from the initial stages, the problems during the meetings do not arise. Bags containing plan paper, carbon paper, a stamp pad, a file, a pen were given to one woman from each group to facilitate writing/recording.

Action Plans

Related local officers were present at the time of reporting of plans made and also during meetings in the area, which served as a motivation to women.

Most of the activists working for women's development in ASTHA are men, although women are on the field team. They have been trained and have been working in this field very efficiently for several years. Efforts were made that both men and women



organisers stay with the participants in both the phases, so that during the process of training, they can have informal discussions, come close to each other, develop mutual understanding, and work as a team. The training programme also helped the organisers to have a better understanding of the problems faced by women in the area so that they could extend their cooperation afterwards. This residential strategy proved to be helpful in various situations. Some of the women formed saving societies in the villages and slowly membership started increasing.

In some villages the women successfully cured children suffering from diarrhoea by making ORT solution. They also advised the people to strain the water for drinking purposes before use. In three to four villages they made use of available governmental resources for immunisation.

Other actions were :

1. Women forced the *Gram Panchayat* to punish a person when in a drunken state if he molested a woman of the village.
2. In the process of police cases the rift with the other party used to become permanent resulting into regular clashes.
3. At one place under one *Gram Panchayat* less than half of minimum wage was paid for daily wage work. During the training programme,

women participants were told about the laws of minimum wages. After becoming aware about this and in spite of non-cooperation from men, women participants organised women and initiated a fight through a demonstration before the office bearers of the *Gram Panchayat*. They called them to the work place and made them see the exploitation themselves. Through this, they were able to force the employers to pay more wages. In the process, men also benefited and from then on, they started encouraging their wives, mothers and sisters to attend the meetings.

4. In some *Gram Panchayats* these women not only encouraged other women, but also men, to come forward and attend the meetings. They also encouraged them to attend training programmes. In fact the people's confidence in ASTHA is a result of the efforts made by these women.

The importance of the training programme can be understood by the fact that all of the 50 women participants who were present in the first phase also attended the second phase with full enthusiasm and also encouraged other women to take part in the programme.

In the end it can be said that the importance of



these kinds of training programmes lies in the fact that they turn the development process into a movement. These training programmes provide an opportunity to create a learning environment, and develop an understanding of available government resources, to co-relate the process of problem solving with development problems through their analysis.

Action plans made during the training programme as this was the first training programme for women in the area.

Evaluation

Both mid-term and post-training evaluation were done after both the phases. These evaluations were made on two levels, one at the level of participants and the other at the level of the trainers.

Feedback was received from the participants regarding what they learnt, which processes they liked, whether they felt it would help them in their work in the area, in terms of organising for development, and also what they felt about ASTHA's trainers' roles. The evaluation sessions were conducted in small groups in which participants expressed their feelings.

Efforts were made to know to what extent the programme proved to be useful, and whether the participants would be able to implement in practice

whatever they learnt in the programme. Evaluation was also done about the process, the needs of the learners and the training programme itself, so that the programme could be improved accordingly in the future. Assessment was also made in terms of the team work of the trainers, the level of organising skills of the women participating in the programme, so that their needs for support could be identified and efforts could be directed accordingly.

The whole evaluation was conducted on the basis of individual feedback.

Glimpses Of Work Done By The Participants After The Training Programme

A conceptualization process about organising people had started in the minds of women participants. These women went to all the small hamlets at the *Gram Panchayat* level and discussed with both men and women about the things which they had learned during the training programme, and motivated them to organise in order to deal with the problems faced by them. As a result, participation of women increased in all the meetings, and many new women's groups emerged in many other villages.

Women participants prepared other women to come forward and understand their responsibilities to deal with



their own problems and to get over their fear about attending meetings.

Methods to form a "saving and loan society" out of small savings were discussed in the training programme. Such societies can provide economic help in emergency helped in systematizing the group's organising activity



and helped them to action achievements in a very short time.

Leadership strength at local level is the need of the moment. This strength can only escalate the process of change and development, and training programmes have an important role to play in this.

Future Planning

Efforts will be made to develop leadership qualities among the same women participants through training programmes so that they can play their role even more efficiently. New women's group leaders will also go through a similar training programme.

The training programmes will also be used as means to generate knowledge, awareness and efficiency so that the women can become confident and work even more successfully.

Our previous experience has shown that training is a very important means in the process of change and development. Thus, if practical training programmes are designed, keeping in mind the work objectives, then, it can help in speeding up the whole process to a great extent.

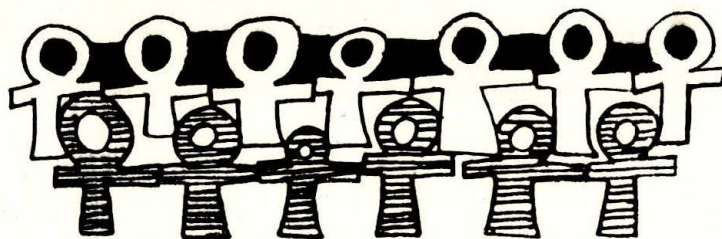
The capability of imparting information to other women in the area should also be developed among the participants.



Conclusion

The success of this training was due to a strong and united training team, and to a clear "learning readiness" on the part of the women. This Awareness

Training Camp was like a key unlocking a flood-gate—initiative, energy, ideas, analysis, courage, strength all rushed out. As trainers, we will have to prepare and work hard to keep up with them - already, they have taught us many things.



Appendix

First Phase

Objectives	Subject Matter	Process
1. Introduction of participations & objectives.	Mutual introduction Explaining training objectives and their relevance. Explaining the aims and objectives of ASTHA.	Introduction of participants, lecture discussion.
2. Identifying and analysing the problems being faced in the field.	Analysis of society & consolidation of the problems being faced by women.	Symbolic games i.e. Goats and Tigers and film show. Group discussion.
3. Providing information regarding organising strong groups. Suggestion/ way of problem solving.	Role of women in problem solving.	Case studies of other fields narrated by rural women. Field Discussion.
4. Providing information regarding health, cleanliness, the environment.	Discussion on women and children health care: making ORT & explaining its sources.	Briefing by local nurse, demonstration and exercises.
5. Providing information regarding laws which affect women in particular.	Problems related to activities of labour department and wages for women.	Session by District Labour Officer.

(Second Phase Continued)

Objectives	Subject Matter	Process
6. To learn about the Panchayat System.	Discussion on work, organisation future plans and related problems of Panchayat and Panchayat Samiti.	Input session by Development Officer and Sarpanch.
7. To learn programme planning and problem solving.	Programme planning, problem solving for women.	Pictures, role play and discussion.
8. Providing information regarding ongoing programmes of the Govt. Explaining the relationship between the Government's programmes and the Panchayat. Panchayat Samiti and Dist. Level officers and offices.	Development programmes for scheduled tribes the role of women.	Lecture by Deputy Commissioner of the Tribal Development Department. Film show and discussion.
9. Strengthening the potential leadership of women and women's activities in the area.	Action planning for the next 3 months.	Exercise for planning for village groups.

Second Phase

Objectives	Subject Matter	Process
1. To acquire expertise in solving problems arising out of the original workplan.	Alteration in the original workplan of first phase keeping in view the problems faced.	Discussion in small groups and reporting in larger group.
2. To understand the basic principles of planning in order to deal with the problem.	Understanding the basic principles of planning and problem solving through examples.	Discussing various points in larger group and then planning to deal with the problems in small groups.
3. To have an understanding of different aspects of credit policies and procedure in prevention societies.	Benefits of a cooperative society and various rules and regulations governing.	Lecture by resource person and discussion.
4. To make the participants aware of environmental, child health, agricultural and cattle farming issues.	Symptoms of child diseases and ways of prevention. Information on agricultural and cattle farming resources and implements available and their development Information on environment issues.	Lectures by resource persons.



TRAINING FIELD LEVEL WOMEN ACTIVISTS



- Preeti Oza, PRAYAS
- Sushrnita Banerjee



Introduction

The following case study is of a training of field level activists, mostly women, who work with voluntary agencies doing rural development work. These agencies are also working, or are about to begin work with, women.

Of the 13 participants who attended the training programme, there were mainly women (11), and 2 were men who came because the agency they belonged to did not have any women workers. They all came from different educational backgrounds.

The participants came from two states, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh, to be trained as organisers for the Awareness Generation Programme of the Central Social

Welfare Board, and were supposed to mobilize women's groups in their areas and conduct awareness camps on the problems faced by the women.

The case study has been written almost entirely the way in which the report of the training was made - to make it readable for the participants and any other field workers working for women.

Details of discussions, small group reports and analysis were recorded on charts mainly in written words, and at times in pictures for one participant was totally illiterate.

The tone of the Organisers' Training for Women's Development was set by making the women participants take a joint decision of whether they would like to include the two male participants who came in spite of the trainers insisting that women organisers from the agencies should attend. The participants discussed the advantages and disadvantages of the situation and decided to include the two male members.

Training Begins

Day 1:

To begin with, we introduced ourselves to a co-participant of our choice whom we did not know, through conversation (interview). The question we asked each other was: "Who am I and what do I do?"



One of the conditions which was laid down for the conversation was that a person should reply to only what was asked of her by the other one. You start talking separately in groups of two. You then introduce your partner in a bigger group. There were certain inhibitions when talking to the male participants present. It also happened that some people asked more questions and some less, some felt shy and some hesitant. It also seemed that some did not put their questions clearly and adequately

As a result of this, the question then arose as to how does one go about collecting information from strangers, keeping in mind, the specific objectives?

Knowing about this is important because on entering a village, it becomes necessary to collect information from the people there. **During this discussion some aspects of an interview were understood.**

The participants were divided into three small groups and a list of the things they wanted to learn in the camp was made, which was arranged and tallied with the pre-designed model. It was thus made clear as to what we were going to learn in the next ten days. The design of the training programme and the schedule was made on the basis of the things the group wanted to learn.

Timings for the various sessions were also fixed

unanimously after discussions.

Day 2:

"Women are like a pair of sandals". "Money (jewels), land and wives lead to fights between men".

We all know of such sayings in our regions. One has been hearing them since ages.

— "What kind of images of women do these sayings, poems, stories etc. reflect? "

These sayings were meant to reflect women's nature in a particular light. In some, women's lack of intellectual abilities, in others their inability to be financially independent and in still others their low social status is shown. Is this true ?

— "Do these values represent the real 'common woman'?"

To answer this we recollected and wrote true stories about the life of the women in our homes and villages. These women have been frightened of these values (of breaking the myths) by struggling in their day-to-day life. One of our brothers pointed out that he had not come across any woman who has won by her own struggle. Perhaps he does not feel that common women's struggle is anything out of the ordinary. In spite of the inhibitions we all came before the big group and related our stories. Many things came out from these



stories.

"Which are the elements that help a woman in her struggle and victory, and which are the elements that hinder the same?"

Very carefully, we made a list of these. **We all noted that some of these elements were true for women's development work also.** After dinner we divided into four small groups and made posters showing the various elements which helps or hinders women's development. In the light of our inexperience in making posters most of us were doubtful as to whether we would be able to make them or not.

— "How to make posters and why?"

Three groups were able to make posters; one group disintegrated because of lack of confidence. The following question arose:

— "How is work done in small groups?"

After we explained our posters, a discussion about this medium was held.

Day 3:

— "What did we feel and remember of the last two days?"

Listening to the answers to this question given on the previous night encouraged us to learn further. Today

we were to know about women and law. Why do women not get the rights given to men? An article titled "Aspects of Slavery" and a booklet "Trapped in the Four Walls" was read in three groups. During the heated discussions on these, one of the participants said that "After all, the Thanedar (the government) will behave in the same way because he too is a part of society". More heated discussions were held on this. After that it became clear that the violation of women's basic rights was done in the family structure which is supported by the male community, government system (judiciary) and the contractors of religion and caste.

After this we trainers thought among ourselves that perhaps every woman at some juncture of her life must have experienced the denial of her basic rights. We then decided to ask:

— "How are women's basic rights violated in their own homes?"

When this topic came up in the big group, silence spread. Perhaps we were thinking of new relations with our own families. Some of us then narrated incidents from our own life. Some of us were stopped from studying, some married at an early age. But it was not easy to talk about things we experienced ourselves. Our hearts were hesitating to see our reality. Thus, attention was lost in the discussion. And also some chaos occurred due to children crying and moving around in the room.



It was felt that even a sister's tragic story was not heard properly. We trainers felt that one of the reasons for the hesitation was perhaps the presence of the male friends in the groups. Expressing her worry on that matter, Preeti said, "It would be useless to proceed further if we did not intend to speak or listen. If the presence of men is one reason then there should be no hesitation in saying clearly that till now we are not able to say many things unhesitatingly in front of men, that we are brought up in this way" Participants were to decide among themselves and tell the trainers if they wanted to proceed further, and whether they wanted the men to be present. Saying this we trainers left the group.

Understanding the situation, our male friends went out themselves. The conversation picked up. **The women sat near to each other. They narrated many incidents that had happened to them.** It was felt that irrespective of where they came from, **being** women - our struggle in our personal experiences was the same. We were bound together. Observing this feeling we trainers made clear that apart from our traditional relations (family, relatives), there is a special bond between us from which we can continuously derive support and strength. **There is a definite need for expanding the sisterhood, and it is possible to do so.** That evening we were heavy with these emotions. We lightened ourselves by

singing songs and dancing. **The way in which we were bound by sorrows, we got bound in pleasure too.**

Day 4:

According to the designed programme, another sister Nirmala joined us. She was to talk about women and health. We were already friendly with her as she had been with us since the previous day. This way it became easier to talk to her. As it was decided earlier, our male friends kept away from this session also. In the morning Nirmala made a list of health problems of women on the basis of her experiences and started a discussion. The list had many things related to our reproductive ability and physiological processes. When discussion was started on this, we realized that we were ignorant about our own bodies and we held some misconceptions about it. For example: "Dirty blood comes out during menstruation", "Menstruation is impure" etc. Then the following question arose:

- "Why don't we know about our bodies and its processes? And why are there so many misconceptions about it?"

Nirmala gave us new information in a very simple manner on these questions. Why and how does menstruation takes place ? This was made clear with the help of a diagram. Some possible solutions were given to other problems of women which they generally



hesitate to discuss. It became clear that one reason why we were not able to control our own bodies was due to lack of information.

The same evening a simple booklet on women and health was given for reading, in which information especially about methods of contraception was given. After this a decision to stage skits in two groups on some of the subjects mentioned in the booklet was taken and a lot of skit related animation started within the groups.



Our male friends were asked to devote the whole 'Health' session time on reading two articles "Who Controls Women's Health?" in the book "Aspects of Women's Development" (*Mahila Vikas Ke Ayam*), and "The Story of Rakku". They were asked to understand the matter and analyse it in the light of some questions. They had to report this to the group the next day.

After dinner we all saw the skits with profound interest. In one role-play we saw the behavior of government doctors with the patients in the village health centres. The way the village woman health worker treats her patients in the village was also enacted. In the other role-play a woman health worker explained few methods of family planning to the village women. Both the role-plays were entertaining and lively and spontaneously a discussion started on these topics. Things like - our health services do not actually reach the poor village women, most of the doctors and chemists get together for their personal gains and sell medicines which are not required etc. came up. The question that then arose was:

- "Why are such health services run in our country which do not help and reach the poor?"

We were also pleasantly surprised by our potential to do role plays and thought about:

- "How can we use this medium of 'role-plays' "



for the process of learning and teaching in villages ?”

Day 5:

The previous day's questioning about the health services was still to be understood. Both our male friends presented their ideas at first on the gist of the articles and then on women and health. Satyendra said that women themselves were the reason for their poor health for generally women eat less, only to survive, or give birth to children even in a weak state; or consider the home their only domain for which they are happy to keep working hard.

We women got quite disturbed at these explanations and started the discussions with angry questions. We all got together and forced Satyendra to have a look at the situation in his own family. “What would you say if your sister leaves all the work for you and goes out to enjoy ?”

We observed from this discussion that the state of women's health was related to certain social conditions.

- “Which are the social conditions that affect women's health and how ?”

The other male friend while giving the gist of “the story of Rakku” raised some points about the **structure**

of the government health system on which a very fruitful discussion was held which helped us in understanding certain aspects of it and gave us some surprises too :

- The government is a puppet in the hands of industrialists and the capitalists and manufactures more equipments and does more research on the ailments which affect the rich.
- Medical colleges have courses and studies which have no relation to reality.
- Those medicines are promoted and distributed which are made in the factories of the rich (capitalists).
- Doctors and other health workers hesitate in going to the villages, because their only aim is to treat the rich from the cities and make money.
- Government's health system is made for the convenience of the doctors and not the patients.

This discussion made us realize that women cannot attain good health in such a social system with this health set up. Then what is the alternative?

“What kind of struggle do women have to wage for staying healthy and in what alternative system can they remain really healthy ?”



We then threw some light on the state of women's health by discussing it in three small groups. Some alternatives were also suggested. After meals, **Nirmala gave statistics while explaining the state of women's health, and made their relation with the existing social conditions clearer.**

Right from birth, girls became victims of adverse social attitude towards them. Participants said that in their villages, in most of the cases girls are given very late medical treatment on falling sick, whereas boys got immediate attention. The diet of girls is also controlled. Stating some awful observations made by a study done in Punjab, Nirmala made clear that there was inequality in the behavior towards boys and girls, irrespective of the family being rich or poor.

Girls were the main victims of illnesses and death. The government's policies and its promises of "we want the health services to reach the poor" were proved hollow by showing very simple figures.

After four days of discussions and other things which made us think anew, our attention was drawn towards our own regions. After all it was necessary for us to do something about the problems of our regions.

- "How to identify and understand these problems ?
What are the specific problems of our region
and on which of the problems do we want

suggestions from others ?"

With the intention of giving an opportunity to learn and understand the region and work of each other, we trainers started the process of exchanging information between friends from Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh, dividing participants into small groups.

- "How can you gather information about specific problems ?"

With great interest and intensity we shared and understood other's problems and became clearer about our own.

After dinner we all got the pleasant opportunity to go out of the training centre. We went together to watch a folk play put up by a voluntary organisation in Kaya village. The sad story of the situation of women in poor tribal community was shown in the local 'Gavari' (Folk Dance Drama) style, in which women were sold many times over. The play was impressive in spite of some difficulties of language.

Day 6:

In the morning we met the play artists, many of whom were tribal villagers themselves, and we learned about their ideas on how they use theatre, and its effects for social change. The leader of the group talked about the uses of theatre with authority but till now they



were not used to discussions after the plays nor were they able to associate women with theatre. A friendly bond was created with those artists.

The problems of our regions which we had arrived at the previous day became more clear to everybody after some discussion. A separate list was made of the specific problems of each region on which we wanted suggestions from each other. But mainly the general problems from each of the states were listed.

In the afternoon we got the opportunity of discussing with Bansilal Garg and Sunita, who was with us in the training also, their special experiences in women's development.

- "Can a male worker do the work of women's development? Can he work together with a woman worker?"

Four members took the responsibility of getting information from them through an organised interview. Besides getting information on the basis of the experiences of Shri Bansilalji and his interesting style of talking, we got inspiration and guidance on how to do concrete work in our areas. Sunita helped him in this. Shri Bansilalji told us how he developed faith in women's development when in various struggles, he saw the commitment and strength in women. Men can also do the work of women's development if they have faith in women's

strength. It would come through if they have simple and friendly attitudes towards women. Male workers can also hold special discussions with the men folk and make them understand the need for women's development. It is possible to become associated with women by raising their specific problems. The most important thing about working with a woman worker is to assure and create faith both in the people and in the fellow worker about your reliability and straight character, according to Bansilal. Actually it is necessary to exhibit such a behavior based on equality with the other worker, both in work and relationship. Bansilal like some other male workers have seen many changes in his own life by working for women's development. Now he understands the women in his own home better and helps them in their work.

Listening to Shri Bansilalji was so interesting that time just flew and soon it was evening.

After dinner we saw a new programme. In 10 days time it was not possible for us to meet the village women directly. Therefore a video film was shown about the poor and backward village conditions, and the story of a united struggle of a women's organisation to improve their financial situation. One was a real story and the other a feature film. In both we got the real glimpse of the problems of the poor for the want of economic development. This highlighted two fundamental questions:



- "How to organise poor, illiterate women for development?" -
- "What sort of schemes would be appropriate for the economic development (to increase income) of poor women?" -

Day 7:

Six problems specific to certain regions that were listed out in the previous day's discussion were :

1. Problems of corruption
2. How to eradicate polygamy
3. Alcoholism
4. Feast following death
5. How to oppose atrocities (physical) on women
6. Dowry menace and how to deal with it

We were asked to understand and solve three of these problems in small groups. First the trainers took the problem of the feast following death and through discussion explained the process of its possible solution. Later in three groups we held discussions and came up with some alternatives to tackle the problems of alcoholism, dowry and atrocities on women. But this process remained a little complicated. Majority of the new workers could not satisfactorily understand the regional problems concretely and think about their solutions.

After lunch we talked with Ginny Shrivastava, from a voluntary organisation of Udaipur, about her experiences in organising tribal women for economic development. Last night we had already seen the role of the economic struggle of the sisters from "*Brahmanon Ka Varda*". Ginnyji explained in a very interesting manner the background to this work and the problems faced by the workers supporting these women. **Important aspects of economic development of women which are often overlooked also came to light. We got concrete tips on organising women by forming small groups.**

The main issues which emerged from discussions with Ginnyji were - women not having access to information to fight against government's distrust of women, and the lack of resources with poor women that restricts them from carrying out any programme successfully for their own development.

Talking to Shri Bansilalji and Ginnyji further clarified those aspects that promote women's development, especially those related to the role of the worker. After dinner it was necessary to put all these points in a properly organised manner. Together we enlisted the important points about any programme of economic development of women and Preeti made a systematic summary of them. We ended the night session early that day as we all were tired.



Day 8:

In the process of understanding the subject of women and law, we all expressed the necessity of knowing the laws related to the special situation of women through a lawyer. A message had already been sent to the lawyer in Udaipur (nearby city) but no reply had come so far. We trainers were very worried about this but in the same centre the lawyer had come for another law training and finally the programme to meet the participants this morning was fixed up.

It was good that on the previous night the participants had made a list of the laws that we considered necessary to understand. One of us had enlisted these by asking the following question:

"Which laws related to women and their processes do you want to know?"

We got information from the lawyer in simple words.

Before our meeting with the lawyer ended, Shri Gupta, an officer of the Tribal Development Department came.

"What are the governmental schemes for poor tribals?"

It took a lot of time even in giving information about the thirty three schemes.

Our friends from Rajasthan raised some questions

about the processes and usefulness of some of the schemes. We trainers had also decided to ask a few questions highlighting the attitude of the government, like if the use of a scheme is based on some specific resource (wells, etc.), then actually how many poor tribals can benefit from such programmes? Mr. Gupta got a little exasperated with these questions. He avoided answering them and put all the blame for the lack of upliftment of the poor on the greedy nature of man which he considered natural and unchangeable. He put the main responsibility of creating awareness in people and organising them to secure their rights solely on the voluntary organisations!

Because women do not own land or property, they themselves are not directly benefited by any schemes. This Guptaji believed was according to our cultural traditions, but he had no problems in benefiting women if they were able to become heads of their families. After Shri Gupta, the Additional Collector, District Rural Development Agency, Shri Srivastava, was to talk to us but he did not come.

After this talk we were a little upset having heard about the indifferent attitude of the government. We were asked to write on this:

"Seeing the attitude of the government towards women, in general how does one get support from



the government ?"

As we sat in the winter sun and were trying to resolve this complicated situation, two engineers from the DRDA arrived on behalf of the Additional Collector. We were a little doubtful about how much they would be able to tell us about development schemes.

Anyway ! Most of the programmes of the government officials are unpredictable! At least the Additional Collector had sent his assistants. A discussion on the information which the engineers could give was arranged after lunch.

"What are the National Rural Development Programmes and Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programmes ?"

Discussions revolved around local political effects, the rule of fixing the wages on the basis of work measurement, because of which labourers do not receive minimum wages and other such issues which affect these schemes. In the beginning one engineer tried to justify such exploitative rules.

It is a statutory rule that minimum wages should be given either on eight hours work or wage must be fixed piece rate, ie., a certain wages for a fixed work output. By mixing up these two conditions and also the work load being heavy, minimum wages are not procured.

After continuous deliberations the government engineers came to the conclusions that workers should be organised to fight for their right of minimum wages, and voluntary organisations should take a lead in this work. After the discussion with the engineers, we added some more points on the issue of coordinating with the government. We also added some guidelines on how to get support from the government for women's development in the present context. Jhamku gave the gist of the whole issue in one sentence saying, "Neither salty nor sweet !"

We were on the verge of finishing this discussion when two sisters, 'Sathins', Sundari Bai and Dadham Bai of the Women's Development Programme came along. On entering the room they hugged every woman sitting there with a natural and touching warmth—as if our hearts met ! Jhamku, who was taking the training with us and who also works as a *Sathin* in Jodhpur got especially delighted. Together, the three of them explained to us, with examples, in a very interesting way their role in inspiring the women in their villages and organising them around the problems they faced. Sundari had managed to secure the wages of women taking some government sponsored training in village Karauli. Dadham Bai had succeeded in acquiring for all homes equal opportunities to work on famine work sites by putting pressure on the concerned authorities through the women's



group. And gradually the extraordinary work of ordinary women was abundantly exhibited before us. The Sathins soon became part of our intimate group as if they were always a part.

Before finishing this session we decided to do a cultural programme in the evening. We trainers made groups on the basis of states and each group had to present at least one new play and song. And enthusiastically we started the preparations. The two male friends also took part in the cultural programme. Each of us danced a variety of dances. We had suddenly let go off our inhibitions and hesitations. We sang the songs written by us with inspiring verve.

"Come sisters, let us be united. Let us get the rights which we have been deprived of." Satya who was most shy and used to say 'no' to every attempt to make her participate, also did a lively dance. We all got bound together in a spirit of enjoyment.

Day 9:

The next day we started the session at nine in the morning, as we had enjoyed till late in the night the previous day. We made a brief review of the things learned till date, and checklisted the things remained to be understood. Earlier during the listing of the things to be learnt, some of the women had expressed the

desire of learning certain things for their own development. On one of the days we trainers had put up a list of questions on the wall and explained their importance to the group:

- "What was your attitude during the various phases and activities of the training ? Why ?"

Through seventeen questions, which you had to answer anew each day, the trainers helped the participants to make a sketch of their behaviour. "Do you always hesitate in talking in big and small groups ?" "Or do you always make your opinion according to the opinion of others ?" It highlights an important aspect of our nature if we have never started a discussion. This especially affects our day-to-day life and our work in our area. If we always hesitate in starting anything then perhaps we will have difficulties in starting work in new areas. If we hesitate in giving our own opinions then we may not be able to act and think independently or have an independent identity.

The group wanted to know in general about the questions listed so we trainers explained it. It was made clear from the beginning that filling up the list of questions was everybody's own voluntary decision. It is imperative for each adult to take up one's own responsibility of self-understanding and self-development.



Other's can only support and guide in one's development. Nobody else can 'do' our development. Once filled up this list was like a mirror. Analysing our mirror was also left to us and it was decided that whoever wanted the trainers' support would be given time in the sessions to come. After this discussion the time had come to think about some fundamental questions related to women which had come up during the last seven days and which we had continuously enlisted on a chart. We were divided into three small groups to discuss on these:

"How did the biased beliefs about women come to be and popularized? Whose personal interest was hidden in it? What can be done to do away with these beliefs?"

In each of the groups interesting discussions were held. We all thought about these issues in depth. The discussions held in the smaller groups were presented on charts in the big group. This question was analyzed in several ways. Some started from explaining the situation of primitive man, tried to understand the situation of women in the society in various stages of history. Perhaps in the primitive age, women also moved around and hunted. Gradually due to the responsibility of giving birth to children and bringing them up, their movement became limited. With the advent of agriculture she got bound by private property, permanent settlement and

carrying for the fields. In this way the economic situation produced some social structures such as family, private property etc. and hence women were tied to the home even more. One group made clear the analysis of the present reality in which in order to continue to enjoy unlimited independence, it was necessary for men to control women's bodies, strength and labour. The discussion was beautifully handled by Sushmita.

In the meanwhile some members of a women's organisation of *Kucchi Harijan Basti* from Udaipur city came with three workers of a voluntary organisation to meet all of us. After lunch there was an informal talk with them about their problems and the functioning of their organisations. They informed us about the various atrocities committed by men such as alcoholism, goondaism, selling off women and the unprecedented courage shown by the women of the *Harijan Basti* in their struggle on these issues. These women, who were working in the Sanitation Department of the Municipal Council of Udaipur and who were financially independent, also had to continually face the repression in this male dominated society. These women workers, much as they wanted to, could not spend much time with us as they had to go back early. A *bhajan* of Meera Bai sung by them gave a fitting end to this discussion.

In the last three four days we all had met many such persons and groups and had tried to know about



their ideas and work on women's development. The time had come to understand the process of women's organisation on the basis of all these ideas and experiences.

– "How to form women's organisations ?"

We all sat separately and wrote down our ideas on the basis of these on the three aspects of organising



women - i.e., starting to form an organisation or a group, the process of consolidating it and trying to give it continuity. Together all of us put them up systematically.

It seemed that the gist of many experiences had come before us. In the evening that day we got familiarized with another enjoyable way of learning.

– "How to talk to people through puppets ?"

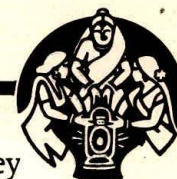
We trainers were feeling disappointed when we learnt that the artists invited for the puppet show were not coming. But Susmita did not loose heart and on the basis of her past experiences explained the main rules and ways of doing a puppet show in a very simple manner. In spite of this being the group's first experience with puppets, they presented two beautiful puppet plays.

Day 10:

Today was the tenth day of our training. During the last nine days we had taken up various subjects and activities together, and the continued process of teaching and learning went along. The main aim of the training was to understand how to inspire village women and to strengthen their groups and organisations by organising awareness camps.

– "How to organise awareness camps for women ?"

While preparing for the training, we trainers had



accepted the fact that methods used and environment created during the ten days of training will be an example in itself to show how to work with women and how to organise awareness camps with them. The best method was to enable you to identify those aspects of the activities of the training which are important for a successful awareness camp. The trainers believed that if the group understands the objectives of the various processes they will be able to organise the camp independently. That is why the understanding of the last nine days' programme was put for discussion by dividing into three groups over a period of three days each. Before sitting in the group the trainers talked about the main aspects of training design and methodology:

"What were the various methods of learning (different subjects) adopted in the camp? Why?"

As we were going through our notebooks to recollect some activities and processes, the field activists (Prachetas) of the Rajasthan's Women Development Programme whose *Sathins* we had already met, came to meet all of us. They were scheduled to come along with the *Sathins* but due to transport mismanagement could not reach on that day! During our talk with them, the trainers came to know that they had organised a long training for women. They had brought with them charts made on different subjects by the *Sathins* and pictorial representations of the things learnt by the latter during

their trainings. It was a pleasant coincidence that they had come to talk to us at a time when we were understanding the methods of training.

When we finished our work in the small groups, we gathered together, to talk to the activists:

"Which methods are mainly appropriate in the training of illiterate village women?"

In a simple manner, activists Madhu and Sushma made clear the main points of their work and the methods of training through the charts that they had brought.

They also put forward some important aspects of women's development and made clear the relation between the importance of training and their work. In order to form women's groups it is very effective to organise village level meetings and public programmes and to invite men in them. This way the activities of women's organisations/groups get recognition also. It is natural and convenient to call meetings at places where generally women want to sit together. There is a lot of pressure if too many issues are taken up at a time, therefore only one issue should be taken up at one time in a systematic manner which should have a proper follow up. An important contribution of the women's groups is the mutual sisterhood between the members of these spread in the villages.



After an inspiring discussion with the women activists we came back to the work done in the smaller groups. A summary of the activities of the last nine days emerged through small group discussions which was consolidated up in the big group.

After lunch when we came back to the big group it was the beginning of the end of this training. Here we had learnt many things but how would you use them on going back to your homes and work ?

- "How will we work for women's development and organise awareness camps in our respective regions ?"

At this session Preeti explained about the Awareness Generation Programme of the Central Social Welfare Board. This training of camp organisers was taking place under this scheme and more details were shared with the group. On returning to our organisations, women's development work and awareness camps had to be organised under this scheme.

After this the group very enthusiastically worked in order to design a six months programme on raising awareness in women in their work areas through their respective organisations. The women did find it difficult to apply the points learnt in this training to concrete realities. Instead of evolving a concrete programme, the objectives and activities required in women's development

were being referred to, for example "understanding the religious, economic and political condition of women" and "organising women and making them aware of their rights".

We then guided them to think about specific and concrete programmes taking into consideration the work they were involved in and the programmes of their organisation. Gradually, all of us prepared simple and concrete programmes for ourselves.

After dinner we shared our plans before the larger group to maintain the learning process. Some of us decided to work specifically on the fuel wood problem of women, in the Himalayan region. Some had planned to try to make a federation of different groups, and still others decided to start by meeting the women and understanding their problems.

But our work at the training had not yet finished. Someone's story had to be finished, someone else's song was to be completed. Besides, addresses had to be exchanged. Some administrative work also had to be completed. Gradually the training started winding up by tying up some loose last strings.

Day 11:

Today was the day of departure, but we did not feel like leaving as we had been so involved in the



the training and with each other. Right from the morning there was a little sadness in the air. After completing some administrative work, we all evaluated the training.

"How appropriate were the topics covered and methods practised to the needs enlisted for the training ? How effective were these ?"

Each group member had to do a written evaluation of the training as well as about oneself and others. The trainers gave a subject list for this. But how could Jhamku Bai, who could not read, express herself ? She was asked to do it by way of pictures for which she was given colours and chart.

Some participants wanted to know about the evaluation related to their self-development on the basis of the list they had filled up. The trainers talked to them individually about this. We exchanged our views through evaluation in the larger group. The trainers also evaluated the training and themselves.

We were happy that we all had developed our potentials in this training, contributed towards each other's learning and learnt a lot.

There was a definite enthusiasm even as we were carrying with us the joy of light and sorrow of separation.

To lessen the sorrow of separation we played a game in the end.

"How can little games be used in training ?"

On a paper stuck to each one's back, every body else showed what image they had of that person in the form of a symbol from life and nature. Somebody was a moon, somebody the sun, some one else was an ant and still other was a bird. Someone thought of another as a mountain, and someone else a lock. These figures were our mirrors which we took along with us with the thought of looking at them sometime or the other.

Conclusion

Participatory training is the process of learning together which enthused a constant excitement for learning and the way it went about in this training can be summarized thus:

Knowledge is power and the germinated seed of this power is present in each. This plant of knowledge flourishes when it gets the necessary fertilizer and water and a proper environment. We had tried to give such an atmosphere and material in the ten days' women's development training for activists of voluntary organisations which we had organised. It can be said that there were five main aspects in the training:

1) Common Place

It was always believed that ordinary people



like you and me can also work for women's development. The women in our village who have a very ordinary daily life also lead very brave lives. Their strength can be used in the difficult task of women's development. The participants' stories about the courageous women of their villages, the organised struggle of the ordinary women 'sathins' working at the village level under the Women's Development Programme and of the Harijan women of Kucchi Basti in Udaipur against their alcoholic husbands, the self-managed wasteland development of the tribal sisters of Brahmanon Ka Varda are tales of ordinary women.

2) Simplification

Complex concepts can easily be understood by common women. The training design and analysis were based on our experiences and discussions. All this knowledge was understood in simple words. Men's control in society is the cause for women's situation. In social sciences this is given the difficult definition of 'patriarchy'. Similarly we understood the relation of poor vs rich without giving the definition of the capitalist set up. We also understood the relations between pharmaceutical companies, industrialists, and research on

ailments through a play without difficult words. During the course of training 'ordinary efficiency' and 'specialization' were not necessarily differentiated. Together with the trainers, the trainees also at times gave their opinions for organising different activities. Skills such as puppet playing, poster-making and staging plays no longer remained special professions but became a medium for common people to use in their life and work.

3) Togetherness

Participants from two states together took part in this training. People with different educational backgrounds sat together and exchanged ideas. On the one hand there was Santosh who was a post-graduate and on the other hand there was Jhamku Bai, an illiterate. Our viewpoints were also different. In the beginning Satyendra believed that women themselves were the cause of their weak health. At this juncture the women participants stood firm on their viewpoint and made Satyendra change his opinion. Another speciality of this training was that men and women together took part in it. In such an atmosphere of diversity it is necessary that each person gets an opportunity to develop his/her own thinking. Therefore



flexibility is essential for such a training, and it was amply built in.

4) Comfortable Environment

The training atmosphere was always simple and tension free. We held discussions on many issues and went through many processes. We came to know of the contradictions in our beliefs.



We understood the exploitation in our families. Rivalry in the training was to the minimum and co-existence and cooperation was maintained.

5) Creation

In the entire process of the training traditional ideas and concepts kept being destroyed and alongside new alternatives were being thought of. In the place of old sayings and songs, new slogans and songs were created. In the place of the old health set up, a new concept and system of health was visualized. On the one hand protest was expressed by raising questions on the family structure, male domination and rule by the rich. While on the other, new forms of support and cooperation in the form of women's organisations was also suggested. This process continued throughout.

During the training pre-thinking was done, necessary information was added on the basis of which new points of views were made. Cultural awareness was inculcated through self-made posters, role-plays, folk plays, video film, puppet show, cultural programme and local games.

In this way, the learning process became self-reliant and gained strength from its own momentum and will hopefully be continuously regenerated.



TRAINING OF TRAINERS

A Training Programme With Women From U.P. And Bihar



- Abha Bhaiya and Sheba Chhachi, JAGORI
- Gauri Choudhury and Runu Chakravarty, ACTION INDIA



a chronological account of each and every day. The process and content overlapped constantly, and it would be unfair to the workshop to see them separately. The report hopefully will give a feel of what we tried to attempt - exploring the possibility of understanding one self and one's place in society, and gaining the courage and strength to change what is unjust around us.

Introducing Ourselves

Communication is a process integral to life, intrinsic to every act, every relationship. Without it we can neither recognise our own desires/intention nor can we communicate them. How well we are able to communicate, with clarity and confidence, depends on how much we have understood our own selves.

If I want to be heard, if my words or what I wish to say is to be received I will have to look into myself, understand myself and share this insight, honestly, with whoever I wish to communicate with so that she too can begin to open up, look at her own self and thus begin the possibility of deeper relationships.

But, the tragedy is that we rarely get the opportunity to connect with others in this way. External values, identities, social norms - are heaped upon us and we become the mere carriers of these - mere beasts of burden. Whatever path we may choose, whatever context,

Introduction

Thirty five women came together for 8 days, all of us women involved in working for other women in some way. Some of us came looking for new information, some to learn new skills, some to hear about other work experiences - what we all found and explored together went into all this. Yes, but most importantly, opened up a whole new area - of knowing ourselves and each other, as women.

What we are sharing here is a process rather than the details of the content. Therefore, the report is not



after a time we begin to experience our own hollowness.

Our workshop was an attempt to create the possibility of knowing oneself differently - to move away from traditionally defined methods, to step aside from the way society has defined us: this was our fundamental premise - and the different methods, processes and ways of working we used, all stemmed from that.

The process began with an attempt to break hesitations and shyness. How to introduce ourselves to each other? We could, of course, have simply said our names - but we chose to play a game. We sat in a circle - a ball of wool is in one woman's hand. She throws it to another woman, saying her name at the top of her voice. The woman who catches the ball must then throw it to another in the circle, shouting out her own name, and so on. Once all of us have



said our names, the game changes: when the ball comes back to someone who has already said her name, she must throw it and say the name of the woman she is sending the ball to. If you don't remember, you can ask.

Somehow the game itself makes you attentive, without feeling that you are being forced to listen - in just 15 minutes we all knew each other's name and a little of the hesitation had dissolved, an ease had begun to be established. For each one of us had concentrated on each other, focused our attention.

After having introduced oneself, the need is to know more about the other. We divided into pairs. Each of us had to try and get to know something about our companion, and share this with the whole group. We chose some basis for this knowing - questions which would give this process of introduction a new dimension, which could try to know these areas which are a part of each of our lives but which usually remain unspoken.

- a) Which was the happiest occasion of your life?
- b) What did you want to become in your childhood?
- c) Is there any incident in your life that makes you very unhappy?
- d) Being a woman, what is your opinion about Mrs. Gandhi?
- e) Any incident in your life that thrills you, fills



you with excitement ?

- f) How do you feel as the evening starts descending ?

The answers were varied as well as common - most women talked about their childhood as the happiest time of their lives; of women friends, and the sense of freedom that they felt as children. Many of them desired to be economically independent and dreamt of becoming a teacher, nurse, social worker - fairly well defined and socially acceptable professions. The concept of unhappiness was directly linked to illness, death, fear of sexual assault. Some talked about poverty, exploitation and injustice. For some, memories of their first few years in '*sasural*' were very painful where they experienced humiliation, sarcasm and rejection.

For most participants Indira Gandhi stood for courage and sacrifice for the nation. She was an ideal woman for many. Only one participant felt that she was no different from a man and was not committed to the poor. Evening, for some participants, meant fear, loneliness and sense of futility of their lives. For a majority, and especially for married women, evenings brought tiredness and they looked forward to rest and sleep.

But talking about oneself or asking another questions does not completely remove one's hesitation. There are other ways of getting to know each other, other areas

of hesitation - when we touch another's body, and when another touches us, a different area of shyness dissolves. Once again, we sat in a large circle. One of us had her eyes tied tight. She was then left in the middle of the circle. Nearing another woman, she has to touch her and remember the special elements of her features that she can feel, so that when she is back in her place, and her eyes are opened, she can recognise the other through very different means, a different sensitivity to the other person.

Another game which helped us to get more comfortable and free with our bodies was the fish. All of us, with our eyes closed, lay down in a circle. Keeping our eyes closed, and without lifting the body from the ground we had to move towards the centre of the circle. If, while moving or rather dragging yourself on your stomach you came across an arm or a leg or the torso of another fish you had to simply clamber over it, keeping your eyes closed. We ended up, a pile of fishes in the centre of the room - opened our eyes and saw that we were all on top of each other. Someone's elbow in someone's face, someone's knee on someone's stomach! Some bruises, a lot of laughter - some of our childhood had returned to us.

The suffocating traditions and practices of society have alienated us as women from our own bodies, hearts and minds. Particularly as we grow from girlhood to



womanhood, we are forced to control and restrict normal, free movements. We learn to constrict our bodies - head bent, eyes down, the weight of the pillow on our heads, bent backs, slow hesitant feet - the visible proof of our enslavement. As we leave our childhood behind, we leave behind the use of our bodies. We are clothed in shame, fear, hesitation - this becomes our claim to respect.

The games and exercises we used help to break some of these shackles. On the first day, the participants seemed weighed down with the concern of keeping their bodies covered, hidden, respectable. But as through the exercises we began to remember and re-enjoy the use of our bodies, this external behaviour began to change. Sunita, who sat barely able to speak her name out, began to laugh a free open laugh. Her *dupatta* lay in the corner forgotten - it was no longer something she had to constantly think about. Shivrani, whose face was shadowed with self - denial, became, as the days went by, a woman whose whole being seemed to flower, who used her whole body to express what she was saying - the '*chaddar*' of elderliness which she had wrapped herself in had flown away somewhere.

Each one of us reclaimed the body which had seemed not to belong to us. A part of learning to understand ourselves, express our feelings and relate to each other.

How do we become more sensitive to each other? Let us become pairs. I am your mirror - whatever action, movement you initiate I must follow - simultaneously. My eyes concentrated on yours, my whole attention turned to you, becoming part of you, so that my body moves in perfect coordination with yours, never for a moment letting my eyes, my attention waver. Now, you are my mirror - I move, you mirror me - we learn to watch with concentration, to understand what the other wants to do, wishes to say - we learn to respond to each other.

Through these exercises with our bodies, an atmosphere of ease, of trust and of openness developed. Each day we spent an hour in the morning working with our voices and our bodies, getting to understand them better. Those of us who had learnt not to speak above a whisper rediscovered the pleasure of shouting, the power in one's own voice. We then began to see how we could use these parts of ourselves to express things. For example, taking a word and trying to say it with different feelings and tones, or showing an emotion using only sound and gesture without words. How can we use our bodies to both experience and express different feelings? Everyone has to imagine she is tied up inside a body and use her imagination to create in herself and the one watching her that experience.

Another exercise - make yourself as small as possible.



pull every part of your body in till you occupy the smallest possible space. Then, begin to expand and push and stretch to the limits of your body.

To feel one's identity shrinking, becoming smaller as the body shrinks - to feel the power, the strength in oneself as the body expands.

The time had now come to look back at our feelings, our attitudes and experiences. To probe that part of our mind over which layers of duty, beliefs and social norms were encrusted.

Often, we as women, and as activists working for social change, find ourselves fulfilling roles which have been externally defined. While believing that we are working at the grassroots, our way of working has tended to become mechanical. Are we really linking as one human being to another? Are we relating on the basis of our own experience and values? Is this not the reason why we begin to feel an emptiness, a meaninglessness in our attempts to bring about change in society? For us as women, who are trying to explore different ways of living and working, it becomes crucial that we look at our own selves - see where we are in society - understand the specialness, and yet the similarities of our individual experiences. Explore the meanings that our own and other women's lives can give us.

Woman—Family—Society

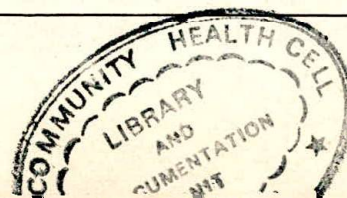
"I never did observe *purdah* but I feel a '*bandhan*', a restriction around me all the time as if I am locked up within four walls."

"The '*Bahu*' that belongs to the inner courtyard of the house, cannot cross over the threshold."

"When I share equally in happiness and pain of life with him, why am I unequal?"

"Woman is looking for protection for herself. Fear of rape has created circumstances for her to get tied to one relationship."

This session was devoted to understanding woman's place within the family and society - primarily to understand how patriarchy and patriarchal values are constituted. Every participant was asked to say what she thinks a family gives to its members. It was clear from their description that the family was the basic unit that gave its different members - men and women different sets of values. While it gave rights to its male members, it defined duties for women. This social institution also imparted the notion of morality, religious practices, caste feelings, etc. On the other hand was what we hoped for from the family - love, caring, protection, belonging. Somewhere perhaps we accepted the strictures of the family because of these needs which.



JM-100
05613 589



however, were never actually fulfilled. The promise of these needs being met often covered up the terrible inequalities we actually face and see around us.

Thus, for us it is important to see inequalities that exist not only in society - but also within the family, which is the basic building block of society and reflects its hierarchies and power structure.

Some pertinent questions were raised : Who made this society ? If everyone contributed equally in building this society, why do some groups (based on class, gender or caste) face hardship and discrimination? When and how did discrimination arise between men and women?

Participants shared their own experiences of discrimination against the female child in the family in the area of food, socialization, access to education, marriage, share in the property, freedom, religious practices, decision-making processes, etc. Participants also felt that most decisions in the family are taken by elders and men.

It was at this stage difficult to go into the origin of this discrimination but everyone seemed to feel that the existing structure of family and society do not give women their rights. Yet nobody wants to break the family - what perhaps is needed is to change the structure and built-in inequalities within that.

Some of us shared how we had in our own lives tried to change the balance of power in our own homes

and the problems as well as successes we had had. There was a heated discussion over some of these attempts - hearing another woman's experience helped us to confront our own attitudes, and the situation in our own lives.

In this workshop, we have tried to link our work and our life. How our experience of being women connects us with others, creates our reality and how do we change this reality. Therefore, our questions and discussion on the family, the individual and society were at two levels - in our own lives and as an analysis at a conceptual level.

Women And Health

The session on health was conducted by a *bustee* level health worker of Sabla Sangh from Seemapuri, Delhi

She began the session with a game where every participant was a doctor who had to choose whether she wanted to go to a rural area or urban centre and also give reasons for the same. This itself generated lot of debate and participants themselves came to some conclusion regarding the commitment of professionals such as doctors to poor people.

The next question was regarding the basic needs of poor people in urban and rural areas. The participants mentioned the following as minimum needs for a human



life to live with dignity:

- Right to livelihood
- Clean water and air
- *Roti, Kapada aur Makan*
- Health care and special facilities for women and children
- Education and access to information
- Transportation and electricity
- Entertainment

Then each participant was asked to share whether she had all this in their respective villages and it became clear to the whole group that basic needs in most of the villages are missing.

The next question was: Why is it so ? Again participants delineated the reasons for this :

- Lack of means of production;
 - Poor are oppressed;
 - Not united;
 - Not organised;
 - Lack of education;
 - Wrong government policies;
 - Migration of educated people to cities;
- The debate continued:

Who owns land, raw material and resources, capital ? Even in this, whether there is equal control by men and women ? What do the poor own ?

From our own situations, we gave examples of exploitation of the poor and women. How even among the poor, women are poorer and own nothing.

When we came to the issue of women and health, participants talked first of the reasons why women have very specific health problems. Due to *purdah*, fear, hesitation, her very low self image, she being the last on the family's priority list, her health needs get neglected and are attended to only when it becomes a crisis. Where do we begin when we realise that among the participants themselves there are experiences of stomach ailments and constipation because of lack of toilet facilities, how she has to control herself till it gets dark to go to the field even to pass urine.

Women and children are the main victims of lack of food and nutrition. How patriarchal values have gone so deep in her own consciousness that she is the one who feeds her husband better than herself, even if she has to starve. Women narrated how a man never asks whether there is enough food to go around for everyone. Even when a woman wants to give little extra to her daughters the elders in the family immediately remark "Why milk for her ? Is she going to plough the land ?"

Participants talked of other factors that affect women's health adversely:

1. Her low status in society



2. Child marriage and early and frequent child birth
3. Burden of family responsibility and worry
4. *Purdah* and lack of freedom - conflicts and suffocation inside the family
5. Double burden of work
6. Lack of confidence due to humiliation which affects her health
7. Innumerable restrictions affecting natural growth of woman's body
8. Lack of sleep and rest
9. Problems of cleanliness and other problems during menstruation
10. Lack of nutrition and care during pregnancy and child birth
11. Lack of sanitation and water facilities

We discussed in the group the reasons for all this. Some participants again came up with their own analysis - a woman accepts the superiority of man and inflicts all this on herself:

- Woman is woman's enemy
- Inequality between men and women
- Social pressure and tradition
- Economic inequality
- Lack of education, etc.

There was a long discussion on all these issues. Women shared all that they suffer due to existing taboos,

practices and beliefs and how they themselves have little understanding of their own body functions. The whole concept of purity and impurity affects women and their health immensely. She is treated as dirty and therefore, untouchable physically and socially during menstruation, childbirth, etc.

The other issue that was discussed and debated was family planning. We with a socialist feminist perspective shared our own view on this. Participants talked of general lack of choice to control their fertility and lack of information on contraceptives. How increase in poverty and unemployment affects the issue of birth control. One woman said, "When it's a question of buying food, clothing, education, etc., then I feel I should have only two or three children but when we work on the field, I feel if I had many grown up children, we would have earned better".

The afternoon session began with the presentation of *Phad* (a traditional form of story-telling through unrolling of a long cloth with different panels on it) which was part of an exhibition prepared by slum level health activists of a health programme where many of us are working. It was presented in a docu-drama form. The theme of the exhibition was "Birth of a Female Child". Participants responded very positively to this form of communication and felt that they could use this effectively in their own area. There was also a discussion



on the content of the *Phad*. Participants shared different practices that are still prevalent whereby a female child is killed by either filling salt in her mouth or tobacco, etc. It is common experience that the female child is discriminated against from birth.

In the evening till late night, the group sat together discussing natural birth control methods by which women themselves can control their fertility. A majority of the participants did not know anything about the fertile and unfertile days of the menstrual cycle and in an intimate session, we tried to understand our own bodies. It was clear that many of us needed more information on different aspects of our physiology and changes that our body goes through. We also shared information on NET-EN (an injectable contraceptive under trial in India) campaign that some women's groups have launched at the national level.

Women And Work

In this session, we wanted to understand women's own perception of their work through eliciting their contribution to the family and the production system.

Our aim was to build some socio-economic concepts which would substantiate our understanding of the subordinate status of the woman at **all** levels in our caste and class divided society.

- Domestic work has no value.

- Women's work is invisible, unseen.
- Women's work is not included in the G.N.P.

We started with a short impromptu skit - "My wife does not work", in which the husband clearly did not consider his wife's endless drudgery within the house from dawn to late in the night, as "work".

On the 24-hour clock we began the rural woman's day at 4 a.m., and hour by hour moved round the clock cooking, cleaning, collecting fuel, and water, toiling in the field, tending animals and gathering fodder, care of husband, children and other family members .. "*Aurat ki bhi kabhi chootti hoti hai*" ? The woman who stepped out to earn a living carried a triple burden in fulfilling her role and responsibilities as a producer and reproducer in production and reproduction.

To illustrate the value of each of these tasks we calculated how much each of these services cost when acquired outside the home. If this unseen task force of domestic slaves (work without wages) went on strike would life come to a standstill ?

Having made the distinction between paid and unpaid labour, we gathered the perceptions which clearly indicated that acceptance of the woman's role in the domestic sphere had been deeply ingrained in her concept of herself vis a vis her family. Her self image, her self worth, was measured in terms of being a good wife, a good



mother which meant giving selfless service with love. This value system was further extended to the nurturing services in the occupations that were respectable and open to women - teacher, anganwadi worker, nurse, secretary, etc. In the poster-making session one of the participants graphically depicted her desire to be a good social worker and gain the respect and high regard of her husband and his family, and become an active and useful member of her community by helping other less fortunate women. However, the women were well aware of the triple burden they carried, they had articulated it on the first day, in their answer to the question - what/how do you feel when the sun goes down and the day is coming to an end? Fatigue, and the anticipation of sleep was the unanimous response with the exception of a few women. Though the women did not calculate the "value" of their labour in terms of money, they saw it as a form of exchange. They got shelter, food, clothing and social security in return for their services, they also saw it being conditional to their fulfilling their role, and not as a right of being a woman.

What do we want as a role model? What kind of life and work do we want for the new women? What kind of life do we want for our daughters? The workshop was an exercise in thinking the impossible, a time and space for dreams and desires in our vision of the future.

Man's Work, Woman's Work

The division of labour between the woman and the man in the domestic sphere defines their role and status in our society, by the "value" attached to the kind of work done by men and women. These "values" and norms had evolved and in the process of socialization and have become a part of our psyche as "man's nature", and "women's nature". Specific skills and abilities are attributed. Men are strong, brave, superior in mind and body to women who are weak, helpless, gentle and loving, long-suffering and submissive. Not just different, but unequal. Why should child-bearing and rearing not be seen as work? Or have less value? How is giving birth less strong, less brave than going hunting, or going to war?





And why should the bearing and rearing of children be the woman's responsibility primarily, when preservation and propagation of the species was being ensured in the continuity of the family in the father's name ? Our conclusion was inevitable - this was a man-made world, made by men for men, and women and their labour, and the fruits of women's labour was owned and controlled by men, obviously in their own interest. We are talking about and recognizing patriarchy.

Paid Work, Employment, Wage Work, Piece Rate Work, Family Labour

We moved on to the area of paid work. First we listed all the occupations that the participants knew of, particular to their own regions in which women were involved. These ranged from piece rate work like *beedi* making, to agricultural work, to services, to blue collar jobs.

After a brief tea-break, the participants were asked to write one sentence about the "farmer". Each one read aloud her sentence. Without exception everyone had written about the farmer as a man, although we ourselves had just listed women's contribution to agriculture!

Discussion followed. What kind of wages did women get in agricultural labour ? Did women earn less because they did different tasks ? Were women paid less than

men for the same tasks ? Where women's wages had increased had they organised to demand higher wages ?

In our culture why were women not allowed to use the plough ? In certain parts of Africa women did the ploughing of the fields, and owned the land they cultivated. In paddy transplantation it was almost always women who did the back bending job standing in ankle-deep water. We identified the woman's tasks in agriculture, and the man's tasks. We compared the wages of male and female workers, we found variations in wages from region to region. In some areas the remuneration was still made in grain, usually cheap grain. In some areas money was paid, plus the morning and the mid-day meal. On an average men were paid Rs. 10/- to Rs. 12/-, while women got Rs. 5/- to Rs. 7/- only.

Family Labour

The woman prepared the potters clay, the man created the vessels. The women spun the yarn, the men did the weaving. In the cottage industry sector, men and women took on specific roles, the women usually doing the less skilled and often the more laborious work.

And, in the final stage, the sale of the produce, it was the man who sold the produce in the market and thereby controlled the money. The woman's labour is not costed separately, and remains unseen. Her contribution to the economy is not just undervalued.



but until recently, almost non-existent.

The struggle of the women's movement is to gain recognition and equal value for women's work - **EQUAL WAGES FOR EQUAL WORK.**

Questioning The Concept

Men and women did not get paid equal wages. Women and children were cheap labour. Their earnings were considered supplementary to the household income, why ?

Discussion : The man was the head of the household, the bread earner. Though the man was looked upon as the main bread earner, in practice men spent a considerable portion of their income on drinking, smoking, gambling and other extravagances. Often the man did not contribute to the household expenses, leaving the woman to fend for herself and her children, and sometimes even the husband. The women said that a woman did not consider her earnings as her own. She gave the money to her husband or her mother-in-law. One participant said she had not been allowed to keep even half her salary, and the fact that she had asked for it had led to a lot of bitterness. She was called selfish and not respectful of her elders.

Often the woman's entire earnings go into the household, for basic and essential needs. So we know that the concept of the supplementary wage is a way

of providing cheap female labour to this production system.

Women-Headed Households

Statistics show that 12 percent to 30 percent of households are single parent, women headed households, both among the rural population and migrants to the urban area. Yet our society, and the government does not recognize the woman as a worker, a producer, a breadearner.

Cheap Labour

Multinationals come to the Third World to exploit the cheap labour of women. Industry "puts out" work to the women outside the factory to avoid employment benefits, especially maternity and child care facilities to cut down labour costs, and increase their profits. The government gives men and women equal wages, because our Constitution guarantees it, but women inevitably work at the lowest rung of the ladder.

In the construction industry women do not do the skilled jobs. Masonry, carpentry, electrical work are skilled jobs reserved for men. Women remain in the large army of the unskilled labour force, the load carriers, stone-breakers.

The purpose of our discussion was to get an overview of the situation of women at work. How employers



look upon women's labour, how her own family look upon her labour, how the society looks upon her labour. In the context of what had been discussed in the morning's session, a framework had been attempted within the parameters of which we wanted to look at the income generation projects undertaken by the groups present.

Eliciting the details from each group took the entire afternoon.

In discussing and commenting on the schemes, their rationale, problems in implementation, etc., several of our own attitudes to work which we had unconsciously absorbed from society came to the front. For example, that men are better at work that is more physically demanding, sewing machines are an appropriate tool for women's economic self-sufficiency, etc. Would we, having understood better the issue of women and work, look at our own schemes differently ?

It was not easy to assess how much of the concepts was grasped by the participants, or would be applied to their real life situation. We can only say that we tried to use a deductive method in drawing from their lives and their own reality, from a concrete situation in developing an abstract theory or building a concept.

We have, in seeking the material basis for women's subordination, been looking at women's work in a way

that is concerned about women.

Communication/Poster-Making

Every now and again my mind returns to the Sevapuri workshop. All of us - each one of us: each special, each different. It seems as if in that short space of time I had got to know at least a little, to understand so many women - not just their names or what work they did, but a little of what they were as women. Not the same stereotyped images that we all present to strangers but some of the pain, the fears, the contradictions each of us lives with.

Perhaps that is what was so special about Sevapuri - that there were no "readymades" - whether in terms of ourselves, the issues we were working with, the skills we wanted to learn. Looking at the photographs, I remember talking about the hesitation I had felt when learning to use a camera, the hesitation I sometimes still feel - how I had to fight the tendency in myself to say "I can't do it - let someone else" (more skilled, more confident, usually a man) do it, and how each one of us had said that while they had used posters, exhibitions in their work, they themselves did not know how to make them, could not draw, could not paint - that someone else, some talented person in the organisation, some artist had always made the posters.

Madhuri's hand - a few centimeters above the clean



white sheet, making small circular movements in the air. "How to put the point of the pencil on that clean sheet. I will spoil the paper. I won't be able to make anything. I don't know how to draw a straight line - she won't even let us use a ruler" - who knows how many years of fear lay in the gap between the point of the pencil and the paper. And then later that very day in the evening - this poster !

But I am going ahead too quickly. How did we begin thinking about, talking about communication ? In a sense, although we spent 2 1/2 days specifically talking about communication and exploring our own poster making skills, communication was a thread which wove through from the very first day of the workshop to the very end. The "games" and exercises, the songs, the sharing of experiences - but let me come back to the session. We began that day by talking about our own experiences with using different communication forms - what kinds of media, who had developed them and in what contexts we had used them.

Almost all of us had used theatre, songs and posters in our work. Whether a play made by school children on alcoholism, a 'Nukkad Natak' on problems of caste, superstition, or on the need for organisation, we had all explored this medium ourselves. While some of us had been more involved in working with a group of children or women to develop a play and had not actually

taken part ourselves, others had acted in plays. There was an interesting use of theatre. Priyamvada told us about where in the middle of a mela, a large pit was dug into which she went - asking for help to come out as a play on the need for cooperation.

Mahila Melas, Shibirs, meetings and especially interestingly, traditional festivals such as Kartik Purnima were usually where we had performed plays, sang songs and put up posters. Although one or two women came from groups which had printed and distributed posters, most of us used hand made posters usually to aid discussion in a shibir, or as an exhibition. Who made these posters ? Almost unanimously each one of us said that we could not/did not know how to make





posters and that either another activist from the group (often male) who was specially gifted, or an 'artist' would make the posters.

Very different was Shiva Kashyap - a Madhubani painter who lived by her art and had worked on themes such as pollution, environment, as well as images of women from mythology such as *Draupadi*, *Sita* and *Durga*. *Parvati* from Delhi had learnt to make her own posters and worked with a scroll like form - *Phad* - which used a mixture of song, theatre and drama, to communicate. Only two of us had used audio-visual material, i.e., slides and films. Some of us also talked about forms such as speeches, *padyatras* and *parchis*.

Having talked about the media we ourselves use, we went on to talk about the media around us - the different ways in which we received information in society. Having listed the different media, we went through each form asking three questions :-

- Who owns it ?
- Who controls it ?
- How does this influence the messages or information we receive ?

As we collectively answered these three questions in relation to each of the media, it became clear that by and large all these forms of communication were owned/controlled either directly or indirectly by the

government or industrialists/capitalists i.e., those with money, and that these were most often male, upper caste and upper class. Even forms like meetings and *baithaks* which do not seem to be 'owned' by anybody could easily be controlled by the same dominating forces.

This control over media had a major influence on the content of the messages we receive. The controlling interest presents only the information which suits them, their own views and perspective on reality. The voices of the poor and the oppressed, the voice of women could not be heard. Although there were enlightened or progressive journalists who attempted to bring out certain issues, they too were constrained by the vested interest which controlled their newspapers. Even when issues of concern to the poor or women were taken up, the entire situation or actuality was never presented. This analysis emerged from each one of us saying what we felt and discussing with each other our different perceptions. We then listed the different images of women presented in the media by going round the circle, with each woman adding to the growing list on the chart.

Woman as defined only by her body - woman as dependent on men, having no importance or intelligence of her own, woman as a sacrificing mother, housewife, woman as anti-other women, etc. Having listed these images, we began to connect these with images that exist in society about women - especially images projected



by the family and religion which we as women had internalized.

We began to make another list, this time summarizing essential attributes that we as women were supposed to have and discussed how we ourselves felt in relation to these images. As we looked at the list we had made, we felt that we did identify, and positively, with some of the images there - for example, the image of the *Devi*, the image of the mother and maternal love - but that there were contradictions between the images we were expected to relate to - that we were somehow caught in trying to satisfy multiple images - of woman as having special power, strength and creativity but simultaneously being subservient, dependent and defined only through her body and her relationships with men (wife, daughter, mother).

What were the aspects of our life and experience that did not find any representation in these images? What elements of these existing images did we identify with and wanted to appropriate in a positive way? What would constitute an image which we could call our own - how do we create alternative images?

- These questions went beyond objectively analysing the mass media - they took us once again back to ourselves, to our own definition of our identities, to who we are as women and from that to a desire to

try and create our own images - to step out of the silence in which we have remained and begin to explore ways of expressing ourselves, of saying what the dominant media cannot and will not say.

We divided into smaller groups of approximately 6-7 women each. First, we talked with each other as to what we wanted to say through our poster - what issue concerned us. Having reached some shared understanding of this, each one of the group drew on a small sheet of paper as to how she would like to present the idea.

The first step towards using pencil and paper - towards thinking in visual terms.

"Oh, in our group you are the only one who can draw - we will give the ideas, **you** draw"

"No - sorry - not allowed". I became a school teacher - the rules were clear. Every woman had to make her own sketch - however poor or foolish she may think it to be.

"But, how?"

"I don't know - you do - let's think it out together - let's try - it's only paper - there is more if this one gets spoilt". Cajoling, sometimes scolding, teasing, discussing, laughing at ourselves we all made the initial sketch.



"Now, let's look at these sketches - I don't know the issue you have in your mind - I can only tell you what I see in front of me - What does an activist do when you take away her words - when she is confronted by a new language which has its own logic, own grammar, own method. Slowly, slowly, by looking at our own drawing, at posters put up on the walls, thinking about what we wanted to say, we began to get involved in this new language."

"I want to show that this man oppresses his wife by beating her - well, of course I should draw him larger than her - otherwise she looks stronger - I want to share my vision of the future - of a time when men and women are equal - I will use a weighing scale as a symbol."

Now the larger sheet - full poster size papers - colour - questions of visibility, detail, the meanings of colour, the boldness of an image - the immediacy of communication - all the tools of the graphic designer.

It's 6 O' clock, it's 7 O' clock, it's time for dinner, it's after dinner, it's the next morning the session must start - "Just a minute, I am still finishing the hand - it's too small, I am making it bigger" Suddenly the room is transformed. On two clotheslines 15 ft. each, we have one by one hung the posters we have made. So many ! But each group was to make only one or

two finally - but then we made more - "I made the group one and then made one in my own - see - what does it say to you?" The excitement, the pleasure, the pride - and the sheer delight in being able to say "I did it - I drew, I coloured, I thought it out"

We then sat together and presented each poster to the whole group - reactions, comments, a lot of laughter, embarrassment. But, as we went on, we realized how good really each of our posters was. How each communicated clearly - irrespective of how "well drawn" or not it was. We then began to think about the different ways in which our posters communicated. There seemed to be broadly three kinds - one kind which made a statement, one which was like a prop or a tool for telling a story, one which provoked questions and discussion.

In what situations, for what purposes would we use which kind of poster ? What kind of relationship do we wish to establish with the women we were communicating with ? If we were interested in changing consciousness, would not the most relevant communication be one which led to dialogue, to discussion, to questioning ? In looking at our own work, analysing it as well as analysing other posters around us, we developed an understanding of how our communication needed to be different from the one-way communication of the mass media which we had criticized, and how



often we ourselves, because of the way we perceive our role and our relationship with those we are working with, can establish different kinds of situations - how we needed to consciously work towards a more participatory, dialogic kind of communication.

But then that perennial question - would these posters work in our villages? Would non-literate women understand them? And the only genuine answer - that it depends on what kind of relationship you create with them, how you use the poster, how you involve the women. That it is not a problem of techniques, that there are no packaged solutions to what will work and what will not. All that can guide you is the unwavering belief that if you speak from the heart, if your own experience informs your communication, then only can you enter the experience of another and begin a genuine exchange. Whatever medium you use, whatever your level of skill communication is about creating relationships and true communication is an exchange not a delivering of messages.

Women And Law

We started the session by presenting the case of Sudha Goel (who was murdered for dowry) without disclosing the judgements of the different courts of the case. The group then was divided into two and one woman was made the judge. We did a mock trial of

the case and listened to the arguments of the boy's side and the girl's side. An interesting scene developed where the girl's side argued on behalf of the girl, citing examples of harassment and injustices done to her; referring to her social reality and silences that get built around her; how she finds no space in the family or society for expression or articulation of her rights and needs and is forced to live under the most inhuman circumstances. After this exercise, we shared the actual judgements of all the three courts in this case which were different at every level.

For us the case was just a starting point to understand some basic questions - what is the legal structure? What is the basis of our legal system, what role does the legal system play in maintaining the present economic and political system? What we tried to do together was to explore our perception and understanding of the legal system as it operates in our country.

With different examples of alienation of tribal lands and forests from people, appropriation of land for mining, dams, etc., we tried to understand the whole concept of what is just and unjust. How systematic introduction of various legislation has deprived people of their means of production but it is not considered a crime. When we defined what is theft, we also tried to see why a contractor/landlord who does not pay minimum wages is not considered a thief, while in reality he is stealing



from people their share of hard earned wages.

Similarly, we tried to see what is legal and illegal. At the time of the nationalization of mines, many mines were closed down and workers were retrenched but again depriving people of their livelihood is not considered a crime either. It slowly started becoming clear that the law primarily protects people who own means of production. Labourers, tribals, *Dalits* and women, i.e., the larger section of the population seldom benefit by laws and different legal provisions.

But then, we do have the Minimum Wages Act, the Bonded Labour Act, Rape Bill, etc. But by investigating history, we realise that these Acts have come into existence after long struggle by workers/women and other oppressed groups not only in this country but in other countries. However, even these provide minimum protection. People had to struggle to get even the right to drinking water. The inmates of a home for destitute women had to go to the Supreme Court - the highest court of the country - to get a piece of two yards of cloth for use during menstruation.

Through this process, it became clear to us that the law primarily protects the interest of the rich. Our experiences of the poor fighting for their rights were full of endless, tiring legal trials taking us nowhere. Even if the laws existed, it is an impossible task to

see them implemented. In none of the areas where participants worked, agricultural labourers were paid minimum wages and nowhere were women paid equal wages.

When we came to probe into the whole issue of women and their legal rights, we divided them into two section: Laws within the family, and Laws outside the family.

Laws Within The Family

Inside the family, the right to personal liberty is violated by very "private" people, i.e., parents, husbands, in-laws. While the Constitution guarantees every citizen the fundamental right of freedom of speech and movement, a woman most often cannot exercise these rights. Participants substantiated this by narrating how women are kept in *Purdah* and are not allowed to move around freely. Women talked in detail about various ailments they suffer from because after day break they can't go into the open to defecate. Different instances of dowry harassment, wife beating, desertion, sexual assault were narrated by participants. The questions that ultimately confronted us was - how far we can use legal systems to fight for our rights? Basically there are very few laws to protect women. The basis of our family laws are the religious scriptures which believe in subordination of a woman and reinforces her secondary



position in the family and society.

Laws Outside The Family

We discussed at length as to how only fighting legal cases will not/cannot take us too far. Legal battles can be just part of our attempt to change the overall structure and injustices built in the system. Certain issues, e.g., a dowry case in the case of Sevapuri Women's group, helped them to articulate the issue of violence against women in the family and also built lot of support among women in the villages around. Even women in *Purdah* could identify with the issue. Thus, legal battles can strengthen the ongoing work and be a forum of public activity. Fighting a case therefore is not an end in itself but a means for raising consciousness and therefore has a demonstrative value.

Participants narrated at length cases of sexual assault, desertion, domestic violence, etc., in their respective areas. In many cases it was not possible to start a legal fight due to lack of control over her own life, lack of evidence, or willingness on the part of women to fight; the expenses involved; and not the least, the lack of knowledge and information on the legal aspects of the problems. Women also face the problem of finding sympathetic lawyers in rural areas. At this point, we discussed at length the repercussions of fighting legal cases for women. The question that was posed was simple - what will we do when a woman comes for

help ? Supporting a woman in a crisis means giving a lot of oneself. We shared our experiences of working in a crisis centre. In the context of rural areas, where there is a stronghold of social norms and practices and there is no infrastructure, women's groups have to be very clear and strong.

We also discussed the issue of demystification of law and the need for us to get more and more acquainted with the various sections and bills affecting agricultural workers, *Dalits*, women and other oppressed groups. Participants were keen to have this kind of information and understand this for their work. This meant going into the details of each and every relevant section. In response to this, we have sent all the participants copies of simplified pamphlets on laws related to Minimum Wages, Release of Bonded Labour, Rape Bill. We also hope to be able to hold short workshops on some of the issues arising out of this workshop. It demands a different kind of preparedness and commitment.

Theatre Work

When we began the theatre work, some basic work with voice, meanings of expression and use of the body had already been done. The sharing, discussing, questioning we had done collectively, and individually, had prepared us in a different way.

Now the time had come to probe deeper into our



own psyche, to work with the inner mind. For this, a true feeling of trust and togetherness is essential. Our minds needed to be jointly focussed and all the physical energy of the body needed to be used up, so that the mind can become quiet, concentrate and begin to make associations.

In the morning we had played a vigorous game. Then we began the session by exercising our voices. Eyes closed, all of us making a simple sound. If one changed the pitch, all of us followed suit - if another dropped to a hum, all hummed. Then for quite a long time we concentrated on making a continuous sound through our noses in a lying down position which then slowly faded. The room was darkened, we felt very closely connected to each other and quiet and receptive. When each person's attention was centred, we began the exercise we call the 'Poem'. One person begins to speak, recite, weave words together to create images, associations which helps one to get in touch with one's feelings. As the voice continues, you are free to do anything with your body. Move your body in any way as long as it is silent. Or you can choose to lie completely still. The associations, the images began to open. Memories, dreams, our broken forgotten hopes, our joys, our sorrows begin to tumble out without fear or hesitation - in this lies relief, in this lies creativity. Each one of us went deep into ourselves - there was no space for

superficiality - each word, each pause, each silence seemed to physically touch.

Slowly, slowly the voice faded away, and after a time we began to get up - some withdrawn, some crying - some still completely absorbed.

And we talked about what we had felt - shared our experience of the exercise.

All this prepared the ground for us to begin work on developing the plays. Alongwith exploring ourselves, we had been getting familiar with and practicing different skills essential for theatre. Learning to express ourselves through voice, gestures, emotions. This gave us a sense of confidence and empowerment - a sense of freedom amongst us and a desire to communicate. We did another exercise - as women what are we afraid of. Each had to write it on a piece of paper, without her name, fold it and put it in a box. We divided the different fears that came into the box into three kinds :-

- Fear of Society and Family
- Fear of Men
- Fear of Loneliness

We then formed groups of 6-7 women around each of these issues. Each group then made a small play on the theme - one group made a song. Each group chose and developed its own way of presenting their



issue. Some used more abstract means, using very few words and gestures and body movements, some were more narrative in nature. Each had the intensity of a felt experience rather than the rhetoric of an 'issue'.

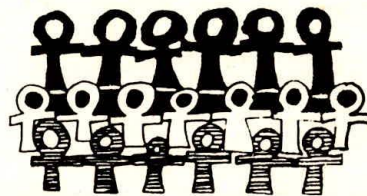
In our discussion after presenting our plays to each other, several basic points emerged. The need to be clear about :

- 1 Who you are making a play for before actually developing it - for ourselves, for society, for women only, etc.
2. Where you will perform - in the city, the village, on the street or inside an *angan* (courtyard). These decisions depend on our objective—if we wish to initiate a discussion among women, something created for the *angan* would be more appropriate. If we wish to raise an issue at a general level, do propaganda, then street corner skits are most appropriate.

We also talked about theatre as having very special qualities as a form of communication. That it requires

nothing except your own self body, voice and mind, that it can create a very direct way of communication and relationship. We all shared how this small experience of making and presenting our own play had given us the confidence that we could work with theatre in our own situations. Each one of us had realised that working with any medium is not a question only of skills, techniques or talent. We all had understood that if we ourselves believe in and have explored through our own consciousness the issue we wish to make a play on - whether for raising discussion or spreading awareness - we would be able to do it.

For, only after having entered our own minds with all the pain and vulnerability that it entails, could we enter into another, and thereby communicate. There can be no conclusion to the beginning of a process which will continue, for each one of us, in our own lives, in our own work situation. As Kalpana said, **"All of you have opened the book of my life from the reverse side—I didn't even know that these pages existed"**.





Appendix

Day 1 – **Introducing Ourselves and Getting to Know Each Other**

Introducing ourselves, exploring ourselves and each other, connecting with each other as women through a series of games and exercises, using talking, voice, body and play.

Day 2 – **Women, Family & Society**
Where do we as women belong in family - in society ? Who defines our role ? What is the relationship between Individual, Family & Society.

Day 3 – **Women and Health**
Common needs of the poor in rural and urban areas. How far facilities and services exist ? Special health problems of women. Our perspective on birth control.
Showing of *Phad* (a health exhibition)

Day 4 – **Women and Work**

Double burden. Range of work and women's participation in production process. Work and wages. Action and strategies for income generation by different groups

Day 5 – **Communication/Poster - Making**

What forms of communication groups have been using ? What is Communication ? Different media forms. Control of media - in whose hands ? Dominant images of women. Images that we could create.
Developing themes for poster making and poster making in small groups.



Day 6 — Looking at and critiquing our posters.
Different forms and the kind of
communication relationship that we
establish with people.

Afternoon — **Women and Law**
Law for whom? What is legal system ?
Who makes laws ? How law
works in reality ?
Definition of right and wrong.
Justice and injustice.
Laws within the family
Laws outside the family
Laws and people's action.

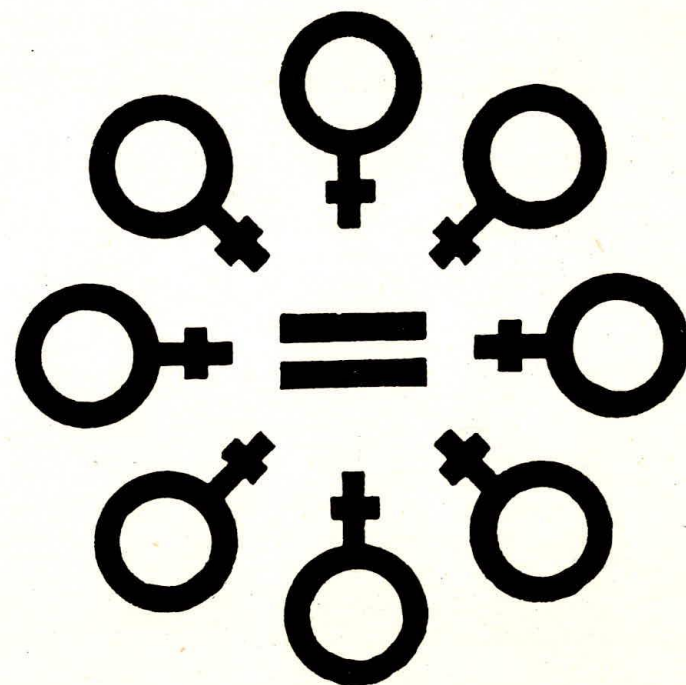
Day 7 — **Theatre Work**
Sound work and exercises. Creating
memory lane individually and
collectively. Group formation and
identification of themes for preparing
skits.
Preparation of 3 plays and one
song.

Day 8 — **Evaluation**

Daily: Mornings — Body exercises, voice training and
learning cycling.
Evenings — Showing slide shows, films, plays,
shows, etc. Display of material
brought by groups.



ANALYSIS OF CASE STUDIES





- a) What are the learning processes of poor women?
- b) How should the realities and specific concerns of women be reflected in the design, content planning, choice of methods, strategy and follow-up of every training ?
- c) What are the various issues that trainers should be sensitive to and the roles they should play in the process of training women's groups ?
- d) What are the structural support systems that need to be built into a training programme with women ?

Several new insights have been drawn out from the case-study presentations. Though each training effort has been unique and distinct in its approach, yet there is a common thread which has emerged - one of the most significant questions which was raised during the analysis was, **"How do poor women who have never been through any formal system of learning learn to learn"**? It is also evident that a major attempt made by the groups has been to break out of the established patriarchal norms, empower women to individually and collectively address their realities and develop an alternative vision based on women's first-hand experiences.

The collation of experiences of the women trainers revolved around four major aspects:

In discussions on the above, key principles were crystallized, a number of questions were raised, some of which we were able to answer, others we reflected upon, while still others remained for self-examination and further critical reflection.

The following is a brief summary of the discussions, along with highlights from the different case studies to elaborate upon some of the key concepts that have emerged.

A. Learning Processes Of Women

Starting with the premise that women learn differently from men, since women's reality is quite different, considerable time was spent in understanding



what are some of those unique learning processes which characterize women's learning, what are some of the anxieties that impede women's learning, what would be an ideal pace of learning for women, does a model of learning emerge from our discussions and analysis, et al.

In light of the above, it also needs to be seen then what are the implications on the role, skills and the person of a trainer, in this context. What mechanisms should the trainer adopt such that would best facilitate the learning of women?

These are some of the dimensions highlighted in the Case studies:

1. Poor women when attending any 'training' situation would naturally bring with them tremendous anxieties. They have anxieties related to their homes, family, children; they have to leave behind their major responsibilities for a period of time when they attend any training programme. "Who will look after my children, have they had food? Have the goats been taken care of?" etc.

They bring anxieties related to the ridicule and contempt that their husbands and other influential members of the family and community have put them through. "My two

divorced daughters have brought enough shame to the family; I don't want them wandering here and there attending the training", said one father in a slum settlement.

"What will these women learn?" is a common refrain from the men in the villages.

They have anxieties about coming into an unfamiliar situation ... "What will be the end-result of this training?"

Thus women come to any new learning situation with layers of anxieties. This affects their involvement, concentration, attention-span, personal hopes and desires. At times these anxieties manifest themselves by women becoming withdrawn, upset, tense, hyperactive, listless etc. during the training. It must, however, be mentioned that, these anxieties that women face are an integral part of their daily lives and therefore, **prior to any formal structured learning process, every trainer should address herself/himself to the personal issues of every woman learner.**

Every participant observed in the workshop that women begin to open up by talking about their personal problems - an event, a crisis, a child's sickness, etc.



Providing space, time and a relaxed, supportive atmosphere for the women learners becomes very essential during any training programme. Listening to them, reassuring, accepting, acknowledging them, helps them to relax and loosen up. During the sharing process, women realize that they are not alone in their sufferings, others too have similar experiences. At times trainers have also shared some of their personal problems as women with the group members. This helps bring the group closer to each other, learn from each other, and provides a sense of collectivity. Women gradually learn to emotionally distance themselves from their own problems and become involved in the larger groups' problems and issues. Use of songs, dance, drama helps them to loosen up and make them feel relaxed.

Also, at the outset itself, many women learners are unsure and anxious about their own ability to learn - this is based on their own low self-esteem and the messages that the world has been constantly thrusting onto them - stupid, dumb, ignorant, powerless, etc. **"What can I learn now? I am stupid and ignorant; I have never been to school"**.

It becomes important to build into the training

an atmosphere that values women, values their labour which to the larger world is invisible, respects them, allows them to discover their potentials without fear of being rejected or ridiculed or evaluated. This exploration leads to women building up alternative images of themselves and slowly developing a sense of confidence. This can be done through songs, dance and drama. The JAGORI case study amply illustrates how they have helped women explore their 'real' selves through discussions, role plays, docu-drama etc. The PRAYAS case study too has highlighted how the existing images of women were juxtaposed with the real images of women and how the group validated their own understanding of women's images in society and rejected the existing stereotyped ones.

This process of exploring and reflecting upon the self helps in a personal search of identity, helps women move towards developing self-directed and self-supportive learning systems.

Training programmes can provide opportunities for women learners to move from feelings of worthlessness to self-defined feelings of worth.

However, it must be emphasized here that a



sharing process demands a lot from the trainers and resource persons. If they were to look at the sharing process as a waste of time, or 'it's the women's problems alone', it will definitely impinge upon women's learning and involvement in the process. It demands from the trainer a greater investment in the lives of the women learners - at times they may have to pay home visits or find some alternative support systems, whatever the case may be.

Besides, such a process has implications on specified content coverage for the day. There may be times when the planned session may have to be left aside and dealt with on another day.

Moreover, the sharing process should not outlive the objectives of learning and end up with no learning having taken place ultimately in the group.

Such a process illustrates the personal dimension of learning of women starting from the self, and validating the self for women learners. It was also discussed that this sharing process is quite different for a group of male learners, since men do not feel free or comfortable to talk about their personal problems in a group

at the outset of any training programme.

2. It was observed by some participants that poor women also tend to exhibit a **diffused focus** of learning in semi-structured environments. During sessions, it was observed that women tend to be cyclical in their thinking and go around ('gol-gol') the issue being discussed by punctuating it with personal concerns, experiences, stories, anecdotes and other seemingly unrelated issues. One of the participants from SPARC recalled how a woman learner had retorted during a learning programme:

"How can I think straight when my life is not straight. Even as I sit here in a training, at the back of my mind I worry about my husband, the children, whether the food is being cooked, the water collected, and so on - my life is one big circle and that's how I think - 'gol-gol'".

In other words, what it reflects is that these are but simulations of the multi-dimensional and complex reality of women, and they have difficulties in maintaining a linear boundary for discussions. As trainers we need to recognize this aspect of women's learning. We need to emotionally relate to women, and be able to



manage the spread-out agenda by extricating and systematizing women's experiences in the process helping them articulate and conceptualize beyond their emotional reactions and bringing them back again to the learning focus. It was also mentioned that women tend to communicate indirectly at times, they mumble; they whisper to their neighbours - since they are used to talking indirectly with their husbands and in-laws etc. As trainers we need to cue in to their communications process and bring it into the focus of the discussions. Experience of the participants said that women learners appreciated being brought 'back to track', when a diversion takes place in their learning process.

It was emphatically mentioned that the above does not imply that poor women cannot think straight. Within their multi-dimensional approach to life, there exists a very clear and concrete system of thinking and action. And it is to **this thinking** as trainers that we should tune ourselves to.

However, it was also felt that after women do get exposed to a series of training situations the diffused focus may diminish, but it will always be there.

3. It is also appropriate to highlight at this stage the **affective dimension of women's learning**. Women's emotional needs are strong, they are very caring, nurturing and are able to get into an experience and out of it rather quickly. Participants at the workshop used phrases like, "women operate better at the feelings level"; 'gut-level' learning; intuitive learning et al. to describe this aspect. On the other hand, men cannot cope with emotional content as openly or legitimately as women.
4. Another important facet of women's learning **process is that women like to perceive every issue in a holistic, concrete framework - 'a micro-macro context'**. They prefer to talk about concrete issues that are related to their daily lives: children's health; survival economy etc. They ask questions, they try to see and forge links. How is health related to poverty? How is alcoholism responsible for growing misery? Why do men want to control us?

Every case study vibrantly highlights this aspect.

The discussions on health in the 'Training Field-Level Women Activists by PRAYAS, looked at the exploitative structure of the government health services and linked it to the kind of



struggle that women have to wage for staying healthy and developing an alternative health system. They then looked at the socialization processes of young girls and how they became victims of adverse social attitudes.

Likewise with other trainings, ultimately the discussion boils down to the genesis and nature of oppression of women and helps them discover and analyse the reality of this oppression.

Women play a critical role in every sphere of social and economic life, as members of society, as workers, as mothers, as daughters, as educators, and it is this process that has enabled

their consciousness to move beyond the self to the larger collective in order to make the connections that would effect a universal social change. Thus their perspective encompasses the holistic nature of their lives.

5. As all adults, women also possess a vast untapped body of experiential knowledge. Historically, women's popular knowledge has been given very little or no recognition in the larger society. Over centuries, the popular knowledge of the oppressed groups has been denied and unrecognised by the producers and disseminators of the dominant knowledge system. Dominant knowledge has been institutionalised by the control over means and forms of production of knowledge, as in the academic institutes of higher learning, and has been considered the domain of the elite. Thus over a period of time, the poor and the oppressed have lost a sense of value and faith in their own knowledge systems and life experiences, and have succumbed to the dominant control which tells them that they know nothing.

Thus the popular education movement and Participatory Research seeks to help the poor



and the oppressed groups to articulate knowledge from their own perspective and experience and use what is relevant to their daily lives and living.

However, oral forms of knowledge which are generally vested with the male members of the family get disseminated at their social and legitimate forums (meetings, chatting-sessions, socialization of young boys, etc.).

In this process, women's oral knowledge and perspective has been even more denied and peripheralised. It is this articulation of women's reality and experiences within their social contexts and demystification of women's perspectives of themselves and society, that needs to get its due place and recognition in the larger body of traditional, popular and experiential knowledge of the poor and oppressed groups.

Training programmes can effectively tap and generate women's traditional knowledge and help them articulate reality from their perspective analysis. Several illustrations abound in the case studies. The CHETNA Health Team found that a discussion on measles could best be initiated when women's traditional knowledge was incorporated into it.

In the Housing Training of SPARC, women used traditional forms of measurements by using their sarees and *mangalsutras* to arrive at length and breadth of a room for building their houses.

In the JAGORI case study too, women recalled old folk lores and tales related to women and then analysed them.

6. Not being used to structured learning situations, women learners find it difficult to sit in sessions for long stretches of time. They begin to feel restless, get bored and lose interest in the topic of discussion. Women have had no opportunity in participating in structured reflection - action programmes, and since their mind is initially always involved with their families and their work, it will take them time to enter into focussed and systematic reflection processes. "Men during training programmes take *beedi* breaks - what about the women", asked one participant. "They take chat-breaks, talk to one another laugh etc.", said another. It must be recognised that these breaks are valid, considering that women never get breaks, and they can use it to discuss, share, have some fun and get back into the subject and foci of learning. Gradually as they become convinced about their



learning and intensely involved about issues related to their lives, the pace of learning is not a problem at all. Basically women are serious learners, attentive and good listeners and build up their concentration well. By role definition they have always been good receivers of information

7. It was discovered that women very much value their learning opportunities. They get very few such opportunities in their own lives and hence they invest highly into their learning, make it purposive and use it to bring about changes in their own lives.

They get into an inclusive mode of learning by involving themselves completely and they also explore possibilities of collaborative learning with other women. It was also discussed that

women do not feel competitive towards their co-learners nor the need to outdo each other, this thus facilitates collective learning. Women value these changes once they realize the power of it. For example, a common phrase used by Bihari women in Bombay is "*Dimag khul gaya hay*" (our minds have opened up).



Learning avenues for women inevitably results in some sort of change in them as women. As discussed earlier, a sense of confidence and self-worth builds up in them. They also now acquire a new status in their community (as village health worker, trainer, etc.) and gradually become recognized as leaders of the community.

Obviously, the changes that take place in women's lives do not go unnoticed in the



community. The community at times does react negatively and with hostility. Women have to learn to deal with these reactions. For example, the SEWA health workers were labelled as 'bold' women. We felt that negative remarks are an indication of the changing perception of the community about the women. It is therefore important that women analyse and understand these remarks and develop new equations in the community.

The information they have acquired puts them in a powerful position and support needs to be provided to them to mobilize community support and initiate new actions.

8. The participants at the workshop tried to establish a model of learning for women. This indeed was a difficult task. It was clear that women do not follow a linear mode of thinking and learning. Then what is the model - **cyclical**? Ultimately, certain principles of the learning model were identified

- Starting from self and personal issues and moving towards family and the society and other issues (micro to macro model).
- Concrete experiences are used to derive abstract principles.

- From simple to complex, dealing with simplistic concepts and moving onto more complex ones.
- Starting from known, familiar issues and then going on to unknown, newer forms of knowledge.
- Learning should be related to their daily lives and be useful to their daily lives and existence.
- Learning should be a fun process. It should allow women to paint their dreams, fantasize, stimulate and be creative. Such a process unleashes the latent creative potential in women.
- Learning process should build into it constant inputs, information, feedback, reflection, action. This help women monitor their learning and plan for the future.
- Learning by doing is considered very vital. Women create new forms, give expression to their ideas as well as practice their skills in the process.
- Women also disseminate their knowledge to a larger group and influence the learning of other women.



B. Pre-Training Elements

In all the case studies and in the discussions during the workshop, what emerged was that participatory training programmes entail a considerable amount of pre-training preparation. This is true for both the residential and non-residential training programmes. This preparation takes various forms and often involves a number of people. It was felt that in the case of women's training the woman herself, her family members particularly the male members (husbands, fathers etc.) and the community all need to be involved in the pre-training process. Pre-training preparation helps establish the learning framework and sets up the learning environment.

1. The Woman Learner

As mentioned earlier, pre-preparation of participants is essential because women often feel that they cannot learn or are afraid of the learning process. Much encouragement, support and inspiration is needed and this may be undertaken individually or even in small groups. Exposure to other women or groups from the participants' village or slum, who have experienced and enjoyed the process earlier, is very strengthening. By meeting women like themselves, who once shared the same anxieties about learning, prospective participants feel both inspired and more at ease. The CHETNA and

SEWA Health Team for example, involved older and more experienced health workers in the preparation of the new workers before training and also as trainers later. In the case of Astha, discussions were held with the women in a group prior to the training and certain inputs also given. This helped women get a flavour of what a training programme would be like, creating a defined focus of learning, besides helping them enter into a learning context and building a learning environment.

2. The Family

The entire family - husband, children, in-laws, parents and others - are often involved in pre-training preparation. This includes building support with key members in the family by discussing the training, conducting several meetings and even inviting some of them to attend





the training sessions. By involving families in this way, cordiality is established and doubts, suspicions and fears can be allayed to quite an extent. In the workshop, several women involved in training shared their experience of working with the participants' families before and after the training and felt that this contributed greatly to women feeling at ease and more able to participate fully in training programmes.

3. The Community

Involving the community, whether in a village, slum or pavement settlement is an important element of pre-training preparation. In both case studies and discussions at the workshop, it was felt that communicating and sharing the contents and sometimes even the process of training programmes is essential. Several groups like SPARC spent considerable time on area meetings involving various members of the community. Diffusing rumors and gossip which would affect the women learners deeply, and undermine their confidence and inhibit their learning during training is also an important part of the process of dialogue with the community.

In addition, what emerges is that trainers have to be sensitive to the community dynamics which have evolved over a long period of time. Apart from curiosity, suspicion, doubts and even scorn, about involving women in training, the community may have a negative view

of certain individuals or groups of prospective participants. Sometimes it is important not to ignore community resistance as this may have some real basis. The resistance should be dealt with.

Finally just the fact of involving women in training leads to a change in their status vis-a-vis the community. Women then have to deal with tension and open hostility at times. There is often a feeling of jealousy because the participants are viewed as having been singled out for a special privilege - the training. Preparation of the community, sharing of information and dialogue with the community, are ways of dispelling some of these tensions. Also when women are to go for residential training programmes, it becomes important to gain the trust of the family and the community that the women will be safely looked after; familiarity of the organizers and trainers to the community and family also becomes very essential.

4. Male Members

Within the family and the community at large, men particularly view training programmes for women with suspicion and distrust. This was an experience shared by several groups who participated in the workshop. Men often feel they should be in the fore-front and in fact that they should be involved in the training because they are smarter, have more education and



exposure and can take decision related to the community. If men are invited to join or observe the training they often dominate and inhibit the women, and yet, understanding the reasons for their aggressive behavior and diffusing any tensions that may arise is very important. Meetings of men, particularly husbands, becomes a very important element of the pre-training preparation. Men need the emotional support to cope with women's learning and empowerment. SPARC pre-training preparation, for example, involved talking to men in the community assuring them that the training was for the general good of the larger community. The trainers, in the case of MYRADA, paid home-visits and tried to spend time with family members and deal with negative attitudes of the husbands. Gradually, even women learners took responsibility for different clusters for inviting and informing men about the nature of their training and work. Thus, their cooperation was sought. Sometimes



involving men can become a source of much-needed support. For example, in the SEWA experience, an all-male mandal offered one of their rooms for the health training. However, the emphasis that **it is a women's training** should be made very clear.

C. Training Methodology

1. Training Design

The group looked at some of the unique features of a training design for women learners. The design of a participatory training programme is based on the needs of the learners and helps systematize the learning processes of learners.

The design of a training programme for women should respond to the personal and emotional needs of women. As we discussed in the learning processes, opportunities should be made in every training programme (no matter what the content of the training) to help women talk about their anxieties, open up, share and develop confidence and a sense of self-worth in herself and in the collective. The design should deal with women's blocks about learning and explode some of the myths about women (women can't conceptualize, they can't plan, etc.)

The design of the training programme should also provide space for women to articulate their learning needs

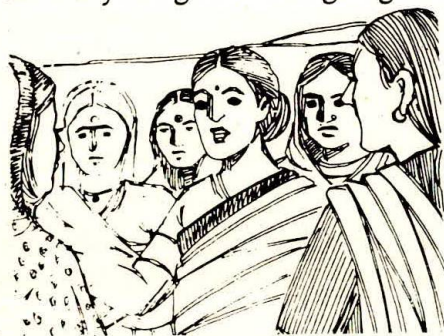


gradually. It should reflect women's concerns and the community's concerns which are central to their lives and which bind them to the learning process (children, shelter, economic activities, health etc.).

It was also discussed that every design should necessarily have a module on women and health, since this is one of most neglected part of women's lives.

The design needs to be dynamic and flexible - it should address itself to any immediate crisis or concern that may emerge in the women's lives in the community. This would mean at times not keeping its schedule or at other times not having the training at all !

It was also mentioned that training should be designed in phases, and should not be a one-shot process. Once women get involved, they look for ways to pursue their learning and hence the design should be based on this consideration. Needless to say, women should be involved in every stage of designing the training.



The design should help women reflect, analyse, give and receive feedback and share with each other, and plan for future actions. Methods used should provide the tools for critical reflection and analysis.

Training programmes need not be very structured events. Based on women's time and involvement in the programme, there should certainly be possibilities for unstructured events. In fact, SPARC's experience of one year of training with women was in an unstructured frame. This, however, does not imply that strategy and planning is short cut in the process.

It was also discussed by all, and is clearly highlighted in every training programme, that learning by doing proved to be a very valuable experience and process for women. It helped women to apply their traditional knowledge and skills and learn new ones in the process. It also proved that women can do things with their hands (breaking the widespread prevalent beliefs that only men are skilled) and enhance their self-esteem. ASTHA held meetings to involve women in designing their own training programmes and planning for them.

Every training design should also build into it monitoring and evaluation systems. This helps women take stock of their learning as a group, review their learning needs and plan for the future. It also helps keep the learning focus central to the process. The training



design is also reflective of the strategy of training that is adopted by each group/organisation and the contents of the training programme emerge out of this planned strategy.

2. The Time Frame

This again has to take into account women's reality: Should the training be residential or not, for how long should a training be held? There were diverse experiences among the various trainers. It was strongly felt that residential training have their own advantages of involvement, continuous time to develop relationships, to help women get in touch with their feelings and shed their anxieties about themselves and their families. However, it was not always feasible to have such trainings, especially in urban areas where there is a tremendous crunch for space, and women are simply not able to get away. Most trainings were preferably conducted over a period of 2-3 days, at a stretch. MYRADA's training programmes were short-duration ones. However, some groups such as JAGORI held an eight day training programme at a stretch. The SPARC and SEWA trainings were held in short phases over a period of one year.

It was agreed by everyone that it was most effective to conduct the trainings in a phase-wise fashion and in harmony with women's own lives.

However, residential nature of training is dependent on the support-system that can be developed for the women for care of their children, etc.

3. Content Of Training

Starting with women's own knowledge and experience and building on that knowledge was the common experience of all trainers in determining content for the women learners. It was also shared that every content area dealt with (whether it be measles, chicken pox, water and fuel problems, educational programmes, legal rights, credit societies, etc.) should necessarily be evocative of women's reality and oppression. It should be linked to their disempowerment and collective action. Critical reflection, thinking, analysis and systematization of the group's thinking should always follow in a session. Women should be provoked to think and analyse beyond the mundane, stereotype frameworks and come up with alternatives that make meaning to them. Ample illustrations are provided in all the case-studies where the world-view of the issue, and its implications at large have been discussed.

Several myths were also broken in the process of dealing with complex content matter. A case in point is that of the SEWA-CHETNA Training. The trainers had anticipated that the session on anatomy would be complex and difficult. They tried to simplify it, illustrate it and



discuss it with the women. But to their amazement, these women were very familiar with anatomical dimensions (due to their cultural practices of eating meat and buying the torsos). The women were also interested in learning the technical jargons of the diseases and medicines. To them these 'big words' were not to be used by the professionals alone. They too can learn it and it would give them status and recognition in the community.

4. Use Of Different Training Methods

Considerable time was spent discussing the various methods that can be used, which take into account women's style of learning and build their knowledge, create awareness and sharpen skills.

However, it was emphasized that the challenge in the use of methods lay in them being able to address women's reality - much has already been written about this. The following are some of the considerations for choice of methods.

- * It should be able to help women articulate and cope with their multiple anxieties and tensions;
- * It should help women relate their experiences and perspectives and use it as a basis for further learning;

- * It should provoke women to think, feel, act and get in touch with themselves;
- * It should build women's confidence as individuals and as a collective;
- * It should help create an atmosphere of openness, security, comfort and acceptance and promote critical reflection;
- * It should provide women an opportunity to dream and fantasize and let go their imaginations. This provides the much needed stimulation for creativity and empowers women in the process;
- * It should allow opportunities to use women's traditional knowledge and concepts and forms of expression;
- * It should challenge women's thinking from the stereotype and help them move ahead.
- * It should use humour and create an environment of fun.

It was also discussed that some of the existing standard exercises and simulations that were designed and were being used, in training were ineffective for women. An example of 'Star Power' - a simulation which highlights the inequalities and power structures in society - was given. This simulation has certain rules set up



for competition and bargaining which does not take into consideration women's thinking and psyche. The rules of this game emphasize authority and highlight power and exploitation of the strong over the weak. However, women function as a collective, non-exploitative and emotional. The scripts therefore do not take into account these nuances of women's life.

Some of the methods that have been used are as follows:

- a. For opening up, relaxing women and enabling them to enter the self and feel good about themselves, songs and exercises were used. For introducing themselves, some groups used processes that help women define who they are and what do they do in pairs. Starting out with dyadic introductions reduces the anxiety that a woman would face if she had to introduce herself in the larger group. One group set women thinking about themselves, their happiness, their children, etc. In talking about themselves, at times catharsis takes place which lightens the burden off women. Women then begin to break off some of their socio-cultural barriers and explore into issues that have meaning for them.
- b. To help women express themselves and to help

the group collectively analyse a situation. e.g. dowry, wife-beating etc., role-plays, skits, dramas, docu-dramas have been effectively used. Through participating in role plays women act out their true feelings and are able to become aware of some of the critical dynamics behind the situation. The JAGORI group has used the 'Phad' — which is a traditional docu-drama form — of story-telling that is followed by discussions. Story-telling has been another form used by the groups. Either creating traditional stories or using it as in a form of case study. This brings to the fore several issues for discussion.

- c. Group discussions were very often used in combination with other methods or techniques like a role-play or a puppet-play etc. Small group discussions provides all women an opportunity to share their thinking and also helps develop their self-confidence and acceptance by other members in the group.
- d. Ice-breakers and energizers in several forms were used, at the start of the training, or in the middle, or towards the end. For example songs, small exercises, games etc. These helps 'break the ice' and activate the learners, lighten the atmosphere, provide a sense of fun and joy, give a break to the intensity of the learning



process and help bring back the attention of the women to the learning focus.

- e. Several aids like puppets, posters, charts, demonstrations, video etc. that portrayed women's lives and depicted their concerns were also used in many of the trainings. Hence it becomes easier for women to relate to them and use them as a basis for further discussion and analysis. The Chetna -SEWA training made posters portraying the current problems the community was facing - measles - and from there on further discussions took place and inputs were given. Video feedback has also been effectively used by SEWA and SPARC. Women reviewed their group functioning and were subjects of their own learning.
- f. As part of skill building and consequently enhancing women's self-esteem, several groups have used creative techniques by which illiterate women can express their ideas - drawings, line drawings (ASTHA), making posters (JAGORI) designing model houses (SPARC) etc. Women also enjoy doing things with their hands.
- g. Lectures have been extensively used to provide relevant information and present concepts to women. However, discussions and analysis

always followed every presentation. Principles of simplification of content, relating content to their lives, analyzing content from women's perspectives, repetition of main points need to be kept in mind while giving a lecture.

D. Support Systems For Women Learners During Training

Given their difficult lives, their responsibilities and the numerous obstacles that they have to face before, during and after training, organizing for support systems during training is very important for women. There are certain concerns - who will accompany the women to the training, what about childcare, physical arrangements, loss of wage labour, and community support that were identified as being issues that have to be dealt with in a sensitive, caring and non-threatening way. With some of these concerns suitably taken care of, women feel more relaxed and able to participate fully in training.

1. Men Accompanying Women

Groups participating in the workshop reported that very often women cannot come unaccompanied to a training programme. There are various reasons for this, a major one being that their families are reluctant to let them travel alone. This is especially true in rural areas where distances are great and transport facilities



are poor. Generally men accompany the women to the training, as in the case of ASTHA where men brought women 90 kms. by bus. The men then stayed on at the training site but were not included in the training. This was also a strategic use of involving men to cooperate in women's training and look after the children. Some men also escorted the women in the Central Social Welfare Board training conducted by Prayas in Rajasthan. It was collectively decided by the women that they may sit in on the training, except for sessions focusing on sensitive issues. Here too, learning being the focus, men also discussed inequalities faced by women, shared it with the women's group and realized how theoretical they were. Thus both groups learnt in the process. In both these cases, the trainers responded to the reality of women's lives, realizing that the women would be unable to come without male escorts. Thus space was made for the men in the women's training programmes and strategically they were sensitized and involved in the process.

2. Child Care

Very few poor women have infrastructural or back-up support for childcare. It is, therefore, essential to take this fact into account and plan ways to support women in caring for their children as a part of the training. In some training programmes, women bring their



children with them and feel comfortable about their being with them. However, some groups at the workshop said that in their experience children often made the learning process difficult, because of the time and attention participants had to give to them and the children themselves having a distracting effect. Thus organizing alternative childcare for children becomes important.

There were some examples of women bringing older siblings to look after the younger ones, and the trainers providing toys. Setting up creches or play centers were other alternatives that groups had explored. Finally, there were a few experiences of husbands looking after children at home so that their wives could participate in the training. This gave women a new sense of freedom. However, others reported that as poor men often work outside the home where childcare facilities do not exist, it was not possible to explore this option often. However,



if the training programmes are held in the community itself or nearby, other women in the community were mobilized to take care of the children. However, trainers should feel comfortable if women bring their children and not become irritated or angry with them. Rejecting children would tantamount to rejecting the women learners.

3. Physical Arrangements

In many training programmes for women, board and lodging is provided, thus freeing women from one of their everyday chores - cooking. However, in the training one group -ASTHA - set up work committees to look after the cooking and water collection, and these tasks were rotated. Sometimes women even brought food to the training which was shared by everyone. All of this created an atmosphere of sharing and strong bonds were developed among the women and the trainers which also helped in the training process.

4. Training Stipends

With regard to providing some kind of training stipend or compensation for daily wages loss, there were two different approaches based on differing situations and perspectives. One approach was to provide some training stipend, usually a meagre compensation for daily wages lost because of the time taken by the training.

The experience of some groups revealed that poor women were able to participate more fully knowing that there would not be any loss of wages. Also, some women asked for wage compensation as a part of the training programme. In addition, the groups who took this approach felt that since middle class resource persons are paid, why should not poor women also receive some remuneration, and why should they be expected to sacrifice their meagre earnings ?

Other participants were not in favour of any kind of remuneration or stipend for women learners. They took the approach that in creating an alternative society, efforts have to be made, and as women's training was to contribute to this, any kind of wage compensation was not desirable. Further, there were examples of training programmes where providing stipends to participants destroyed the delicate dynamics within a community. Tension arose as to why some women alone were selected for the programme, and many women started attending the programmes for the stipend alone. They would come on the first day and not come on subsequent days. In addition, it was felt that there were ways to prevent loss of wages, ideas for which often came from the women themselves. These included alternative work arrangements and adjusting training schedules to the work timings of women. For example, training for agricultural labourers in the lean season rather than during sowing



or harvesting time.

There was no consensus on this complex issue. It was generally agreed upon that the decision to provide training stipends or wage compensation depended on various factors including the area involved, the kind of training, the time period of the training, the needs of the participants and the perspectives and perceptions of the trainers and the groups involved.

5. Community Support

In the section on pre-training preparation, we discussed the importance of involving the community. During the training also such involvement and support of the community is very important. If community members are supportive, women's learning during training is greatly enhanced. This may take various forms including help with household chores like fetching water or collecting fodder and even child care.

On the other hand, as in the pre-training phase, if women are ridiculed or face hostility, jealousy and tension, the learning process is seriously inhibited or may even have to stop. Thus at the workshop, several groups felt that continuous dialogue and sharing with community members as ways of developing support during learning were very important aspects of the training process.

E. Trainer Roles

In the workshop, considerable time was spent on understanding and discussing the multifarious roles of the trainer who is involved in women's training - their own learning needs, trainer preparation, special skills needed for trainers in women's training and their relationship with learners. We also looked at roles and responsibilities of a resource person involved in some sessions in training.

It was emphasized that trainers should value and care for the learners and have an understanding of their reality. They should be sensitive to women's needs and issues and be able to value women's rich and varied life experiences. As women learners have few opportunities to share their views and concerns, the trainer should be able to listen and empathize with them, even if at times the issues may not appear to be directly related to the training. This flexibility and adapting to the learners' needs and concerns was felt to be very important.

Related to this is the ability to share emotions with women. It was felt that women relate to feelings and are comfortable with sharing these. The trainer, therefore, should be able to empathize and get close to women and share feelings whether of joy or anxiety. In fact, trainers from several groups said that sharing



their own problems with the participants helped in establishing a rapport and building close relationship with others. Further, all of this sharing helps to build up a warm, nurturing and non-threatening environment which women respond to, thus enhancing the learning process for all involved.

Next, trainers should be able to communicate a sense of fun, of excitement and mutual discovery in training. Women feel comfortable with various modes of communication - songs, dance, plays - and the group felt that trainers must respond to this. The spirit of enjoyment was viewed as important and trainers should be able to communicate this to the learners as well as set up the environment for women to enjoy their learning.

Further, it was felt that in their roles as facilitators of the learning process, trainers should be sensitive to



how they interpret, analyse and reflect upon issues with women. Trainers play a significant role in systematizing the learning of women. Rather than imposing their own interpretations or world view of issues on learners, the trainers should stimulate a process of critical reflection and analysis among the women learners. 'Dumping' one's own ideas and analysis, it was felt, was to be avoided by the trainer.

However, some sort of a framework for critical reflection which would be open and flexible is often helpful for learners. Both the trainer and learners should be able to interpret and analyse with the hope of developing an alternative vision of society which would necessarily be different from the existing one which is male-centered. The trainer's role would be to stimulate, provoke, make the analytical connections and even trigger off creative analysis, leading to constructive and innovative alternatives. They should help each woman to articulate her aspirations and link it to the group issue. This keeps the foci of learning and the involvement of the women. Several groups shared their experiences of initiating this process, describing it as exciting and very powerful.

Finally, it was felt that trainers should be open to their own learning and personal growth. There were numerous examples of trainers feeling anxious and concerned about the training : how to put forth a particular concept, deal with a particular group? In addition,



many trainers felt that they questioned their own abilities and skills. For example, the ability to deal with emotions and the complexities of women's realities which are inevitably brought to the training situation.

In addition, many trainers felt that their own ideas and concepts for training women are still evolving and changing. Thus trainers have to grapple with numerous conflicts and dilemmas. However, all the groups at the workshop felt that they had learnt a tremendous amount from training. Many said that they themselves had been strengthened, supported and inspired by the process of learning and sharing in women's training. It was a powerful experience and a unique learning opportunity for the trainer.

1. Developing Special Skills

Given the complexities of women's training and the various roles ascribed to trainers, it was felt that special attention needs to be paid to developing various skills and to the growth of the trainer in general.

First, the trainer's own understanding and sensitivity to women's reality needs to be finely developed. Trainers have to develop the ability to question and break existing myths about women in our society. They also have to be sensitive to group dynamics and learn to draw out women who may never have expressed their views before.

Being in touch with one's own feelings, including anxieties, is also an important skill to develop as has been discussed earlier. Developing one's emotional and even physical stamina was seen as important since learning process can demand a lot of energy. Women's training programmes are exciting but exhausting. Reviewing one's role constantly, checking one's bias, reality testing skills were also considered essential for the trainer.

Developing one's ability to be flexible and creative was also identified by the various groups at the workshop as being very important. Trainers should also be able to promote mutual support among the learners. In sum, it was emphasized that the trainer should be open to involving herself/himself in a continuous process of self-development and discovery, and at different stages in the life of women's group formation and learning, there are different levels of involvement of the trainer.

2. Male Trainers In Women's Training

The issue of male trainers was discussed at length in the workshop. In some groups, male trainers without any female colleagues conducted women's training. In others, mixed teams were involved. The fundamental question that was asked was why have male trainers at all in women's training? The reason given were both practical and conceptual.

Groups like ASTHA and PRAYAS explained that in



Rajasthan it was very difficult to find women trainers. The reality is that at present, there are many more male trainers, and if a number of women's trainings are to be conducted, it becomes imperative to involve male trainers.

Others felt that if we believe in involving all people in the process of social change, of which training is a part, then male trainers do have a role. As long as the trainings were **women-centered**, the involvement of male trainers did not pose a huge problem. Some groups like the SEWA-CHETNA team did not include male trainers, both for historical and ideological reasons. These groups work exclusively with women and felt that an all-women group in a training situation has its own set of very powerful dynamics.

All the groups felt that if male trainers are involved, then some orientation and sensitization to women's realities and feelings is essential. Male trainers should be careful not to bring the existing pattern of male domination in our society to the training situation. They must be prepared to listen and watch and not project their own thinking on the women participants. They also should be prepared to leave training sessions on certain issues (for example child birth), so that women can share and learn with no inhibitions.

Also, male trainers need to recognize that women's

learning processes and styles are unique and different from those of men. They should be sensitive to the cues and nuances of women's feelings and expressions.

A significant point that emerged was that though some male trainers had developed skills to be effective in work with women and were sensitive to participants and their needs, however, they had not resolved issues of unequal structures and power relations within their own families. This contradiction often surfaces in subtle ways, perhaps a stray comment or attitude, and needs to be addressed further. The MYRADA case study felt that male trainers had not resolved the gender issues in their own lives and it became important to address it.

3. Resource Persons

In many training programmes, resource persons are invited to the training for a short duration of time, in order to give specific inputs. There was a divided opinion about whether this was a positive step or not. In cases where resource persons are oriented to the nature of the work and training, and have a general knowledge about the women and their concerns, they were found to be very effective. The trainers have a very important role to play in facilitating the discussions, helping build links between the specific input and women's reality, and enabling a process of critical reflection-analysis, when resource persons are taking sessions. Thus resource persons



may be of distinct advantage to the training.

However, some groups did feel very strongly that the use of resource persons is almost akin to an intrusion, since they are oblivious to the group dynamics and processes. Hence, a lot of intense emotions may surface among the women, and since the resource person tends to depart after a session, these residual feelings are not dealt with. It is unethical as well as stressful for the women to be left off like that. Thus it was strongly emphasized that resource persons should be invited only if absolutely essential, they should be oriented to the training framework, and the trainer should continue playing the facilitator role.

F. Follow Up

Follow up of training was considered to be a crucial investment and one that needed to be systematically planned. It was unanimously agreed that enough time ought to be spent on the follow up plans during the training itself. Opportunities for women to make these plans themselves and work out their ideas systematically is itself a learning process for the women, and it helps them take stock of events. It is a chance for women to apply what they have learned. This kind of planning is a movement from the 'abstract' to the 'concrete'; besides this has a spin-off effect in that the family and the community see a practical outcome.

However, it was cautioned that follow up should be done slowly; women should not be pushed or rushed. Any change must be brought about gradually, or else it would alienate and threaten the women's existence in their family and community.

Trainers must provide all the needed support for women to plan out their future agendas. In the case presentations, follow up has been planned in different ways. Several case studies (RISE, MYRADA) have worked out action programmes in depth, to follow up plans made during the training. Field visit to other places; meetings once a week. In some cases, follow up was also done by meeting the family members regularly.

Follow up plans with women help build up an alternative vision of things to come and provides the much needed strength and power as well as a high collective morale.





TOWARDS AN ALTERNATIVE VISION





when the going becomes difficult, a small spark of hope is reviewed through small successes.

This effort, we feel, has major implications in training, especially of heterogeneous groups. In areas where it is almost impossible to work with women-only groups, it is imperative that males be sensitized. What does this mean ? What are the general principles related to women's training ? How are these derived ? We have attempted to outline some of these in this compendium. However, it will need a lot more experience and time before these may be clearly distilled.

One of our efforts has been to define a clear model of training for women. This has been a very ambitious task. Certain characteristics of a model have been identified. It is complex, since women's lives are complex ! Perhaps there is no single model of training. Every group present had unanimously accepted a participatory model of training. An effort was made to explode the existing myths and evolve strategies for training based on an egalitarian world-view. However, this is one of the areas for future thought and work.

For women trainers, especially, this can be an extremely difficult proposition. On the one hand we are working with poor women challenging existing norms which are oppressive, on the other hand we are grappling with our own reality - the anxieties, the anger and pain which are caused by an oppressive environment.

One of the most significant aspects of this collective pooling of information is that it is an initial step in evolving concepts based on first hand grassroots experience. For many groups, especially those working in the more remote areas, it was reassuring to share their thoughts and to find others traversing similar paths ! Yes indeed, women's training is breaking through new frontiers, it is exciting, dynamic and challenging. Yet it is one long struggle, since it means a re-questioning of socialization processes and structures which have emerged out of existing power relations. Yet, we know that this is a struggle which cannot be given up. Often,

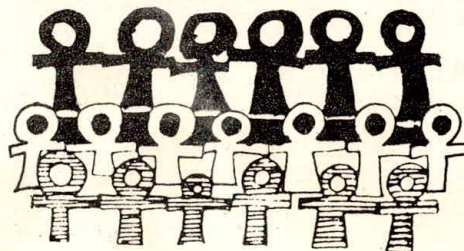


the burdens at home, the contradictions in our lives, and the sense of vulnerability faced especially by those activists who are based in far-off areas. There may also be a lack of sensitivity on the part of male trainers, and some of us may not be in areas where other women are supportive. Yet it is a belief, and a commitment to social change which enables us to continue working. Thus, such forms of sharing have major implications in strengthening networks of women trainers.

However energizing and rejuvenating a training process may be, it must not be forgotten that it is only one small input towards a broader process of social change. The women who have been through a training process may have changed, but the structures in the real world remain the same; often once an awareness is created, it may become all the more difficult to deal with the

same oppressions. Women trainees have had the experience when they leave a training programme with a burning desire to implement all that they have learned; to their disappointment their community may not respond. In some instances, they may even be confronted with a negative reaction, thus making them wonder and question their own position.

Hence we feel strongly that support systems need to be developed and sustained. Not only among the poor, but also among those working with the poor. These serve a multiple purpose : to share strategies and approaches with one another; to conceptualize from a collective pool of information; to share in one another's achievements; to help alleviate the pain; and most of all to strengthen each other's work and carve out new directions for the future.





WORKSHOP LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Ginny Shrivastava
ASTHA
109, Kharol Colony
Old Fatehpura
Udaipur-313 001
Rajasthan.

Preeti Oza
PRAYAS
Deogarh (Devlia)
Via Pratapgarh
Dist. Chittorgarh-312 621
Rajasthan

Shashi Tyagi
SUCHETA KRIPLANI
SHIKSHA NIKETAN
P.O. Manklav
Via. Mathania
Dist. Jodhpur
Rajasthan.

Pallavi Naik
CHETNA
2nd Floor, Drive-in-Cinema Building
Thaltej Road
Ahmedabad-380 054
Gujarat

Mirai Chatterjee
SEWA
Sewa Reception Centre
Opp. Victoria Garden
Ahmedabad-380 001
Gujarat.

D. Susheela
RISE
Nayakanari Road
Via-Kota
Dist. Chittoor-517 424
Andhra Pradesh.

Jyotsna Roy
DEEPAYATAN
State Resource Centre for Adult Education
Buddha Colony
Patna-800 001.
Bihar

Jacintha S.K.
SAKTI
1357, 9th Cross
First Phase J.P. Nagar
Bangalore-560 078
Karnataka.

Mona Daswani
Prema Gopalan
SPARC
P.O. BOX 9389
Bombay-400 026.

Kiran Bhatia
Karen McGuiness
FORD FOUNDATION
55 Lodi Estate
New Delhi-110 003.

Anita Dighe
ADULT AND CONTINUING
EDUCATION UNIT
3rd Floor, Old Library Building
Jawahar Lal Nehru University
New Delhi-110 067.

Meera Chatterjee
CENTRE FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
53 Lodi Estate
New Delhi-110 003.

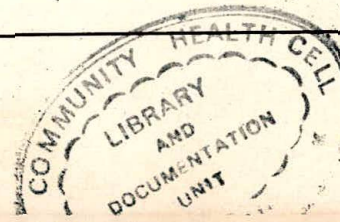
Rajesh Tandon
Suneeta Dhar
Atreyee Cordeiro
Nandini Narula
PRIA

45, Sainik Farm
Khanpur
New Delhi-110 062.

ADDITIONAL CASE STUDY CONTRIBUTORS

Abha Bhaiya
JAGORI
B-5, Housing Coop. Society
N D S E Part-1
New Delhi-110 049.

Ranjani Krishnamurthy
MYRADA
2, Service Road
Domlur Layout
Bangalore-560 071
Karnataka.



ABOUT US

The Society for Participatory Research in Asia, New Delhi, is a non-profit voluntary organisation registered under the Indian Society's Act.

Participatory Research is an educational process which attempts to assist the deprived and the powerless to articulate knowledge from their own point of view. It implies an effort on the part of ordinary people to understand the role of knowledge as a significant instrument of power and control. Participatory Research gives value to individual and collective experience and gives credit to existing popular knowledge of people. The components of Participatory Research are to acquire the ability to appropriate knowledge produced by others, to obtain the confidence and tools to produce their own knowledge, and finally to use this knowledge to work in their common interests through collective action. Thus Participatory Research challenges the monopoly over knowledge and its tools in the hands of the few.

PRIA is a support institution which works and collaborates with field-based activists, individuals, groups and organisations in such a way that it strengthens their capacities in areas of research, training, evaluation and organisation-building, and helps to their understanding of the issues they are working on.

We are involved with groups on issues of Access and Control over National Resources, Women and Development and Occupational Health and Worker Education.

In the area of Participatory Training (PT), which aims at enhancing the competencies and internal training capabilities of grassroots organisation as well as other training and research institutions, both in the non-governmental and governmental sector, we are involved in a Training of Trainers programme, both at the national and regional levels. We are also involved in efforts to promote the understanding and practice of PT philosophy and methodology in women's learning-training efforts, adult education, and in the developmental issues we work.

The text of this compendium has been written and edited by an Editorial Collective which comprised of Mona Daswani of SPARC (Bombay), Mirai Chatterjee of SEWA (Ahmedabad), and Suneeta Dhar and Atreyee Cordeiro of PRIA.



Society For

PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH IN ASIA

45, Sainik Farm, Khanpur, New Delhi-110062

AMAN PRINTERS, NEW DELHI