

Report of animation work at Nalwadi taluka Daund, district Pune

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Mrs. Tara Ubhe, the main animator of VCDA, started visiting Daund taluka of dist. Pune in 2000. Pune district is geographically divided in two parts. The western part is situated on the slopes of the Sanyhadri mountains and the eastern part is on the plain. There are 18 big dams constructed in seven talukas of the district lying on the slopes of Sanyhadri mountains. Mrs. Ubhe comes from Mulshi tal. Pune dist. which is situated on the western part of the district. She started to go to Daund taluka which lies on the plains.

Daund taluka is larger in size comparatively to the talukas lying on the western part of the dist. The sizes of the villages and populations are also larger than the villages in the talukas of the western part of the dist. People from the talukas of plain area of the district consider themselves superior to the people staying in mountain area of the district. Inhabitants from the mountains are always considered as ignorant and stupid by the people from plain, they receive inferior treatment and people from the plains always try to make fun of them. The other factor to be taken into account is that, after the construction of the Panshet and Warasgaon dams, people who were displaced were rehabilitated in Daund taluka where the water of the dams is given to agricultural land. Their rehabilitation is not yet complete after 45 years. Most of the farmers who were rehabilitated in Daund face the resentment of the local population, as the local population must give some of their land to the dam-hit people, since their own land is now irrigated with the dam water.

Mrs. Ubhe, a less educated woman resident of the mountain area, was not taken seriously in the beginning. It was a challenge for her to work in such a difficult situation. With her own intelligence and skills, plus the methodology of animation work, she started slowly to gain the confidence of the local population. In 2000 she started in Kedgon area of the taluka, where she works with the people who were displaced from Panshet and Warasgaon as well as local people. In 2002 she started going to Nalwadi, a hamlet situated on the Sholapur highway. In this hamlet she found people from Osmanabad, dist. Marathwada, a region of Maharashtra some 200 km from Daund taluka. They have started migrating in 1976. Originally, Nalwadi was a hamlet of Kasurdi village. When people from Osmanabad first came, they erected huts near Nalwadi on the government land. The farmers of Kasurdi village immediately understood the advantage of the presence of migrant labour. As they are always available to work on their land, and on the top of it they are in a vulnerable state, so the farmers from Kasurdi encouraged the migrants to erect huts on the govt. land. This is a sort of encroachment on govt. land. In the beginning there were only four huts. With passage of time now there are 48 households who have started occupying the land. Many parts of the Osmanabad district are drought prone areas, so small and marginal farmers and agricultural labourers have to

migrate in search for work. In some cases it is a seasonal migration, but in Nalwadi people started permanently migrating and getting themselves established in Daund tal. As there is a large irrigated belt, getting a work as agricultural labourer is somehow easy.

There are other cultural factors which prompt people to migrate and stay permanently away from their origin. Youth, women generally, do not like to stay in a joint family. Away from the original village they feel more free and can venture new initiatives. In Nalwadi on encroached land people mainly come from Matang and Mahar castes, and Muslims reside. As mentioned earlier, they encroached on the govt. land and built their houses on it. As the land is illegally occupied they have no papers of the land with them and they are under the permanent threat of displacement.

Mrs. Ubhe really started from Bhondave hamlet of Kasurdi village. Mrs. Ubhe first encouraged Mr. Bhujbal belonging to the Mali (gardener caste) to become a local animator. He is a migrant from Purandar taluka, Pune district. His village in the Purandar taluka lies in the drought prone zone, so he migrated to Daund taluka in a place called Yavat which has become a part of irrigated belt with Panshet and Warasgaon dam water. He had taken a plot of land on rent in Yavat and cultivated it for some years. Then he came in contact with a big farmer who had a piece of land in Bhondve Hamlet of Kasurdi village. For the past eight years he has been cultivating the same plot of land. In the beginning he was very much interested in the work of organization. He is a very sensitive person. He has faced many difficulties in his life. He experienced poverty and insult. He showed some initiative in organising his own life. In the organisation he started discussing with other animators, and in the group of animators he started organising agricultural labourers, but local rich farmers put pressure on Mr. Bhujbal to stop the work. As Mr. Bhujbal himself depends on these farmers, he had to leave the work of animation. Taking the decision between personal difficulties and the interest in the organisation's work is very difficult. The problems are very complex. He has been caught up in a situation which provides feelings of frustration and helplessness. He still welcomes Mrs. Ubhe in his house. Mrs. Ubhe visits the area at least twice a month and stays in Mr. Bhujbal's house. Mrs. Ubhe has a maturity to understand his difficulties and she always tries to strengthen contacts with him.

Mr. Bhujbal knew some residents of Nalwadi as some women were coming as labourers to Bhondve hamlet. With the help of Bhujbal, Mrs. Ubhe started visiting Nalwadi. She first established personal contacts with the local population. During the discussions Mrs. Ubhe gradually came to know their problems.

The first question she handled was a school for small children. Nalwadi is established near Sholapur highway. The children had to attend the school on the other side of the road. It was difficult for small children to cross a highway. So, with help of local people she started a Balwadi (*école maternelle*) in a small hut in the hamlet. In the beginning young lady from Bhondve hamlet was chosen as a teacher. She was a young girl and after some months her father was not ready to send her to Nalwadi. Local people, in a meeting that Mrs. Ubhe attended, choosed a teacher from Nalwadi itself. Side by side many other questions were

also brought for discussion in the meetings. Mrs. Ubhe asked them whether they get work throughout the year and whether their remuneration is sufficient for survival. People answered that during the season they get 2 to 3 bags of millet called *bajra*. They do not get permanent work. So it was decided to demand work under the Employment Guarantee Scheme. An application with the signatures of 76 labourers was given to the office at Daund taluka. As this a green belt area the EGS was not applicable.

Mrs. Ubhe tried to understand the difficulties they face when they look for jobs. Generally they have to go as an agricultural labourer to the big and medium farmers. These farmers decide on the timings of work, the rate of remuneration, whom to employ etc. The labourers understand the constraints they have to face but immediately they cannot take action against the local farmers. Now the Labour ministry of the Central Govt. is instructed to accept forms in which a labourer gives his information. Govt. believes that when such information is collected they can provide work for labourers. Mrs. Ubhe gave this information. She has asked them to fill the forms and afterwards they were submitted in the Taluka Office.

The problem number one for the residents is to obtain legal papers of land and houses, so they will not be under constant fear of displacement. This problem was discussed in many meetings. It was decided that people should act stepwise finally to obtain legal papers of the land on which they have erected houses. The first step was to get their houses registered in the "Gram Panchayat", a village council. It was tried many times that a "gram sevak" (local govt. officer) should register the houses in the list of houses of the Gram Panchayat. The gram sevak who is supposed to meet people in the village was always out of the village. So, Mrs. Ubhe and a few representatives went to Daund on 6th June 2003, filing an application for registering their houses in the official list. Now the houses have been registered in the Gram Panchayat.

While trying to solve the problem of getting permanent space for habitation she continued to discuss and tried to take action with the local participants on other problems also. The Balwadi (*école maternelle*) was started but people were of the opinion that Govt. should help building the room for the Balwadi. Another question was of the drinking water supply. People wanted a bore well to be constructed by Govt. A few representatives went with Mrs. Ubhe to invite an elected representative of the Zilla Parishad (district level body). They invited the president of the Zilla Parishad, Mrs. Mandakini Chavan. She agreed to come on 9 July 2003. Many labourers were present. She agreed to give a small plot for Balwadi. An inauguration took place. It was decided that the building of the Balwadi would be constructed by collecting money from the residents. There is scheme of the Govt. to give 28000 Rs. to construct houses for the families who are under the poverty line. A few families have already applied to get the money and two such houses were sanctioned. They got 15000 Rs and afterwards the officials started asking many questions. The first objection was that since it is a Govt. land such houses cannot be built on it. Mrs. Ubhe and some representatives went several times to Daund. People asked the question, why in the first place money was sanctioned and part of it was given? When representatives went to invite Mrs. Chavan they also discussed this problem at

length with her. On 9 July she talked publicly and promised to help in this matter. This issue was followed up by people and Mrs. Ubhe. Finally all the money was released and the two houses were completed.

The project of Balwadi was not completed because of internal quarrels between three communities, Mahar, Matang and Mulims, to get hold on Balwadi. The Balwadi unfortunately is closed down. Mrs. Ubhe tries to convince the three groups that for such problems they must remain united. Division between them will come in the way of getting permanent legal land titles to them.

Animation process is never smooth. There are some success stories. Some residents had ration cards but most of them had not. As most of the families are under the poverty line they should get a special yellow ration card. Residents tried with Mrs. Ubhe applying for the ration cards. The efforts were done in the beginning to try with the local official. He was not helpful. Finally they had to go to Daund many times. Now most of them obtained these special ration cards. Govt. has another scheme called "Antyoday Yojana" (scheme for the upliftment of people at the lowest level of society). The benefits of this scheme are given to the citizens who have the special yellow ration cards. Now residents can take advantage of this scheme.

Same was the story about getting cards given by Election commissions office. A few had these cards. Mrs. Ubhe initiated other people to get hold of these cards. Slowly most of them have obtained these cards.

Another demand of residents was the supply of drinking water. With the help of the "gram sevak" (local Govt. officer) a bore well was repaired and now people get pure drinking water in their hamlet.

The young girls and women can get the advantage of a Govt. scheme of getting cycles and sewing machines whose families are under poverty line. A few of them got the cycles and sewing machines.

Animators take a leading part in the meetings for discussions on general topics. Mrs. Ubhe initiated discussions on the topics of the cultural and social barriers under which women have to live, about the fundamental rights given by the constitution, analyzing some schemes of the Govt. with the real intention behind it, problem of the Babri Masjid demolition etc.

There are three microcredit groups started by the people on their own, each community having one group. They call the group according to the name of their leader: Mahar community called their group "Ramabai Ambedkar Group" and Matang community "Annabhau Sathé Group". Mrs. Ubhe is trying to convince them that instead of three small groups they can have one single group.

Local leaders of the political parties try to influence people and take financial advantage out of it. A leader resident of Kasurdi from Republican Party was prominent among them. When Mrs. Ubhe started visiting Nalwadi people were totally dependent on him. Slowly they started taking distance from him. They have understood the game. People and specially women not only attend every "Gram Sabha" (village meeting) but also try to take part in discussions. On every 15th of Aug and 26th of Jan it is compulsory to hold a Gram Sabha. Barring this, there are 4 more times Gram Sabha must be called. So, generally, every other

month there is a Gram Sabha. If the elected members of Gram Panchayat and some residents of the village feel the need of the Gram Sabha, they may also call a special meeting. Women from Nalwadi attend all such Sahbas now. They participated in the Gram Sabha, and through that body they got the sanction for 16 more houses for families under the poverty line. These women are telling Mrs. Ubhe: "Because of you we got confidence. Now we try to solve our problems without depending on local leaders. Now we are able to discuss with officers. We do not fear to go to the taluka Place."

VCDA believes in revitalizing and valorizing popular traditions. Mrs. Ubhe started meetings on the work of traditional midwives. One of them attended a meeting we had arranged in Pune.

Mrs. Ubhe is still taking one meeting every month in Bhondave hamlet. 5 to 6 women who take more active part in the meeting are attending Gram Sabha. Like the women from Nalwadi they have also started visiting taluka Place for their own questions and difficulties.

On Sholapur road there are many migrants from Osmanabad districts who encroached on Govt. land. Mrs. Ubhe started visiting one such hamlet, Indira Nagar of Yawat. The problems are the same as Nalwadi.

She also started visiting a hamlet in which Vaidu people (a community of traditional healers) are residing. This hamlet is not on the highway. Now Mr. Polekar, another main animator, is helping Mrs. Ubhe. Both of them talked in length with the traditional healers about their practices, methods, how they collect and prepare medicines, etc. The valorization of their tradition can be discussed with these people. CCRSS has taken a project of preparing monographies on excluded communities. Mr. Chandrakant Kokate is collecting information from traditional healers from Ahmednagar district. Mrs. Ubhe and Mr. Polekar will help in the collection and writing processes.