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Report concerning the three hostels for girls run by VCDA in Pune district, Maharashtra, India, which have been aided by Partage for the year 2005–2006

Abbreviations: “dist.” is a district (equivalent to French “département”), “tal.” is a *taluka* (equivalent to French “canton”).

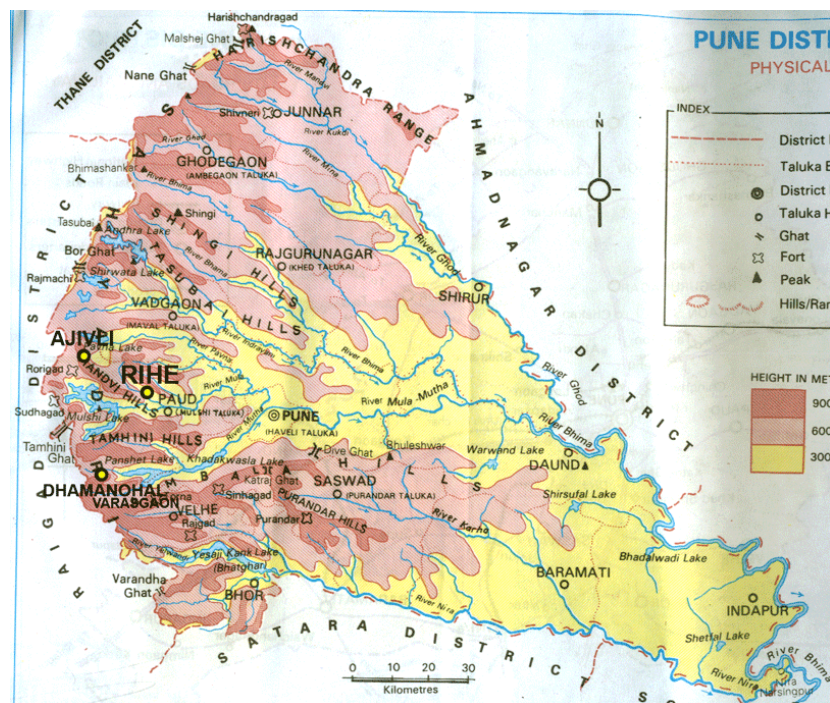
The three hostels are in remote areas of Pune district:

1- Dhamawal (also spelled “Damanohal”), tal. Mulshi, under the responsibility of Mr. Devidas Pasalkar

2- Rihe (Padalgharwadi), tal. Mulshi, under the responsibility of Mr. Prabhakar Ghare

3- Pachane, tal. Mawal, under the responsibility of Mr. Pandit Padalghare.

We run a 4th hostel at Pabal tal. Shirur dist. Pune, which is not supported by Partage. Still we will supply information about its activities. Mr. Pandit Padalghare is in charge of the Pabal hostel. As a principle animator he has to take many responsibilities of the general animation work of the VCDA. So it was decided that Mr. Shiddu Shejwal will take the responsibility of the Pachane hostel from Feb 2006 onward. We are happy that the elected body of Pachane village (*Gram Panchayat*) has shown willingness to run the hostel which we started in 2004 and run for two years. This is the policy of the VCDA since the beginning that if local people are taking initiative we have to give them backing. So now we are shifting the hostel which we were running in Pachane to Ajiwali in Mawal taluka. This village is more remote than Pachane. A dam was built in this area and the major part of cultivated land of 15 villages submerged in the village. VCDA has an animatrice, Mrs. Laygude, from that village. The hostel will start in her house. The principal animator Mr. Shejwal will take the responsibility.



This report will describe the processes of:

- A) Selection of the students,
- B) Parents' responsibility,
- C) Discussions,
- D) Participation of other people from the village,
- E) Teachers' tasks,
- F), Learning strategies,
- G) VCDA internal management committee,

and will finish with:

- H) Summary and perspectives.

A) Selection

We did not select new girls this year as the same girls continued to stay in the hostels.

However, in Dhamanwal hostel two girls passed their 7th standard exam in May 2005. The school at Dhamanwal is up to 7th St. So those girls had to leave the hostel. In their place two new girls were selected and for this process the same criteria as last year were followed.

In Padalgharwadi two girls had to leave for difficulties in their house so two new girls were taken in their place. We had to select one or two girls in each hostel.

Priority was given to the girls who were otherwise unable to attend any school. The parents, agricultural labourers or marginalised farmers from remote areas who cannot provide even for the basic needs of the family are considered the poorest families, and girls from such families were selected.

B) Parents' responsibility

The following are the general objectives regarding the parents participation and overall perspective and we continue our association with parents on this basis.

We insist on the parents' educational responsibility. Parents' meetings are strictly compulsory every second month. This is an absolute condition. If parents miss these meetings without proper reason their daughter is no longer welcome. In these meetings are mainly discussed matters relating to girl's education and girl's status, women condition, and the running of the hostel, but also other issues of parents' concern (corresponding to those of the VCDA animation work). Some collective participation is requested from parents (fuel, medicines, but especially uniform). The hostel becomes a means to awaken parents and place them in the context of the VCDA perspectives. Girls' education starts with that of the parents.

Parents should be mentally opened to the ideas of the conscientisation work and ready to support the VCDA animators' activities in their area. The hostel is understood as a part of that whole social work. Failing this, their daughter is no longer welcome.

In all the three hostels parents participated by giving fuel. In Dhamanwal hostel some parents gave some millet called *warai*.

With the following guidelines which were decided in the first year, the parents meetings were held in each hostel.

The association (VCDA) is working "with" people and not "for" the people.

- It is not a benevolent work. Animators are from the same milieu. So running the hostel is the responsibility of the animators, parents and villagers.

- Animators will take the financial responsibility.

- The education of girls, their cultural activities will be looked after with animators by parents and villagers.

- In administration also, all will participate collectively. Running of the hostel is not the

only work the association is engaged with. We have to think collectively on our problems and try to find out ways to run the schools. All parents and villagers are expected to participate collectively.

In Dhamanwal, Devidas Pasalkar discussed with the parents about the planning of the hostel. How the parents will help in the running of the hostel. First of all the parents agreed to meet every second month to review the progress of the girls. Parents come other times as they have to bring fuel or some millet to the hostel girls.

Pasalkar raised the question in the first meeting in June: "During the summer vacation, what difference you found in their behaviour?" The observation of the parents was that girls have become more tolerant. They patiently listen before reacting. They behave more considerately with their younger brothers and sisters. At the same time they feel free to express their mind. They can openly, freely and firmly tell their opinion. This change has come as animators, villagers and parents themselves tried that a coherent group will be created with the girls who stay in the hostel.

In other meetings some problems of planning of the hostel were discussed. For example, in each hostel the animators try to create committees to take the responsibility of different types of work, such as cleaning, bringing water, helping in the preparation of food etc. The parents supervise how these committees are working. Parents meet teachers and discuss with them the progress of the girls in their studies.

In Pachane hostel, in the first meeting with the parents in June 2005, Pandit Padalghare said that we give opportunity to the girls from poor families. Why do we think like that? We are poor and we work with you who are poor. Guy Poitevin was of the opinion that the poor must assist and work with the poor. Many institutions run the hostels. Some run the hostel as a service (*sewa*) to the society while others are only in need for a tax-exemption status. There are many different motivations to start and run the hostel. We must try to understand why we are poor. Who has kept us in poverty? In our meetings we are going to discuss it. We will think and try to solve our problems together.

C) Discussions

In Dhamanwal area a private company is buying the land from the peasants and they are dividing the land into small plots to be sold to urban people who build farm houses. They have other plans of building hotels, swimming pools etc. The land which they are trying to buy is in the mountain area and there is a big dam built by Govt. for supplying drinking water to Pune city and for the irrigation. The company is pressurizing Govt. for privatizing the dam. Though some peasants have sold their land to the company many of them are not ready to sell the land. The local population is facing many problems because of the work of the company. The animator Devidas Pasalkar with the local population is holding a number of meetings with the officials of the company, as well as with Govt. officers. They are organizing demonstrations also. The parents are peasants also and they are taking active participation in this struggle. The local population is opposing the ideas of the company to "modernize" the area. People raise the question "modernization means what?" Who will decide what is modernisation? These people meet generally every week and sometimes even they have daily meetings. A few news paper cuttings have been attached to this report.

In Rihe (Padalgharwadi) and Pachane hostels the problem is the same. Many agents are actively engaged in the land purchase-and-sell business. The local population is deeply in trouble. 25 km away from Padalgharwadi a very serious problem arose as the Govt. and private companies are establishing IT Park in a village named Man. There was a very serious clash. A few farmers died in the police firing. (See the paper cuttings) So the local population and animators are busy discussing and taking active part in the ongoing struggle.

D) Participation of other people from the village

As we have written in earlier section the local population is in the midst of this struggle.

E) Teachers'tasks

It was difficult for some girls to cope with the pace of school teaching. The teachers helped these girls of each hostel as they needed extra attention. Some teachers even came to hostel to help the girls for scholar home work.

Teachers from other villages participate in this project of hostel. They show interest and concern for the process and the method which we follow in running the hostel. In Dhudhawan there is a primary school. Sangeeta Kondiba Kachare, after passing 4th standard exam, was admitted in the Dhamanwal hostel for further education. She went to her parents for a short holiday in August. The teacher from the primary school of Dhudhawan asked her to come to the school and report her experience of the hostel. She told how they live together, many girls from different villages, how Pasalkar's mother takes them to the mountain to show medicinal plants, about their drama which they have created with Jitendra Maid, an animator from VCD.A., about her school, her school friends and about the teachers etc. The girl got a good experience of narration in front of a group. These teachers from nearby villages come with parents some times to visit the hostel to know our method and perspective to run the hostel.

In all the three hostels the teachers attend the meeting which is held for parents. They discuss the progress of the girls in school education with the parents.

In VCD.A since the beginning we arrange meetings with teachers. We meet not only the teachers from the schools where we have hostels but we arrange meetings in different parts of Pune dist. This year we had one such meeting in Male tal. Bhor. Teachers discussed their difficulties in the meeting. In some villages the school is called "one-teacher school" as the teacher has to look after four standards from first to fourth. As the Govt. is paying the teachers their salary, they ask them many other duties. They have to be on duty when there are elections, they have to convince the men and women to be ready for the family planning operation, they have to look after the programme of building latrines in the villages and many other tasks. So, naturally the teaching suffers. In that meeting it was decided to meet their organization.

Teachers from the school from Dhamanwal were telling animators that as there is no electricity in Dhamanwal area the students have not seen television, computer, cinema. There is a lesson on how to run a computer. It is difficult for teachers to teach students this type of lesson. The teachers said that the students from these mountain areas know different type of skills such as climbing on trees, recognizing herbs and trees with their specificities etc. The question of the teacher was why there are not any lessons based on such skills.

F) Learning strategies

After two weeks, when girls started feeling accustomed to the hostel's life, it was discussed with them how the different tasks should be distributed among themselves. After the preliminary discussion the committees were formed a) cleaning, b) helping in the cooking, c) planning the day's timetable, d) education committee to help each other in the studies. This practice is followed every year.

School education

All the girls passed their final examination which were held in the month of April and now they are admitted to the next class.

8 girls from three hostels appeared for scholarship examination (3 from Pachane, 4 from Dhamanwal and 1 from Padalgharwadi).

They take part in all activities followed in the school. Vaishali Baban Waje from Pachane hostel spoke on Savitribai Phule, a social reformer, on 15th of August, Independence Day, and Sheetal Shivaji Garade spoke on Babasaheb Ambedkar on 26th Jan, Republic Day, when these two days were celebrated in the school. Suman Dhebe from Dhamanwal spoke on the constitution and Ambedkar on 26th of Jan in the school. Girls from Padalgharwadi hostel sang a song on 26th Jan ceremony in the school.

In Dhamanwal village there was a reading competition where girls were supposed to read a passage from the text book in front of villagers. This competition was arranged by the school. Medha Halande from the hostel stood first in this competition.

Two girls from the Dhamanwal hostel took part in running competition (400 m. running) in their school.

Three girls from the Padalgharwadi took part in running competition (400 m. running) in their school.

Sheetal Shivaji Garade and Pallavi Ashok Yewale from Pachane hostel took part in the singing competition which was held in the school of the Owale village.

Non-formal education

We continued to concentrate on the general policy of the VCDA to give emphasis on increasing skills of observation and extra-scholar aspects of education, such as:

- Visiting farms was easy as the hostels are situated nearby. The information collected was about the purchasing of the seeds, cropping patterns, composition of the soil, manure, different agricultural operations, which product is taken to market, how the surplus is sold etc.

- In Dhamanwal (a mountains area) it is possible to cultivate only some crops like paddy, and millets like *ragi* and *warai*. Pasalkar raised the question with the girls what may be the reason of the possibility of few crops in our area? Girls approached some farmers to know the reason. In this mountain area the monsoon brings heavy rain and they have to cultivate on the slope of the mountain so these crops can sustain these conditions. This was the reply of the farmers. The girls took detail information of paddy crop.

- The girls from Rihe (Padalgharwadi) and Pachane hostels also took detailed information of the paddy crop in their respective areas.

- Practice of traditional arts and crafts: Most of the programme continued. Like last year in every hostel, girls took interest in drawings. Some girls have prepared the paintings with the help of beads, red and black berries from small plants. Most of the girls know how to draw *rangoli* and each morning they try different designs. In all the hostels girls tried with the mud creating some objects like utensils, lamps, images of birds and animals, geometrical forms etc. They prepared masks from cardboard. Girls from Pachane hostel prepared greeting cards for Divali (lamp festival) and for New Year. (Jean Poitevin visited two hostels in Rihe and Dhamanwal and took some photographs.)

- Traditional medicine: Like last year Devidas Pasalkar's mother took the initiative in showing and giving information of medicinal plants to the girls of Dhamanwal hostel. She used some of these medicines when girls suffered illness.

- The "reading of the sky". In Dhamanwal, Devidas Pasalkar and a few old people from the village taught the girls how they observe changes occurring in constellations. The Monsoon for example is expected with nine constellations. It is interesting to observe the various aspects in the nature which show small or big changes like the new insects taking birth, the leaves of the trees change colour, new birds visit, small changes in the texture of the soil, change in the direction of wind, in the size of the clouds, the clouds bringing rain along with certain constellations etc. For the farmers such changes are extremely important, and they plan their agricultural activities according to these changes. After the study of each constellation the girls exchanged notes and discussed what questions they can ask more to observe the next constellation. In two other hostels the same experiment was tried. When girls were not able to observe and take notes of all the nine constellations, the aged experienced farmers from Padalgharwadi and Pachane helped them in this experiment.

- Songs, dance and drama forms. Like last year the expression through drama was tried in all the three hostels. To start with, it was discussed with the girls what they liked to perform and how. As the discussion continued, the following questions were raised: Have you seen any drama? Which type of drama? Where have you seen it? What exactly do you remember? What part did you like? Is it possible to perform some part of that drama?

- They remembered some types like Bharud, the drama prepared and performed by the groups of youth from the village, popular theatre etc. Some girls have seen films on television. In the meeting they tried to perform some role plays. Then it was discussed whether they will like to prepare their own drama.

- The girls, with the help of animators, chose the following topics for their drama. In Dhamanwal hostel they decided to present a drama on the concept of "development". In Rihe hostel they chose "how we can conquer over our situation". And in Pachane hostel they decided to show about the village festival — who participates, who takes decisions, how is it celebrated?

G) VCDA internal management committee

The main objective of the VCDA is to work collectively sharing the responsibility by critically evaluating the work and collectively taking decisions. For the hostels there is an internal committee of principal animators.

- 1) Namdev Polekar working with the organization since 1980 has a long experience of running the hostel. The hostel at Panshet (tal. Welve) near a huge dam at the western part of Pune dist. was the first experiment of VCDA in 1981. When the hostel was started Panshet was very poorly connected to Pune city and it was still more difficult to travel inside the

dam area. Polekar was responsible of the hostel since its inception up to 2004 when we decided to shift the hostel to Dhamanwal as Panshet had become a semi-urban centre.

2) Pandit Padalghare working with the organization since 1983 took the responsibility of the hostel at Pabal from 1999 onward, and in addition he was responsible of the Pachane hostel from 2004 to 2005Dec.

3) Prabhakar Ghare working with the organization since 1983 took the responsibility of the Rihe (Padalgharwadi) hostel from 2004 onward.

4) Devidas Pasalkar, himself a student at Panshet hostel (VCDA was accepting boys in the Panshet hostel for some years), joined the organization in 1996. He took the responsibility of the Dhamanwal hostel since 2004.

5) Siddu Shejwal working with the organisation since 1990 took the responsibility of the hostel at Pachane since Jan 2006. He was responsible of the hostel at Akawale (tal. Mulshi) run by VCDA. The local residents of the village showed their willingness to run the hostel. In VCDA we always feel that when local people or Govt. is ready to take the responsibility then the project should be handed over to them. Ultimately it is our objective that local people get themselves involved in the programme started by the organization with the help of the people.

6) Kusum Sonawane has been working with the organisation since 1981. As a woman animator she has to play a very important role in all the hostels. She has to tackle all the problems and to be with them to share their moods, joy, their curiosities, and guide them. As they are entering into adolescent phase her role becomes very important. She has a skill to be a considerate mother. She takes a leading part in the street theatre prepared by VCDA animators. She can sing well and compose poetry. She takes responsibility to teach the girls songs and prepare small dramas. She sees that the girls take part in the celebration in their schools of Independence Day on 15th of August and Republic Day on 26th Jan uary.

These animators meet to discuss and plan the programmes of the hostel with a particular focus on informal training. Pandit Padalghare, Ghare Pasalkar and Shejwal take the responsibility of the hostels. They also visit each other's hostels to help each other. Namdev Polekar and Kusum Sonawane visit all hostels according to their convenience.

H) Summary andperspectives

The wider perspective of providing opportunities to poor girls of education and empowering women in general will be continued.

In VCDA, since the beginning we are meeting teachers and have meetings with them. When the Partage team came to meet us they attended one such meeting. We decided to concentrate more on the teachers' meetings. In these meetings such type of questions can be discussed: How the curriculumof the school is prepared? Which type of students do they have in mind when they prepare the curriculum? Why is it not taken into account that there are students with different aptitudes and skills? Who decides on the education policy?

Animators discuss the methodology, perspctive of the education. Education is an important subject which we discuss in self-learning workshops as well.

We decided to arrange meetings with the girls who are not going to school.

The effort started last year under the label "reading of the sky" will be followed more systematically. We are trying to take help of senior villagers who are more knowledgeable in this respect.

It has been decided that the participation of the parents and villagers should become more meaningful in the meetings arranged to discuss and act on subjects relating to active democracy. We decided to start some such meetings in surrounding villages with the help of parents.

For Pabal hostel, though it is not aided by Partage, I give a brief account. All girls from this hostel successfully entered in the upper class by passing the final exam. Two girls participated in the song which was sung on the 15th of August. Two girls took part in the drawing competition held by local Newspaper *Sakal*. In our effort of giving importance of non formal education and giving emphasis on increasing skills of observation and extra-scholar aspects of education, the girls went to meet farmers and collect information about the onion crop.

The main interesting fact is the discussion with parents and the local population of the villages around Pabal. In 2004 we had attended the World Social Forum and participated in the discussion on the subject "Solidarity Economy". In that group it was decided that to oppose the globalisation and the adverse activities of World Trade Organization, such as GATT, why not start reviving the traditional exchange systems? We have started the discussion among the

farmers of the village surrounding Pabal village. The parents also are included in the discussion. The farmers have shown interest in the concept. Pabal lies at the eastern part of Pune dist. We also started the same discussion with farmers of the western part of Pune dist. We hope that the farmers from both sides will try to exchange their products, as for instance millet from the eastern part of Pune dist. can be exchanged for rice from the western part of the dist.