

Report on Self-Education workshops (SEW)

December 2005

VCDA has started Self-Education workshops (SEW) in February 1990. Many youth and women are enthusiastic of doing something in their villages for the people. After some time they reach the situation where they find that it is difficult to continue. They do not understand how to proceed further. They lack the analyzing capacity. They cannot take distance from their work and critically understand the reality. In this state of disillusionment, either they leave the work or they get trapped in some emotional, religious movements.

The SEW provides the opportunity for these youth and women to analyze their action, situation, problems, political, social, cultural structures. They can raise many questions which they are not used to. For these workshops no outside expert is invited to guide them. Dr. Guy Poitevin used to be present in the meetings to raise some questions. Participants themselves can get trained by raising questions to each other and helping each other to do the analysis. Nobody can get trained alone in isolation. It is an effort to get trained in group which itself is not sufficient: participants should further be able to critically analyse, form a group, and act in their respective areas of operation.

On 17th Nov. 2005 we launched the 9th batch. The main animators of the Garib Dongari Sanghatana (GDS) have taken the responsibility on themselves to choose the participants for this 9th batch. They came in contact with many small organizations, institutions which are active in different parts of Maharashtra. The youth and women who have already participated in SEW workshops also help animators. On two grounds the participants are chosen for the new batch: (1) in organizations and institutions with whom we have no prior contact, GDS animators visit responsible people and discuss with them; (2) participants who are already completed the training can also help in organizing meetings in their respective areas with the organizations and institutions they are in contact with. The GDS animators attended 5 such meetings in different parts of Maharashtra and they visited some areas to select the participants for 9th batch.

The following is the report of 5 meetings (1) Palam dist. Parbhani on 15th of March 2005, (2) Puntamba dist. Ahmednagar on 5th Aug 2005, (3) Shantivan dist. Raigad, on 15th Sept 2005, (4) Karanjali, dist. Nasik on 21st Sept 2005, (5) Chandrapur on 21st Oct 2005, and two visits: one in dist. Satara, Sangli and Kolhapur from 27th to 29th Oct, and the second one in dist. Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg from 7th to 10th Nov 2005.



(1) On 15th March 2005 a meeting was arranged by Mr Karanje (himself a participant of SEW workshop) at Palam in Parbhani dist for Marathwada region. Mr. Jitendra Maid and Mr. Devidas Pasalkar attended the meeting. Nine organizations took part from 4 districts: Bidar, a dist. adjacent from Karnataka State, Beed, Nanded and Parbhani.

All the representatives from these different organizations explained what type of work they are involved in. One of the participants said that the funding agency has asked them to concentrate on the problem of child trafficking. They have not come across such cases in their areas. As the funding agency insists they are surveying the area. Mr. Rathod from Nanded dist., who has completed the SEW workshop training, said that we should raise some questions to the funding agency instead of accepting their dictates. We need to assess the programmes that a funding agency is suggesting. Mr. Karanje told that we learnt from the SEW workshop that we must ask questions to ourselves, what type of work we should do in our own area. Common people of the area know which questions they face and these questions must be tackled with the help of local people. Mr. Dadhe from Parbhani dist. said that in Marathwada there are many registered institutions and most of them are defunct. Mr. Rathod said that for doing work anywhere it is not mandatory to start an institution. Registered institution is not a precondition for efficient work. The essential things are the involvement of local people and the will and commitment of the persons who want to start the work

From this area we have selected 4 participants.

2) On 5th Aug. Mr. Suresh Kokate arranged a meeting at Puntamba, dist. Ahmednagar. The GDS animators Mr. Pandit Padlghare and Mr. Namdev Polekar attended the meeting. Mr. Kokate had attended his first SEW workshop on 18/2/1990. He is working in a social center called "Asha Kendra ". The head of the centre was the friend of Dr. Poitevin. He liked the idea of SEW workshop trainings. He encouraged Mr. Kokate to help us in choosing participants from "Asha Kendra ". Mr. Kokate himself liked the training and he got more involved in VCDA activities. At that time, CCRSS had taken a project of preparing monographies giving encouragement to the youth from different communities and casts. He is from the washerman community. He had taken initiative preparing monography on his own community with Dr. Guy Poitevin. Now the preparation work is over.¹ Mrs. Hema Rairkar is now contacting publishers for the publication of this book in Marathi.

His interest in SEW workshops continues. With his initiative other participants attended the SEW workshops.

There was another sad reason for the meeting organized on 5th Aug. Mr. Kokate lost his son on 8th Jan 2005 in an accident. His son was involved in the work of creating microcredit groups with the help of a bank. Thanks to his efforts in this area of 10 to 15 villages, 250 such groups exist. His friends collected money in the name of his son. Friends wanted to create a trust for giving prizes to people who take initiatives in activities such as microcredit groups. Mr. Kokate gives more attention to the microcredit groups of tribal communities and groups formed by people who are under the poverty line. After this ceremony a special meeting at Gondegaon near Puntmba was arranged for the purpose of discussion and choice of the participants for the 9th batch of SEW workshop. The youth who have already taken part in SEW workshops were present. 40 women and 20 men were present. Some were representatives of the microcredit groups, notably from the tribal communities and groups by people under poverty line. Mr. Padalghare explained the objectives of the SEW workshop. He told the assembled audience that, as we insist on discussions on critical analysis methodology for forming a group, we need to know each other personally. We must share our personal griefs, difficulties, joy and tender moments. The bond between us is based on such sharings. This bond helps us to be more and more committed to the work. Our commitment is not for only some issues and questions but it is a lifelong commitment for the work of changing and establishing the society which will be just and equal. Mr. Polekar told in the meeting the short history of GDS work and said that what Mr. Pandit Padalghare has told, we in the organization do experience it. Mr. Laxman Thorat, Mr. Bhavar, who attended earlier SEW workshops, said that what has been told by the two animators from GDS is also their experience. Four participants were chosen from this area.

3) On 15th September a meeting was arranged by an institution called "Shanti Van". Mr. Prabhakar Ghare and Mr. Jitendra Maid attended the meeting. In all 16

¹ See excerpts in Suresh Kokate. *Parit Communities: Occupation and Survival* . In (B. Bel, J. Brouwer, B. Das, V. Parthasarathi, G. Poitevin, eds.) *Communication Processes, 2, The Social and the Symbolic*. New Delhi: Sage, 2006.

people were present who are taking responsibility of the different programmes run by the institution. "Shanti Van" is run on the Gandhian principles by a group of people from Sarvodaya movement. "Shanti Van" is located in Nere, 18 kilometers from Panvel, a town on the Bombay Pune high way. The institution owns 122 acres of land. In this institution they have a hospital for the treatment and a rehabilitation center for leprosy patients, a nature cure center, a handloom center for weaving carpets, towels etc, an orphanage, old age house, production of herbal medicines and oils. Volunteers come from different districts of Maharashtra. Mr. Govind Shinde, the head of the institution, was in search of training facilities for the social workers from his organisation. He sent his social worker to participate in the 2nd batch of SEW workshop. And since then he takes care to send a representative to each batch. Up to 9 participants attended SEW workshops. Mr. Shinde is of the opinion that the workers from their institution who take part in the SEW programme have increased the level of thinking and analyzing capacities. Their action programmes have become more methodical; they try to establish contact with local population. Following are the reactions of some of the participants.

Baburao Mahjan said: "Before joining the SEW workshop I was very arrogant, I was dishonoring people. At all levels I was making lots of mistakes. When I went to Pabal and started taking part in the discussions I cultivated the habit of listening to others, which helped me in the work I undertake in the cluster of villages."

Mr. Chavan said: "Like most of the so-called social workers I was thinking that villagers are ignorant and they depend on others for even a small work. Now I realized that nobody is ignorant. People know what to do and they can take their problems in their hands."

Mr. Gore said: "I attended the SEW workshop. Now when I go to the villages and start meeting, I experience that people raise questions themselves, they tell themselves their problems and even during the discussions they give the answers. I went to one village for a meeting. After the meeting nobody was inviting me. I was rather surprised. Ultimately one person invited me. He said that we were not sure that you will eat with us. I stayed with them. Now we have established a personal relationship. It took ten months for me to be accepted by the local population. Local people took the question of the ration cards in their hands and solved it. Now they take part in village meetings (*gram sabha*)".

Sharayu Saraf said: "SEW workshop gave me my own identity. I became confident that I can improve my image."

Vinod Pachghare said: "Now I can examine my experiences, and work on the criteria which I got in the SEW workshops. This process is extremely useful for me."

4) On 21st Sept. 2005 a meeting was arranged by Mr. Waman Waghire at Karanjali, tal. Peth, dist. Nasik. Mr Waghire attended the 7th batch of SEW workshop. He is very committed to his work. He has a capacity for critical

analysis, so he has been invited to each SEW workshop meeting to help main animators of GDS.

For the meeting held on 21st September he invited 22 people from surrounding villages who were present. 25 people from Karanjali were also present. Mr. Pandit Padalghare attended the meeting.

Since Mr. Waghire started attending SEW workshops he tackled two problems in his area of operation. He is himself a tribal from Kokana tribe. The area is predominantly a tribal area. In tribal areas some residential schools are run. In one of the schools there was no teacher for many months. Waghire with local people tried to meet authorities without any outside intervention. It took a few months for them to get the new teacher appointed, but in this process people got the confidence that they themselves can solve their problems. The other problem was the injustice made for an employee from the forest dept. That problem was solved in the same way with the involvement of the local population.

When the meeting started everybody introduced oneself. Many who were present are trying to run a small shop, sell vegetables etc. Some try to do welding work. So they try to take some initiative on their own. Most of the enterprises give them seasonal employment.

When the discussion started the questions came: Why do we have to face so much injustice? Why are we unable to speak against it? Is it true that we are ignorant? Is it true that we do not understand? Who is called a notable? Who is called knowledgeable? Who is called a great person? The one who has money. The one who can speak in a proper language, whose dress is presentable etc. So, the language, dress, money are the factors which draw the line. Competition brings the upliftment of some people. Competition never provides opportunity to all individuals.

Waghire explained his experience of the SEW workshop.

For 9th batch 7 representatives were chosen from this area.

5) On 21st October a meeting was arranged by Mr. Ramesh Jadhav at Chandrapur for the Vidharbha region. The animators of GDS, Mr. Devidas Pasalkar and Mr. Siddu Shejwl, were present. 30 people came from Gondia, Bhandara, Gadchiroli and Chandrapur districts from 10 different organisations. 60 local people attended the meeting.

Maya Katekar, Suresh Dange, Gurudas Semiskar, Gopal Raypure and Anita Shende who had attended earlier SEW workshops were present.

To start with, Mr. Pasalkar talked about the objectives of the SEW workshop. Mr. Shejwal narrated the short history of GDS. He gave insistence on the methodology of GDS work.

Among the local people who came to attend the meeting there were 45 women. They said that they feel like taking in their hands some activities such as prohibition and closing down the system of dowry, but they do not understand how to go ahead. If they go out of village they fear that people will say bad things about them. If they go to *taluka* place nobody listens to them. Many

women wanted to express, say something. The words came up to their throat but they were not able to speak out.



The Pabal centre in which Self-Education Workshops are organised

Then Anita Shende who attended the SEW workshop talked about her own experience about the workshop. "In Pabal, when we go we stay there as if we belonged to the same family. The only thing necessary is that you take decision boldly to go to Pabal. We have never come together and reflected on our condition. We have never got such opportunity to come together for thinking and reacting. Once you go and attend the workshop then you will not have to depend on others. You will understand that local leaders, established people, rich will never support us. They will never help us. After attending the workshop fear will not remain in your minds."

Maya Katekar who also attended the SEW workshop said: "I was bold and joined the institution, but after completing the workshop I understood how to organize meetings, from where to start, how to listen to what people say. As I started attending meetings at Pabal I was able to listen attentively to what others are saying. I tried to speak in the meeting. In the beginning I was not sure of myself. Slowly I discovered that I can talk, I can think about the topic which is under discussion, I can freely express myself, I can react, I can participate. This revelation was a great thing for me. I could not have discovered myself if I had not been a participant of the SEW workshop. There we understand, as human beings, how we can deal with each other".

Suresh Dange said: "Before attending the workshop I was not knowing how to go among people? What to say? SEW workshop taught how to listen properly, peacefully and attentively. I have understood this and now it is easy to go and mix with people and discuss the problems together."

Ramesh Jadhav said: "After attending the workshop I understood how to get organized and fight against the selfish people. Without organization we cannot do anything."

At the end of the meeting the local women who had come to attend said that they all wanted to attend these workshops: "We never get any opportunities to go out. We do not know how to express what is in our minds. Nobody takes us seriously." Such was the enthusiasm. It was of course not possible to select so many people.

From this area we have chosen 3 participants.

It was decided that Pabhkar Ghare and Mr. Jitendra Maid will visit the organizations and institutions with whom we had no prior contact. They both visited districts Satara, Sangli and Kolhapur of the western Maharashtra region, from 27th to 29th October 2005.

- i) On 27th October they visited Mr. Ashok Bhosale from Bijewadi, tal. Man, dist. Satara. He belongs to an organisation which is a part of the network of *People's Rights Movement*. He is a *dalit* youth. His organisation works with *dalits* as well as Marathas. Unemployment is the main issue tackled by the organization. The unemployed youths get easily addicted to drinking, they get tapped in betting practices and then criminality follows. The second effect of unemployment among the youth is their migration to urban centers where they are not getting a permanent employment and have to live a bad quality of life. In their organization they thought that if they have their own elected representative they can get access to power and it will help them solving their problems. One *dalit* representative got elected to the *taluka panchayat*. Since this *panchayat* is a Maratha dominated body, the *dalit* representative was not able to push his agenda.

Mr. Bhosale is of the opinion that the youth have no opportunity and time to think about their own problems. The SEW workshop can provide this opportunity.

- ii) On 28th they met Mr. Rajendra Dhende at Sangli. He is a secretary and founder of *All India Debtors Association*. They are in contact with the farmers who have taken debts from banks as well as from money lenders. In Sangli area, the number of farmers who committed suicide as they were unable to repay loans is comparatively more than in other parts of the state of Maharashtra. When Mr. Dhende and his friends started studying individual cases with the help of some chartered accountant friends, they came to know the tricks of the bank in calculating the amount to be repayed by farmers. The shocking revelation was that, in some cases, the farmers had to pay the interest rate up to 85 percent. This a very serious problem. They have to go to court and fight. Court cases take lot of their time. They are aware that the question they are dealing with is of very particular nature. The workers of the organisation must be open to the wider problems. They have decided to send their one worker to participate in the SEW workshop.
- iii) On the same day they met Mr. Shahin Shekh and Ms. Surekha Kamble. They married to each other. This is an interreligious marriage. They work in red light

area for the rehabilitation of prostitutes. They are the members of the network which works on food rights of the people.

They were impressed by the action research methodology followed in the SEW workshops. Surekha will participate.

- iv) On 29th October 2005 they met Mr. Anil Vasudev from Ichalkaranji, dist. Kolhapur. He works among the handloom weavers. Ichalkaranji is a well known center of the handloom weaving. This industry is facing a grave economic crisis which leads to many problems. The workers have to take debt which they can not repay and they are in the trap of money lenders. Out of frustration they get addicted. It is difficult to organise them. Mr. Vasudev thinks that if they get the opportunity to go out of their own milieu and get trained it will help the organization.
- v) On 9th November 2005 they visited Santosh Zore at Lanja, dist Ratnagiri. He attended the first batch of SEW workshop. He narrated his experiences. He said that in his organization they try to give some training, but the method followed in SEW workshops trains participants at a higher level. He agreed to send one participant.
- vi) On 10th November 2005 they visited Mr. Prasad from Gopuri tal. Kankavali, dist. Sindhudurg. The institution in which he works is run on Gandhian principles. Mr. Govind Shinde from Shantivan had suggested their name. He agreed to send one worker from the institution.