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# EXPLORING POSSIBILITIES

A REVIEW  
OF THE  
WOMEN'S  
DEVELOPMENT  
PROGRAMME,  
RAJASTHAN

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# I THE WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

The Women's Development Programme of the Government of Rajasthan was launched in mid 1984. It was announced by the Department of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj in the form of an official document—a Project formulation in May 1984. "The principal aim of W.D.P.," it recorded, "is to empower women through communication of information, education and training and to enable them to recognise and improve their social and economic status".\* The first activity in W.D.P. was a Sathin (village level worker) training conducted in August/September 1984 in Padampura—a small village in Jaipur District. It was followed by Pracheta (block level worker) training conducted at Jobner (Jaipur District) and Manaklav (Jodhpur District).

This training was innovative and experimental in nature. It marked a low profile, a soft beginning of intervention for rural women of Rajasthan. There was no formal inauguration, none of the speeches, photographs and fanfare which mark the launching of a new Government programme. Despite their 'smallness' however, the positions taken in this training were fairly clear. Conceptually, development was understood as 'internalised growth' and therefore was not a matter of handing down of schemes. This growth demanded as its pre-condition, a climate of hope and confidence, generating self respect and group effort. The main thrust of the programme for rural women, therefore, was for facilitating these 'conditions' through diverse processes. What these processes would be, was something which was continually to be discovered through experiments. Evaluation had to be an integral component of every stage of activity, providing for revisability in attitude and action. The programme in a very real sense, had to be an ongoing exercise in learning organically by doing, based on the premise that a development programme had to **develop** rather than be **implemented**.

\* Womens Development Project—May 1984 Page 1.

It is important to note that this programme had as its backdrop, a series of reflection/planning exercises carried out with various women's groups in India over a period of two years. A systematic attempt was made by the Government to evolve an approach which would incorporate the experience of these groups—learn from their mistakes as well as positive achievements. One major feature which can be termed as the 'converging wisdom' generated through these exercises was to allow for 'revisability' in the planning. "A development plan ought to develop rather than be made and implemented" was the basic premise. This did not mean that one could get out of planning. Rather, it was seen as an attempt to plan for a possibility of incorporation of fresh knowledge on a continuing basis. The project was initiated with financial assistance from UNICEF and is currently supported by them at the State level as well as in five districts.

Obviously this was a very unusual approach to developmental intervention initiated by a Government Department. It implied activity which was extremely difficult. It meant a daring attempt to go to the very roots of the problem of deprivation and subordination. This needed various kinds of strengths—a joining of hands, in the hope of creating a structure. A structure which would have the inner strength and grass root linkage of voluntarism, the security and stability of Government and a continuous incorporation of critical reflection from research bodies. Theoretically, these three groups were recognised as the pivots of developmental activity in the planned programme. Would this precarious mix work?

Now, in December 1986, this programme has spread over six districts, conducted almost twenty training/reorientation programmes and has as its participants almost 350 members. The Government on its part, has formally reinforced its commitment to women's development through the announced twenty point programme (clause 12). The actual texture of the programme, however, raises many questions. Has the association of the Government and NGO groups, together with researchers, acquired stability? What are the kind of activities that are being undertaken in various districts? What is the texture and ethos of the processes representing WDP? Are these activities fulfilling the 'objectives' as initially visualised? To what extent? Are there any bottlenecks? Do they register any major shift in the 'approach' to women's development or developmental interventions as a whole? Have fresh methodologies been evolved? Who is benefitting? Does the programme need further support? Of what kind?

This report addresses itself to these, and many other similar queries arising within and outside the programme. It attempts to knit together experiences of the Sathins, Prachetas, Project Directors/Officers, researchers, and the voluntary workers associated in the programme and analyse 'What is happening in WDP'. The exercise is both to see the pattern as well as consolidation of the processes. The main text is divided in four broad sections. The first part deals with the methodology of this evaluation. It is a sequel to an earlier review done in February, 1986. It examines the assumptions of the programme in the light of its present feel and deals with some of the significant processes visualised, i.e. selection procedure and training. Here again, the idea is to capture the 'operating mood' and reflections of the participants and not judge them in a set format.

The second section describes Jajam and the third is about Shivir, including a selected condensed record of some of the happenings in the villages where WDP is functioning. They are excerpts from various reports and letters written by Sathins, Prachetas, and Project Directors/Officers, compiled and edited by Idaras and IDSJ.

Finally, a short conclusion is attempted, to focus on some suggestions that have been made by the co-ordinators of this programme. They arise out of some exercises in self-evaluation that were done in all the districts, subjecting their own activities to critical inquiry.

The following organisational structure was envisaged for WDP in early 1984. This continues to be the formal pattern around which WDP weaves its activities.

## **VILLAGE LEVEL**

Each selected Gram Panchayat has a trained village level worker called a **Sathin** who belongs to one of the villages of the Gram Panchayat. She is responsible for the formation of women's forums at the village level. She works in close link with nine other Sathins of neighbouring Gram Panchayats. The cluster of 10 Gram Panchayats with 10 Sathins is coordinated by one **Pracheta**.

## **BLOCK LEVEL**

The Pracheta, a block level Government functionary, provides support and guidance to the Sathin. She also provides the communication link with the district level.

## **DISTRICT LEVEL**

- (i) At the district level is the District Women's Development Agency (DWDA), under the Chairmanship of the District Collector. Each DWDA has a Projector Director who is assisted by a Project Officer.
- (ii) Technical Resource Support is provided at the district level by the Information Development and Resource Agency (IDARA). This is a voluntary agency working in the field of adult education and rural development.

## **STATE LEVEL**

At the State level:

- (i) The Districts IDARAs are coordinated by the State IDARA.
- (ii) The Director of WDP is the overall incharge of the programme.
- (iii) The monitoring and evaluation of the programme is facilitated by the Institute of Development Studies, Jaipur.

# II EVALUATION

Evaluating an innovative ongoing programme calls for improvising sensitive and adequate tools for observation and judgment. In the Women's Development Programme, this challenge becomes more complex because there is a simultaneous demand for 'understanding' as well as 'distancing'. The authenticity of a description rests on its capacity to reach out to diverse levels of perception. On issues like women's suffering and subordination, this sensitivity to delicate nuances is possible when one relates to the situation not merely in a cerebral manner but also at an emotional level. However, 'judgement' is valid only when this involvement is suspended, a distance created and a balanced reference is made to the 'values' which these processes are meant to actualise.

The central principles adhered to in this process are:—

- (i) Diverse levels of perception deserve to be respected and taken seriously before any judgment can be made.
- (ii) These perceptions can be elicited only if there is no strict demand made through a specific format or for a specific idiom.
- (iii) Validations for the authenticity and adequacy of information are best made when observations are subjected to group sharing and reflection.
- (iv) The process of recording, analysing and reporting observations is an integral part of developmental intervention in that it reinforces what is worth doing and how it should be done.
- (v) Participation in the activity of evaluation is itself a mode of development for the individual. This implies that the more people involved in the process, the greater is the consolidation of the developmental activity.
- (vi) To facilitate this process, it is important to involve at least one outsider to the activity who shares the objectives of the programme but is not part of the process which is evaluated.

This report, therefore, relies essentially on perceptions of different levels, recorded over a period of two years in the form of letters and reports of Jajams, Pracheta meetings, observations from PD/PO and reflections from Idaras. It also incorporates experiences of informal meetings which are a regular feature of the programme. The reports of these meetings take the form of reliving the situation. The choice and weightage given by the writer of

these reports are taken as important indicators. Though this kind of information is neither formally systematised nor computable, it clearly records the mood, level of enthusiasm, perception of priority, anger, disgust, hope, fear and above all, horizon of action in the specific context of the village reality.

For a consensus on 'What is the overall picture', a series of evaluation meetings and workshops have again been conducted at the district and State level. The groups have critically looked at their own processes and occasionally it has meant the spending of enormous energy over issues which might appear trivial to an 'outsider'. However, the assumption underlying this process has been to simultaneously correct the drifts and not just observe, record and report them. If rural women really need assistance to shake off their subordination and suffering, the processes of evaluation have to be simultaneously seen as processes for strengthening the activity. Again, if it is correct to assume that improvements in the human situation are possible not by ordering change but only through an internalisation of change, the evaluation activity acquires an added responsibility for sharing of information and consolidated knowledge. Both these points have been taken as serious principles of direction in this evaluation study.

In what follows, an attempt is made to feel the present texture of both the institutionalised activities and the field situation through a simultaneous process of 'description' and 'analysis'—to coalesce What, Why and How.

## SELECTION PROCESS IN WDP

The survival of any innovative developmental programme rests essentially on the people responsible for implementing it. This was a clearly recognised principle in the very planning of WDP. Hence there was no hurried or sudden recruitment/transfer of people to handle the programme. Very cautious steps were taken on this account. It led to the creation of an 'appropriate' selection procedure designed to suit this unique programme.

Since early 1984, when the programme was still in its embryonic stage, a series of workshops were organised, initiated by the Government of Rajasthan with support structure provided by IDS, Rajasthan Adult Education Association, Aruna Roy and Sushmita Banerjee. Women from different fields—college teachers, professionals, activists and administrators were invited to participate in lively discussions on women-related developmental issues. These workshops provided basic clues for the process of selection. Importance was given to the way the participants reacted to the different issues and the people presenting them. The points that were particularly noted were:

- how sensitive the participants were to women's issues,
- what were their views regarding women's development,
- level of maturity and understanding of views held by others,
- revisability; receptivity to new ideas,
- enthusiasm and innovativeness,
- belief in group action and reflection.

There was no compromise on these points. Finding the right people **as fast as possible** to handle the selected district's programme was not the top priority. As a result of this meticulous distilling, only five Project Directors and three Idara personnel could be identified by end of 1984.

In Kota district, even after two years, the programme has yet to get started because the right personnel are not available.

## INITIAL SATHIN SELECTION

With the programme still awaiting a full-fledged take-off, a beginning was made with the first Sathin training in August 1984. In the absence of any district personnel to look into the selection, the Rajasthan Adult Education Association (Jaipur and Ajmer) assisted in identifying villages and Sathins for the programme. The first lot of Sathins, thus selected at random, was heterogenous in terms of age, caste and literacy. They were between 16 to 55 years old, from different castes, with educational levels ranging from illiteracy to a matric pass. There were only two clearly acknowledged criteria which bound them together:

- readiness to change and receive new ideas,
- enthusiasm and willingness for participating in the programme.

## SELECTION THROUGH TRAINING (PRACHETAS)

Theoretically speaking, Prachetas were selected through regular interviews. However, their effective selection has been only through their training.

The first two attempts at Pracheta training were made at a time when the programme had hardly any physical shape to it. There was one batch of twentytwo trained Sathins, six project officers/directors and three Idaras. All of them were still working out the modalities to put their understanding of the programme into practice. Later Pracheta training worked out a curriculum which not only integrated the insights generated in the first two attempts, but also the reality of the programme in the field. In all these training programmes, it was envisaged that the Prachetas would be primarily responsible for the subsequent Sathin selections and identification of villages. Hence the need for them to internalise the central values which were to form the guidelines for this work.

Prachetas mostly came on deputation from other Government departments. After their initial interview, they underwent training similar to that of the Sathins for about twentyfive days. The decision to recruit them was made by the trainers only after the training was over. A Pracheta was assessed basically on her understanding of rural women's situation and problems, which meant:

- did she (was she prepared to) relate to the rural women on an equal basis?
- what did she think/feel about the rural environment—was she comfortable enough to work in a village?

In a nutshell, the effort was to assess her **sensitivity** and **empathy** to rural women, her ability to delink herself from her middle class values, and to what extent and at what pace she could attempt to change/revise her views. To come back to the Pracheta's task of Sathin selection, the processes and criteria appeared very complicated while being discussed at the Pracheta training. However, the points generally agreed upon were that:

- an effort should be made as far as possible, to identify women from the lowest socio-economic strata.
- her community should be involved in the process of identification. She should be acceptable to the community.
- whoever was identified should be enthusiastic and not be very rigid, should be able to listen to and empathise with the women of her village regardless of caste and other factors.
- monetary gain alone should not be the motivation.
- she should be a link in the process of decentralisation.
- she should **not** become the nucleus of all the schemes that came up in the village.

"The Pracheta had to internalise not only the values that made the Sathin the nucleus of the programme, but also relate her condition to forces outside her village. The training had to therefore also concentrate on redefining their own understanding of the meaning of women's development and to grapple with some predominant notions relating to women's status, health and sexuality. Individual threads had to come together to join a cohesive, understandable theoretical statement (however immature that may have been) about equality, oppression and the relationship of the women's issue to mainstream development.

The Pracheta also had to be able to operate in different idioms—one which was the dominant idiom, and the other, that of the Sathin and village women. She had to learn to listen, develop patience and understand that knowledge was not the sole prerogative of the literate. She had to learn to become a scribe to collect this new 'body of knowledge'. Also she had to learn the idiom of reporting this information and other well wishers, successfully and pithily."

—Trainer's diary (1985)

Pracheta-training, therefore, became central not merely for Pracheta selection but also for Sathin selection and the discovery of an appropriate support structure at the village level. What happened in the course of events after the first two trainings is indicative of the complex linkages in the programme.

At the theoretic level, after a good deal of effort, some clarity had emerged on Sathin and village selection. But once in the field, when the Sathin selection actually began, innumerable problems arose. For the Pracheta, the guidelines evolved at the time of training were too demanding. For the trainers, the principles were non-negotiable and had to be reinforced by all the participants in Women's Development Programme—Government functionaries, Idaras and I.D.S.

Voices of the Prachetas on Sathin Selection:

"It is difficult to convince the lower class women to come for the training. Almost always they have to forsake their daily wages for the 20- 25 days of the training."

"They have problems about leaving their cattle as there is no one else to look after them."

"Even if, with great difficulty, they are convinced, other vested interests in the community (higher caste people for instance) dissuade them."

"We should take higher caste women also if they are prepared to come. They are listened to in the village much more than a lower caste woman."

"Whether lower caste or higher caste, if the woman herself has faced enough struggles in her own life, and if she is prepared to come, we should take her."

...and a Trainer's:

"Sathin selection is a very delicate task, in which so much depends on the sharpened sensitivity of the Pracheta involved. It all depends on how quick her perceptions are regarding the village, its problems, the caste and power politics in that village. No amount of rules and criteria is going to help her unless she has internalised the spirit involved in this—and till then, the whole process will remain just a task to be performed. The major thrust should be, not on the detailed instructions about Sathin/village selection, but **strengthening, reinforcing the Prachetas to imbibe the spirit of the programme.** This more basic training would sustain the process valued in the programme."

—Trainer's diary (1986)

## TRAINING

### An Evolving Methodology

Training, in a significant sense, can be seen as the backbone of the programme. Chronologically viewed, the central processes, revised approaches and evaluation procedures have all been initiated through the training programmes. However, an equally important aspect of this training is the fact that its pattern has evolved out of the feedback from the fieldwork. Each subsequent training represents a deeper response to the 'reality' as perceived by the growing number of participants. Annexures I and II describe this process.

## THE CONCEPT

The realization that 'development' is a notion which demands a qualitative shift in the attitudes of the people involved has had its major implications for WDP training. The exercises have primarily been to generate experiences which facilitate altered perceptions of the self-image as well as social image of women. Far from being lectures on 'cleanliness', 'nutrition' and 'child-development', the training programmes experiment with the possibility of creating a climate of questioning, reflecting, sharing, choosing, seeking and discovering—through listening and talking. With these core concepts as the guiding principles, the texture of each training programme has been woven in various patterns.

In a way each training programme has been a unique story created by each specific group. When the tribal groups assembled they began with the issues related to forests; the Marwari Sathins started with the issue of water. The Bhilwara group focussed a good deal on mines and labour. Training in Ajmer concentrated on famine works and the harassment of women. The take off has always depended on how the priorities are seen by the specific

group. And yet, they appear to be the same, at the very basic level—be it for Sathins, Prachetas or Idaras or Project Directors. Each training has, as its central feature, an assumption that the trainers are not outside ‘controllers’ of the situation but go through the same processes themselves. The training is in effect a learning through camp-experience.

The first step, almost always, is an exercise in coming out of oneself—i.e. looking at one’s own ‘being’ and actions as an ‘outsider’, asking oneself, ‘What is it that I do?’ ‘What is it that I think?’ In a climate of togetherness, these questions slowly melt into a deeper perception of ‘What are the things that we do?’ and ‘What are the kinds of experiences that we go through?’ An experience of being a part of larger group emerges imperceptibly. It is a move from the personal to the collective ethos.

At another level, this move from the ‘private’ world to a ‘shared’ world generates an experience of strength. Suffering in privacy, recognising one’s lot as god-given or ‘destined’—is always an experience of powerlessness. Sharing, listening and reflecting lend a distance from oneself and facilitate a balanced perspective. This is a lived understanding of solidarity.

This jotting from a participant’s diary gives some feeling of the current understanding of training in W.D.P.

“Why do we call these trainings?

—it sounds a misnomer,  
for an experience where  
each one’s turmoils and trepidations  
are transfused  
and transformed.

A transition takes place  
with new experiences  
changed attitudes  
and revised stands.

With so much going into  
these experiences  
how can we call it  
a ‘mere training’.”

(Idara Diary)

Given these broad features, it is obvious why W.D.P. trainings have not had a set of common teaching aids. It was discovered in the first few training programmes that the process of making songs or creating charts was probably far more significant than the finally prepared material. However, two significant features emerge throughout these training programmes. Firstly, with each new training, it is being realised that there is no dearth of trainers. From amongst the Prachetas, almost eighty percent have evolved skills for training. So also the Sathins. Beginning with the concept of a ‘highly skilled trainer’, W.D.P. has now moved to a decentralisation of this very important activity. A chart of the training teams over the two years demonstrates this point clearly (see pg. 52). Secondly, the notion of training is increasingly being seen as one long process in which the camp-experience has to be linked with the existing structures of action at the field level. Hence there has been a growing stress on more frequent field visits, analysis, involvement of associated groups and visualisation of longterm linkages. The latest training which is being planned in Jaipur District has three sets of field visits, staying with other Sathins and work-analysis as a followup.

The following note from the State Idara describes the shifting pattern of trainings in W.D.P.—

“Each of these trainings had been different, unique yet similar in a broad sense, specially so when it comes to the contents....”

“Padampura training, the first of its kind in WDP, with no infrastructure, got the longest rope to begin with. No structural hassles. The non-hierarchical, free, adventurous mood of the training had its transforming effect on the Sathins. They went back to their villages charged with a feeling of abandon and confidence, ready to begin something and everything at their own level without waiting for anyone to call a start. It was probably an ‘overdoing’, but that is hindsight wisdom!”

Then came the Pracheta training. Again in a very similar mood regarding the take off of the programme.

Everything was just coming into being. Precisely because of this—the uncertainty of things—training programmes also become forums of evolving what would be the pattern of WDP activity. It led to an over emphasis on ‘training’ and trainers. Training became a panacea, a magic cure for all field situations. One knew that this again, needed a balance.

The first re-orientation came as a major break. The complex texture of the infrastructure, the obvious mismatch between the training atmosphere and what exists in society, started affecting the Sathin-Pracheta- PD-IDARA relationship in a criss-cross pattern. Sathins’ confidence in themselves, their outspokenness, their initiative and independence as individuals posed problems. With efforts to mellow these traits, the next re-orientation was diametrically opposite to the earlier one, taking the surrounding climate as a real situation. However, it had its repercussions. The approval mechanisms of the concerned people started to matter more than their own initiative. What was seen as ‘necessary’ soon became a problem. And everything came boomeranging back to the training, to the trainer.

All this reaffirmed the need to think over the training patterns. Training within the confines of a particular period of time had to be stopped and it had to be understood as an initiation of a continuous process. The field situation had to be accepted as a continuing facet of the training and not be seen in isolation. A conscious recognition of training and field work as a **continuous exercise** was made.

For a field situation to become an extended training in its natural environs meant that the District needed intensive participation in the training programmes. Each participant group had to strengthen the other, making it essential to incorporate feedback from the field to the training centre and from the training centre back to the field. Gradually, the PDs and POs partook in the training and even took over, for some districts have done without any outside resource persons/main trainer. Now each district has become self sufficient in forming the core team with the older Sathins and Prachetas playing very important roles as trainers even to other districts.

## A CORE CONVERGENT

What was the core convergent point of all training schemes even as the dust began to settle on the early variable factors? The answer must be: **the effort to evolve a different perspective**, to rediscover the lost faith and confidence in ourselves, in our collective strength. It was never an easy task. All those archaic values that had been dinned into our heads decrying and rejecting the positive qualities of womanhood, all those stereotyped images had been so absorbed into the system that questioning had almost become sacrilegious. But it emerged, slowly and steadily—faith in solidarity and sisterhood born of sharing all those moments of personal pain, humiliation, the years of silent suffering and the moments of happiness. It was a pooling of experiences and recollections, so remote that even thinking about them seemed forbidden—let alone talking of them. Many had almost forgotten them in the course of coping with everyday life.

From all these, a pattern began to emerge. Through the crumbling of old images rose the roles, the unguessed, uncharted capabilities. The training programmes now initiated a revised, **positive** perception of a woman’s own identity in a larger social process.

## SOME SPECIFIC FEATURES

The initial training helped the participants to focus on the common element in their effort. Later training began evolving certain characteristic features. Each district’s character—climatic, geographic, socio-economic and others, started to feature in the trainings. Constant feedback from the field brought about the realisation that WDP’s work cannot take place in isolation. This meant tackling many issues—handpumps, famine works and minimum wages, ration and grazing land problems, other village level workers and their functioning, health and birthcontrol and many others. To effectively start dealing with all these issues, relevant information (with constant feedback) had to be collected and disseminated.

Thus a balance of commonalities and specifics became essential to WDPs functioning, with the style of functioning of each district unit adding an extra touch. This started shaping the individual profiles. Each of these

evolved its own particular patterns of functioning, yet did not deviate from the essential character of the main programme. This gives the whole exercise a very enigmatic flavour—this ability to cope with so much diversity, while retaining the essence.

(State Idara, November 1986)

# III JAJAM

A Jajam is the monthly meeting of the Sathins, organised by them at the village level. It is a platform for exchanging and sharing their work experience. For the village women, the Jajam is a place where they can openly talk about their problems, think of alternatives, and reflect on their present positions. It is also a festive event for them, with everyone joining in the singing and dancing, which lasts sometimes till the early hours of the next morning. What is important, however, is to see how a Jajam is planned and the nature of issues discussed in this forum.

Though there is no format for planning a Jajam, one can discern a general pattern over the past two years. Sathins take the total responsibility for conducting this meeting. They identify the issues to be discussed, and also plan the physical arrangements for it. Once they identify the issue, they contact the Prachetas and sometimes write to the district Idara asking for support at the 'information' level as well as a contact with resource persons if they are needed. The Jajam takes off with the Sathins' stories, in which they share their experiences of the last month. This necessarily involves a reference to the follow up of the last Jajam. An effort is made to see how far the last Jajam's decisions have been implemented and if not, what is hampering its progress and what should be done. In all this, the Sathin's role is a very important one. Sometimes, the issues lead to vehement opposition, and even harassment from local vested interests. This is where the Prachetas, Project Directors and Idaras come in. They assist the Sathins to understand these problems and link them to a wider perspective.

Some of the major issues cropping up in the Jajams are the availability of drinking water, installation of handpumps in the lower caste locality, repair of a tank, health issues like the PHCs not functioning, or the ANMs not co-operating. They also discuss other problems relating to women's harassment, information/follow-up relating to different schemes like pension for the disabled or widows or registering names in the BPL list, the payment of loans etc. (See District Calendar, Ajmer, Annexure I).

The following excerpt from a Jajam report highlights how the perception of a problem leads to action.

"In Jajam Chandlai, women discussed the problems they face with the local doctors and nurses. They often refused to see the patients during hospital hours. Instead they would ask them to come to their residence, so that they could charge a fee from them. The participants of the Jajam decided to call these doctors and nurses

to the next Jajam and discuss these problems with them. This alone, they felt could give the correct version from both sides. As a follow-up, a workshop was also organised with the Sathins and the ANMs at a Pracheta headquarter. This workshop managed to evolve a working relationship and to some extent good rapport between the Sathins and the ANMs."

(Jaipur DWDA report, 1985)

Issues relating to drinking water have been taken up in a number of Jajams, specially in Jodhpur. The following excerpt illustrates how it was handled by one group in Salawas.

"Sathin Rambha came up with the issue of polluted river water in Salawas village. She pointed out that wastage from the neighbouring factories is dumped into the river. Apart from discolouring the water, the pollution had led to alarming health hazards. It was observed by some women that even when animals drink that water they have serious problems. The villagers felt that being a Sathin, it was Rambha's duty to find a solution to this problem. During the discussion in the Jajam it was clear that Rambha alone could not do anything by herself. Everyone suggested that she should try to involve the community, have discussions with them and make them realise that without a group effort this would never be solved. As a result of taking up this issue at the Jajam level, Rambha understood what to do about this problem. She had a series of meetings at the village level, with women, men, and the Sarpanch. Soon the community realised that they all would have to pool in their efforts to tackle this issue. In these meetings they decided to erect a wall outside the factory so that the water would not flow out of the factory, in case the management failed to find some solution. Sathins discussed it with the Prachetas and DWDA and Idara. This led to the intervention of the Collector. He promised that purifier plants would soon be installed in the factories."

(Excerpts from Jajam Report and Pracheta Report—Jodhpur District, 1985-86)

Sharing each other's joys and sorrows, listening to the village women's problems and trying to help them in whatever way they can, our Sathins have already paved the way for organising women in villages. The pace is slow but there is spontaneity and hope in their efforts. The number of other village women who gather for the Jajam is an indicator of how much rapport the particular Sathin has with the women of her village. Another indicator is their participation in the Jajam. For them it is a big event, they have a role to play, they are listened to. It is this participatory mood of Jajam which keeps them together, generating the spirit of sisterhood and solidarity.

## THE CONCEPT

### An analysis of the 'shifts' in processes

Initially, the purpose of a Jajam was primarily to serve as a forum for evaluation. Over the last two years, both the form and content of the Jajam has reflected a continual revision and incorporation of many more expectations from the village women. The initial expectation was that Jajams would be a one day meeting to share the problems and experiences of the Sathins—a follow-up/monitoring mechanism. Soon it was felt that just one day was not enough for an informal kind of sharing which also involved a lot of release of repressed social sentiments. Often, these are expressed through singing and dancing, role plays and dramas with a good deal of abandon. This feature has necessitated a change in the time span of a Jajam from one day to one and a half to two days depending on the mood of the gathering and the type of issues discussed. Each situation renders a different texture to the particular Jajam.

## THE JAJAM AS A CONTINUING TRAINING SITUATION

There is a growing realisation among all the WDP members now that whatever goes wrong in the field situation cannot be attributed to the initial training alone. If that training is to be understood as an **initiation**, then far more intense and rigorous is the need for training in the field. This has led to the understanding of the Jajam as an exercise in **continuous training** in the field situation, which should reinforce the central processes of WDP. This realisation is fully shared at a theoretical level but no tall claim can be made that this has been thoroughly understood by women in all the processes of the Jajam. But certainly the effort is on.

If a Jajam, in a fuller sense, has to evolve as a forum of communication between the Sathins, and other village women, a continuous rethinking has to be done on the notion of roles to be played by the various functionaries. Without playing a high profile role how can the Idaras and DWDA's direct the trends emerging in a Jajam? If they have to authentically assist the participatory processes and initiative amongst the Sathins, they may have to be very patient. But, there is always a desire to see results. Also it is difficult to convince the larger group (the Government) that participatory action presumes patience. A good deal of understanding is needed to allow for the village leadership to take deep roots through Sathin solidarity. This is yet to be done. And it will be done as the lateral linkages between all the Sathins are strengthened. With this the Jajam would acquire greater meaning. It will increasingly make all the administrative factors redundant or secondary. Then the Sathins would really 'organise' the 'meetings' whenever, wherever they want (i.e. not necessarily taking it as a formal monthly meeting) without waiting for the official letters from the DWDA, or the Pracheta or the funds. Then the type of issues taken up, the urgency to tackle it, would become the guiding factor, breaking the time span of one month, if need be. Then the community involvement, the Sathin's accountability to the community, could become the driving force behind the Jajams.

(Idara perceptions, 1986)

# IV SHIVIR

'Shivir' can be viewed as a forum for continuing education in WDP. It is a self conscious effort to meet the 'information needs' identified during the course of work. In this situation, training is seen "...not as an exclusive closed door activity for one homogenous group, but rather as an opening out, sharing of knowledge, information and exchanging alternatives for solving them in a heterogenous group. It implies an **acceptance** of different idioms and attitudes, a seeking of their convergence in solving jointly defined or stated problems." (—Trainer's diary).

Shivir is primarily built around a problem which is a common concern of all the participants in the district at a particular time. It has emerged as an intensive exercise organised in the village for a period of three to four days. It involves a collective participation of the Sathins, Prachetas, Idaras, Project Director/Officer of the district. This interaction aims at systematically understanding the various facets of the problem, obtaining sufficient knowledge related to it and arriving at a common perspective.

In the 28 months of the existence of the programme in the six districts, two Shivirs have taken place in two districts of Ajmer and Jaipur. Two Shivirs are being prepared, one in Jodhpur district and a second in Ajmer district. In Ajmer district, the first Shivir was organized on the issues of 'Famine relief works'. It took place in Bhamolav village, Arain Panchayat Samiti, from the 5th to the 7th of February, 1986. In Jaipur district, the Shivir was organised on the issue of 'Panchayati Raj' in village Bhatari, Bassi Panchayat Samiti, from the 15th to the 17th of October, 1986. In Jodhpur district, a Shivir is being organised on the issue of 'Famine' and in Ajmer district on 'Health problems'.

## THE SHIVIR PATTERN

Though each Shivir was moulded by a specific issue, the nature of the group and the needs of that area, the underlying process of the two Shivirs held so far have been similar. What follows is an attempt to describe the pattern of the Shivir. The activities have been clubbed under three heads:

## PLANNING THE SHIVIR

Planning a Shivar involves its two basic aspects:

- the need to identify an issue on which there is a convergence of all the participants in the district.
- responding to the information needs.

Therefore the planning itself takes a month. The Sathins, Pracheta, Idaras, Project Officer/Director are equal participants. They have a series of meetings at the village, block and district level. The planning process is described below, with instances from the Shivirs by way of highlights:

**Initial Planning** begins with the announcement of the quarterly programme by the DWDA and Idara of the district. Some of the decisions they take are:

- The month in which the Shivar will take place.
- Whether all the Sathins of a district shall participate. This depends on the number of Sathins.
- Whether the responsibility of the Shivar needs to be given to a particular resource person. (In the Ajmer district the first Shivar was coordinated by a voluntary worker.)
- Expenditure on the Shivar is estimated.

**Understanding the concept of Shivar** is first communicated to the Prachetas and the Sathins, through Pracheta meetings and in Jajams or special pre-Shivar meetings. The tentative dates for the Shivar are fixed and the planning activities are drawn up with the Sathins. Initial tasks for the participants are determined.

**Identification of the subject for the Shivar** has two levels:

(a) Each Sathin first identifies the major problems which need to be resolved with her group of village women. She holds a series of meetings and discussions in the village and is sometimes assisted by the Pracheta. This generates an interest in the women about the Shivar as well. The Jodhpur district Shivar planning report clearly conveys this:

It was obvious to Sathin Ganwari Bai that most of the people in her village were deeply disturbed by the prevalent famine conditions. It was the fifth year in succession with no rainfall. The conversations she had been having with the women in the last few days showed their desperate condition. For Luni Devi the immediate concern was the survival of the livestock—"Where is the water and fodder for the cattle? Human beings will survive somehow", she said. For Sayari it was the problem of feeding their children. Most of the men were migrating in search of work. Sathin Ganwari told the women that they could prevent recurrent famine if they all planted trees. There was a direct connection between treecover and rainfall. The women agreed with her but said that it was a suggestion for the future. What was it that they could they do 'today' to help overcome the famine situation. For Chuni Bai it was all in the hands of God. Human beings could do nothing about the famine. But Nani and others had a solution in mind "if only the Pracheta Behenji could get the famine works started then they would get 'some' money. Even if they did not get the full wage." The Sathin felt that there was an attitude of dependence and acceptance of the given. She told them that the Pracheta could do nothing alone. They would have to get together, meet the Sarpanch and get the famine works started. And of course they could get a full wage if they all pressed for it unitedly.

When she told the women that they were having a meeting with specialists, to discuss one major problem of women—they all said emphatically, "please discuss our famine problem and let us know how we should cope with it!"

Ganwari Bai knew that this needed immediate handling. This could be treated as the central issue for the Shivar. (Jodhpur, 1986)

(b) Such village meetings are to be followed by a meeting at the district level, with all the functionaries to select a common problem from those identified by the Sathins. There is a conscious attempt at selecting that issue—which not only needs immediate handling for most of the Sathins, but which will also strengthen the women at the grass root level, when they know of it.

The example from the Jaipur district Shivar planning gives an idea of this process.

After holding discussions and meetings for a week in their villages, the 27 Sathins of the district met with the Prachetas, Idara Personnel and the Project Officer. The four topics which came up were:

1. Gynaecological problems of women
2. How to build confidence in women of socially backward castes

3. The problem of village men drinking liquor

4. The Panchayati Raj system

Each topic was screened by the participants. It was felt that the problem of 'how to build confidence in women of socially backward castes' was woven in the focus of every activity of WDP. It was not required to be taken separately.

The problem of 'village men drinking liquor', was considered to be a very sensitive issue. It would probably lead to immediate conflict situations with the village men and the powerful. For which the Sathin and her group were not as yet ready.

How was the choice made between the two subjects, the gynaecological problems of women and the Panchayati Raj system? The Sathins were of the opinion that the latter should get the priority as they had to encounter the Panchayat constantly during the course of their work. A deeper understanding was needed for its operations.

The Prachetas, Idara and the Project Officer felt that a Shivar on the Panchayat Raj system would be a timely intervention before the forthcoming Panchayat elections. The aspect of the Sathin's role in the panchayat elections could be incorporated, too.

Thus a consensus emerged on the issue of the Panchayati Raj.

(Jaipur Idara, 1986)

**Information gathering** follows, once the decision is made on the subject of the Shivar. Each participant has a role to play in this.

(i) The Sathins are supposed to gather information on the issue from the experiential and operational aspects, with the help of Prachetas.

The issue of the Ajmer district Shivar for example, was famine relief works. The Sathin met the women at the famine work site, in their homes and in the group meetings she organized in the evenings. In some cases the Sathin was a labourer herself. She thus gathered the village women's perceptions on the existing state of the famine works in their village: how it operated, the work conditions, the wages, when they were paid, selection on the famine works. They also found out from the Mate the department from which the works had started.

Those Sathins in whose village the works had not started had found out from local sources why it had not.

(ii) The Prachetas, Idara and the DWDA have to provide theoretical information on the subject concerned. They are supposed to either collect the information themselves and communicate it in the Shivar or invite specialists to the Shivar. This decision depends both on the issue concerned and the individual involved.

In both the Shivirs, this was carried out differently.

#### JAIPUR DISTRICT SHIVIR

The Idara and DWDA invited resource persons and organized a workshop before the Shivar. This enabled the Prachetas, the Idara personnel and the PO to understand the Panchayati Raj system from different perspectives.

A political scientist was invited, who traced the Panchayati Raj system in a historical perspective with special reference to Rajasthan. The Rajasthan Gram Panchayat Act was discussed. Information on the Panchayat structure and the Panchayat elections was sought.

A development researcher was also invited, who complemented the above information.

After getting this information, the Prachetas met the BDO's and the village Sarpanchs and tried to understand the operations of the Panchayat.

By calling experts to give information on the subject in the pre-Shivar meeting, the Jaipur DWDA and Idara dismissed with the idea of inviting resource persons to the Shivar itself.

#### AJMER DISTRICT SHIVIR

The Prachetas tried to get the details of the famine works operating in the Gram Panchayats of the Sathins from the relevant Panchayat Samiti—the amount of money sanctioned for the work, the number of labourers to be employed, the nature of the work, bottlenecks, if any, etc. A few were unsuccessful because of a lack of cooperation at the Panchayat Samiti office.

The Project Director and Idara specialist tried to seek information related to the rules of the famine work from the development department. They also tried to obtain a picture of the famine works assigned for the year from the State gazette notification.

The Project Director Idara and the voluntary worker identified the specialists who provided the information support in the Shivar from the Social Work and Research Centre, Tilonia. They were:

- the coordinator of the women's programme, with a long experience in the wage issue,
- the geologist to help identify soil samples, on which the wage rate in famine works is passed.

A lawyer was invited to help understand the labour laws appropriate for such works.

**Selection of the village for the Shivar**, is a collective decision. The criteria for the selection are broadly as follows:

- (i) The Sathin should take the initiative in organizing the Shivar in her village.
- (ii) The issue of the Shivar must involve the women of the village so that they can participate in the Shivar.
- (iii) There must be space for organizing the Shivar and staying and water arrangements must be made available to the participants.
- (iv) The Sarpanch should cooperate with the Sathin.

**The Choice of invitees** is made at the Idara and DWDA level.

In the two Shivars, different priorities led to a difference in decision making:

Since the Ajmer district Shivar was the first Shivar in WDP, the district functionaries were not certain about the form it would take. They decided they would take no chances. Only those who had been part of the planning processes would be participants in the Shivar.

Thus there were no participants from other districts. Since one Shivar planning meeting was organized with the State level participants, the coordinator, state Idara, and a person from IDS(J) participated.

The Jaipur Shivar took place at a time when there was a realization that inter-district participation was important. Each district saw itself in the larger set of other districts. Therefore the Jaipur District extended the invitation of the Shivar to all the districts. They got a good response from each district. Representatives of the Sathins, Prachetas and either the Project Director or Idara participated.

## THE SHIVAR

This is an intensive three day camp experience. The focus is on one issue. Exercises during the three days mainly consist of bridging the gap between experimental and theoretical information. This is not a mere transference of information. It is a mutual process of sharing. It leads to a change in perception of the situation. It happens through the same process as in a training programme. The steps involve:

- Eliciting information from each Sathin. This provides a description of the existing situation.
- Discovering that it is the common situation,
- Critically examining it,
- Responding to it by communicating the theoretical information,
- Arriving at a common perspective.

This is followed by the participants formulating their future plan of action. The Shivar finally concludes with a collective evaluation session. A description of the Jaipur Shivar highlights this process:

There were over seventy participants in this Shivar from both Jaipur and outside districts. There were about 40 Sathins, 13 Prachetas, four state and district Idara Personnel, four PD/PO's, three IDS(J) personnel and the rest were invitees who participated for a brief while. Since a third of the participants were from outside districts and had not been involved in the planning process, the Shivar started with the Jaipur district participants introducing them to the concept and planning of the Shivar on Panchayati Raj. This initial exercise helped in bringing the participants to a common direction.

This was followed by exercises, both in the large group and in sub-groups, to elicit the Sathins understanding of the relationship of the Panchayat to the people in her village. It appeared that the Sarpanch was the sole power in the Panchayat. The ward Panch and the Mahila Panch (in all the villages they were co-opted to the Panchayat) seemed nonentities, they did not know much above their role in the Panchayat. There was a direct relationship of caste-population and status to the election of the Sarpanch. The financial status of the Sarpanch improved on being elected. Most of the Sarpanchs, whether of the higher caste or the lower tribals, could not bring benefits to the poor. The village in the Gram Panchayat to which the Sarpanch belonged got the maximum benefits. Some of the Sarpanchs did not stay in the Gram Panchayat. Most of the Sarpanchs did not involve the people in the Gram-Sabha. The Panchayat council rarely met. The Sarpanch controlled all the

schemes operating in the village. He selected the Mate. He controlled the Cooperative Society. His link with a political party was evident.

Most of the women of the villages were not concerned about the Panchayat. They did not know about the Election System. They voted as their family men told them to. They would personally not like to vote a drunkard as Sarpanch. They assessed him by his work—whether he brought famine works and installed handpumps in the village.

In the perception of the women there seemed to be no distinction between the roles of the Sarpanch, Patwari, secretary, Gram Sevak and the Cooperative Society President. They were all powerful people of the 'Government' at the village level.

Two kinds of issues emerged from the discussion, which were taken up subsequently:—

Information related issues, which were

- i) Information on the political set up, the Administrative and Revenue set up and the Cooperative society at the Gram Panchayat and the Panchayat Samiti level. The roles of the different functionaries were explained.
- ii) Information on the Panchayat elections.
- iii) Information on the Cooperative Society election.

The other related issues which were discussed intensively were—

- i) who would be a good Sarpanch,
- ii) if the Sarpanch is not cooperative, where does the strength lie, with the village people or with the power holders above him,
- iii) role of the Sathins in the present elections, and
- iv) what is 'Government money'.

As an illustration, the points of discussion on the first such issue are given below:

**Who would be a good Sarpanch?** This discussion took place in the large group. Each Sathin contributed to it. According to them, a good Sarpanch would be one

- who would not withhold information relating to the benefits of the poor, instead he would make the effort to communicate it to them,
- who would hold the Panchayat Council meeting regularly,
- who would participate in the women's group meetings,
- who would interact with them even after the Panchayat elections,
- who would not discriminate between the different villages of the Gram Panchayat,
- who was honest,
- who would make efforts to bring the different development schemes to the Gram Panchayat,
- who would stay in the Gram Panchayat village,
- who would bring political awareness to the village,
- who would not play the 'divide-and-rule' game to maintain his seat,
- who would remove the liquor shops from the village,
- who would hold the Gram Sabha and take the opinion of the people in his work.

**How would they ensure this attitude in a Sarpanch?** Some were sceptical about whether they would be able to elect such a Sarpanch in their lifetime!

Some felt that the Sarpanch, after the election, should take a vow publicly that he would live up to the value of honesty.

Others felt that if there was a group censorship on the Sarpanch, then probably it would make a difference in his work. They felt that they would like to work towards building this group.

**Formulation of the future action plan:**—Each participant had to plan her future activity:

What would the Sathins go back from the Shivar and do?

Most of the Sathins stated that they would go back to the villages and try and communicate to the village women about what they had learnt. They would do this both individually and in the group meetings with women:

- they would try to convince women to stand for the ward Panch elections and to vote consciously on the basis of the capability of the person.

— they would be conscious of not being wooed by any of the election candidates.

The Prachetas and Idara stated that they would primarily seek the new information needs identified in this subject and communicate it to the village women. They would also rise up for any kind of support asked by the Sathins.

**Evaluation of the Shivir :** The entire Jaipur group of Sathins, Prachetas, Idara, P.O. and the State Idara and IDS(J) personnel evaluated the Shivir.

Sathins found the Shivirs a very convincing activity. For one Sathin this information had given her a sense of liberation. Another stated that the Shivir had destroyed the myth that money may come a woman's way but never knowledge.

They praised the Bhatari village Sathin for the physical arrangements.

One limitation which they observed about themselves in the Shivir was unpunctuality. This they said, should never happen again.

**The Prachetas** felt that the Shivir had brought the entire district together. They had experienced a sense of solidarity, which had rejuvenated them.

They appreciated the contribution of each participant in maintaining the physical arrangements.

They saw their limitation in terms of communicating the information systematically. This, they said, they would prevent from happening in the future.

**The Project Director and Idara** felt that the Shivir had made an impact which they had never seen before:

- It was impossible to believe that village women could sit for three days continuously and discuss an important topic like this.
- They appreciated the participation of the other district functionaries.
- They also appreciated the way in which the Prachetas and Sathins took over the entire responsibility of the physical arrangements.

## POST SHIVIR RIPPLE

The follow up of the Shivir is an important activity. The Prachetas, Idara and the Project Director need to provide constant support to the Sathins. The nature of the support depends on the needs of the Sathins.

The following excerpt from Ajmer district gives an idea of the after-effects of the Shivir.

Each Sathin on her return to the village shared the information with the concerned women about famine relief works. This was followed by various actions in different villages. The women came together and succeeded in resisting the irregularities in demanding the selection of poor women for the famine relief works, getting the minimum wage of Rs. 11/- or its equivalent of 7 kilos, 300 gms of wheat. They negotiated the quantity of work given and the hours of work per day.

These and several other successful actions were given the continuous support of Prachetas, the P.D. and Idara. Idara and the DWDA organised follow-up meetings and workshops with the Prachetas and Sathins. These were occasions for reflecting on their actions, seeking more information and planning future action. Now ten months after the Shivir, when the Kharif crop has once again failed to grow and fodder is not available, the Sathin and the women in some villages have already contacted the Revenue Girdwar and Sarpanch. To find out from them, whether in their reports to the Government they have described the famine situation correctly. The Sathins know that it is a crucial report for any kind of assistance during famine from the Government.

(Ajmer Idara Report, 1986)

The Shivir at present is a major event in the district. It was originally visualized as a quarterly activity with the Sathins of two or three Pracheta clusters being the participants. However, the way these two Shivirs have emerged, it is obvious that **the quantum of time, energy and resources involved in them is enormous**. That is probably the main reason why they are not so frequent or spread out. Other reasons are:

- a. Each Pracheta unit is still incomplete and the entire district group is not very large.
- b. The process of selecting the Sathins, training them and assisting them in the consolidation and expansion of their work has precluded the Shivir from becoming a quarterly activity.
- c. The various districts are still discovering the concept of Shivir and there seems to be a need to discover it collectively with all the functionaries.

## APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT

### Some Cases

WDP's experience over the last two years has reinforced its initial assumptions. It is now becoming increasingly clear why **the central issue is not how one can deliver the developmental schemes to rural women of deprived sections**. Rather, "it is one of **creating conditions in which these women can discover themselves as active participants in developmental processes**." Any attempt to 'sell' a scheme, however valid, begets neither credibility nor participation in the present climate. It is generally seen as a Government programme from which people may individually 'extract' whatever they can. This perception has led to certain disastrous consequences in some attempts at distributing assets. The following points summarize the feedback from the rural areas through rural women.

1. Government programmes project a scenario in which the rural poor again get subdivided into 'strong' and 'weak'. The results are that the stronger among the weak compete for individual growth at the cost of the larger majority—and **women** have invariably been at the losing end of the deprived majority.
2. It has created a further distance from the Government. The scheme is seen as a challenge for clever manipulation with a justification that this is after all not hitting against any person. "It is Government money," they say, "hence nobody's interest is marred."
3. The chances of people 'participating' in a programme for overall group benefit get eroded because the 'formulation' of the programme is still at the level where the subordinate group always takes it as the projection of the vested interests of some hidden power. Bitter experience teaches that 'public' decisions actually benefit a powerful minority. Naturally, the rural deprived classes are suspicious of such schemes—particularly the women. Countering this complex situation, which we have found to be a major factor preventing women's participation in development efforts, the activities of WDP can be seen as initiating diverse forms of action around the following core guidelines:

1. A continuing sense of trust and mutual confidence must be maintained without any crack in the implementation of the programme at all levels. This in turn, implies a ruthless rejection of personal gains/fraud amongst all the participants in the development programme through an open, critical group approach. Because the programme has a unique texture of involving Government, non-Government voluntary groups and academics, it has worked for a reinforcement of the fundamental assumption that 'trust is possible'.
2. Experience-situations have to be generated at all levels to examine that observation, reflection, understanding and planning can be, and should be, women's activities also. This must be seen as a more substantial interpretation and description of 'education' for women. The attempt, at the first level, has to be to make the existing body of knowledge about them and their situation available to them in the way they can receive it. This, in turn, means that the 'idiom' and 'pace' of information dissemination has to be guided by their perceptions. With this step, the other associated levels of rational analysis follow necessarily, demystifying the notion that only a few can 'think'.
3. Activities should generate experiences which project meaningful developmental processes as that which do not foster double standards of 'private' and 'public' justice. The problems hitherto seen as 'personal' for women have to be tackled at a collective level just as much as what is projected as a group demand has also to be followed in personal lives as a code of ethics. In short, **continuous, participatory monitoring and evaluation become a necessary process of development activities**. Given this backdrop, WDP increasingly interprets the central focus of the program as **assisting women's active participation in the developmental process, facilitating communication, access to information, analysis and decision making, action with responsibility and critical evaluation of what is worth continuing and what needs to be revised**. With these core processes of developmental intervention, the issues that are now seen by rural women as "crucial" to development concern **access to water, food, fuel, fodder, education and health, in a just and equitable manner—not as "doles" but as results of active contribution and participation**.

## WATER FOR ALL

Bhanvri, Sathin of Datan village of Srinagar Panchayat Samiti, came to know of the Handpump Abhiyan in Ajmer district. She shared this information with other women of her village during a meeting. The group decided that the Harijan and Gujar Bastis in their village needed handpumps because they suffered the hostility of the upper caste groups when they took water from their handpumps. The women made out an application for two handpumps through the Sarpanch.

The PHED department responded with a team to install the handpumps. The upper caste group prevented the installation of the pumps in Harijan and Gujar 'mohallas'. They wanted these pumps added to their mohalla. And violence followed. Eventually, the Harijans managed to get one handpump in their mohalla, but the Gujars could not. The team had to leave as one person got injured in the clash.

After this event, the PHED team came thrice to install the pump in the Gujar basti and on each occasion, the powerful upper caste group prevented them from doing it.

The women's group organised by the Sathin of that village met again and decided that they needed to act promptly. They realized that if the 'Handpump Abhiyan' got over without accomplishing this task, the Gujar mohalla women would continue facing water problems. Once again, they wrote a fresh application to the PHED department. The team came again. The women's groups took charge of the situation and stood in the Gujar mohalla all day. They got their handpump!

(Ajmer District Idara, April 1986)

## AVAILABILITY OF WATER

A year long battle

The story begins in early 1985. Wells and ponds, the only water sources in village Piplund (Jahajpur Panchayat Samiti, Bhilwara District) were dry. The women had to walk several kilometres to fetch water. This caused immense toil for the wage labourers and firewood pickers. They expressed the need for handpumps or taps in the Sathin meetings.

Following this, the Sathin, together with the Mahila Panch met the Sarpanch. They got to know that 11 years ago the tap water scheme had been passed and sanctioned for their village. But due to strong internal politics in the village, the scheme never came through.

These women decided to form a committee to plan the strategy for getting the scheme. Each mohalla was represented in the committee by a woman.

The committee first wrote letters to the Sarpanch, B.D.O., M.L.A. and Water department. They asked them to bring the water scheme to their village within a month or else they would go on strike. When there was no response, 125 women of the village, for the first time in their lives, got together, took out a procession in the village and staged a dharna outside the Panchayat Bhawan. They also staged a relay hungerstrike. Each day, five or six women sat on strike. On the fourth day the Sathin and Mahila Panch met the A.D.D.O. at Jahajpur, the Panchayat Samiti headquarter. They were assured that in ten days the water problem would be solved. The women called off the strike.

On the tenth day an engine was fitted in one well and water was pumped out. This facility lasted only for one day. The women were not fooled. Once again they wrote letters to the officials. They also met the Zila Pramukh, M.L.A., Pradhan, Sarpanch and threatened to go on strike again. They sent reminders continuously. It took one year for six mohallas to get **one** tap connection each.

Knowing about this has led other village women to join together to look at their water situation and search for a solution. In Kankaria Khera, a handpump has been installed through women's efforts.

(Bhilwara District, May 1986)

## GRAZING LANDS

Issues of cattle fodder

Twenty women of village Salemabad, Silora Panchayat Samiti met Sathin Kamla to discuss the encroachment upon a portion of the village common grazing land by a few upper caste families from another village. The cattle belonging to the residents of this village got beaten up by the encroachers who had even built a fence for themselves.

This was very upsetting. They, being poor, were totally dependent on that grazing land for feeding their cattle.

The Sathin organised a meeting where all the affected women decided to act immediately. The Sarpanch and a few other men had also realised this was a problem, so they joined together and encountered the intruders. Initially the men felt that women should keep out of all this, but the women took a firm and active stand. When the other partymen tried to stop them they said that they were only taking back land which was theirs. The Sarpanch feared violence. He contacted the S.D.O. and the police. The land was finally returned. The women's persistent efforts prevented the land from being grabbed by a small exploitative group.  
(Ajmer District, 1986)

## UNDERSTANDING ISSUES

### Family Planning

In Kalesara, Pisangan Panchayat Samiti, Gyarasi is a Sathin who has won the confidence of the poor and lower caste women. These women had been victims of a good deal of discriminatory treatment by the 'Mate' of famine works, who blatantly favoured the ones who made efforts to please him. Given this background, he pressurized these women that their names would be eliminated from the list of wageworkers if they did not get a sterilization operation performed on them (he in turn had to fulfil some targets). He had eliminated eleven names from the list of famine workers on this ground, out of which two women who were 18 years and 20 years old with no children, were eliminated because they were not willing to be operated on. With the intervention of the Sathin through some senior Government officers, all the names which were removed from the list of workers in Kalesara Budhwara and Sarsari were incorporated again. The idea was to make sure that a programme to assist women's development should not become a coercive mechanism. Later, Gyarasi found that three women did wish to get operated. These women, therefore, were helped to get sterilized. All the other women in the famine work helped them to retain their jobs and worked extra on their behalf to see that they did not undertake taxing physical work immediately after the operation.

The consensus that emerged later was that the resistance was to coercive measures and not to the concept which has to be rationally understood and implemented. Also, that assurance of post-operative help was the biggest motivation for surgery needed for family planning.  
(Report—Ajmer District, October 1986)

## IDENTIFYING PRIORITIES

### Consolidated planning and action

Diminishing latrine space is an increasing problem which women face in rural areas. This is an experienced suffering which seldom got discussed, analysed and seen as a problem deserving attention on a priority basis. In Ropa village, Jahajpur Panchayat Samiti, Malti Sathin, together with a large group of women, initiated a process of problem solving which brought about responsible action arising out of reflection and planning, while simultaneously distilling general principles for future action.

The latrine space allotted in Ropa village (like many other villages) was on the periphery of the village or along the road side—both being extremely inconvenient in terms of distance and minimum privacy. The women who were subjected to daily suffering were almost two hundred, belonging to Regar, Chamar, Pindara, Kumhar, and Mahajan jati. They talked about it in the Sathin's meeting. The Sarpanch was sympathetic but was 'helpless' as he had no solution. The group pursued the matter in the Panchayat but with no result. Concrete action was definitely needed—but how?

The women soon identified that some private Rodis (gobar decomposition pits) were on Panchayat land. They found that the only bottleneck was the fact that it was on a connecting linkway to the local Seth's farm. They looked for an alternative approach to the farm and thus assured, started cleaning the space. The Sarpanch agreed to the solution. When the Seth resisted, they argued: (i) you being a man can use the other route also, which is a little longer. (ii) You seldom go by this route to the farm—only the Halli uses it, who does not object.

The Sarpanch and other village men were also now supporting the women's argument, so finally they got the land. The next step was to construct a wall. The estimate was for an expense of Rs. 500/- out of which the women contributed Rs. 250/- collectively and the balance was given by the Panchayat. These women also gave one day's

free labour. The Panchayat contributed stones and lime. They simultaneously got a small Kheli (water tank) made near the enclosure to ensure the availability of water for women and animals.

This achievement created quite a ripple in the village. Women from other mohallas started coming to ask for help. They had earlier shown total indifference to the matter. The Sathin insisted that in order to solve a problem a participatory reflective process must be followed so that action can be consolidated.

(Pracheta Report—Bhilwara District, May 1986)

### **SEEKING FAIR DISTRIBUTION**

#### **The Case of the Cooperative Store: A Sathin's Story**

On returning from training, I started meeting the women of my village. On one such occasion, the women told me that since the last five months they had not got their ration of sugar. Twenty of us (women) went to the Cooperative Store. We asked the dealer for the register. We discovered that the record showed a collection of sugar against our names for the last five months. The shop dealer aggressively maintained that we were lying about not getting sugar.

Next day I met the Pracheta and discussed this problem with her. We decided on a plan of action. On the following day the twenty of us again went to the ration shop but this time with our ration cards. The Pracheta didi accompanied us. We again asked him for the register. He was very scared and refused to do so. Then we went to the Secretary with 100 ration cards. These proved that none of us had taken sugar for the last five months. Where did the sugar vanish? We also approached the B.D.O. and presented our case.

The Cooperative Store dealer was suspended after an enquiry. We have a new dealer now and we collect our sugar regularly.

(Sathin Indubala, Village Chinch, Bagidora Panchayat Samiti, District Banswara)

Women's groups in several villages of Banswara district have struggled to ensure fair distribution of goods from the Cooperative Store.

### **EDUCATION**

#### **A Matter of Motivation**

In Jodhpur district the Sathins had successfully managed to mobilise the women labourers to demand minimum wages for famine works. The Sathins and the women had realised that they were putting their thumb impression against Rs. 11/- but receiving only Rs. 3/- or Rs. 4/- as wages. Each time they did this they got angry and embarrassed. They knew they were being exploited and yet felt helpless because they could not read the muster roll. They themselves realised the powerful role of literacy and decided that they must learn to read and write. This desire for opening literacy centres for women in the villages was expressed by most of the Sathins to the Prachetas and Project Director. Before any concrete action could be taken, Sathin Jamuna of Khabra village opened an informal literacy centre and started teaching the girls and women of her village. When she was told that she was not trained for the job and would not be paid for it, she replied that she was not doing this to get the wages, but because it gave her an opportunity to meet women and interact with them.

Seeing the keen interest of the Sathins, the Project Director and the Idara Specialist pursued the matter with the Adult Education organisations, the Government and NGO. Immediate action was taken by these organisations. The Sathins with their group of village women helped the supervisors of the adult education organisations to identify the Anudeshikas for these centres. The Jodhpur Adult Education Association, (NGO) involved the district Idara personnel as well as the Project Director in the training of these Anudeshikas.

The Adult Education Centres were started in some other villages of Jodhpur district by the District Adult Education Association (Jodhpur).

### **PROCESS OF GROUP REFLECTION**

An important facet of WDP has been to knit reflective processes into developmental activity at each level. In village Bhambor, Jodhpur district, the Sathin's enthusiasm for women's activity had elicited a demand from the women for a power ghani (electrically operated oil machine). These women had planned to apply for a loan to the Government to acquire the machine. This was discussed with the Idara of Jodhpur district by State Idara and

IDS(J) personnel. The response was that the Pracheta must initiate a discussion on the issue and inquire into the various details of this demand. The questions that were discussed were:

- (a) Who would work on the power ghani—the women, their husbands or both?
- (b) Is the supply of electricity to the village regular?
- (c) Are there other such ghanis in the village? If so, are they working well?
- (d) How much information do the women themselves have on this matter? How do they think they will benefit from the introduction of the ghani?
- (e) Do these women have basic knowledge about electricity and electrically operated equipment?
- (f) What do the other women feel about this issue?

A meeting was held amongst the women who had initiated the demand. When they met in a group and reflected on the matter, it became clear that since the supply of electricity was not regular, having a power ghani would further complicate their problems. They revised their decision, and chose a second alternative which was more feasible. This time through constant questioning they themselves decided on the ambar charkhas. They are now working on this.

(Pracheta Report—July 1985, Jodhpur District)

## TREES

### Understanding the issue

In July 1986, Sukhi Bai of Bhuwasa village, Ghantol Panchayat Samiti, was informed about tree plantation and a social forestry scheme by the DWDA Banswara. She discussed the matter with her group—Adivasi women. They seemed to be unsure about the feasibility of tree plantation.

1. They were preoccupied with Ropni (Transplantation) in their own fields, and therefore had no time.
2. They could not link this activity with any 'returns' which would be of benefit to them.

Sukhi Bai, however, persisted in her efforts to convince them of the need to plant trees. The women finally agreed, but then, the area had to be identified with the help of the Sarpanch. The first site suggested by the Sarpanch was on the village periphery and was therefore, inconvenient for 'maintenance'. The second piece of land suggested was the school compound near the basti. The Sathins approved of this selection. The Pracheta went to the Panchayat headquarters and told the nursery officials that women in Bhuwasa needed 200 saplings.

The Sathin and the Pracheta collected the women and they all worked together to dig the holes in which the saplings were to be transplanted. The women then hired two donkeys to transport the saplings from the nursery to the selected site. Despite heavy rainfall many of them travelled 6 kms. to Lohariyavas nursery and collected the plants. Then all the women together planted these saplings in the village.

Such plantation efforts were carried out in all the 19 villages of the district where the Sathins are working. (Banswara District, August 1986)

## A SATHIN'S STORY

### Issue of Family Planning

On 17th October 1986, I took a woman from my village to the Hurda hospital for a checkup. She had earlier undergone a sterilization operation which failed. She was in the second month of her pregnancy. The doctor here insisted that we get a note certifying that she had undergone the operation. I got the certificate made, then the doctor said that we should come to the sterilization camp which was arranged for the 20th of the same month. He said that an abortion would be necessary before the operation is performed a second time. Then on the 20th we reached Gulabpura where the camp was arranged. But the doctor in the camp refused to deal with the case because according to him the husband should also be present. For some time I kept quiet but then I spoke, "If a woman is above 18 years of age and is not insane then she can have an abortion in the absence of her husband." The doctor said "Who told you all this? Where are you working?" I replied "I am working as a Sathin for the Women's Development Programme. In the training we were told all this by the lady doctor".

Then I narrated the entire story about the doctor in Hurda. The doctor in the camp rung up the doctor in Hurda and spoke to him. After some time people started going home. I said "What about my case? If you don't want to perform the operation you give it to me in writing". The doctors then told me that they would have to perform a

T.T. operation (tubectomy), and would not give the money (incentive) for the case. We agreed but I said, "If the operation failed, it is the doctor's fault, not ours, and when the operation fails you do not even hear us. If I take her back and she has a baby, the women in the village will say that operations are useless".

But till the evening we just sat there, and the doctors kept ignoring us. Then the Development Officer arrived and inquired about the total number of cases performed that day. I told him my story. He called the lady doctor, who agreed to operate. But once the officer departed the lady doctor said there might be a power failure in the evening, so she would operate in the morning.

I really lost my temper and went back to the doctor in Hurda the next morning. I told him if he would not accompany us we would go back to Bhilwara and tell every one about the shabby treatment we were given. The doctor from Hurda accompanied us and the child was aborted and the T.T. operation done. We stayed in the hospital for 7 days, and on the eighth day we asked the doctors for a Jeep so that we could be dropped back. But they said we should take a bus. Then B.D.O. Sahib arrived and upon hearing my story said that since the operation was done a second time, it would not be counted as 'their case', hence a Jeep would not be given. I insisted that it was the doctor's fault and that they would have to give the Jeep. Then the B.D.O. and the team of doctors asked about my work. I told them about our 'programme'. They said, "Take the Jeep. Now your work is done. Inspire more women to come for sterilization. If you need the Jeep, write to us at the Hurda address and ask for it".

(From Pracheta Report, Bhilwara District, October 1986)

## SOCIAL EVILS

### A Response

Sathin Puni belongs to the Garasia tribe and lives in the tribal village Malwa Chora of Udaipur district. Mobilising the women initially was a serious problem for Puni because of the topography of the area, which is a hilly terrain, and most of the houses are quite a distance from each other. Many men in the village are involved in the illicit distillation of liquor which has led to increasing alcoholism among the menfolk. Wife beating has become a common feature due to drunkenness.

The Sathin discussed the issue with the Pracheta and together they decided that Puni should talk to the men and women of the village. Puni went to many houses; the women complained that men squandered money on liquor, and also beat their wives. Often women went into 'nata' because they were beaten by the men. But the men got angry with Puni and told her not to interfere in their personal matters.

But the Sathin and the Pracheta did not give up. They discussed the issue in the Jajam. A collective decision to announce that alcohol consumption was illegal, was taken. The Sathin and the Pracheta then tried to involve the police. They went to the police check post but were told that though action could be taken against the men who misbehaved on the roads, no action could be taken by going to individual households.

The issue took a serious turn when Puni's husband beat her up after consuming illicit liquor. She realised that this was a public issue. She would not be able to tackle the problem alone. She went and discussed the issue with the Sarpanch and some village elders. She also got in touch with Sunder Bai, the Sathin in the next village. They decided to involve the Project Director, Prachetas and other Sathins and attend the village general meeting. They all collected for the meeting, and during the course of conversation, the issue was broached. Because Puni's husband was also present, Puni felt that he would feel threatened by the strong support she was getting. The village elders empathised with her. They spoke about the issue to all those who had gathered. The men had not realised the gravity of the problem nor the women's suffering. Some of them declared that they would give up drinking completely. The village elders and the Project Director also talked to Puni's husband who repented. They told him that he should support Puni in her efforts to tackle the issue because she was fighting for a just cause and would definitely succeed in convincing other men to give up alcohol. A lady police officer who attended the meeting announced that in future, legal action would be taken against the men who consumed illicit liquor and beat up their wives. Hence by involving the village elders, the men and women, Puni succeeded in reducing the consumption of liquor.

But some men of her tribe decided to excommunicate Puni, because they felt that they had lost face in front of 'outsiders'—Prachetas and the Project Director. This time the women of the Garasia tribe rose to Puni's support and argued the case with the elders of the tribe. They prevented them from excommunicating Puni. (Pracheta Report, Udaipur District, August 1986).

## ORGANISED ACTION

### Village Support

Two years ago Shankar Ganwaria, a smuggler, came and settled in Sathin Dakhu Bai's village, Daijjar. The people of the village doubted his integrity since they had evidence of his involvement not only in illegal business activities but also in the flesh trade. The people of the village had reported his activities to the police, he had been to the jail a number of times but managed to free himself each time.

The villagers resented Shankar Ganwaria but were scared of him. Sathin Dakhu Bai was the only person who seemed to pose a threat even to Shankar Ganwaria because of her women's group. Hence when she was away at the Sathin Reorientation training in November 1986, Shankar Ganwaria managed to encroach on a sizeable portion of the village Abadi land by illegally settling 40 Ghanchi (milk-seller) families and 80 Ganwaria families from Jodhpur on this land with the help of the previous Sarpanch of the village and one Nath Baba who looked after the village temple. These families gave Rs. 500-800 each for getting a boundary wall constructed around each allotted piece of land.

When Dakhu Bai returned to the village the women insisted that she should hold a meeting. In the meeting they told her that Shankar Ganwaria had encroached upon their land and that since it was Abadi land they were the rightful owners of this land. She should, therefore, help them get it back.

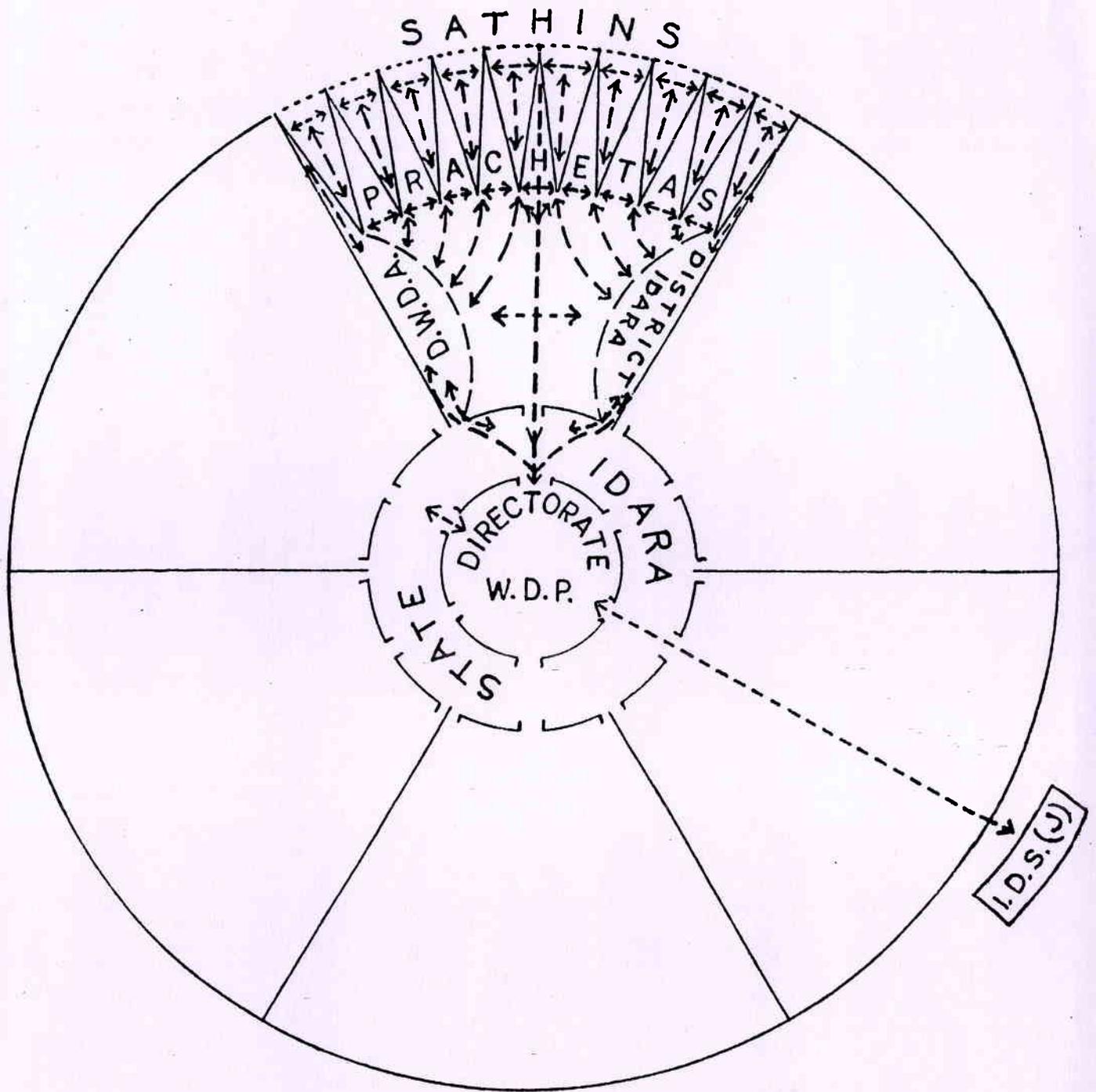
Dakhu Bai informed the current Sarpanch, the Project Director and the Idara specialist about the meeting. Next day around a 100 women collected, and in the presence of the Sarpanch gave Shramdaan (the gift of free labour) and broke down the boundary wall constructed by Shankar Ganwaria's men. They decided that these materials would now be used for constructing the boundary wall of the village school. A number of people lent their tractors to lift the stones etc. The next day the village men gave Shramdaan for the same purpose. The Project Director and Idara specialist reached the site and told the people that they would try and get all possible help from 'outside' if the entire village gave approval for this. The next day the Project Director was informed by the villagers that Shankar Ganwaria had registered a case with the police against 265 people of the village. They were scared that the police would come and round them up.

In the meantime the villagers also found out that when Shankar Ganwaria had been jailed earlier, some important B.S.F. documents were recovered from him. Hence the B.S.F. officials living in the B.S.F. centre in Daijjar were also trying to get rid of him.

When the Idara specialist and the Project Director went to talk to them, the B.S.F. officials offered their full support to them, and told them that they were aware of Shankar Ganwaria's activities across the border, and the danger he could pose for the country. The WDP functionaries also came to know from reliable sources that no police report had been filed by Shankar Ganwaria, hence the villagers could register a case against him.

The above information was shared with the Pracheta and the Sathin who further shared it with the village people. The villagers once again demanded that a meeting should be held that very night at the Mahila Vikas Kendra. The Kendra had no electricity—but this did not discourage the villagers, they somehow managed to connect the electric wires from the main road to the Kendra. The meeting was attended by all the women, men, as well as the Thakur of the village. The men said that had the women, along with the Sathin, not taken up the issue, they would never have taken it up on their own. After discussing the entire case for a long time, a collective report against Shankar Ganwaria in the name of the S.P. Jodhpur was written by the group.  
(Jodhpur Idara, December 1986)





NOTE: This is a diagram of the information flow system of the Women's Development Programme in six districts of Rajasthan. Details of only one district are shown.

# INFORMATION FLOW SYSTEM

The salient features of the diagram are—

- (a) the circle as a symbol of 'holding of hands' by Sathins irrespective of where they belong. A cooperative as well as a crucial role of the Sathins is highlighted;
- (b) a visualization of the possibility of a continuous move in an 'extended horizon' like growing ripples reaching out in larger and larger circles;
- (c) total openness in the communication system, i.e. even a Sathin can write to the Director WDP if she wishes to;
- (d) cooperative nature of the support structure by IDARA and DWDA to Sathins;
- (e) the Government administrative structure as providing inner strength to the programme which is carried out at the village level;
- (f) communication channels are kept continuously vitalized both ways. Not only is it possible for information to flow from villages to the centre but also from the centre to the villages.

# CONCLUSION

The pattern emerging through diverse activities in WDP districts is simultaneously exciting as well as challenging. At one level it is pointing towards a possibility—the possibility of people's participation in planning processes, initiated through women's groups in rural areas. At another level it is also raising serious demands on the existing pattern of social relationships which have cast women in subordinate roles as a matter of routine. The tensions likely to be generated both in the family as well as the outside social context are already being predicted by most of the WDP participants. They feel the unrest—which in a way we have all learnt to recognise as a necessary condition of 'change'! Will this 'unrest' take on an increased tempo for work or will it sap their energy and turn them back? Time will tell.

At this point, we venture to offer some responses to the set of questions raised in the first section of this review. Has the association of the Government, voluntary groups and research bodies stabilised? The answer is Yes and No. In a significant sense, there is a warmer dialogue between them, mutual suspicions are at fewer levels and in many activities they have worked as equal partners. It is heartening to note that on many occasions, senior bureaucrats extended warm support to the programme in a spirit of 'participation' rather than that of 'instruction' or 'management'. Many crisis situations have been gracefully tidied over by these gestures, leaving the group strengthened. However, there have also been occasions when these groups have quickly regressed to their earlier prejudices and displayed them in a manner which needed serious monitoring. One realizes that working continually in this association is really an attempt to do the impossible! It is obvious that in principle, the entire Government machinery rests on hierarchical organisation, whereas the culture in voluntary groups rejects the very notion of hierarchies. Again, there is a basic contradiction in mixing the 'rule-governed' attitude of the Government with the open, non-formatted approach of NGOs. The former emphasises the distinction between 'official' and 'personal' whereas the latter works on destroying the hiatus between the two. WDP, in its very concept, works on the assumption of stretching the two cultures to such an extent that they may merge as a unit. However, this generates a tension which may break this linkage or alternatively, reduce one to the other. Bureaucratization of the NGO is what one has to guard against. The other possibility is a wishful dream!

The complexity of demands in this programme primarily affects Project Directors/Project Officers. They

represent the programme in the district, linked (and answerable) to the Collector on the one hand and to Idara on the other. The Government linkage demands an acceptance of as well as comfort with the rule-governed hierarchical ethos of the larger Governmental structure. Here they have to move in a vocabulary which recognises the 'Officerhood' as the significant mode. On the other side, this very mode exposes them to condemnation by the Idaras and all the NGO associates who have learnt to read minor gestures of 'senior—junior' relationships as indicators of sinking into Sarkari culture—a word of abuse in their vocabulary. The result of this situation is clearly visible in the emotional stresses that these officers have to go through. One can discern why in a particular district, if the relationship with the Government hierarchy is good, the one with Idara is heavily strained and vice-versa.

A second problem linked to this is the inability to understand (on the part of all the three groups—Government, Idara and I.D.S.) as to who should "coordinate" the activities and what would be the correct mode of doing it. Technically, the Director WDP should be an overall coordinator but ironically she barely gets to understand the processes before she gets transferred to another post. Other officers at the State level have a similar pattern of linkage with WDP. The Government head has the power but not the necessary informed ability to coordinate WDP activities which are (happily) getting increasingly diversified. Idara can coordinate inasmuch as it has information and ability to do so but it has no power to 'order' the coordination. I.D.S. as an evaluating agency has, by definition, to keep a low profile and therefore has neither the power nor the facility for coordination though probably it controls the major information system. Here the riddle is almost an insoluble one in principle but in effect, individuals have risen above their defined roles and somehow 'managed' the show. The overall effect of this kind of 'stretching' is visible on the State level participants as 'strain' whereas at the rural level, the situation is of supreme comfort.

The ethos of WDP can, at present, best be described as intensely 'critical'. It is going through a reflective phase when serious questioning has begun on everything. It is a positive phase, inasmuch as 'rationality', which often is supposed to be the quality appreciated (if at all) in men alone, is being expressed and supported by rural illiterate women also. Its costs are, of course, heavy. It consumes enormous energy as well as time. There is no sweeping action, no fast moving sensational activity possible at this juncture. If each decision is subjected to reflection, examination and group consent, it is bound to be slow. But, the hope is that it would be steady!

As for fresh methodologies, they are being evolved. On this point, one can give a completely positive answer. Not only in the training but in all processes of action-organisation, new ways are being evolved for opening up a dialogue, handling counterpositions, revising stands and correcting mistakes. The one common feature in all the districts is a quick rejection of an activity as soon as it starts appearing ritualistic. The implication of this, of course, has sometimes been a 'discontinuity' in process. For example one can see the 'Sathin Ro Kagad' once again in a fluid state—withdrawn as a routine paper and being subjected to redesigning after an evaluation from the Sathins themselves. Also, another paper is being planned—a newsletter for Prachetas.

What kind of support does it need now? All kinds! This programme can run only with active Government support for innovation and flexibility, which it has been receiving so far. If at any point in future, a routinized target approach is inflicted on the processes cultivated by WDP, the programme will be stifled and lose its power. Attempts at education and forceful commands run counter to each other and therefore one has to make self-conscious choices about what we wish to support. A tricky point here is regarding the 'orientation' of Government officers. How can they be expected to take a totally different approach with respect to WDP without a proper initiation? Who is going to 'introduce' the programme with each 'transfer' in the bureaucracy concerned with the implementation of the programme? The question is important in view of the fact that within the last two years there have been three changes at the Director's level as well as the Secretaries' position.

Similarly, the voluntary groups supporting Idaras would need to extend sympathy and understanding for the varied roles which Idaras have to play in WDP. In the absence of PDs, they have had to take up almost the entire responsibility of coordinating Prachetas and making on-the-spot decisions at the field. These could involve a closer working relationship with Government officers. This latter aspect has often been described contemptuously by NGOs as "becoming Sarkari". This would also have to be sensitively checked.

With the expected 'spread' of the programme in near future to other districts as well as to more villages in existing districts, there would have to be a revision in the existing information flow system. It is recommended that a fresh approach to more sensitive as well as concise documentation be evolved, to facilitate faster action-

intervention at the field. Prachetas as well as Idaras would have to undertake an exercise in 'group-reporting' methodology.

The newsletter for Prachetas as well as Sathin-Ro-Kagad need creative inputs—for which efforts have already begun. A good deal of strengthening of the communication system depends on the 'alive' nature of these two modes of linkage.

Finally, it is recommended that a yearly 'Mela' of all the WDP participants should be held at a rural centre, involving all the voluntary groups existing in the WDP districts. This would provide the necessary 'airing', 'zest' and decentralised critical input to all the activities of the programme. The contribution of 'Mahila Mela' held at Tilonia in October 1985 has been remarkable vis-à-vis the consolidation of participatory processes. This feature needs to be reinforced and woven in the structural pattern of WDP planning.

## POST SCRIPT

August 1987

The following report indicates the present status of WDP support structures. It also details the process of evaluation-monitoring at the State level.

### PROCEEDINGS OF THE WORKSHOP HELD AT IDS, JAIPUR, AUGUST 4-5, 1987

A two day evaluation workshop was conducted at IDS (J) to share and solve some of the problems that were arising in the WDP functioning. The need for such a meeting was identified in the 'training of trainers' held at Bhilwara/Jodhpur in June/July, 1987. The organisational details of the workshop were jointly planned by the State level bodies, namely the Directorate (WC&N) State Idara and IDS.

#### Participants:

1. State Government	Mr. I.C. Srivastava Ms. Mira Maharshi	(Secretary) Social Welfare (Director) Women Children & Nutrition
2. Project Directors	Ms. Pritam Pal Ms. Sarla Naidu Ms. Kaushalya Bhatia Ms. Vimla Jain Ms. Sushila Vohra Ms. Judith Daniel	—Jaipur —Ajmer —Udaipur —Bhilwara —Jodhpur —Banswara
3. Idaras	Ms. Manju Sharma Ms. Indira Pancholi Ms. Kamlesh Yadav Ms. Tara Ahluwalia Ms. Chitra Rathod Ms. Vijay Lakshmi	—Jaipur —Ajmer —Udaipur —Bhilwara —Jodhpur —Banswara
4. State Idara	Ms. Mamta Jaitly Ms. Sunita	(Coordinator) (Trainee)
5. IDS	Ms. Sharada Jain Ms. Kavita Srivastava Ms. Kanchan Mathur	
6. Voluntary bodies (in which Idara is based)	Ms. Kanta Marwah Shri Shankar Lalji	(Ajmer Praudh Shikshan Samiti) Banswara (Bharatiya Vidya Mandir)
7. Special Invitees	Ms. Aruna Roy Mr. Anil Bordia	Consultant (Secretary), Education, Government of India

The workshop was coordinated by Ms. Aruna Roy on both the days. She was assisted by Ms. Mamta Jaitly and Ms. Kavita Srivastava.

### Issues Identified

It was felt by almost all the participants that the problems in the working pattern of WDP were rooted in

- a) The structural pattern of WDP, leading to
- b) The conflicts in roles that they were cast in, which created
- c) Confusion in the allocation of priorities.

It was important, therefore, to share and reflect on the problems from diverse perspectives. The following dilemmas came up clearly:—

**From the Project Director's roles** (These problems were voiced with varying emphasis by different PDs)

1. "We are seen as Government functionaries not only by the Government but also by the rest of society, with the implied expectation. However, WDP participants expect us to function in a voluntary spirit. This creates conflicting demands on us."
2. "In spite of the fact that whatever activity we are asked to supervise (by the Government) does relate to Women's Development, the WDP **process** of doing it differs radically from that of other programmes. If one person simultaneously operates in two kinds of approaches (one 'participatory' and the other 'management oriented') it gets to be a very difficult task."
3. "In the district, the Project Director is supposed to be answerable/ accountable for WDP activities. However, she has no control on what Idaras say or commit without her knowledge. This leads to major problems."
4. "Sometimes there is an 'urgency' in the implementation of Government Development Programmes (relating to women). The process central to WDP is slow and requires coordination at diverse levels. Being in the Government hierarchy, we cannot refuse to accept the 'instruction' given to us. This creates problems in our work, specially with Idaras non-support."
5. Very often the accent on 'work' which can be seen and recorded gets a negative correlation with 'village-level solidarity' and the spirit of participatory decision making. What should be given a priority?

### Idaras

1. We look upon ourselves as integral and equal participants in WDP together with DWDA. However, in effect, our roles are identified as that of 'assisting' only. Sometimes we get the feeling that the Government does not 'recognise' us as its partner. Nobody knows what Idara is.
2. We do not have any access to the information regarding Government officials' (related to WDP) visits, programmes etc. If we are an equal part of the district unit, it should also be recognised by others in the same spirit.

### Parent Bodies of Idaras

1. We are supposed to provide support structure to Idara but we have no idea of what is actually required from us. Nobody has shared the "approach" or the "programme visualisation" of WDP. We have no information on what is happening in the programme. If we ask questions, it is not taken very well. If we do not ask, it is taken as indifference.  
We ought to be made aware of what is expected of us and only then can we see how we should respond to the demands made on us.
2. As an organisation, the voluntary agency has some norms and approaches which are shared by all its members. If WDP Wing (Idara) has a different style and a totally different set of rules for themselves, it creates organisational problems in our working. Idara seldom considers itself as a part of the larger body it is based in. That is our problem.

### Directorate

1. Though it is always said that the Directorate should coordinate and provide an impromptu support structure to WDP activities, all information is not received at this end in good time. In the absence of relevant information, it is not possible to intervene in an appropriate manner.
2. Given the framework that the programme is within the Government structure, WDP has in effect been given ample space to follow its own style of functioning. This is seldom realized by the functionaries.

### State Idara & IDS

1. There is a very marked district bias in the PD/Idara unit; manifesting itself in some sort of inter-district competitive attitude. What is needed is a wholesome acceptance of different ways of doing things and looking at oneself as a part of a larger unit, i.e. WDP. It is difficult for us to communicate a move which may find its rationale in the larger interest of the Programme but which is seen as partially against the interest of the district.
2. Some of the reports that came to the State level reflect a desire for self-projection and listing of achievements in a personalised manner. These go against the overall ethos of WDP.

### Other Voluntary Bodies (Represented by Ms. Aruna Roy)

1. WDP has relied on the support and assistance from voluntary groups as and when they have felt necessary. They have not extended a relationship of reciprocity to the voluntary groups existing in the districts where they are working.
2. No systematic effort has been made by WDP to 'involve' the voluntary groups where the areas of work overlap—both geographically as well as conceptually. This would necessarily lead to mutual distrust. The problems/predicaments were voiced by various participants (with varying emphasis) in an uninhibited style. The only constraint felt was that of time, which was strictly monitored by the coordinator. A consolidated version of the problem-solving steps that were suggested and generally agreed upon by all,

follows:

1. As far as possible, the DWDA and Idara should be seen as a Single Unit. They should look upon themselves as equal partners and the following lines of action would reinforce this perspective:
  - (a) All Government notifications pertaining to WDP which go to DWDA will also be sent to Idara.
  - (b) It is recommended that the village tours should be made jointly.
  - (c) Even when the PDs or Idaras go independently, they should share their perceptions about the field level situation to maintain the information flow.
  - (d) Any activity organised at district level should be planned by PD and Idara jointly.
2. The activity to be undertaken by WDP units should be decided in a group meeting, to ensure an authentic (subsequent) participation. This applies to all levels, i.e. village, block, district and State. The important point is that the work has to be done in a spirit of internalised participation which can result only from a sharing in the decision making process.
3. Relationship of the Idaras to their parent bodies can improve:
  - (a) If a preliminary sharing of views is done in a systematic manner.
  - (b) A relationship of mutual trust and soft interaction is adhered to. It is not possible to involve the larger body in all the activities but periodic dialogue and information flow should be maintained.
4. WDP functionaries must evolve a systematic approach to involve the voluntary groups in a spirit of reciprocity. This alone would give them the much needed support mechanism, maintaining the dignity and freedom of both.
5. WDP activities must also take into account other similar activities around them and try to generate a dialogue with other functionaries. This would stabilise their process in a deeper manner.
6. As far as possible, steps should be taken to ensure a holistic perspective on women's issues rather than mere district-based approaches.
7. A national level workshop should be organised at the earliest by Idaras on issues relating to poverty and employment. This would facilitate a clearer vision of appropriate intervention.

### Some Clarifications/Suggestions

1. A brief and incomplete discussion took place on what the WDP strategies ought to be at the village level in the context of the present drought situation in Rajasthan. It was decided that this issue ought to be the focus of a separate meeting.
2. The problems of finances to the Banswara district unit of WDP were sorted out. An assurance was given by the Directorate that the pattern of funding would be the same as in other districts. Banswara Idara would get the release of its first quarterly by the end of August.
3. It was suggested that instead of the position of a Project Officer in the DWDA, the post of an APO should be created.
4. It was agreed that the Director's nominee should be an Idara representative in the constitution of the Pracheta

- selection board. This would facilitate the participation of the Idaras in the selection of Prachetas.
5. It was suggested that another Pracheta training would be organised soon after the selection of Prachetas in the district.
  6. IDS(J) was given the responsibility of writing the note on the planning process in WDP, in order to further clarify the approach taken in the entire programme.
  7. It was suggested the specific administrative and financial problems should be tackled with the Director (WC&N) with the involvement of the persons of the concerned district.

October 1984—November 1986

The focus of this two year calendar is mainly on the meetings held with the Sathins and the village women at the village, block and district level in this period. Three types of meetings have been listed:

- (i) Jajams—monthly meetings of Sathins at the village level.
- (ii) Shivir meetings— Discussions on the issue of famine relief works
- (iii) 'Child marriage meetings' and discussions organized with village women to analyse this social malpractice.

## I. JAJAM MEETINGS

S.No.	Date	Village/ Panchayat Samiti	Participants	Issues and Events
<b>1984</b>				
1.	Oct. 12	Arain	Sathins 10 P.D. 1 Idara 1 State Idara 1 Group from SWRC Tilonia 4 Voluntary Worker 1	Sathin appreciation of the Jajam forum. Discussion on the feedback of family members, village folk and village leaders on Sathin's 'work'. Singing of songs composed in the training.
Note: Jajam not held in the month of November, due to Pracheta Training, Jobner (Jaipur District).				
2.	Dec. 17	Ajmer, DWDA Office	Sathins 9 Untrained Prachetas 3 P.D. 1 Idara 1 Tribunal Officer, Distt. Ajmer 1	Discussions on: —Unsuitable location of DWDA office. —Difficulties faced by Sathins in establishing themselves with the villagers, especially the men. —Viewing of a slide show on Mausar (death feast). A discussion on the repercussions of Mausar on the poor.
<b>1985</b>				
3.	Jan. 11-12	Mandavariya	Sathins 9 P.D. 1 P.O. 1 Sarpanch 1 Gram Sevak 1 Village school teacher 1 Folk musician 1 Supervisors, Ajmer Adult Education Centre 2 Village group, men and women 100	Discussions on: —The first Sathin-Ro-Kagad. Positive reinforcement by the Sathins. —Gynaecological problems of village women. —Importance of immunization for children. —The ANM's absence, with the Sarpanch. —Absence of the teacher from the village school. —Singing of the life story of Rani Roopmati by village folk musicians. —Sathins discussed with the village women the problem of stagnant water and dirty drains.
4.	Feb. 11	Ajmer, Audio Visual Centre	Sathins 9 Prachetas 7 Idara 1 Jodhpur Prachetas 3 SWRC group 3 Lady Doctor 1 Dy. Director Audio Visual Centre 1	Discussions on: —Gynaecological and other health problems of village women with the doctor. —Domestic remedies for common health problems of children. Film show

Note: This was followed by a two day workshop at Pushkar, to introduce the Sathins and Prachetas to some of the Government officials in Ajmer.

5.	March 15-16	Chota Lamba, Arain	Sathins Prachetas Sarpanch Village school teacher Village group men and women	9 7 1 1 200	Discussion on: —Reasons for WDP not giving economic benefit schemes to Sathins, to offer village people. —Sathin's job insecurity. Doubts cleared. —Strategies for repairing malfunctioning handpumps. —Sterilization and post operative care. Street play on effects of death feast. Film Show.
6.	April 29-30	Budhwara, Pisangan	Sathins Prachetas P.O. Idara Mechanical Engineer Village group men and women Children (Regar and Chamar Jati)	18 7 1 1 1 30 20	Discussion on: —Sathin's eating with lower caste women. Fear of being excommunicated from their caste. —Old Sathins' meeting with Udaipur Sathins. —Maintenance of handpumps. Some details. —'Processes' of work of both Sathins and Prachetas. —Street play on 'Child Marriages' done by Sathins and Prachetas.
7.	May 14-15	Pisangan	Sathins Prachetas P.D. Idara Village group, women	18 7 1 1 25	Discussion on: —Disadvantages of taking IRDP loan for sewing machines. —Problems faced by women in bringing up children without economic help from husbands. —Social practices: Nata and child marriage.
8.	June 14-15	Bhamolav, Arain	Sathins Prachetas Sarpanch Village group, men women and children	18 5 1 50	Discussion on: —Women's demands for employment. —Government procedures starting famine relief works. —Importance of social forestry. —Scarcity of water. —Construction of pakka road to the village.
9.	July 9-10	Mangliawaas, Pisangan	Sathins Prachetas P.D. Idara Village school teacher Distt. forest officer SWRC communication team Village group, men and women	18 7 1 1 1 1 35	Discussion on: —Discriminatory treatment of lower castes by Sathin's family. —Importance of social forestry, Nukkad (street-play) by SWRC team on the ignorance of villagers about acquiring IRDP loans.
Note: Jajam not held in the month of August. A village group get together of old and new Sathins and Prachetas was organised in Ajmer from the 13-14 of Aug. 1985.					
10.	Sept. 19-20	Ladpura, Srinagar	Sathins Prachetas P.D. Idara Addl. Collector Sophia College group Village group, men and women	21 7 1 1 1 6 100	Discussion on: —Spending less at Jajams. —Irregularity in the appointments of teachers in village schools. —Non-selection of poor in the below 'poverty line' list of the government. —What determines the sex of the child? —Which medicines are available free of charge from the P.H.C.?
11.	Sept. 24-25	Lotiyana, Jawaja	Sathins Prachetas P.D. Idara Agriculture Officer B.D.O. Jawaja village women	15 7 1 2 1 1 20	Information on prevention of crop disease. Narration of prevention of Mausar in a Sathin's family. Discussion on: —Mother-in-law, daughter-in-law relationship. —Jajam arrangement; whose responsibility? —Sathin-ro-kagad.

12.	Oct. 10-11	Bhagwanpura, Pisangan	Sathins Prachetas P.D. Idara Gram Panchayat Society President Sarpanch Village women	15 7 1 1 1 1 1 30	Discussion on: —Water availability: discriminatory attitude of caste Hindus towards the lower caste at the handpumps in the village. —The economic problems of Rajput women. —Purdah problem.
13.	Oct. 23-24	Dasuk, Arain	Sathins Prachetas Village women	15 7 50	Discussion on: —Sathin signing on a blank sheet of paper when a team came to enquire into the nurses' regular absence from the village. —Information on handpump repair. —How to hold group meetings with village women. A critical view was taken of the Jajams in the district.
14.	Nov. 7-8	Kotra, Jawaja	Sathins Prachetas	15 4	Discussion on: —Village women's demand for employment. —Govt. housing scheme for the poor. —Handicapped and widow pension rules. —Liquor consumption by men in the village. —The oppressive social practice of Nata.
15.	Nov. 21-22	Silora	Sathins Prachetas P.D. Idara Village women	19 7 1 1 25-30	Discussion on: —Village women's persistent demand for work. —Selection of labour in the famine works on the basis of bribe. —Is Sathin work motivating women to get their children immunized? —Construction of Mahila Vikas Kendra in the Sathin's villages. —Decision taken to have cluster wise, Chotti Jajams. Because of the large number of participants, discussion on all issues was not possible.
16.	Nov. 29-30	Jethana, Pisangan	Sathins Idara P.D. Village women	7 2 1 30	Discussion on: —prevention of rampant thuggee in villages by outside groups of men and women. —Irregular attendance of some Sathins in Jajams. —Disadvantages of acquiring a sewing machine on an IRDP loan.
17.	Dec. 10-11	Kalesra, Pisangan	Sathins Prachetas P.D. Idara Doctor Village women	15 7 1 1 40-50	Discussion on: —Some Sathin's unpunctuality in Jajams. —Advantages and disadvantages of the Chotti Jajams. —Need of both mixed and cluster-wise Jajams. —The procedure of getting famine relief works started in the village.
18.	Dec. 19-20	Dadiya, Arain	Sathins Prachetas Sarpanch	19 2 1	Discussion on: —The inordinate delay in starting famine relief works despite the sanction. —Fodder and water problems for animals. —Illegal cutting of trees in Dadiya village.

1986					
19.	Jan. 8-9	Bada- Kheda, Jawaja	Sathins Prachetas P.D.	7 4 1	Discussion on: —The concept of Shivar. —Minimization of fraud attendance in the famine relief works. —Vehement rejection of sterilization operation as the selection criteria of women labourers in famine works. —Forcible sterilization of women in some areas.
20.	Jan. 15-16	Datan, Srinagar	Sathins Prachetas P.D. B.D.O. Village women	20 7 1 1 15	Discussion on: —The concept of Shivar, Sathin's tasks for the Shivar determined. —Sathin's role in motivating women for sterilization operation. —Rape Laws. —Sathin building village level support structure. —Roles of Patwari and Sarpanch, Gram Sevak. —Need of inviting the Sarpanch, Patwari and Gram Sevak to the Jajam. —Illegal cutting of trees in Dadiya village.
Note: Jajam not held in the month of February as the Shivar was organized between 5-7 of Feb. 1986.					
21.	March 3-4	Baila Jawaja	Sathins Prachetas P.D. (Ajmer & Bhilwara) Idara Village women	13 5 2 1 32	Discussion on: —The meetings to be organised by the Sathins in villages on the practice of child marriage. —Famine-relief works issues (Post Shivar response). a. penalty on the labourers. b. when should payment be made to the labourers. c. payment: piece rate or on the basis of the minimum wage. d. efforts being made to get the works started. —Sathins' lack of response to the Sathin-Ro-Kagad. —Arrangements in the Jajam. Whose responsibility?
22.	March 11-12	Sapunda, Srinagar	Sathins Prachetas P.D. Addl. Dist. Dev. Officer Village women	19 5 1 1 25	Discussion on why sterilization operations fail. —Sathins shared their experiences of the celebrations of International Women's Day in their villages. —The ADDO gave information on the new famine works rules. —Decisions taken that some Sathins would go to those Sathins' villages who were facing problems in mobilizing women.
23.	April 7	Beawar Khas, Jawaja	Sathins Prachetas P.D. Idara	5 6 1 1	Rethinking of the central values in the Women's Development Programme —on the method adopted by the Sathins in their work. —on the roles of Sathin, Pracheta and P.D. Discussions on the venue of payments of wages to the labourers in famine-relief works.
24.	April 15	Kotri, Silora	Sathins Prachetas Idara P.D. SWRC Tilonia	6 4 2 1 1	Information on: —Identity cards made for labourers in famine-relief works site. —Quantity of wheat to be obtained by the labourers for equipments in famine-relief works. —Discussion on the process to be adopted by Sathins for organising the village women.

25.	April 24	Akodiya, Arain	Sathins Prachetas Idara	8 7 1	Discussion on: —Sathins' inability to keep accounts. —Who benefits from the nutrition programme. —Payment of wages in famine-relief works not proportionate to the work done. —Organizing the labour at the famine-work site. —Form of Jajam.
26.	April 25-26	Gegal, Srinagar	Sathins Prachetas Idara	7 6 1	Discussion on: —The irregularities existing in the famine relief works in that area. —Personal problem of one Sathin. —The role of a Sathin for greater clarity in Sathin's understanding of their work.
27.	April 28-29	Baseli, Pisangan	Sathins Prachetas P.D. Idara	8 7 1 1	Discussion on: —The meetings had with village women on the social practice of child marriage. —Role of Sathin in assisting the village women to overcome the irregularities existing in the famine-relief works. —Lack of availability of drinking water.
28.	May 8-9	Bandan- wada, Bhinai	Sathins Prachetas P.D. Idara	44 7 1 2	Discussion on: —Meeting of old and freshly trained Sathins. —Information on the Collector's new order on famine-relief works. —Relevance of labour law in the informal sector. —The minimum wage. —Gram Sabha. —Sathin's meeting with the new Sathins. —The rules of famine-relief works. —Sathin's role in the village. —The process of working. —The form of the Jajam.
29.	June 3-4	Kohara, Kekri	Sathins Prachetas Idara SWRC Group Tilonia Sarpanch BDO	9 4 2 4 1 1	Discussion on: —Cutting of trees in one Sathin's village. —Mausar —Use of puppets by Sathins in village meetings. —Implementation of development programmes at the village level, with the BDO. —Pension for the handicapped.
30.	June 5-6	Sanwa, Jawaja	Sathins Prachetas Idara Village	7 1 1 15	Discussion on: —Strengthening communication between Sathins, Idara and DWDA. —Processes adopted by Sathins in their work during the last one month.
31.	June 7-8	Lehadwada, Srinagar	Sathins Prachetas Idara Village women	6 2 2 45	Discussion on: —Net-en, Injectable contraceptive. —Handpump maintenance and repair. —One Sathin's act of signing on a blank sheet of paper on the Thanedar's order. —Sathin's role in collecting and communicating to the Idara, village Dohas and Pahelis.

32.	June 12-13	Fatehgarh, Arain	Sathins Prachetas Idara Village women Mate	7 1 1 60 1	Discussion on: —The dispute at the Fatehgarh village famine-relief work site. —Success of women in different Sathin's villages in resisting irregularities in the famine work. —Issues raised in the Sathin-Ro-Kagad. —Meetings which Sathins had with women at the village Adult Education Centres.
33.	June 23	Nand, Pisangan	Sathins Prachetas Idara P.D. Village women	8 1 1 1 25	Discussion on: —Process of Sathin's work. —Organising a Jajam; whose responsibility? —Caste discrimination at the village handpump. Lower caste women not allowed to use it. —Why a Sathin was not sending her daughter to her in-laws.
Note: Jajam of Silora cluster did not take place due to the Sathins being involved in the re-orientation from June 16-23.					
34.	July 3-4	Moyana, Masudha	Sathins Prachetas P.D. Idara Village women	8 3 1 1 25	Discussion with the village women on: —Problem of fetching water from a 5 kms. distance. Alternative sought: handpump installation. Information on the procedure given. —The lack of employment, why no famine relief works? —Electricity problem in the village. —Their role in organizing the Jajam. —Discussion with the Sathins on their work processes.
35.	July 9	Devpuri, Arain	Sathins Pracheta Village women	8 1 30	Discussion on the: —Strong linkage between Sathins in this cluster, due to intensive inter-village travel by the Sathins. —the epidemic which killed 49 children in a village. The role of a neighbouring village Sathin in rushing medical help to get the children inoculated. —Sathin and village women's role in bringing a separated couple together.
36.	July 11	Babaicha, Srinagar	Sathins Pracheta P.D. Idara Village women	6 1 1 1 45	Discussion on: —Women's health problems. —Need of a second Shivar. —Sathin-Pracheta differences in the recently held Sathin re-orientation.
37.	July 22	Jethana, Pisangan	Sathins Pracheta P.D. Idara Sarpanch Village women	8 1 1 2 1 25	Discussion with Sathins on the: —Drinking water problems of Baseli village. —Careless attitude of the Budhwara village school teacher. —Irregularities carried out by the Sarpanch in getting the Mahila Vikas Kendra constructed in Jethana village. All Sathins to be vigilant in order to prevent it from happening in their village. —Evaluation by some Sathins of 3 other Sathins with problems of establishing themselves. Discussion with the village women on: —Land registration and illegal acquisition of land. —Handicapped pension rules. Sathins did a street play to communicate to the village women the message of strength in 'unity'
38.	Aug. 6-7	Salemabad, Silora	Sathins Prachetas P.D. Idara SWRC Tilonia	28 3 1 1 2	Discussion on the problems of this cluster of Sathins, of —No Pracheta. —Bringing the village women together. —Reflection on issues which bring women together and issues which divide. —Sathin narration of their last month's work.

39.	Aug. 11	Langira, Bhinai	Sathins Prachetas Idara P.D. Village women	15 4 1 1 16	Discussion on: —The process of their work. —Subject for the Shivir. —Family planning operations.
40.	Sept. 20-21	Moyana, Masudha	Sathins Prachetas Village women	44 6 25	—Jajam held mainly to sort out the Sathin's problem. Her life had been threatened by a family enemy. Women's views. —Tried to convince the two families that they must come together and talk. Meeting of the old and freshly trained Sathins.
41.	Oct. 23-24	Jalian, Masudha	Sathins Prachetas P.D. Village women	61 7 1	Discussions on the: —Working of the Panchayat Samiti. —Handpump installation and repair. —Jaipur Shivir, experiences shared.
42.	Nov. 13	Kotara, Jawaja	Sathins Prachetas P.D.	10 1 1	Discussion on: —Role of Sathins in the Panchayat at Elections. —Identifying the limitation and strength in the process adopted by each Sathin in her work.
43.	Nov. 17	Ramsar, Srinagar	Sathins Pracheta P.D.	10 1 1	Discussion on the: —Mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship. —Role of Sathin in the forthcoming Panchayat election. —A Sathin decision to stand for the ward Panch election. —Those Sathins work who are also Anudeshikas of Adult Education Centres. Attempt to weave the WDP processes in their work as Anudeshikas. —Sathin's role in Sathin selection.

## II. SHIVIR MEETINGS

This list details the Shivar meetings held over a period of three months. The meetings were held at the district, block and village level.

S. No.	Date	Place	Participants		Purpose
<b>1986</b>					
<b>PRE-SHIVIR MEETINGS</b>					
1.	Jan. 2	Tilonia	Prachetas P.D. Voluntary worker	7 1 1	The concept and planning of the Shivar was discussed. The Prachetas were to communicate this information to the Sathins and assist them in identifying a topic for the Shivar.
2.	Jan. 8-9	Bada-Kheda, Jawaja Panchayat Samiti	Sathins Prachetas P.D.	7 4 1	In this Jajam meeting the concept of Shivar was discussed with the Sathins: What is a Shivar? How is it different from a Jajam? Who would be the participants? The Sathin's task of selection of a subject. Since all the 36 Sathins would not be able to participate in the meeting to decide on the subject for the Shivar, it was decided that some Sathins would represent the entire group.
3.	Jan. 15-16	Datan, Srinagar Panchayat Samiti	Sathins Prachetas P.D. Village women	20 7 1 15	-do-
<p>The Prachetas communicated this to the rest of the Sathins in their villages. The Sathins held meetings in villages to identify one or two urgent problems of women in their village. Cluster-wise meetings were held with the Sathins at the Pracheta headquarters. In these meetings Sathins arrived at a consensus on one or two issues for the Shivar. They also selected two or three representatives from themselves for the final meeting on the selection of the Shivar subject.</p>					
4.	Jan. 25	Ajmer	Sathins Prachetas P.D. State Idara Director, Women Children & Nutrition UNICEF representative Voluntary worker	18 7 1 1 1 1 1 1	<p>The issue selected was famineworks. It was a difficult choice between the family planning programme and famineworks. Laadi Bai took the initiative and put forward her village's name as the venue of the Shivar. It was finally decided that her village, Bhamolav in Arain Panchayat Samiti, would be the venue. Subsequent tasks of all the functionaries was determined. Those Sathins in whose village the famine relief works were on, would gather the labourer point of view about the works, the labour selection criteria, payment, quantity of work, the categories of labour, relationship between family planning operations and selection for famineworks. They would note suggestions which the labour women had for improvement of work conditions. Those Sathins in whose village faminework had not started, would find out from the Panchayat as to why it had not, what was the state of famine in their villages, etc. The Prachetas would gather information from the Panchayat Samitis. Information related to the famineworks in those Gram-Panchayats where the Sathins were working, the department from which the works had started, the amount of money which had been sanctioned, the number of labourers expected to be employed, the time span for the work, etc. The P.D./Idara would gather information from the Development Department about the theoretical norms laid down for famine relief works. They would also consult the gazette. The voluntary worker would gather information from those workers of SWRC, Tilonia associated with the wage issue, about the gap between what happens in famineworks and what ought to happen. The initial planning of the physical arrangements was done. Travel details, as to how to get to village Bhamolav, were discussed.</p>

5.	Jan. 29	Ajmer	Sathins	36	Once again, clarity was sought on what information each Sathin had to gather from her villages.
			Prachetas	7	
			Idara	1	
			P.D.	1	
6.	Jan. 30	Jaipur	State Idara	1	The Shivr planning process was shared. Suggestions were made.
			Ajmer Idara	1	
			IDS(J)	3	
			Voluntary workers	3	
7.	Jan. 30-31	Ajmer	Prachetas	7	Physical arrangements for the Shivr were discussed and duties assigned. The resource persons were identified. The constraints faced by the Sathins and the Prachetas in collecting information were discussed.
			Idara	2	
			P.D.	1	
8.	Feb. 1	Bhamolav, Arain Panchayat Samiti	Sathins	1	Discussed what the Shivr would be. The village people's support sought.
			Prachetas	4	
			Village women & men	75	
			Sarpanch	1	

**SHIVIR**

9.	Feb. 4-6	Bhamolav	Sathins	3	The conditions of famineworks in the Sathin's Gram Panchayats, known. Thus emerged a profile of famineworks in the district of Ajmer. —The theoretical norms related to famineworks discussed. —The 1986 Government plan for famineworks in the district stated. —Discussion with the Bhamolav village women on the irregularities being carried out at the famineworks. —Stories on how irregularities in famineworks had been overcome in other parts of Ajmer and Rajasthan. —Future action plan formulated by the Sathins. —Evaluation of the Shivr.
			Prachetas	7	
			Ajmer Idara	2	
			P.D.	2	
			State Idara	1	
			IDS(J)	1	
			Dir. Women		
			Children & Nutrition	1	
			Addl. Director, WDP	1	
			UNICEF rep.	1	
			Voluntary workers	6	
			Geologist	1	
			Lawyer	1	
			Sarpanch	1	
			Sarpanch	1	
			Village men & women	175	

**POST SHIVIR MEETINGS**

10.	Sathins communicated both individually and in groups, information about the faminework rules to their village women.				
11.	March 3	Ajmer	Sathins	3	—Sathins stated the irregularities discovered by the labour women at the faminework site. —They stated that the mate at the work site himself did not know the rules. —They stated the few cases where the women had resisted the irregularities and succeeded in their demand. —They wanted the rules written out and sent to them.
			Prachetas	7	
			Idara	2	
			P.D.	1	
			Voluntary worker	1	
12.	March 30- April 2	Ajmer	Prachetas	7	—The information related to famine work in the Rajasthan State Gazetteer was interpreted and written in a simple language. —With an overseer of the Public Works Department, the exact method of how the famineworks are measured was learnt. —Samples of mud gathered from the Sathins' Gram Panchayats, where the famineworks were on, were examined. The corresponding quantity of work associated with the texture of the soil particles identified.
			Idara	2	
			P.D.	1	
			SWRC Tilonia		
			Voluntary workers	2	

In the month of March 1986, Sathins organized meetings on the issue of 'Child Marriage' with their group of village women. A meeting in each of the thirty six villages where the Sathins work was organized. These meetings were the beginning of a dialogue with village women on child marriage on a sustained basis. They lasted for a period of two months till Akha Teej in the month of May which is the auspicious day on which the maximum number of children are married.

Both the Sathins and Prachetas facilitated these discussions. Film shows and role plays provided the take off in some of the meetings. They analyzed at length why the practice was continuing over such a long time. The women felt that since marriages on Akha Teej were mass marriages, economically it worked out cheap. They agreed that it had several disadvantages for women.

— Many couples were mismatched.

— Child widows were forced to enter into a relationship of nata-second wife to a man. She never got the same status in society as that of being married as a first wife.

— Health problems started early in life because of early conception and repeated child births.

— The girls were not sent to school as their natal family did not have the right to take this decision. She belonged to the in-laws.

The women felt that they could not escape from being a party to such marriages, as the decision of stopping a child marriage could not be taken at an individual level. Their caste would ostracize their daughters if they were not married early. Who would marry them later, they asked. If the caste Panchayat decided to abolish this practice, then maybe they would think about it. They felt that if women were participants in the caste Panchayat meetings, then probably the women's point of view could be presented and such decisions taken.

The all agreed that though they would not be able to prevent the marriages from taking place this year they would prevent the mukalava (when the bride goes to in-laws) from taking place at an early age. Actually, this was the effective marriage ceremony.

The immediate effects of these meetings were that the Sathins did not allow such marriages from taking place in their families. There were fewer marriages in these villages this year.

## LIST OF SOME OF THE MEETINGS OF AJMER DISTRICT

Date	Panchayat Samiti	Village	No. of Women
<b>1986</b>			
Mar. 13	Ajmer city		19 women of 7 villages of Srinagar-3 Sathins, 10 sisters of St. Martin's School, 3 Prachetas.
Mar. 17	Masudha	Jiwana	20 Regar labourers.
Mar. 17	Bhinai	Bandanwada	10 of Damami jati, 1 of Jat jati, 3 of Kumhar jati, 1 of Teli jati.
Mar. 18	Masudha	Nandwada	40-50 wage labourers.
Mar. 18	Pisangan	Nand	20 of Sadhu and Gujar jati.
Mar. 18	Srinagar	Lohadwada	20, belonging to the wage labour group.
Mar. 18	Bhinai	Kanhaikala	40 women from Kanhaikala, Nimhera, Kanerkhurd mainly of Gujar, Bagoniya, Jat, Chamar and Bhil jati.
Mar. 20	Pisangan	Budhwara	25, Regar and Chamar jati.
Mar. 22	Pisangan	Kalesara	40 of all communities.
Mar. 22	Arain	Dadiyon	40 of all jatis.
Mar. 27	Bhinai	Chapaneri	35-10 of Dhobi jati, 15 of Raidas jati, 10 Jat jati.
Mar. 28	Pisangan	Bansali	25 Harijan and Bhambi jati.
Mar. 28	Srinagar	Ramsar	20 Regar and Chamar jati.
Apr. 9	Pisangan	Jethana	15-20 Nai and Chamar jati.
Apr. 9	Arain	Chotalamba	40 women of all castes, wage labourers.



S. No.	Place	Date	Trainers	No. of Prachetas
1.	JAIPUR Jobner	28.10.84 19.11.84	Aruna Roy & SWRC Team	5
			IDS(J)	1
			Resource Persons,	4
			Short interventions	10
2.	JODHPUR Manaklav	4. 1.85 25. 1.85	Aruna Roy & SWRC Team	5
			State Idara	1
			Ajmer Idara	1
			Jodhpur Idara	1
			IDS(J)	1
			Prachetas, Jodhpur	2
			Resource Persons,	4
3.	UDAIPUR Kaya	22. 7.85 12. 8.85	Short Interventions	12
			Aruna Roy & SWRC Team	5
			State Idara	1
			Ajmer Idara	1
			Jaipur Idara	1
			Jodhpur Idara	1
			Udaipur P.O.	1
			IDS(J)	1
			Prachetas, Udaipur	5
			Bhilwara	1
			Jodhpur	2
			Ajmer	2
			Jaipur	1
			Banswara	1
Resource persons	5			
<b>Total</b>				<b>61</b>

**TRAINED AND WORKING SATHINS**

S.No.	District	Trained	Working
1.	Jaipur	29	26
2.	Ajmer	77	63
3.	Udaipur	50	48
4.	Banswara	19	19
5.	Bhilwara	70	64
6.	Jodhpur	54	49
		299	269

**TRAINED AND WORKING PRACHETAS**

S.No.	District	Trained	Working
1.	Jaipur	8	8
2.	Udaipur	13	8
3.	Ajmer	9	7
4.	Jodhpur	10	8
5.	Banswara	10	4
6.	Bhilwara	11	8
		61	43

# A. BHILWARA DISTRICT

1. Panchayat Samitis	11
2. Panchayat Samitis where WDP is functioning	10
3. Prachetas	8
4. Sathins	64

Village	Sathins Working since	Village	Sathins Working since
Panchayat Samitis: Sahada & Raipur Pracheta H. Qrs.: Keshithal		Panchayat Samiti: Jahazpur Pracheta H. Qrs.: Amarwaasi	
<b>Sahada</b>			
Keshithal	May, 1985	Ropan	May, 1985
Mahendargarh	May, 1985	Piplund	May, 1985
Khankhala	July, 1986	Binder	Feb., 1986
Potla	July, 1986	Amarwaasi	Feb., 1986
		Tikad	July, 1986
<b>Raipur</b>		Sarsiya	July, 1986
Nandsa	Feb., 1986	Khajoori	July, 1986
Mekunda	Feb., 1986		
Jhadol	July, 1986		
Panchayat Samiti: Mandalgarh Pracheta H. Qrs.: Ladpura		Panchayat Samiti: Mandal Pracheta H. Qrs.: Karera	
Barundni	May, 1985	Karera	Feb., 1986
Sardarnagar	Feb., 1986	Laduwaas	Feb., 1986
Jajwa	Feb., 1986	Luhariya	July, 1986
Mahuwa	Feb., 1986	Bhagwanpura	July, 1986
Ladpur	July, 1986		
Tilsa Mahadev	July, 1986		
Singeli	July, 1986		
Manpura	July, 1986		
Panchayat Samiti: Banera Pracheta H. Qrs.: Raila		Panchayat Samiti: Suwana Pracheta H. Qrs.: Karohi	
Banera	May, 1985	Kodukota	Feb., 1986
Raila	May, 1985	Karohi	Feb., 1986
Sardarnagar	Feb., 1986	Suvana	Feb., 1986
Lambiya kalan	Feb., 1986	Rupaheli	July, 1986
Beira	July, 1986	Gudla	July, 1986
Lambiya Khurd	July, 1986	Biliyan Kalan	July, 1986
		Agarpur	July, 1986
Panchayat Samiti: Asind Pracheta H. Qrs.: Palari		Panchayat Samiti: Kotri Pracheta H. Qrs.: Badliyaas	
Brahmineki-Sareri	May, 1985	Paaroli	May, 1985
Barasni	Feb., 1986	Aakola	Feb., 1986
Palari	Feb., 1986	Aama	Feb., 1986
Padasoli	Feb., 1986	Badliyaas	July, 1986
Daulatgarh	Feb., 1986	Suthepa	July, 1986
Jetpura	July, 1986	Rased	July, 1986
Shambhugarh	July, 1986		
Khatola	July, 1986		

Panchayat Samiti: Hurda  
Pracheta H. Qrs.: Hurda

Jalampura	May, 1985
Kotri	May, 1985
Hurda	Feb., 1986
Sodar	Feb., 1986
Gagera	July, 1986
Sareri	July, 1986
Khejri	July, 1986

## B. JAIPUR DISTRICT

1. Panchayat Samitis	17
2. Panchayat Samitis where WDP is functioning	9
3. Prachetas	8
4. Sathins	26

Village	Sathins Working since	Village	Sathins Working since
Panchayat Samitis: Sanganer & Jhotwara Pracheta H. Qrs.: Bagru		Panchayat Samiti: Chaksu Pracheta H. Qrs.: Shivdasपुरा	
<b>Sanganer</b>			
Laxmi Narayanपुरा	Oct., 1984	Titariya	Oct., 1984
Dantli	Oct., 1984	Kumhariwaas	Oct., 1984
Goner	July, 1985	Chandalai	Oct., 1984
Ajairajपुरा	May, 1986	Tootoli	Oct., 1984
		Karera	July, 1985
<b>Jhotwara</b>		Panchayat Samiti: Bassi Pracheta H. Qrs.: Tunga	
Mundia Ramsar	Aug., 1985		
Dhankia	Aug., 1985	Khepuria	Oct., 1984
Siwar	Aug., 1985	Mohanपुरा	May, 1986
Sirrsi	Aug., 1985	Bhateri	May, 1986
Panchayat Samiti: Jamwa Ramgarh Pracheta H. Qrs.: Jamwa Ramgarh		Panchayat Samiti: Sambhar Pracheta H. Qrs. Sambhar	
Naila	Oct., 1984	Pipali ka waas	May, 1986
Manota	May, 1986	Pratapपुरा	May, 1986
Tholai	May, 1986		
Khabarani	May, 1986		
Panchayat Samiti: Sambhar Pracheta H. Qrs.: Renwal		Panchayat Samiti: Dudu Pracheta H. Qrs.: Mozamabad	
Pachkodra	May, 1986	No Sathins trained as yet.	
Bassi Nagar	May, 1986	Panchayat Samiti: Phagi Pracheta H. Qrs.: Madhorajपुरा	
		No Sathins trained as yet.	

# C. UDAIPUR DISTRICT

1. Panchayat Samitis	15
2. Panchayat Samitis where WDP is functioning	13
3. Prachetas	8
4. Sathins	48

Village	Sathins Working since	Village	Sathins Working since
Panchayat Samitis: Girva & Jharol Pracheta H. Qrs.: Wagapura		Panchayat Samitis: Girva & Mavali Pracheta H. Qrs.: Merata	
<b>Girva</b>		<b>Girva</b>	
Pai	April, 1985	Debari	April, 1985
<b>Jharol</b>		<b>Mavali</b>	
Kumaria Ka Khera	April, 1985	Merata	April, 1985
Sisarama	April, 1985	Tulsi Das Ki Sarai	April, 1985
Bhunjhara	April, 1985	Salerakala	Dec., 1986
Madari	April, 1985		
Wagapura	April, 1985		
Makadadev	Dec., 1986		
Risarvar	Dec., 1986		
Peepulbara	Dec., 1986		
Panchayat Samitis: Dhariavad Pracheta H. Qrs.: Kesariavaad		Panchayat Samitis: Khamner & Baragaon Pracheta H. Qrs.: Nichli Odan	
<b>Kesariavaad</b>		<b>Khamner</b>	
Arbara	April, 1985	Upali Odan	April, 1985
Parela	Dec., 1986	Nichli Odan	April, 1985
Sari	Dec., 1986	Karauli	April, 1985
Lohagarh	Dec., 1986		
Nalwa	Dec., 1986		
		<b>Baragaon</b>	
		Kesuli	April, 1985
		Negaria	April, 1985
		Amaraji ka Gura	April, 1985
		Lesingh	April, 1985
Panchayat Samitis: Gogunda & Kotara Pracheta H. Qrs.: Chatia Kheri		Panchayat Samitis: Sarada & Kherwada Pracheta H. Qrs.: Kalyanpur, Kherwada	
<b>Gogunda</b>		<b>Sarada</b>	
Bhadvi Gura	April, 1985	Bhorai Pal	April, 1985
Chatia Kheri	April, 1985	Tokar	April, 1985
Sematal	April, 1985	Nala	Dec., 1985
Jasawantagarh	April, 1985		
Jhalori	Dec., 1986	<b>Kherwada</b>	
Jajarpura	Dec., 1986	Bichhiwada	Dec., 1986
Chipala	Dec., 1986	Mauwada	Dec., 1986
<b>Kotara</b>			
Malva Ka Chaura	April, 1985		
Devala	April, 1985		

Panchayat Samitis: Relu Magara & Raja Samand  
Pracheta H. Qrs.: Orda

**Relu Magara**  
Orda April, 1985

**Raja Samand**  
Mahi April, 1985

Panchayat Samiti: Salumbar  
Pracheta H. Qrs.: Bhabarana

Bhabarana April, 1985  
Jodhpur Khurd April, 1985  
Kothar Dec., 1986  
Manysur Dec., 1986  
Amloda Dec., 1986  
Sheshpur Dec., 1986

## D. BANSWARA DISTRICT

1. Panchayat Samitis	8
2. Panchayat Samitis where WDP is functioning	4
3. Prachetas	4
4. Sathins	19

Village	Sathins Working since	Village	Sathins Working since
Panchayat Samitis: Bagidora Pracheta H. Qrs.: Chinch		Panchayat Samitis: Garhi Pracheta H. Qrs.: Bajavana	
Nangama	Feb., 1986	Garhi	Feb., 1986
Kalinjara	Feb., 1986	Parahera	Feb., 1986
Chinch	Feb., 1986	Deduka	Feb., 1986
Barodia	Feb., 1986	Bajavana	Feb., 1986
Bagidora	Feb., 1986		
Panchayat Samiti: Talwara Pracheta H. Qrs.: Thikariya		Panchayat Samiti: Ghatol Pracheta H. Qrs.: Mota Gaon	
Thikariya	Feb., 1986	Mota Gaon	Feb., 1986
Saliya	Feb., 1986	Ganora	Feb., 1986
Sagadoda	Feb., 1986	Bhuvas	Feb., 1986
Kopara	Feb., 1986	Chanduji ka Garha	Feb., 1986
Londha	Feb., 1986	Tanda	Feb., 1986

# E. JODHPUR DISTRICT

1. Panchayat Samitis	9
2. Panchayat Samitis where WDP is functioning	7
3. Prachetas	8
4. Sathins	49

Village	Sathins Working since	Village	Sathins Working since
Panchayat Samitis: Bilara Pracheta H. Qrs.: Bilara		Panchayat Samiti: Mandore Pracheta H. Qrs.: Badli	
Birawaas	June, 1985	Manaklao	June, 1985
Khejarla	June, 1985	Dajjar	June, 1985
Silarai	June, 1985	Badli	June, 1985
Kapadla	June, 1985	Bamloor	June, 1985
Bilara	Feb., 1986	Rajwa	Feb., 1986
Barna	Feb., 1986	Aganwa	Feb., 1986
		Lordi	Feb., 1986
Panchayat Samiti: Osian Pracheta H. Qrs.: Osian		Panchayat Samiti: Balesar Pracheta H. Qrs.: Balesar	
Raimalwada	June, 1985	Jatti Bhandu	June, 1985
Bhikamkor	June, 1985	Khari Beri	June, 1985
Khabrakhurd	June, 1985	Talesar	June, 1985
Gopasarya	June, 1985	Utambar	Feb., 1986
Nevra	June, 1985	Belwa	Feb., 1986
Chirai	June, 1985	Serwala	Feb., 1986
Chopasni	June, 1985	Dhadhaniya	Feb., 1986
Kharikhurd	June, 1985	Aagolai	Feb., 1986
Bathwasiyaan	Feb., 1986		
Umaid Nagar	Feb., 1986		
Ratadi	Feb., 1986		
Panchayat Samiti: Bhopalgarh Pracheta H. Qrs.: Bhopalgarh		Panchayat Samiti: Looni Pracheta H. Qrs.: Looni	
Rajlani	June, 1985	Ramwas	June, 1985
Sathin	June, 1985	Nandwan	June, 1985
Radod	Feb., 1985	Koori	June, 1985
Bagoriya	Feb., 1986	Bhandookla	Feb., 1986
Kumahara	Feb., 1986	Banar	June, 1986
Devatvara	Feb., 1986		
Panchayat Samiti: Phalodi Pracheta H. Qrs : Vacant			
Moriya	Feb., 1986		
Lordiya	Feb., 1986		
Mokheri	Feb., 1986		
Cheela	Feb., 1986		
Beethri	Feb., 1986		

## F. AJMER DISTRICT

1. Panchayat Samitis	8
2. Panchayat Samitis where WDP is functioning	8
3. Prachetas	7
4. Sathins	63

Village	Sathins Working since	Village	Sathins Working since
Panchayat Samiti: Jawaja Pracheta H. Qrs.: Lotiyana		Panchayat Samiti: Pisangan Pracheta H. Qrs.: Govindgarh	
Lotiyana	May, 1985	Budhawara	Oct., 1984
Kotra	May, 1985	Pisangan	Oct., 1984
Sedariya	May, 1985	Bhagwanpura	May, 1985
Baila	Aug., 1985	Nand	May, 1985
Barakhera	Aug., 1985	Ganahera	May, 1985
Sanwa	Aug., 1985	Kalesara	Aug., 1985
Byavar Khas	Aug., 1985	Jethana	Aug., 1985
Lasani	Nov., 1985	Baseli	Aug., 1985
Surajpura	Nov., 1986	Dabla	Nov., 1986
Panchayat Samiti: Silora Pracheta H. Qrs.: Vacant		Panchayat Samiti: Arain Pracheta H. Qrs.: Fatehgarh	
Paner	Aug., 1985	Chhota Lamba	Oct., 1984
Bhadoon	Aug., 1985	Bhamolav	Oct., 1984
Kotlari	Aug., 1985	Dadiya	Oct., 1984
Khatoli	Aug., 1985	Akodiya	Oct., 1984
Harmada	Aug., 1985	Dhasuka	Oct., 1984
Salemabad	Aug., 1985	Mundavariya	Oct., 1984
		Deva Puri	Aug., 1985
		Fatehgarh	Aug., 1985
		Borada	Nov., 1986
Panchayat Samiti: Masudha Pracheta H. Qrs.: Vacant		Panchayat Samiti: Srinagar Pracheta H. Qrs.: Datan	
Jiwana	May, 1986	Ladapura	May, 1985
Jaliya II	May, 1986	Laharwara	Aug., 1985
Moyana	May, 1986	Danta	Aug., 1985
Kheempura	Nov., 1986	Sapunda	Aug., 1985
Nandwara	Nov., 1986	Bawayacha	Aug., 1985
Kharwa	Nov., 1986	Gagal Akhri	Aug., 1985
Jamola	Nov., 1986	Ramsara	Aug., 1985
Begaliyavas	Nov., 1986	Narawara	Nov., 1985
Ramgarh	Nov., 1986	Tiharai	Nov., 1985
		Magara	Nov., 1985
Panchayat Samiti: Kekari Pracheta H. Qrs.: Juniya		Panchayat Samiti: Bhinai Pracheta H. Qrs. Bandanwada	
Kohara	May, 1986	Chapaneri	May, 1986
Mewada Kala	May, 1986	Bandanwara	Nov., 1986
Gul Gaon	Nov., 1986	Lamgira	May, 1986
Mewada Khurd	Nov., 1986	Jotaya	Nov., 1986
Amla	Nov., 1986	Gopaliya	Nov., 1986
Devaliya	Nov., 1986		

# PRACHETA TRAINING

A paper by Aruna Roy and Sharada Jain, 1985

## INTRODUCTION

This paper looks at what can be termed a meaningful training programme for those involved in intervention efforts in women's development. We realize more and more that the issues involved here are very complex. It is also obvious that there could be diverse ways of looking at them and dealing with them. However, one needs to do this exercise and one way of doing it could be to begin with sharing some of the experiences from the three Pracheta Training Programmes that were conducted in Rajasthan under the Women's Development Programme. Though they might have been conducted in a not-so-conventional manner, the processes initiated through them were certainly the right ones. We do not suggest quick generalisations from them nor do we recommend treating them as some kind of a 'model' which can be replicated. This issue must be discussed in depth once we have described, in parts, what was done in these programmes. In what follows, we shall try and capture the essential core of the Pracheta Training Programme through putting together a collage of events. The method of training has to a large extent, determined the style of presentation of this report. The flexibility and informal nature of the training and its unstructured logic are difficult to present through conventional reportage. What is said here, therefore, tries to capture the spirit of what happened while attempting to bring out the concepts that underline them.

Three groups of Prachetas (block level women functionaries) were trained in Jobner (Jaipur district), Manaklav (Jodhpur district) and Kaya (Udaipur district) in 1984-5. The participants were a mixed lot. There were approximately 25 Prachetas in each training programme—an unknown quantity. These groups of ex-Government school teachers, Gramsevikas and Anganwadi workers were part of a class and caste group that has traditionally accepted the confines of orthodox mores. There were also some of us who represented voluntary groups/freelance workers involved in working with women. These two categories of participants formed the core group. Besides these we frequently invited those working with theatre, lawyers, doctors, academicians and administrators.

What happened in those twenty-one days? What were the highlights of the training programmes?

But first we need to share our uneasiness with this term. We wonder whether these series of experiments in

group-living and group-thinking can ever be accurately described as 'training'—a word which by definition has a limited objective. Training as a concept has a sharp edge. It cuts through the canvas and creates a hiatus between the trainer and the trainees, the 'expert' and the learner, the superior and the inferior. It also suggests that there are certain specific skills that the expert knows (or ought to know), a method of transferring these skills that there is (or ought to be) and a mechanism of evaluation/measuring the degree of success in the transference of these skills. The assumptions underlying a general use of this concept are:

- There are some identifiable skills which are valuable, which we **need**.
- Some people have them, others do not.
- The expert must 'impart' or 'give' what she has in the form of knowledge so that the learners' behaviour changes.
- This training must steer clear of all such intangibles like emotions and values. Trainees should be taken simply as those who have to 'learn' to do something which they do not know how to.
- We can measure the success of training by measuring the skill acquired.

These assumptions are well justified in a large number of activities like those concerned with mechanical skills (e.g. operating machines), physical skills like swimming or even artistic skills like singing. A serious difficulty arises in making these assumptions when we wish to generate (?) some competence in developmental intervention.

To illustrate the point better, we can even consider those skills which have, in a confused manner, been associated with women's development and contrast them with what we term as a general ability to relate to women's issues.

Let us look at the following three sentences:

- 'She is receiving training in making baskets'.
- 'She is receiving training in stitching garments'.
- 'She is receiving training in working for women's development'.

To consider just one point—i.e. that of evaluation, we can clearly see the difference in the kinds of competence we are dealing with in these cases. The last one is not exactly as identifiable and measureable like the first two are. One can easily assess whether a woman **can** make baskets and, how many she makes in one day. It can also be checked whether a woman stitches neatly, and that she can stitch a shirt. It is in the third case that we have problems. Here, there is no single skill, no specific area of recognizable activity. She does a whole lot of things. To understand her growth, we would, in fact, have to inquire whether she has acquired a sensitivity for the deprived, a commitment to relate to them, a confidence to work in rural areas, an enthusiasm for change, a desire for seeking knowledge at each step, an ability to listen, a facility with analysis, etc. The list will be unending because it would be describing all those features which we have learnt to recognise as indicators of development. In this case, we have moved from the area of skill generation to the possibility of being a 'different' person as a whole—a person who cannot afford to remain outside the process of development. In order to be working for women's development, the person has to become a centre of development in a personal sense also.

All this sounds far too abstract. An actual training programme, however, implies simplification to a degree which, ironically, may appear very strenuous.

## 'US' AS A DISCOVERY

We begin by being ourselves—living together in a camp, bringing just ourselves. We do the ordinary things—look at each other, eat, wash dishes, clean the place, make beds on the floor—and talk. Talk without having mothers, fathers, officers or husbands around—talk with a sense of space. This strangely elementary mode, strangely novel mode, for those of us who live hemmed in by all kinds of 'do's' and 'don'ts', demands the pressures, voices around us. These voices around describe us in various ways, forcing us to see ourselves falling in strange brackets—almost shaping and moulding us without ever consulting **us!**

But where was this 'us' ever before?

## PRACHETA DIARY—JOBNER TRAINING

'Who am I?'

I cannot answer this. Whenever I have asked myself this question, I appear to be just a name—I did not even

choose it! And I look around and see there is also a 'body' which goes with the name. What more? I look a little closer—there are some 'sores', some aching spots which are hidden, covered with bandages because they look ugly, they feel dreadful.

In this newly acquired space (given by the 21 day training programme), one gets tempted to 'air' these. This just happens and then a thorough burst takes place—almost thunder. All the women go through a feverish activity of removing layers and layers of their 'being' only to discover that there are so many of them—**similar**, together.

A new 'us' emerges which embraces a whole range of women who have also suffered, who too are mutilated by the pressures around, who have been forced to live in fear and sometimes in helplessness!

'Who are we—we will discover it together'. This process begins on the first day.

At about 3.00 p.m. when most of the Prachetas had arrived we decided to begin the training.

We all joined hands and sat in a circle on the durrie. What followed was a brief introduction of each of us—my name—the place I belong—my work—these were the areas which were highlighted.

A cue to a general discussion on women's position in our society was provided by two participants who stated their experiences of women's shelter homes which they had visited before coming to the training. There was an attitude of warmth in accepting the plight of the inmates of these shelter homes. This brought forth sharp reactions from the other participants and led some to narrate their experiences of work, where they had to face a hostile attitude from men and the power wielders whenever they resisted their decisions.

About 50 percent of the group articulated their opinions, the rest remained listeners.

For many the training had not yet begun. This, they felt was simply a discussion to pass time. They failed to realise the relevance the discussion had to their understanding of women in society.

When one trainer put forth the suggestion that the group decide on the training time-schedule, it was received with some shock. As trainees, they expected that they would be told what the 'time-table' would be and not be asked to make it. However, a general consensus was reached in 'exercises' at 7.00 a.m. and 'class' beginning at 9.30 a.m.

One of us asked why they felt that 'exercises' were important. Some felt that as in the training period they would be doing household chores (physical labour) they would not feel 'fit' for the day. This led to a discussion on 'drudgery', 'work' and 'exercise'. We learnt to distinguish the differences. We also tried to understand the reasons why we women don't do 'exercises' every day.

This brought the day's discussion to an end. We ate dinner together and washed our plates. For some, the idea of the trainers washing their own plates seemed strange!

The group broke up after this. The trainers reflected on the day's happenings. It was felt that the film 'Subah' should be shown during the training as the issue of women's shelter homes had come up.

It was also felt that we would talk about ourselves on the following day since so far we had related to each other within fixed categories e.g. as a 'Pracheta', a 'teacher' a 'trainer', 'trainee Pracheta', etc. This exercise would probably allow us to discover ourselves and each other as 'women'.

## SHARING

### TRAINER'S DIARY—JOBNER

Vimla looked like any pretty school teacher. Her nylon sari and small airs, her assertion that she could not exist without seeing a film a week established her class identity. This was the Vimla we first saw.

Then, Vimla began to talk about wage workers and their problems. She talked about her past when she had actually worked as a wage labourer and her problems within her family and in the village.

Vimla was enraged at the inhuman treatment of wage workers. She recalled the story of a woman whose milk went to make a cup of tea for an overseer. She felt the physical pain of that woman. She wept. Vimla began talking of what happens to her when she goes to work. Her fear of physical violence, her assertion of the right to protect her body.

In the beginning Vimla was just a pretty face with a name. With each passing day, she became a 'person'. In listening and responding to her, all of us began to talk of our own sorrows and joys. In this process a new kind of sharing began. We began to trust each other.

When some one, or something moves us, a story, a poem, it is an indication of having reached a 'turning' where communication with each other becomes possible. It is at such moments that discussion on sensitive issues can really begin.

It also meant that all of us could only begin from where each one of us was—Vimla began to talk only because she could talk about whatever she wanted to. She had to be comfortable with other persons sharing the same idiom, before a serious debate could begin.

We, in our turn, had to accept that Vimla's views—her biases, her story—were relevant. She herself was important and had an intrinsic value as an individual, as a participant in the learning process. We had to believe that Vimla could create something unique, original and significant. We had to have faith in her.

Paradoxically enough, it was our faith in Vimla that moved us into feeling and thinking about 'us'—of sharing, of forming a group and solidarity. A realization dawned that an individual lacking in self-confidence can never become an active member of a strong group.

Vimla did not expect that anyone would actually want to listen to her. When she recognized that her pain, her pleasure, her problems were important, not only to herself but to others, something remarkable happened. A slow process of recognition began. When a group of women share their experiences, and discover that they, 'the unimportant lot', are in fact creative, unique human beings, a great excitement of sharing and confidence begins to grip the group. And a genuine process of listening begins. Now we are ready to look at ourselves and our social milieu critically.

Vimla and all of us shared our walking hours. We talked in the sessions and out of it. We ate together, laughed and sang together, cried together, washed each other's plates, looked after the sick. It was this concern for each other that led to a great understanding of our individual collective problems.

## YET ANOTHER DAY REFLECTION, INTERNALISING RULES

### TRAINER'S DIARY—MANAKLAV

We met for exercises at 7.00 a.m. and we found that we were just three-fourths of the total number.

It being a cold winter morning, we met for 'class' on the terrace of the training centre. We were late. Some suggested that we formulate ourselves rules and abide by them so that we come in time. Explanations were given—that the bathrooms were too few, that there were insufficient chulhas for heating the bath water and that some participants were inconsiderate about the time they took for a bath. We continued to discuss this till we realized how important this aspect was for the training. This was a concrete problem for us to solve collectively. Each one felt that a conscious effort must be made, beginning from oneself, so that such a situation would not occur again. Some decisions were taken by the participants on how this aspect could be organized efficiently.

## COMMUNICATION

When there is a willingness to share, we begin to listen. The act of listening takes some effort. It is only as it gathers momentum, that it becomes important.

### TRAINER'S DIARY—JOBNER

The training had not yet begun at Jobner. Six of us had arrived early. We waited till evening but the numbers did not grow. We began to talk desultorily. We talked of chores at home, the problems of letting a man handle the kitchen. Different points of view were expressed. Gradually we began to talk about other demands on women. Our positions and our perceptions were different. We thought it would be interesting to record our separate impressions of the evening. Saroj, commenting on the exercise, recalled the story of Hanuman in Lanka when he went to meet Sita. Everything he saw looked red because he was in a rage. Perceptions, she said, were biased by our state of mind, and our conditioning. We began to talk about how one can communicate despite differences.

Why were we able to communicate with ease?

Was it because we did not have prejudices? Or because we were willing to listen?

- Because we ate, washed our plates and sat together?
- Because we did not have separate and different kinds of rooms?
- Because we did not put on airs?
- Because we were not called 'madam' but 'didi'?
- Because there were no chairs for the madam?
- Because there were no separate class rooms and bed rooms— we slept and discussed in the same room?

We discussed all these and finally there was a consensus. For genuine communication, there has to be a feeling that all of us are equal, though we may be quite different! Equality, we realized, was not 'sameness' but being 'similar'—each having an original way of seeing things, which was what made her attractive, valuable and deserving respect. Communication, seemed to rest on **accepting** each other and finding that we strengthen each other, by being similar and yet a 'person' in one's own style.

## PARTICIPATION AND DECISION MAKING

### TRAINER'S DIARY—JOBNER

We sat in a circle on the floor on the first day of the training at Jobner. Everyone thought it might be a good idea to begin with a prayer. Why did we want to pray? Everyone looked expectantly at the 'official trainers'. The 'official trainers' looked at everybody else. It was suggested that each one would state why she wanted to pray. She would also suggest how she would pray. It took an hour and a half to decide that we would pray for expressing solidarity, for peace, for ourselves. We also decided we would like to sing together. We did not want to sing religious songs. So, we sang a song celebrating mankind, in hoping that one day we would succeed in all that we set out to do.

Later, Madhu was a bit fed up with this process. Every single decision had to be discussed, each individual opinion elicited and then a decision taken. She wanted to know why we went through this process at all. Couldn't the few responsible trainers decide quickly in the interest of all concerned?

Madhu's question started a serious debate on group decisions. We went through the process yet again with each individual expressing her reaction to Madhu's query. We finally came to the conclusion individually and collectively, (Madhu included) that we wanted to take group decisions. The issues were:

- It was necessary if we wanted genuine participation.
- It was necessary if we wanted to share.
- It was necessary to understand those who did not accept the suggestion.
- It was necessary to understand the reasons for the acceptance or rejection.
- It was a method of ensuring support.
- It was the basis of collective action.

To us, participation meant that every activity had to be non-mechanical. All of us had to be able to articulate without inhibition and say why we wanted or did not want to do anything. Each activity had to be creatively seen and evaluated in the context of our need.

It is not possible to do this when we are afraid of each other, or of the idiom in which we are expected to talk.

Taking about my need for praying or not praying, is relevant only if I have the minimal power to decide whether I should or should not pray. While I express my personal views on whether I want or do not want to pray, I also understand that as a member of a group, I have others with me who matter. This basic concern, together with the confidence of being accepted, generates the freedom, fearlessness and humility which constitutes the spirit of participatory decision making.

### TRAINER'S DIARY—MANAKLAV

We need to go through several exercises in **doing** this, internalising each bit of what is entailed in the notion of participation. It is almost like getting soaked with the idea. Our hope is that this process will manifest itself in all relationships—be it in the field or with officers. By doing what we wish to achieve, we are planning for decentralised, participatory decision making by the rural women—the core of development.

But group decisions were not always a consensus. There were instances when there were differences, contradictions and conflict.

### TRAINER'S DIARY—KAYA

One day, a lavatory was found to have been left dirty. The first time it happened, a quick decision was taken to clean it. But it happened again. This time it led to accusations and counter accusations. The group appealed to the few 'trainers' to decide the issue and put an end to this triviality. Many participants felt it to be a waste of time to discuss this point in the group. They felt that swift decisions should be taken. However, many of us insisted on the participatory mode. Everyone was asked to spell out the criteria for the selection of a decision maker in case they thought that the decision be taken by a single person. There was a good deal of disagreement on this question. It became fairly clear in the process that if the group wished to undertake collective decision making on so called 'important', 'glamorous', 'intellectual' issues they also had to deal with what appeared to be trivial. It took us almost two hours to realize the importance of taking responsibility for failures.

For us all, this was an evaluation of our inability to understand, communicate and internalise the process. We had to collectively learn how to deal with dissent, to use it creatively, to grow.

## DEALING WITH DISSENT

### TRAINER'S DIARY—KAYA

Maheshwari had an odd way of brushing off all attempts to make her talk during the sessions. It was apparent that she did think a lot and could articulate. She did talk to her neighbour, aside or in the dining room. But she clammed up during discussions. She did not respond to different overtures to make her talk. One day she burst into tears, alleging that she was being laughed at and slighted, that she had no brains, that she spoke clumsily, and that everyone was much better schooled than she was. She could not be persuaded to say who laughed at her. We all knew who did. But she continued to name others. Everybody was upset.

No one was willing to accept mistakes. This happened in the middle of an important session on creative theatre. All of us felt that the planned session had to be postponed, till such time as the group began to analyse the incident. It took us a long time using mime, nukkad (a form of street theatre) and discussion to arrive at a partial understanding of why Maheshwari behaved the way she did.

We learnt to apologise, to accept our mistakes. There is really no such thing as losing face if we wish to learn together and if we do not fear ridicule.

## DEALING WITH CONFLICT

We learnt that conflict between different persons is also natural. We all have different perceptions. What we do have to learn is the ability to distance ourselves from our problem and to resolve it rationally.

Any issue was relevant if it disturbed us and prevented our participation. When one of us is hurt or upset, everything **has to stop**. 'Working' includes time spent on understanding.

Any non-participation is a major issue. It reflects the level of communication, understanding and sharing in the training process.

## CREATIVE MODES OF EXPRESSION

### TRAINER'S DIARY—JOBNER

The session on physical violence began early one evening. Two of our participants who were returning to the training quarters from the agricultural college faced harassment at the hands of some students. They depicted the incident through a roleplay. It showed the onlookers' attitude of utter indifference (which included some professors and students). The roleplay evoked spontaneous reactions/responses from other participants. Some more stories were told by different members of the group, which related to similar harassment at work and in the family. All these experiences left the entire group greatly disturbed.

Next day, there was the news of Mrs. Gandhi's assassination. We were very uneasy about the violence associated with the event. It was followed by extremely distressing news of violence all over the country. This information led

to a wide range of discussions on issues ranging from caste, untouchability, bania exploitation to exploitation by all kinds of middle men in the villages. All these were seen as acts of violence.

On the sixth day after this event, as a cumulative outburst a series of songs, posters and couplets were created. This creative phase extended even to the dramatic form and prose-writing.

## ASKING QUESTIONS, LEARNING

### TRAINER'S DIARY—MANAKLAV

We had talked to each other, listened shared, danced, sung, made posters and written songs. Yet, some of us felt guilty because we had not had 'classes' or got information packages. The more 'educated' amongst us were conditioned and had rigid notions of learning methods. As a result, a very interesting session took place. This happened differently but was an unmistakable part of the process in the Prachetas Training Programme at Jobner as well.

We sat together and identified issues that we had highlighted through our stories, songs, dances and discussion. The first few days had helped us identify three broad areas of concern that emerged from our collective experiences. They were—

- Insecurity and physical violence.
- The marginalisation of women in the development process.
- Women's powerlessness today—the lack of a common forum for self expression and learning collectively.

We had to share not only the analysis, but the details of the method. **This led us to understand how knowledge is not the hegemony of the powerful and the educated alone.**

### TRAINER'S DIARY—KAYA

Kamla raised a question of major importance. She had worked as a research scholar in CAZRI. She could not understand how these 'low' intellectual activities could be termed as learning fit for an understanding of developmental processes. The miming and role play, she thought, was of nursery level—fit for illiterate women. On this point we sat together and categorised the activities we had mimed.

It was almost a revelation to her that this categorization was more effective than any such activity she had undertaken earlier. It was the method which was different and which gave more authentic results. Kamla was excited and convinced.

## SEEKING INFORMATION

### TRAINER'S DIARY—KAYA

We felt that a good deal of information needed to be shared. But we were hesitant to pack the training with information which was not readily received. Whenever the relevance of receiving information is not clear, it is not assimilated.

Information dissemination is an important part of women's development. But, what kind of information does the WDP consider important?

Talking about it amongst ourselves led us to understand certain things:

Information is of different kinds.

1. There is one kind information that is necessary for immediate and decisive action. For example: There is a flood—send out an alarm.
2. There is another kind of information which calls for absorption and resultant qualitative change, such as:
  - There is an epidemic, pregnant mothers must take preventive medicine, or
  - All castes should be allowed access to the handpump, serious action will be taken for non-compliance.

In dealing with the latter kind of information, the information has to be made available at a suitable time in an understood idiom, after familiarising oneself with the social conditions. We must in other words:

- Feel that the epidemics must be stopped from spreading. That it is **our** concern.

- Understand that this epidemic can be prevented from spreading only if we look for channels of communication with the affected women.

Once this is internalised, **then** we need to know the details of the illness, if there is any foetal damage, understand that mothers' illnesses can affect unborn children if their mothers take ill and the consequences of negligence. We also need to know the reasons why such epidemics happen.

After we have received all this timely information we are ready to act.

At Jobner we did not get the 'specialists' in, till the second week. By then we were fairly clear about what kind of information we wanted to get from each one of them. We had a session before each 'specialist' arrived. In this session we identified areas that we wanted to know more about. We also discussed how we should organise the exchange of information. In some cases we preferred lectures, in others we had discussions. Some were structured and others were not.

When we organised a session on law, for instance, we were ready with a broad outline. We wanted three different sets of information.

- The first dealt with issues that concerned us personally at the moment—marital law, right to urban property, dowry, etc.
- The second was on issues that concern a rural population—land records, inheritance, encroachment on land, land disputes, etc.
- The third dealt with general information on human rights, police action, arrest, detention, FIR and so on.

It can be argued that this list could have been made without participation. We all knew what would emerge anyway. But it is important that this list grow out of an awareness of one's situation, in family, in society and that it is internalised. It is important to ensure that the information received has been retained.

## HOW WE PARTED

### TRAINER'S DIARY— KAYA

When we approached the end of the 21 days, there was a general feeling that the party was going to end. The relationships that had grown over the two and a half weeks in which we were together, were 'special'. We had not ever had had this kind of space to look at and talk about ourselves and evolve friendships the way we had here. Very often, one of us said, 'I am amazed at myself. I have said things here which I have not said to a soul. What an experience. Can I relive it again? Will I adjust to the world outside? How I will miss you all!' Home and children beckoned us. But there was a part of us that was reluctant to let go of this new found support and solidarity that had temporarily been ours. The end was an affirmation of the bonds that had been knit. It was paradoxically expressed through our tearful goodbyes. We vowed to support each other and come together again. We had created a new family of beings. Ours was a family that extended to include the Sathins, and women in the villages. We parted with an enthusiasm to rediscover this excitement in our work and newer relationships.

## SOME PERCEPTIONS

What are the general principles that emerge from these experiments? We shall attempt to list some of those special features which our group has recognised as empowering processes—which in the past ten months have helped them in their work at the field level.

1. This kind of training rests on an assumption that a mere cerebral approach in training does not help a developmental worker. One has to feel and think in a coherent manner in order to act authentically. Feelings or attitude do not change by mere 'information', however well delivered. Even an alternate approach of instilling habit patterns in action (by a process of positive and negative reinforcement) and hoping that a change would occur in 'feelings' and **then** in turn would change the modes of perception, is also not validated by experience.
2. Unless the 'us—them' hiatus is removed in an essential experience, it is difficult to 'pretend' that 'we are one'. This latter approach is the only way to ensure that developmental processes do not degenerate into mere relief measures.

3. These training programmes assume a basic respect for the trainees and a genuine effort has to be made at each step to understand them. This appears to be the only way of promoting a process of mutual understanding in work.
4. Yet another assumption in these trainings is that the best way of communicating a set of values is by actualising them. This is what we understand by the oft repeated cliché—'learning by doing'.
5. These training programmes need to be accompanied by a well planned follow-up programme. The trainees cannot be just left to themselves after one 'exposure'. A sensitive communication channel has to be vitalised for continuous reinforcement. The workers have to feel that in their revised perspectives and attitudes, they have a backing and assurance from those whose approval matters to them.
6. A very important and probably controversial feature of this kind of training is to destroy the dichotomy between 'work' and 'leisure'. The assumption is that unless one starts 'enjoying' work, one can never excel in it. The added energy, zest needed for being a link in the change process requires a holistic identification. One strong indicator of the 'success' of these training programmes has been the fact that the Prachetas enjoy their work.
7. Finally, a continuous, participatory evaluation is an integral feature of this training. Evaluation has to be seen as something which strengthens—not something for which one is forced to 'pretend' or tell lies in fear. Self-evaluation as well as mutual evaluation as a necessary pattern in 'work', facilitating a 'reaching out' for help in the form of knowledge or assistance is central to this programme.

All these features gather meaning only when they are linked to a larger system where a conscious effort is made to reinforce non-mechanical and non-hierarchical patterns. Their strength is sustained only if the total programme in which they are woven, represents a similar spirit. In short, they can only be seen as a part of a larger set which could, by being 'different' (i.e. quantity-oriented, impatient, hierarchical, oppressively systematic, etc.) very quickly destroy its meaningfulness. The question that we have probably to ask ourselves is really not what kind of 'training' is needed for workers in women's development programmes, but rather, what kind of programmes we should visualise which will support authentic developmental workers.

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# FORMS OF COMMUNICATION IN SATHIN TRAINING

A Paper by Sushmita Banerjee

“From one familiar approach, through traditional politics, we have seen the central facts of society as power and government. From another familiar approach, through traditional economics, we have seen the central concerns of society as property, production, and trade. These approaches remain important, but they are now joined by a new emphasis: that society is a form of communication, through which experience is shared, described, modified and preserved... Many people seem to assume as a matter of course that there is, first, reality, and then, second, communication about it. We degrade art and learning by supposing that they are always second-hand activities: that there is life, and then afterwards there are these accounts of it. Our commonest political error is the assumption that power—the capacity to govern other men—is the reality of the whole social process, and so the only context of politics. Our commonest economic error is the assumption that production and trade are our only practical activities, and that they require no other human justification or scrutiny. We need to say what many of us know in experience: that the life of man, and the business of society, cannot be confined to these ends; that the struggle to learn, to describe, to understand, to educate, is a central and necessary part of our humanity. This struggle is not begun, at second hand, after reality has occurred. **It is, in itself, a major way in which reality is continually formed and changed\*.**”

During the Sathin trainings, rural women of different ages, belonging to different classes, castes and districts, stay together for a month. In that period, a number of forms of communication are used. This piece is a result of the interaction and observation of two training programmes and two re-orientation programmes (with women from Jaipur, Ajmer, Udaipur and Banswara districts). It does not provide an exhaustive list of all the forms used, nor does it contain an evenly detailed analysis of the forms mentioned. Quite often, the most effective communication was through events, objects and atmosphere—these have not been discussed in this.

—‘Communications’  
Raymond Williams

\*Emphasis, mine

The purpose is not to record something 'exotic'—for that is just what they were not. No, this is not about 'rural forms'. It is about myriad ways in which expression was possible. It is what a large number of us have seen and experienced. Perhaps at different times, in different ways.

Alice, (in Wonderland), on being admonished to think carefully before she spoke, indignantly exclaimed: "How can I know what I think till I can see what I say?"

## DRAMA

'Putting up a play'—there is a distance, deliberation and effort implied in that phrase. However, the Sathins constantly freewheeled into impromptu plays, made of drama an extension of speech, a continuation of narrative. A play was not A Performance, rather, it seemed to be an animated situation, a discussion in action. The ease with which this spillover into a play was effected was like switching from one language to seek the particular strength of another. This recourse to another language, drama, could be for any one of these numerous reasons:

### ANALYSIS

(The milk cooperative play)

A discussion on cooperatives had barely begun. The words were 'Sahakari Samiti'—a combination of complicated sounds which drifted uneasily. Till someone said the word, 'milk' and, there was a clamour, 'In my village, in my village'. Within minutes the Sathins were on their feet saying, 'It's like this—'

What followed was a play, simple and powerful. It showed their perceptions of the functioning of the milk dairy cooperatives in their villages. In precise, unabashed and fearless detail (inclusive of the cuts and commissions at various levels, the tea and paan for the potential protesters, the children without milk at home). They enjoyed playing the truck and driver bit, with all the various stops and Inspector Sa'abs—so round and round the room the 'truck' zoomed and spluttered several times.

The meaning of Development, the functioning of certain kinds of cooperatives (their possibilities and limitations), the nexus that deprives the rural poor: the Sathins presented their analysis of these in a play. They did not **speak** of their analysis, and then translate it into a play—they analysed in drama. The play made their thought explicit.

It then led to a discussion of agricultural economy.

### ELUCIDATION, RECAPITULATION, CONSOLIDATION

(Chipko and others)

After the Sathins heard of the struggles of women in other places (a newly arrived resource-person had narrated these in Hindi), they said, "Perhaps all of us have not understood, and so we will not remember. We will do the stories in plays." In their enactment, they improvised details of names of characters, of villages. They added those slight touches which made the bare plots breathe.

Like in the rape episode involving a minister, they included a 'typical' speech. Then, they added the character of the 'chamcha', tagging along with the minister. When the 'chamcha' had to pick up her daughter who strayed into the middle of the scene, the minister instantly patted the daughter, and the chamcha quipped, "Our worthy minister is very fond of children." Such improvisations demonstrated their case in acting, mainly because the play was not a performance for others, but a language for one's own self.

A third story was about a struggle for minimum and equal wages for men and women. In this, they showed all the various operations—digging, relaying, carrying—involved in the work. Such details were based on their own experience which they transferred to the play. What they had heard was no longer an interesting, unrelated event. They connected it, at once, intimately to their own lives.

By transforming a skimpy story line into a fullblooded script, by giving body to these stories of courage and by 'acting them out,' they made the lives and struggles of women elsewhere in India, part of their own collective memory.

## REFLECTING EXISTING VALUES

(Good woman— Bad woman play)

Very often, a play provided the base by showing 'what is'. This led to a questioning of what is, i.e. the status quo. The Sathins were asked to do a play in which there was a good woman and a bad woman. Their characterisation of good and bad dramatically highlighted the existing values and norms. While in a discussion it might have been difficult to list the characteristics, the play included all those trivial but significant details which formed their images of good and bad.

## APPROACHING AN ISSUE

(Minimum wages, Drinking, Ration shop plays)

Many issues were articulated as plays, and these plays were repeated. The first time an issue was taken up in a play there was usually a statement of the situation in an exaggerated repetitive fashion, with a lot of hitting, running and shouting. The dialogues merged into chorus, the movements ended in groups knots, the end was abrupt. The play just said, 'This is it'. The second and third times (repeated after an interval ranging from days to weeks), the same issue would include an analysis of the situation ('This is how we understand it') and an approach to it, the nature of intervention ('This is what we are going to do about it').

## PLANNING AND ANTICIPATING

('When I go back to the village' play)

In one of the trainings, all the 24 Sathins together did a play in which they showed the kind of problems they anticipated in their villages and their approach. One of them took on the role of Sathin, and all the others acted as villagers of different classes, castes, local officials, a policeman, a doctor, and so on. Thus, doing a play was a way of planning.

## LEARNING AND TEACHING

(Roles of Sathin and Pracheta play)

The training of one lot of Sathins was about to finish when another lot of Sathins came for their re-orientation. The two groups met, 'old and new' Sathins. A day later, the new Sathins said they would like to do a play for the old Sathins. The play they enacted was about an independent, self-reliant Sathin and her healthy relationship with the Pracheta. One wondered about the reaction—after all, it could be thought impertinent of the new Sathins to 'teach' or point out something. The appreciative applause ended our fears.

Some plays were for **giving information about Government schemes** (IRDA, NREP, NAEP etc.), and many **dramatised the events and stories** narrated by the Sathins about their lives and villages.

There had been no theatre workshops as such, during the Sathin training. The starting points for the plays varied often, they broke or flowed into a play, sometimes they decided to do a play, and sometimes, it was suggested that a play be done and only a title was given ("drinking" or "good woman"). The time for the preparation of these plays ranged from five to fifteen minutes. The plots, directions, enactment, everything was totally in the hands of the Sathins. The length of the plays varied from five to forty minutes.

In a single, month-long training, there would be as many as 10 to 15 plays. The 30 odd plays one has seen, have certain similar characteristics, whatever be the subject matter, whosoever the participants:

— **All** the Sathins willingly and eagerly participate in plays. Acting is not seen as a special skill in the hands of a few.

(However, had these very Sathins been directed by an urban resource person—directed in the conventional sense of learning and rehearsing set dialogues, blocking moves, cues, and had to perform on a stage for a large audience, not all may have acted, and the play would be different).

— The plays include songs and ceremonies. For instance, weddings, visits, partings, would be shown along with the traditional songs and rituals.

— If two or three groups are doing different plays by turn, the Sathins who are watching as audience also join in the play, interpose, comment. The distance between audience and actors is easily and unconsciously crossed.

- The plays are panoramic showing two or three settings simultaneously with simultaneous action. Usually, this simultaneity of scenes is done with a bare minimum of overlap and confusion.
- Very often, the plays go on and on. The actors and audience get so involved in it that the play continues. The separation between reality and play-acting is not specified, one merges with the other.
- Often actual time is shown, for instance, if a character is making 'rotis', then, that much time will be taken till a sufficient number of rotis are shown, in detail, and have been made.
- Linked to this is the approach to repetition. Sometimes, instead of showing an action as representative of a regular routine, the action itself would be shown several times. Or again if a certain scene was enjoyable, it would be repeated.
- The play, thus, was not geared to an audience, it was an expression.
- It featured an unwritten script, no sets, a flexible stage/floorspace size and a kind of collective direction.

A discussion or narration could merge into a play, and a play would flow without a marked break, into a discussion. This may have stemmed from the fact that their narrative style itself is dramatic.

In narration, space and time are collapsed into the abstraction of a word; in drama, the Sathins re-erected space and time in concrete terms. The acted narrative, which is often their style, gets over the static nature of simple narration, but it does not have the simultaneity and detail of reality. Their drama seems to be an attempt at a more authentic representation of reality, overcoming the one and two dimensional natures of narration and acted narrative. Flatness is transfigured into breadth, depth and perspective. The somewhat tangled and elliptical nature of narration assumes a brevity and precision in a graphic scene.

Their plays struck root in certain elements of the folk song—repetition, on-the-spot improvisation, collective participation, and the vigour and joyous abandon of the folk dance.

## ACTED NARRATIVE

This is not a defined, particular form, but a name one has given to a style of narration observed innumerable times. While recounting a story or event, a Sathin would suddenly get up and accompany her speech with action (this was a style adopted mainly by the illiterate Sathins). For instance, while saying, 'So I went to the moneylender', she would walk up to one of those who were listening, and assign the character of moneylender to her, address herself to the listener as if she was the moneylender, but at the same time, also say the dialogues of the moneylender herself! In the course of her narration, she would stalk up and down, gesticulating, now choosing this one or that to address herself to, like playing a lone hand of cards with several 'dummy' partners!

The persons addressed would nod, assent, demur, thus entering into the story of the narrator. Unlike a storyteller, the Sathin would not only wait for the 'Hunkara' (assenting chorus), but also interrupt her narrative flow to ask the opinion of the person she was addressing. The listeners and the narrator both cross a certain boundary—the listeners enter into a dialogue or active participation, the narrator makes the story part play, part narration.

## NARRATION: STORIES, EVENTS, ANECDOTES

Assertion of a stand, a point of disagreement, a clarification, a tangential approach—the very same lines which form the grid of a discussion, but each in the form of a 'story'.

In the beginning, whenever an issue was taken up, it would soon 'digress' into a long-winded episode narrated by a Sathin—all the other Sathins would listen with rapt attention, while the resource persons would want to come To The Point. However, on listening carefully to the response to the episode—which would be yet another episode!—it seemed that often a discussion was taking place. The end of one narration was usually followed by some murmurs, comments, preceded by 'Look how it happened that ...'. These comments abstracted the essential elements of the episode ('the line of argument' as it were). Someone else would then say, 'But in this or that village with so-and-so it was different'. And another episode would follow. After which the counter argument would then be summed up by someone or other. In this manner, stories, too, were tools for discussion and debate.

Truly a peaceable mode of exchange with no scoring of points and acrimonious arguments.

Their narration drew upon, and merged with the poetic and literary on the one hand and the dramatic on the other. Is it because in the oral tradition there is so much reliance on the spoken word that it assumes a character and richness quite unlike our bald, dry statements? Or is it that the parable and anecdote have been discarded by the urban educated as inferior forms?

## DOHA, PAHELI, CHUTKULA (couplet, riddle, joke)

To get something across effectively and in essence, the Sathins use a few quick lines, not an angular diagram but an impressionistic sketch—the doha. Often, summing up a discussion with the major ideas and arguments was not as effective as a doha recited by a Sathin, which beautifully captured the spirit of it all. They knew a large number of 'dohas' which they would use at appropriate moments, to understand and also explain to each other.

During one of the trainings, one session had consisted entirely of jokes and their analysis—who was the butt of ridicule, what were the kinds of situations, what were the implicit values.

They had a fund of riddles, too, which they kept exchanging in nightlong sessions. Such verbal gymnastics, not directly related to their daily lives and personal experiences, were apparently engrossing. Here one sees "...their language, not, assuredly, as a normative set of noble values (clarity, elegance, correctness)... but as a space of pleasure, of thrill, a site where language works **for nothing**..." (Barthes).

While the narrations and plays have a rooting in concrete, physical details, the 'dohas' involve abstractions and essences. The Sathins are comfortable in both. And while they were rambling in their stories, they were brief and accurate in the comments made at the end of the stories, and the summing-up in the 'dohas'. The attempt of the stories and plays was to present them as close to the real, as detailed as possible, so that one knew **exactly how it was**. The dohas left much to the interpretation and imagination. This traversing from concrete to abstract, reality to allegory, explicit to cryptic, within a few seconds, was because there seemed to be one whole, unfragmented world of communication.

## SONG

Nearly 150 rural women of Rajasthan (the Sathins during their training), have together created over 60 songs in the last year and a half. Like drama, the composition and singing of songs was not the preserve of a talented few. All joined in the making of the songs. The exact process of song composition differed from training to training.

The song played different roles in a training. Sometimes, especially during the first few days, singing familiar folksongs during a session, gave the folksong—for the Sathins—a status they did not feel it had (not thinking that their humble songs could be part of a training). Also, it being an area of familiarity and strength for them, and heard so appreciatively, enhanced their status in their own eyes, shaking loose the labels of 'illiterate village women—poor things!'

The **Sathin-geet** were composed by the Sathins. Such a song could open an entirely new phase in the training. When the Sathins of one district heard a song about drinking (during their training), which had been composed by the Sathins of another district, they suddenly started narrating their own experiences. Till then, personal experiences had not been shared.

Such a song could give confidence, and counter the culture accepted as dominant and superior. While all the Sathin-geet implicitly do so (by the fact of being in dialect, based on folk tunes, made collectively by a large number of rural women, many of whom are illiterate), even within this there were gradations. For instance, most of the songs composed by the Sathins of Banswara district, were based on 'garba' tunes. When the few Adivasis hesitantly put forward their unfinished scraps of rhythmic, undulating, chanting songs, they were surprised at the enthusiastic response of the resource persons. In fact, some of the songs made by the Adivasi Sathins later became the most popular ones.

Such a song could delineate the issues that had come up for discussion, and give pointers to some of the work of the Sathins.

Such a song was a collective statement on the status of women.

A song was often resorted to as a method of documentation, and an easy-to-handle, readily accessible information-retrieval system.

The tunes are those of wellknown folk songs. In a few bhajans, the changing of just a few words has made the content and meaning relevant to the present day situation.

The changes in word and content slid smoothly into the structure of the folk songs. They did not have that tasteless, synthetic quality often present in advertising and propaganda, which also use folk tunes, for instance, family planning messages or the advocacy of a particular fertiliser. Perhaps this was because the 'new' content was whole and real, part of their life, experience, and not pushing a single line through.

There is a simple, earthy poetry in the Sathin-geet, quite unlike some of the present day ersatz compositions which sound like a number of slogans strung together. When written, it is not always possible to indicate the exact nature of stress and undulation, so the songs may 'read', sometimes clumsy and unmetred. Some of the songs have sense and sound combined with such precision, that there is a feeling of the meaning. When sung, the songs are transformed into harmonious entities.

This is not to say that **all** the songs the Sathins composed were thus. During the training, their songs underwent a process of refinement, weeding and selection. They kept 'tuning' a song, as it were, till the right note was struck.

While these songs often accompanied dances of various types, a few were specifically composed as 'dance songs'.

## DANCING

Dancing together meant several things—relaxation, abandon, solidarity, joy and pride in the body's expression of physical vigour and wellbeing. Dance had an engulfing quality. And a gut appeal—it was the one form of communication (apart from chatter and riddles) which continued unabated throughout the night.

## GAMES

There were games of all kinds—childhood games of the Sathins and resource persons, others which led to discussions on leadership, mutual trust, teamwork, and games which were, well, just games! Many Sathins commented that it seemed like a refreshing return to 'childhood', in the sense of an opportunity to laugh and play and be just themselves.

Many complex concepts could be discussed with ease, because they had already been played. Not all these games were designed to lead up to such discussions. Many were familiar childhood games seen anew. And some of those games with inbuilt concepts for discussions, were just played, with no debate afterwards. The 'rule of the game' was enjoyment, spontaneity and participation, and not 'topics-to-be-covered'.

Games played the important roles which nonsense and fantasy play in life, that of balancing, providing an outlet, stimulating imagination, putting a perspective 'on its head', offsetting and keeping in proportion the sometimes overwhelming sense of seriousness and reality.

## WRITING

In the first training, writing not only occupied a place of ease but made positive contributions. There were four or five Sathins who could comfortably read and write, and another two to three who could manage to do so with effort. Apart from the factor of this relatively sizeable number, the removal of two tacit taboos—of being grammatically correct and of writing in a certain style—liberated the act of writing from its schoolroom confines.

Most of the writing was done in groups and read out. So, it was always coupled with listening. Sometimes, the same issue was discussed by several groups, which recorded the gist of their deliberations. The several aspects and depths stood out, when they listened to each other's reports. A homelier version of seminar papers!

Then, there was writing to be put up on the walls. These were highly decorated and entered the realm of decorative and poster art.

In the reorientation programme six months later, writing was used for making forceful stands, for critical

comments and synopses. The major issues which came up during the reorientation, have been written by the Sathin groups and included verbatim in the reorientation report. This is not because their particular style has the dubious virtues of quaintness and rural authenticity, but simply because they are good pieces of writing in themselves.

The important aspect of their writing is the inclusion of the ideas of those who cannot write, whose faces would light up while listening to the reports being read out, when they heard again, what they had said earlier. The technology of writing often acted like the tape recorder—one was faithfully recorded and played back! For those Sathins who were illiterate, this playing back was with an added 'grain', an amplitude had been acquired, that of the almost sacrosanct written word.

## DRAWING

In a group where only one or two were fluently literate, writing had to be abandoned after a few attempts. Instead, drawing was used, extensively, for documentation and expression. Just as writing, to be complete, had to be coupled with listening, drawing had to be coupled with commentary.

There was no question of artists and non-artists. Just as everyone sang, danced, acted, everyone drew and coloured.

## VISUALS

Several sets of flashcards, dealing mainly with health, provided insights into visual literacy, as well the possibilities of this medium.

In one training, a resource-person showed only about five or six cards from one set, beginning with the question, "What can we see in this?" Then, those Sathins who could read the storyline at the back of the cards, showed the pictures. And finally a few sets were shown by Sathins who could not read.

The black and white line drawing pictures, especially those which had unfamiliar settings (tables, tiles, microscope), had to be figured out. These pictures can be either a disaster, or, as was the case in this training, provoke a lot of guessing, suspense and merriment. Since the pictures were not totally unfamiliar, the Sathins were trying to fill in the blanks, interpret the objects depicted. So, this kind of a set fell into the 'Riddles' category! Without the context of dialogue and participation, such a set can be meaningless.

Where the Sathin (who could not read what was written on the back of the cards), was, simultaneously understanding a picture and explaining it to the others, the relationship of communicator and audience was changed. The communicator was not the one in possession of a meaning to be revealed, a plot to be unfolded. By first saying what she saw in the picture, and the audience saying what they saw, a story was created afresh together, not necessarily the given script.

The picture, then, did not contain, it spilt over; it did not lay out, slowly, its own specific net of meaning in which all were bound—it provided a point from which an ever-growing and changing web could be spun collectively, its meaning was light, clear, transparent, temporary. What bound, was the **activity of meaning-making**, and not the imperious net of a given, stated meaning which caught one, acquiescent.

The Sathins decided to make their own sets of flashcards, in one of the trainings. They made one on menstruation and another on XY chromosomes. A 'new' form, that of flashcards, became theirs—it held no secret and authority. They too, could make and show picture stories. And the picture story itself was not a new concept—there was the traditional 'Pabuji ka Phad'.

## PUPPETS

Puppet making stretched over several days—pounding, pasting, kneading, stitching, all areas of strength. However, handling the puppets required more deftness than was possible to attain in the limited hours during which the Sathins practised putting up puppet plays.

What often happened was that behind the curtain, the dialogues of a play went on, with the puppets standing still, the audience forgotten! Though glove puppets (which the Sathins made), can be manipulated with less expertise than string puppets, still, a minimum of dexterity, audience consciousness, is required, a definite set of communication skills which have to be developed.

The tape, mike, camera, formed a fractional part of the trainings (they were hardly there, really), so not much can be said about them. Or, then again, perhaps their very absence speaks?

## UNDERSTANDING

I. The distinctive feature underpinning these descriptions is the **kind of relationship** between (a) the Sathins and the forms of communication; (b) the forms themselves; and (c) the Sathins, in the use of the forms.

### THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE SATHINS AND THE FORMS OF COMMUNICATION

Basic to this relationship, is the meaning which the forms seemed to have for the Sathins. The forms, for them, existed in their elemental meaning, i.e. as means of expression. With such a meaning, expression becomes predominant. In concrete terms:

(i) Just as communication is an integral part of one's being, the means/ forms, too, were inalienated aspects of that expression. Thus drama-dance-song-drawing were not distinct acts, but inseparable parts of expression.

(ii) Since expression was predominant, it dictated the means. Using, pursuing, abandoning, changing the means of expression were natural corollaries—discussion could become drama, could come back to talk, could move to acted narrative, break into a song, step into dance.

(iii) As means, they did not take on the entire structure and all the conventions of the various forms. As means, the forms did not have a wholly autonomous existence, it was not necessary to 'complete a play'. The forms had no, or very few, independent demands and so,

(iv) They were controlled by the Sathin's needs of expression. The Sathin did not have to try and 'fit' into the forms.

(v) Thus, the question of 'being able to' act, dance, draw, did not arise. Each Sathin used, at 'different' times, all these means to express herself.

(vi) The norms, then, of assessing such forms of communication, were different. It was not 'was it a good play or a good dance or a good picture', in which the form has an independent existence, but rather, was the Sathin able to express herself.

With this meaning and relationship, the forms of communication are, at once, made more and less, reduced and enhanced. Reduced, because if seen as mere ways and means of expression (like an extension of gesture, intonation in conversation), they are arbitrarily dispensable, whimsically used. They do not develop and assume the status of 'forms'. And enhanced, because the forms, by lending themselves to so many interpretations, are made so much more elastic. By retaining recognisable traits (so that a play can be named as much), and yet not being circumscribed by the definition (a play and yet, not a play really), they are enriched. By having to be constantly re-defined, they transcend the static nature of categories and enter the area of experience.

### THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE FORMS OF COMMUNICATION

This also becomes intimate, and to some extent, the forms are inextricable.

(i) With the blurring of categories, dance, drama, song, merge into one holistic unit, separated when and if desired. The process is one of **extricating a particular form** from an amalgam, a whole. In this process of extrication, parts of the whole are still 'stuck on'. (Thus, drama would have bits of narration, discussion, mime, song, dance 'stuck on'). The forms are brought to light and voice from a silent reservoir, and if unsuitable, dropped back, and they mingle soundlessly. With this analogy, different forms flow out and in, and neither seems 'odd' at any point.

(ii) The understanding of certain features in one form, may have to be in terms of another. For instance, the repetition of certain enjoyable actions in the plays, may be comparable to the repetition in music—"the emphatic redundancy of moments of excitement and termination" (Barthes, referring to Beethoven's music).

(iii) And also, the sense perceptions of one form may have to be those conventionally associated with another. For

instance, drawings done by Sathins to be 'heard' and also seen; drama to be **done-and-seen** (the audience often becomes the cast); written information to be 'sung'; writing to be 'heard' and written, read.

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE SATHINS IN THE USE OF THE COMMUNICATION FORMS

The distinctions of message, channel, audience, source faded. Each form was a **collective creative activity**. For example, as already mentioned, if a play was being enacted by a group of five Sathins for the remaining 20 or 25 Sathins, very often the spectators would get so involved that they would join in the play. Or, some of the cast would suddenly sit down for a break, with the audience. Even when a play was watched throughout by an audience of Sathins, this audience was not outside—their comments, suggestions, reactions, formed part of the play. There was no concept of a silent recipient audience. And no readymade script—it was made by each as the play progressed. With flashcards, the story is made together. Songs are composed together, someone adding a line here, another there.

The forms of communication, as used in the Sathin trainings, do not "... fit well with the demands of an **average** culture. Such a culture, defined by the growth of the number of listeners and the disappearance of practitioners (no more amateurs), wants art, wants music, provided they be clear, that they 'translate' an emotion and represent a signified (the 'meaning' of a poem); an art that inoculates pleasure (by reducing it to a known, coded emotion) and reconciles the subject to what in music **can be said**: What is said about it, predicatively, by Institution, Criticism, Opinion". (Barthes)

II. One could also see the forms of communication in terms of the **logic, thought structure, idiom of rural women from a predominantly oral culture**. That is, understand the particularities of the manifestations of the various forms, within the generalised structure of the folktale, its nature.

"The abrasive frictions, the breaks, the discontinuities..., the juxtaposition of narrative entities which to some extent run free from an explicit logical articulation. One is dealing here ... with a sort of metonymic montage: the themes are **combined**, not developed ... metonymic logic is that of the unconscious..." (Barthes).

III. In pragmatic terms, one could see these forms and **their effectiveness in a specific context**: as media to be used by rural women in villages of Rajasthan.

Those forms which are associated with 'putting up shows', e.g., puppets, plays, are a difficult proposition considering the strong social stigma against women performers. However, with an informal group of about 20 to 30 women, puppet shows and plays could avoid becoming 'tamashas'. Women in travelling puppet troupes and drama companies are mainly engaged in ancillary industries of stitching clothes for the puppets and so on. (There may be women handling the puppet strings, too, but all their actions would have the protection of the 'clan').

For women to enter these 'male media' (in a non-professional sense), would require several considerations: the social standing of the performing group, the support it has amongst the women, the kind of village (its caste/class composition vis-a-vis that of the performing group and the support group, the number and strength of 'lumpen' elements), the kind of issues that are taken up. For even a professional men's troupe, a 'wrong' kind of issue taken, or even the use of a 'wrong' word, or a drunkard in an unknown village, can almost wreck the show!

In other words, a fullfledged puppet or play performance by a village women's group would have to be a **considered** step. Another aspect of such performances is that they would require a minimum amount of expertise and practice. Time and a place would have to be found for rehearsals. These sound very trivial, but in a village situation, the time and space, organisational factors may be the inhibiting ones for women, even if they are prepared for the performance.

However, with these two forms, it may be the critical size of the audience which matters—with a small all-women group, the impact might be heartening with women from the audience also taking turns to manipulate the puppets or joining in the plays; with a large, unruly mixed audience, the setback may weaken the credibility of the women's group. The intention, here, is not to make pronouncements on audience size, but just add a cautionary footnote to puppet and play performances.

Songs are easily acceptable, spread, and created. Being a part of their cultural tradition, there is no undue effort

to use this form. They do not need a setting, they can be sung on all occasions, at different places, even while doing different things. Where a powerful song can be easily learnt by all and can 'travel' from village to village, a play or puppet women's troupe does not have the same mobility.

Despite, or perhaps because of a largely illiterate population, the written word has an authority and credibility which the other forms do not have. This is not to suggest that inundating the villages with written 'material' will have impact. The numerous handouts on agriculture, health, literacy, given by so many agencies, are very often, a waste.

The reference here is to the written word which can help give a voice to the women, a voice that is located in a specific situation, and yet, by the fact of it being written, places it in a wider context. A written forum can draw upon the strengths of articulation, as well as resist the local pressures that try to muffle it. In breaking the silence with the spoken word, the strength of numbers is essential; in breaking the silence with the written word, the protection and base of a public form is implicitly ensured. The moral protest, if it is not to sink into silence and oblivion after a sporadic instance, needs the endurance and visibility of the written word.

In matters like famine relief works, deforestation, developmental policy, a written forum can weave stray instances into larger issues, and stray voices into a chorus. It can act as a support structure, by strengthening the links between the Sathins.

But the brunt of the impact of making issues public, may have to be borne by the Sathin. Being an inhabitant of the village, and a woman, she would have to face many social pressures, physical intimidation, she would not possess the 'travelling immunity' of a citybased reporter.

Then again, unlike other forms, a written forum will have to be created and sustained. As such, if it does not take off, it would be a futile exercise. It would require both imagination and perseverance to create such a forum. While the other forms can be used immediately after the Sathins go back from the training, this would require organisation. So, while it holds the hazy promise of future possibilities, the other forms have the significant advantage of immediate use.

With flashcards, one is playing safe. They do not have the connotations of public performances. In fact, they take on some of the respectability of books. At the same time, the colours and pictures are attractive. Also, the visuals and the language are understandable, the pace of 'flipping over' is slow and can be determined by the audience. The size of the audience is, perforce, restricted to about 20 or 30. While being safe, they may not be too exciting and may become didactic presentations.

Distribution and creation is easy. Less effort requires no presentation. All in all, correct and cautious.

What has to be seen in the use of all these forms, is the possibility of **dialogue, accessibility and control**. The sets of questions one would ask before the use of a form of communication, would centre around these three parameters. And these parameters, firmly located in the cultural context, the specificity of women in rural Rajasthan.

IV. And finally, one could understand the forms of communication in terms of **a broader, feminist perspective**. Three short excerpts have been taken from Sheila Rowbotham's article in the book 'Beyond the Fragments', and have been related to the forms of communication in Sathin-training, one, on the notion of skills and talents, two, on the idiom of politics, and three, on the relationship to ideas.

(i) "Members of a newsreel unit described their approach to this in the context of a film collective:

"The problem politically...is how to separate bourgeois notions of 'skill' and 'talent'—which are always used to divide people, to create hierarchies, to make some people feel superior or to assume more power than others—from the very real differences of skill and inclination and experience which we do have that are not only expressive of our conditioning, but of our individual creative selves which need nourishing..."

But they also said:

'...We recognise different capacities as skills which go entirely unrecognised in the bourgeois media; the ability to relate to people; to express feelings directly; to recognise and express differences and personal needs; to take care of one another. These skills are often also unrecognised on the left.'

And in the context of the training:

— All the Sathins acted, danced, composed, drew: these were not presented as special skills and talents which made some feel superior;

- At the same time, recognising the real differences as expressive of conditioning, the environment created in the trainings was one where the oppressive, conditioning effect of negative self-images was sought to be overcome, so that more and more Sathins 'discovered' their talents.
- And further, recognising the differences as expressive of our individual creative selves which need nourishing. The forms of communication were collective creative expressions, and not only a transmission of messages. So many women participated in making songs, plays, drawings, flashcards, that they provided the nourishing of creative selves and made training **a space and time for the nurturing of creativity.**
- That all the forms were expression, were dialogues, were ways of reaching out, is a recognition of skills usually considered unrelated or marginal to the technique of the correct execution of communication forms.

(ii) "The women's movement in recognising it, was not just what you said and did, but how you said and did things which transmitted your politics, extended the scope of practice."

In the context of the trainings, how the songs were written, how the pictures were shown, how the plays were conceived, directed, enacted, were as important as their content or 'finished production'. By 'how' is meant the forms of organisation and participation which went along with them. It was not that some Sathins wrote all the songs, or that the pictures were presented as lessons, or that the plays were controlled by a few—the structures of leadership, the space for individual creativity combined with collective expression, was important.

"It (the women's movement) implies a politics in which the very process of radicalisation carries the necessity of taking initiatives in many aspects of our lives. If this is not to be an impossible and soul-breaking ideal it requires the conscious creation of cultural forms and a personal vision of politics."

The forms of communication used in the training are attempts at this **conscious creation of cultural forms.**

(iii) "It is not just a matter of the ideas, but the relationship to them."

The forms of communication dealt with the ideas of feminism. And the relationship to these ideas-in-forms was natural, spontaneous, warm, inalienated. Women's rights, their consciousness and dignity, was not a cold, distant goal to be grimly, calculatedly grasped.

"Yeats commenting on Maud Gonne's involvement in the Irish movement provides an external unsympathetic description of the price women have paid even in relation to male dominated popular movements.

'Women, because the main event of their lives has been a giving of themselves, give themselves an opinion as if (it) were some terrible stone doll ... the opinion becomes so much a part of them that it is as though a part of their flesh becomes, as it were, stone, and much of their being passes out of life.'

It is a terrible cruel price and feminism has clawed a way through to ideas which do not involve this handing over of our beings because we are within them.

But a violent and painful experience leaves scars which harden. **We need to create as well as oppose.\*** The implicit understanding of this has been one of the strengths of feminism."

\* emphasis, mine.