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INSTITUTE OF DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Forms of Communication
in
Sathin Training
Sushmita Banerjee



B-118, Mangal Marg, Bapu Nagar, Jaipur 302 015

Preface

One of the most engaging as well as sensitive issues relating to developmental interventions is that of 'communication'. When and how is communication possible? Can we create certain conditions which assist communication? Does it require special skills? Or, is it a matter of revising our attitudes?

Sushmita Banerjee has, during various training programmes that she conducted for rural women, experimented and reflected on different modes of communication. Her experience was shared and discussed at the Institute during her one-month consultancy with the Women's Studies Cell. This paper represents her approach to 'forms of communication' and, as such, is a valuable initiation for further work which needs to be done on the subject.

Sharada Jain

"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."

- 'Communications'

Raymond Williams

* Emphasis mine

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 observations of two trainings 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 in communication were events, objects and atmosphere - these have not been discussed in this.

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 the 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, 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?"

Alice in Wonderland

DRAMA

'Putting up a play' - there is a distance, deliberation and effort implied in that phrase. However, the manner in which the Sathins constantly free-wheeled 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 case with which this spillover into a play was effected was like switching from one language to seek the particular strengths of another. This recourse to another language, drama, could be for any one or other of these numerous reasons:

Analysis (e.g. The milk-cooperative play)

A discussion on cooperatives had barely begun. The words '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 protestars, 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 in a play. They did not speak of their analysis, and then translated it into a play - they analysed in drama. The play made explicit their thought.

It then led on to a discussion of agricultural economy.

Elucidation, Recapitulation, Consolidation: (e.g. Chipko and others) : After the Sathins had heard about 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 enaction, 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 full-blooded 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 : (e.g. Good woman - bad woman play)

Very often, a play provided the base by showing 'what is'. This led on 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 : (e.g. 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 group-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 : (e.g. 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 : (e.g. Roles of Sathin 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 these Sathin-trainings. 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 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 5-15 minutes. The plots, direction, enactment, everything was totally in the hands of the Sathins. The length of the plays varied from 5-40 minutes.

In a single, month-long training, there would be as many as 10-15 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 2-3 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 unconsciously crossed.
- The plays are panoramic showing 2-3 settings simultaneously, and 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.
- An unwritten script, no sets, a flexible stage/floorspace size, 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 stem from the fact that their narrative style itself is dramatic.

In narration, space-time is collapsed into the abstraction of a word; in drama, the Sathins re-erected space-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 folk dance - vigour and joyous abandon.

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 money-lender', she would walk up to one of those who were listening, and assign the character of money-lender to her, address herself to the listener as if she was the money-lender, but at the same time, also say the dialogues of the money-lender 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 to, 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-&-so it was different.' And another episode, 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.

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 night-long sessions. Such verbal gymnastics, not directly related to their daily lives and personal experiences, was 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'. While 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 one upon another pell-mell, was because there seemed to be one whole, unfragmented world of communication.

SONG

Nearly 150 rural women of Rajasthan (the Sathins during their trainings), 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 folk-songs during a session, gave the folk-song - 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-songs 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 well-known 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 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 expression of physical vigour and well-being. 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 on to discussions on leadership, mutual trust, team-work, 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, seriousness and reality.

WRITING

In the first training, writing not only occupied a place of ease but made positive contributions. There were about 4-5 Sathins who could comfortably, read and write, and another 2-3 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 4-5 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 art as well as poster.

In the reorientation programme 6 months later, writing was used for making forceful stands, for critical comment and synopsis. The 4-5 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 flash-cards, dealing mainly with health, provided insights into visual literacy, as well the possibilities of this medium.

In one of the trainings, a resource-person showed only about 5-6 cards from one set, beginning with the question, "What can we see in this?" Then, those Sathins who could read the story-line at the back of the cards, showed the pictures. And finally a few sets which 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 elaborating on 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, together a story was created afresh, 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 flash-cards, in one of the trainings. They made one on menstruation and another on XY chromosomes. A 'new' form, that of flash-cards, 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, really there), so not much can be said about them. Or, then again, perhaps their very absence speaks?!

UNDERSTANDINGS

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 pre-dominant. In concrete terms:

- (i) Just as expression, 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 pre-dominant, it dictated the means. Using, pursuing, abandoning, changing the means of expression were natural corrolaries - 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 structures 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, in which expression and communication are pre-dominant.

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 such), 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 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, and separated when 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, e.g. 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 5 Sathins for the remaining 20-25 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 ready-made 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 listener's 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 pre-dominantly oral culture. That is, understand the particularities of the manifestations of the various forms, within the generalised structure of the folk-tale, 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 20-30 women, puppet-shows and plays could avoid becoming 'tamashas'. Women in travelling puppet-troupes and drama-companies, are mainly engaged in ancilliary 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 full-fledged 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-space, organisational factors may be the inhibiting ones for women, even if they are prepared for the performances.

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 set-back 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 hand-outs 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 city based reporter.

Then again, unlike other forms, a written forum will have to be created and sustained. As such, if it doesn't 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 20-30. While being safe, they may not be too exciting and may become didactic presentations.

Distribution and creation is easy. Less effort required 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-trainings - one, on the notion of skills and talents, two on the idiom of politics, and three, on the relationship to ideas.

(i) "Members of newsreel 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 aren't only expressive of our condi-

tioning, 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 trainings:

- 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 fact that the forms of communication were collective creative expressions, and not only transmission of messages, that so many women participated in making songs, plays, drawings, flash-cards, provided the nourishing of creative selves, made of trainings 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 3-4 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 trainings 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, her consciousness and dignity was not a cold, distant goal to be grimly, calculatedly grasped.

"Yeats commenting on Maud Ganne'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 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.