

A Report on Capacity Building Workshop: Inclusivity in Education and Development

Dates: March 1 to March 7, 2012.

Venue: Ajmer Adult Education Association, Vidyut Nagar Extension, Ajmer, Rajasthan.

Participants:

From Ajmer Adult Education Association:

1. Archana Ruka
2. Chetan Prakash Malviya
3. Mahaveer Sahu
4. Sanwar Lal Purohit
5. Raghuveer Prasad
6. Surender Singh
7. Vitthal Prasad
8. Sardar Singh
9. Nand Bhanwar Kanwar
10. Vijay Lakshmi Sharma
11. Kamlesh Keer
12. Sapna Solanki
13. Priyanka Nama
14. Sanjay Palod
15. Vikram Singh

From Bikaner Adult Education Association:

1. Manoj Kumar
2. Ravinder Kumar
3. Jagdish Godara
4. Hanuman Ram
5. Ram Niwas Sidh
6. Anil Giri
7. Jagdish Godara

Schedule:

March 1-2 : Conflict Positive Workshop - Arjun Shekhar, Neha Buch and Meenakshi, Pravah.

March 2 : Trip to Pushkar.

March 3 : Workshop on Education for Marginalised Groups-Dr. Sharada Jain, Sandhan, Jaipur.

Creative Writing Workshop (Gender) - Anuradha Marwah, AAEA.

March 4 : Workshop on Caste and Identity - Indira Pancholi and team from MJAS, Ajmer. Visit to the Dargah.

March 5 : Interactive session on Gender - Dr. Ratna Sudarshan, ISST, Delhi.

Film and Discussion on Communalism - Jamal Kidwai, Aman, Delhi.

March 6 : 'Challenges to Activism in Contemporary India' - Public Lecture by Shabnam Hashmi.

March 6-7: Theatre Workshop - Sanjay Kumar and pandies' theatre team, Delhi.

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MINUTES:

Day 1: Thursday, March 1, 2012.

- **Facilitators:** Arjun Shekhar and Neha Buch from Pravah, Delhi and Meenakshi from Pravah Jaipur Initiative.
- **Theme:** Conflict Positive.

Post-breakfast, the workshops began everyday with the participants singing songs and bhajans. The Pravah team began with an introduction about Pravah and the work that the organisation has been doing over the years.

The session commenced with trying to lay down basic rules that the participants would try and follow not just over the first two days, but throughout the duration of the training.

Neha related an anecdote. Once, a famous and established Zen master heard of another whose teachings and philosophical musings were attracting even more followers. The Zen master decides to visit this new monk and learn from him. With much difficulty, he climbs up a long and winding mountain path. The monk welcomes the Zen master and starts pouring water in a tumbler for him. He keeps talking and pouring water. Ofcourse the water overflows. The monk tells the Zen master- "Your glass is already too full. You know so much, I would not be able to teach you anything no matter how truly you desire to seek more knowledge."

Then, a copy each of Pravah's 'The World is My Classroom' training manual was distributed {sections from this were later used during the workshop} and participants were asked to sign the undertaking on the first page. They were then asked to sign it, with the other hand- the one they do not usually write with.

After a short discussion on the two activities, the following rules were decided upon by workshop participants-

- Try and be flexible about our words and thoughts through the course of the workshop, to be able to learn the most.
- Make room for new ideas.
- Try and focus on what can be learnt through this capacity building workshop, rather than just participating.
- Try to contribute to the workshop as much as possible from personal learnings and experiences and not just aim to learn passively.

- The Two Feet Law: Anybody can chose to leave if they want to, as long as they are confident about their reasons for leaving and inform someone about why they are deciding not to participate.
- Try and push ourselves beyond our comfort zone and try new things. We learn best- when we are a little uncomfortable, on unfamiliar ground, when there is some struggle involved in getting to the heart of something. So, we should try and interact with those we have not made any efforts with in the hope that the group may learn together.

The workshop then commenced with an exercise{“mind jog”}. Participants were divided into three groups. They were asked to share any incident or anecdote from their life which they thought brings out their personal attributes. Since some stories could be of a very personal nature, participants were asked to be sensitive and not divulge if a group member wishes to narrate something in confidence.

Many personal and/or social conflicts emerged.

Arjun then went on to ask some questions and make some comments about the exercise.

Are not our narrations of an event or situation or person biased\selective narrations of a story?

No matter how sincerely we try to relate our version of the story, won't it always remain a half truth- true, but only part of the entire truth? Does the party we are in conflict with also not have some parts of the story\truth? That there is a difference between these versions of truth is what gives rise to conflict. What we have to think about is- does it need to? Does my story have to be seen in opposition to your story?

After these reflections, Meenakshi put forth the following proposition-

“Disagreement\conflict always leads to the breakdown of a team\group.”

Participants were divided into two groups- those who agree and those who disagree.

The groups were then asked to list why they agree or disagree with the proposition.

The following reasons were put forward:

AGREE	DISAGREE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It takes a toll on team members emotionally and mentally. • People who are in disagreement may not participate to their full capacity. • Inter-personal relationships will be affected so communication within the team will be affected. • If a conflict goes unresolved, it adds on to any future conflicts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If we argue and discuss, the quality of our work improves. • Clash in ideas leads to better, more inclusive ideas. • If we do not discuss and disagree, our understanding remains superficial. • Conflict if not admitted is not necessarily resolved, just stays hidden. • Even if there is already conflict, argument and disagreement may further clarify why the conflict came up.

The facilitators made the following interventions\remarks in the debate -

1. Are the two parties saying different things?
2. It is more a difference in opinion as opposed to difference in worldview.
3. Most people have a mixed opinion on this, whether the conflict is individual or social.

After this discussion, participants were asked to close their eyes and reflect on what has been discussed about conflict since the workshop commenced.

After some time of guided meditation and pondering over such things as the impact of conflict on people, their emotions in conflict ridden situations, what are the general attitudes that people adopt in a conflict situation, participants were asked to answer the first question on page 25 of the given Pravah workbook- Describe a personal conflict that you wish to resolve.

After this, lunch was served.

Post-lunch and after some more singing, the session continued with another mind jog.

Participants were asked to choose ten words out of a given list of words. These words were basically various values and attitudes that are associated with human behaviour like happiness, freedom, confidence, dependence, curiosity, friendship, equality, fun, independence, non-violence, patience, challenges etc. {The list is not exhaustive.}

Participants were asked to choose only those words which they think describe them best or which they can relate to themselves.

Then they were asked to reduce the list of ten to five, and then from five to three, and finally from three to one.

Some responses after this exercise:

- One thing is more difficult to prioritise than when we have lots of options.
- All these values have a different level of significance in our lives. While some values have more significance for an individual, even for the same individual the importance of a value may change from time to time.
- Some things we presume are part of every individual did not even make it to any one's list of ten. This just goes to show how we do not even take the time out to reflect on our daily attitude and behaviour.

Then, Meenakshi put forward another proposition:

“For the right ends, violence is justifiable.”

Once again, participants were divided into two groups- those who agree and those who disagree. However, this time both teams had to try and change the opinion of people from the opposing side with their arguments. Teams were also allowed to cross-question each other about their arguments.

Main points that came up in the ensuing debate are listed in the table below.

AGREE	DISAGREE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● For self defense. ● Sometimes animals have to be put to sleep. ● To fight social oppression. ● For national security and protecting our natural resources. ● To prevent violence against women. ● It is justified in our scriptures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Violence begets violence. ● Violence complicates a problem instead of resolving it. ● Affects both the perpetrator and the victim and neither are able to break out of the cycle. ● It has negative mental and emotional impact on people. ● It is an undemocratic method to end a conversation.

<p>CROSS QUESTIONS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● According to you, then what the US did to Afghanistan can be justified? ● Then what is the solution to problems like domestic violence- a vicious circle of violence? ● Has anyone seen Ram and Ravana or their struggle to draw moral justifications of violence based upon that? ● The fear of the police works as much upon ordinary citizens as on criminals. People are afraid of even filing a complaint because of the abuse of power and violence associated with the police itself. 	<p>CROSS QUESTIONS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Do the Home Ministry and police not need the use of force sometimes to maintain peace? ● If women of a community are under attack, should not those people resort to violent means to protect them? ● Should terrorists like Kasab not be apprehended with force and be given the death sentence? ● Did not Ram attack Ravan because people sometimes have to be controlled with violence?
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Based on the preceding discussions, the teams were now asked to make a list of the values that they think are behind their arguments. After a brief discussion, the following list was shared-

Values FOR	Values AGAINST
Humanity Right to Live Independence Safety	Humanity Inter-dependence Sensitivity Equality Trust

Interestingly, the values chosen by the two teams were not as disparate from each other as their preceding arguments. Putting the two debates on conflict and violence together, the following observations\inferences were put forward by the facilitators for the participants to ponder over.

1. So, is conflict an opportunity, or maybe a challenge? To clarify, to learn, to understand better and expand our worldview.
2. Does conflict\disagreement provide an opportunity to make a team more self reliant?
3. Can conflict act as a binding rather than dividing force?
4. So is conflict positive also?

So can we take our internal conflict, in this case the one that participants listed on page 25 of the workbook, as a challenge and pledge to resolve it?

The next mind jog tried to take the discussion in that direction. The participants played bomb and shield and nobody survived. Participants were asked to think about how, if at all, this could have been prevented?

Neha summarised some of the things that had been discussed- Conflict is imperative in life and can not be avoided. Since all conversation is just us relating stories, all relationships and conversations will then necessarily have conflict.

If we are to believe that there are no universal truths, then can both or more of these half truths be seen as valid as each other?

Keeping these pointers in mind, participants were asked- In a situation of conflict, what percentage of responsibility would you say lies with you and how much with the other party?

Some of the figures {in %age} that were put forward are-

ME	OTHER PARTY
75	25
50	50
60	40
55	45
20	80
70	30
25	75

Putting this discussion on hold here, the following game was facilitated. Participants were paired up with someone they have had the least interaction with. One person was asked to play the role of clay. The other was asked to mould them into some shape without talking to the person. Then, the roles were reversed {the person playing the clay played the potter and vice versa} and the exercise repeated.

In the third variation, both were asked to play potter and were also allowed to use themselves as well as the other as clay.

Participants were then asked to share the emotions they felt while playing the roles they just did and then again answer the question- In a situation of conflict, what percentage of responsibility would you say lies with you and how much with the other party?

Most participants agreed that the third round was easiest to make an image because there was balance in terms of individual roles and expectations, less confusion and a stronger feeling of equal participation. So, is the ideal way of sharing responsibility 50% each?

The facilitators intervened and asked but does it not actually imply that all parties involved have full ownership and responsibility of a situation? So, again the question was raised, to try and change a situation, how much responsibility lies with every person involved?

Most participants came to the conclusion that one needs to take 100% responsibility of the situation.

Some still had doubts and reservations about this. Taking full responsibility of a situation can be difficult and sometimes the situation can not be totally under our control, it was pointed out.

After this, the session was closed and dinner was served.

Day 2: Friday, March 2, 2012.

- **Facilitators:** Neha Buch from Pravah, Delhi and Meenakshi from Pravah Jaipur Initiative.
- **Theme:** Conflict Positive.

The workshop began with reflections on the previous day's workshop.

Participants were asked to write their most important learning on a piece of paper and then crumple it. Then, they were asked to throw these around, at each other.

Participants were then asked to pick up any piece of paper and share that learning as their own.

For the next mind jog, participants were paired up and ropes with five knots in them were distributed to each pair. They were expected to hold the rope at each end and untie all the knots without letting go of the rope or changing hands.

After this, participants were asked to reflect upon the efforts they have made till now to resolve the personal conflict that they shared on page 25 of the provided workbook.

After that, participants were divided into four groups of five each and broken squares were distributed for them to put together without communicating with each other at all. When asked to list down some of the things that according to them helped their group complete the broken squares or made it harder, participants listed the following:

- Understanding the other person's need helped in exchanging required pieces with someone without talking.
- Some people were following only some rules to be able to complete their own squares, this made it difficult for others to complete their squares.
- Some participants felt anger and frustration at not being helped by others in completing the task.
- Too many pieces were sometimes landing up with some people in the hope that they will make the squares and then pass it on to others.
- There was competition to win so everyone was not cooperating to ensure that all were able to put together their squares.

After this discussion, the Win-Win graph, provided on page 32 of the workbook was discussed. A win-win situation is seen as one where neither party suffers any loss because there is cooperation and 100% responsibility on both sides and people are expected to carry each other along. One person's loss may translate into some loss for the larger team also, which is why win-win is seen as more positive and constructive than a win-and-lose situation.

Then, Neha read out some questions. The questions were read only once and participants were not given too much time to answer. They were expected to write down the answer and not share it. But the questions were tricky in the sense there was no extra knowledge required to answer, just quick thinking and being able to infer from the information that was already being provided. For instance,

Q. A man is building a four sided house with a door on each side, each facing the geographical south. One day the man is leaving his house when he notices a bear trying to pry open one of the doors. What is the colour of the bear?

A. White, because if all the doors open towards the south, the house must necessarily be located upon the south pole.

Nine such questions were asked. This exercise was taken as a starting point to begin a discussion on listening and the personal attitudes that may help one become a better listener.

Participants were then asked to list what according to them are some of the behavioral indicators that show whether a person is listening or not. The following were shared.

Behavioral Indicators of a Good Listener	Behavioral Indicators of a 'Bad' Listener
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Alert ● Makes eye contact ● Facial expressions and open body language. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Paying attention to something else. ● Cross-talking. ● Dreamy expression or eyes. ● Too much agreement.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asks relevant questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No response or a totally irrelevant response.
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Participants were then asked to fill out the questionnaire provided on page 80.

The evaluation key at the end of the questionnaire lists four attitudes that help in listening- Empathy, Confronting, Searching and Advice.

Participants were then divided into four groups and asked to discuss the ways in which the above attitudes can be reflected in our behaviour. The groups shared their conclusions with the entire team. The compiled list of behavioral changes that help in adopting these attitudes and becoming a good listener, an important learning technique for educators as well as students, is given in the following table.

Attitude	Behaviour
EMPATHY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building a positive relationship with the person. • Investing adequate amounts of time. • The right body language. • Listening first rather than talking.
SEARCHING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asking relevant questions. • Being sensitive towards the other person's needs\problem. • Putting forth and helping to explore the various options\solutions available.
CONFRONTING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asking the uncomfortable questions also. • Not putting blame, but trying to share responsibility. • Not putting undue pressure or use fear as a motivating force.
ADVICE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trying to motivate to find solutions rather than giving a presumably "right" solution. • Sharing experiential and relevant rather than passively acquired information. • Challenging the person to push their boundaries. • Not advising if we can not take 100% responsibility.

It was pointed out that any of these attitudes will stem from our own opinions rather than being imposed from outside. Thus, it will be based on our identities, experiences, values and stories. In other words, our half truths. So, one should be wary of letting one of the above listed attitudes take primacy over the others. Otherwise, communication is not mutually beneficial. According to the evaluation chart on page 80 of the workbook, participants were then asked to reflect over which of these behaviours they already exhibit in daily life and which they would like to inculcate or develop further.

Starting from sharing our own half-truths and coming towards listening to and understanding the half-truths of others, the workshop thus concluded with one last exercise. Participants were divided into groups of three. Within this group, they were asked to share the conflict that they had been thinking about through the workshop. One person would help by enacting the other party and listen to how the respective workshop participant now looks upon and articulates their role in the conflict. The third person, was then supposed to give feedback to the second person on how they handled the situation and how they could have done better. The process was repeated for each person in the group. Considering the personal nature of the discussed problems, they were not shared with the larger group and people were asked to respect each other's privacy.

The workshop then ended with some more songs.

Post lunch, on the same day a trip to Pushkar was organised. There was much singing and dancing on the bus to and from Pushkar. For the Ajmer and Bikaner teams, this was the first opportunity to spend time in an informal setup and get to know each other better. We first went to the Ghats. Then some people visited the Brahma temple, while some others went on a steep trek to the Saraswati Temple. Many just explored the market and town around the lake. Some discussions from the workshop spilled over to personal conversations in smaller groups. It was interesting to see how people were trying to personalise the learnings from the sessions and explore how they can use them in their daily life. For instance, an interesting discussion spontaneously started around the difficulties women face in going out, for any purpose, even work and how they are constantly reminded about 'appropriate' attire. This discussion was initiated by the women participating in the workshop and emanated from their own experiences.

Day 3: Saturday, March 3, 2012.

Session 1:

- **Facilitator:** Dr. Sharada Jain, Sandhan, Jaipur.
- **Theme:** Education for Marginalised Groups.

The session had a simple design. Dr. Sharada Jain first shared some of her experiences of having worked for the education of marginalised groups. The participants were then asked to share what work they have been doing in the field, what problems they have been facing and what could be the possible solutions to these.

A Brief Recap of Dr. Sharda Jain's Talk :

Development programs from Rajasthan, especially in the area of education and literacy, have been used widely across the country. But, ironically, these same models have reached a point of stagnation within Rajasthan because not everyone is aware of all aspects and provisions of these models. With pressure on the government for education sector reforms building up and more and more work being done on the Right to Education, it becomes even more important for educators to know exactly what all provisions are already available to us and make sure they are utilised, and what provisions are being asked for and need to be asked for.

Another reason for the limited success of development programs is that they are task oriented and the objectives are short term. This is why it is important that workers share a vision of social development and change through education, otherwise the long-term agenda suffers.

One of the principles behind the Doosra Dashak model is that it is only for deprived or backward sections of society, because more privileged sections already have access to knowledge and power.

But then it becomes important to reflect upon how we define 'deprived sections.' What are they deprived of? What allows this to happen?

Some examples were given like education, exclusion from society, health care facilities, distance from resources

But the predicament of the education sector at present is that the educated are unemployed are looking for jobs and employers are also looking for qualified people. This clearly shows that our existing education programmes are failing to achieve what they claim to be doing- enabling people to contribute to the economy. This is because the approach is market oriented, instead of child oriented. That they might be able to earn more in the future, is neither a desirable nor a very effective way to encourage a child to learn.

If the process that excludes certain sections from society does not stop, the so called backward classes can not be helped by giving them sops. Rather, this just lets the vicious circle of poverty continue.

The process of exclusion is somewhere related to even how we construct our own or others' identity. Our identities get constructed against unequal lines-gender, economic position, caste, religion, region, language etc. While ways of discrimination may be many, the powerful sections of society are able to perpetuate these structures of discrimination due to their total control over three basic things-

- Economic Power
- Political Power
- Knowledge or Information

Those reaping the benefits of these structures keep strengthening their hold over resources. So a growth in the available resources does not signify the dilution of power. Rather existing power structures ensure that these resources will be unequally distributed in society.

This is the problem with the constitution- on paper, it is one of the greatest documents but on the ground the reality is nothing like the one promised in the constitution.

So, to break this nexus of power, where can we begin? Maybe knowledge is easiest entry point because it is the only one where usurping power is not required, instead power{knowledge} can be shared.

But, sadly more and more children are getting disillusioned with the education system.

Especially for children living in extreme socio-economic conditions, the education system has little to offer.

This is why a child centric approach to education is necessary because any program can not hope to be successful if it does not work for the beneficiary.

To empower people, literacy is absolutely necessary. Oral traditions of passing on\sharing knowledge have died out. Today there is an explosion of information and it simultaneously keeps getting encoded, in various media. People need to be able to access this knowledge.

Discussion:

{Based on the issues introduced above, the following questions were raised by either the facilitator or a participant and the corresponding responses are a summary of what was discussed by the entire team in response to the questions raised.}

Q. But is literacy education? What is the difference? Does education by itself help in empowering people?

A. We should be able enough to have access to and find information as and when we need it- that is one of the necessary conditions to ending social exclusion.

Q. What are the tools that help us seek out this information?

A. The following may be of help-

- To ask, research.
- To be able to listen.
- To not just be literate, but also be able to practice it.
- Have the wherewithal to take initiative in asking for information- who to ask is also important.
- Positive, mutually constructive, social relations and interactions aid the learning process. A social group will together learn something faster and better than an individual might.
- If the learning process is not fun, it will be difficult to sustain the curiosity to learn.
- To not just have knowledge or experience, but to be able draw learnings\inferences from it.
- To be able to make informed decisions from these learnings.

Q. But then what is a suitable way to educate people? What is to be “taught”?

A. Curriculum is a very important part of any development model. So, it should be drawn up very carefully. The necessary components of a well designed curriculum are given below.

CURRICULUM:

- Objectives\Aims\Intent
- Content
- Pedagogy
- Evaluation, Re-evaluation and Reflection

Also, the term “to teach” someone has the wrong stress, to be able to learn is the real objective of education.

Q. It is a big problem that the target group for AAEA adolescents program is always migrating- boys for work and girls to the matrimonial house after marriage.

A. In the case of adolescents at least, the problems are more or less universal. But solutions need to necessarily be contextual and in tandem with the specific socio-economic realities of the target area. Some suggestions that emerged are listed below.

- Pedagogy needs to be fun and anecdotal.
- One should also try and plan activities that will ensure that the learning process continues even after the camp has ended.
- The best way to learn is to help someone learn something.
- Girls should not be left out of sports.
- Ideally, we should not aim at being able to draw community members to an education program. Such a program will not really work in the long term. The goal should be to plan the program according to how the community will be able to incorporate it in their own schedule.
- Good monitoring and planning really helps a program because it essentially means the program does not lose sight of its larger, long term social agenda. An easy formula is-

Good planning= {what is to be done+how+when+by whom} / why is it to be done.

Good planning just requires an ability to bridge the gap between our needs and the resources available.

On this note, the session came to a close and lunch was served.

Day 3: Saturday, March 3, 2012.

Session 2:

- **Facilitator:** Ms. Anuradha Marwah, AAEA.
- **Theme:** Creative Writing, focusing on Gender.

Post-lunch, the session began with an introductory discussion on the various elements that make up a story. The following were discussed -

- Events
- Characters\Protagonist
- Aim or moral of the story: It was questioned whether it is necessary to have a moral to a story?
- Role of the story-teller: Where we take the story is up to us. It also helps to try and make the story entertaining and convincing.

Then the ground rules for the following session were laid out.

Participants were divided into four groups with Archana, Raghuveer, Chetan and Manoj as leaders.

A paragraph was shared with all the groups.

Participants were expected to retain the given sentences verbatim, wherever they choose to place it within the narrative.

The given lines sketched out a scene of confrontation between a father and daughter, with the daughter deciding not to keep quiet anymore.

Leaders were asked to help the group to decide one person to write down the story as finalised by the entire group and another to read it out to the larger group.

The following suggestions were made to help the groups build up their stories-

- Try to give the characters a back story. Who is Nisha?
- What could have led to the conflict?
- What could have happened to empower her to make a different decision about a seemingly familiar situation?

Stories finally written by the four groups are enclosed.

A brief summary of the premise of the stories presented and the discussion after each group's presentation follows.

Group 1: "Nisha ki Kahani"

The protagonist Nisha falls in love with a classmate who is from a different caste than hers and it is suspected that they have had physical relations. The father and caste panchayat oppose this and try to separate the lovers. But with the help of a female friend and using the provisions of the law, she elopes and marries according to her wishes.

Questions:

Q. What happened to Nisha's family? The family must have been ostracised by the community after Nisha ran away. Was it right that she totally disregarded the future of the family?

A. This is Nisha's story. We have tried to relate it from her perspective. The problem in the first place is that the family and community disregarded Nisha's right to make her own decisions about her future.

Q. How did she suddenly get the confidence to go against the family and caste panchayat?

A. Through the knowledge of her rights that she received from her friend and the decision to assert those constitutional rights.

Q. But does Nisha share no blame in this situation? Especially, since she had physical relations before marriage?

A. The date of marriage was deliberately left unclear to provoke the question that if two consenting adults decide to get into a physical relationship, is the ritual of marriage necessary? Furthermore, such a question would not be raised for a boy in similar circumstances. People feel much more threatened when girls exercise their sexual rights.

Q. But this is socially unacceptable.

A. This was a personal matter and her personal decision has to be respected. Also, it is not an uncommon practice, it is just that society tries to brush it under the carpet.

Q. Would the law help her despite the choices she made?

A. She was well within her rights to do everything she did. The law helps the woman in any situation of domestic violence, irrespective of causes and can not make any moral condemnations about her character or personal choices.

Concluding comments:

- It was interesting that despite the controversial nature of the story, it did not end on a negative note.
- The rules and regulations of the community, in this case the jaati panchayat, should not be allowed to take precedence over constitutional provisions and our fundamental human rights.

Group 2: “Kaash Woh Mujhe Samajh Paate”

The protagonist Nisha commutes with her friends daily for a computer training course in the hope of being able to earn more. One day she faces sexual harassment on the street. She is scared to talk about this incident as she does not want to be forbidden from venturing out of the house. When the family hears of this, they start finding faults in her character and try to punish her for what was clearly not her mistake.

Questions:

Q. Her silence was used against her. Why did she not say anything before the father confronted her?

A. Children, especially girls, are usually afraid of the father. And on top of that our culture does not encourage any sexuality related conversations, certainly not between daughters and fathers. It is also appalling that in a situation like this, the father would believe rumors rather than his own daughter. Maybe this story is also an indicator as to why girls do not come back home and talk of such incidents as they might either be accused of encouraging it or lose out on their freedom to step out of the house.

Q. Could it have been related to what she was wearing? Are only boys responsible for harassing girls? Should girls not be wary of attracting unnecessary attention?

A. Harassment happens anyway, irrespective of clothing. Don't traditionally clad women get harassed on the way to the fields? Uneducated, illiterate women also get raped just because they are from a lower caste. A woman does not do anything to ask for harassment or rape. Men are the perpetrators and they are the ones who come up with such heinous justifications, which they make up to justify their criminal act.

Q. So, should fathers not worry if their daughters come back home late?

A. They should but is putting restrictions on the girls the solution to the problem? Men can stay out till whatever time they please.

Q. Sometimes groups of girls also pass comments when boys cross them. Many times a street sexual harassment incident might not have been as serious as it is made out to be. In rape law, why is the woman's testimony taken to be true, unless proven otherwise?

A. The worst thing about something as serious as rape is considered to be the shame it brings upon the family of the victim. So much so, that restrictions are imposed upon the movement of girls for 'their own safety'. Yes, women also commit sexual offences, but the percentage is not even comparable to the offences committed by men. Even then very few cases are reported because of the shame associated with rape and the callous attitude of the police. Worse, people are often scared of the police. In such a complex situation, it becomes necessary to take a woman's testimony to be true to enable women to report instances of rape. After that the law takes its own course and the charge can be proved false.

Concluding comments:

- It is interesting that in a story about something as serious as sexual harassment, ultimately the father comes across as the negative character.
- It is not unimaginable that the girl would try to hide the fact of her harassment from her father since it remains a huge problem for girls who want to work or study to get permission from their paternal or matrimonial families to just go out.

Group 3: "Ab Sahaa Nahin Jaata"

Nisha's in-laws harass her for more dowry. She knows her parents can not afford to give more money. One day she decides to walk out of her marriage and returns to her parents' house. But they are not very happy with her decision. Still, she struggles to find work and become financially independent so that she can support herself and her poor parents.

Q. Why did she not tell her father that she was being harassed for dowry?

A. Going back to the earlier discussion on how various social and familial pressures force girls to remain silent about such things, haven't we all seen dowry death cases in our villages where the paternal families or even the neighbours did not know, that something like this was happening? She was aware of her parents' financial condition, she did not want to put undue pressure on them. She wanted to be financially independent.

Q. Then why did she return to her father's house? Whatever be the case, it brings shame upon a family if their daughter has left her marital household.

A. She does not have any property or resources, where is she supposed to go if she wants to leave the house where she faces violence on a daily basis? Also, she loved her mother and thought she will understand her. Why can a girl not claim any rights over her parental house?

Q. But dowry is more or less an enclashed phenomenon. The rich do it, the poor only try to keep up with the custom.

A. This is not true. It is more like shifting the blame. The social custom is that people of every class either voluntarily give or are asked for as much dowry as they can possibly afford. Just like

child marriage, dowry continues because people from all social groups participate in it. Any one section can not be blamed for this.

Concluding comments:

Since it is a widespread social practice, to end dowry we need more people who would publicly come out and resist it. There are many examples of people who refused to give dowry despite the threat of social ostracizing. The law is not sufficient to contain this- we have to stop accepting or giving dowry.

Group 4: "Nisha ka Aatmavishwaas"

Nisha's step mother does not like her. She keeps stealing money and blaming it on her. She generally tries to drive a wedge between Nisha and her father. Her younger brother is also turned against her by the mother. The father does not believe Nisha about her innocence until her brother confesses that he had been lying under his mother's influence.

Q. So what happens to the step mother?

A. Had the characters in the story thought about her precarious social standing- as second wife and step mother, she might not have plotted to get more control in the house. The story deliberately does not focus on her, since Nisha was the protagonist.

Concluding comments:

- Father is not just irresponsible but also believes the younger boy more than the girl. This is a very common way in which parents discriminate between sons and daughters, the daughter's opinions are not taken seriously.
- After second marriage children from the first wife always get unequal treatment, especially girls.
- It was interesting to see how Nisha was treated worse because of her physical condition.
- Usually, stepmothers are portrayed as evil. And it is true, that sometimes they do discriminate against the other wife's children. But isn't this another way in which women are pitted against each other instead of finding commonalities in their struggles? In this case, both were at odds with each other because the father had total control over the resources and was irresponsible towards one or the other.

Day 4: Sunday, March 4, 2012.

- **Facilitator:** Ms. Indira Pancholi and Ms. Bhanwari Devi.
- **Theme:** Identities, Caste and Gender.

After breakfast and a bhajan, the workshop started with an introduction exercise.

Two square shaped pieces of paper each were distributed amongst the participants.

On the first, they were asked to draw an inanimate object that according to them represents their personality the most.

On the other, they were supposed to write down two attributes\ personal traits that they think help them in daily life and in the work they do.

After everyone had shared what they had drawn and written, participants were asked what according to them are some of the factors on which our identities are based. They were asked to further categorise these factors according to whether these identities are acquired from society or do we have total control over them. The following were pointed out.

Factors that define our identities-

Factor	Acquired	Self-made	Both
Name			√
Caste			√
Birth	√		
Religion			√
Relationships		√	
Personal Traits		√	
Family	√		
Work/Profession			√
Dress			√
Language			√
Gender/Sex			√
Culture/Traditions	√		
Region/Place/Geographical Conditions	√		
Ideas			√
Bodily Appearance	√		
Colour of Skin	√		
Eating Habits		√	
Education\Literacy	√		
Age	√		
Financial condition		√	
Access to resources		√	
Citizenship			√

The facilitator pointed out that our identities somewhere get informed by all these categories. Socially, they may make us weak or strong, depending on the circumstance. In different situations our identities get formed\played out differently and this is what affects our position within the larger power structures.

Participants were then split into four groups and asked to discuss the following-

- What according to us, defines our identities in our daily life?
- Do these factors make one a powerful or a powerless person in that situation?
- Does the Constitution endorse the power we gain from these identities?

After discussing within their respective groups, participants made a presentation for the whole team. The main points that emerged are listed below. Arguments made by more than one group have only been listed once.

Group 1:

- Focused on three factors that define their identities- gender, caste and names.
- Presentation experiential in nature- most of the points were made through anecdotes or incidents from the lives of the team members.
- It was pointed out that even after getting an education, which is hard enough in the first place, girls find it difficult to start working while men do not face any such problems.
- Inter-caste marriages are still a taboo. Even the more sensitised men, both in the group and in the villages, will support a male friend if he wants to marry someone from another caste or religion, but are reluctant to do so for a female friend or colleague.
- Mobility\travel and access to resources still a big problem for girls whereas men easily enjoy these privileges.
- Apart from problems faced in daily life, girls also face the threat of extreme violence or social exclusion in the form of punitive rape or disownment by marital and/or paternal families for acting outside the confines of their defined social roles.
- Sharing food or water with people of another, especially lower, castes is frowned upon and actively discouraged. Caste panchayats levy fines on individuals who are found sharing food in social spaces.
- Names are an inherent part of our identities. They may be indicative of our caste, region, religion, language, gender etc. It is a common way of discriminating\ostracising someone to give them apparently derogatory nick names that mock a person's personal choices, physical appearance, economic status, skin colour, caste, religion, profession etc.

Group 2:

- The group focused on the themes of gender, caste, age, religion and family.
- People from the lower castes many a times develop insecurities that stem from social perceptions of the caste that they 'belong' to. It may affect their confidence, type and place of work, personal choices etc.
- Disability disempowers people over and above other aspects of their identity. Negotiating power in any space becomes that much more difficult with any kind of physical and/or mental difference.
- Women holding senior posts or designations are not taken seriously, especially in outside of professions that have traditionally been considered fit for women, like teaching or sewing.
- Skin colour affects the way people perceive us, which in turn affects our own perception of our self and our confidence. A dark skinned girl for instance is considered unmarriageable and a liability for the family.
- Speech can also be a factor that affects our relationships with people around us. People who speak differently or in a certain way, language or dialect are often mocked. This leads to their feeling hesitant in articulating anything in company.

- Personal effort to make friends across castes, religions and genders can empower us to resist social pressure to associate with only certain sections of society. These relationships, looked down upon by society, can become our alternative support system.

Group 3:

- Height is another aspect of our physical experience that is used to mock people and can affect our perception of our selves.
- Our educational qualifications can alternately make us feel superior or inferior, depending on the situation. This also reflects how our education system encourages competition and consolidates hierarchies rather than questioning them.
- New localised traditions- like welcoming people from other castes to our house- can help resist these oppressive social practices.
- The knowledge of or ignorance about the law and our rights can affect the choices we make in daily life.
- It can be difficult to be studying something that one is expected to have finished by a certain age. Alternately, this can also give you confidence to follow your dreams and decisions.

Group 4:

- The group focused on caste and gender, based on personal experiences.
- A Brahmin woman may get respect in the field due to her caste, but as a woman it might still be difficult for her to travel.
- Sometimes people discriminate against an independent, free thinking woman claiming a good Brahmin woman would not dishonour herself by fraternising with other communities and men openly.
- A Jat man in a predominantly Jat area has the freedom to go anywhere he may like and do whatever he chooses, but may feel inferior and hesitant due to his education.
- An highly educated person from the Scheduled Castes with significant amounts of land may actually be able to break the confines that caste imposes upon us and help other people from backward communities improve their condition.
- Discrimination at work may happen in the most subtle of ways. A participant, who is from the SC community, related an experience of not being appointed for a high post despite being qualified, due to the fact that his sub-ordinates were all from higher castes.

Concluding Discussion:

Based on the presentations and the preceding discussions, the following conclusions were drawn.

- Society is based on power relations and our personal relationships also reflect similar power struggles.
- What we learn and how is related to our identities and that is why it is not the same for all of us. Different people learn different things in different ways.
- We do not just passively follow culture. We also have the power to change it through our participation. Discriminatory social practices have become a norm over years. To counter these we need more alternative, questioning practices that we can all help strengthen with our daily choices and behaviour.

- Some or the other aspect of our identity may prove to be a setback for us, while another may empower us to stand for our rights. The point is to be able to locate our social position within the matrix of power and realise what privileges we have as compared to others, and what is being denied to us by the more privileged that we have an equal constitutional right to.
- Alternative social practices that question the established hegemony need to be sought out, encouraged and shared with others. To include these in the curriculum may be important to counter the biased, power centric versions of history in circulation.
- The law and the Constitution while important are not sufficient to ensure a just and equal society. There is often social pressure to not take recourse to the two even in the face of extreme cases of discrimination. We need to be able to exploit systemic provisions to encourage the practise of Constitutional principles.
- It is not enough to have the opportunity to do something. To what extent we are able to exploit a given opportunity is also related to our identity and experiences.

The workshop then concluded with another exercise.

Based on the discussions of the day, they were asked to write down one thing that they would like to change about themselves and thus start the process of social change with themselves rather than outside.

After the workshop, participants were taken to the Ajmer Sharif Dargah for the evening.

Day 5: Monday, March 5, 2012.

Session 1:

- **Facilitator:** Dr. Ratna Sudarshan, ISST Delhi.
- **Theme:** Interactive session on gender.

The workshop followed an interactive model. Session was primarily discussion based.

The discussions can be put under two heads- present situation vis-a-vis gender in Ajmer district and other parts of Rajasthan, and what can be done in the future to improve the situation.

The workshop began with Mobility Mapping of a fictitious girl, Asha. Participants were divided into groups and asked to list the factors that might restrict or facilitate Asha's mobility in society at various stages of her life. Using the conclusions they come to and their own experiences, participants were asked to then list the ways in which discrimination along gender lines is still practiced in society. The following were listed.

- The birth of a boy in the family is celebrated with much fanfare.
- By and large, boys have freedom to wear what they chose to, while girls are constantly told about 'appropriate' clothing.
- Girls are either not enrolled in a school or if enrolled drop out in higher numbers and in a much lower class as compared to boys of the same age and area.
- Boys have freedom of movement- can go anywhere, at any time of the day, for any duration of time that they like.
- Girls do not get much say in what the family can watch on television.
- In terms of sharing food, families rarely see boys and girls as equals. Boys get pampered with special preparations, milk and milk products, *laddoos* etc. Girls are socialised to not be too demanding and learn to eat whatever they get.
- In case of sickness, boys are urgently taken for treatment, while girls often just go by on home remedies.
- Girls are told not to talk too much, especially publicly.

- If a girl in the family is getting married, usually, people try to marry off younger sister/s, if any, at the same time to reduce cost even if the girl is below eighteen years of age.
- Boys are hardly if ever expected to learn or contribute to household chores.
- The *pardah* system still continues, especially in upper caste families.
- Very young girls often get pregnant, soon after their *gauna*.
- Large social gatherings usually exclude women or stress on women staying away from public/'male' spaces.
- Even though the situation of Rajput women is much stronger, in many places her stepping out of the house is still frowned upon.
- Girls are by and large discouraged from participating in sports.
- Women are kept out of family decision making- even in important issues like the marriage of their children.
- Any woman *sarpanch* is just a signing authority who is asked to contest elections to make use of the seats reserved for women candidates and post victory, her husband or the *sarpanch pati*, wields the power of the post for all practical purposes.
- Women of the household are the first in the house to get up and the last to sleep, yet their contribution in terms of running the household is not acknowledged.
- In many cases of HIV, the man has blamed the woman for passing on the infection, even when he is known to have been the carrier.

Facilitated by Dr. Sudarshan, participants then brainstormed on and listed various ways in which these discriminatory practices can be resisted and a more women friendly society can evolve. The following suggestions emerged.

- Girls have been able to go to school if they go in groups. A more widespread consciousness of women collaborating for independence and mutual support rather than just in inevitable situations, may help women claim public spaces.
- Traditionally, women have even worked outside the home, like on the field or when they take animals for grazing or to collect firewood. The stigma and judgment of character attached to women in more 'modern' professions may reduce if this is also seen as an important contribution that women are making in society rather than as a threat to the jobs available for men.
- Families should not shirk from taking responsibility of their daughters after marriage and help them in case of maltreatment by the in-laws.
- Narratives of women who have gone against their circumstance and defied the restrictions that gender imposes on them need to be culled out and shared to inspire other women to do the same.
- Education and financial independence go a long way in empowering a woman.
- The changes in marital and familiar tradition with generations need to be more questioning and open ended rather than being regressive or promoting the status quo. For instance education and employment status can take primacy in marital relations rather than property or money, which in turn may encourage equal education opportunity for girls.
- Social pressure to marry by a certain age should stop. People should be able to marry whoever they see fit at whatever age they choose.
- Giving and taking dowry needs to be discouraged at all costs. The law is not sufficient to change certain social practices, a change in attitude is essential.
- Practices like communal ceremonies for more than one wedding at minimal costs need to be encouraged.
- False information in circulation about women's bodies and reproductive health needs to be countered with education and authorised medical opinions.

- Boys need to be encouraged to share the resources that they have such easy access to.
- The mother's role in teaching a girl to not give in to discriminatory patriarchal structures can be crucial.
- Sports should not remain the forte of boys. Women can and must be encouraged to participate in and fare well in sporting events.
- Equal sharing of food needs to be emphasised. Families need to ensure the health of each member, irrespective of gender. Maybe the entire family eating together is a better practice for this rather than women serving the men first.
- Girls need to be able to claim those things for themselves that give them happiness rather than surviving with a servile attitude.
- Traditionally, some activities are seen fit only for men and some only for women. It might help to organise social gatherings where people participate in a task that is not considered fit for their gender to break these engendered notions of work.
- We need to give more leadership responsibilities to more women, in all spheres of life.
- Maybe organising women in groups according to their age group might stall the process of gender socialising for girls and the propagation of patriarchal ethics by women themselves.

The session then concluded with the facilitator highlighting one important learning- that workshop participants also need to inculcate these values in themselves and try to change their own behaviour to be able to encourage others to do the same.

Day 5: Monday, March 5, 2012.

Session 2:

- **Facilitator:** Jamal Kidwai, Aman, Delhi.
- **Theme:** Communalism.

The session started with an introductory talk on communalism by Mr. Kidwai. Then, Shabnam Virmani's film *Hadd-Anhad* was screened, followed by a discussion.

A Brief Summary of the Introductory Talk:

Religious reformers like Kabir, Nizam-ud-Din, Bulle Shah related social change to a critique of religion centuries ago. Yet, we are still unable to separate the functioning of State and society from religious beliefs and forces, despite the secular nature of our Constitution.

Our present predicament started with a clash in the different definitions of secularism that were being evolving before 1947. The various interpretations of freedom, secularism and the right to faith by the founding fathers of the nation and other populist leaders, like Gandhi, Nehru, Ambedkar, Jinnah and Savarkar affected the definitions of these both in the constitution as well as in popular imagination. Ambedkar totally rejected and attacked Hinduism while Gandhi insisted on following it and the need for religious reform.

Jinah and Savarkar were personally not religious practitioners. Yet, they both publicly demanded a Muslim and Hindu nation respectively- a clear example of exploiting religious sentiment for political gain, a problem that still afflicts Indian politics.

This was a bad precedent. The State endorsing a religion has led to violent communalism all over the world. The most obvious example of this is the rise of Hitler in Germany. Religious leaders twist around or abuse history for the sake of propaganda.

Children learn all of this through socialising and might imbibe these hateful attitudes. It is the responsibility of an instructor to undercut/prevent this process.

A Brief Summary of the Discussion after the Film Screening:

The following observations were made by participants after the movie screening. Responses are indicative of what the larger group discussed, rather than the facilitator providing overarching answers.

Q. Is the film one sided and unfair towards Hindus because it just mocks Hindu sentiment about the burning issue of Babri masjid? Have Muslims also not vandalised Hindu places of worship through history?

A. In a feudal setup, kings of all religions had a practise of desecrating the opponent's place of worship. This was of course wrong and just a way of perpetuating feudal structures and power. But in a democracy, we can not do this for satisfying the egos either individuals or communities. Temples\places of worship can not take priority over the people and the nation. Orthodox mullahs now targetting Sufis in Pakistan. This was also shown in the movie. The movie does not demonise or hold only one community responsible. But in light of India being a Hindu majority country, the community needs to accept blame for such events as the post Babri Masjid demolition riots, the 2002 riots in Gujarat. To show both sides of a lop-sided debate leads to a stagnant situation.

Q. But people do feel strongly about this issue. There were lots of discussions in the villages around the time of the Babri Masjid court case verdict and people did want the land to be handed over to Hindus.

A. We can not keep harking back to history to lay claims to land and nation. This is the same logic that was behind the Partition of 1947, yet communalism has only increased since then. Secular ideals of our constitution should mean that citizenship takes precedence over faith, which is a personal matter and can not be used to lay claims to land or property.

Q. I was with the RSS for 10 years. I find that only people outside the RSS accuse it of being right wing. We were never mobilised for any violent acts using the name of Savarkar. He was one of the leaders of the nation, how can his name possibly be used for spreading right wing, fundamentalist ideas?

A. This is how misinformation is spread in society. If one were to read Savarkar, we would find it is one of the more extremist texts of our time. Savarkar idealised and praised Hitler, and thought Hitler's Germany was the best model of national development available at the time. But textbooks in Rajasthan, and in many other books, he is portrayed as a great Indian historian. This is because of vested interest, since his interpretation of history was completely Hindu right wing in nature.

Q. But apparently, their women's wing Durga Vahini, does a lot of work for the upliftment of women.

A. That is another way of playing vote bank politics. All political parties claim that they support women's struggle for their rights, but do very little about it.

Further, organisations like Durga Vahini do not necessarily work towards uplifting the status of women since they define women's role in the family and society along the same unequal lines that we have been questioning in the workshop.

Q. People can not just be expected to let go of the faith they have been following for years. What can a religious person do to stop this without having to let go of their religious beliefs, even if they are in the majority?

A. This goes back to our discussions around setting new traditions. If it can work for dowry, marriage etc, why not for religion as well. Does the film also not hint at that?

Q. Like the title of the film suggest, maybe we need new perspectives to shatter our mental and behavioral boundaries.

A. Definitely. Prioritising our own religious identities and not understanding the other's values leads to communal clash. We need to be able to look at the world from a less selfish, more holistic perspective.

Concluding Remarks:

The session then ended with some concluding remarks and comments by the facilitator and participants.

- Considering the workshop aims to impart leadership training, maybe we need to take initiative about faith and religion and start reformatory, more inclusive social practices and belief systems along with boycotting discriminatory practices.
- The birth of Bangladesh as a nation stands testimony to the fact that dividing nations along religious lines does not help the situation.
- Religion has very little to do with faith these days. It is more a financial opportunity, a profitable business. This just goes to show that privileged castes and priests propagate these practices for personal gain rather than any higher spiritual goal.
- Not worshipping a deity {*Nirgun*} can be an important way for the faithful to resist ritualistic, Brahminical traditions.
- The most important thing one learns from Kabir and other saints of the Sufi-Bhakti traditions is not to believe anything without questioning and logical arguments.
- Reform movements have been unable to dislodge the power structures within each religion. Thus, maybe atheistic position is needed to resist religion and its extremist interpretations.

Day 6: Tuesday, March 6, 2012.

Kanta Marwah Memorial Lecture:

- **Speaker:** Shabnam Hashmi, Anhad, Delhi.
- **Theme:** Challenges to Activism in Contemporary India.

As part of the Kanta Marwah Memorial Lecture Series, a public talk by Ms. Shabnam Hashmi was organised. Highlights of the talk, the discussion that followed and the subsequent interaction between Ms. Hashmi and the workshop participants are given below.

- In Gujarat, more than 10,000 NGOs were active in 2002. After the riots, only 31 of these organisations came forward to openly speak against the wrongdoers. People claimed that they are not interested in politics and their work is not related to this issue. But something like communal riots has to be politicised.
- An apolitical position means one is simply endorsing the status quo. Nothing is apolitical.
- Ironically, these days social work is taught in colleges, with specialisation in different fields. To be an activist is a 24x7 job, one needs to be available whenever required. It can not be a time bound, work-for-pay endeavour. Also, social work can not be compartmentalised. Issues are not isolated but connected to each other and larger socio-economic forces.
- Abhinav Bharat and RSS terror networks, which have been operational since before 2000, have been exposed to a great extent since 2006.

- As activists, our efforts have to be conceived of within a larger agenda of social change- it is not that we have to or can possibly work on all possible social issues, but we must think about all the aspects to add to what we do. For instance, is it enough to just 'educate' an upper caste person who openly discriminates with Dalits?
- The cause of secular democracy suffers when one makes a compromise with religion for the sake of the work one is doing, especially for the rights of minorities.
- There is a danger in religious and secular organisations working together. Religion can not be an activists' tool, the Constitution is. That all political parties use the short term politics of religion to further their agenda of change is proof enough that such an agenda does not translate into real change. The Jamat-e-Islami is as bad as the RSS, and should not be involved in efforts to rehabilitate Muslim communities.
- It is important to know the larger vision of an organisation before endorsing it.
- Women need to stop enslaving themselves- need to start participating in decision making rather than waiting for permission or empowerment.
- In response to a comment by an audience member who thought that communalism should not be discussed in public forums as it only increases hatred and one should try to unite the country with positive movements like India against corruption, Ms Hashmi pointed out we should be talking about communalism, things can not be brushed under the carpet. Not raising the issue of communalism in India only works in favour of the majority and the right wing elements.
- To educate people or make them literate is not enough. We also have to think about our agenda. What is it that we want to teach or be taught? The content in books should be relevant to life. Our rights and the struggle that helped us achieve them should definitely be a part of the curriculum to counter partisan, nationalist renditions of history.
- Atheism is very important in fighting religious fundamentalism and must be discussed on more public platforms, since currently it finds very few takers. But initiatives like the Kabir Project also fulfill an important function since it poses a threat to religion from within and might be the only way to draw people who still hold on to their faith.

Day 6&7 : Tuesday, March 6 & Wednesday, March 7, 2012.

- **Facilitators:** Sanjay Kumar, Swapnapriya Manna, Diksha Lamba, Shilpi Gulati and Siddharth Singh, pandies' theatre, Delhi.
- **Theme:** Theatre.

The training ended with a theatre workshop, which started post lunch on March 6 and continued till lunch on the following day.

The theatre exercise began with some physical exercises and games.

Then an exercise called Legitimising the Lie was conducted. Participants were asked to introduce themselves in five sentences. While three of these were to be true/facts, participants had to fabricate two things about themselves. After a person shared their five line introduction, the rest of the participants were asked to guess which were the truths and which were the lies. The exercise generated a lot of curiosity and excitement in the participants. Some were initially hesitant to participate and insisted that they do not lie. But slowly the exercise caught on and participants narrated interesting stories.

After that, participants were asked to form images in groups of four. Four people were given the same word which they had to come and represent with their bodies for the rest of the team.

While they were all acting out the same word, they had to try and keep their images different. After a couple of rounds, the images were turned into machines- wherein participants can use repetitive gesture or movement or sound to add to the meaning of their image and they could now use each other's help to portray a collective, instead of an individual image..

Words thrown at the various groups were related to the themes of caste and gender that had been discussed in detail over the preceding days.

The day ended with each of the groups presenting a machine related to the issue of caste or gender or both.

The next day, the session began with another physical exercise. Participants were paired up. Then, one part of the pair was asked to close their eyes while the other guided them around with the help of a mutually decided sound. When the facilitator asked the entire group to stop, participants were asked to open their eyes and see how far they are from their partner and try and perform better in the next round, after a couple of rounds a complication was introduced. Apart from guiding their partners, participants could also now imitate the sound of some other pair and try and lead away the person with their eyes closed. Both participants in a pair got the chance to enact both the roles.

After this participants were divided into four groups. While all the female participants constituted one group, the other groups were decided at random. Then each group was assigned a facilitator. The groups were then asked to present a comparatively longer machine on any of the issues that came up in the images and machines the previous day.

Groups presented machines about a corrupt bureaucrat, caste based discrimination, rape and the problem of mobility for girls.

After the presentations and discussion, the groups were asked to pick up the presentation of any other group and asked to present it in their own way. They had the freedom to decide to take up any of the themes raised in any of the presentations. After some time assigned for preparation, the groups were asked to perform their dramatised situation in front of the entire team.

Three of the groups did a presentation on rape and one on the caste system.

The situations were complex, well dramatised and led to interesting discussions.

Video footage of the presentations prepared by the groups over the two days is available with AAEA.

With this, the workshop came to a close.

Suggestions for Future AAEA Planning:

Based upon participant feedback and suggestions by facilitators, the following can be some of the ways in which AAEA workers can take these learnings further and try to implement them in the target area and in the AAEA action plan.

- The team should be familiar with all aspects of the National Curriculum for Adult Education.
- After the creative writing workshop, some participants observed that writing gives clarity and helps in articulating things one has been engaging with for long. Coming from this, participants expressed interest in further honing their skill of creative expression through writing stories, poems, songs, plays, news articles etc.
- In the session on communalism it was suggested that the participants should read the works of Savarkar, Ambedkar and Patel, Nehru's "Discovery of India" and Bhisham Sahni's "Tamas." Perhaps AAEA could source these books.
- It was suggested that participants learn more about the Gujarat carnage through some of the fact finding reports and documentaries about the incident.
- During the Pravah session, participants also expressed interest in interactive pedagogical techniques employed during Pravah trainings and other life skills and capacity building workshops like this one. Pravah also conducts a Facilitation and

Instructional Design training program. Perhaps, this could be organised for the AAEA team in the future.

- AAEA team members who have attended other theatre workshops in the past, seem to have benefited from it in terms of both performance and in nuanced representation of issues. Coming from this a need to further strengthen the already active AAEA theatre program was expressed.
- Many team members also expressed a desire to improve their grasp over the English language.
- The possibility of starting more mother and child programs to be able to reach out to more married young women was suggested.
- Rape seems to be a common incident and communities try to hush it up. AAEA team could be trained in the laws against rape and sexual harassment and how to act in the event of a case of rape or sexual assault.
- It was suggested that such a training should be organised at least once a year and that in the future, it should not be planned around a festival/national holiday as it makes commuting difficult.

Feedback from Resource Persons via email to Secretary, AAEA:

Some of the facilitators wrote in with feedback and suggestions after the workshop. The same is shared below.

- ***Neha Buch, Pravah, Delhi :***

“First of all, just a very warm thank you from all of us for giving us an opportunity to come and engage with the wonderful team. Arjun, Meenakshi and I really enjoyed the interactions and came back energised and inspired by the warmth, honesty and commitment of the team. Archana truly led from the front by sharing her own insights about herself with transparency and helped the larger group to understand the Conflict Positive process through the sharing of her own understanding. Sanjay Palod was absolutely brilliant and sourced out the material that we needed even in the short notice that we gave him. The Conflict positive is a powerful design, and the full potential only comes out when the participants choose to engage with it and try it. The group that was there did just that. And the openness with which they jumped into it was just heartening.

The quick feedback round at the end of the one and a half day was extremely positive and indicated that most people were able to have significant takeaways. It would be great however if you could share with us your feedback post your own interactions and observations as well.”

- ***Jamal Kidwai, Aman, Delhi :***

“It was a pleasure to be part of the capacity building programme hosted by AAEA. The organisation is doing very valuable work and intervention in the field of education. I found this workshop not only an innovative intervention for teachers but also a good learning experience for myself. I found the teachers of AAEA very articulate and proud of the work they are doing with AAEA. Their questions and comments reflect that AAEA is constantly engaging them in discussions and encouraging them to think out-of-the-box.

On behalf of AMAN, we would like to share and collaborate with AAEA in our projects as our mandate and approach is very similar. We hope to take forward the discussions we started on future collaborations. Sanjay Palod and other team members were good hosts. I really enjoyed the workshop.”

- **Ratna Sudarshan, ISST, Delhi :**

“The first thing that struck me was everyone's familiarity with the workshop mode, how quickly they formed groups etc. which made it very easy to conduct the workshop.

I was, genuinely, taken aback by the almost unrelenting description of gender discrimination. Of course it exists everywhere but is usually a little more subtle. Also usually there would be one or two voices saying something different. But here there weren't any. Or, people saying that it doesn't happen to that extent in their families, etc. Or even, that yes we agree it shouldn't be like this, but what can we do. The only such hesitation maybe came from the point one girl made that they are told eating the meva Laddoos leads to problems during childbirth- so then of course girls won't ask for the Laddoos - which also means that one can't hope to tackle the situation without having some way of showing everyone that there is nothing contained in these Laddoos which could have such an impact etc.

So overall, I felt the exercises may have helped to show them tools which they can use with others or in teaching (because they said they had not used them earlier) but, I hadn't planned enough for a stronger discussion on the 'therefore what' or strategy part of it, and so was very glad that you also took this up a bit at the end.

So what could one have been done better? I felt - in the future, we could spend less time on understanding gender discrimination and more on getting them to think about\ try to identify feasible and relevant strategies to get people to modify their perceptions\behavior.”

- **Sanjay Kumar, pandies' theatre, Delhi :**

“It is difficult for me to speak about one workshop isolated from the years of close ties that pandies has with AAEA, particularly with its workers. Many workshops with adolescents in Sarvaar have found the workers interacting with us at times from the periphery, at times as observers and sometimes, some of them, as participants.

Doing a workshop with them under the rubric of capacity building was an exciting, even challenging thought. The majority of the participants were from Sarvaar, including the five women participants and some had come for training from Bikaner. As usual with pandies, each workshop and its target participants demand a different methodology, we spent some time talking and deciding what we should do and as importantly what we shouldn't, specially from the workshop paradigms that we had conducted before the participants from Sarvaar. Reaching a little before our session, we realised, and not to our surprise, that issues of gender, caste and religion were getting priority. We participated in three sessions before ours and all were setting high standards and the responses of the participants were of extreme engagement.

So what do we do? Start with asking the participants to iterate one thing which they found most captivating among the workshops they had participated in. Negotiating with authority and power came up repeatedly, disparities of caste, gender and religion were stressed. Our workshops on both days began with physical/theatre exercises designed to push away the stress on the cognitive that such programmes invariably involve. And then there was performance.

The participants began by performing and detecting lies. And the bar of performance kept rising thereafter. Two things that struck me most were, first, that the tenuous, vital connection between being and believing, and performing kept getting explored. The participants performed what they were not or what they did not believe in and came back closer, more believing than before. Second, the Bikaner participants, who in general assessment had been seen as a tad behind in terms of negotiating with gender and religion were right up there beside their Sarvaar friends. Freed of the intellectualising and taking of position that discussion forces us into, we could perform as the Other and then come back to ourselves not really as the other because we had better understood that predicament. The men were remarkable at performing kinnars and women and manifested

an amazing comfort with alternate sexuality that would not have been possible within the cocoon of a discussion. Pushing through a series of performances, the participants veered it towards crimes against women, caste iniquity and government corruption with a bias towards the first (two of the final four machines were about discrimination against women). The nuances and span were evidencing the close negotiations that participants were doing with these issues - there was a performance on rape in the family, rape on the strength of money position, on the need for people to get together to oust the corrupt.

The impact was probably put best by a participant from Bikaner when he said that he knew about rape, had even helped victims and their families negotiate but he had never thought the issue out with such detail, he needed to think more and negotiate further.

The negotiation with religion remains. Another workshop, may be two, to think out and negotiate this scourge.

This would be incomplete without high praise of all the participants, a workshop can be only as good as they want it to be, and special praise for the dynamism of the Project Director from Sarvaar, for the curiosity and zeal that characterised her unit and became a hallmark of the workshop.”